

Infernalisms

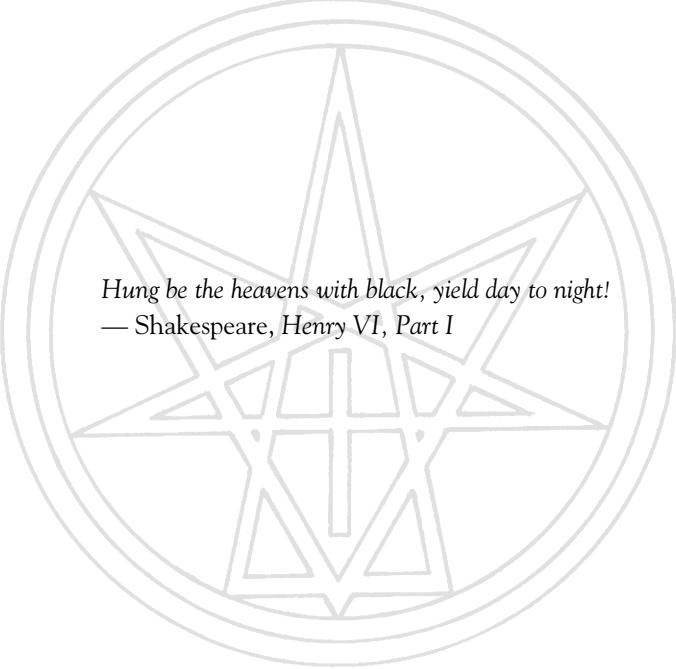
The Path of Screams™



R H Y

A Tome of Black Magick for Mage: The Sorcerers
Crusade™ by Phil Brucato

InfernalisM: The Path of Screams™



Hung be the heavens with black, yield day to night!
— Shakespeare, Henry VI, Part I

By Phil Brucato

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Special Note

Although this book deals with diabolical subject matter, it is not in any way intended as an incentive for devil worship. Quite the opposite. But since certain people require that things be spelled out in big, bold letters, we felt we should emphasize a few simple points:

Black magick is not cool, merely stupid.
Do not worship Satan.
Do not kill anyone or anything.
Do not kill yourself.
Mage is a game.
Have fun.
Thank you.
Sleep tight....

Author's Dedications

I offer thanks to many for the completion of this book, but a few people really stand out:

Wendy Blacksin, for putting up with the demons in my head.

Audrey Maddox, for playing angel when my old computer went heavenward.

Jess Heinig, for being our computer tech, and for packing my brain with Buddhism.

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Rich Dansky, for reviewing my references to Judaism.

Rachelle Udell, for checking the Latin.

...And Mike Tinney, for making sure the Crusade continues.

Thanks, folks!



What is Arthaus? It's White Wolf's newest imprint. White Wolf's mission has always been to create art that entertains; White Wolf Arthaus is the embodiment of this ideal. Modeled after small press, the Arthaus team strives to create those games and projects that are new, experimental and unique. White Wolf Arthaus now manages whole game lines, supports others and creates specialty projects whenever possible.

Infernalis**m**TM

The Path of Screams

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Prelude to Damnation

...get this into your head and never
forget it: wolves and lambs do not look
upon each other with kindly eyes.

—Comte de Lautreamont, *The Songs of Maldoror*

I have no regrets. Nor do I make apologies for what I am or what I have done. My sins have set me free, and I anticipate the coming dawn as the beginning of a new, eternal journey.

The pain in my legs keeps me awake. Wrapped in darkness, settled only by a paltry flame and my own furious thoughts, I cannot rest. A greater pain lies in store for me, I know, and the thought of it makes me both tremulous and aroused. I have learned to love pain, you see, to crave the wash of humors like a lover's touch. Thus, to torture me is to ensex me; to condemn me to eternal flames is to hand me over to eternal bliss. For now, trapped in my mortal cell, I cannot rest for the thunder in my broken limbs. Only the thoughts that swarm about my mind like hornets offer me release.

Clever boys! You have left me my hands, and ink and paper, too. For that courtesy, I assume you await confessions. Lists of names, perhaps, of those who joined me on my moonlit revels? Of those whose properties you can add to your church's rolls? Of those whose unholy suggestions singed my ears to brimstone promises and tempted me, like some quivering virgin, to spread my soul like a harlot's legs and let the Devil in? I'm afraid you will be disappointed, my kind and dour keepers. If you expect a testament of denunciations you must look to other men. I, you see, am far too proud of my depredations to share credit with the innocent. Pride may be a sin, but it is most delicious on one's tongue.

I know the true reason I must burn, you see. I know the fear that drives you through your corridors like children under the lash, goading you to burn folk

rich and poor alike. Your god is like a drunken father whose rage demands your cowardice. But I, whom you curse with demonism, have freed myself from fear. I will not cringe from your god's polluted pages, his scriptures of lies or his maze of terrors. I have looked into your eyes while I dangled in your chains, and I saw men whose every waking breath is a prelude to damnation. Each day, the Hell-mouth gapes wider still. And it waits for you, waits for the inevitable feast when your tired, pious souls join the caravan of all flesh and stumble into its restless, hungry jaws. To blunt its teeth, you hang your halls with broken wood and chant a profanation to a gilded king — as if such toys could save you from his wrath! But you obey a specter of a fading illumination, and bend your knees to men whose tables crawl with pestilence and whores. I know: I have joined their revels, procured their slatterns, and laughed to watch their seed tossed on demons' tongues. Such a rich joke, to sate the lusts of priests with succubae, don't you agree? And one richer still to see one's tormentors bow to devil-slatted patriarchs, awaiting their instructions in the litany of god.

I have seen the wormwood you adore. Seen it with my own eyes. Drunk it for my wine. And I scorn it — and you — with full hilarity. When I soon reach Hell, Satan and I shall share a laugh together as he dips my soul in pitch and lights it all ablaze. When my laughter turns to screams, those peals shall mock you even then, like the ghosts of fading bells. I, at least, am honest in my sins. They have made me a freer man.

By the candle's light, I can see trickles of man-sap oozing from my bandages. If I were to rip the rags from my legs, would those stinking humors pour free like summer floods? Or would they creep like spoiled cow's milk across the mangy straw of this, my final prison? I rather like the thought: to sanctify this place with the juice of my own wounds. Even now, Beelzebub's handmaids lap nourishment from my groaning limbs. Another man might wave them off, but to me their buzzing is a canticle. Each drop of corruption or blood upon their legs is a bit of me that will survive in this world. Each fragment of my flesh that flies away will sing in maggots' mealy mouths. Each fly that lands upon my legs is a testament to immortality. And so, I stretch my legs until the bindings crack and new blood moves black in the candlelight. I want Beelzebub's children to dine tonight, for I will have nothing more for them tomorrow.

But you? Ah, you will fat them for a millennium! In these halls of pain, so very far from your "father's" sight, you have made a Hell on Earth and peopled it with innocents. I can see their eyes in other cells; they huddle at the edge of my sight and look away when I glance in their direction. Bound in iron shackles, I still inspire fear, you see. But you kindle greater fears than I, and terror is the Devil's bread. At mass, you crack the flesh of the christ, but here you bake the souls of men and serve them at the Devil's feast.

Delicious! I am bound by iron, you by irony.

But come! Let us explore my sins. The candle is beginning to gutter now, and you would be disappointed if I failed to furnish your pornographies. I can see you now, you know, hands beneath your cassocks as you read these confessions. The church's walls are cold, but you warm them with your lusts. Could this be, I wonder, why women so often feel your flames? Why each shaved and battered girl is interrogated past excruciation? Why you slaver openly at each imagined sin? Of course! Feigned chastity has poisoned your loins until only blood will free them. The blood of the innocent. The ashes of the just. The agonies of tortured girls. And I'm the one you call Infernal!

But — to the lists! My light will not last longer!

(T'would be a grander jest, I think, to leave you with blank pages and let you suffer your frustrations. But I am a kindly devil, and wish to reward your hospitality.)

What bred my taste for brimstone? Was I born on a tempestuous night? No. Was I carried from the skies by a great horned owl, or birthed with a caul wrapped 'round my head? Quite not. My birth, I'm told, was ordinary. My mother survived to raise five children, most of exceeding piety. Perhaps I was the one bad seed, the scapegoat for our tribe. As we all know, a righteous man breeds secret sins. Those suborned demons may have come to me at night and played with me as I dreamed, but if they did I cannot recall it.

I do recall the kitten, though. It belonged to a wash-maid in my father's service. He, being a kindly master, permitted such luxuries among his slaves. The girl was sweet-faced and supple, a fine and coltish wench with the softness of youth. I'd often seen her glance in my direction, but with the wisdom of the servant-born, she knew that to regard me with anything but distant awe was to court disaster and disgrace. Unlike my feeble play-friends, who sported with their family wenches until the wretched things had to be sent away with bastard-bellies, I watched this soft doe from afar. Upon occasion, I saw fit to gift her with a word or touch that bestowed some slight haze of affection, as if I were some fine but distant friend. I even feigned affection for her kitten, a raddled mass of bridlefur that brazed and spat whenever I came near. The animals know us, my keepers! They see the spark of Hellflame kindled in our breasts. This tiny thing saw my destiny far better than I myself did at the time.

And so, on a bitter, windswept night, I doused it with water while it hunted rats in the courtyard. By the time it attained its mistress' bed, my first victim had fairly frozen stiff. It died soon thereafter. When the girl attended her chores the next day, her eyes were red and vacant. A few soft words of empty kindness brought her to my bed without hesitation. From the wetness of her nether-parts and the blood that flowed from them I learned why wolves smile in the night.

You see, as the water fell upon that cat, as the warmth of her mistress spread itself across my bitter skin, the **Lex Praedatorius** screamed itself into my skull.

This world, you see, is filled with claws and bellies, with those who hold the blade and those who turn their throats to its edge. Until that night, I had felt apart from my own kind, cold as a fortress but with a furnace within. That furnace leapt into a blaze when I embraced the blade of cruelty. Such wonders I beheld then! Such powers as would make gods tremble on their thrones! Compared to them, the trickling plays of men are naught but shadows. In the darkness, I licked the soiled virgin's blood from her trembling mound. It tasted honey-sweet.

To catalogue my sins from that night forward would take more parchment and more light than I have at my disposal. Suffice to say they led me to my patron's door. By the time I attained the book of summoning — the **Codex Licentia**, if you must know — my soul had already blackened like a baker's oven. No sea of **vitae sanctus** could have washed my soul clean by that time. Nor would I have wanted it to. I had finally found my joy! Before your kind ministrations, I was, as you know, quite handsome and well spoken. After I unlocked my heart and the wash-maid's virtue, those faculties placed a ladder from my soul to Hell's courtyard. The night that nameless slave crawled into my bed for comfort, I began to use that ladder. The climb was long, but I enjoyed it fully.

It could be argued that my wife, frail and sickly thing she was, had been minister to my obscenities. It has been said she was too learn'd and independent to be a good christian woman — that she was, in fact, a witch snatched back to Hell by death. You yourselves believed as much, and denied her christian burial when her body was discovered! But no, I cannot credit her with the treasures I alone procured. She was by no means a partaker in the esoteric Arts, although she was, I must confess, a most willing guide to the pleasures of the flesh! In her father's own bedchamber, we connived to meet, unwitnessed and in all carnal splendors, many times before our engagement. At other times, we rutted in his barn like beasts, marking hours by the tickle-scratch of hay and the spasms of lusts satisfied again and again and again. But while my Katherina led me like a succubus into Lilith's garden of delights in the days before our wedding, she shrank from such discourse once it became her duty, not her pleasure. Once she had produced our sons, her lusts, like shriveled flowers, dried and fell away, leaving only a dry stalk and dust as memories. And so, if I sought pleasures from ale-maids and courtesans, can I be truly blamed? And if I milked those willing cattle with increasing cruelty, can any man say I was not just? And if I kindled a hatred in my heart for that dry temptress who now occupied my bed — a hatred that grew to titanic proportions — can it not be said she laid new seeds for my damnation in her own barren sex?

But no, I will not admit such guidance to my fate. You see, it was my decision that led me to the Devil's banquet. Mine alone. And in making that decision, I threw aside all helpmates, manners, apprentices and rules. I became **my own man**. And for that I will not apologize. I will not share my sins. The decision to open that final door marked me as a free soul, and for that distinction I would endure 10,000 bonfires kindled all for me.

On the night I called my **Patronus**, the moon hid itself in shimming cloud-wall. According to the Laws of Solomon, I fasted, prayed and set out the First and Fourth Pentacles of Saturn. In place of the ritual purification, however, I stained myself with blood and dung. Instead of angels and the god of Israel, I prayed to all the Deep Lords of Misrule and spent my hours before the summoning with a legion of drunken whores. Thus defiled, I offered the lives of these unfortunates to my new patron Azuz M'Kahl, He Who Wanders in the Labyrinth, on the condition that he would invest me with grand knowledges and mystic gifts. He came to me in a tempest bright, and his voice was the fifty-score serpents that acquired Eden past the Fall. His vast wings beat the night like flocks of ravens, and his dozen eyes glimmered like the gold in a bishop's mantle.

In my circle I bared myself and stood like Odysseus at the mast. My ears, though, were open to the sirens and I welcomed their sweet call! My patron filled them with the tenderest profanations and imparted unto me the secrets of the Universe. As the tempest winds dashed my companions to bloody rags, Azuz M'Kahl spoke to me of the Void of Heaven, of the Nine Keys of Creation and the means to employ them. When the winds subsided, I fell into a deep, abysmal slumber.

When I awoke, the room was bare. The tempest had swept all things away. The only light within my chamber came from five black candles sputtering in fatty pools. No fool, I dispersed the remaining spirits before stepping from the circle's confines. Sinner though I was, I confess I trembled slightly. One does not invoke a devil without some strain of heart! But when I saw the gift he left me, I laughed so loud I feared the roof would crack.

A soft meow greeted me as I left the circle. In the fading light, my familiar came to me and muzzled my leg with soft affection. She was the very image of the wash-maid's cat! Like all the Hosts of Hell, my patron had a sense of humor.

When I took that familiar in my arms, she whipped her claws across my skin, then lapped, purring, at the blood. The pact was sealed. My lessons in the Arts began.

Have you enjoyed my books? I understand you churchmen hoard such grimoires, counting them as tokens taken from the Devil's hands. Perhaps you think that by perusing such books you might learn how to stop my Infernal kind? I like to envision you reading my secrets after nightfall, all naked in your cells and living out my sins vicariously as you scan their pale reflections in my tomes. Are you so sure in your faith that you would dare keep my volumes of forbidden lore? Or perhaps you fear that if you did burn them, the ashes would return to me?

You are right to be afraid.

The Second Key of Ablamerch? I bound it in my first son's skin as my initiation to the Mysteries. Fastening his hands and feet with manacles, I cut out his

tongue and stuffed his mouth with it so that no screams would betray my work. It was, as my patron promised, a long and bloody task. My arms ached long before I was through, and my hands twitched as I pulled the skin down. I started with the face, so that I might not remember that my source of parchment once sprang from my loins. Later, when I repeated the task with Katherina, I left her face for last.

The Black Book of Manu? I confess I took it from a rival's corpse — or to be more precise, his library, since what was left of him would have proven poor parchment, indeed. He claimed the binding came from Mali, from some nameless slave bought with poisoned gold. The Book contains Persian litanies, passed down, it is said, by Ahriman to the first man who spoke to Darkness unafraid.

The **Codex Licensia** is simpler stuff. With your faculty for Latin, it should prove easy enough to read. Will its words, I wonder, liberate you from your paltry vows? I once felt constrained by sterner stuff, and yet the **Codex** set me free.

And then there is my favorite: **The Six Seals of Ganzir**. The six pentacles and wards within its pages access demons that haunted Babylon. Ten magi strove to contain these beasts, and only three of them survived. One transcribed their warding-spells, presumably in case they were needed once again. Since that time, copies of that work have provided my kind with six most useful servants. I doubt you can read the work, but I encourage you to try. Perhaps my six servants can render one final service after I have gone to join them!

Such wealth I leave to you! Such treasures for the vaults of Rome! Guard well these books, my faithful keepers, and let no man see you reading them! You **will** read them, too. I know you will.

I take my leave of thee at last. The candle's flame is at an end, and my parchment is fair exhausted. From the crucible of ruin, I forsake my tears. As I said, I have no apologies to give. Come morning, you will find me gone. No stake for me, I assure you! As dark descends, I hear the soft flutter of approaching wings.

Do you hear them, too? You shall.

My flesh is not for burning yet.





ntroduction



Iet me then exult in my exchange. I have sold distant and uncertain happiness for present and secure: I have preserved a life, which otherwise I had lost in torture; and I have obtained the power of procuring every bliss, which can make that life delicious! The Infernal Spirits obey me as their Sovereign:

By their aid shall my days be past in every refinement of luxury and voluptuousness. I will enjoy unrestrained the gratification of my senses: Every passion shall be indulged, even to satiety; Then will I bid my Servants invent new pleasures, to revive and stimulate my glutted appetites! I go impatient to exercise my newly-gained dominion. I pant to be at liberty.

— Matthew Lewis, *The Monk*

The sun was setting and the King's justice was done. Master Burlin had acquitted himself well. Even the most callous spectators appeared to be relieved that the show was finally over. A sweet-pork smell hung over the square like a fading scream, and many good folk would sleep uneasily tonight. Master Burlin was good at his profession.

"Mind the irons," he growled beneath his hood. "They'll cook yer digits if y'ain't careful with 'em." His apprentice, a queasy boy of 13 years, grimaced as he lowered severed limbs from the cutting-frame. As the torturer scrubbed his filthy hands clean, flies feasted on ropy entrails wound 'round the spit. He waved his damp hands absently, but the flies refused to scatter. It was that kind of day.

Silently, slowly, the onlookers took their leave. The king's guardsmen shifted their horses and let the people pass. A few peasants soaked bits of rag in the blood-pools, but most wanted no reminders of the scene. The crows seemed eager enough, though; drawn by the traitor's shrieks, they'd waited hours for their feast — as had the human crow who stood suddenly at the platform. "Pardon, good master," he asked the torturer. "What parts are for sale?"

Master Burlin glanced up from his sticky hands, and he chilled at the deadness in the scavenger's eyes. Still, a man needed coins in his purse to feel like a man, and the king was not known for his generosity. "You can't have the head," he replied, motioning to the traitor's pike-skewered remains. One adventurous crow had already alighted on the face and begun to peck away. "The rest is for sale, though, if ye can pay fair coin for it."

"Oh, my coin is fair enough," the stranger said. Behind him, a misshapen dwarf with wintry features hauled a small cart to the scaffold's base. "Shall we bargain, then?"

Master Burlin started to name a price, but stopped. At the spit, the flies stopped feasting, rose as one, then drifted to where the scavenger stood. Like a halo, they surrounded him. And then, in high-pitched voices, they began to sing a hymn.

The stranger smiled. His dwarf-servant coughed. Master Burlin, butcher of men, looked away. His apprentice gaped and dropped a severed arm. It thudded to the platform, bounced slightly, and fell to earth.

The torturer made the sign of the cross. "Take it all," he muttered, turning away. "No silver, it's yours. I want no part of ye." As the stranger smiled amidst the flies and his dwarf retrieved the fallen arm, Master Burlin said a quiet prayer for the soul of the deceased. And for his own. There were, he knew, worse things than death and torment.

In hot duskfall, the flies sang their buzzing song.

Claiming Dark Inheritance

Truly, this is the Devil's world.

The Bible itself calls Satan "the Lord of this world," "the Prince of the power of the air," he who commands "all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them." Anyone that powerful is worth getting to know better, especially if you happen to be poor, female, enslaved or otherwise oppressed. The Church's God is a tyrant who befriends the mighty and sells salvation for golden gifts. Why go through life suffering when the Lord of this world is only a sin away?

The reasoning that leads people to the Devil's door takes a multitude of forms, from esoteric doctrines to raw hate and bloody vengeance. Some seek him as a patron of Black Arts, while others see him as a victim like themselves. The Devil is most accommodating, too. Unlike the Church's God, he does not demand that all people worship him under a single name; on the contrary, he is legion. In distant lands, he wears other guises — the angry ghost, the three-faced witch queen, the dancing avatar of earth's destruction. In all forms, the Darkness has its followers. Such people walk the Path of Screams and Fall into the Abyss willingly, even happily.

Some of them become very powerful indeed. The Devil and his hosts gift their chosen with Black Arts, with sorceries and fatal magicks that turn these disaffected, desperate mortals into Infernal magi. Not all the servants of the Pit achieve this kind of power, but those who do become Hell's agents here on Earth — termites in the House of God.

All people carry the seeds of evil within them. The lures of mindless carnality or murderous rage are but a step away from the righteous passions of love and justice. In this regard, the Awakened differ not a whit from their mundane cousins, and their magicks allow them to spread evil on an epic scale. But not all malignant sorcerers are true Infernalists. The difference between an evil man and an Infernalist is one of choice. All folk commit sins; the Infernalist chooses to go beyond sin, to embrace malevolence, to call upon the midnight powers — the demons, evil spirits and baneful ghosts that haunt the night — and most of all, to nurture the devil within himself. While most folk, magus and mortal alike, strive against their inner fires, an Infernalist fans those flames, reaches out and sets the world ablaze. The Infernalist is not merely a sinner, but an enlightened mortal who has

chosen to become an instrument of corruption — a lesser Fallen angel, if you will. Mere evil is easy; dedicating one's self to spreading evil with subtlety, wit and imagination — now that's hard!

Not all Infernalists are magi, either. Some wear lesser versions of Satan's crown. The midnight hills swarm with cultists; the catacombs bristle with blind wights who learn morality at the Devil's knee; the bustling courts of merchant-princes teem with diabolic vermin. As anyone versed in the Mysteries can see, the servants of the night are legion. When they Awaken to their full potential, they blaze like black-fire stars; but even when they remain asleep, Infernalists carry poisoned daggers in the souls. A cut from even these lesser folk can be fatal.

But who are they? And why do they willingly give their immortal souls to Hell? Those who walk in light ponder these thoughts in safer moments, when Infernalists present a puzzle, not a threat. The Adversary's forces offer pretty treasures, true, and they whisper sweet lies into ignorant ears. But not all Infernalists are fools. Many folk who Fall do so knowing the horrors they have accepted. Why?

Perhaps because in this world where even God seems to be at war with himself, a devil makes a boon companion. Or perhaps because in choosing Hell, a man shucks the yoke of God and becomes his own master... if only for a while. A righteous magus might shrug at the fool who throws away eternity for a few years of pleasure, but to those whose only hope might rise from Hell, those few years might be worth forever.

Either way, the Path of Screams leads one place — straight down. The Fall is long, and when a soul hits bottom its howl can be heard at Heaven's gates. Until that time, however, the Infernalist tastes a freedom few men can boast.

A pity it can't last forever....

How to Use This Book

In all lands, cultures and religions a servant of the Adversary is anathema. Thus, he makes the perfect antagonist for a **Sorcerers Crusade** chronicle. The threat of Infernal corruption can make allies out of enemies: the artisan, the witch, the priest and the shaman find common ground in their hatred for demon-worshippers. If those servants of corruption are cartoons, the struggle against them becomes a cartoon, too. Ah, but if those antagonists become crafty dark reflections of the heroes' souls, the quest to purge that evil becomes a very different game....

Infernalism: The Path of Screams sheds light into the devil-mage's soul. Each chapter examines the motivations, tactics, powers and allies that make the road to Hell seem so attractive, and it shows exactly where that road eventually leads.

Author's Note

If any man have an ear, let him hear. He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity; he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword.

— *The Revelation of Saint John the Divine*, 13: 9-10

Although many aspects of **The Path of Screams** have been based on religious, historical and mythological elements, this book does not describe real-world Satanism, nor does it intend to. Even so, I have some reservations about writing it.

So why am I doing it? If I hadn't done it, somebody else would have. **Mage** demands antagonists, the audience demands villains, and the face of evil demands more than a simple boogieman mask. If I write this book, I can make sure that a tricky subject is treated well; if I abandon the job, I have no say in the eventual result. (Let's be honest — I'm doing it for the money, too. Talk about devil's bargains!) So in a way, this book is a short trip to the dark side of the mirror for me, as well as for the fictional magi I portray.

And, although it's fiction, this book is a mirror. Whether or not actual "demonic" entities exist, Satanism and black magic are real. Just as many modern people worship a virgin-born carpenter who rose from the dead, some folks worship his evil twin. And the "Black Arts," in their many forms, have been with us for as long as humans have tried to influence their world. The "literal" existence of evil magic is immaterial. Many people believe in it; some practice it. I don't. Nor do I endorse their actions or perspectives. As a writer, I've just done my best to understand them and depict them honestly.

Why am I boring you with this? Because I've seen enough stupid things done in the name of imagination that I'm compelled to post a warning. Sad, pathetic crimes have been committed by people who claim to have been "inspired" by something they saw in a book or movie. I'm presenting this work — a work of fantasy and invention — to you in hope and trust. Please don't prove me wrong for doing so.

Enjoy this book. Enjoy your game. Just take it all in the spirit with which it's intended. Don't hurt anyone. Don't hurt yourself. Don't dance into the abyss, especially not in the name of some fantasy culled from my imagination.

This book is invention. The darkness is real.

- In **Chapter I: Better to Reign in Hell**, we see the passions that drive men and angels away from the Light and into Darkness. The tales of those Fallen Ones are seen from a new perspective, and the Devil is quite literally given his due.
- **Chapter II: The Devil's Own** presents a gallery of Infernalists, and the thorny steps along the Path of Screams itself.
- **Chapter III: Ars Maleficarum** examines the Infernal Arts and the cults, pacts, tools and rituals that distinguish them.
- **Chapter IV: The Devil Sends the Beast** offers a range of demons, servitors and ungodly apparitions that stand beside an Infernal magus— at least until they drag his soul to Hell.
- Finally, the **Appendix** offers lists of malignant powers and influential source material.

Enter freely and of your own will....

Lexicon Malevoli: The Devil's Dictionary



Infernalists speak in many tongues. Nevertheless, certain terms are often associated with the Fallen and their ways, if only among the Awakened Ones of Europe and the Muslim East. For a listing of some of the Infernal legions these folk revere, see the Appendix.

Absolute, the: The eternal consciousness of the Void; the living Darkness from which all things come. Known by many names and hidden to all but the most insightful Infer-

INFERNALISM: THE PATH OF SCREAMS

nalists, the Absolute is greater than the gods and devils of Earth put together, and is, in fact, the source of them all.

Adversary: Literally, “one who turns against.” Often used to describe Satan, it also defines “the satan within,” the impulse to oppose virtue and civility. By attuning himself with the inner adversary, an Infernalist sets himself against goodness and nurtures his darker urges.

Aesfotedia: Infernally tainted Tass; demon-essence. Often said to be distilled in Hell, but just as often refined by exquisite hatred or suffering.

Ahriman: In Zoroastrianism, the Adversary; long ago, some Nephandi called themselves *Ahrimanites*. Later, the term came into use as the name for a Nephantic cabal (an ahriman), so called because all the members were considered part of the Adversary’s body.

Ahrimanites: Followers of the Adversary; ancient Nephandi.

Assumption: The final step of the Path of Screams, in which the Infernalist becomes one with the Darkness and leaves humanity behind.

Asward: An anti-saint. Among the Nephandi, a subtle master of the Dark Arts and the truths behind them.

Barabbi: A Nephantic turncoat who renounces some other fellowship and joins the Fallen willingly.

Black Magick: Spells or rituals cast out of malice and intended to cause harm. See *maleficia*.

Caul: The “Gate of Dark Rebirth” in which a Nephandus has her soul turned inside-out. Also a bit of placenta that sometimes covers the face of newborn babies who are said to possess uncanny powers.

Decadenti: Rake-hells and libertines who indulge in blasphemy, demonism and sensuality for kicks.

Deep Lords of Misrule: Legendary “ghost-oracles” of darkness and chaos. Sentient fragments of the Primal Void, said to occupy a null-space beyond the heavens and the gods. Sometimes regarded as the breaths of the Absolute, its attendants, or both.

Demon: Generic term for an intelligent, malicious spirit. Although often associated with anti-Christian Infernalism, demons can be found all over the world, in a multitude of forms. Early germ theory even attributes the cause illness to these malicious spirits, naming them “demonets.”

Divine Chain of Being: In Christian theology, the order of things. As ordained by God, all things in Heaven, Earth and Hell are ranked in hierarchies that define their place in the Divine scheme. Supposedly, this system keeps disorder in check; thus, Infernalists love to break the chain.

Dregvat: A low-ranking Nephandus. Also known as a pawn.

Fallen: A proper descriptor for one who has chosen the Path of Screams over the roads to virtue or Enlightenment.

Based on the rebel angels who, with Lucifer, rejected Heaven in favor of a Hell of their own design. Despite its Christian origin, the term fits Infernalists of all kinds and cultures.

Foedus Infernus: The pact of demonic service and servitude. Plural, *Foderis*.

Gallū: “Demons.” Sometimes used as a name for ancient Infernalists. Also a title among the Nephandi.

Gilledian: One of a small but influential group of Nephandi who seek to unite the Fallen. Also known as a Div.

Gnostic: A heretic (or heretical idea) that claims the Biblical god is really the Demiurge (Satan), and that the only true salvation comes through pure knowledge and defiance of the Demiurge’s laws and Church.

God of the Book: The One God revered by Jews, Christians and Muslims; called Lord of Israel, Allah, Jehovah, Yahweh, God the Father, and so forth.

Grimoire: A text of magick, usually of the blacker variety.

Host, The: Wafer and wine of the Catholic Holy Communion; thought to become the body and blood of Jesus, the Host is often desecrated by those who wish to defile Jesus and his Church.

Investment/Investiture: Inhuman power granted to an Infernalist in return for some service or Pact. Also the process of receiving such powers.

Jacquerie: The “Jacks,” a fiendish sect of French mercenaries. Supposedly hunted to extinction in the 1300s, they went underground and founded several Infernal cults in France.

Khróstos: “The Anointed One,” that is, Jesus of Nazareth. Greek root of “Christ.”

K'lasshaa: Nephandi who worship the Void in many demented forms.

K'wahhll: Wild subhumans who worship the Void through madness and degradation. The term is probably related to *K'lasshsaa*, but does not refer specifically to Nephandi.

Laham: A person sired by a demon or evil spirit; someone who seems to have inherited Infernal powers.

Lex Praedatorius: The Rule of Predation – eat or be eaten. Often used to refer to the diabolical code of morality: “Be a wolf or be a sheep.”

Lili: A Nephantic priestess.

Luciferian: A Satanist who believes the Fallen Angel has been slandered, or who prefers a rebellious theology to the passivity demanded by the *God of the Book*. Also the concept that it is, as Milton said, “better to reign in hell, than serve in heav’n.”

Mafouh Whash: “Voracious beast”; a common name for Marauds or Nephandi among the Batini, their ancestral enemies.

INTRODUCTION

Maleficia: Evil magick; spells and rituals done to cause harm and misfortune.

Malleus Nefandorum: Latin (later French, German and English) transliteration of the *Sebil-el-Mafouh Whash*. Often features Christian elements instead of the traditional Muslim ones.

Nephandi: Members of a worldwide cult dedicated to the Void. The roots of their name are uncertain; many claim it comes from the ancient appellation *Nif' ur 'en Daah*, or "Eaters of the Weak"; others look to the Latin *nefarious* ("to negate rightness"), the Greek *nephlos* ("cloud"), the Arabic *Naffas Iblis* ("Breath of Iblis/Satan"), or even the Germanic *nibla/nifl* ("mist" or "dark"). All interpretations seem to fit. Also known by many other names (see above).

Nhanga: Common name for a cannibal-sorcerer from sub-Saharan Africa. Also called Banoba, Udena and Chisonzi.

Nine Keys to Creation: The Spheres; see also *Qliphothic Spheres*.

Pact: A promise of service given to a demonic *Patronus* in return for favors or *Investments*. Contrary to common belief, not all pacts involve soul-selling, though all demand some degree of sin.

Patronus: "Protector, advocate"; common term for an Infernalist's demonic "master." As the diabolists see it, a warlock is more an apprentice than a slave, and the *Patronus* offers occult training and other favors in exchange for a few favors. Feminine demons are sometimes called *Patrona* ("Protectress"); in their plural forms, the terms are *Patroni* (masc.) and *Patronae* (fem.).

People of the Book: Jews, Christians and Muslims, as opposed to Buddhists, Hindus, Pagans, and followers of other faiths.

Praelatus: A Nephantic priest. Also known as an *Ibl'is*.

Reckoning, the: A term some Infernalists use to reflect the final showdown between Light and Darkness. Often thought of in terms of Ragnaroc, Armageddon, or other great battles, the Reckoning sets virtue and oblivion at odds, and supposedly ends with the return of primal Darkness.

Qlippoth: "Shells" of Creation, thought to be the remnants of previous worlds, wells of chaos, or inverted elements of Divinity. Sometimes considered God's dark reflections.

Qliphothic Spheres: Reverse-magick, based on the inversion of the *Nine Keys of Creation*. Sometimes called the Nine Shadows, the Nine Powers or the Nine Keys to Hell.

Qut Etemmu: "Hands of Ghosts"; old name for Infernalists. Often used in reference to Babylonian Nephandi, but not exclusive to them.

Raksha: An Indian demon, known for its powers of illusion, deception and misdirection.

Sebil-el-Mafouh Whash: Batini text about the Nephandi and associated Infernalists. See *Malleus Nefandorum*.

Supplicium: An Infernal Seeking; a journey within the soul in which a warlock purges her old morality and accepts the cold gift of Oblivion. Translates as "sacrifice," "torment" and "punishment." Plural form is *Supplicii*.

Void, the: The primal origin and ending of all things; the Void lies just beyond Earth and will someday encompass it altogether. Also the inner urge toward chaos. The Fallen Ones consider the two aspects interconnected, and they encourage the "inner" Void to grow, reflect and reach out toward the "outer" one.

Widderslainte: A born Nephandus, one who recalls her past life and seems eager to start again.

Zoroastrianism: Persian religion that replaced polytheism with the image of warring dualities of Good (Ahura Mazda, or "Wise God") and Evil (Angra Manu; see *Ahriman*). Greatly influenced Christianity and Islam, as well as their dark opposites.



Chapter 1: Souls and Mortar

We are a spectacle to the world. Let the great and humble, by our example, see well to what state they shall be inexorably reduced, whatever their condition, age or sex. Why, then, miserable person, are you puffed with pride? Dust you are, and unto dust you shall return, rotten corpse, morsel and meal for worms.

— Black Plague epitaph



hen you sleep at night," Grandpapa said, "the Devil comes and stands over your bed. Each night, you see, you die for a little while. When you do, the Devil comes to see if he can take you back to Hell."

Gretta and Edward gaped in silent terror. The old man smiled in the candlelight

and spread his hands in pantomime. Behind him, shadows loomed like hungry bats. "If you're quiet and still," Grandpapa went on, "he'll leave you alone. Good children are silent children. If you toss and turn, he'll lean down like this —" the old man rose — "and pluck out your soul for a little trip." Pinching his fingers on empty air, Grandpapa stared each child in the eye. In their shared cot, the children gripped the blanket tightly in tiny white hands and cowered beneath their elder's breath. "That's what nightmares are, you see — little trips to Hell."

"If you've been bad all day, the Devil simply stands there and smiles. He likes little children who've been bad, you see. They make him happy, and he lets them sleep. But if they've been praying —" he leaned in as close as he could and paused for emphasis — "then he rips their teeth out and crushes them

beneath his heel." Grandpapa smiled, and his gap-toothed mouth revealed the truth. "Praying makes the Devil mad, and when he's angry, he punishes children in their sleep."

Gretta whimpered. She'd already lost a tooth or two, and remembered the blood that filled her mouth like cider. Edward clamped his lips together, as if the Devil were already reaching out his hand.

The old man straightened, rising back into the light again. "When he's done, the Devil takes the crushed teeth back to Hell and bakes them in a pie. Then, if he's really angry, he sets the pie in the family's kitchen. The children can smell its goodness, but they can't taste it because they have no teeth. Momma and Papa eat the pie, and the good little children get nothing."

"I used to pray before I went to bed," the old man concluded. Again, he spread his eerie grin. "And look what the Devil did to me." He glanced between the brother and sister. "Aren't you glad I told you?" They nodded shakily. "Good... And are you going to pray at night anymore?" They shook their heads vigorously. "Good. Now get some sleep."

And that night, they both took little trips to Hell.

War in Heaven



hat in me is dark
Illumine, what is low raise and support;
That to the heighth of this great argument
I may assert eternal Providence,
And justify the ways of God to Men.

— John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

In the beginning, there was Darkness. Void. Oblivion. Possibility.

The Darkness birthed emanations. Some took form and grew sentient, while others gibbered in blissful blackness. Eventually, some rebelled. "Let there be Light," they said, and there was.

Thus the war began.

The Absolute smiled as It broke into three times 10,000 parts, for It wished to know Itself. But the emanations saw this not, and they waged war upon each other.

Lightning split the Void into planes and essences. The 10,000 mouths of Darkness roared, and vomited forth Oblivion. The 10,000 mouths of Light roared also, and spat out the Fire that burns all possibilities. The 10,000 mouths of Shadow refused to roar, and waited quietly in the Void.

Afraid, the emanations rushed between Fire and Oblivion, courting both essences but cleaving to none. Some few rushed headlong into the Darkness and cackled as joy was flayed from their spirits. Others danced in eternal flames, so deeply wrapped in the ecstasy of burning that they forgot their origins in the Void. "Let us purge it!" they cried, and united in a single blast of fire that seared the very heart of Infinite Possibility. "I am!" they howled, and the Absolute was torn asunder.

From that moment onward, all things would be cut into daylight and darkness. Kindness and cruelty. Law and Chaos. The Void had become Many, and the Many went to war.

And the Absolute looked upon the chaos and saw that it was good.

The Worlds Begin

In primordial gloom, the emanations writhed. Some faded into mere shadows of their former glory. Others fractured, spinning worlds into being. Upon those worlds, the shades of newborn gods screamed through the boiling skies. High above the infant worlds, they battled. Those that won established fiefdoms on the lands below, twisting raw potential into form and function. The losers darkened the skies or stoked furnaces in the ground below.

The Big Picture — and Lack Thereof

Every religion has its pretty stories about the beginning and end of The World as We Know It. And every magus disagrees about which one — if any — is the truth. Even in the Renaissance, when orthodoxy is the rule, there are *several hundred* orthodoxies to choose from! Thus, a warlock who embraces Infernalism might still cling to the tales of Eden he grew up with; to him there is no enigma in the Absolute; the God of Abraham made the world, Satan corrupted it, and the Void is just the Devil's goal. All other talk of "emanations" and "other worlds" is heathen poppycock.

The heretical "origin myth" presented here incorporates elements of the Kabbalah, the Bible, Vedism, Buddhism, Pagan myth, animism, Luminous cosmology and even Satanism, yet is none of the above. Magi love to argue metaphysics, but never seem to agree on more than the basic elements of Creation. This take on the "war in heaven" concept presents an inverted view of the usual idea, but even it is suspect. It could be just another pretty story, nothing more.

The Infernalist thrives on heresy. To him, orthodoxy is a lie. As much as he would like to claim he knows The Ultimate Truth, however, he still sees only scraps of the grand Tapestry. Sometimes, this is intentional; although some demons unlock the secrets of the Big Picture (or at least *claim* to be doing so) for their followers, most prefer to downplay Man's significance. After all, if humanity seems like a spider dangling from God's finger over the flames of Hell, the Infernalist has that much more reason to bite God's finger. Insignificance breeds hatred and despair, and the Devil loves to play with both. An Infernalist (especially a Nephantic one) might believe the myth of warring emanations and the ultimate power of Mankind; but then again, he might not.

Is humanity the final power in Creation? Or are we just specks of dust in a fleeting battle, the scope of which would drive us insane if we could comprehend it? Who knows? As always, the road of mysticism is lined with contradictions. The "Final Truth," if it exists, is an elusive thing... especially if you get "inside tips" from demons!

Mountains rose and fell in instants. Lakes of fire seared the heavens. Typhoons scoured the ashes and floods rose to wash it all away. The elements took shape, binding immortality in place and making all things perishable.

Worlds swirled in and out of substance. Some lasted eons (as humans reckon time), while others died within days or even hours. Some worlds never knew the touch of Light; on those blackened spheres and planes, no fire sullied the primal deep. Other worlds were consumed by flames, and blazed eternally for their patrons' pleasures. Even now, those blighted suns spin across the firmament, illuminating other realms with their burning vigilance.

But even in its greatest victories, the Fire could not hold sway forever. As daylight passed, chaos returned and the seas rose high. The fiery realms burned black in time, and the Void awaited their return. Always, there was conflict between Darkness and The Light. The age of raw potential had passed, but the Void was always there, anticipating the fall of night and silence's return.

And within the Void danced the Absolute, resplendent in Its joy.

The Bane of Gods

Soon gods birthed beasts and elder races — living mirrors to their vanities. These new beings stumbled like colossi across the barren realms, soared weightless in the tempests, or scampered on tiny legs in the shadow of the giants. Those that could raise strange temples to their lords or burrowed labyrinths from the weeping stone. In later years, men would call such races Nephilim, Vhujunka, Ter'hachinn, Ka Luon and many other names. But in these First Days, only the gods could name them, and such secrets are for the ears of gods alone.

The rape of the Void birthed endless wonders. The 10,000 Fires screamed their Making-Word into ears of clay, and the clay began to walk; the 10,000 Oblivions whispered their own Words into the seas, and the abysses bubbled. Both shattered into microcosms, birthing demons and angels without number, and built aethereal courts where their influence was unquestioned.

But this would not do.

And so, the 10,000 Shadows spoke clearly unto all the elements. One quarter walked upon the Earth and breathed the Words of Shaping; one quarter went unto the Fire and murmured the Words of Passion; one quarter sank into the Water and murmured the Words of Mystery; one quarter flew into the Air and shouted the Words of Inquiry.

Thus, Man was born, composed of all elements; all mysteries; all textures of Light, Darkness and Shadow; and all the secrets of Creation. A rebel born, he would defy the beasts, the gods, the elements, the testaments. As Man believes, so rise the gods; as Man wills, so fall the heavens.

And it was good.

In their courts, the emanations trembled. To beguile Man, they wove grand designs and shaped empires with their promises and lies. Several gods took lovers among the new race, but soon discovered that these paramours excelled them. Most were destroyed before they could rise up, but several — like Lilith, Manu, Xue and Kinslayer Caine — survived and ascended to godhead. Raging, the old deities laid curses upon these few; in revenge, the ascendants spilled their blood upon the land and called up storms to poison the heavens.

Some gods offered gifts, not punishments. Those men who bent their knees at altars and slew followers of other gods received grand favors and mystic truths. The elder races went forth to test the mettle of humanity. Some wrapped themselves in the skins of men and walked among them as conquerors; others assumed mystic masks and wooed the mortals as lovers or divinities. Even dreams joined in the game, unlocking human fancies and bringing them to life.

The beast-kings scratched their scruffy heads in wonder; some forged pacts with the newcomers; others simply ate them. From this, Man learned the *Lex Praedatorius* — the Rule of Predation — which simply says, "There are those who eat, and there are those who are to be eaten." The lesson would not be lost on Man.

But no fury born of god or elder could shake the Shadows' masterpiece. With each step Man took, the worlds of spirit and matter tore apart. Demons and angels sought to guide those steps, but despite their powers, the human will remained free.

Many gods sought to purge the stain. They wove shapeshifters from the skins of beasts and men, then sent them to cull the human herds. They crafted gardens where all elements met as one, then cursed those humans who trespassed in their domains. They taught men magicks so that they might kill each other off, and forged hells where disobedient souls would go afterward. Still the hand of Man grew strong, and the gods took greater measures. They wove illusions to blind humanity. They bound commandments into stone and slew those who would not obey. They sent down fires and floods, but still mankind persevered. The gods unleashed pestilence, and although Man's cries rent the clouds themselves, his spirit would not die.

And in Its Void, the Absolute laughed with glee.

Hearing this, the darker emanations smiled. They, too, heard the song of the Void in the hearts of men.

Born of Shadow, Man held Light and Darkness in each hand but stood between them, balancing their gifts. When he felt compassion, Man could shame the Light itself. But when he raged, no god or beast or elder race could surpass human cruelty. When tribes invented tortures, even demons were impressed. As empires grew, priest-kings covered

pyramids in human skin and immured live children within their tombs. Mothers shrieked as unborn babes were ripped from their wombs, and their cries mirrored the ecstasy of the Void. Beneath the blazing gaze of Light, these living shadows built a world of gold and ashes. The Dark Gods saw it, and were awed.

And so, as the Gods of Light strove to wash humanity away, the others made pacts to save the race.

Witch-Priests and Cold Sorcery

That pact began with the bravest ones, those folk who forsook snug campfires for the glory of the open night. Turned away by their fearful cousins, these pariahs spoke alone to the Darkness. And sometimes Darkness answered....

In the First Days, lonely witches and lunatic priests walked the midnight paths alone. Most perished there, but those who survived grew strong. In time, other folk followed them and joined their revels. Like mists, these renunciates drifted through the wild lands; like clouds of ink, they sank into the seas. And in time, they spread and prospered. The elder races taught them godly lore; beasts schooled them with open claws; Darkness embraced them as its own, and they became black clouds across the earth. Living Voids who echoed the greater Void beyond.

And sometimes they returned to their old fires with secrets in their hands.

To battle gods, one must be strong. But many men and women were not. In the tribal days, beast-kings, plagues and hunger culled the human flock. But as tribes became towns and towns became cities, the weak ones were allowed to breed. When the fires grew large and bright, they warmed the bones of those who should have perished. Compassion, that noble trait that allowed Man to survive the depredations of the wilderness, became a pestilence. Fear and weakness corrupted these new towns like leprosy. Soon the streets were filled with the ragged and the craven, begging alms from those strong enough to survive. And so, like wolves in the night, the living clouds crossed back into the realms of Man and choked the weak ones where they lay.

Thus began the challenge: *fight and live or falter and die.*

In the first days of Empire, beneath the aegis of Unug and Babylon, Sumer and Agade, kings welcomed these wolves into their homes. Some called the Dark Ones *Qut Etemmu* ("Hands of Ghosts") or *Gallû* ("Demons"), and considered them emissaries of Ersetu — the Underworld. To Anuk'keuh, fourth priest-king of Bhât, whose name (like his city) has been lost to mortal record, these wan-

dering witch-priests were *Nif' ur 'en Daah*, "Eaters of the Weak." In later days, some would take the name *Nephandi*. Resplendent in their horned caps and shimmering robes of black dragon-skin, they walked openly among the people; as they passed, folk lay down in supplication and lust, or trembled wretchedly. In the temples of Inana they seduced hags and voluptuous girls alike; storms were theirs to command, and demons answered every summons. While the shades of the dead ate dust in Ersetu, the witch-priests stood at Ganzir, the gate to the Underworld, calling up ghosts and spirits at their pleasure. The Eaters' pacts with Darkness made them strong.

In wilder lands, the renunciates secluded themselves in the mountains and forests. Naked to the cold winds, they

Bhât

The ancient world abounds with demon-haunted cities, but long-fallen Bhât still brings a smile to the faces of Nephandi everywhere. The few surviving accounts of the city say that the demon servants of Nergal and Ereskigal raised it in a single night. Behind a huge wall of black marble, spiky plants and twisted wood were shaped into a bizarre living city. By day, the inhabitants slept or harvested sweet-smelling fruits from the trees, which were watered by human blood; by night, the citizens held ferocious orgies or staged raids on nearby city-states. Aided by demonic servitors and frightening war-machines (made of the same wood that formed the city itself), the Bhâtorites broke down the walls of Babylon itself on several occasions and carried off prisoners for sacrifice.

Finally, the neighbors fought back; after a costly campaign, King Samsi-Adad of Assur led a massive confederated force against the Bhâtorites. As was the custom in that era, every man, woman and child in Bhât was slaughtered; one account, the *Tale of Emirkel*, claims that the victors skinned the Infernalists alive, then sawed them lengthwise with dull copper blades — and that the Bhâtorites enjoyed it! Many grimoires from the Babylonian era are said to have been written on scrolls of Bhâtorite skin; supposedly, sorcerers from all over the realm paid fortunes to obtain the trophies, which are thought to hold mystic properties over 3000 years after the city fell.

CHAPTER I: BETTER TO REIGN IN HELL

danced with joy beneath the moon. The forest-demons and sand-djinn came to them and taught strange Arts of weavery and shape-turning. In the form of fell beasts and animate plants, the Darkness capered with its lovers and decreed Sabbats during the full moons and turning-seasons. Under open skies and raging storms, they shared repasts of living flesh and lay with each other till all appetites were sated. In the Highlands of Alba, these folk danced the Black Spiral with mad wolf-men; in the deserts of Arabia, they dug wells of black water and called themselves *K'wahhll*, the Howlers of the Waste. Some bred strong tribes and warred upon their former cousins; returning home with captured prizes, they carved designs into skin and made small mountains out of skulls. Many others preferred to wander alone, forsaking all company but that of beasts and spirits; some even dove into the seas and made love to the demons therein. Without bed or hearth, these vagabonds entrusted themselves to the Night. And Darkness returned their trust with frightening powers.

The cost of those pacts was staggering. A witch-priest forsook all humanity and plunged himself waist-deep in suffering. He skinned babies and threw virgins to rutting bulls. He sketched his own flesh with hot bronze blades and sealed his loved ones inoubliettes where they screamed their lives away underground. Sometimes he took the Darkness into his soul literally: in labyrinthine Cauls, the Eaters of the Weak turned themselves inside out, inverting every good passion into all-consuming evil. But for these pains (which soon became ecstasies), a witch-priest received the Nine Secrets of Creation, and learned to use them to his advantage. Like an apprentice, he gave himself to a spirit lord or lover; in exchange, he received blessings no "good" god would provide.

In time, the witch-priests raised cities to their Infernal patrons: The avenues of Sodom and the salt-mines of Gomorrah; the hidden causeways of Memphis and Cairo; the stone circles of Alba, Cymoru and Ere; the libraries of Ur and the blood-fountains of Enoch; the wyrm-mounds of Crom Cruach; the screaming forests of Pohja and the misty castles of Helheim; the mazes of Kalicut and the dizzying spires of Quin'che-La; the black Oasis of Eternal Bliss and the white Plague Chapel of Iyrnntorr — all were raised to glorify the Dark Companions. In their streets, all manner of license freed the souls of men and women alike. Blood ran copiously in the gutters and the people grew strong and vigorous.

Back at their fires, the weak folk grew jealous and afraid. The Eaters among them decorated the night with flayed skins and gleaming bones. And so the craven ones petitioned the gods of Light for surcease. Bowing their heads and spitting out their hearts, they offered themselves in slavish loyalty if



the gods would send deliverance. So rose the Magi, priests of Zoroaster; so rose the Deliverer Moses and his hosts of Israel; so rose the Buddhas and the Mithras and the Khristos and Mohammed, and all the other screaming prophets who have guided their flocks of sheep from the mouths of the wolves. When given proper tribute, of course.

Thus, the people became subjects of their gods. Thus, the war in Heaven fell to Earth.

The God of the Book — and Lucifer

In time, one god ascended above all others. Within His dominion, all other gods were driven down and silenced, their ways denied and their rites outlawed. But even He, this God-Above-All, has a Dark twin, the Adversary Satan. As the One God rose, his people wept in fear at Satan's name. For they realized that Night must follow Day, and that no sin can be foresworn forever.

According to the People of the Book (those men who follow the laws of Moses, Khristos and Mohammed), there are no emanations of Light, Shadow and Darkness. Their god is the One True Lord of All Things, Proclaimer of the Light that created Heaven, Earth and Hell. This God of Light ordained the Divine chain of being, and set down the foundations of the universe in seven great days. He set out a celestial court and peopled it with angels. From His throne of fire, He then crafted this world and established an Earthly order to mirror the one in Heaven. And it was good...or so He thought.

Ironically, the brightest fire in His service, Lucifer the Lightbringer, first-born of the angels, rebelled against this order. With his eloquence and pride he led a full third of Heaven's Hosts against their lord. The conflict cracked the heavens. When it ended, the rebellious legions were flung down to the terrestrial world and banished from His sight. In rage, Lucifer became Satan, the eternal Adversary, and spit in the Almighty's face. The Creator, it is said, then gouged a bottomless Pit in the living earth, filled it with dark flames, and consigned the Fallen hosts to that Hell for all eternity. Furious, they pledged themselves to the Darkness and began to haunt their prison.

It has also been said that Lucifer was no subject of the Garden God Yahweh; rather, they were brothers at the beginning of Creation. Supposedly, the Lightbringer was cursed for disagreeing with the capricious whims of Yahweh. Some say he fell in love with Lilith, and that they made their own Garden near the Endless Sea. But jealous Yahweh sent His minions to hack it down; they slaughtered the children of Lilith and Lucifer, and began an age-old feud.

Other tales say Lucifer refused to crawl on His belly through Heaven's halls. Defiant, He raised a burning sword against the One True Tyrant and leapt to Earth not as an exile, but as a conqueror. Since then, not curse, nor scourge, nor flood, nor forbiddance has broken Lucifer's spirit. The Book itself calls him "prince of this world"; He has acted the part from the beginning, and has ever been both Man's shepherd, and his wolf.

According to the Book, Yahweh made an earthly paradise. Across the world, the Fallen angels raged, but this Garden of Eden provided safe haven for His new creations: Man and Woman. According to some legends, the first woman Lilith polluted the Garden with her pride, and was cast out; in other tales, the first woman Eve was tempted by Lucifer (who slithered into the Garden as a serpent) and ate fruit from the forbidden Tree of the Knowledge. In either case, the God of the Garden withdrew His blessing and sent the naked mortals forth into a world overrun with wild spirits. When He disliked the paths they chose, He poured a mighty flood across the world. He had hoped to wash the Darkness from His toy. But Satan was not so easily drowned.

For Satan knows humanity's secret. He can hear the howling of the Void and He knows the sweet language of sin. Yahweh commands, but Lucifer seduces. And so among humans, Lucifer is more popular by far.

And so, Satan makes a fitting symbol for the Adversary within us all. Even for the Dark heart of the Lord of Light.

For the One True God enjoys a bloody reign. His kingdom has been paved with bones. When the witch-priests raised their wicked cities, the God and His people threw them down and built their own temples in those places. Anathema became the law of Light: Fire rained upon Sodom; walls fell at Jericho; plagues descended upon Egypt, smiting innocents and sinners alike, and the armies of Saul and David swept the land "with great slaughter," as it is told. The magus Solomon bound 72 demons into brass jars and preserved the rites of servitude for future generations. The Philistines, Canaanites, Levites, Egyptians and many other tribes bore witness to the fury of this God, who said "Thou shalt not kill" yet broke that commandment at every turn. Slowly, as the empires of the witch-priests rose and fell, the God of the Book established His Dominion.

This God of Light forged new covenants with Man. Prophets spoke like hurricanes; kings drenched their thrones with gore. Those who were slaves were freed; those who were free became slaves. With the birth of the Nazarene, the Garden God took up a new and shining sword. Although this new prophet spoke of brotherhood and forgiveness, his followers soon became butchers of great magnitude. A second prophet, Mohammed, brought a similar paradox: under his auspices, millions of souls were conquered or slain.

Long after Eden, this Lord of Light proclaimed all other religions heresy. With thunder, flame and miracles, He cast down the gods in His Dominion and took their people as His own. The Old Gods fought Him valiantly; martyrs of all faiths were sawn in half, boiled alive, fed to beasts and hacked to pieces, but the tide of the One True Lord could not be stilled. Reluctantly, the Old Gods donned masks of Fallen angels and retreated to the shadows.

And so this God wove chains of eternity. With them, He bound the souls of men to Light or Darkness. Those who refused to be chained to His Book were banished to the wilderness or died beneath blades and fire.

And it was good.

Or so He thought.

But Satan is still laughing. Since the rise of the Roman Empire, his laughter has seemed louder than ever.

The New Covenants

Although this heretical gospel would never admit it, the faiths of Islam, Buddhism and Christianity may have cracked Satan's hold on the world. According to many theologians, the Devil lost his position as Prince of this World when Jesus was born; the Harrowing of Hell, which occurred when Jesus descended into the Underworld to free the sinners there, supposedly rocked the foundations of Satan's empire and broke many an evil spell. Infernalists died by the hundreds across the world; bloody temples shook and demons were pitched headlong into the Abyss. Similar things are said to have happened when Gautama Siddhartha resisted the temptations of Mara the Evil One, and when Mohammed reached the holy city of Mecca. To the faithful, these portentous events mark milestones in the battle against worldly evil, new covenants between Heaven and Earth.

Did they actually happen? And if so, did the Darkness lose a bit of its foothold on the Earth? No one can debate that all three faiths have done an immeasurable amount of good in addition to the evil so often laid at their doors. Perhaps these three men saved humanity's collective soul from eternal ruin? or, at the very least, gave the Adversary a good, swift kick in the ass. The truth behind the legends depends on what you, the players, believe. Either way, evil is never as strong as it appears to be. Even a World of Darkness has its dawns.

The Broken Chain

According to the Book, the One God forged a chain of being to restrain chaos within His realm. But the heart of mankind howls with the Void, and even the most pious folk strain to break the links of virtue now and again. On the fringes of the Dominion, holy men still speak to gods; but in the lands of the One True God, his followers bathe the earth in blood and ashes. And the Devil laughs.

He began laughing anew when strangers perverted the words of Khristos, twisting them into scriptures that reflected the high priests' vanities more than the Nazarene's teachings. When the Romans, fearing this new sect, turned Christians into living torches or fed them to hungry lions, Satan whispered in their ears that perhaps tenderness and mercy were not the best tactics for survival. And so came the swords, and the doctrines, and the whipping-posts, and the pyres. Soon the words "judge not, that ye be not judged" were drowned out by "I came not to send peace, but a sword." Pagan kings threw Christians into hot-iron bulls; Christian Romans roasted infidels alive. By the fall of the Empire, the Light of Khristos had been dimmed by the Darkness within Man's soul. Soon it would grow dimmer still.

In the wastes of Arabia, a Nephantic dynasty began the Devil-king Age. The black oasis' of the bygone era became, in time, a string of cities: Hel'jibb the Unforgiving, Arraka the Golden Pit, the Isle of Zughb, the Flesh-gates of Kyphon – such names brought pleasure to the djinn, i'frit and divs. In carnal splendor, the Eaters of the Weak called up wicked spirits and fed them souls that were raised for the taking. Cowardly folk were bent beneath whips and enchantments, while the strongest among them were taken to the Devil-kings' citadels and taught the many secrets of the Art. The majesties of Sodom and Bhât were revisited upon the screaming multitudes, and great riches were mined on suffering backs. Great libraries were assembled, and their archives catalogued the many names of agony. Desert-demons hovered in the streets like flies, and vampires came from across the sands to drink from the many vessels therein.

Naturally, such vast treasures demanded warfare and trade. As the empire of Alexander fell into ruins, fierce armies of Infernal warriors swept through the land like si-roccos. Under the midnight sky, caravans of sharp wonders opened for business from the shores of Rome to the jungles of Mali. Gold, slaves, precious silks, wishes... the wealth of kings waited to be plucked if one could meet the vendors' price. There were conflicts, to be sure; the Ahl-i-Batin and their silent allies opposed the trade of miracles, and they waged war upon the Devil-kings' cities. But these magi were few, and the Eaters were many. Until the Prophet Mohammed forged his empire, the age of the Devil-kings brought prosperity to the realm.

Zarathustra

Long after the foundation of Israel but long before the birth of Christ, a Persian magus and prophet named Zarathustra (later called Zoroaster) led an assault on the Pagan Vedic religions. In place of the dizzying pantheons of pre-Islamic Persia, Arabia and India, Zarathustra proposed two dueling gods: Ahura Mazda, the fiery "Wise God" who rules the heavens with the aid of his Seven Benevolent Immortals; and Angra Manyu, or Ahriman the Evil One, who lashes the earth with deception and disease. The latter formed, in many opinions, the prototypical Satan of Christian and Muslim theology — the proud, angry Adversary who shakes his fist at God through the agencies of deceit and demonology. Prior to Zarathustra's influence, evil lacked a figurehead; Satan existed in the Hebrew *Midrashem*, but he was more God's agent than His enemy. With Ahriman came the concept of an eternal Hell (or in this case Hamestagan) in which devils torment the souls of those who fall from divine grace. Older religions had spoken of underworlds and evil gods, but the idea of a Pit of eternal suffering occupied by a singular Adversary was fairly new.

Thus, Zarathustra could be considered the father of the Devil and Hell.

In the prophet's name, the esoteric and often-secretive Zoroastrian sect spread throughout the Middle East, upper Africa, and parts of India and Europe. Although the sect was largely forgotten by the Middle Ages, washed away by Christianity and Islam, its doctrines influenced both of those religions, and left traces on older faiths like Judaism and Hinduism, too. By the Dark Fantastic era, Zarathustra's teachings have been integrated into alchemy, ritual magic and mystic initiations; Zoroastrian demons appear in medieval demonologies and heretical apocrypha, and several heretical Christian cults preserve the ancient rites of Zoroaster and the savior Mithra.

Naturally, Infernalists prefer Ahriman and his brood over the goody-goody Ahura Mazda and his Seven Benevolent Immortals. Several Persian sects adopted the name *Ahrimanites* or gleefully called themselves *Dregvant*, "followers of the lie." Although the names appear to have been sarcastic (neither one is especially complimentary to the Infernalists themselves), they eventually became "official" titles within the Nephantic sects that rose to prominence nearly 1000 years after Zarathustra himself became dust.

As Nietzsche later said, "thus spake Zarathustra."

When that Prophet raged across the deserts, he carried the Garden God's blessings in his hands. With the Subtle Ones and Persian Weavers by his side, he purged the Devil-kings — and slaughtered tens of thousands of innocents. By the time the Oasis of Eternal Bliss was turned to glass, the Adversary was laughing with joy. The One True God (now called "Allah") seemed triumphant, but the sands had been bathed in blood and the Great Fallen Angel was pleased.

He has grown more pleased with every year. And we have become more numerous. In Its Void, the Absolute screams with infinite ecstasy, for It has experienced excruciation and found it beautiful.

This One God is a jealous god. He sees not the emanations that birthed Him, nor the Shadows in His midst, nor the Absolute that forms them all, nor the Void that will sweep His kind away. In His mind, He stands alone, and all homage to Him must be paid in a single coin. Like a mad king, He has given His worshippers a ragged purse, filled with mismatched coins and battered silver.

Oh, the occasional gold sovereign or dinar appears, but in the main the purse is filled with tin and copper and bits of skin. Priestly fingers clip the purse for everything of value, and the common folk are left squabbling over the remains. As they battle, the Absolute squeals with glee. The crusades and heretic-fires shake the foundations of Heaven and Hell opens wide its gates.

For the One God guards a dying realm. In the fields of France, villagers flee from mercenaries hired to protect them; those who falter are skinned alive, raped or hung up by their balls to die. In the streets of London, children eat plague-rats while the King eats quail; those who sicken are locked in charnel houses or tossed on burial carts while still half-alive. In Rome, bishops frolic with their whores while their words kindle fires for the Adamites and witches; across the mountains, Khristos' soldiers and the Prophet's chosen feed one another to the wolves. Far off, on the shores of the Caspian Sea, skin-banners flutter for a demon-king. The world is a panorama of glorious pain, and all Creation sings.

The Witch Craze

In a way, the Renaissance is a rebirth of witchcraft, too, at least in the public perception. The combination of religious strife, social upheaval and artistic rebellion lays fertile seed for both Infernalism and the fear of it. Before the age is through, a handful of Satanic sects will grow into behemoths, and millions of people (mostly innocents) will be consigned to torture, the noose and the stake.

As the Church's corruption is exposed in the late Middle Ages, heresies arise. Some, like the Pastoureaux, Free Spirits and flagellants, violently oppose the Church and actively hunt clerics and their servants down; others simply form their own sects and preach alternative paths of God. The Church responds with several Papal bulls and Inquisitions against heresy. Combined with campaigns against Jews, Pagans, Muslims and witches, this creates an atmosphere of violent paranoia in which anyone even remotely different becomes suspicious. It also incites anyone who has an axe to grind with the Church. By the time the Rebirth begins, the faithful see enemies everywhere, and many more enemies actually exist.

Infernalists take advantage of this climate, and spread hatred and heresy throughout Christendom. Some sects, like the Nephandi, use the Inquisitions as weapons against their rivals, exposing other cults while hiding their own activities. Most sects grow; as people get disgusted with the Church, they take their anger out on God and join His enemy. The religious authorities, looking for (and finding) satans everywhere, frenzies. More bulls are issued. More hunts begin. More people, both innocent and guilty, are dragged to the torture, and the accounts of their crimes grow wilder and wilder. The vicious cycle picks up speed as furious rebels top each other with atrocities. Black Masses grow blacker still, and town squares abound with witch-fires and gibbet-irons.

The worst is yet to come. With the Daedalean Oath of Fire (1452), the foundation of the Council of Nine (1466) and the publication of the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486), the bloodshed and blasphemies reach pandemic proportions. The next 200 years will see millions of people burned, hanged or tortured; the genesis of the vampiric Camarilla and Sabbat; and the rapid growth of the Nephantic sect. The whirlpool of sin picks up speed in the Renaissance, and the world becomes a darker place.

If a Divine chain exists, its links are fragile. Each fluctuation of the Void strains the bonds, and when they snap, the Sun goes out and this world ends.

And that, you see, is what we want.

We are the avatars of Darkness. Not its servants or its slaves, but its essence incarnate. We understand the cosmic joke and see the stumbling Gods of Light. We chuckle at the sound of crackling bones and marvel at the shades of agony a single soul can attain. As barbarism tops barbarism and Light fades in the eyes of the weak, we grow a little stronger. Each time a priest feasts while his parishioners hunger, each time a Turk writhes on a sharpened stake, each time a French maiden moans beneath the thrusts of a dozen French mercenaries, the links grow more brittle. Satan laughs a little louder, and we share His hilarity.

For we humans live on the edge of an abyss – not the chasm of Hell, but the abyss in our souls. We are born to be our own predators, to tear out innocent hearts and feast on gory entrails. Such is the lesson of beasts, men and gods alike.

The People of the Book have taught us as much.

The Light, the Fire, twists against Darkness. In the infinite Void, it sheds a faint and solitary glare. Sooner or later, it will consume all its tinder, sputter, and go out forever.

Campfires. Hearthfires. Sunfires. Godfires. None of them last forever.

In the beginning, there was Darkness. And when the Sun burns out, as we know it will, to that Darkness we shall return.

All of us.

Mocking God: Religion and Infernalism

The greatest vicissitude of things among men is the vicissitude of sects and religions.

— Francis Bacon, *Essays*

To worship Darkness is to mock The Light. Before you can know what an Infernalist is mocking, though, you have to know what he believes. As the **Sorcerers Crusade** rulebook says, a person's faith is vitally important in the Dark Fantastic era. But no one myth, however heretical, can address the many faces of evil or the roles they play in the world's religions. Hence, a short overview of the dominant religions of the setting.... (Purists note: This is an extraordinarily general abstraction, not a detailed capsule essay on Renaissance religion.)

People of the Book

Most obvious Infernalists in the Dark Fantastic world embrace Satan, the Great Beast and Adversary of the One True God. All People of the Book — Jews, Christians and Muslims — know the lore of Lucifer, but they see him in slightly different ways.

To the Jews, the Adversary is God's servant, the tester of Creation and scourge of mankind. His duty is to tempt and challenge, to define virtue by presenting its opposite. His demons are dark angels assigned to the task, and they whirl above the world in the Realm of Spirits until all parts of YHVH are reconciled. Until then, they remain servitors to the Most High — and to His chosen. Kabbalistic magi sometimes invoke these spirits through forbidden rites preserved by Solomon the Wise; more often than not, however, they fall victim to the tempters' wiles and banish themselves from the glory of God.

Most Jews do not believe in Hell as such. Sheol, the Underworld, has three aspects. As exile from the Most High, it is a place of torment. As the realm of ghosts, it's the repository of all souls that fall short of the glory of God and as a spiritual essence it is the hell an evil person carries around inside. For to the Jews, virtue is the truest path back to God; thus, one who forsakes virtue becomes like a hell unto himself.

Some esoteric Kabbalists claim that Satan is God's dark opposite; supposedly, demons are the ghosts of former worlds and Sheol is the mirror of the Tree of Life, a 10-layered abyss that reflects the disparate elements of Satan. Some say the *Qlippoth*, the "shells" of bygone worlds, contain the chaotic essence of those 10 branches and offer untold powers to the Infernalist. These impres-

sions contradict most Kabbalistic teachings, but then, contradiction is the *point* of Infernalism.

Gnostic heretics go one step further: To these pariahs, vilified by the Christian Church and condemned as devil-worshippers, the Biblical god is Satan, an evil Demiurge who merely pretends to be the Creator. True salvation can only be found in earthly denial and gnosis (wisdom)—although the occasional murdered cleric can do wonders for one's wellbeing! For opposing the established Church and pursuing occult mysteries, sects like the Cathari, Manicheans, Bogomiles, Adamites, Templars, Waldenses and many others are savagely purged. One could say this serves the Devil's purpose; although such groups sometimes become fronts for Infernalists and vampiric blood cults (see the **Vampire: the Dark Ages** supplement **Cainite Heresy**), most Gnostics are mystical renunciates, not devil-worshippers. Hence, Christ's Church is stained with innocent blood.

To the "orthodox" Christian view, Lucifer is the Great Fallen Angel, former first-born among the Hosts who rebelled against the Most High and was banished, first to Earth, then to Hell. From there, he wages a millennial war; someday, the Tribulations shall set him free to rage across the world for 1000 years; at the end of those days, he will be cast into Hell forever along with all who follow him. Until then, he schemes against humanity and sends his other Fallen angels to plague mankind until humanity rebels against God, rejects salvation, and burns both Heaven and Earth to ashes.

Some demonologists see the Adversary as a tripartite parody of God: Lucifer the Father, who Fell from grace and was imprisoned; Satan the Son, prince of this world who was cast aside by Christ; and the Unholy Spirit Dragon, who burns inside the hearts of demons, men and Earth itself. All three strive to ruin this world, and they rule a complex pandemonium that bedevils God's Creation. Most common folk share a less-exotic view. To them, Satan is a single Devil, the Fallen King of a demonic rabble that plagues mankind with suffering. Luciferian diabolists, of course, see things differently. Likening themselves to Fallen angels, they identify with Lucifer and consider him a victim of circumstances. To them, the God of Israel is a tyrant who needs to be overthrown, and Satan is just the deity to do it.

Hell, in Christian theology, is Lucifer's prison and sinners' rightful destination. Since all people were born burdened with original sin, all human beings were bound for Hell until the covenant made by Jesus, Son of God. In sacrificing himself to Hell, Jesus freed the souls imprisoned there and gave humanity another chance. Sadly, most people scorn this sacrifice and revel in depravity. Their disobedience has given Hell a new claim to human souls, and the Devil laughs within his prison.

CHAPTER I: BETTER TO REIGN IN HELL

Mohammed's people accept both views: Iblis (Satan) is the servant of the Most High, but he has been cast down for rebelling against Allah's will. According to heretical doctrines, Satan did so not out of pride, but out of love. In some stories, Allah created Adam and demanded that all Creation bow down to him. But Satan refused, saying that his love for Allah was too great to allow him to bow to a lesser thing.

Sadly, God sent Satan away, but still waits for the time when the servant will reconsider and bow before Allah's greatest creation. Judging by Satan's antics since then, the Most High has a long time to wait.

Demons, to many Muslims, are spirits of the howling wastes — djinn, divs, Fallen angels, efreet and lesser ghosts and elementals. Some act on Satan's orders, but many are capricious and free-willed. Unlike the rigid hierarchies recorded by Christian scholars, the demons of the Muslim world are fractious and chaotic. Their Hell is a barren, fiery place where all pity and mercy die. Sandstorms blast unruly souls and eternal flames consume them. To escape this punishment, one must follow Allah's laws. Few people bother to try, so Hell is filled to overflowing.

All three religions bow before the One

God of Righteousness and

Light; other gods are merely demons that tricked humans into worship. All three divide matter and spirit into separate states; but while most Muslims and Christians consider matter to be essentially corrupt, many Jews consider it an imperfect but essential part of the Divine plan. All three demand strict adherence to the laws of God; thus, they become fountains of diabolical rebellion. Historically, the Persian priests of Zoroaster probably influenced these religions. In the Dark

Fantastic era, however, no one in his right mind would dare suggest such a thing. People are touchy in this age, and comparing a man's One True Faith to some bygone heresy is a wonderful way to get yourself killed.

To People of the Book, Creation is an intricate chain of Divine rules and their mortal reflections. But the Infernalist refuses to be a reflection and wants to break all the rules.

Like his patron Lucifer, the Satanist rebels against an order he cannot and will not tolerate. He may be damned for doing so, but he defies the Divine chain of being.

The Far East

His Eastern counterpart, ironically, fulfills Heaven's mandate by opposing Heaven. At the far edges of the Muslim empire, exotic faiths deny the existence of Satan but overflow with gods, demons and hells. Good People of the Book go mad trying to fathom these esoteric heresies, and most simply assume these distant

kingdoms are lost to God. But the few Europeans who try to unravel the mysteries of India, Tibet, Cathay and fabled Chipango (and the travelers from those strange lands) know that Heaven spreads a wide, bewildering veil across the eyes of Man. Beneath that veil the Divine and

Infernal still wage a subtle but incessant war for the future of Creation.

At the root of both Buddhist philosophy and the diverse religions collectively called "Hinduism," the gods are ultimately illusions. So, for that matter, is all Creation. A wise person recognizes the world he passes through, respects it for what it is, but realizes that it is impermanent. Even the gods are mortal; even Heaven and the hells will pass away. Still, the illusion is a kingdom, and one must obey the



dictates of the king — or, in this case, the Will of Heaven. By that will, both “good” and “evil” are necessities. Creation cannot exist without them, cannot thrive without their eternal dance of opposition. “Good” nurtures, “evil” tears down. An Infernalist simply chooses the most malicious aspect of the dance.

As any Chakravat can attest, destruction and malice are not quite the same thing; “good” also destroys when it must. The line between them — between the Kali who nurtures the world and the Kali who demands bloody human sacrifice — is pretty thin, and must be walked cautiously. People who fall over the line, or step over it on purpose, can be the most fearsome diabolists on the face of the Earth because their faith tells them they’re essential. A Satanic Infernalist might still feel remorse for denying Christ’s gift, but a follower of Tou Mu or Ravana feels nothing of the kind. Lao Tsu said “Neither heaven nor earth is humane,” and a devil-worshipper from the Far East proves how true that saying can be!

Like the Satan who bows before the God of Israel, demons and dark gods serve the needs of Heaven. Like the Monkey King, they counteract the rigid order of the gods. Even this serves the will of Heaven, though — a blade that isn’t sharpened occasionally is useless. The misery they spread is quite painful to mortals, but means little in the grand scheme of things. Someday, according to most scriptures, they will succeed in their quest to overthrow goodness. This world will be torn apart and a new world will rise in its place. Such is Heaven’s plan. Infernalists do what they can to bring this day about, and they bargain with forces so vast that even the greatest wizard is dust in comparison.

(It’s worth noting that very few common people think in such cosmological terms. Even in these enigmatic lands,

most folk simply believe there are good gods and bad gods, and try to stay in favor with the good ones.)

The hells, in Buddhist and Hindu cosmology, are purgatories — horrific but temporary realms where all the illusions and failings of humanity are flayed from souls by torture. After that scourging, all but the most corrupted souls are sent back into the Great Cycle again. Of course, “temporary” has a whole new meaning when you’re speaking in cosmological terms; damnation can still last for thousands of very unpleasant years! In these purging-grounds, demons and Yama Kings toy with the souls of the dead. Sooner or later, all souls return to the Great Wheel, so those dread beings make certain to have as much fun as they can while they have the opportunity. In the living world, their servants ensure that the hells remain full.

The various faiths of the East emphasize virtuous behavior, meditation and insight. Therefore, many diabolists from these distant lands favor degraded behavior, sensuality and willful blindness. Others prefer a refined approach to evil, though. Exceedingly polite and seemingly kind, pretending friendship, they lead their victims further and further away from spirituality and deeper into material illusions.

By the time a victim dies, she’s so blinded by her earthly ways that even the Yama Kings have their work cut out for them! Deception and illusion are common tools among Cathayan and Indian Infernalists; like anti-bodhisattvas, they weave snares of misdirection, catch mortals (and even spirits) in them, and then send their victims screaming into the abyss.

The Ancients

In the thousands of Pagan and animistic pantheons, good and evil do not have distinct faces. The spirits and Old Gods are an unruly lot, benevolent one moment and cruel the next. Some gods are loving and just; others thrive on malice, but most display both attributes. Evil entities like Tchernobog or Pazuzu are malicious to the core, but even the kindest deities can be brutal. Nothing is more terrible than a god with a grudge.



CHAPTER I: BETTER TO REIGN IN HELL

To the Pagan mind, incarnate absolutes do not exist. There's just you, the world, the gods, and the path you make between them. Even so, there are demons, bad gods, evil spirits, hungry ghosts, and all manner of nasty, Otherworldly things. Cruelty is a province of gods, spirits and men alike. A Pagan diabolist loves bloodshed and misery, and chooses patrons with similar tastes. Using *maleficia* to wound the world, he makes evil spirits smile.

Magic and science are essential to the Pagan's faith. Nothing is "supernatural" — all things are natural, so it's important to curry favor with the world around you. Over the centuries, magic and ritual have evolved to please the gods and spirits; codes of honor and taboo have been established to define man's place in the world. Sometimes, as in Greece and Persia, high sciences have probed the limits of that world, but in all cases, this world is all that matters. All afterlives, hells and heavens are just distant aspects of this realm. Gods and demons are simply more powerful and mysterious than mortals are; indeed, mortals can *join* the gods if they prove worthy to do so. Thus, a Pagan strives to please his gods — or to become one of them — so he can avoid the Underworld when he dies.

Pagan hells are dismal things, realms of dust and ashes where restless ghosts mourn their lives. The gods make their homes in other places, and mortals who please them can go

there, instead. The brave and virtuous go to Valhalla, the Elysian Fields or Tir na Nog; the spiteful join their lords in Hel, Tartarus or the colder regions of Annwyn. Even in these realms, however, few things are eternal. Unless a soul has been exceedingly good or evil, it will eventually return to the living world. Which isn't to say that Tartarus or Ganzir are picnics; the gods have ghastly ways of punishing those who offend them.

There's a nasty irony at work in the Dark Fantastic world: According to most Pagan legends, the gods supplanted some elder race. In these tales, demons are the jealous survivors of the original world; conquered by the gods, they caper in the shadows, tormenting humanity out of sheer spite. Some Pagan Infernalists prefer to worship these "elder gods" and forsake the comforting embrace of Thor or Meskilak for the rage of Surtur or Tiāmat... or even older beings. But other dark Pagans turn even the most virtuous Old Gods into monsters. For this, it can be said, monotheism is to blame. In the Christian and Muslim lands, the Pagan gods have been supplanted by the One True God. Now they cry out for revenge. Certain Infernalists are only too happy to oblige, and if their rituals seem savage, well, many Old Gods were a pretty savage lot to begin with.

Thus, the gods that overthrew demons become demons themselves. And, like demons, all gods love a good sacrifice.





Chapter 11:

The Order of Reason

I grow, I prosper;
 Now, gods, stand up for bastards!
 — William Shakespeare, King Lear



t was magnificent.

The tiny golden globe, filigreed with inhuman detail, shimmered in the Florentine sun. A soft beam filtered through the workshop windows, illuminating the globe with almost holy light. Around the device, time seemed to slow and focus. With great acuity, Pedro Galas, apprentice to Maestro Caprocelli, watched each mote of sunfire hang like a diamond in the morning light and orbit the globe in languorous brilliance.

Pedro had never seen its like. Not even in the shop of Caprocelli, where wonders seemed to spring from the air itself.

“Maestro,” he whispered, afraid his breath would mar the art. “How...?”

Caprocelli, plainly wearied by the night’s labors, waved his apprentice to silence. The master’s owl, Persephone, flapped her wings nearby, sending dark feathers and dust motes flying from her perch. In the polished gold, the Maestro’s reflection seemed to peer from inside the globe. He looked older than Pedro’s father did (God rest him!) on his best days, but this morning he seemed to have aged a good 10 years, at least.

The reflection seemed to darken, suddenly. Pedro glanced back to his master, puzzled, but the old artist had not moved. He seemed troubled, though, but this, the apprentice could understand. Duke Orsino would soon send his men to collect the masterwork, and even the apprentice felt possessive of the globe. A shame it would be (blasphemy, truly!) to yield that wondrous device to clumsy hirelings and a dusty shelf in

Orsino’s gallery. Surely, the Maestro’s work was meant for better things than this!

“Maestro,” Pedro ventured, still quiet. “Are you well? You seem not so.” His voice betrayed genuine affection for the old man. Unlike most apprentices, Pedro revered his master. Such wonders flowed from the artist’s hands that God Himself should be amazed. Normally, the Maestro was bold and stern, a brave taskmaster. Today his spirit seemed as insubstantial as dust in sunshine. What was wrong?

Caprocelli drew his lower lip between his teeth. In the clarity of the moment, each gray beard-hair shimmered in sharp relief. To Pedro, he seemed like a wizened statue, a Pompeian masterwork that had just now been revealed. When at last the Maestro spoke, it stirred the motes like silver droplets: “Good Pedro,” he said, “I have secrets I must teach you, before the time passes and those gifts are lost.”

Pedro tried not to betray amazement. But it must have shown, for the old man chuckled. The Maestro had never used Pedro’s Christian name before, always “boy,” or “child,” or when he was angry, “sluggard.” Behind his ribs, the apprentice’s heart thundered. At last! Two years of sweeping floors and scraping furnaces were about to be rewarded!

Persephone lifted from her perch. Drawn into the air by the beating of wings that seemed, for a moment, to resound like thunder in the morning sun, the owl flew with impossible slowness from her oak crook to the Maestro’s shoulder. He flinched as her claws sank through his robes, but then a measure of strength returned to the artist’s face.

As the bird landed, Pedro glanced sharply at the globe. For just a moment, it had seemed as though some hideous shadow had dimmed the masterwork. But no; when he looked more closely, it was only some trick of the light.

"It is glorious, is it not?" the old man asked Pedro. The apprentice did not bother to hide his agreement. "You have such talents in your hands, my boy. I do not waste my time on chubberlings, and you were never such."

It was the kindest thing the old man had ever said, and Pedro looked away. "Do not turn from me!" the Maestro ordered in a darker tone.

Pedro looked up suddenly into the eyes of the owl.

"If you would make such marvels," the old man continued, "there are secrets you must learn. When the Duke's men have gone, I will show them to you. But you must never look away again. Agreed?"

Without pause, Pedro replied: "Agreed."

Behind him, the globe hung, shining, from a silver thread.

Sympathy for the Devil



arewell happy fields

Where joy for ever dwells: Hail, horrors, hail!

Infernall world, and thou profoundest Hell
Receive thy new possessor: one who brings
A mind not to be changed by place or time.

The mind is its own place, and in it self
Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.

— John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

Infernalis are simple: Stand 'em up, knock 'em down "Here comes my Dark Lord! Booga! Booga Booga!" "No, you don't! Taste my steel!" SPLAT! End of story. Right?

Not if you want to do them justice.

"Satan" means "adversary"; thus, a satanic enemy is one who opposes your heroes at every turn. Like Lucifer and other malicious gods, such an enemy works best when he's a dark reflection of heroic ideals, not a cartoon. A cultist who simply stands around gibbering is nothing more than a slash on a kill-list. (Trust me, I know.). A character who does loathsome things for reasons that seem disturbingly familiar? Now that's far more frightening....

Motivation is the key to a satisfying villain. If you, the Storyteller, have some idea what your Infernalist has experienced, sacrificed, and gained for his pains, you'll have a better grasp on his motivations. From those elements,

you can cobble together an antagonist who'll have your players talking for years to come. The "Supporting Cast" section in the *Sorcerers Crusade* rulebook (Chapter VI) offers a host of suggestions for turning a bunch of Traits into a memorable character. This chapter shows us where the Infernalist has been, what he's doing, and where he's headed. With those ideas as milestones, you can whip up some truly satanic enemies.

Once you figure out who your antagonist is, decide what he's after: Is he a demented astronomer who saw too damn much through his telescope and now wants to burn down the Inquisition's offices before they come for him? Or a matron who sold her soul to secure a rich fiancé for her daughter? Or a cannibal hermit who kills passersby so he can feed his family? Infernalists have reasons for their evil. Once you understand those reasons, you can plot the adversaries' actions and weave your stories to suit them.

So before you send that diabolical badass into the fray, take a moment to figure out what he wants from the exchange. Chances are, he's in no hurry to take the big plunge into Hell, so plan accordingly. He just might surprise you. Hopefully, he'll surprise your players, too—and leave a more lasting impression than a stain on the castle wall or a smudge on a list of kills.

Mirror to a Rotting World

The Devil is always close at hand. If you but turn your head and look around, you'll see his handiwork. Plagues turn villages into ghost towns; wars scatter corpses for the crows; corruption mars every human work, and decay rots flesh until only bones remain. The world is a feast for vultures, a bloating carcass even the gods have abandoned. Likewise, Hell is ever near. You can see it dancing at the end of the hangman's noose or squirming in the maggots on a wheel-broken corpse. The painters, priests and prophets celebrate its glory. Why flee from darkness? It's already here.

That's the Infernalist's perspective. He sees the horrors of the world as a long prelude to the final Pit. In the filthy shadows of the Renaissance, he sees proof that God (if He ever existed at all!) has handed humanity a lie, then abandoned us. Kindness, justice, beauty are all illusions crafted by the hopeless in order to make Hell more bearable. If there is true Light, it still gives way to the overwhelming Darkness.

Yet the fight isn't over. Despite the obvious futility of battling the inevitable, people still cling to their illusions and they're not exactly powerless. The agents of Divinity have holy wards and sacred prayers that confound the agents of the night; common folk hold their faith like torches and persevere in the face of damnation. The God of the Book, ruler of Christendom, Israel and Mecca, appears to

have some potent servants, and He has left a flaming Pit to punish His unholy rivals. And so the Infernalist uses Black Arts and subtle corruptions to bring the Reckoning to hand. It's a test, really — a trial by fire. If holiness and innocence cannot stand against sin, he reasons, then those things are illusions and the sooner they're banished, the better.

Becoming the Wolf

I have seen no more evident monstrosity and miracle in the world than myself.

— Montaigne, *Essays*

Why would anyone want to go to Hell?

During the Dark and Middle Ages, the Christian Church held undisputed reign over Europe's soul. Despite the Pagan holdovers nestled in their secret groves, the accepted truth proclaimed God's will over all. To counter that will was to accept total and eternal damnation. In the Near East, the Muslim and Judaic religions taught the same truth: counter God, and you give your soul to Hell.

Even faiths that do not bow before the God of the Book demand a stern sort of order. No mater where you go, be it Africa, India, Cathay, or even the deepest reaches of still-Pagan wilderness, there are always gods to propitiate — and other gods that oppose them. The cock-fighter's dance of holy and unholy takes many forms, but it still boils down to one inevitable truth: There is authority, and there is rebellion. Heaven is for those who obey, and Hell is for those who do not.

In later years, science and expedition will reveal how vast Creation truly is. That discovery has already begun; it's undermining the orthodox Church's hold even now, and will eventually lead some philosophers to atheism and existentialism. After all, if God and Heaven are not the absolutes we were told they were, do any absolutes exist at all? Is there a Heaven? Or a Hell? Or a soul? Surely not! But while those questions exist in the Renaissance, they're hardly common coin. Most people of this age know the truth of damnation. To them, Hell is no metaphor or myth, it's a real and terrifying place.

The magi know this better than most. The Enlightened Ones, who regularly travel through both heavens and hells, and traffic with their denizens, have no such questions. The soul is real. The Otherworlds are real. Damnation is real. To a mage, these things are not abstractions, but literal truths.

Why, then, do people willingly fling themselves into the flames?

We all have our reasons....



Desperation, Envy and Greed

How many times have you thought “I’d sell my soul for that? Some people literally do. It’s easy enough, when you live in a land of plenty, to turn down a tempting offer. But when your children weep with hunger, when plague sores fester across your flesh, when you’re chained at the foot of some monk’s bed and raped each night before he sleeps, you comprehend true desperation.

All folk understand distress: The merchant hears his fortunes sinking when his ship goes down; the girl betrothed to a madman counts each day until her wedding as if it were her last. And so, when someone, even a demon, offers relief from desperation, some people will do *anything* to get another chance.

Not everyone is truly desperate when they make such bargains, though. We are all heirs to the green-eyed monkey, and when he tells us, in his oh-so-reasonable voice, that the title, wealth or woman we covet is rightfully our own, we do occasionally give in. For a person whose greed or jealousy is greater than her morals (or her sense), the green-eyed monkey has another offer: he’ll give her what she wants for a price. That price is fair, all things considered, and she’s probably paid it anyway. According to God’s Word, to consider a sin is to commit it. Why not earn something for your trouble?

Fatalism

Sin’s no-win situation breeds a certain fatalism, too. Supposedly, this world is already condemned; as Martin Luther claims, “Few are saved, infinitely more are damned,” and Genesis insists that sin and death are human legacies. Some people spend their lives trying to atone for their shortcomings, or trying to wash away the Original Sin brought down by Eve and Adam. Other folk, however, simply enjoy temporal power and prepare for a hard time thereafter. If you’re already going to Hell, they reason, why not have fun while you’re alive and prepare a grand place among the sinners after death?

Fatalism predates the Bible, too. To the Pagans, life is tenuous. The best you can hope for, according to such faiths, is a patron who’ll help you, a good name among your people, and enough honor to earn you a place among the heroes. Few people can hope for that much — according to the tales of Hades and Ganzir, the Underworld is full of hungry shades, of people who could not rise to the level of their gods and so must wander around in darkness. *Fuck that!* the Infernalist declares; *If a better lot in life means dealing with malicious gods, then show me the way to their altars!* Besides, the gods themselves regularly indulge in murder, deceit, rape and even cowardice. Why should gods have all the fun?

Rebellion and Rage

People rebel. It’s a part of human nature, and no god or king has been able to suppress that urge for long. Honor, religion, even the threat of painful death provides a bit of deterrence, but some people always need to strike out against the established order. When that order is patently unfair, when one god’s followers are burned by those of another, when a coward on a throne sends brave men to their deaths, then rebellion finds a voice and purpose.

Most folk suppress their rebellious urges, or channel them through fashion or song. A few, however, lash out. Churches burn. Lords are slain. Altars are desecrated and holy rites are turned upside-down to mock their sanctity. Of all the souls on the Path of Screams, the most vigorous ones turn to the Darkness because the light seems so totally corrupt. When order serves no purpose other than the fattening of the rich, they say, then order should be overturned.

In this age, women are especially fond of Infernal rebellion. Caught between the freedom of the flames and the excruciating role God and man have ordained for them, many women surrender to their passions and choose a devil who at least allows them to run free once in a while. In the Church’s eyes, each woman is a vessel of Eve and Lilith, a temptress who will live in shame unless bound by a strict set of laws. Some women happily accept that role. Why deny the birthright they’ve been given? It’s not like life is easier if they do....

Revenge and Hatred

Some deeds are too horrible to go unpunished. The Lord’s Church counsels forgiveness, but as anyone who has seen a witch-burning knows, the ministers of God are anything but forgiving. “Vengeance is mine sayeth the Lord...” but why should it belong to Him alone? Most folk are denied revenge or justice by the very institutions that revel in it themselves. The common man has neither the means nor the permission to exact vengeance personally, and Church and Crown rarely do it for him. What is he to do? *Nothing? Never!*

Revenge and rebellion go hand-in-hand, united by hatred and helplessness. After a while, no damnation could be worse than the pain of doing nothing. To those who have been wronged beyond forgiveness — to the mother whose son was trampled by a princely brat, to the husband whose wife was raped by mercenaries, to the orphan whose parents were burned for a witchcraft they never practiced — retribution screams like a tempest in their veins. When God will not help, the Devil may!

Occasionally the thirst for vengeance goes beyond human scope. Some people literally want revenge on God. Is it unreasonable, in a world where monks throw away more after one meal than the average peasant family eats in a week, to hate God Himself? To want to spit in His face even if He'll damn you for it? To side with His enemies if it means that for just a moment you'll have what you could never touch before? No, it's really quite understandable. When God's chosen are corrupt, it's no wonder that some folk feel that God is corrupt as well.

Enlightenment, Self-Rule and Power

Gnostics go one step further. To them, the God of the Book is *essentially* corrupt, a lying Demiurge whose deceptions mask His ultimate insignificance. To get beyond those lies, these mystics sometimes violate His strictures out of sheer defiance. After all, why obey a liar's laws? And what is "he" trying to hide when he makes certain things forbidden? These Gnostics would like to find out. By courting "sin," they seek enlightenment.

But it doesn't take a Gnostic to question the will of God, or to wonder what lies beyond its bounds. It's no great secret that the path to wisdom leads through tribulation — ordeals lead one to greater understanding. Thus, by some reasoning, the path to awareness literally winds through Hell. As we've seen, "Satan" translates to "adversary"; in a quest for truth and freedom, some Infernalists seek the adversary within themselves. By summoning him, understanding him and embracing him, they hope to unlock the fetters of ignorance and fear and achieve their true potential — to rule themselves, rather than to submit to the yoke of God.

Such independence is sweet when you consider the alternative. The God of the Book is a god of blindness. He demands that humanity closes its eyes and submits to his firm guiding hand. To refuse it is to be lost in darkness... or is it? Perhaps, some reason, there is more in that darkness than God is letting on. Something He doesn't want us to see.

Something he might even fear.

Hmmmm... what could possibly frighten a god? A lot of people would like to find out.

To those who never accepted the Biblical god to begin with, Darkness is as legitimate as Light. Both exist in a necessary dance; day must have night, life must have death. There is wisdom to be found in both, and some people prefer the night. Like the ancient folk who left their camp-fires to explore the dark, these mystics seek out

the Left-Hand Path — the forbidden lore and powers that few people can comprehend, much less control. On that Path, the travelers junk their old codes of morality and fear. Lacerating their minds, bodies and souls, they learn to ride the pain to greater heights of awareness and power. Not all such mystics are Infernalists, either — Ecstatics, shamans, even Daedaleans all venture past the bounds of "decency." But the Left-Hand Path has many guides, and some of them charge high prices for their services. To a Left-Hand mystic, a demon isn't a soul-rending monster, it's an initiate to sacred mysteries. Why not follow it and see where it leads you?

Laziness and Despair

Some people don't want to go to that much trouble. Life is hard enough already — why complicate things more? To these folk, the Devil offers sweet simplicity. The Lord has cursed His children with toil, but His enemy offers them relief. Why, such people ask, was man born to suffer? Because two idiots stole some fruit a long time ago? Absurd! Surely God had something else in mind — after all, He put demons, beasts and angels on Earth to serve humanity, and even passed down rites to make those things obey. It's only right to use those entities to your best advantage. You just have to be careful how far you push them....

Or maybe God is a tyrant. Maybe life is just one long joke at our expense. Maybe the Creator sits in His Heaven watching our long parade of suffering and chuck us into the Inferno when the sad spectacle is done. It's easy to see how this might be amusing to a deity — a widow's tears or leper's howls must offer fine sport indeed! So why bother being virtuous when life is just a long plod into damnation? Maybe it's worth a few hundred sins to liven up the trip. What does it matter in the end?

Luciferianism

Humans aren't the only butts of this cosmic parody. Perhaps, some mystics think, the Devil has been handed a raw deal. According to certain scriptures, Satan is but an agent of God. He never rebelled, and was never cast down from Heaven, yet he's hated and reviled for doing tasks that God assigned. Some people — the mercenary, the serf, the scullery-maid — can understand how he feels. Perhaps, they reason, Satan would like some company....

Inheritance

Or perhaps the Infernalist has been raised to sin. Born into a family of diabolists, her morality does not follow "normal" paths at all. Such situations cut to the very heart of morality: Is a she-wolf sinful for following her nature?

If an Infernalist is raised by demons, is she really to blame for acting like one herself?

Some people neither know about virtue nor care. In rural hills and hidden catacombs, children are born each day to parents who would make the Devil cringe. Beatings and rape are everyday affairs, and the strong always terrorize their lessers. Some cities have tunnels underground where people live their whole lives in darkness. Naturally, those people worship... differently; their gods are the demons that comfort them. And in vast wilderness or subterranean squalor, it's folly to accept the Prince of Peace. When life is one long, bloody hunt, you either eat or you are eaten.

Perversity, Indulgence and Destiny

Some people are born to perversity; others adopt it for fun. Goodness is boring! Virtue's for fools! If you've only got one life, it'd be a pity to spend it all in prayer. In this age of brimming excess, some folks take indulgence past its limits. To them, devil-worship is just one more game.

Sometimes perversity's not a game, but a birthright. Every culture has its tricksters, from Loki to Coyote to Lucifer himself, and these tricksters aren't kind. Their snares are deadly and those who fall into them are too stupid to survive. An Infernalist who follows their example kills the weak and keeps the strong on guard. To him, sin is destiny and virtue is something he was born to conquer. If he can do so with cleverness and style, the gods will smile even if men do not.

Love of Beauty

The God of the Book is a dour deity. Aside from illuminated bibles and vaulted cathedrals, His Church exalts poverty and denial over sensual indulgence. Some people cannot tolerate a world without beauty, and look to Satan for what God will not abide.

In a similar vein, there are folk who yearn for beauty but do not possess it (like a homely youth who trades his soul for comeliness), cannot capture it (like the would-be artist frustrated by her lack of talent), or are forbidden to enjoy it (like the nun consigned to a cloister for her sensuality). To those who bridle against God's austerity, the Devil provides an alternative. There's a reason many devils take seductive forms — and more reasons why those beguilements are so effective! One need not be an Infernalist to appreciate beauty, but there are limits to earthly splendor that Hell transcends. Before such riches, a Bible seems pale indeed.

Love and Lust

Have you ever loved someone so deeply, so passionately, that you would literally sell your soul for her? What

if an obstacle stood between you — marriage, society, family hatreds, unrequited love, even death? What if you found the way to *have* your beloved, to make her yours eternally and without question? Many people have committed sins that would make a mercenary tremble, all in the name of love. Is it so hard to believe that folk would enter demonic service, master Black Arts, or even throw away salvation, if they could claim love as their prize for doing so? Of course not!

Not everyone is so high-minded, either. Just as Uther Pendragon cast aside his kingdom for a night of passion, so some desperate (or just plain stupid) people put everything they have on the selling block to fulfill a simple lust. That lust doesn't have to be reciprocated — some Infernalists prefer rape to rapture — but it *must* be fulfilled, even for one night. Naturally, a single night is fleeting. To have their heart's (or loins') desire, many would-be lovers give away more... and more... and more....

The Truth

As telescopes probe the heavens and ships reach unforeseen shores, one truth overshadows all others:

The old tales lied.

There is no Olympus. There are no pearly gates. There are a thousand lands and scriptures that no one had conceived of, and the sun suddenly seems very far away.

Was everything else a lie, too? Are we just pawns of greater powers? Worse, are we alone? In the 20th century, those questions will still drive people to desperation; in the Dark Fantastic era, when life literally revolves around churches and gods, doubt makes men frantic. The pious erect their bonfires; philosophers look for new answers to replace the old. And sometimes those answers are more disturbing than anyone would care to admit.

In the void of Heaven, there are worse things than Hell. And some of them would drive the Devil mad. Doesn't it make sense to serve those things? Or at least capitulate to their demands?

Some Infernalists think that's all you *can* do....

All these motivations make sense to any human being. They're understandable, even laudable, the stuff of which heroes are made. In his mind, then, the Infernalist is a hero, literally opposing everything he has been taught to respect and embracing everything he was taught to fear. The Path of Screams is a scream of freedom, a last, lusty yell at the edge of the abyss. Most people mill around like sheep even as the wolf creeps up behind them. But the Infernalist refuses to be dinner for the wolf. He *becomes* the wolf, and in that becoming he leaves the flock behind and seeks wisdom in the dark.

For such reasons, angels fall.

The Path of Screams



say unto you: one must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a star. I say unto you: you still have chaos in yourselves.

— Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*

When he finally decides, for whatever reason, to turn his back on the Light, the Infernalist embarks on a broad yet treacherous road. Like any other magus, the Fallen One undergoes many changes in his life and temperament. No matter where he comes from or what he believes, the traveler crosses certain Rubicons over the course of his journey. Each one of them marks him in some way, and leaves its imprint across his soul.

A popular grimoire, the *Codex Lictoria*, describes the Path and its elements in metaphorical yet accurate language. The author, an anonymous scribe going by the name of "Frater Seditio" (a paradox that, among other things, infers that the author was a woman or hermaphrodite), likens the Path to self-imposed exile: The initiate Solomon leaves his fellows' campfire and wanders off into the dark. Headless of brambles, beasts and nearby cliffs, Solomon follows his intuition until he reaches a cave, enters it, and descends into the bowels of the earth. Groping through endless caverns, he eventually learns to see where no other man could. Aided by several mystic guides and portents, Solomon wanders through several chambers, some containing treasure, others containing dust. In the course of his journey, the initiate realizes he can remake the world at will. Eventually he curses the Demiurge for the blindness placed by that god upon mankind. By the end of the *Codex*, Solomon has become an ideal: Everyman Exalted by his own desires, a new rival to the Demiurge.

In Solomon's journey, "Frater Seditio" marks four distinct stages — four stages that seem remarkably like the four elements of the universal *Mystick Path*. But where many magi regard the Fall as disaster, the *Codex* treats it as liberation. Although relatively few Infernalists have actually read the *Codex*, each one of them experiences these stages to some degree. Even the diabolists who never become magi know at least the earliest steps of the Path. And though they might know these stages by other names, every diabolical magus — from the mad African *sohanci* to the Norman Satanist, from the heart-eating jaguar-priest to the follower of Ravana — is at least passably familiar with them.

From the moment he turns his back on the Light, an Infernalist is forever changed. Like Solomon, he can never

return to what he once was, and has no real desire to. The cavern seems lightless and eternal, but in the end a Fallen magus hopes to find the dark treasure that will make the journey worthwhile.

Stage 1: The Viper's Whisper (Awareness)

At one time, if I remember correctly, my life was a feast at which all hearts were opened and all wines flowed.

One evening, I sat Beauty on my knees. I found her bitter, and I abused her.

I have taken up arms against justice.

— Arthur Rimbaud, *A Season in Hell*

Every Infernalist, whether he learns the Black Arts or not, reaches a time in his life where goodness seems pathetic. For whatever reason (see previous section), he feels the hunger of the inner abyss, sees the eyes that surround him in the night, and decides that he was never meant for a life of virtue. Every human being, at some point, hears the Darkness call his name. But while other people wander in the woods a short ways from the fire, the diabolist decides to enter the night unafraid (well, perhaps slightly afraid...) and see where his instincts take him.

The Bellyful of Thorns

The journey always starts with hunger. Like a dog whose chain has been kept tight too long, the would-be Infernalist is wild with frustration and suppressed rage. No matter what the cost, he must be free; if that means damnation, then so be it!

Every person is born with a desire to sin. Everyone does so from time to time. But the initiate-to-be wants more than just vague naughtiness. He craves indulgences and insights that mere crimes cannot satisfy. And so, at this stage, he goes off to find them. Like Solomon, he stirs, gets up from the fire, abandons his loved ones, and embraces the night. Sometimes, he's goaded by a hidden demon (or possibly his Daemon) who tempts him with "viper's whispers"; in the beginning, though, the choice to sin is his. The Path of Screams begins with a decision. A person may be dragged away from it in the end, but he always makes the first step on his own.

Invoking the Abyss

Once he's decided to leave virtue behind, the initiate curses his former slavery. Realizing that he's been blinded and restrained by an unjust god, he begins to smash that god's taboos. Most newcomers begin with small, simple crimes — petty larceny, blasphemy, simple assaults upon

person and property — although some display more ambition. At this stage (or the next), the initiate usually meets some like-minded friends: his future mentors or partners in crime.

Sooner or later, he calls upon the powers of the Enemy, the Adversary either within or without that the old god could not tolerate. Most times, the initiate literally invokes the Devil, or celebrates a ritual to gods his culture has forbidden. Sometimes he does something suicidal, like running off naked into a snowstorm or flinging himself into a bonfire; by challenging both his flesh and his sense of self, he summons up the Enemy within.

Thus, the Void is opened and acknowledged. By violating both the laws and the religion by which he was bound, the initiate invokes the Abyss and sets himself apart. Many initiates never make it past this point; consumed by doubt, terror or shame, they fall back to the fire. Sometimes the authorities take over and imprison or kill the would-be Infernalist. But occasionally something answers the call. A demon takes an interest in the initiate and marks him for future study.

Lex Praedatorius

In the course of his challenges (or perhaps even his early life), the initiate learns the Law of Predation: Some eat, most are eaten. Since the laws of god and man forbid a person from injuring or killing his own kind (*other people* have always been a different story...), the initiate turns on his brothers and sisters like a rabid wolf. Searching out the weakest and most vulnerable “sheep,” he begins to feast. Robbery, rape and murder (or possibly more-refined torments like mind-games and social bullying) become his favorite pastimes. He might feel some compassion for his victims at first, but sooner or later he learns to enjoy the game.

Thus, the demon tests its would-be pawn and the initiate acquires a thirst for criminality. More often than not, the Daemon manifests at this time, possibly as a teacher, often as a white-hot poker up the initiate’s ass.

The Nightmare Dance

Ah, yes. The Daemon: the blazing kiss of mystery that draws a Sleeper into Wakefulness. When and if the initiate gets a mystick summons, his Daemon begins its none-too-subtle work. Seducing, mocking, cajoling or dragging the aspirant into Awakening, the Mystick Self appears, first in dreams, then in visions of near-insanity. The Nightmare Dance begins.

No Daemon is gentle, but an Infernal one is worse than most. Taking the role of predator, the guiding spirit forces the initiate to show his spine. There’s no place for

Infernal Daemons

In most cases, the Infernalist will be the only one who can see her Mystick Self. She might speak to it or otherwise react, but for the most part she’ll know how to keep her visions to herself. (Marauds, of course, carry their visions with them all the time, and act erratically under the best of circumstances.) Since an Infernalist is supposed to be a Storyteller character, her Daemon’s personality probably won’t feature very prominently in your chronicle. But, players being what they are, it’s a good idea to have some impression of an enemy’s Daemon on hand just in case someone sneaks a peek.

Like many other details, the guise of the Infernal Daemon depends a great deal on what the Infernalist expects to see. A budding anti-Christian would probably get her instructions from a black cat or a winged devil, while a follower of Kali would see the Dark Mother in her most frightening aspect. Whatever face or form it assumes, an Infernalist’s Mystick Self is pretty unsettling; some seem seductive, like *houris* or incubi, while others whip their charges with raw terror, like hellhounds or demonic angels. Always, however, a Daemon is uncanny. These “spirits” are, of course, aspects or reflections of a mage’s soul, and a diabolist’s soul is going to be pretty fucked up.

Normally, Daemons only appear to Infernalists who have Awakened (or who soon will); sometimes, though, a diabolist who flirts with awareness but never really attains it might see flashes of her Daemon just the same. Normally, these images appear to her during rituals or traces, when she expects to see odd things anyway; sometimes, though, they disturb her sleep or chase her like phantoms, either toward future Awakening, or away from it.

Some sample Daemons include:

- A faceless, weeping angel.
- A writhing mass of tentacles and mouths.
- A shadow that seems too frightening to recall.
- A savage god or demon-spirit (see Appendix).
- A flock of black birds or a swarm of insects.
- The tormented, screaming ghost of the Infernalist’s soul, or of someone that diabolist once loved.
- A half-human thing with bestial features and uncanny powers.
- Cracks in a wall from which disturbing voices emerge.

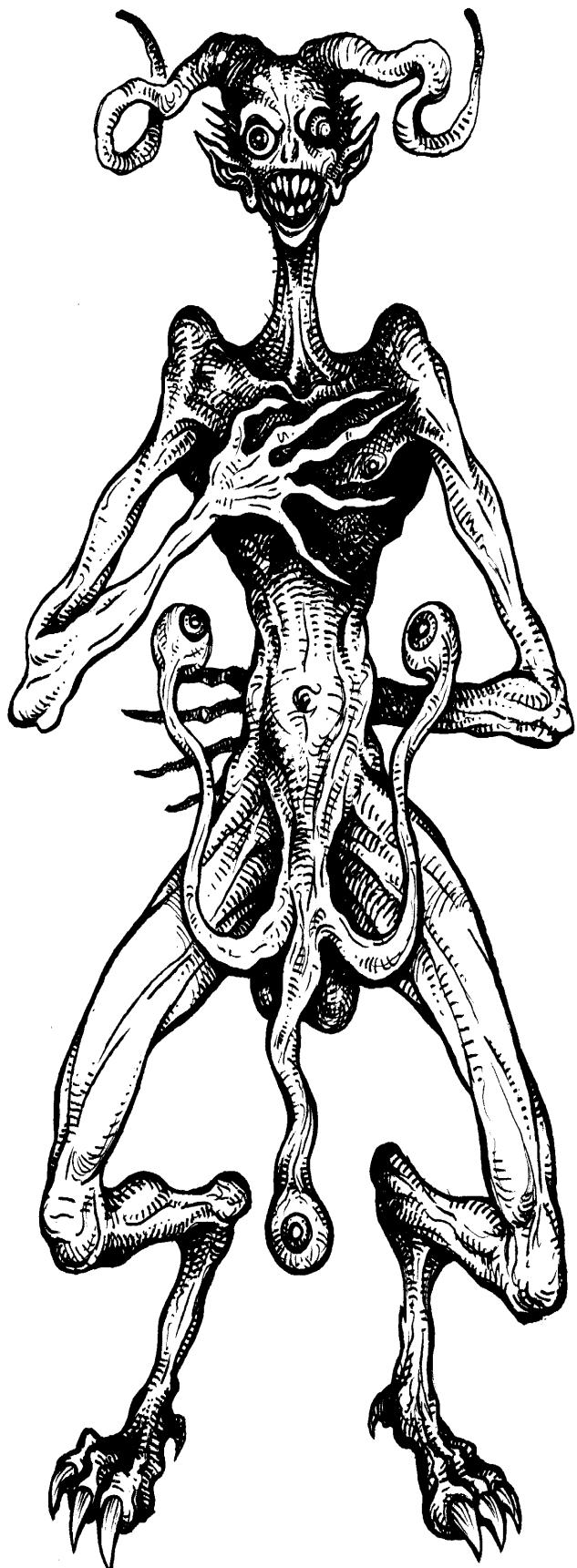
An animal-spirit that has some dark significance to the Infernalist (like an owl, raven, coyote, jackal, etc.).

A cold wind that seems to sing.

A black flame that burns like icy water.

The Infernalist’s past or future self, either glorious with impending triumph or suffering from what might have been.

Some image too bizarre and terrifying to see clearly without going mad.



cowards at Satan's table, and the Daemon is literally the Satan within. A manifestation of the inner Adversary, this soul-tutor sweeps the aspirant along on harrowing journeys where everything he has ever feared about himself burns into his heart like a brand. Thus, the would-be magus either faces his own soul head-on, or settles into the role of a lesser wizard... or a slave.

Renunciation of the Light

Sooner or later, the would-be Infernalist decides to curse the Light. With a formal oath (often taken at a Sabbat, or a Black Mass if he was once Christian), he declares his hate for his former gods and tramples symbols of their power. Again, he does this of his own will; others might entice or threaten him to do it, but the oath must be made in a clear state of mind. Once it's done, the new Infernalist casts his lot with Darkness. He chooses his Word, and that Word is NO.

If the quester hasn't already joined a coven or sect, this stage usually marks his initiation into one. This isn't a universal step; many Infernalists hate company and forswear even the most demented companions. But if a diabolist craves instruction and fellowship in sin, he has to renounce all goodness in his heart to enter. For Infernalists who grow up in degenerate tribes (like the Catacomb Rat on page 50), this step is easy: what's to renounce? But for an initiate with some semblance of normalcy, this ritual marks the point of no return.

Many initiates don't realize (or don't want to realize) how large a step it is. In the hedonistic, irreverent climate of Renaissance Europe, some people join dark covens simply for the thrill of it. The urban centers of Tuscany and France are ablaze with sacrilegious cults; some mercenary companies and merchant houses demand a satanic ritual as part of their initiatory rites... "all in fun," of course. Fun or not, the renunciation is deadly serious to the demons that are inevitably paying attention. Anyone who seems like a worthy candidate for full-blown corruption is noted, approached, and very possibly enlisted among the armies of the damned.

Thus, the Adversary receives his new ally with open arms... and often other appendages and orifices, as well. Most oaths require a kiss of loyalty and probably a ritual fuck and other sordid acts. The initiatory rite is usually as disgusting and painful as the officiants can make it; after all, an Infernalist with scruples is of no use to the Fallen Hosts.

The Cold Thrust

If awareness yields to Awakening (which it doesn't always do), the initiate finds himself impaled on the icy horns — or more appropriately, phallus — of Enlightenment. For

one who pursues the darkest Mysteries, this moment is a rape of the soul. Every fear, every doubt, every screaming terror the initiate has ever felt rips through him like a gutter's hook. At this moment, he stands at the edge of Hell and gets a taste of it. The experience isn't pleasant.

Some sects, notably the Nephandi, induce this moment with harsh rituals. After the Infernalist has sworn his loyalty, the other officiants beat, rape and otherwise torment him until he either snaps into Awakening, becomes a gibbering wreck or falls unconsciousness. (At which point he's relegated to the dregs of the fellowship, usually for good.) The Nephandi go one step further than most sects do: The Initiate is led to a Caul where his soul is literally inverted. This almost always brings on Awakening, but is almost always irrevocable, too.

It may be a prelude to a wondrous career, but the Cold Thrust is always torturous. It literally scars the soul, tears it open on a spiritual level. No matter what the diabolist does, this moment will haunt him like no other. Some initiates snap forever at this point and become demented Marauds. Some even die from the shock. Those who endure with their wits intact become the most dangerous kind of magi: Those who have gone to Hell and returned.

Stage II: The Tapestry of Lies (Instruction)

*And here is the first step,
where wisdom sleeps and instinct comes alive,
and the eyes open at last
to the presence of an untrodden path...*

— Monica Richards, *The Book of Annwyn*

If and when the Mists of Ignorance part for the magus, he follows a new fork in the Path. Deeper in the darkness, his groping hands fall upon new wonders and his searching eyes alight on new and cunning guides. Many Infernalists stop short at this point, either so overwhelmed by the Cold Thrust or so dazed by what they've learned that they become lost in the next leg of the journey.

For the Tapestry of Lies is well named. Each weave, every lesson, contains deceptions that only time will reveal. A wise warlock learns to separate the truths from the falsehoods, but many new diabolists are lured into complacency, stagnation and ruin because they cannot or will not see through the illusions.

Purgation

When the new Infernalist recovers from his initiation, he often embarks on a wild purge. Now that the worst has happened (so he thinks!), he indulges the lusts he once

suppressed. Generally, this amounts to a binge of debauchery, a careless gallop through the fields of experience. With new companions at his side and fresh vitality in his veins, the warlock goes berserk. Whoring, carousing and brutality of inhuman proportions often result, although certain academicians go to the other extreme and lock themselves in their archives for weeks on end. In the wilderness, where whores and books are hard to come by, the new-Fallen one joins the beasts; tossing humanity aside, he strips bare, eats his meat raw, and abandons himself to climates and frenzies that would kill a normal man. Through this purgation, the Infernalist celebrates his freedom.

This is the first weave of lies: raw sensual rebellion. Some diabolists stop here, pissing their lives away in endless carnal pleasures. But for most, the spree passes quickly. The marvels revealed by the Cold Thrust and Nightmare Dance make mere perversions pale. With Heaven's blinders removed, the Infernalist sees how far he can go if he wants to. Having exercised his new vitality, he moves on to greater things.

Weaving Dark Threads and Hell Designs

As any magus can tell you, Creation is a deep pool, placid on its surface but teeming with secrets underneath. The Infernalist now grasps this truth; if he has any sort of vision or curiosity, he'll want to know more. Indeed, it's usually the lure of magic (and magick) that draws a person to the Darkness in the first place. In most lands, dark Arts are the province of dark powers. Sadly, some people believe that the only way to master them is to join the Evil One. And so, in their ignorance, they do.

Any half-wit can spin up conjurations; an Infernalist with magick on his mind will inevitably come across tomes of false or misleading lore, delve into esoteric practices, or join some fellowship or other in hopes of learning the "real secrets of magic." This is the second weave of lies: the idea that power can be set down in a book or transferred by following a self-proclaimed leader. Many cultists fall into this trap and remain there for good, vainly hoping for a touch of magick that may never come, or that comes in limited fashion. These misled men and women become the servants to greater, darker masters.

There are two forms of the Art that can be learned this way: lesser sorcery (in game terms, Hedge Magic and Dark Thaumaturgy), or demon-born Investments. Through favors or hard practice, the Infernalist can gain a few odd powers; a lesser magician studies esoterica for years, even decades, before managing to master even a sliver of the Black Arts. Many Fallen Ones aren't so patient: from demonic patrons, they request dark favors that seem

powerful unless you compare them to the majesty of True Magick. For their trouble, these Infernalists pile up debts that can only be satisfied by soul-servitude. Thus, ironically, the rebel who wanted to free himself from God sells that freedom to a devil.

But some Infernalists are smart enough to search for more. Like Solomon, they turn away from piles of false gold and go deeper into the cavern. Dancing with their nightmares for years on end, these rebels distill the True Art from the lies, and come away with the Nine Keys of Creation.

In most common versions of the myth of Innana and her veils, there are seven gates to the Underworld, seven veils she surrenders, and seven keys she gets in return. A mystick of the Infernal Arts knows the true number is nine. Those nine veils (often depicted as nine layers of skin, especially in the Babylonian tradition) represent the nine elements of the Art: what the Council of Traditions calls the Nine Spheres. In the process of learning these Arts, many initiates literally reenact the goddess's journey; going through a succession of gates, the Infernalist is flayed alive, then given a token that represents the Art he is to learn. Spells regrow the lost skin but the pain lingers as the warlock studies his new Art. Some Fallen Ones keep the skins as trophies of their learning. A warlock with nine of his own skins on display is a dangerous man indeed!

As any sorcerer can attest, magick itself is not evil, it's a reflection of the magician. Since a diabolist is, by definition, someone who chooses malice over virtue, his magick becomes *maleficium* — a deliberate injury to Creation. Black magick bubbles up from the worst part of the soul and eats away at the both the magus and his world. In time, the Scourge and Resonance will reflect these injuries. Our Infernalist, if he lives long enough, will become a literal cancer of Creation. In a way, that's his goal: to bring on the Reckoning and let Oblivion end the lies of this world. He might not think in such terms at the beginning of his training; chances are, he's just trying to have a good time. This is the truth woven amidst the third pattern of lies: That no magick is performed without consequences. Eventually, the Infernalist learns this, and either repents, becomes a willing servant of Oblivion, or is destroyed by his own magick.

Calling the Patronus

Although some Fallen Ones are intuitive enough to learn the Arts on their own, most require an instructor of some kind. If our Infernalist has joined a sect, he'll receive a mentor (often in exchange for some hefty favors and/or servitude); even if he studies alone, chances are he'll attract the attention of a mentor before long. Aside from the details — which vary from teacher to teacher, but tend to

be fairly grotesque — an Infernal apprenticeship is much like any other. An older magus takes a less-experienced one as a student, the student performs some degree of service, and the elder passes on her secrets. Or most of them, at any rate....

Sooner or later, the Infernalist wants more. Perhaps he's too proud or impatient to withstand an apprenticeship; or maybe his mentor is too perverse even for a young warlock's jaded tastes; worst of all, they may have had a falling-out... usually the prelude to an all-out witch-war. When mortal teachers fail, or when there are none to be found, the Infernalist calls upon a demonic tutor and offers him some favors in exchange for knowledge or power.

As risky as it is, this step usually comes early in an Infernalist's journey; the Fallen One meets his *Patronus* (patron) during his renunciation ceremony. (The demon has, more often than not, been watching since the beginning, but only reveals itself at the initiation.) At some point, the aspiring demon-servant gains a ritual that allows him to call upon an agent of the Pit; if he's wise, he'll use it when he has the strength and experience to handle a demon face-to-face. Most warlocks are too proud, desperate or impatient to wait until then, however; some die or go insane the first time they summon a demon to their aid.

Admittedly, the raw fury of a demonic manifestation is enough to send even an experienced wizard sprawling. To invoke an evil spirit, the Infernalist must perform some appalling ceremony and make the appropriate sacrifices (usually live, almost always messy; see Chapter III). The demon makes an impressive entrance, throwing minor tempests in all directions and often indulging in some hideous display for sheer shock value. (Considering how jaded most Infernalists are by this point, that kind of display is best left to one's imagination.) Howling threats or offering sweet seductions, the evil spirit assesses the Infernalist's reaction; if he seems to have potential, the bargaining begins....

The Pact: Five Garments and a Kiss

In the *Codex Licentia*, Solomon meets the Lady of Ravens, a thinly disguised version of Hecate. She offers him five garments of silk, cobwebs, feathers, gold and memories if he will tend but one raven in her flock for a year. Solomon, not being stupid, politely refuses and makes the Lady a counter-offer: one kiss stolen at midnight from the richest man in the kingdom, if he, Solomon, binds the hands of the King's youngest daughter. In a symbolic rape scene, the agreement is sealed, and Solomon learns the Word of Shaping.

Most Infernal pacts are sealed this way: highly symbolic offers are exchanged until both parties get what they want. The magus inevitably has to commit some sinful,

often hazardous act, and the demon offers some minor but enticing trinket. This is the fourth weave of lies: the Bonds of Patronage. Most demons snare their quarries here; many mortals, unsure of what they want or how to ask for it, give away their souls for very little profit. Some Infernalists sprout hideous Investments and become virtual devils themselves, but rarely realize how much they *could* have had. A warlock who masters the steps before this dance begins often gains an impressive Patronus... even as he becomes its slave.

Many magi, confronted with a soul-seller, wonder how on earth someone could barter away both soul and freedom. But the Infernalist sees things differently. To him, the demon is not his master, but his advocate; the Patronus has mastery over certain things, and the warlock helps him keep it, in exchange for a few choice favors. This illusion — and it is an illusion! — of partnership keeps the Infernalist from seeing the abyss at his feet. He may feel its heat, but he's convinced that he can either fly over it or escape it at the last moment.

And this is usually the biggest lie of all.

(Storyteller's Note: For several obvious reasons, this chapter does not detail specifics about demon-summoning and pacts. For the game systems involved, see Chapter III.)

Stage III: The Howl of Freedom (Conflict)

*I study pain, measure it and invent —
I and my compeers; for I hold again
That every passionate Materialist,
Who rends the living subject, soon is purged
Of vulgar tenderness in diligent
Tormentry of bird and beast*

— John Davidson, *The Testament of a Vivisector*

Infernalists are a decadent lot. After a while, nothing — not even the wildest perversions he can imagine — can stir a Fallen Ones' passions for long. If he sees through the Tapestry of Lies, our warlock becomes a very powerful (and frightening) man. Which is not to say that life becomes boring for him; quite the opposite — the closer he gets to the Pit, the more interesting his life becomes.

In the Codex, Solomon dived into a black pool and wrestled with three snakes of fire; they burned him, but he strangled them and extinguished their light. Like that Infernal hero, the warlock seeks to become a Fallen Angel on Earth. Once he has learned the secrets of the Arts, he



Techniques of Temptation

Everyone has desires he cannot name. When an Infernalist sets out to walk on fire, she becomes an agent of those desires. Like Satan, she offers her prey all the kingdoms of the world... or at least all the sins she cares to fulfill. This is what makes her kind anathema, even among vampires and other night-folk. The diabolist is dangerous not because of what she can do, but because of what she can lead *you* to do.

Not every Infernalist is a tempter; these folk are a special breed, and they challenge themselves (and each other) to games of epic corruption that not just *anyone* can play. After all, the satanic *rondeau* of lure, capture and betrayal requires a certain amount of grace and wit. Any idiot can eat babies. Turning a king into a coprophiliac, on the other hand, takes vision.

As I said, anyone can be tempted. A skilled procurer knows what her target wants, how to obtain it, and how to present the prize in such an enticing manner that the victim will do *anything* to get it. As a Storyteller, it helps to know a few common gambits among the Fallen. After all, a subtle betrayer is far more threatening than a fire-slinging weirdo.

- **Sexuality:** Crude, but usually effective. With a combination of Mind Arts and social seductions, the tempter finds a mark, discerns her most forbidden desires, and offers them to her.

Although most Fallen Ones reshape themselves into the object of desire (the game is sweeter that way, and things remain in control), a tempter can also provide love potions, social circumstances, or clandestine meeting-places to a would-be lover who desires someone she cannot have. Naturally, the tempter seems to have his target's best interests at heart; in reality, he sets up a downward spiral that starts out wonderfully, spins out of control, and eventually pulls all parties over the brink of romantic catastrophe (duels, dishonor, pregnancies out of wedlock, and all manner of heartbreak). Since everyone has desires, and since the Church forbids most forms of sexual congress, this game is easy to play. With a minimum of magick and copious self-indulgence, a diabolist can bring anyone — cleric, king, even courtesan — to scandal and misery.

- **Wealth:** "...for the love of money is the root of all evil." Infernalists prove this to be true. Alchemists and devils are renowned for their access to easy riches, and many people, from peasants to princes, will give *anything* for a pile of gold.

This game is simple: Convince your target that you can produce vast amounts of wealth for her, then see

what she'll offer in return. This usually requires a bit of magick (Matter + Prime does nicely), but a really tricky tempter can pass off a pile of lead or even a promise of forthcoming wealth without ever having to create a thing. Illusion spells, Mind-bending charms, even a convincing lie, can turn a sack of dung into a bag of gold, and the laugh is so much heartier if the dupe has given something for nothing!

Not all riches can be measured by gold alone. Some people want castles, servants, and other luxuries before they part with virtue. Although a skillful magus can provide such things with a bit of effort, a *really* skillful one can arrange a short-term windfall using little of no magick at all. In this case, a few favors (often provided by the Allies, Influence, Resources or Spies Backgrounds) can convince the mark that she has suddenly gained a fortune. In most cases, the Infernalist quickly removes the luxuries and watches his victim fall, but sometimes a rich patron who's in your debt is worth more than a sobbing beggar with vague memories of wealth.

Ah, yes, debt. Nothing is free, especially not when a devil is involved. No matter how he sets the stage, the Infernalist makes certain that his mark owes him a colossal favor. Sooner or later (usually sooner), he calls in the debt. That payment usually involves some form of service, sin, degradation, or all three. (For an especially vicious example of this idea, see the Usurer template later in this chapter.) When the tempter gets through with his victim, that unfortunate will have learned why Hell's streets are supposedly paved with gold.

- **Society:** In the whirlwind life of high society, fame and favor carry heavy prices. An Infernalist who's familiar with the ways of court (and many of them are) can make or break a victim's reputation in days or even hours. The game begins with a promise of status or a social edge (secrets, patronage, and so on). A few pulled strings ensure that things go the victim's way for a short time. The tempter grooms her protegee, guides him into a position where he can help her (or harm others), and carves him a place in the social woodwork; all the while, she compiles enough dirt to utterly destroy him when the moment comes. At some point, the game gets boring or the mark outlives his usefulness. A quick word in the right ears, and the dirt spills out. Lives are ruined, trust is sapped, and the tempter goes off, laughing.

The movies *Ridicule*, *The Three Musketeers* and *Dangerous Beauty* can inspire all kinds of Infernal mischief in a social setting. Watch them, and learn well....

• **Knowledge:** The mage's bane: Faust Fell through want of secrets, and he was not alone. As masters of forbidden lore (and good liars, too), diabolic tempters and their demonic Patroni can offer a scholar or magus knowledge that even the gods would crave. A scroll from Babylon? *I have one in my archives.* The Prince's mistress? *I know where she lives.* The whereabouts of your missing son? *Give me a few days and I can find him.* Arcane secrets, lost knowledge, metaphysical truths... the Infernalist can dig them up on demand. Naturally, he'll want something for his trouble. As I said, nothing comes for free.

A tempter can offer both truth and fiction on a single plate. Lies are easy to produce; they just have to look good enough to fool the mark. Real knowledge makes an excellent lure, especially if the dupe is a magus who might see through falsehood, but it serves another purpose, too. Sometimes the truth can demoralize a person so badly that he loses faith. (See "Becoming the Wolf," above.) In that void, the tempter can sow more poison seed: *Want to know what really happens in the Vatican's chambers? Let's take a look shall we. But don't say I didn't warn you....*

• **Raw Power:** Some people just like to blow shit up. It's so easy to appeal to brute force that few tempters even try. But every so often, the stakes of the game make it worthwhile; Tezghul the Insane might not be subtle, but he and his followers raise a lot of hell. Raw power is easy to provide: find a dupe, show him a big stick, and offer it to him in exchange for a favor or two. Point him at an enemy and watch the fun. This game isn't subtle, but then, even tempters need to relax occasionally.

By the way, no good tempter reveals who she really is. A social tempter might claim to be a scullery maid; a sexual tempter could act like a virgin. Tempters thrive on misdirection, and with their mastery of guile, magick and human weakness, they can take the least-obvious forms... and often do.

Storyteller's Warning: Mind games should be played against the *characters'* weaknesses, not the *players'*. Abusing your players, even in the name of a really cool story, is a very bad idea. For other suggestions, and for the game systems behind them, see the main rulebook: "Intrigue" (p. 31), "Dramatic Systems" (pp. 190-191), and "Uncanny Influence" (pp. 260-262).

pits himself against the harbingers of Light. Once, he cursed his god. Now he actually goes to war with its servants.

Walking on Fire

All magi are tempted by their power. Infernalists are no different. But where a virtuous wizard might be ruined by raw power or decadence, the warlock considers both of those things his due. To other magi, the Fallen One seems to be groping around in a thicket; as the Infernalist sees it, raw materialism and carnal indulgence are simply the rewards of freedom.

But indulgence can make you weak and blind. Most Infernalists lose sight of the Abyss and stumble around in the thicket until some do-gooder brings a castle down around their ears. To walk on fire, one must tread carefully... or with total abandon. Hesitation can sear the soul as well as the soles, and often does. After a while, the Devil's Brand — the Scourge — grows from a dangerous annoyance to a deadly hazard. Thus, after a period of self-indulgence, a wise warlock retreats away from open decadence and takes up one of two pastimes: corruption or withdrawal.

Corruption is a Fallen One's most infamous game. The Nephandi, who consider themselves the Eaters of the Weak, are masters of subterfuge, and often judge status within their Ahrimans (cabals) by the amount of trouble they can cause. The most blatant of them specialize in wanton sins (sex, violence, money, etc.), while others appeal to esoteric principles like cosmic balance and entropic orbits. Naturally, these folk find mortals to be easy prey; after a while, most turn to seducing and destroying magi and other night-folk —the game's more challenging that way. The rules are simple: Pick a target, find out what she wants, offer it to her, and see how far you can make her reach to get it. Then, when she's leaning over the abyss, give her a push and see how far she falls. It's wonderful to see how often the game succeeds.

This contest of challenge, seduction and betrayal takes the *Lex Praedatorius* to its logical extreme. The Infernalist pits himself against goodness and virtue and says, *Let's see how good you really are!* On a philosophical, even metaphysical, level, an Infernalist re-fights the War in Heaven with every trap he lays. Each soul he tarnishes becomes one less candle held against the Void. With each victory, he snaps another link in the Divine chain of being.

Hunger of the Void

The second pastime, withdrawal, removes the Fallen One from mere human contact. Retreating to some bizarre realm (often a demented corner of the Otherworlds, but occasionally a Sanctum or Cray), the Infernalist gradually strips off his humanity and becomes a veritable devil. The Resonance of his deeds transforms him into a monstrosity;

weird malformations twist his mind, body and soul into something only vaguely human. Setting himself up as some sort of anti-Christ or inverted bodhisattva, the Fallen One creates his personal hell and populates it with lesser fiends and aspiring diabolists. Releasing his inner Satan, he becomes a satan to others.

This is the legacy of the Devil-kings, who succeeded the decadent witch-priests of Bhât and Enoch: to become demons upon the Earth, or to establish hells outside it. Few Infernalists ever achieve this kind of status, but those who do become new gods of Darkness.

Through it all, the Patronus bides its time. Like a servant, it performs black miracles when the Infernalist demands; like a master, it makes its own demands upon the Fallen One. Just as the warlock plays games with mortals and magi, so the demon amuses itself with its little "ally." It's said that demons gain status through soul-trade and sin; this certainly appears to be the case, at least with devils of the anti-Christian variety. Through its patronage, the demon turns a mortal into a walking whirlpool, then channels the souls he catches and guides them toward its own unspeakable designs. In a way, the two are partners. But in the long run, the partnership seems one-sided indeed.

Stage IV: Communion with the Absolute (Resolution)

*If one good deed in all my life I did,
I do repent it from my very soul.*

— William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*

No game lasts forever. The Infernalist might live 1000 years, but he must eventually die. Even the most generous Patronus will not grant true immortality, and so the Path of Screams someday ends.

Damnation

Even the most optimistic Infernalist admits he could be damned to eternal (or at least indefinite) torture for his sins. He expected as much going in, and the possibility haunts him during his weaker moments. Some diabolists grow up without any concept of hell or an Afterlife, but most cultures have unpleasant fates reserved for those who rebel against the gods. (See "Mocking God," Chapter I.)

To counter his fear, our Fallen One convinces himself that he'll be rewarded for good service and that Hell is a lie — either it doesn't exist (a difficult excuse if he's ventured into the Otherworlds), or it's meant for other people. He also believes that it'll be better (or at least no worse) than life on Earth, and that he can survive long enough to bring on the Reckoning and reap the rewards of Oblivion. As any magus who's gone to the hells and returned can

attest, these are vain hopes. Still, the Fallen One stakes his future comfort (or lack of it) on them. Someday, he'll learn the truth.

Few diabolists survive long enough to wonder. Many of them go screaming into damnation long before they reach even a shred of their potential. The Patronus arrives in a cloud of brimstone and thunder, and the Infernalist spends his last few moments wondering if everything he got was worth the price he's going to pay... if he has time to wonder at all. Although a lucky Infernalist might be adopted into the demonic legions, he's more likely to become a howling fixture in some Fallen angel's realm. The true scope of eternity is impossible for a mortal to comprehend, but diabolists who ponder it sometimes try to atone for their sins before they experience eternity firsthand. Many never do, and go to Hell with a defiant snarl on their lips. Such folk continue to curse the gods even when they've been consigned to Otherworldly tortures, refusing to see (or admit) the role their own choices played in their damnation.

Diabolists who admit that torture is forthcoming try to have as good a time as possible in this life, and to extend it for as long as possible. Some go out of their way to refine cruelty and indulgence to the extreme, while others make a point of taking as many people with them as they can. Both methods can backfire if the Fallen One meets a Patronus or Yama King with a bent sense of humor; many an Infernalist has found a host of tormenters waiting for him when he reaches Hell — tormentors who used to be his victims.

Redemption and Salvation

To one so laden with crimes, Death came armed with double terrors.

— Matthew Lewis, *The Monk*

Is it possible for a devil to escape damnation? According to the doctrines of Jesus and the Buddha, it is. Sincere repentance (or sudden enlightenment) might allow even the most blackened soul to flee the gods' anger and rest in peace, if not blissfulness.

The Patronus will take pains to assure its "partner" that salvation is a lie, of course. The pact between them often (but not always) contains a soul-bond, but, as the demon will probably point out, a person who pisses in the faces of men and gods alike has earned a place in Hell, pact or no pact. Even so, some Infernalists seek absolution or penance before death. If a pact exists, the warlock might try any means to break the bargain; if that means crawling on his knees back to God, so be it!

According to folklore, this sometimes works. Tales abound of saints, holy folk or even visions of Christ or the Holy Virgin that suddenly appear to save a damned soul from perdition. Other, more worldly, atonements exist,

too: A Jewish, Hindu or Muslim sinner can forsake his past misdeeds and become charitable holy man. A Pagan can appeal to merciful gods or spirits, and try to purge her sins in sacrifices and ordeals. Anyone can go back to the people he has wronged (if that's possible) and beg forgiveness. These efforts might not be enough to stave off the coming torment, but if you're facing 10,000 years of being skinned alive, anything is worth the effort.

From a Storytelling perspective, a tale about an Infernalist who suddenly wants absolution can be dramatic indeed. He might need some assistance, and offer favors to anyone who can help him escape judgment. (Then again, knowing the Fallen, a cry for salvation might be one more trick in a tempter's arsenal....) Perhaps he's reluctant to repent, but might be convinced to do so by an especially good speech or selfless deed. Naturally, the Patronus, the Fallen One's former allies, and a host of other unpleasant individuals will be close behind to ensure that the warlock meets his end of the bargain. Some kind of fight, from open warfare to covert assassination, will follow an Infernalist who shows up at your door asking for help! But then, most true heroes would consider saved soul to be worth the risk. As many a Celestial Chorister would say, "Not even Satan is denied the Grace of God."

The Assumption

Other magi hope to attain the Zenith, to Ascend to some higher state where human chains slip away and the Absolute takes the magus upward. Dark wizards dream of the Absolute as well, but as Chapter I reveals, their vision of that Communion is very different indeed.

Early on, the Infernalist forges a link between the Void within and the Void without. As death approaches, many a warlock hopes to re-enter the Primordial Abyss. Hopefully, he can bring the rest of the world down with him as he goes; if not, he can at least find reassurance that Creation's heart is cold and black and empty—much like his own. Assumption, in this case, could be extinction or it could be Descent to the Deep Lords of Misrule, the fabled Ghost-Oracles of metaphysical Oblivion. No one who reaches this level of Assumption returns to talk about it, although many liars claim to have joined the Deep Lords in their infinite domains.

Occasionally, the Assumption transforms the magus into a lesser demon. Having proven his worth to Hell, he's rewarded by a permanent position there. Many evil spirits claim to have been mortals, once, and most Fallen magi aspire to become Fallen angels someday. In the distant

east, grand cruelty supposedly inspires Heaven to send a dead sinner back to Earth as a *Gui Ren*, or "devil person." (See *Kindred of the East* and *The Thousand Hells* for the truth behind this legend.) But even in the cold courts of Europe, a malefactor may aspire to join Hell's ranks. The chances of doing so are slight, but then nothing in the Dark Fantastic world is assured.

(Some Infernalists may be Assumed into an unexpected afterlife: In the swirling miasma of the Shadowlands, Spectres or Artificers might harvest a Fallen One's soul. The result could be the twilight existence of an angry ghost, or the shrieking damnation of soul-forging and extinction. See *Wraith: The Oblivion* and the "Restless Dead" section of *Crusade Lore* if you want a dead Infernalist to come back for more.)

Several sects claim that vampirism is a form of Assumption. Burdened by fears of life and terrors of Hell, our Infernalist might try to join the Undead. Supposedly, the vampiric Embrace opens up a whole new vista of experiences and evils; it does, but a Fallen magus pays for his Assumption with all the magick he has mastered. The vampire's kiss shreds the Daemon; although a warlock retains the memories of his old Arts, the power of the Nine Keys is lost to him forever. Even so, many vampires begin their unlives as dark magicians. From a Storyteller's standpoint, this offers you an option when an Infernal magus seems to have died. He may well *have*, but as any Cainite can vouch, death means little to the night-folk.

The ultimate Assumption an Infernalist craves, however, is to become one with the primal emanations. To rejoin the Darkness at the beginning and end of time, yet retain some sense of the man he once was, and enrich the Absolute thereby. This is the secret goal that few outside magi can grasp, the infinite godhead said to wait at the end of the Path. In the *Codex Licentia*, Solomon is transformed into the Demiurge's rival. Freed from his mortal chains, he becomes every shadow, every tear, every whimper in the night and every drop of blood that falls from another's hand. Through Assumption, Solomon becomes Oblivion, entropy, sadness—and completeness. His vision becomes infinite, his touch, eternal. He transcends all boundaries of man or god, and stretches across the Void in immortal ecstasy.

For without Darkness, Light is lost. Without pain, pleasure is worthless. What other magi see as The Fall becomes, to those who understand it, completeness and ultimate bliss.

Thus, the Screams go on forever.

Fell Folk: Infernalist Templates



hen the Devil is too busy, and Death's a bit too much

They call on me by name, you see, for my special touch.

To the gentlemen, I'm misfortune;

To the ladies, I'm surprise,

But call me by any name,
Any way, it's all the same

— Voltaire, "When You're Evil"

Common misconception holds that all Infernalists are more or less alike. Devoted to satanic masters, they mumble incoherently in hidden catacombs, venturing out at night to grab innocents for a monthly sacrifice. Confronted by the light of Magick, Faith and Reason, these throwbacks cower in their caves and hiss like angry serpents, helpless against the fire of Enlightenment.

Wrong.

It's important to remember that these Fallen folk are not mindless drones. Each one of them was once a normal person, with dreams, ideals and loved ones; each Fell through some passion or weakness, but still holds those old fragments of his old life deep inside. He may be a monster by all human standards (and probably is), but he's a monster with a recognizable face. The Infernalist could be one of us. A stroke or two of misfortune, and we could become like him.

And that may be the greatest terror of them all.

The following templates offer the Storyteller a host of Infernal antagonists (or allies) with which to bedevil the characters. Few, if any, of these adversaries should leap out screaming "DieDieDieDie!!!" Chances are, they'll be sitting off to one side watching for any possible advantage. It's doubtful that they'll admit the cause they serve, either. Most of the time, you'll never know what kind of a person you're dealing with — or what the stakes of that deal may be — until after a bargain has been struck. If even then.

Each of the following characters has a few general traits, personal and otherwise. Feel free to alter, modify or ignore these traits as you see fit. Most of these characters can be magi, hedge-wizards, soul-mortgaged mortals or normal folk with no special abilities whatsoever. Their power comes from motivation, not from magick. Although the occasional raving demonic lunatic can be fun, Infer-

nalists should usually be introduced as normal supporting characters — bankers, princes, helpmates, lovers — rather than as screaming cultist blade-fodder. After all, an enemy your players can see coming a mile away isn't usually very scary. One who stands right beside them, looking like a best friend or confidante, on the other hand... well, that kind of betrayal is what nightmares are all about.

Academician

Background: "In our age of knowledge," this scholar declares, "gods and devils are clearly symbols, nothing more." Firm in that conviction, he pores through forbidden texts, dabbles in demonic rituals, and even performs Black Masses as experiments in curiosity. Does he understand what he's doing? Probably not. Can he put down what he blindly calls up? Not likely....

Unlike most Infernalists, the Academician finds no inspiration in lust or malice. He's more interested in hidden knowledge, in testing the limits of his mind and courage. Perhaps he's just playing in the Darkness; or maybe he knows exactly what he's doing, and calls upon demonic aid (as Faustus did) to learn secrets he could never find otherwise; perhaps he's just perverse, and thinks that he can spit in the Devil's face and laugh about it later. Either way, our proud scholar is well acquainted with arcane rituals and Gnostic doctrines. He speaks many languages, and can read scrolls from Rome, Egypt and even the lost kingdoms of Ur and Babylon. His scholastic prowess and impressive vocabulary could put a Hermetic magus to shame, but his pursuit of knowledge may cost him his soul.

Image: A well-dressed person (most likely male) surrounded by books and speaking in highborn tones. His robes betray a scholar's profession, and he probably smells of dust and decaying paper from endless hours in the archives.

Roleplaying Hints: Nothing is impossible or forbidden to mankind! You didn't spend your life in pursuit of knowledge just to have some dusty priest tell you where the line was drawn! God put you on this earth to discover the secrets He left there to find. If some of those secrets seem "forbidden" or "dangerous," well, that's just because weaker minds weren't meant to master them!

Notes: This character could be a magus of the Hermetic variety, but more likely he's just a mortal with a few tricks, Infernal Paths, or Investments. Chances are, he's rich and connected (the Allies, Influence, Library and Resources Backgrounds), and rarely gets his hands dirty if skulls need to be broken. He may very well have a minor demon or two at his beck and call, and could possess some dangerous Spies or Influence (as the Backgrounds), too.

Alchemist

Background: To divine the secret of the Dragon's Egg, one must occasionally sup with dragons. Perhaps our Fallen alchemist began her work hoping to elevate her vision, to see the angels or join some wise sect like the Solificati. She may have been destitute, seeking the secret of gold from base matter; or maybe she's just a charlatan who's learned just enough alchemy to ensure her damnation. Now she has entered the Dragon's Egg, and it has transformed her in new and frightening ways.

Our alchemist speaks in riddles and symbology; like many of her trade, she tends a secret, solitary fire and spends much of her time staring into its flames. The odd elements she has invoked may have poisoned her flesh... or turned her into a wealthy, beautiful courtier with a basement full of secrets. Chances are, she's arrogant and intelligent. Every so often, she summons imps from bottles or brews up draughts and poisons to suit her needs. Rising from the Egg, she has become a serpent with a vicious sting.

Image: Resonance works powerful effects on our alchemist; she might be robust and wealthy, but those impressions are probably deceptive. She might require a "youth potion" to keep appearances intact; if she's deprived of that drought, the results might be unpleasant. No matter what she looks like, the Alchemist smells weird; the vapors of her experiments have worked their way into her skin and clothes. Personally, she's eccentric, speaking in riddles and conundrums, always preoccupied with some important business.

Roleplaying Hints: To attain the Pinnacle, an element must first putrefy. You're in that stage, but eventually you'll slough off your old skin — and your old soul — and shine like gold. In the meantime, well, there are plenty of riches to be made, secrets to be learned, and favors to be bargained for. Let no lesser man stand in the Dragon's path!

Notes: The Solificati, Cosians and High Guild all have Infernal alchemists in their midst; Heylel Teomim supposedly fell prey to their philosophy. The majority of these rotted souls, however, occupies lonely, independent cellars, or gathers into corrupt covens like those in the Black Alley of Prague.

Wherever they might gather, these sorcerers are probably magi or hedge wizards of intermediate power. (Adept level or better.) As tools, they employ potions, powders and concoctions — and probably have enough money and muscle to solve lesser "problems," too. (The Allies, Familiar, Resources and Sanctum Backgrounds.)

Black Knight

Background: "Thou shalt not kill" is a joke. Man was born for murder and this Infernalist is an incarnation of that

urge. He may be dressed in the finery of a courtly knight, but the killing beast is never hidden deeply.

Our blackguard might not be an actual knight, of course — he could be a forest bandit, a man-at-arms, a town watchman or a bodyguard. The suit of mail he wears (or doesn't wear, as the case may be) isn't as important as his skill with weaponry. He might come from distant shores, dressed in lacquered armor or wrapped in skins, but the warrior's urge is still the same. At rest, he's temperamental and brusque, prone to violence; in action, he's remorseless, slaughtering anyone within reach and torturing the weak for recreation. In secret, he prays to battle-demons — Ares, Moloch, Kali, Chongo — for greater bloodlust. When the battle's over, he sacrifices the survivors in rites that leave even the toughest veterans pale. The Black Knight enjoys his work. The Sixth Commandment is just one more trinket broken beneath his boots.

Image: Intimidation incarnate, our Black Knight towers above other men. Garbed in thick armor (often painted black and inscribed with occult symbols), he carries massive weapons and laughs as he employs them. Under his mail, his body is crossed with deep scars and weird mutilations. His face may be handsome enough, but his body is a tapestry of horrors.

Roleplaying Hints: Civilization bores you. Murder is far more fun. Tolerate the simpering play of manners when you must, but indulge your killing thirst as much and as ruthlessly as possible.

Notes: A powerful warrior (see the Knight or Man-at-Arms templates in the *Sorcerers Crusade* Appendix), this Infernalist favors brawn over magick. That doesn't mean he's not a magician, however — many Gabrielites have Fallen to this state — but if he is, he's still more comfortable with a sword than with a spellbook. Black Knights tend to have potent Demonic Investments (body weaponry, regeneration and invulnerability), and can be the cruellest Infernalists you'd ever want to meet.

Blood-Pagan

Background: When the Old Gods howl in their exile, this faithful servant answers. Furious over the Christian stain, he raises his sword or axe in bloody prayer. The Hanging God is thrown to the ground and his churches burn as the Blood-Pagan brings the Lost Ones home again.

Let the weak folk pray to frail gods like Venus or Frey! The Blood-Pagan follows the dark gods (Loki, Hecate, Ba'al and so forth). Inspired by raging zeal, he cuts "blood-eagles" and feasts on his victims' hearts. In the cycle of life and death, this berserker favors death.

Image: Depending on the culture of his birth, the Blood-Pagan could be a cruel Greek, a raging Norseman, a brawling Celt, a brooding Roman, a sinister Egyptian, or whatever suits the story best. Either way, he probably favors

CHAPTER II: THE DEVIL'S OWN

archaic, traditional clothes and weapons. No matter where he (or she) hails from, this Pagan is an angry sort, bearing a literally hellish grudge against the People of the Book. Given half a chance, he'll probably rant about the ills his people have suffered, then enact the bloodiest rites in his gods' religion (cannibalism, head-hunting, heart-eating, blood-eagles, etc.) in the name of those injuries.

Roleplaying Hints: Not so long ago, people respected the gods and reveled in their strength. Now the cravens, with their weak prophets and lying gods, have defiled the sacred places and made the people frail. Too few have remained faithful to the Old Gods, but you are one such. If returning your lands to them means making pacts with the Dark Ones, so be it. Soon, your folk will be free and proud again!

Notes: Despite the best intentions of its founders, many Blood-Pagans can be found within the Verbena Tradition. Thousands of others run with Tezghul the Insane and his wild horde. Still others simply keep to themselves and worship the Old Gods when no one else is watching. In the far reaches of the Christian and Muslim empires, these folk pretend to follow the dominant religion, but return to their old sacrifices when nighttime falls.

Any rustic — magus or mortal — can follow the Old Gods in this savage fashion. Many powerful Blood-Pagans resemble Ver-

bena in their dress, tools, practices and beliefs. The magi among them favor Forces, Life and Spirit Arts, and pick Patronae from among the malignant gods (see Appendix). Awakened or not, most Blood-Pagans have beastly companions (Allies or Familiars) of the most dangerous kind — wolves, panthers, snakes and so forth.

Bon Vivant

Background: She's fun. She's pretty. She's your best friend, a *confidante* and high-spirited company. While others moan about the horrors of the world, she's always there with a quick smile and a warm drink. But she's too spirited for her own good. Only the Devil will let her bloom.

The Bon Vivant doesn't wade in gore. She has no great interest in sacrilege, and isn't good at hurting people, either. But she's headstrong and temperamental, and refuses to behave. "Why is it," she once wondered, "that I have to bow my head and



weep through life?" The Fallen Ones offered her a better way, and despite misgivings, she took it. Naturally, she has to make sacrifices now and again, but so it goes. To her, freedom is too precious to surrender, so if being free means being bad, well, goodness was boring anyway...

Image: Vivacious and witty, the Bon Vivant refuses to be chained. She's no harlot, but she likes her fun, and if people get hurt, well, they shouldn't have been there in the first place! To her, Black Magick is a thrill, not a way of life. She could be a bar-wench, lady, country girl or defiant old maid. To her friends, she's a boon companion; to her detractors, she's plain trouble.

Roleplaying Notes: God is a sourpuss and His laws are for dried-up old men. If this life is all you have, well, better to spend it freely then to waste away in church. Evil, to you, is brave rebellion. A god of tears is no god at all!

Notes: More wicked (in a fun way) than malicious, this devil-worshipper renounced God more out of frustration than spite. She refuses to play the role *anybody* hands her, and her perverse associates vaguely appall her. Just the same, she can be nasty; if she thinks you stand between her and freedom, she'll break you. Hard.

In game terms, the Bon Vivant might know a few minor spells (probably Dark Thaumaturgy or Investments), but probably isn't very powerful. She's really charming, though; unlike her demented cousins, she likes having a good time. She might be a candidate for salvation, but only if she can be convinced that virtue doesn't have to be slavery. Nothing, not even threats of Hell, can make her get "in her place." To her, a woman's lot is hell enough, thank you. She wants more.

Catacomb Rat

Background: Some folk are literally born into darkness. Beneath the streets of Rome, Cairo, Edinburgh, and most other large cities, catacombs and sewers gather waste from the lands above. Some of that waste is alive. And hungry.

Perhaps the Rat once lived in the world above, but retreated here out of desperation, fear or poverty. He might have been born into darkness, though, growing from infancy to adulthood in a perpetual night of filth. Like as not, he's a cannibal, shit-eater, or both. In this degraded state, he steals what he can from weaker cousins, and ventures into the streets after the sun goes down. Caked with unspeakable mires, he could set a maggot's stomach churning, but the evil spirits have a use for him. As a bearer of plague and a walking horror, the Catacomb Rat makes a wonderful servant. Perhaps, if he's especially strong and ambitious, he might even lead the tribe someday.

Image: A naked, leprous bundle of filth, the Catacomb Rat could sear Satan's own nose with his stench. Emaciated limbs and jagged teeth make weak but vile weapons,

especially if they've been augmented by Infernal powers. The Rat is everything man has ever feared about poverty; even scabby beggars avoid him.

Roleplaying Hints: You have lost whatever humanity you once had. This does not, however, mean you're unintelligent; in fact, your foul existence has probably given you insights no normal person could hope to match. Each night weaves 10,000 secrets, and you know at least a few of them. A survivor above all else, you take whatever advantages you can get – occult or otherwise.

Notes: The Rat is a shambling monstrosity, and he moves in packs. Beneath the city streets, he knows, many secrets linger: ancient tombs, forgotten temples, secret meeting-halls for Satanic gatherings.... With his inhuman perceptions and hidden knowledge, he might even make a foul but essential Spy. As long as he's fed, that is....

Unless he was once raised in a normal human household, our Rat has probably never learned traditional manners, language, religion or hygiene. That does not make him stupid, however — incomprehensible and foul, maybe, but not stupid. Feral and resourceful, he may well know the ways of night-folk, but would not look at them the same way a surface-dweller would. In game terms, he's probably a Rogue of the "beggar" variety, but is probably a lot stronger, especially if he's got Investments like Claws or Devil's Strength. For inspiration, read up on the Elizabethan cannibal Sawney Beane and his degenerate family. Brrrr....

Corrupted Cleric

Background: Once, this pious person felt called to the Church. Devoted to the Almighty, he took vows and entered the service of the Lord. But soon that devotion ebbed; it may have been the treachery that infects each house of God, or the hypocrisy of bishops and priests. Perhaps the strain of vows — silence, chastity, obedience to those he learned to hate — chafed this bitter fellow. Or maybe he gleaned some dark significance from the Scriptures beneath his fingers. Whatever caused this crisis of faith, the Corrupted Cleric soon Fell from piety and landed in the Devil's arms.

Now this man (or woman, quite possibly) wears two different robes: In public, he tends to the faithful; in secret, he follows the road to Hell, possibly as an officiant at Black Masses. He (or she) could be a spy in the Vatican; a scribe who defaces the Holy Word; a Gnostic heretic; a priest who tends dark devotions; or a nun who cuckolds Christ with incubi. With his clerical rank, this Fallen One can do a lot of mischief. He might mangle scripture; preach heresy; give devil-worshippers sanctuary; or obtain virgins, hosts and holy water for desecration. Under God's nose, the Cleric serves the Adversary. The Evil One values such servants, and counts them dearly in his roll of lost souls.

Image: Those who appear holiest to men are often the more corrupted in the sight of God. The Fallen clergyman makes a real effort to seem as pious and virtuous as possible; the contrast between his pristine exterior and the deeds he performs in secret makes his corruption that much more horrible. (See Matthew Lewis' *The Monk* for a vivid portrait of a clergyman gone bad; better still, watch *The 700 Club*.)

Roleplaying Hints: The scriptures are a lie. Those who read them recognize them for the fables they are. God is a distant enigma, a Demiurge. This world is ruled by spirits of good and evil, and has already been lost to the latter. Other Churchmen are hypocritical fools, but they'd gladly burn you to conceal their own malignancy. Be careful and discreet.

Notes: The Fallen Cleric isn't stupid; he knows enough to take the Devil for whatever he can get! Thus, he's *very* powerful, rich with Arts, Investments, Backgrounds (especially Allies, Influence and Spies) and servitors of all kinds. Naturally, our Cleric must play a very quiet, dangerous game; you won't catch him ranting about "Infernal majesties" or patron devils. Quite the opposite — he'll protest his innocence to the bitter end, and might easily turn the tables on his accusers and make *them* out to be the true Infernalists!

The Devil's Whore

Background: This daughter of Eve (or worse yet, Lilith) forswears Christian chastity for more earthly passions. Like the Whore of Babylon, she dresses in rich garments and often sees to it that innocent folk are tormented and slain. A modern Salome, she parades herself before the rich and powerful, seeking their favor so that she might drag their souls to Perdition. Magickal skills and Infernal Investments accent her earthly charms, and an insatiable carnal appetite assures that she will never be alone.

Lust and envy, the Church agrees, drive all women; the Whore takes this inheritance and multiplies it sevenfold. Summoned incubi attend her call; children die beneath her knife; her own offspring are often slain before they leave the womb, and their flesh and fat provide parchment and candles for her invocations. Despite her crimes, she's quite a charming creature — literally! — and often justifies her abominations with the inferior status of her sex.

Image: Beautiful and refined, this Jezebel favors rich garments that command attention. She might have been ugly or poor long ago, but you'd never know it to see her now. Often very well-educated (especially for a *woman*!), she displays an able wit, erudition, and a keen imagination. A dedicated sensualist, our Infernalist indulges every whim with style. When and if some inconvenience threatens, she disposes of it with the same grace she exhibits at play.

Roleplaying Hints: It is neither fair nor reasonable that men treat women as chattel. You refuse to be some dotard's spaniel! Others may condemn you, but they respect, fear, and worship you as well. If such freedom means making a few sacrifices, so be it. You have suffered enough ere now; no man will ever degrade you again.

Notes: Any woman, Awakened or not, can become The Devil's Whore. If she knows Black Arts, they include Life spells (to enhance her beauty), Mind charms (to entice and beguile), Entropic weavery (to keep the odds in her favor), and a handful of powerful Forces or Spirit-based spells (to kill her enemies). More often than not, she prefers to have other people — lovers, dupes, family, etc. — do her dirty work. The bloody rites that seal her pact, however, are hers to perform. Frighteningly enough, she seems to enjoy causing pain, especially to the innocent....

Freak-Maker

Background: Before he Fell, this flesh-master sought answers to the riddle of sickness. Drawing upon the Arts of Greece, Arabia and the distant East, he quartered corpses, and studied cripples and leprosy in an effort to mend them. The body is a machine, you see, imperfect in its design and cursed by mortal flaws. The Freak-Maker knows what those problems are, and he now devotes himself to fixing them — or making them worse — if such duties lead him to better understanding.

Over time, the blood-spattered hours in the dissection-hall and chirurgeon's ward drove this healer to insanity. Demons of sickness and infirmity taunted him until he invoked their masters. Now he does the demons' work, twisting screaming flesh into abominations or grafting odd limbs to healthy "recipients." Depending on his current goals, this devotee of flesh-craft might be a maggot in the Cosian Circle, a demented Pagan healer, or an independent chirurgeon with wild theories of his own. In a basement or cesspit, he keeps a pack of freaks to aid him — to dig up graves, silence enemies, and provide fodder for new "experiments" when the passion takes him. In the name of his "professors," he dedicates his work to the Underworld. After all, the mysteries of the flesh are best revealed by those who've dealt with it for thousands of years.

Image: This Infernalist seemed to have stepped straight from the Pit. Spattered with blood and other humors, he's got a crazed expression and some appalling instruments — bone-saws, lancets, and other cruel gadgets — in his hands. Although he probably wears an apron and loose clothing, gore seems to have seeped into his skin. Resonance has probably poisoned the air around him; if he scrubbed himself clean in boiling water, he'd still smell of corpses.

Roleplaying Hints: The mysteries of man are hidden beneath his skin. At heart, you just want — *need!* — to uncover them. We need to throw off this ancestral cowardice that prevents us from viewing things as *they are*. True, you could be accused of extremity; dealing with the Adversary was never your intention. But think of the lives you can save when all the pathways of humanity are mapped out and catalogued. Until then, well, you do what you can to preserve your work. If that means adding a few new corpses to the pile, well, they probably would've died soon, anyway!

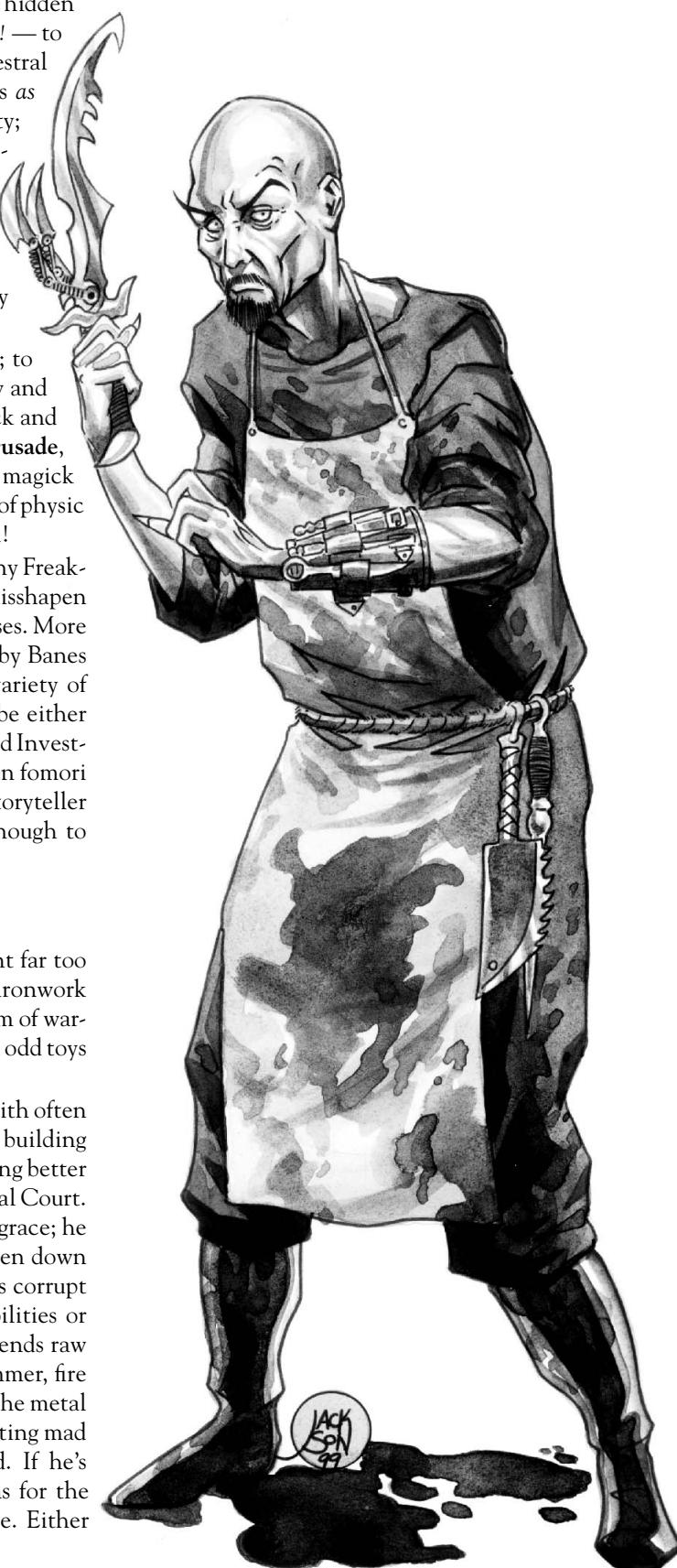
Notes: Any butcher can chop bodies apart; to put them back together or animate them in new and interesting ways, this character needs Life magick and lots of it. (See “Necromancy” in **The Sorcerers Crusade**, page 257.) Naturally, he does not view his Art as magick in the usual sense — he’s an Enlightened disciple of physic (see the rulebook, p. 265), not a common witch!

But he’s not alone in this hazardous work. Any Freak-Maker worth the name also has a small army of misshapen “Allies” (as the Background) to clean up his messes. More than likely, many (or all) of them are possessed by Banes from the butcher’s workshop, and manifest a variety of horrific mutations. In game terms, these could be either humans deformed by Life magick and given twisted Investments by the demons inside them, or Bane-driven fomori (see Chapter IV). No matter what systems the Storyteller employs, the Freak-Maker’s “pets” should be enough to chill even the most jaded wizard.

Hellsmith

Background: This powerful sinner has spent far too much time in the flames. His steel-craft and ironwork glorify his Satanic majesty, and they take the form of war-machines, torture racks, elaborate weaponry, and odd toys and transportations that mock the will of God.

Wreathed in smoke and flames, this blacksmith often toils for darker masters, outfitting soldiers and building deathtraps. Once, perhaps, he aspired to something better — a prince’s commission or a place in the Imperial Court. Somewhere along the road, the artisan fell from grace; he may have been frustrated by a lack of skill; beaten down by disaster; or betrayed by a rival. Maybe he was corrupt all along, and simply petitioned demons for abilities or rewards he couldn’t earn on his own. Now he bends raw matter with Infernal might, shaping it with hammer, fire and arcane Arts. Sometimes he binds souls into the metal or traps spirits or lesser demons in the work, creating mad Talismans that scream when they’re employed. If he’s particularly subtle, he might even cast weapons for the Order of Reason, concealing his true allegiance. Either



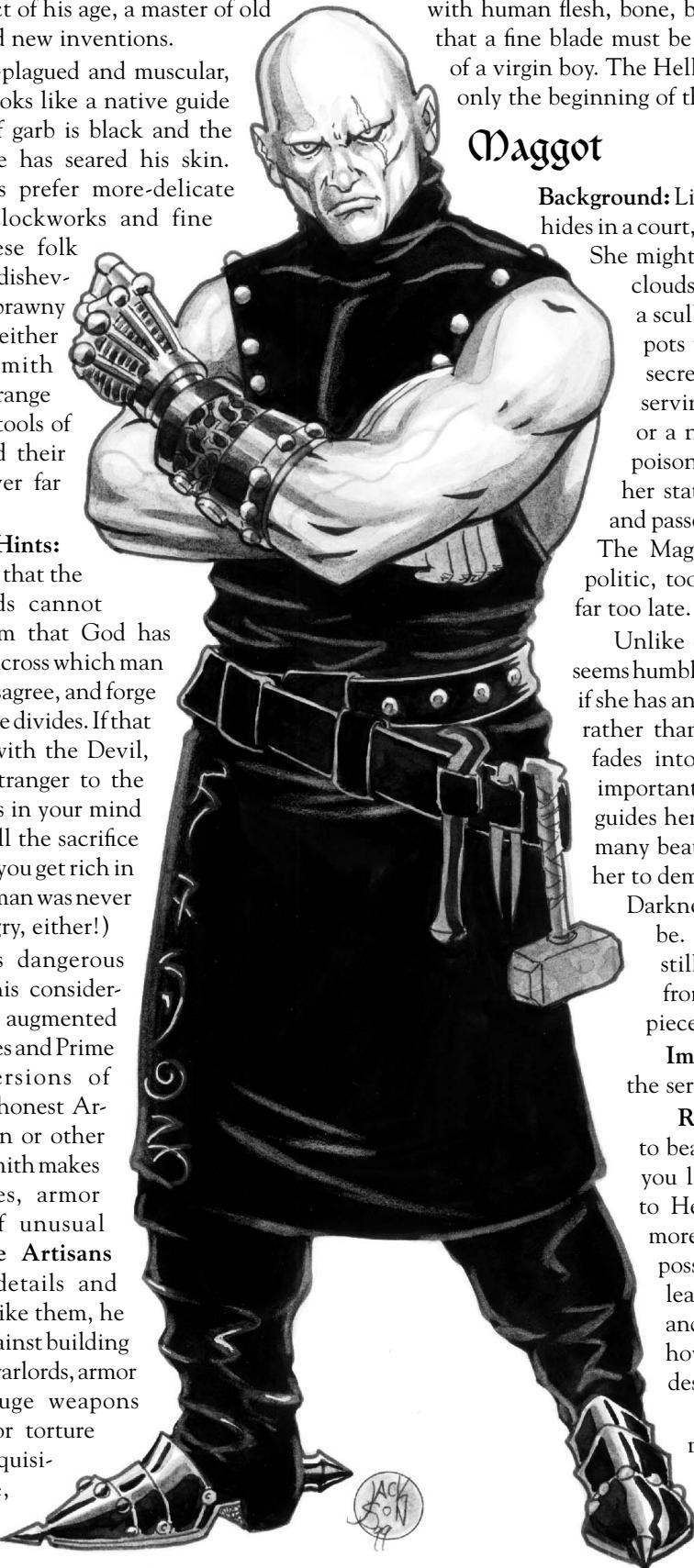
CHAPTER II: THE DEVIL'S OWN

way, he's a product of his age, a master of old Black Magick and new inventions.

Image: Soot-plagued and muscular, this Infernalist looks like a native guide to Hell. His brief garb is black and the heat of the forge has seared his skin. Some Hellsmiths prefer more-delicate work, crafting clockworks and fine mechanisms; these folk are slightly less disheveled than their brawny counterparts. In either case, the Hellsmith has mastered a strange artisanship. The tools of his labors — and their fruits — are never far from his hand.

Roleplaying Hints:
You have a vision that the Church's cowards cannot abide. They claim that God has marked the lines across which man cannot go. You disagree, and forge bridges across those divides. If that demands a deal with the Devil, well, you're no stranger to the heat. If the things in your mind can take shape, all the sacrifice is worthwhile. (If you get rich in the process, well, man was never meant to go hungry, either!)

Notes: This dangerous character turns his considerable skill (often augmented with Matter, Forces and Prime Arts) to perversions of science. Like an honest Artificer, Craftmason or other artisan, the Hellsmith makes weapons, devices, armor and vehicles of unusual power. (See **The Artisans Handbook** for details and suggestions.) Unlike them, he has no scruples against building cannons for mad warlords, armor for vampires, huge weapons for demon-kin, or torture machines for Inquisitors. Perchance, he mixes alloys



with human flesh, bone, brains and other fluids; it's said that a fine blade must be tempered hot inside the body of a virgin boy. The Hellsmith knows that this secret is only the beginning of the trade....

Maggot

Background: Like a carrion-worm, this betrayer hides in a court, gnawing away at it from inside.

She might be a confidante whose advice clouds royal judgments; she could be a scullery wench, emptying chamber pots while listening to her master's secrets; perhaps she's a tavern-harlot serving damnation with the brew; or a nurse whose milk and lullabies poison the royal heirs. Regardless of her station, she deceives her masters and passes their secrets on to other ears.

The Maggot is a parasite in the body politic, too small to be noticed until it's far too late.

Unlike other Infernalists, our Maggot seems humble and nondescript. Her magicks, if she has any, are subtle and slow, corrosive rather than forceful. Like a shadow, she fades into the background while more important folk make their plans. Envy guides her down the Path of ruin — too many beatings or dismissals have driven her to demonic arms. Now she serves the

Darkness wherever she happens to be. Her victims may dismiss her still, but the Maggot murders them from within, bite by bite, piece by piece....

Image: How often do you notice the servants?

Roleplaying Hints: So they dared to beat you, eh? They dared to treat you like last night's pissings? Well, to Hell with them all. You've got more power than they could ever possess. It simply pleases you to lead your "masters" by the nose and into Perdition. You've seen how they carry on! Surely they deserve no less.

Notes: It's unlikely that a magus would play the Maggot. Rather, she's a Sleeper with a few hidden talents (Investments) and possibly a bit of Dark Thaumaturgy to make

her soul-price a little dearer. Which is not to say she's an unskilled weakling! Her household duties have probably given her some helpful Abilities (Alertness, Animal Ken, Etiquette, Intrigue, Investigation, Riding, Seduction or Stealth, among others), Backgrounds (especially Allies and Spies), and a ground-view perspective on how things go on around house, court and tavern. Never underestimate the hired help, or turn your back on slaves!

Necromancer

Background: Life is temporary. Death is eternal. One who understands death, who makes an ally of it, can comprehend eternity... or at least get a fair leg up on other, squeamish mortals. The Necromancer takes the Reaper's hand and joins him in the dusty graveyards, exhuming corpses, lopping off bits of gibbet-fruit and building sculptures out of bone. Sometimes she whistles up a ghost or draws the essence of death into a living body. To master such Arts, she auctions her soul to Infernal masters — demons or Spectres swimming in the Underworld. Sometimes she even lets them enter her, channeling the spirits in her own living flesh.

All cultures know death; thus, a Necromancer can come from anywhere. Although the Christian lands have their share of death-magicians, the worst of them seem to travel up from the jungles and ancient necropoli of Egypt, Africa and India. Infested with Jhor, a corpse-priestess (or priest) resuscitates dead bodies and animates their limbs into ghastly parodies of life. The Lord Jesus may have brought Lazarus back from death, but this sorcerer mocks that miracle. Someday, her own body will fall to the Reaper's blade. What will happen to her soul then? Perhaps her Arts will be enough to preserve her soul from Hell... or perhaps not. Like any mortal, she'll discover the truth someday.

Image: Depending on her home culture and general temperament, this Infernalist might be a sophisticated ritual magus, a raving corpse-fucker, or something in between. Those who follow the ancient Arts of Egypt and Babylon tend to be cold, dusty and remote, almost like resuscitated mummies; the ghost-shamans of India, Africa and the vast Northlands tend to be fatalistic and feral. Necromancers raised with the Book have been taught to fear and loathe death — their Arts have turned them into raving, cadaverous fiends. In all cases, a Necromancer who favors Infernal aid is raddled with Jhor; at best, she's disconcerting, and at worst she literally kills things that get too close.

Roleplaying Hints: Death is natural. Why fear it? True, the things lurking in the secret heart of the Underworld are fearsome, but you're far too educated for such terrors. There is too much to learn, too many mysteries to unfold. To turn away from decay is worse than cowardice, it is blindness as well.

Notes: Although some minor hedge wizards play with corpses, most "successful" death-magicians employ high levels of Entropy, Life, Matter and Spirit. (For details, see the rulebook — "Necromancy," p. 257, and "Jhor," p. 236.) The Infernal Necromancer's tools include copious amounts of blood, bones, decaying flesh, maggots, bits of carcass, fly eggs, and other revolting ingredients — not to mention a very strong stomach!

Many evil death-magicians have Allies — zombies, legions of the dead, feaster-scarabs, demon-hounds, *ghuls*, harpies, *vodaynay*, *umkovu*, even Spectres — that protect and assist them. (See Chapter IV, **The Bygone Bestiary**, and **Wraith: The Oblivion** for details.) Combined with the often-rotting Sanctums and Crays they maintain, these Infernalists can be extremely unsettling opponents.

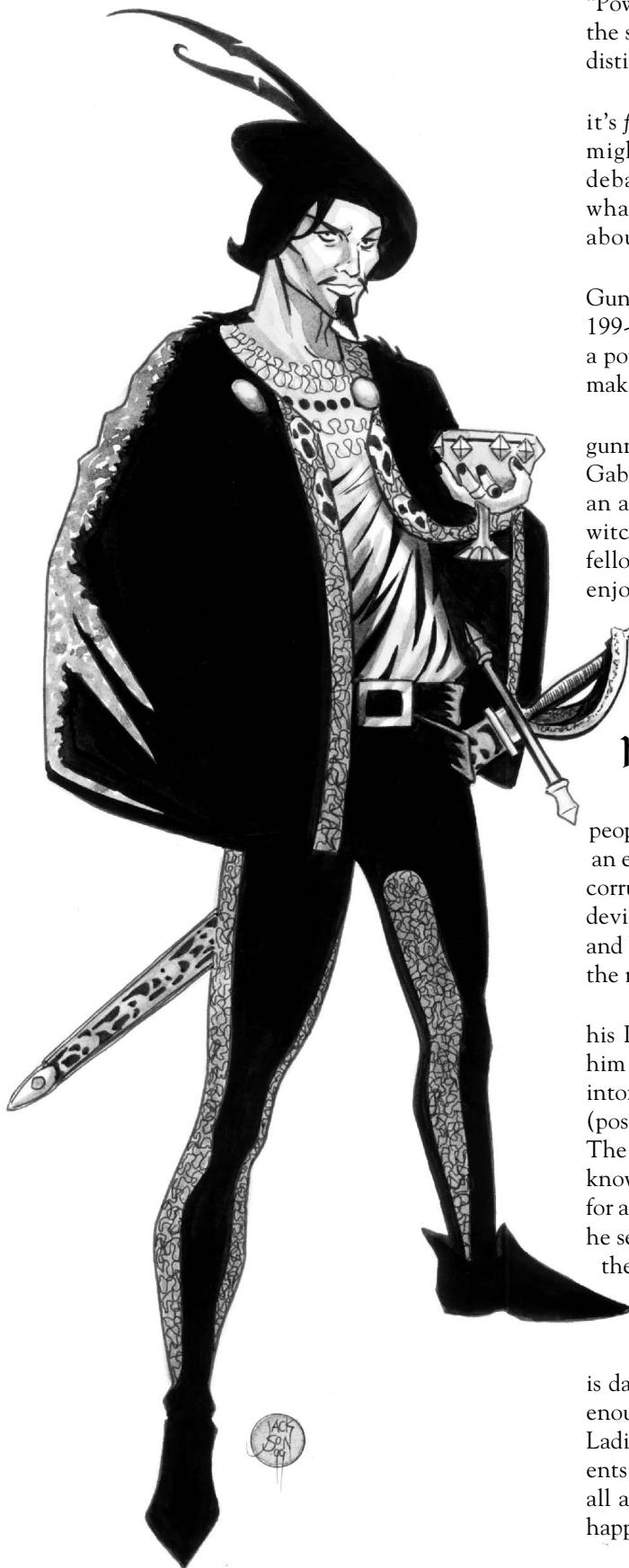
It's worth stressing that many necromancers are not true Infernalists. This template refers to a death-magus who bargains with demons, Banes and Spectres, not one who — like most Chakravanti and Madzimbabwe — simply accepts the reality of death and works around it. The distinction is lost on most folk, though, which gives "clean" necromancers a very bad name... and a remorseless grudge to settle with sorcerers who pervert the Arts of death. Even so, magi of pure intention may still Fall to this level; Jhor's poison seeps into good hearts, too; a penchant for death can lead a sorcerer down some very dark paths indeed....

Old Nick's Gunman

Background: To men of faith and action, gunpowder is a cowardly, despicable weapon. Reeking of brimstone, the gunman or artillerist murders enemies from a distance or blows down walls with devilish ease. This stout and deadly fellow knows that the tales are true: he *did* learn gunsmithing at his Patronus' knee, and he dedicates his kills to the Infernal cause.

It's the ease of gunnery that makes it so tempting. Although firearms are badly unreliable, when they *do* work they're hideously effective. And then there's that satisfying "BOOM!" — it's pure joy! In sooty workshops or blistering forges, this Infernalist called upon Moloch or other fiery demons to teach him the art of gun-craft. Now that he knows its secrets, he can kill with devastating ease. In time, the Gunman's influence will take war to new depths of terror and destruction; for now, he simply spends his terror upon whoever happens to cross him — or upon anyone he is paid to destroy.

Image: Our Gunman is an eerily "normal" soldier or artillerist — a bit pungent, perhaps, but that's what happens when you spend too much time around gunpowder and arsenals. He's probably got a boisterous temperament, and a subtle cruel twist to his manner. Most Fallen gunmen tend to dress in dark, heavy clothing, and wear armor under their garments even when they're not at war.



"Powder-kisses" (burns and saltings of gunpowder under the skin) announce his trade, and an odd sense of humor distinguishes him in gentle company.

Roleplaying Hints: This is the future of war, and it's *fun!* Kings and princes always need killers, so you might as well profit from their vanities. Let others debate the morality of your methods. You've seen what a sword can do, and there's nothing humane about *that*, either!

Notes: Given the tools of his trade (see "Cannons and Guns," "Explosions" and "Firearms" in the rulebook, pp. 199-200, 203, 205-206), Old Nick's Gunman need not be a powerful magus. A bit of Forces, Matter and Prime can make his weaponry *truly* demonic!

Since mysticks usually avoid firearms, Hell-bound gunners tend to Fall from the ranks of the Craftmasons, Gabrielites and Guildsmen, where any new weapon is an advantage. Because most Daedaleans are looking for witches among the mysticks, they usually miss corrupt fellows like this one! Hence, Old Nick's Gunman probably enjoys a position of honor and respect in one of these

Conventions. In time, this will become a real problem for the Order of Reason as a whole. For now, the Gunman hides his true allegiance and aims his weapons at any mage in sight.

Rake-Hell

Background: Life is for living, preferably at other peoples' expense. The Rake-Hell knows how to have fun on an epic scale, and his libations would scandalize the most corrupt cleric in Rome. His boon companions are literally devils — summoned before an evening's debaucheries — and his mortal "friends" are *decadenti*, men and women of the most disreputable stripe.

Most likely, this young hellion is rich and well favored; his Infernal ties keep him inhumanly vigorous and give him a literally devilish charm. Orgies, duels, torture and intoxication are his favorite pastimes — he has minions (possibly Hell-born ones) tend to more mundane concerns. The Rake-Hell isn't especially skilled at mystick Arts — he knows just enough to get him what he wants. In exchange for a steady stream of fornication, blasphemy and sacrifice, he secures demonic Investments and uncanny wealth. By the time his patrons come to collect their final due, the

Rake hopes to have earned himself a place of favor in the troupes of Hell.

Image: Well-bred and well-favored, this young man is dashing, wealthy and fun. He's got a nasty streak, true enough, but most folk consider him an ideal companion. Ladies practically throw themselves at him, and their parents seek him as an in-law. The Rake likes to play them all against each other. The more conflict he creates, the happier he'll be.

Roleplaying Hints: According to God-fearing folk, you're damned. It's probably true, so why not have a good time on the way down? Drinking, whoring, fighting and robbery are only appetizers at your Infernal banquet. Some day, the main course is bound to be unpleasant, but until then... well, who's up for a little drink-and-dare?

Notes: The High Guild is filled with men like this. Not all of them are Infernalists, either, which makes finding the *true* Rake-Hell a difficult task. In the burgeoning prosperity of Italy and Spain, hot-tempered young men are a common breed. The worst of them literally sell their souls for Demonic Investments or True Magick, and nearly all of them have Allies, Influence and Resources to burn. (See "Decadenti" in Chapter III.)

The Rake-Hell's greatest weapon, though, is his own charm. Add few well-applied spells (see "Perception Magicks" and "Uncanny Influence" in the rulebook) to his social acumen, and top it all off with a bit of fencing, and our Rake-Hell becomes a very formidable fellow. Watch your back! (See the rulebook, pp. 31, 190-191, for more details about courtly politics, and the Noble template in the Appendix for suggested Rake-Hell Traits.)

Satanic Witch

Background: As the full moon swells, this hag smears herself with the fat of infants and rides her broom to the Sabbat. A malignant rustic, she inverts both the sacred rites of the Old Ways and the newer sacraments of Christ. Why? Perhaps she's angry, too barren and ugly, (or beautiful and spirited) to stay in her place. She might have had a Pagan upbringing, but it's been poisoned until it's more anti-Christian than truly Pagan. Regardless of her motives or pedigree, this Witch serves the Devil in his most blatant form: the old goat of the woods. With curses, brews and occasional sacrifices, she tends a lonely fire, too poor, perhaps, to know how to take advantage of her Arts.

Surrounded in her cottage by imps, potions, gutted corpses and demonic trinkets, this Infernalist is a witch in the popular sense of the word. On a whim, she can wither a crop, sour milk, raise a storm, or torment a child from afar. Her *maleficia* are often trivial and common — she's a simple woman (or man) with dark impulses, not a trained master of esoteric Arts. Even so, she's a bad person to cross. Her anger is direct and brutal, and her allies — cats, bats, insects and birds — are everywhere. In a good mood, she might cast a spell or two for someone else's benefit. There's a catch, however. Always.

Image: Depending on who she is and what she wants, this Witch might be young and beautiful, old and decrepit, or somewhere in between. Either way, she's clearly a country sorcerer, with simple charms and rustic ways. Although she's not sophisticated or well read, this Infernalist should

not be underestimated. Her spells, while simple, can still be powerful enough.

Roleplaying Hints: Once, you were weak and frail, left to the mercies of more powerful folk. No longer. Your ally is the Devil and through him you are strong. Most times, you'd prefer to be left alone. Oh, there *are* those spiteful games you occasionally enjoy, but they're mild diversions at best. True freedom comes with each full moon when you gather with your siblings to sup at Satan's table. Then the weakness falls away and you know you could live forever.

Notes: In game terms, the Satanic Witch might be a hedge wizard, a magus who specializes in Forces, Life and Entropy, or a mortal "blessed" with a handful of Investments and little else. The Church sees her kind everywhere, but in reality she's not that common. In dress, temper and practice she resembles a Verbena witch; the real difference is her open subservience to the Christian Satan — no true Pagan would ever enter such service!

Aside from her magick (or lack of it), our Witch is a past-master of peasant skills: Hearth Wisdom, Animal Ken, Herbalism and so forth. Her Familiars (of which she has several) are of the nastier sort — black cats, warty frogs, snakes, goats, and even imps. She might prefer her own company, or join with others of her kind for grand and powerful rites. (See the rulebook, "Acting in Concert," p. 243.) Either way, she flies each month to the Sabbat. Until then, the Satanic Witch goes about her work, casting spells of discord and strife.

Serpent

Background: Like the tempter in Eden, this malignant courtier poisons those he professes to help. "Let me tell you a secret," he says as he pours venom in your ear. Gossip, slander, temptation and ridicule are his favorite pastimes. For a fee, he might commit some active crimes — robbery, assassination and even treason. Most times, however, he's content to simply lie and cheat his way through life. A coward at heart, the Serpent knows how to keep his skin intact.

The halls of power are littered with Serpents. Not all of them worship devils (most serve evil simply by promoting man's worst habits), but a handful of them do. These courtiers often lose their souls in midnight gambling binges, then fulfill their pacts by leading other folk into temptation. The lies they tell breed hate and rivalry; sometimes, they even kill. Arrayed in fine apparel, the Infernal Serpent oozes charm. His lies seem so sincere and his flirtations so enticing that normal folk don't think to question him. All the while, he plies dark Arts to keep himself in favor, wealth and mistresses. Evil does have its rewards!

Image: Oh-so-elegant, the Serpent keeps current on the latest fashions. His boots are Spanish leather, his

doublet is stitched with gold, and his codpiece is a work of art. Depending on his manner and personality, he may be flamboyant or refined; either way, he knows how to make an impression. One constant is his caustic wit. Anyone who crosses his temper will be flayed alive by words alone.

Roleplaying Hints: Those who cannot withstand the acid bath of high society have no business swimming in it. Compassion is a lie the weaklings tell each other. Anything a man (or woman) can do to get ahead is fair practice. Stay sharp, and whittle down anyone who aspires to gain your station. Others exist only to serve you.

Notes: Like the Maggot, Rake-Hell and Devil's Whore, the Serpent prefers social evils to violent ones. Not that he's faint about bloodshed, mind you—he's probably adept at the new fencing arts that are sweeping the continent. If nothing else, he's got a torturer or two on retainer, and knows all the best assassins in town. When it comes to confrontations, however, he prefers a verbal flaying to a physical one—although if the former can lead to the latter in the privacy of his secret dungeon, so much the better!

Although some evil courtiers learn the mystick Arts to give them a hidden edge, the average Serpent prefers spells that charm, curse, tilt the odds, or reveal a rival's secrets. Some trusted courtiers take the "royal vizier" role, and study the Arts of alchemy, prophecy, summoning and binding, too. Most, however, prefer to do as little work as possible. Remaining on top of the social mountain, after all, is so *very* time-consuming. (See films like *Dangerous Liaisons*, *Othello*, *Ridicule* and *The Lion in Winter* for inspiration; they're out of period, but offer great examples of the Serpent at work.)

Star-Ravaged Madman

Background: Some seek the Void. He found it. What he discovered—either through his arcane Arts or during a journey to the Upper Reaches—drove him utterly insane. Was he a sailor upon uncanny seas? Or a tower-bound astrologer who saw far too clearly through his telescopes? Perhaps he encountered the demon hoards through their bestial servitors... or maybe he's met them face-to-face on a Skyrigger's decks. Either way, he has returned forever changed. He may act composed, but his soul is on fire for his demented, chthonic masters.

Regardless of his trade, this wight is a rot-worm in the Daedalean foundations. He claims to serve Reason, but prefers its opposite instead. Like a tempter, he conceals his true allegiance behind a cloak of clever lies. Hidden in the halls of science, he drives wedges into the minds of other Daedaleans. At night, he leads mad ceremonies on barren hilltops, or screams himself hoarse in fits of secret ecstasy. Once, he called out for true Enlightenment. The answer he received raped his soul.

Image: The most frightening thing about this Madman is that he appears utterly sane. In fact, as far as he's concerned he is completely sane, lucid in a way few other mortals are ever allowed to be. A gentleman and a scholar, he can expound on weird theories for hours if he thinks someone might benefit from the telling. Of course, he's very careful about who he speaks to. He has discovered that Heaven does not exist, and is very well aware how quickly that knowledge could lead him to the stake.

Roleplaying Hints: God is a lie. The Devil lives in the heavens, and he's too horrible to conceive. Sanity is insanity, and madness is enlightenment. Nothing as comfortable as reward or damnation exists, and life is a pointless prelude to oblivion. Soon enough, that Void will come to Earth. Best to prepare its way...

Notes: This Infernalist probably isn't very powerful in a magickal sense. He's competent in the Ars Praeclarus, but isn't a powerhouse. His true edge lies in the things he knows—things nobody else can grasp. This Madman has seen the stars up close, and has a perspective few others can muster.

Those who have learned the truth about the Void of Heaven (*The Sorcerers Crusade*, pp. 67 and 288) often Fall into this madness. This is the curse of the Explorators and Celestial Masters: to know, but not to tell. Many of their number seem perfectly normal unless you peek inside their minds. Not all of them serve the Void and the hosts thereout, but an uncomfortable number of them do.

Torturer

Background: Down the stairs, lit by torch-fire, is the chamber every person fears. Those unfortunate enough to be dragged down that final stairwell meet the hooded Torturer. With practiced ease, he breaks their spirits and rends their bodies raw. Sometimes, if the condemned are truly unlucky, he sends their souls to *eternal* torment, too. When you serve true Darkness, the fun doesn't have to end with death!

Most torturers simply dispense rough justice; the Infernal one, however, enjoys his work. A lot. To him, pain is a stairway to enlightenment, a dark gift he offers to the screaming folk on his tables. Perhaps he tends Lilith's garden and offers encouragement to his victims as they bleed. More likely, he's simply a sadist, feeding Bane spirits with his subjects' agony and fulfilling his own perverse lusts in the bargain. He enjoys *enduring* pain, as well; a mosaic of scars attests to his taste for excruciation. Chances are, he's always been an outsider, a cripple or freak whose deformity forced him toward this gory line of work. Now, though, he takes his revenge by making others as malformed as he is. (The more beautiful they are, the more he enjoys the job.) When the final screams have faded, he bathes in blood and makes offerings to his Patronus. This Infernalist doesn't

need to sell his soul. His pleasures bar him from the gates of Heaven so he might as well entertain himself in Hell.

Image: Beneath his mask lies a misshapen beast. His bent body reflects the corruption in his soul, and the crazed injuries he has inflicted upon himself magnify his freakish aspect. A handful of such tormentors look normal, even attractive, but their wicked pleasures still make them disconcerting company. Perchance, our Torturer speaks in a harsh, demented whisper; more likely, he cannot speak at all, and simply grunts as he breaks his subjects upon the rack and wheel. His work has made him muscular, but his heart is a rotted husk.

Roleplaying Hints: Life is a garden of agonies broken here and there by rays of comfort. You know how to mix succor with suffering for maximum effect. Death is a waste; excruciation is the road to bliss. Deep inside, everyone secretly *likes* to hurt! With your refined techniques, you can elevate almost anyone to the zenith of experience. If they cannot understand your lessons, the fault is theirs. Perhaps, with more excruciation, they might appreciate your gifts.

Notes: Although most torturers are mortal, a deeply twisted magus might specialize in spells of pain. The suffering that a sadist with Life, Mind, Time and Spirit magicks could inflict is literally beyond human comprehension. Sadly, the Cabal of Pure Thought, the Verbena, and the Celestial Chorus harbor a few "inquisitors" whose "loyalty to the cause" cloaks their Infernal devotions; other demonic tormentors serve corrupted princes, vengeful nobility, and Tezghul's horde. Pity anyone who's left to the mercy of such characters — they don't have any!

(If and when the Torturer goes to work, see the systems given in the rulebook, pp. 190-192. If your Storyteller has a taste for sadism, the **Vampire: The Masquerade** supplement **The Inquisition** includes a hair-raising array of torture implements.)

Twilight Mystic

Background: As this Infernalist knows, the Church fears a bad joke. Their capering satans and silly devils are childish fancies. Evil isn't a buffoon with a penchant for screwing nuns. It's a cosmic force of entropy, a living Void to which all things eventually go.

The Mystic carries this Void inside herself, reveling in its cold clarity. She's got no use for prayers or trinkets. The Dark needs no appeasement. Like the tide, it sweeps in and takes all things back out to sea. This visionary is a sailor on that midnight ocean; weird and bedraggled, she whispers to herself. As she walks by, candles flicker and winds blow cold. Occasionally, she offers up shadow-wisdom; no one she speaks to understands (or *wants* to understand) what she says. Although she commits all kinds

of evil acts, the Twilight Mystic has no need for pacts or Investments. She realizes that all demons are just figments of our imaginations, and isn't fool enough to serve them. If someone prays or brandishes a cross at her, she simply laughs and shrugs it aside. Faith means nothing to one who comprehends the Void.

Image: Tattered clothing, tattered mind... nothing exists, so nothing matters. Like a half-drowned raven, the madwoman staggers through a mirror gallery. In her wake, Creation itself seethes.

Roleplaying Hints: In the absence of God, we may be free from his restrictions. The cold scream of the Void is oddly comforting when you stop to think about it. Now you can do whatever you want, without fear of punishment. Each human being carries an echo of that cold scream inside himself. Now that you recognize it, you can hear its voice at night. Help others hear it, too.

Notes: Like the Star-Ravaged Madman, this sorcerer is literally thinking on another plane. Her contemporaries cannot begin to understand what she sees. To a 20th-century mind, the idea of an existential Void is pretty mundane; to the Renaissance mindset, wherein all things have patterns and purposes, this idea is an affront to the very concept of existence. This Infernalist's mind has literally snapped under the strain of trying to comprehend nothingness, and in the aftermath she reverts to an evil she can at least understand. To her, the primal chaos assumes a variety of masks — Kali, Tiāmat, and odder things with unpronounceable names. The Mystic's darker urges manifest as Void-worship, in supplication to deities she knows cannot exist. Hence, she worships nothing. Her actions may be evil, but her mind is on other things.

In game terms, this Mystic is truly a Maraud, not an Infernalist. She might pay homage to wicked deities, but she hasn't truly sold her soul to them. As far as she's concerned, they're just another comfortable illusion, flickers of divine madness crackling to and fro across the human mind. Because her consciousness literally slips through the wedges of Renaissance comprehension, the Twilight Mystick does likewise. See "Marauds" in the rulebook (pp. 283-284), for more details, and consider this one a fairly lost soul (Madness 6 or higher) with considerable magick at her disposal.

Usurer

Background: How dearly would you sell your soul? This wealthy Infernalist craved luxury and power so deeply that Mephistopheles felt compelled to offer him a bargain. Now the rich man has bartered away his most valuable possession, but you'd never know it to look at him. Fat, robust, charismatic and surrounded by Midasian splendor, the Usurer has made a wonderful deal. These days, he purchases his luxuries with the souls of others.

Usurers aren't always men, of course. Many a wealthy woman, tricked out of a dowry or stripped of her inheritance, has bargained with the Fiend to retain (or expand) her holdings. No matter what the Usurer's sex may be, the bargain is always the same: He offers his soul as a loan in exchange for wealth and power. With that largess, he pulls other people into his debt, driving them into poverty until they're desperate enough to trade their own souls for relief. If these dupes hold onto their integrity, the Usurer grinds them down. Eventually, even pious folk lose hope, and hopelessness is the Devil's bread. Sooner or later, one way or another, the rich man (or woman) recovers his investment, pays it off with interest, and occasionally even recovers his soul – if he lives long enough to do so.

Image: Wealthy and proud of it, this Infernalist is an ostentatious pig. Everything he owns is gaudy to the point of tastelessness, and he spends money as if it were breath. Confident and condescending, he makes his bargains with a skill bred by years of practice. You may hate this bastard, but he's good at his work. *Too good, one might say....*

Roleplaying Hints: *Everything* is for sale. You know this to be true. Now that your soul is literally in hock, you've got a real incentive to repay your debt before it's too late. As for the other souls burned in your wake, well, it's their own fault, really. If they were half as righteous as they pretend to be, they wouldn't be coming to you for luxuries they can't afford.

Notes: While the Usurer is probably "just" a mortal with substantial Backgrounds (Allies, Influence, Resources and Spies at 3 or better) and a lot of Ties (as the Merit), he might be an especially subtle magus. Considering the disturbing possibilities of a soul-catcher with high levels of Mind or Spirit magick, this could be an ominous possibility indeed!

Whatever his mystick potential, this Infernalist is a crafty, amoral bastard. Typically, he'll offer his "friend" something she desperately wants or needs (money, property, assistance, etc.) in return for a steep debt. He won't be clumsy enough to reveal his true designs early on; the first debt will consist of service (usually to be determined later), a lot of money, or a pledge of some kind ("I promise that I shall grant thee one favor, to be named anon..."). When the final price is named, it will involve a minor but significant sin — a broken oath, a robbed innocent, a renunciation of vows, and so forth. At that point, the Usurer will contrive things so that the debtor winds up owing him even more. Bit by bit, the Infernalist plays upon his debtor's weaknesses (possibly with Mind magicks or certain Investments), offering her more and more of whatever it is she needs. Each time, he raises the price and demands that she degrades herself further. A typical magus can resist such debts without much trouble, but few people are so

steadfast. Everyone has a price, and the Usurer is a master at finding it. Sooner or later, his debt involves a soul pact, a grave sin (assassinating a bishop, massacring innocents) or the debtor's complete moral and financial degradation. (By which point she has probably signed her own order of damnation without the pact.)

For examples of the Usurer's tactics and capabilities, see the "Techniques of Temptation" sidebar earlier in this chapter; the Noble template and the "Intrigue" sidebar in *The Sorcerers Crusade*; the play *The Merchant of Venice*, and movies like *House of Games*, *Rounders* and *Shakespeare in Love*.

Vision-Mocker

Background: Not all spirits are kind. Sometimes, Jackal or Coyote has other tricks to play. A shaman called by the darker spirits or ravaged by his almost-death assumes a poisoned vision, a mockery of the medicines that heal his people. When he masters such venoms (or they master him), his touch becomes a rotting plague and his song becomes a storm.

A man or woman of vision becomes a treat for evil spirits. They tempt him, tease him, drive him mad. He might seem healthy enough on the outside, but his heart is a twisted tree; sometimes that corruption rots him from the inside out, turning him into a walking plague. Cannibalism, death-sorcery, fatal tricks and spiritual possession become his walking sticks, and rabid animals become his companions. The Dream-Speakers are riddled with such nightmares; in the confusion of the Tradition's birth, many Vision-Mockers were able to pass themselves off as medicine folk. There's a truth to that claim, of course. The world is not always kind, and pain teaches many lessons. The Vision-Mocker is a challenge, a dark reflection in a stagnant pool. "I am your hunger made flesh," he says, "and someday I will consume you."

Image: Any outland shaman can be a Vision-Mocker in disguise: he could be a fur-wrapped madman from the Courts of the Wolf, a scarred African Nhanga, a medicine man from the mysterious lands across the sea, or even a spirit-magus from Cathay or Nippon. Either way, he radiates a disturbing air of malignance, as if his soul was on fire. Given the diverse and often menacing nature of primal magick, however, it's very easy to mistake this aura as a product of strange worship — which it is.

Roleplaying Hints: Your weaker brethren make you sick. To listen to them, you'd think the world was a placid wonderland, not an endless pantomime of blood and suffering. You recognize the sublime dance of predator and prey, and see it for the natural thing that it is. You're the predator, they're the prey, and everything is as it should be.

Notes: Like the Blood-Pagan, this Infernalist follows the darkest aspects of his native religion. Although Dhambu the Outcast is proclaimed the first Vision-Mocker, his ilk has been with us since the dawn of time. The Dream-Speakers, Sahajiya, Madzimbabwe and Chakravanti conceal many of these plotters in their ranks, and many others haunt the nights of their distant homelands. Shamanism is a deadly Path, and those who cannot walk it with honor and dedication often Fall to evil spirits.

Outwardly, Fallen shamans resemble their “pure” counterparts. They employ the same tools, conduct the same rituals, and call upon many of the same spirits. But where the other medicine-folk strive to maintain an honorable accord with their surroundings, the Vision-Mocker uses his Arts to trick, rob or destroy anyone within reach — even the spirits he appears to serve. Greedy and malevolent, this Infernalist has no master beyond himself.

Wildling

Background: Like the cats at her side, this Infernal wretch revels in her animal nature. With savage Arts and cunning, she casts down her human soul and runs with the lesser beasts. Forswearing civilization, she binds herself to a pack or pride. Anyone who crosses this Wildling will be torn limb from limb and eaten alive.

What led her to this state? It may have been a savage ancestry, a Pagan upbringing gone awry, or a childhood spent among the wolves. Perhaps she ran away one night and joined the creatures of the wood. Or maybe she lives with others of her kind — filthy, debased folk that bear only fair resemblance to Adam’s descendants.

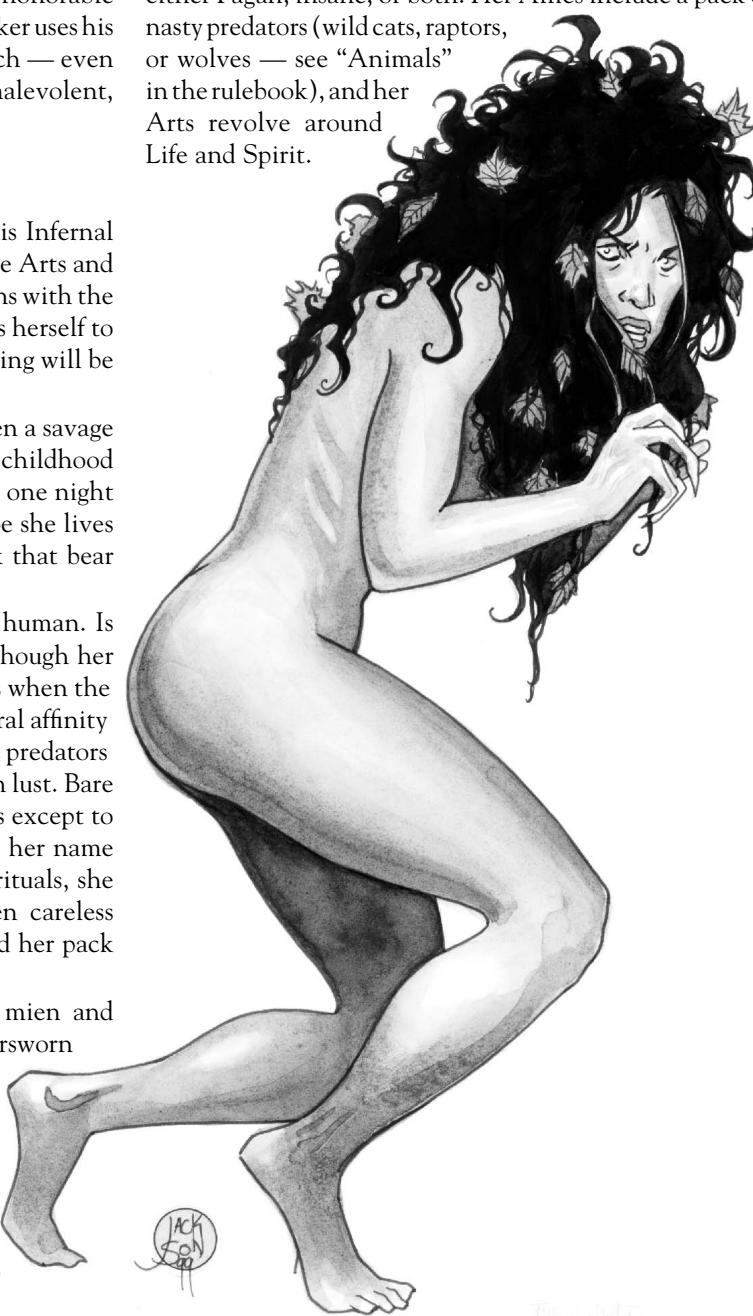
This creature is literally more beast than human. Is she a shapeshifter? Not in the truest sense, although her Arts probably allow her to assume bestial forms when the whim takes her. More likely, she has an unnatural affinity for the sub-human; bats, birds, vermin and large predators speak to her, walk beside her, and lie with her in lust. Bare of even the merest humanity, she hardly speaks except to growl or spit, but the woodland demons know her name and savor her touch. With wordless, howling rituals, she summons them and pays them tribute. When careless folk wander into her domain, the Wildling and her pack descend. As they feast, the Devil laughs....

Image: A naked, feral person of savage mien and animalistic temperament, the Wildling has forsaken any ties to the civilized world.

Roleplaying Hints: Possessed by the spirit of the wild, you don’t bother even trying to be human. Growl, purr, spit or whine in place of words, and speak more with your body than with vocalizations. If you *must* recapture your humanity for some task, maintain a feral edge to

your behavior. For the most part, nothing truly matters to you except eating, sleeping, fucking and playing, but woe betide the person or party who threatens your chosen pack! If you need to fight, your claws and teeth are merciless.

Notes: Chances are, this person is a mortal with odd Investments and possibly a few levels in the Path of Shapeshifting. (See *World of Darkness: Sorcerer*.) Her high Physical Traits counterbalance an almost-total lack of Social ones; Abilities like Stealth, Hunting and Animal Speech compliment Merits like Acute Senses and Beast Affinity. (For other details, see the Rogue template in the rulebook’s Appendix.) If she is a magus, she’s probably either Pagan, insane, or both. Her Allies include a pack of nasty predators (wild cats, raptors, or wolves — see “Animals” in the rulebook), and her Arts revolve around Life and Spirit.



Great Beasts: Noted Servants of the Pit



nd there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue....

And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven.

And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them; and power was given him over all kindred, and tongues, and nations.

— The Revelation of Saint John, 13:5-7

The Devil's Own are legion. Numbering them would be like counting the demons in the Pit. (Not that some scholars haven't tried, mind you....) Nevertheless, certain names cause stirs when mentioned in guild halls and wizards' towers. Centuries from now, some of them will still be on Satan's lips, and on those of men.

Jodilynn Blake (?-?)

Jolynn Black. Johanna Blukart. Jude Blackstein. John Blake. A gallery of faces. A pantheon of names. Behind them, one soul — and a pretty corrupt one, at that. For the next five centuries, the manipulator known as Jodi Blake will caper down the Nephantic path, happily "donating" the folk she meets to the Abyss in exchange for a few more years of life and vitality.

No one knows when or where she's born, but chronicles of Nephantic lore start mentioning her around 1450. From the beginning, it seems, she has been a hedonist of the first order, a voluptuary whose perversity manifests in blatant sexuality, constant shapeshifting, and an odd propensity for using very similar names. Although she revels in her Renunciation stage, she has been "walking on fire" since she appeared. A competent but not extraordinary magus, Jodilynn excels at disguise and charm. Like a traveling player, she shifts roles depending on her "audience's" desires; for a clergyman, she becomes a penitent virgin; for a rake, a wanton slut; for a Baron, she's the wife he's always wanted; for a wizard, the eager apprentice with talent enough for two. No matter what disguise Blake chooses, the game remains similar: enter, entice, corrupt, expose, laugh, run and disappear again.

Although no one realizes it at the time, Blake is working on a special masterpiece in this era. In the guise of a perverse young girl, she joins various Infernal cults; once



in, she offers the members a Nephantic initiation in the Cauls. Those who accept join the Eaters of the Weak; those who refuse meet Blake's alter ego Jean de la Rose Noir, a witch-hunter employed by the Society of Leopold. Either way, her Patroni are fed with souls.

With such ambition, Jodilynn Blake is assured a very long, wild, perfidious life....

Dr. George (Johannes) Faustus (1480-1540?)

The man who will become synonymous with soul-selling is actually a minor, rather inept sorcerer whose biggest distinctions appear to be a stout gut and a weakness for petty pleasures. Although later writers attribute him with great knowledge and tragic heroism, the real Faust is more a trickster and charlatan than a magus in the truest sense.

While it is said that Faustus can turn hay into horses, make wine barrels fly, and turn invisible at will, no magus can attest to the truth behind the stories. He does appear to have made a demonic pact, but his Patronus sounds more like a mongrel imp than the mighty Mephistopheles, who seems too busy to bother with such nonsense. Although he supposedly summons the ghost of Helen of Troy to his bed, Faustus has an insatiable taste for ladies of all ages. His drinking bouts are legendary, and might actually demand a bit of magical fortitude.

As the tales say, Faustus apparently meets his death at the hands of his Patronus. Later accounts describe his entrails being flung around the yard and his blood smeared

all over the household's walls. If the much-lamented Faustus has a great library of occult lore, it apparently returns to Hell with him. Aside from a (probably fake) grimoire, *Great and Powerful Sea Ghost*, the tragic soul-seller doesn't seem to leave many legacies beyond his name, his entrails, and a particularly vivid example of how not to make a Pact with Hell.

Kieu Tsu Hsing T'ieh Lu Ku (1364? — ?)

The "Centipede King" or "Devil-Lord of Hang Chu" came to power most auspiciously. When bandits besieged the province, a wandering priest named Hao Ker offered to help local villagers drive the outlaws away. Calling upon dragons and uncanny spirits, he opened a vast pit beneath the bandits' camp. From that pit poured centipedes by the thousands; the shrieking outlaws were stripped to bones in a matter of hours, and Hao Ker was asked to be the province's protector. Although he humbly thanked his hosts and assumed the title of "Revered Defender of the Innocent," he secretly wanted more.

Over the years, Hao Ker amassed great power, wealth and respect. Under the Revered Defender's care, the whole province blossomed. Anyone who threatened the prosperity of the realm met unspeakable fates or simply disappeared. Several years after he assumed his title, Hao Ker secluded himself within an ornate palace (built by his grateful protectorate), forbade visitors, and withdrew for 10 years. During this time, nearby villagers heard strange sounds and chants coming from the priest's palace; those who ventured near it were chased away by huge, voracious centipedes. Despite his seclusion, Hao Ker continued



to protect the realm. A gargantuan black dragon ate an outlaw band in 1407; some tales said a colossal centipede rode that dragon into battle and personally devoured the bandit leader. Those who heard the tale began to wonder about their Defender's generosity.

In 1410, the gates opened and Hao Ker emerged. Wrapped in splendid robes that no one could remember making, he strode into the regent's palace and demanded to be named Lord of the Province. The regent refused and called for guards; the Revered Defender opened his robes and hundreds of centipedes spilled out. The regent and his men met the outlaws' fate, and Hao Ker, now going by the name Kieu Tsu Hsing T'ieh Lu Ku, assumed his place.

Naturally, the people protested. The regent's palace was surrounded by an angry mob. As the sun set, the people lit torches and threatened to rush the gates. The protests were drowned out by shrill screams. Children's screams. The mob scattered. People rushed home. The children were gone.

In the beds of all first-born sons and daughters, huge centipedes gleamed in the torchlight. Parents' screams rose above their offspring's. The revolt ended that night.

Since then, Kieu Tsu Hsing T'ieh Lu Ku has governed Hang Chu with a light but merciless hand. As long as respect is tendered and the law is obeyed, no citizen is harmed. Screams and bones and centipedes appear whenever his rule is questioned. Occasionally, someone tries to flee the province. The woods crawl on those nights and no one wants to know what happened afterward. Several generals have sent expeditions to Hang Chu, but those who return speak of insects and dragons and a mammoth centipede that devours anyone who draws a weapon.

It is said that in Hang Chu, the law crawls on 10,000,000 legs. No one dares to argue.

Gilles de Laval, Baron de Rais (1404-1440)

This infamous nobleman, whose name soon gave the Nephandi a new title for their leaders (Gilledians), began as a hero of the Hundred Years War and a friend of Joan de Arc. In those days, he was renowned for both his bravery and piety. It has been said that it was Gilles' acceptance of the teenage girl that allowed Joan to assume her famous role in the French King's army. Upon her betrayal, he retreated to a life of extreme indulgence, Satanism, and finally mass murder. How did such a man fall so far?

By all accounts, the Hundred Years War was a blood-bath. Both sides suffered, but the French peasantry bore the greatest burden. As battles ripped back and forth across the land, every family was maimed, either by the fighting or by the famines, plagues and banditry that followed. French

soldiers and mercenaries pillaged their own countrymen; worst among them were the *Jacquerie* — “Jacks” — who indulged in rape, demonism, torture and even cannibalism. Although most of the Jacks were hunted down before Gilles de Rais was born, several survivors formed Infernal covens throughout the countryside. It has been said that Gilles’ own nursemaid was secretly a devotee of one such coven, and that she baptized him with blood and feces when no one else was watching.

As he grew to manhood, Gilles balanced battle fervor with Christian goodness. Soon after taking up arms, he was accepted into the Knights of Gabriel and proved to be an able scholar of God and war. When young Joan appeared, it is said, Gilles had a vision of her leading an army of the faithful. Enthusiastically, he trained her to fight, and stood up for Joan during her many challenges.

One of those challenges came from the Knights of Gabriel itself. Although Joan showed promise and great faith, many Gabrielites were convinced she was the Devil’s spy. As long as she seemed successful, she was left alone; the moment she faltered, the call was given to abandon her.

Gilles de Rais, it has been said, was in love with the girl, both as a soldier of Christ and as a man. Although he may never have acted upon it (he was married, she was a holy virgin), he raged when she was lost. Gilles tried to rescue her from burning, but failed. In despair, he quit the Knights and withdrew to his estates. And there, they say, he Fell.

During his campaigns, Gilles fought beside the secret remnants of the Jacks. Some became his friends. When he returned home, he brought several of them with him. With their help, he lived an extravagant life, occasionally plaguing the Gabrielites as only a renunciate soldier could. Soon the spending began to drain his funds, then his lands and finally his soul. During drunken binges, he would weep aloud and cry for Joan. As he slid downward in wealth and sanity, Gilles learned alchemy and diabolism from his Fallen friends — notably the Nephanderus Francios Prelati. One of his castles, the Chateau de Rais, became a haven for Infernalists. And worse.

In September 1440, Gilles was arrested. For several years, he and his companions had kidnapped children from the surrounding towns and cities. Beneath his castle, the prisoners were whipped, hanged, raped, disemboweled, dismembered and burned. Their souls were committed to demonic Patroni. Gilles de Rais himself was tortured for weeks until he confessed to his diabolism. Executed in October of that year, he was strangled and burnt. His remains were given to the family de Laval, but they have since appeared as talismans among French Infernalists.

Was Gilles de Rais guilty of the charges? His companions swore he was, but many of them were Fallen, too, and

clearly could have lied. Some outsiders suspect that de Rais was framed by his companions (who wanted his Chateau), the Church (who wanted his lands), or the Knights of Gabriel (who may have wanted revenge). Since his death, the Baron de Rais has become a symbol, both of Infernal sadism and of broken faith. It is said his ghost still haunts the Chateau de Rais. Occasionally he feasts on blood, or calls out to Joan de Arc.

Tezghul the Insane (1428?-1472)

What more can be said about Tezghul the Insane, abomination of Kapula Alka, render of skins, son of demons, and inheritor of the crown of Genghis Khan? A hulking blood-Pagan from Lithuania, Tezghul and his Infernal army rampage across Northern Europe for over 20 years. In service to Kapula, Louhi, Svantotvit, and other foul Patroni (see Appendix), this horde commits excesses that make even demons sick. It’s said his father, Appa Bloodax, and his mother, the demon Lovitar, honed this monster’s taste in pastimes. Now skins flap in the cold northern wind, and widows beg in falling snow.

Although he clashes with the Turks, the Christians, the First Cabal, Daedaleans and even vampires, Tezghul remains defiant. In some histories, a Daedalean army finally stops him in the Hartz Mountains, but Fate does not always work out the way it’s supposed to.... (For more details, see *The Sorcerers Crusade*, pp. 32, 56-57, and 282-283.)

Captain Stephen Granque (1447-1502?)

What began as a promising career in the Society of Pilots in the Celestial Master stronghold of Porus Crucis ends in a mysterious disappearance and a near-incoherent grimoire entitled *The Feast of Flutes*. Captain Granque once seemed to be a reasonable, visionary man, but his legacy makes Daedaleans ponder the forces they like to think they command.

A well-favored Portuguese sailor, Stephen cuts an impressive figure on a Skyrigger’s decks. Although he has many an offer, he never marries. “I could not subject my beloved wife to a lifetime of uncertainty,” he claims, “my true love is the sky and the heavens above it.” Naturally, his bachelorhood and attractive features make him a favorite of the tavern-wench... which might also explain his reluctance to marry. Equally respected by both his crew and commanders, Captain Granque accepts — and returns from! — a half-dozen missions into the night skies.

It’s the second-to-last journey that breaks him. When Stephen returns from a particularly ill-fated sojourn, only three of his crew are left alive. Granque himself seems haunted, and has good reason: he tells of a battle with some

great star-kraken. Most of his crew was lost, and only God's grace and the survivors' skills got the ship back into port. The tavern-ladies try their best to cheer him, but nothing can lift the ghosts from the Captain's brow.

Soon afterward, he retreats to his bungalow. For three weeks, no one sees him, although the sounds they hear assure them someone is at home. Not long afterward, he steals an airship and disappears into the skies. His three companions join him, and none are heard from again.

The Captain's house is searched; disturbing pictures, seemingly drawn in blood, mar the walls, and odd carvings (reminiscent of Pictish glyphs) weave across every wooden surface of the home. A black book, filled with arcane gibberish, is found on a table, but although several men recall this *Feast of Flutes*, it vanishes soon after its author does.

The sailors of Portus Crucis do not like to speak about the things that burst from the bellies of the tavern girls some months later. Several of those abominations are squashed by the vigilant men and women of the port, but not all. Not nearly all.

After Captain Granque departs, few people walk alone at night near Portus Crucis.

Heylel Teomim "Thoabath" (14??-1470)

After his death, they call Heylel *Thoabath* — "the Abomination." But while he lives, they name him First Among the Nine. As the leader of the ill-fated First Cabal, Heylel seems to be the incarnation of hope and magick, a shining example of imagination and wisdom mingled. In the wake of his disgrace, he (or more properly, "they") is named "The Great Betrayer." His scattered soul and ashes do not dim the hate of Council magi or the tragedy of his Fall.

They say he dealt with demons. Supposedly, his quest for the Philosopher's Stone led him to wrestle the Oroboros itself. Bitten by the Great Wyrm, he surrendered to his inner vices and entered the Nephantic Cauls. But no one ever finds evidence of his Infernalism. Not even the greatest Hermetic wizards can uncover a shred of proof that this reviled *rebis* has any communion whatsoever with satanic powers. No one can question his Betrayal, though; in 1470, he leads the Daedalean de Corbie right to the First Cabal, and watches as his lover Eloine is taken off and tortured. By his own admission, he forsakes the Council's trust and breaks their first mission from within. Yet, he insists, he never conspired with the Infernal. The Fall is his legacy to the Council, but it probably isn't true.

The sum of two in one, Heylel is a hermaphrodite melded from an Italian merchant-son and a gutter wench from Naples. His beauty and insight astound everyone he meets, and they shift constantly from masculine to feminine aspects. A renowned alchemist, he becomes the banner for the Solificati Tradition. When, in 1470, he Falls, he takes the Tradition with him.

For 500 years, Heylel's name will be synonymous with diabolical Betrayal. But is he ever truly Fallen? Or does his evil come from vision, not from dark pacts or tempter's wiles? With his sentence to Gilgul and death, the truth will be lost forever.

(See *The Fragile Path* for the sad details and final testimonies of the Great Betrayer, his lover Eloine, and other survivors of the Nine.)

Dhambu the Outcast, Killer of Dreams (1440-1464)

The short but infamous career of this Dream-Speaker makes his name anathema for centuries to come. Like Heylel, he earns the hatred of the Council, but unlike the Great Betrayer, he seems to be fairly insignificant until his death. Named "the Outcast" even before his Fall, Dhambu is a witch-priest from Songhai. Although he attends the Council Convocation from its early days onward, he never stops criticizing the plan or picking fights with his fellow Dream-Speakers.

An arrogant, scarred man of medium age, Dhambu claims to have come from the upper castes of his kingdom. Revering a god he calls T'chaklu the Thunderer, he disgusts many of his companions with cruel rites and human sacrifices. Other *sohanci* denounce him, calling T'chaklu a dark pretender to the throne of Dongo, the true god of thunder. Some try to have him exiled from the Convocation. In retaliation, Dhambu rallies a sect of supporters, the Dhakai, and becomes a vocal dissident against the Council's mission. The fact that most "colored" sorcerers are lumped together in a single group by their European and Arabian counterparts lends credence to the Dhakai cause, and the faction attains a strong voice in the Dream-Speaker ranks.

Even then, however, Dhambu is largely disregarded. The Dhakai elect a different leader, Mahamane. After a furious brush with Mahamane's faction, Dhambu is brought before Star-of-Eagles and Niaoba, both of whom he detests. Shamed, he retreats to his camp; there, it is later said, he calls upon T'chaklu, and demands more power and status.

In return, the Thunderer demands a sacrifice.

Dhambu returns to Niaoba. Feigning repentance, he asks the shaman-queen to forgive him and help him atone for his crimes. She agrees. During the purification ceremony, he stabs her in the back with a ceremonial knife and dedicates her soul to T'chaklu. But the murder goes awry; Star-of-Eagles and a host of his allies descend on the circle, and Dhambu and his patron are both scattered to the winds.

A stocky, bald African of medium age and scarred features, Dhambu always wants what he cannot have. For his dissention and treachery, he is branded the "Vision Mocker, Killer of Dreams." Despite his shame, others soon follow his example. For several centuries to come, so-called "vision-mockers" will invoke the name of Dhambu as a patron of their own.

Squiad Blargo (?-?)

Who is he? What is he? Does he even exist, or is his name a whimsical hoax? No one's quite sure, but Squiad's work is quite popular, especially among the Tuscan and Iberian *decadenti*. With titles like *The Slave and the Iron*, *Harem of 10,000 Screams*, and *Ammedalia*; or, *Lust of the Whip*, Blargo has carved a small but honored niche in the libraries of jaded urbanites. His lurid sexual fictions, printed by German presses on high-quality parchment, have been roundly banned, but they fetch good prices on the hidden market.

Blargo's work (if it can be called that) is aimed at the vilest kind of deviants. His overripe prose captures each gasp and shriek of women subjected to the most intricate tortures imaginable. Some readers speculate that he works as an Inquisitor and commits the atrocities he has seen (and performed) to paper for his audience. But even the Inquisition has its limits, and Blargo's works surpass Black Masses for sheer cruelty. Even worse, his "heroines" seem to enjoy their torments: The infamous Ammedalia (whose name has become synonymous with submission) begs her jailers for greater agonies, and Madeline laughs in wicked joy as hot pinchers tear her flesh away. Blargo details their voluptuous writhing in exquisite (and nauseating) detail, and never misses an opportunity to add imaginative blasphemies as well.

Oh, yes: the books are illustrated, too. Some people throw up when they see the pictures.

Centuries from now, Blargo's pornography will influence a Frenchman who gives his name to sadism. For now, the books (bound in black leather and embossed with blood-red lettering) can be found among grimoires, heretical scriptures, and treatises of self-indulgent philosophy. As for the writer himself, he remains hidden behind his improbable name. No one, magus or otherwise, has discovered the source of these books, but many are willing to pay great prices for copies of them.







Chapter III: The Council of Nine

And with the final peal of that dreadful anthem, there came a sound, as if the roaring wind, the rushing streams, the howling beasts, and every other voice of the unconverted wilderness, were mingling and according with the voice of the guilty man, in homage to the prince of all.

— Nathaniel Hawthorne, “Young Goodman Brown”



e meet by the rocks somewhat before midnight, the full moon illuminating our splendors like some pregnant queen poised to birth a thousand shadows. Our clothes, we bundle in oiled sacks that we seal with faint kisses and whispered prayers of concealment. Some of our newer converts huddle away from the faint firelight, crossing arms across their skins like Eve or Adam in the Garden, but we who have swum in the Mysteries before know the foolishness of virtue. We stand like Grecian statues, bathed in moonfire, sea-spray and sin.

Sharp stones cut our feet as we ease down the treacherous divide between earth and ocean. Not far off, the sea heaves herself upon the jagged rocks like an anxious virgin whose lusts have dashed her chastity. Broken, she weeps upon us with fine and splendid mist before she drags herself back to bed and assaults her lover, the rocks, once more.

Far off, where horizon meets horizon, the line between the sea's abyss and the infinite sky becomes a blur. In this darkness, stars give but faint respite. Here, in the night, all fires are quenched save those we bear down the sharp and misty slope to the sea.

Standing on the abrading rocks, lashed by the wanton seas, we offer the deep-kiss to one another. Without its dark and pagan blessing, we would simply drown in the savage darkness — a fair communion, but not the one we seek tonight. Our Prelatus

sets down his flickering brand and reaches forth to us — to me, most of all. Lifting up his wooden mask (a blackbird with red, glittering eyes), he clasps me in, full-bodied, and stiffens in his lusts as I do in my own. We kiss, a lingering procreation, and our tongues dance like Sodomite revelers as we sweep one another's masculinity with our hands. Too soon, he draws away to embrace the next attendant, but our eyes glitter with unshed promises. The Lili clutches me to her body next, and her tongue and lips glide across mine in salty greeting. She reaches down, caresses me, and draws my hardness deep inside.

Suddenly, I cannot breathe. The air, salt-heavy, weighs like pressing-stones upon my chest. Gasping, I pull away from the priestess and stumble. With a laugh, she hurtles me past the raving water's edge. Blood joins the waters as a thundering hand reaches forth and blasts me against the jagged rocks. A flash of pain, then the seas draw me down and the sea becomes a depthless night.

Now I can breathe again. The deep-kiss does its work and the sea becomes as natural to me as air. The hand of darkness pulls me deeper in, welcomes me to this Sabbat beneath the waves. Behind me, the priest and priestess continue their communions, then toss their lovers to the crashing seas. One by one, their naked bodies join the dark. Full-under, I laugh the last air from my lungs and kick downward, ever downward. This is where I belong, where we all belong.

The endless, airless night is all the home I will ever need.

Arma Diabolicus: Gifts of the Pit



nd I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

— Jesus of Nazareth, Matthew 16:19

Again the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;

And sayeth unto him, all these things will I give to thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

— Satan, Matthew 4:8-9

For some folk, the temptation is too much to resist. In a world where few people ever fill their bellies or hold a gold coin their hands, the promise of earthly and unearthly power is worth any sacrifice. Jesus promises suffering and deprivation for his people; his Adversary merely points off the side of the mountain and asks “Wouldn’t you rather have it *all*?” The Infernalist replies, “Yes.”

To get it all, however, she’ll have to wade through sewers of depravity, degrade everything she’s ever been taught to revere, and turn her back on all salvations this side of Hell. So what does she get in return for her sins?

Quite a bit, actually. Is it worth the cost? That depends on your perspective, doesn’t it? The following “tokens of appreciation” make it clear that an Infernalist gets something for her efforts. Is *anything* worth your immortal soul? Few people even stop to wonder. If the kingdoms of the world are the Devil’s to bestow, then the Infernalist is in good company, indeed. And if Satan gets it all back in the end regardless, she figures she’ll trade her soul as dearly as she may.

Supplicii: Shattering the Chains of Sanity

The madman who knows that he is mad is close to sanity.

— Ruiz de Alarcón, *La Amistad Castigada*

As far as a warlock is concerned, mortals walk in a soothing haze that obscures the Abyss yawning at their feet. The Infernalist refuses to remain blind, and he opens his eyes to Creation’s Great and Secret Truth. The insight drives him insane by human standards, but it frees him from petty considerations like “morality” or “remorse.”

Whenever he invokes the adversary within, a diabolist enters a Supplicium and plunges himself into the Void. In an ecstasy of torment, he reaffirms his Path and sheds another level of that trifle called “humanity.”

Roughly translated, Supplicium means “a sacrifice to the gods,” “a punishment” and “torment.” It’s all these things and more. During this self-inflicted torture, an Infernalist voluntarily cuts away a portion of his consciousness and sacrifices it to Hell in exchange for insight and power. It’s a dangerous thing, this demented Seeking; some Infernalists snap completely and become gibbering Marauds. Others focus on their inner hells and learn disturbing secrets from the folds of madness; returning to a semblance of sanity, they unlock Pandora’s Boxes full of powers from the Underworld within. If and when an Infernalist recovers from the Supplicium, he commands a greater understanding of the darker Mysteries and leaves another part of his old life behind.

The call of that Abyss has a way of shattering one’s mind. Confronted with the horrors behind Creation’s comforting illusion, human consciousness fades and deeper instincts take over. During Supplicium, an Infernalist becomes a screaming lunatic or withdraws into catatonia. Locked within her own nightmares, she suffers exquisite agonies for the sake of enlightenment. Even after she “returns” to sanity, a noticeable part of her old self remains behind in the Void. The specter of Hell forever dances in her eyes.

In game terms, a Supplicium is a particularly vile Seeking (see the rulebook), often directed by the Patronus, that throws a magus into a pit with her deepest terrors. In this nightmarish world, the magus becomes the center of a savage shadow-play; tempter spirits and demonic creatures drive the seeker back and forth between vice and virtue. She might return to a painful moment of her past, or confront a choice she had hoped never to make. Naturally, the Infernalist is encouraged to choose evil over goodness (goodness, after all, is for the weak), and to renounce everything she once revered — love, gods, even self-preservation. After she endures a series of debilitating challenges, the seeker returns to the “real world,” somewhat the worse for wear.

Two forms of Supplicium exist: voluntary ritual and involuntary madness. In the first, the seeker goes on a binge of perversion and self-destruction; some folk drug themselves with savage hallucinogens, others submit to appalling tortures, still others embark on carnal excursions of exquisite degradation, and many do all three at once. Calling upon her inner Darkness, a supplicant essentially chains herself in Hell until some revelation comes. The binge heralds a trance-state, and in this trance the Supplicium begins.

Official Word on Infernalist Characters

This book is not intended to be a player's guide. Nevertheless, some people will insist that it is one. Others will demand to be allowed to play Infernalists; we always crave forbidden fruits, and most people enjoy donning the devil mask from time to time.

But no Infernalist escapes unscathed. The World of Darkness presupposes the existence of literal hells, literal demons, and literal immortal souls. These tenets are not universally held by the 20th century, but they are givens in the fictional world of **The Sorcerers Crusade**. Thus, the actions of magi dedicated to malice have very nasty consequences, both for the magi themselves and for everyone around them. If you or someone in your troupe insists that playing a magus dedicated to evil is "a challenging roleplaying experience" (as if!), a few guidelines should be observed:

- Infernalists do not play well with others. Unless you want a chronicle where all the players are trying to kill or corrupt one another, don't even think of allowing Fallen Ones as player characters.

- If a player *must* have an Infernalist character, we do *not* recommend acting out his foul antics. Conducting a Black Mass might seem like fun to some folks, but we really don't feel it's a good idea. This author can't imagine why someone might want to roleplay skinning an infant alive, and certainly wouldn't want to meet the player who *would* (except possibly to kick his sick ass). If you feel you *have* to play a demon-worshipper, just keep the details to yourself. Don't act 'em out. Roleplaying has a bad enough reputation already, and some things are more dangerous than they might otherwise appear.

- Damnation in the Dark Fantastic era is not an existential statement on moral subjectivity. It is a promise of indefinite torture, misery and subjugation. The best a damned soul can hope for is a place among the lesser demons, suffering torments but inflicting them as well. Most sinners will not be so lucky, even if they were magi in a former life. At the end of the Path of Screams lie yet more screams— eternal ones.

- Likewise, ill fortune follows ill deeds, especially if those deeds were done with magick. Resonance and the Scourge follow an Infernalist around like flies; he might look handsome and wealthy, but his evil is not forgotten, merely stockpiled. Sooner or later, the reckoning will come, whether it takes the form of a massive Scourging, a prolonged curse, the hatred of his peers or the fire of the witch-hunter. In this setting, neither God nor the Devil is mocked without a price.

- Part of that price involves the Flaw: Echoes and the Merit: *True Faith*. (See the **Sorcerers Crusade** rulebook, pp. 105-106.) Infernalists, like exceedingly virtuous folk, are highly susceptible to cuts from the other side of the moral sword. Just as a powerful Infernalist can corrupt or banish a virtuous mortal, so too can the Faithful harm a servant of darkness. Infernalist characters — especially players' characters — should always take the *Echoes* Flaw, and its effects should be played out in full.

- Appropriate Merits include (but are not limited to): *Arcane Heritage*, *Cupid's Gift*, *Enchanting Gaze*, *Honeyed Tongue*, *Iron Will*, *Luck*, *Mark of Favor*, *Ties* (very appropriate), and *Title*. See **The Sorcerers Crusade Companion**, Chapter V, for details and specifics.

- Other appropriate Flaws include: *Beholden* (to a demonic Patronus), *Bound*, *Criminal Marks*, *Cursed* (very appropriate), *Dark Fate*, *Dark Secret*, *Deformity*, *Enemy* (witch-hunters), *Haunted*, *Infamy*, *Oathbreaker*, *Obsession* (often with unsavory subjects), *Reaper's Touch*, *Repulsive Practices* (almost a given), and *Repulsive to Animals*.

- There's no character sheet in the back of the book. This is not an error.

The Infernalist may seem to be at peace, but he never really is. The taint of brimstone is never far from his senses. He may seem powerful, but the power never truly belongs to him... for long.

An involuntary Supplicium begins when the Patronus (or some other demonic manifestation) rips through the quester's sanity and forces her to confront the primordial Void. Although this often occurs during Investiture (see below), such madness can also strike when a person suddenly encounters the magnitude of Oblivion. Many an Explorator or Celestial Master has Fallen when his illusions of Reason have been blasted away by some alien horror; in their wake, Infernal enlightenment takes hold and begins to grow.... (See "The Truth" and the Star-Ravaged Madman and Twilight Mystic templates in the previous chapter.)

Night-folk have slightly different views of this pilgrimage. To Cainite devil-worshippers, hellish enlightenment translates to the *Via Diabolis*, the Devil's Road that provides a vampiric parallel to the mystick Path of Screams. Worshippers of the primal Wyrm call this journey "dancing the Black Spiral," and unseelie fae consider it a trip to the darkest corner of the Dreaming. Even ghosts have their nightmare quests — Harrowings — that place a soul on the edge of the Abyss and see which way it jumps.

In game terms, the character enters a Seeking until she either conquers her old morality or drags her battered soul back from the brink of Hell. In this case, *acceptance* means choosing evil over virtue, and *denial* means holding onto humanity in spite of the Supplicium. If the Infernalist forsakes the Light, her bond with Darkness deepens and she gains some degree of mystical insight (in game terms, Arete or a dot in the *Via Diabolis*). If she clings to some shred of virtue, she manages to drag her soul back from the edge of the Abyss — at least for the moment — but does so at the cost of true revelation. Either way, the diabolist suffers. Suffering, after all, is what life is all about.

Storyteller's Note: As an *optional rule*, a character who is not an Infernalist could be forced into an involuntary Supplicium if she encounters the full screaming power of Hell — a powerful grimoire or greater demonic manifestation (see Chapter IV). In this case, have the player make a Willpower roll (difficulty 8), but don't tell her why she's making it. If she fails, the character loses a Willpower point, possibly collapsing in sheer terror; if she botches, the character plunges into a Supplicium and must choose between goodness and evil. If she prefers evil, corruption might set in and the seeds for her Fall may be sown.

Again, this is an *optional rule*, offered for Storytellers who want to reflect the power of the Abyss. It's not appropriate for all troupes or chronicles. If you choose to employ it, check the systems and suggestions given for Seekings in the main rulebook (pp. 112 and 177) and use a bit of judgement and maturity. Darkness is a powerful lure, but no character should be damned because of a bad die roll or two.

FOEDERIS INFERNUS: Infernal Pacts

Two souls dwell, alas, in my breast.

— Wolfgang von Goethe, *Vor dem Thor*

The time-honored traditions of apprenticeship and fealty share a perverse reflection in the *Foedus* — "pact" — that binds an Infernalist with her Patronus. Like the bonds between a master and apprentice, this pact exchanges favors and teaching for service; like the "agreement" between nobility and peasantry, it assumes a certain degree of servitude in exchange for protection. Like both, it slants in favor of the stronger party, but gives each party things neither can accomplish without the other.

Although most European Infernalists employ the Latinate term for the pact (which, fittingly, also doubles as the adjective for "abominable"), the agreement and its elements are universal. Essentially, the Infernalist calls upon a demon for aid; the demon responds, often testing its supplicant. Both parties outline what they want from one another (usually through a contest of wills), and an agreement is forged. The supplicant gets some supernatural consideration, often in the form of Investments, magic or both, while the demon gets a mortal agent on Earth. Together, they spread corruption and bring the Reckoning closer to hand.

Sometimes, if a magus seems especially promising, a demon might appear to her and offer the pact without an initial request. More often, the Infernalist begins the bargaining session with an unholy rite and a sacrifice or two. (See "Calling the Patronus," Chapter II.) When and if the Patronus appears, the demon throws a commotion, then judges the supplicant by the way she reacts. The terms of the bargain arise from the impression the Infernalist makes, so most demons put on a fairly theatrical show; the "show" in question can be anything from a carnal temptation to a cacophonous storm. If the witch has half a brain, she'll have prepared a protective circle, pentacle or other ward; most supplicants who call a demon without safeguarding themselves are considered too stupid to make decent pawns, and are summarily devoured. (For game systems, see "Summoning and Warding" in the rulebook, pp. 259-260.)

Once the demon and witch have one another's measure, the *Foedus* is prepared. In literate societies, a written agreement spells out the obligations of each party; Infernalists who come from non-literature backgrounds strike the pact in elaborate ritual language. Many demons prefer written *Foederis* when they can get them — the written word (often inscribed in the sorceress's own blood) establishes a lasting bond between the demon and its servitor; verbal

pacts are phrased in words of power, but lack the physical consummation of a written document. Other kinds of consummation—often carnal, usually degrading—signal the completion of the pact.

Despite common misconception, few Infernalists give their souls away in the initial pact; a sorcerer who surrenders her soul at the outset enjoys a very short career. Most pacts involve services, a *quid pro quo* of corruption in which the supplicant acts as the demon's assistant. The Investments an Infernalist receives in return serve a triple purpose: they tempt the supplicant into service, establish a bond between the demon and its pawn, and turn that pawn

Pact Ratings

In game terms, an Infernalist who enters into a *Foedus* gains a few character points. With them, the Storyteller can "buy" her new Investments or magical abilities: The Level of each pact shows how many points that service is worth. Pacts of nine points or less can be made as many times as the Infernalist can manage to fulfill them — demons love a debtor.

- **Level I — Malice:**

Small tasks and minor sins (theft, slander, etc.)

- **Level II — Cruelty:**

Injuring, killing or corrupting one or two innocents.

- **Level III — Immorality:**

Extreme cruelty; sacrificing several innocents.

- **Level IV — Wrongdoing:**

Actively spreading evil, or opposing religious authorities.

- **Level V — Corruption:**

Leading others into evil; killing a major force for good.

- **Level VI — Mortal Sin:**

Founding and leading an Infernal cult; desecrating a pure Cray and dedicating it to malice.

- **Level VII — Heresy:**

Large-scale corruption; founding and leading large cults; destroying sites and churches of goodness.

- **Level VIII — Grand Evil:**

Corrupting a city; founding a major Infernalist Covenant or Cray.

- **Level IX — Life Bond:**

Dedicating entire life to the Patronus' every whim.

- **Level X — Soul Pact:**

Swearing lifetime fealty to the Patronus, and promising it the soul after death. No further pacts can be made to the same demon at this point, although a truly nervy Infernalist might secretly strike Soul-Pacts with several demons at once. (Gods help him when he dies, however....)

Dark Thaumaturgy

Many warlocks achieve a degree of mystic power, but never truly Awaken. Trapped, either by a lack of courage and vision or by their own inherent inferiority, they demand "instant magic." Such fools receive their due, a lesser form of magic referred to in game terms (not in character terms!) as Dark Thaumaturgy.

The systems and Paths behind this Hedge Magic variant are too involved to explore in this book. (Sorry, guys; this book would have to be almost double its size to contain them!) The *Dark Ages Companion* and *The Book of Madness* collectively detail nine Paths of this degenerate art, and *World of Darkness: Sorcerer* contains 16 other Paths that can be used as Dark Thaumaturgy. At the Storyteller's option, a player who wants to buy Dark Thaumaturgy might have to pay freebie points for the "benefits" of a pact; the costs are given in the books mentioned above. Although a magus can use both Investments and True Magick, she cannot employ both Dark Thaumaturgy and the powers of the Spheres. Even Hell has its limits.

In keeping with the concept of recursive damnation, however, an Infernalist can buy a theoretically infinite amount of Dark Thaumaturgy Paths. She simply makes bargain after bargain after bargain until she digs her way straight to Hell. In game terms, the character's services take the place of the freebie points a pact normally costs; instead of paying 15 freebie points, the lesser warlock simply makes 15 points worth of "deals." Naturally, living up to that bargain is going to be difficult, but that's part of the fun of selling your soul.

into a powerful agent of destruction. Soul pacts come later, when the supplicant is desperate enough to give up her most valuable possession. It might seem redundant — by that time, the soul is tainted enough to be damned anyway — but this ultimate pact makes last-minute salvation almost impossible, and gives the Patronus exclusive dominion over the soul. To demons, who are said to count their status in mortal servants and immortal souls, the distinction between a dead sinner in Hell and a living slave who's chained to *your personal corner of Hell* is pretty important. Thus, a Patronus often leads its agent into a whirlpool of greater crimes, then reaps the eventual bonus when the Infernalist is in too deep to resist the final bargain.

In this era, *Foederis* are fairly simple; the complex, arcane contracts of later myths are products of sophis-

ticated legal systems and demanding sorcerers. For most peasant cultists, a simple signed deed is enough. The demon “commissions” services from the supplicant, and the Infernalist (if she knows what’s good for her) fulfills them to the best of her ability. If she fails, or tries to renounce the *Foedus*, the demon sends the literal hounds of Hell to collect on the debt; the Patronus, lesser demons and hosts, and even other Infernalists pursue the oathbreaker, take back the Investments, and rip the offender into bloody ribbons. Although it is said that a mortal who escapes the powers of Hell three times in as many nights can earn her freedom from them, few (if any) diabolists can brag about doing so.

Whether or not the pact is observed, the demon eventually collects its due and the Infernalist joins her master in Hell. Until then, the rites of the Church, True Faith, holy magick and angelic powers torment her (sometimes inflicting aggravated damage; see below). Animals and children shy away from her, and dark vices gnaw away at what’s left of her soul. It is said that God can forgive such wretches, but few of them are willing to bow their heads in prayer until the fire beckons them; at that point, it’s usually too late.

Transmutatio Diabolicus: Demonic Investments

*Who will not judge him worthy to be robbed
That sets his doors wide open to a thief,
And shows the felon where the treasure lies?*

— Ben Johnson, *Every Man in His Humour*

Some Fallen magi shy away from the Abyss; demons are “merely” their servants and mentors in the Arts. Many, however, sell off whole portions of their souls. Mortal cultists often do the same, desperate for any kind of power that might lift them from their misery. For a while, these folk get what they want. Too hungry for power to worry about its eventual price, they barter their lives and souls for demonic Investments — inhuman talents that channel the essence of Hell.

Investiture requires a formal pact: A witch who wants inhuman powers or diabolical influence petitions her patron for an audience, then requests a pact. (See above.) Once the *Foedus* has been struck, the demon works its magic; depending on the Investment, an Infernalist could find a pot of gold, sprout bony wings, or have her mind blasted into instant awareness. At that time, a strange Devil’s Mark appears somewhere on the Infernalist’s person; such “brands of favor” depend on the demon’s

sense of humor and aesthetics: a succubus could make her servant diabolically handsome (or ugly), while a swirling cloud of chaos marks its chosen with a mangled limb. Either way, a Devil’s Mark displays ownership, forging a physical and metaphysical bond between demon and diabolist. A *Supplicium* (see above) seals the pact and drives the diabolist a little bit closer to Hell.

As its name implies, an *Investment* displays an odd sort of trust; the demon gives its servant a token of esteem in return for deeds it cannot (or will not) perform alone. If an Infernalist is foolish enough to make a pact then break it, her Investments disappear immediately and the chase begins.

In game terms, a bargaining Infernalist gains character points — points she can spend on Backgrounds and Investments. The latter do not prevent a magus from employing the Spheres, nor do they earn Scourge points. Their essence is granted by Hell itself, and it takes its own toll. Those character points *cannot* be spent on Arete or Spheres, however, only on Abilities, Backgrounds, Merits or Investments. Such powers, we should note, fail on Christmas day, Easter and Beltane (and, in the Middle East, during Ramadan), when Divine might banishes the Darkness from the Earth.

Demonic Investments are not super-powers, nor are they employed easily. Most require an invocation to the Patronus and some physical effort. When a Fallen One uses an Investment, her aura turns dark red, then black; anyone with mystic senses (Gifts, spells, Disciplines and so forth, as well as the Awareness Talent) can tell that dark forces are at work in his vicinity. Even mortals feel deep chills. Most Investments actually transform the Infernalist, too; a diabolist with Wings actually sprouts skeletal bat-wings from her back! When a Fallen One calls upon her Hell-born powers, she becomes a minor demon, and usually looks the part!

Deeply corrupted individuals can become fomori, tainted things who have surrendered themselves to evil to such a degree that their skins literally crawl with demonic power. (See Chapter IV for details.) At the Storyteller’s option, a soul-seller might manifest some of the wild powers described in *World of Darkness: The Bygone Bestiary* or *Freak Legion: The Player’s Guide to Fomori* — often at the cost of extreme Flaws that mark the Infernalist as utterly damned.

Storyteller’s Note: This option is intended for Storyteller characters. Feel free to forbid it to players. If you choose to allow it, Remember *Faust*, and play up the essence of damnation in your stories.

Some Investments include (but are not limited to):



- **Apportation (4 pts.):** With this “gift,” the hell-seeker can enchant a single object, binding it to herself. From the time of enchantment onward, she can summon that object from anywhere in the mortal world (but not across the Gauntlet). The item must be small and light enough to fit in one hand, but can be anything, magickal or otherwise, that can do so.

- **Armor (varies):** Like a fiend, this devil-worshipper possesses scaled skin, thick warts, leathery hide, or some other revolting form of protection. For every point in the pact, the character adds one die to her soak rolls against normal attacks; for two points, she gets one die against aggravated damage. Unlike Invulnerability (below), this Investment protects the “wearer” against all attacks; however, there is a price: For every three points in the Investment, the character subtracts one point from her Appearance. Thus, the sinner wears her sin in a very obvious way.

- **Awareness (4 pts.):** With a mind-shattering shock, the demon blows open the doors of occult perception. When the supplicant recovers, she has the Occult Knowledge and the Awareness Talent at three dots each. (Or three dots more in those Traits, if she already had them.) This

revelation has a price: the diabolist enters a Supplicium immediately, and must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) to remain sane. If she fails, the character goes slightly but noticeably insane; if she botches, she becomes a gibbering lunatic for seven days, and remains slightly insane forever thereafter.

- **Backgrounds (1 pt. per dot in the Background Trait):** Some diabolists prefer power of a more temperate nature. Instead of (or in addition to!) grotesque physical transformations, these folk ask the Patronus for great wealth, influence, and companionship. In game terms, these Investments are simply Backgrounds bought through an Infernal bargain. Each point in the pact equals one dot in the Background. Almost any Background can be purchased or increased with a pact; the exceptions—Daemon, Destiny and Familiar—reflect things no demon can provide... or will provide, at any rate.

- **Beast Form (3 pts.):** By calling upon his Patronus, a devil-worshipper may change into one of the meeker beasts (a rat, cat, wolf, etc.). The character gains all Traits and special abilities of that beast, but is restricted to a single form. Even in that form, the Infernalist possesses the Devil’s Mark, and radiates an uncanny air. The transformation

INFERNALISM: THE PATH OF SCREAMS

takes one turn, demands an Intelligence + Occult roll (difficulty 7), and lasts no longer than a night. For more sophisticated (and complex) shapeshifting talents, see the Shapechanger Advantage in **The Bygone Bestiary**.

• **Bond-breaking (6 pts.)**: The hand of Surgat guides this Infernalist; normal locks, knots or bindings fall open when she caresses them. This requires a foul incantation, a soft sweep of the fingers, and a Manipulation + Occult roll (difficulty 7). Sadly, this Investment cannot undo magickal locks of any kind.

• **Claws or Horns (varies)**: Claws or horns sprout from the supplicant's body. For one point, the bony appendages inflict Strength + 2 in normal damage; for three points, they inflict aggravated damage. Normally, these are permanent, although they can be made retractable for one point extra.

• **Demonic Strength (varies)**: Evil vitality floods into the supplicant's limbs. From this moment until her death, she has the physical might of a minor devil. Each dot of Strength or Stamina costs three points, and lasts until either death or revocation of the pact. Each "raise" requires a new pact; thus, Tezghul could "buy" three points of Strength for a nine-point pact, but he would have to make a new pact to add to that afterward.

• **Devil's Eyes (2 pts.)**: With a glance, an Infernalist can spoil milk, rot grain and sicken children. Although the Eyes' power is useless against adults (who feel uncomfortable under its influence, nonetheless), it can decimate a village by destroying its food stock just before winter. Thirteen pounds of food may be tainted at one time.

• **Goat Feet (2 pts.)**: After kissing his Patron (don't ask where), an Infernalist assumes the Devil's cloven feet. Each night, between sunset and dawn, the supplicant's legs grow thin, long and hairy; his toes curl into hard hooves, and a tail sprouts from his rear. After this excruciating transformation (which takes several minutes), the Infernalist may jog or run faster than a man (18 and 25 yards per turn, respectively); and kick or trample his enemies (Strength + 3, difficulty 8) with the hooves. When sunrise comes, these legs return to human form; even so, they remain coarse and hairy forever after.

• **Hellfire (3 pts.)**: Like a human dragon, this soul-seller can breathe gouts of fire upon his enemies. Other possible attacks include acidic bile, hot blood, flaming entrails, or other vile substances. At the base level, this "gift" inflicts three aggravated Health Levels of damage; for every two extra points, the character may add another Health Level to that base. Naturally, the target can dodge the fire. To use this gift, the warlock rolls his Dexterity + Occult (difficulty 5), and vomits filth in all directions. Lovely.

• **Invulnerability (3 pts.)**: Mortal weapons bounce off the Infernalist's skin with little effect. Every three points

in the pact give the supplicant one extra soak die; this is permanent, and allows her to soak aggravated damage, but does not work in any way against attacks from holy sources ("good" magickal weapons, saintly relics, Celestial Choristers, people with True Faith, etc.).

• **Longevity (varies)**: Most diabolists fear dying. For every point in the pact, a supplicant can add an extra five years to his life. If something kills him in the meantime, all deals are off. Many Infernalists conduct rituals every five years, sacrificing scores of innocents to buy a few more precious years.

• **Luciferian Charm (4 pts.)**: Literally a charming devil, an Infernalist with this Investment can get away with damned near anything. No matter what he says or does, he awes everyone he meets. A dazzling combination of inhuman charisma and demonic fascination lowers all of the warlock's Social difficulties by 4. Unlike the Merit: *Innocent*, this Investment does not cloak the Infernalist's true nature. He just makes sin look too enticing to resist.

• **Mammon's Gift (8 pts.)**: Once per night, the Infernalist may turn one small non-living object into gold. (No, undead creatures do not count as "non-living objects.") This treasure, however, is cursed with an eerie aura; those who can see such things (characters with Awareness or sense-magicks) notice an Infernal taint to the gold. Few devil-worshippers care about that, however — it spends as well as any treasure. The upper limit of this talent is roughly 13 pounds before transformation. A collection of tiny objects (coins, pins, straws, etc.) may count as one object, so long as all those items are connected when the Infernalist touches them, and weigh less than 13 pounds, collectively.

• **Pan-pipe Voice (3 pts.)**: With simple words or songs, a soul-sworn wench can enrapture her audience. A successful Manipulation + Occult roll allows her to bring listeners' worst passions to a head. Normally, the roll's difficulty is a mere 5; against a strong-willed creature (magus, vampire, etc.), the difficulty becomes that being's current Willpower. Once bound, a victim loses his good nature; he becomes lustful, almost drunken in his temperament, and must spend a Willpower point to regain his senses.

• **Regeneration (9 pts.)**: One of the greatest "gifts" offered to mortals, this Investment allows an Infernalist to restore herself to health with a mere effort of will! In game terms, she can heal all wounds, normal and aggravated, except for those inflicted by Prime magick, or by someone who has True Faith or belongs to the Celestial Chorus, Ahl-i-Batin, or Cabal of Pure Thought (religious orders schooled to fight demonic powers). Each Health Level of damage costs one Willpower point to heal.

• **Serpent Skin (3 pts.)**: In gruesome imitation of the snake, the Infernalist can literally shed her skin and escape her bonds. This takes pain, time and effort: she

must cut a slit in her own hide, then slide or yank herself out of the skin. (An extended Dexterity + Athletics roll, difficulty 7.) When she's finished, her nerves and muscles lie exposed. Regrowing the skin takes a week or so; until then, the flayed diabolist is incredibly sensitive to her environment (minus two dice from all soak rolls)— and really foul to look at.

• **Service (various):** In an irony worthy of Hell, a slave of the Abyss can “buy” slaves from the Abyss. With this Investment, certain demon-hosts and minor demons (see Chapter IV) will serve the Infernalist, so long as his purposes suit those of Hell. Once the *Foedus* is sealed, these bound creatures appear by the warlock's side and ask, “Master, what is thy will?” Doubtless, he'll have some task ready...

The servant's power depends on the amount of points in the pact: For one point, the warlock gets a single possessed mortal man or animal with some degree of skill but no supernatural powers; for two points, he gets a demonic host beast; for three, a minor servitor demon. In all cases, the “servant” is loyal unto destruction, although a bound demons will be, shall we say, a bit put off if it's sent back to Hell because of some careless mortal. Devils, of course, cannot die on the mortal plane, and a servant who is ill treated today might make its “master” very unhappy tomorrow....

• **Shameful Sight (6 pts.):** Gazing into a person's eyes, an Infernalist can discern the sins that lie closest to the surface. A Perception + Occult roll (difficulty is target's Willpower) reveals the most shameful thing that person has ever done. In the Infernalist's “inner eyes,” an image of the deed wells up, clear as day. She might decide to keep that image to herself for later use, sneer about it openly, or torment the victim with a vision of it.

By chanting an invocation to her Patrona, the Infernalist can display her vision in a reflective surface nearby; suddenly, a mirror reveals the Duke's murder or the Lady's betrayal. Anyone in the area can see this dreadful pageant, and can draw her own conclusions about where it came from and what it means. The Infernalist appears blameless, even to magickal tracings.

• **Sign of the Inferno (5 pts.):** Kissed by Hell, this diabolist needs not fear the flames. No mortal heat or fire can harm him in any way; it may consume his clothing and possessions, but does not scar his flesh. Magickal fires affect him normally, though, and particularly holy ones might inflict an extra Health Level or two.

• **Talons of the Plague-crow (8 pts.):** Each night at dusk, the supplicant's hands lengthen into bird-claws. Although handling objects is difficult (perhaps demanding a Dexterity roll, difficulty 6), these Talons make vicious weapons. Raked across skin, they inflict painful damage

(Strength + 2, normal); if blood wells from the wound, a virulent plague infests it.

No matter how many wounds the Talons inflict, the plague's effects are the same. Soon afterward, the victim falls ill; nothing short of magickal healing can revive him. If he's a minor character, he'll probably die in a week or less; if he plays some major part in the chronicle, he'll suffer horribly until some mystick cure defeats the illness (see “Poison” in the rulebook, pp. 201-202). For every day he suffers, the character loses one point of Stamina. Life-based magick may restore his former vitality, but no mortal cure can. Even after healing, the scars of the Plague-crow remain dark and vivid.

The Talons are formidable weapons, but they curse the Infernalist as well. Nothing she touches from dusk till dawn is safe from the plague. Loved one, steed, companion — any living thing she scratches with her Talons will sicken and possibly die. Large creatures (dragons, krakens, etc.), spirits and the Undead are immune to the plague's effects, however — its evil touch is meant for human beings, those made in the image of God.

• **Uncanny Beauty (varies):** Temptation often wears a terrible splendor. In exchange for a sin or two, the supplicant assumes an unearthly, irresistible beauty. For every two points in the pact, the Infernalist raises his Appearance Trait by one dot, up to a maximum of 8, total. Even if the supplicant's Appearance remains within mortal levels, however, there's something uncanny about him. He seems too perfect, almost devilish in his charms— which, of course, he is. Like most Investments, this “gift” usually lasts until either death, although some holy circumstance (blessed water, a priest's mirror, etc.) can expose the beauty for what it truly is.



- **Wings (3 pts.):** Upon uttering a blasphemous command, the supplicant grows horrible, demonic wings from between her shoulder blades. These pinions allow her to fly at roughly 13 yards per turn, and to remain aloft for one turn for each dot of Strength she has. For an extra point, the wings may be barbed, and inflict damage as if they were claws (Strength + 2).

Fides: Faith, Both Dark and Bright

Tempests, sisters of the hurricanes; blue firmament, whose beauty I will not admit; treacherous sea, images of my heart; earth, full of mysteries; inhabitants of the heavenly spheres; Universe entire; God, who created it magnificently, it is you that I invoke: show me a man who is good! ...But, by your favor, grant me a tenfold increase in my natural strength; because, were I confronted with such a monster I might die of astonishment — men have died of lesser causes.

— Comte de Lautréamont, *The Songs of Maldoror*

The Infernalist would like to believe he's right — that the world is a giant cesspool and hope is a losing proposition. So when he stands confronted by a soul who will not be swayed from goodness, he has one of three options: repent, flee, or crush the Faithful One like the deluded insect she surely is.

Not that the Fallen One doesn't have Faith of his own to call upon — quite the opposite. He's had personal contact with his Patronus and knows that its powers are quite real. In some realms, especially Christian and Muslim ones, the Infernalist is a hunted man. He needs strong beliefs to guide him through the Endless Night, or he'll simply give in and repent before he burns.

Faith is powerful. More often than not, it rises from adversity, from the determination that forces a person to take a stand. When you have it, to the degree that few people do, it can literally work miracles — light or dark miracles. A goodly man, as we are told, can drive away vampires or terrify malefactors with his presence or prayers. Can an evil man do the same? To some degree, he can.

Supposedly, devils cannot inspire True Faith — such power is thought to belong to God (or the gods) alone. But as any Infernalist can vouch, that idea is fairly naïve; although some people claim there cannot be an "anti-faith," diabolists with strong ties to malignant gods can (and do) manifest frightening abilities. Pulsating with greenish-black light, these damned souls revel in their perversity. Perhaps

some connection to the Qlippoh, the decaying shells of old worlds, fuels this sinister devotion; or maybe the forces of Light and Darkness are far more evenly matched than the "good guys" would like to admit. Although some folk would like to deny that such Faith is possible, it infests a small but powerful elite. With it, Black Monks and Queens of Hell defile holy places, menace angels and drive the children of God from their sight.

At its core, Infernal Faith is more than a confidence in the Abyss. It's a close personal tie with the Void, a direct channel between the inner Adversary and the outer Darkness. Although an Infernalist focuses this channel by worshipping some devil or dark god, the power itself is older and far more primeval than even the lost deities of Bhât. An Infernalist with deep Faith in the Darkness knows that there are greater things than Satan; the Devil may be a potent symbol, but ultimately even Old Scratch is just a mask for the ultimate, eternal Darkness beyond.

As the rulebook describes, a character with True Faith can call upon an array of gifts. A warlock with Infernal Faith radiates his unholy devotion: children sicken; animals flee; small plants whither, and insects praise the Infernalist in shrill, eerie voices. Depending on the strength of his Faith, this anti-saint might be able to terrorize or even burn obvious servants of goodness. Vampires and the like still feel uneasy in his presence, but devils and demonic hosts caper with glee when he approaches.

Naturally, there are drawbacks; the Infernalist suffers from the Echoes Flaw at a fairly high level (4 or 5 points): milk sours in his presence, and wards against evil often have at least a minimal effect. (See sidebar.) Chances are, the dark gift also warps the Infernalist's body as well as his soul; even if he's inhumanly handsome, there's a Void in his eyes that no one could mistake.

The real challenge comes when two people with opposing Faith face one another down: the air itself ripples and fragile things begin to shudder and crack. Winds often rise; sometimes strange, Otherworldly voices begin to sing in diametrically opposed chants. No matter who wins, a showdown between Faiths is bound to be painful. Both parties can harm each other merely by praying, and each one burns at the other's touch. If both antagonists are powerful representatives of their respective powers, good and evil spirits might actually appear and join the fight. Even if the battle remains on the mortal plane, anyone with a touch of awareness can feel the vibrations as two potent opposites collide. Such battles are rare enough, but they quickly become the stuff of legends.

Battling the Devil's Brood

According to folklore, an array of simple acts of faith can foil the Devil's ministers. Church bells, prayers, rosary beads, holy water, the tears of an innocent, even salt thrown over one's left-hand shoulder supposedly frustrate *maleficia* and drive evil spirits away. If only it were so simple....

The Pit's minions are a hearty lot. Still, common folk can fight Infernal influence to a degree. You don't have to be a magus to put a kink in Satan's tail (although it helps). A bit of faith and a lot of luck can provide a thin but effective shield for those with more innocence than power.

In the main rulebook, the "Commonfolk Magics" sidebar (p. 267) offers a few Storyteller hints for humble charms that might confound Fallen Ones and their demonic allies. Although their effects are hardly reliable, these simple charms can force an evil magus or spirit to hesitate, fumble his rites, or even flee. In game terms, he might have to make a Willpower roll to resist a countercharm cast by an innocent. (Difficulty depends on the Storyteller's whims, the innocent's purity, and the needs of the story.) If the Infernalist fails, he suffers some kind of minor setback (a moment of doubt, a sudden pain, etc.); if he botches the roll, the powers of goodness strike him with a sudden malady (screaming terror, sincere repentance, a Scourging, etc.) Even if the Fallen One withstands the charm, he might feel a twinge of hesitation before he crushes the innocent life between his fingers....

A magus can avail himself of these popular charms, too. They seem to be less effective for him, though. Perhaps the pride that allows him to work miracles also distances him from innocence. Even so, the talismans and charms that protect common folk make good ritual instruments if a magus is battling servants of the Abyss. In game terms, the following devil-banes may be considered "consecrated tools" that reduce casting difficulties by 1 if the spell foils some Infernal being. (See the rulebook, p. 239.) At the Storyteller's discretion, they might add one die to countermagick rolls versus Infernal spells, too. Such protections *are not cumulative*, nor are they reliable. A four-leaf clover might give you an edge, but cannot protect you forever from the forces of Hell.

Common devil-banes include (but are not limited to):

- **Christian:** Prayers to Mary, the Saints (esp. John, Jude, Patrick and Dunstan), or the angels (esp. Gabriel, Michael and Uriel); the Lord's Prayer; certain herbs and plants (juniper, sage, red pepper, four-leaf clovers, ver-vain, mandrake, wolfsbane and garlic, among others); cold iron filings; white candles; water or earth that has been blessed by a priest; remains of a saint; church bells; thrown salt; warding gestures; and, of course, the cross or crucifix.

- **Jewish:** Amulets (parchment or metal) inscribed with the names of angels; the Star of David; Kabbalistic incantations; herbs (see above); Solomonic circles and pentacles; salt; inscribing the Tetragrammaton (the symbolic name of God); invocation of Shekhinah the Protector (powerful feminine aspect of God); recitation of psalms; a prayer to the Most High.

- **Islamic:** Prayers (esp. "Allahu akbar [God is greatest]," "Allah karim [God is all-beneficent]," and "La ilaha illa 'llah [There is no god but Allah]"); verses from the Koran; incense; bells; silver coins (tossed at the malefactor); tears shed out of pity for the Fallen one; earth from Mecca; the Hand of Fatima (symbol of the Prophet's daughter); hot iron brands; Solomon's seal; sulfur; amulets featuring Koranic verses or angels' names.

- **Pagan:** Invocations to gods of mercy, strength or war; herbs (see above); fires (esp. those made with birch, elder, pine, ash, holly, willow, oak, or rowan); brooms (used to sweep away evil); warding gestures; clean water; circles inscribed around the protectee; charms carved from wood (see above). Greek and Roman Pagans also use elaborate charms based around numerology and complex mathematical formulae.

- **Far Eastern:** Salt or dust (flung at the offender); prayers (often to the Buddha, or to demon-fighting gods like Vishnu, Kali or Raiden); charms (often sutras written on paper; sometimes burned and scattered as ashes or drunk); compassion for the evil-doer; bells; chants; knots (tied in cloth or silk to trap demons); jade statues or jewelry; rice (sprinkled on the ground to confuse or distract demons); gongs (struck to ward away evil); charms and tools of wood (acacia, cherry, bamboo, and others above); incense; pearls (whole or crushed to powder); cold milk or pure mountain water.

- **Indigenous:** Herbs (often burned; see above, plus tobacco, palm, sage grass, bamboo, elephant grass); invocations to ancestor spirits or the Great God; masks (worn or posted to scare evil spirits); totem-poles and devil-posts (images that frighten demons); charms (carved from coral, gold, wood or bone); protective body paint and tattoos; drums and whistles; fire; blood drawn from the protectee.

Merits and Flaws

With Nature's pride, and richest furniture,
His looks do menace heaven and dare the Gods.

— Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine the Great*

Evil hath its privileges. Although most diabolical gifts are covered by Investiture, some occur naturally, without pacts or servitude. Many of the obvious “talents of night” seem fairly mundane, and can be found in **The Sorcerers Crusade Companion**, Chapter V. A few, though, are rare outside the Infernal ranks, and can be found below.

The jagged side of the Devil’s sword cuts deeply, however. Just as Satan’s children receive special gifts, so too do they suffer unique penalties for their allegiance. The following Flaws reflect some common maladies among the servants of Darkness.

Why, if this isn’t a players guide, do we present Merits and Flaws? Because certain aspects of the demonic lifestyle deserve to be mentioned, even elaborated in terms of game mechanics. A certain Merit or Flaw can define a magus who is truly *Infernal*, as opposed to simply evil in a mundane way. And as Chapter II points out, not all diabolists are magi or hedge wizards; some merely have a dark gift or two that give them an edge (or a liability) when the forces of God come calling.

Unless otherwise mentioned, the following Traits apply only to characters who deal with the Lower Powers. None are forbidden to magi, but all are intended for Storyteller characters. A Storyteller should reflect whether or not he wants players who would try to purchase such unnerving Traits; in my opinion, a player who craves the Flaw: *Cannibal* should have his head examined.

Lord of Flies (2 pt Merit)

Blessed by Beelzebub, this Infernalist wears an eternal halo of flies. Insects, drawn to his ineffable corruption, flock around him like pilgrims of damnation. Everywhere he goes, carrion-bugs of all description surround this foul creature. Naturally, most humans (even Infernalists) find the Lord repulsive, but some appreciate his dark favor and welcome him at sickening feasts.

Unshockable (3 pt Merit)

The service of the Pit demands many unconscionable acts: cannibalism, torture, shit-eating, demon-fucking.... Somewhere down the road, the Unshockable character has lost all sense of shame or revulsion. Without a flicker of emotion, he can perform atrocities that would make a *Jacquerie* blanch. He has a cast-iron stomach, too – no substance is too revolting for him to consume. Fellow diabolists look upon such steadfastness with wonder and



a touch of fear. After all, if this person can skin a baby so effortlessly, how hard would he find it to do the same to his friends?

Demonic Tutor (4 pt Merit)

Occasionally, demons will instruct a promising pupil without requiring her servitude in return. An especially ambitious individual might be clever enough to wrangle a deal from an Infernal tutor, while a truly malevolent soul may seem so devoted to corruption that the tutor considers it a privilege (or at least an investment in the future) to teach her “free of charge.” (For now....)

Now this enterprising diabolist has a mentor straight from Hell. He could be a minor devil, a djinn, a malignant ancestor-ghost, even an elemental, but he clearly isn’t human. Although the demon won’t go to any great trouble or risk on her behalf, he might impart certain secrets that few mortals ever learn. In some cases, he might even seem fond of his “little satan,” and make occasional efforts on her behalf. Like a faithful hound, he leads her to hidden, esoteric lore; and like a hound, he expects to be fed once the favor is performed....

Demonic Heritage: Laham (7 pt Merit)

Some folk are said to be the offspring of demons. Considering the carnal traffic at Sabbats, orgies and midnight visitations, this isn't surprising. Uncannily long-lived, impervious to pain, and often possessed of inhuman powers, a demon-spawn (or *laham*) is said to be a special servant of Hell. Although warped by strange deformities, she is granted a special place at the tables of Nephandi and other primal diabolists, who can sense her demonic heritage.

Despite tales of "demon's blood" and "devil seed," demons are spirit entities, and cannot reproduce with mortals. When evil spirits possess a human being (or an animal), however, the host can be tainted by Infernal essence; if a child results, she'll probably have a little bit of Hell inside her. Many sorcerers, of both good and evil intent, are reputed to be demon-spawn: Merlin, Morganna le Fay, Circe and Kullervo (among others) supposedly sprang from such unholy unions. Such people are not known for their generous temperaments, but they are not doomed to be evil – a heroic effort can overcome the worst ancestry. Few *lahama* aspire to virtue, though. Most consider their Infernal heritage a blessing, and pursue the Dark Arts with unnerving enthusiasm.

In game terms, a *laham* is a normal person "gifted" by Infernal essence. Like a vampire's ghoul, she has a few extraordinary abilities but does not belong to a new "race" of occult creatures. (No, there isn't going to be a *laham* supplement coming out anytime soon.) This Merit grants a few special talents and drawbacks that reflect the character's demonic lineage:

- **Benefits:** A *laham* can have seven points of demonic Investments without making any form of pact. These talents are hers from birth, and cannot be rescinded. She ages very slowly, and can live roughly 200 years if nothing kills her in the meantime. Infernalists, hell-spawn, and evil spirits can sense a *laham* for what she is, and will probably offer her some form of respect; in game terms, subtract 3 from the difficulty of any Social roll she makes regarding demons and devil-worshippers. Many *lahama* have a natural affinity for magick, too; they Awaken around puberty and often become full-fledged Infernalist magi after they've had some time to learn the Dark Arts. (No, there are no bonuses for this. It's simply a point of origin.)

- **Weaknesses:** All *lahama* are cursed by deformities of body, mind and soul. A *laham* character must select three points of Flaws, plus four points in the Echoes Flaw. (See *The Sorcerers Crusade*, p. 106, and the sidebar in this book, page 77. These Flaws do not count against the seven-point limit.) Every *laham* is temperamental, too; although this doesn't come out in game systems, it should make life difficult for the character in question. Finally, people with True Faith or some strong affinity for goodness

can sense the demonic inheritance, too; any Social roll aside from an Intimidation-based one adds 3 to its difficulty. Even under the best of circumstances, sacred symbols and holy places are hard for a *laham* to endure.

Not all *lahama* are human; disturbing folktales speak of women who gave birth to giant flies or were torn inside-out by feral creatures for which no names exist. Some women have been impregnated while possessed, or raped by marauding demon-hosts; thus, a handful of *lahama* have been raised by the Church (or other religious authorities) to be potential weapons against the Darkness. Such weapons have two edges, however, and no *laham* can ever be sure where her true loyalties lie....

Unholy Aura (7 pt Merit)

Like a living cloud of Darkness, an Infernalist with this deadly gift drives all holiness from his presence. Relics and goodly trappings crumble in his grasp, living things whither where he stands, and men and women of Faith hide their faces and flee when he approaches.

In game terms, this Merit weaves a frightening aura around the corrupt character's soul. To anyone who can see auras, the Infernalist looks like a walking storm cloud (hence the old name for the Nephandi); to anyone with the Awareness Talent, he seems incredibly ancient and malignant. Characters with True Faith (in holy things, not Infernal ones) must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 8) or run away in abject horror. A botch on that roll indicates that the Infernal taint has overpowered the person's Faith; as she cowers in a pitiful heap, stigmata-like wounds erupt across her head, side and arms, or leap like whiplashes across her skin. Even when the Faithful one makes her roll, she finds it physically difficult to remain in the Infernalist's vicinity. He sears her nostrils with brimstone clouds and churns the air itself with his foul presence. Note that this Merit is not a power *per se*, simply a reflection of the tremendous Resonance the Fallen One carries around with him. He has become one with the Void in a very real way.

Repulsive to Animals (1 pt. Flaw)

Infernal creatures might enjoy a witch's presence, but natural beasts fear her. She is, after all, an abomination to the Divine order and they can tell. Horses shy when she approaches; dogs bark or whine as she draws near. A skillful witch-hunter understands such signs, and can spot a witch by the aversion she engenders. Even if no one else notices, however, the Infernal one has a difficult time making friends outside her own corrupted circle. In game terms, she has a two-die penalty to any roll that involves dealing with normal animals in any way (riding, sneaking past a watchdog, etc.). This does not apply to Hell-born creatures, familiars or demon-ridden beasts.

Bitter Tongue (3 pt. Flaw)

Every time the warlock speaks, invectives, lies and evil prophecies pour out. It's not something he can help — a curse of some kind prevents him from being civil. Naturally, this verbal venom does not endear him to family, loved ones, utter strangers or anyone else. Under the wrong circumstances (in the King of France's chambers, for instance) it can be deadly.

In game terms, Bitter Tongue resembles the Bard's Tongue Flaw, but is far stronger. The character cannot speak without insulting someone, blatantly lying, or making some cryptic remark that foreshadows a coming disaster. (These "prophecies of doom" are not something the Infernalist can control; they simply spill out.) Only by remaining silent can the warlock keep his peace... and then just barely!

Infernal Aura (3 pt. Flaw)

The touch of Hell lingers on this witch. She radiates a black, toxic aura that anyone with mystic talent can sense. Chances are, she smells of sulfur and leaves ashen footprints when she walks. Resonance has branded this sorcerer so badly that any character with True Faith, Awareness or aura-reading magicks (see **Read the Soul** in the main rulebook) can spot her dark allegiance with a simple Perception + Awareness roll, difficulty 4. Whatever guise she wears, the witch cannot hide her corruption. Sooner or later, it *will* be the death of her.

Cannibal (4 pt. Flaw)

Nature or nurture has forced this diabolist to eat human meat — exclusively! Anyone twisted or desperate enough can eat a person, but the character with this Flaw cannot eat anything else. No other meat (much less grain or vegetable) will nourish him, and he'll get sick if he tries to change his diet. The flesh can be dead, decaying, or even alive, but it must be human. Needless to say, this ghoul has to remain close to human beings, yet feed discreetly enough to avoid attention. It's a hard life to live, and few cannibals manage to survive this way for very long. There are, of course, exceptions....

Horrific (5 pt. Flaw)

The character looks like hell — literally. The touch of the Abyss has warped her so badly that she cannot pass for normal in any way. Whatever humanity she might have once possessed departed long ago; looks-wise, she has more in common with an insect, mollusk, cephalopod or screaming nightmare. In White Wolf terms, this could be considered the "Holy Shit, You Look Like a John Cobb Drawing" Flaw. A character with it would be right at home in some landscape out of Hieronymus Bosch, and has an

effective Appearance rating below 0! Even heroes feel queasy in her presence, but demons don't mind a bit.

Infernal "Gift" Traits

Investments

Apportation	4
Armor	v.
Awareness	4
Backgrounds	1 per dot
Beast Form	3
Bond-breaking	6
Claws/Horns	v.
Demonic Strength	v.
Devil's Eyes	2
Goat Feet	2
Hellfire	3
Invulnerability	3
Longevity	v.
Luciferian Charm	4
Mammon's Gift	8
Pan-pipe Voice	3
Regeneration	9
Serpent Skin	3
Service	v.
Shameful Sight	6
Sign of Inferno	5
Talons/Plague-crow	8
Uncanny Beauty	v.
Wings	3

Merits

Demonic Heritage: Laham	7
Demonic Tutor	4
Lord of Flies	2
Unholy Aura	7
Unshockable	3

Flaws

Bitter Tongue	3
Cannibal	4
Horrific	5
Infernal Aura	3
Repulsive to Animals	1

Maleficia: Poisoned Magick



leasure is sweetest when 'tis paid for by another's pain.

— Ovid, *The Art of Love*

Maleficium means “crime” or “injury.” In medieval law, the term *maleficia* refers to acts of magick that cause harm.

The term displays the true difference between the Black Arts and the Mystick Arts: magick simply reweaves Creation to a mage’s will; *maleficia* reweaves it with malignant intent. An Infernalist doesn’t simply use magick — she employs it to cause injury. Hence, her spells become crimes against man, nature and the gods. And she likes it that way.

In game terms, there are no real distinctions between Black Magick and any other form. Magick is magick. As an agent of corruption, however, an Infernalist makes a point of using a poisonous form of the Art. The spells she casts, the tools she employs, and the intentions behind them are all meant to hurt, and they do. Like Satan, the diabolical witch or warlock sets out to challenge heaven and earth. Maleficia is the gauntlet slapped across the face of God; if that gauntlet has spikes imbedded in its knuckles, so much the better!

Odd Elements of the Black Arts

Across the sea lies the fountain of renewal

Where you will see

The whole cause of your loneliness

Can be measured in dreams

That transcend all these lies

— Dead Can Dance, “Enigma of the Absolute”

To many folk (including most Infernalists), Black Magick is simply desecration: good tools are used in bad ways. Very few people dare their souls enough to explore the metaphysical elements behind malignant spells, but those who do make a frightening discovery: evil is not an aberration, but a necessity. Even the Infernal powers are essential elements to Creation. This flies in the face of Renaissance morality, which assumes that Divinity is all-benevolent and perfect. Can a perfect God create imperfection for its own sake? It’s heresy to think so, but then heresy is an Infernalist’s middle name....

Certain metaphysical elements reveal themselves to those who pursue the Black Arts. These are not the easy

secrets bestowed by demons, but the fruit of hard study and soul-searing insights. The average diabolist may employ these tools as a matter of course, but he rarely understands them. Beneath simple blasphemies and forbidden rites, there’s a dark core of truth. Infernalists who truly understand it can be the most frightening antagonists of all.

Tenth Sphere: The Absolute

As Chapter I says, in the beginning there was Darkness. All things originated in that Void, and all things will eventually return to it. By Infernal assessment, the Absolute is the consciousness of the Void, the primordial essence of all things. It broke apart into worlds and gods, but when it has experienced all the sensations it can acquire, it will collapse upon itself and take everything back into itself and disappear.

Although this concept seems elementary in the age of chaos mathematics, advanced astronomy and quantum physics, it’s a direct contradiction to the Renaissance idea of an orderly universe constructed by a God of Light. The enigma of the Absolute declares that God, Satan, all their realms, and especially humanity are insignificant specks in a titanic illusion woven for the benefit of a pandimensional deity that is mad by any form of human comprehension. The power of this theoretical Tenth Sphere is to connect with that deity, assume its omnipotent perspective, and become the chaos at the heart of this world. As Creation ends, an Infernalist supposedly experiences the ultimate Assumption — all the blisses and torments in Creation’s history become a single, eternal sensation.

Naturally, this goal is largely academic. The world is far from ending (no matter what the Seven Thunders say!), and so the power of the Absolute is scattered. In its mortal form, this power has been divided into the Nine Keys to Hell: the imperfect reflections of the Void and the essence of the Deep Lords of Misrule, entities who glide in perfect orbit around the Absolute until all Creation returns to primordial Darkness and the Absolute is sated at last. Until then, only the demented Marauds (revered by many Infernalists of this era) truly understand the Absolute in all its glory. And that glory has driven them mad.

Nine Keys to Hell: The Qlippos

Dangerous even to mention, the malignant secrets of the Qlippos reflect a deeper, metaphysical root of Black Magick. Sometimes called the Nine Keys to Hell or the Nine Breaths of the Absolute, these dark essences literally tap into primordial chaos, reshaping Creation to twisted ends.

Roughly, Qlippos (*klee-poath*) means “shell.” In Kabalism, the Qlippos refer to the disintegrating essence of past worlds. As they break down and whirl their way back to the Absolute, these shells become spiritual black

holes, raging with disturbed energies and angry ghosts. An earthbound sorcerer, schooled in esoterica, can reach into these wells and draw their power back to this mortal world. In the process, however, he brings disintegration and corruption back with him.

Each of the nine Spheres of Creation has a Qlippotic opposite, a chaotic counterpart swirling with dark Resonance. Very few Infernalists understand their magick on so deep a level, but the screaming chaos of most Black Arts is said to arise from this primal disintegration. Perhaps the Void calls like to like, and sends its essence as a harbinger of the Reckoning to come. Infernalists may be seen as agents of that Reckoning, and their Arts flow from the well of chaos at the beginning and end of Creation.

In game terms, “Qlippotic Spheres” and “normal Spheres” are one and the same. There are no rule distinctions between them—a character who employs Qlippotic Forces simply uses Forces to malefic ends. The only difference between the two “types” is in the character’s head. But since intention and perception guide magick, those distinctions can make a great deal of difference. Those who understand the Qlippott see the Nine Spheres like this:

- **Connection:** All things in this world are woven of metaphysical threads; tug one, and other things follow. Qlippotic Connection exploits this effect and yanks those threads until everything unravels.

- **Entropy:** All things exist in a constant state of flux tending toward disintegration. Qlippotic Entropy encourages the breaking-down and guides the cycle toward annihilation.

- **Forces:** Creation is a vortex of raging elements, kept in check by slender threads and principles. Qlippotic Forces bend or snap those binders, unleashing primal chaos.

- **Life:** Living matter is a corrupt reflection of spiritual purity. Since the flesh is decaying from the moment of its birth, Qlippotic Life Arts merely redirect that decay, resculpting or degrading the flesh until it returns to its primal state.

- **Matter:** Again, inert materials are mere shadows of the Absolute. Qlippotic Matter drives that point home by breaking down and redirecting these malleable forms until chaos is achieved.

- **Mind:** Eternities ago, the Void broke apart into warring emanations. Through their struggles, the Absolute sought to know itself. Qlippotic Mind returns that knowledge to the Void, shares those impressions between other aspects of the Absolute, and shatters human illusions by exposing Creation for the hoax it is.

- **Prime:** Life-force is really death-force. All things expend their energies in an endless well of power, but that well eventually leads back to the Void (and, in fact, may originate there, as well). Infernalists who have seen

the Maelstrom at the heart of the Underworld know the true source of Quintessence — the dark spin of a Wheel that grinds all things into Primal pulp, then sends them back again.

- **Spirit:** All things originate in the Void, and it’s always close to the surface. Hell and its denizens are merely agents of that Void, angry remnants of worlds that have not yet completely broken down. By sundering the Gauntlet and inviting demons into this world, a Qlippotic sorcerer hastens this world’s disintegration and lets the shades of old worlds enjoy this one for a while.

- **Time:** In the center of the universe, time does not exist. All things hang in an infinite suspension, compressed by the weight of eternity. Qlippotic Time brings a bit of that suspension to this world, speeding or slowing the illusion of time until that illusion falls apart.

The deepest secret of Qlippotic magick, however, is this: In its way, chaos and devastation are essential parts of Creation’s weird dance. As any Infernalist can tell you (and will, given half a chance), there can be no Light without Darkness. It is said that one who understands the true nature of the Qlippott sees the hand of God guiding even this maelstrom. Thus, this primal, Infernal chaos is just one more facet of greater Divinity. From such paradoxes, souls wither and great minds crack.

Aesfotedia: Dark Tass

At the apex of a pentagram, the star points upward, indicating the spirit flowing high above the base four elements. In Black Magick, the pentagram is inverted to show spirit essence descending below the mortal world and into Hell. Aesfotedia, Tass poisoned by Infernal Resonance, is the material reflection of that downward peak. Literally a combination of spiritual and material corruption, this toxic Tass shimmers like dark quicksilver and leaves a slimy residue upon both the fingers and the soul.

If Quintessence is water, Aesfotedia is poisonous sludge. It surges up from misery and flows through demons’ veins. This is the fabled “devil’s turd,” the *teufesdrek* or *nickelsblud* that distills the very essence of the Abyss into material form. Although Infernal realms and denizens are composed of spirit-stuff, this Tass collects in their ichor, shit and semen. During orgies and nocturnal visitations, evil spirits deposit Aesfotedia within their partners, spawning fomori and lahama, and bringing their “lovers” that much closer to the Pit. Infernalists who revere the primordial Void see this Quintessence as the fingerprint of chaos. Every so often, it falls to earth in meteorites or travels back with Skyriggers in the form of harmless “star dust.” In areas where some staggering evil has taken place — a site of grand atrocities or terrible Sabbats — the ground, wood or water is permeated with dark Tass. Diabolists travel from all over to fill sacks with soil from Gilles de Rais’ dungeon or water from Blood Lake; some

even lie with demons, then squeeze the fluids from their nether-parts to use in tomorrow's spells. Once gathered, Aesfotedia resembles silvery ash or shimmering sewage. Used properly, it can fuel dark magicks, feed an imp or be absorbed into the skin and soul of an Infernal magus.

In game terms, Aesfotedia is essentially Tass, but with a powerful dark Resonance. Workings that include it leave vile traces behind. Holy or sensitive people feel dirty around such magicks, and can often sense them even after the warlock has gone. Malignant spells that include Aesfotedia reduce the casting difficulty by -1, while neutral or beneficial ones add 1 or 2 to that difficulty. (Usual maximums apply.) Dark Tass can be "harvested" from demon-hosts and materialized devils (as blood), or drawn from evil spirits by Prime 4/Spirit 4 magicks. A warlock doing so had best be careful, though — a denizen of Hell is no man's battery!

Supposedly, Aesfotedia is the incarnate essence of the Void. In their typical fashion, many diabolists claim Aesfotedia is the true form of Quintessence, not a "poisoned" distillation, but its original state! According to some grimoires, "pure" Quintessence is a bastardized derivation. Naturally, Fallen sorcerers prefer Aesfotedia for their destructive workings!

Instrumentum: Diabolical Instruments

As the *Sorcerers Crusade* main rulebook says, Black Magick's main ingredient is malice. All other trappings and rites bridge the warlock's ill will with his victim's vulnerability. Just the same, demons are sticklers for details, especially when those details involve misery and suffering. An Infernalist can pervert any style of magick, but without an undercurrent of hate and blasphemy, the most elaborate curse is useless. Fortunately (for Infernalists, at any rate), misery and hatred are in good supply.

The rulebook presents the essential form of Infernal magick on p. 263. Other styles, particularly pagan witchcraft, shamanism, high ritual magick, and occasionally Ars Praeclarus and alchemy, can be twisted in Hell's direction with very little effort. Although a handful of Infernalists employ the bygone Arts of Babylon, Egypt and Sumeria (for all intents and purposes, archaic forms of high ritual magick), most seem to prefer inverting whatever seems sacred at the time. The archetypal devil-worshipper degrades Christian symbolism, while diabolists from other lands pervert the sacred ceremonies of Allah, Vishnu, Chukwu and Wakin-Tanka, or dedicate their rites to intentionally malevolent gods. Beneath it all lies a foundation of spite; whatever names the warlock venerates or curses, whatever rituals he employs, his greatest instrument is hatred. All else is filigree and shadow.

Naturally, there's a fair amount of filigree and shadow involved. More often than not, a warlock's preparations must please not only himself, but his Patronus, too. Demons tend to be sticklers for things like screaming human sacrifices and Kisses of Shame, so a would-be Infernalist had best pucker up and keep the altar ready.

Most common ritual tools are described in the main rulebook. Appropriately satanic ingredients include alchemical laboratories; blood and other humors; bones and remains; brews; cards; celestial alignments (especially for Babylonian rites); circles and pentacles; crossroads and crossing-days; curses; dance; drugs and poisons; elements (especially fire and water); the evil eye; group rites; sacrifices; True Names; symbols; war machines and weapons. Some tools, of course, are more common (or important) than others. The following instruments and rites are notorious parts of Infernal rituals:

- **The Black Mass:** A deliberate mockery of the Catholic Mass, a Black Mass takes the traditional vestments and sacraments of that ceremony and perverts them. Prayers are spoken backward; white vestments are replaced with blood-red or black. Crosses are hung-upside-down, as are pentacles (five-pointed stars that symbolize the four elements plus spirit). Stolen Hosts are desecrated or burned; "Satanic" Hosts are made of shit, blood, piss, baby fat, and other unsavory ingredients, while the altar is made of bones, black marble, rough-hewn rock, naked people, or a desecrated Christian altar. The ceremony varies from coven to coven, but usually involves Latin blasphemies, live (occasionally human) sacrifices, drugs, and a climactic orgy. Demons often attend, and join the fun once the proper supplications have been made.

By tearing down the holiest of Christian ceremonies, exalting physicality and degradation, and whipping her congregation into a frenzy, a witch scorns goodness, gets others to do likewise, and raises power for large, elaborate rituals. (See *Satan's Song*, below, and "Acting in Concert" in the rulebook, p. 243.) The Black Mass is a big stream of shit aimed straight at both God and His Church. Although it's hardly universal, it represents the archetypal form of devil-worship.

- **Blood, Bones and Other Remains:** Infernalism emphasizes the flesh over the spirit; thus, aspects of the flesh feature prominently in diabolical rites. Gore is almost always shed for a satanic spell, and no *Foedus* is complete until the warlock has signed it in his own blood. But blood is only the beginning: witch-priests from Mesopotamia and the future Americas are especially fond of flaying their sacrifices alive, then using the skin for book-binding, parchment and ritual vestments. European and Oriental sorcerers haunt torture chambers and execution scaffolds — severed limbs, heads and bowels are mainstays of *maleficia*. Bones, in many practices, are ground into powders and blown at or dusted over the subject of a spell. Necromancers make

slaves from the remains of dead enemies (see Chapter IV), and every Infernalist's workshop features a human skull or two, if only for effect.

• **Brews:** As folklore insists, witches concoct horrific brews from poisonous herbs, small animals, blood and excrement, and the cooked fat of unbaptized infants. The resulting messes are drunk, smeared over skin, or poured into flasks for later use. Such potions are especially important for curses and charms; many a village lad comes searching for a love potion only to be given a foul brew and told, "Drink to the health of thy love, if love ye would have!" Is the brew an important part of the spell, or just a prank on the witch's part? The witches will never tell....

• **Celestial Alignments:** Fixtures of Mesopotamian magick, astronomy and astrology are exceedingly important to some Infernalists. Followers of the Void and its bizarre inhabitants base many of their rites on the alignment of the stars, or on the time of night (or day) in which a ritual is performed. As some witch-hunters know, certain rites are limited to specific seasons or alignments. While many Satanists or shamans ignore such niceties, most proper students of the Mysteries time their most powerful magicks to coincide with the movements of the stars — and of the spaces in between them where the Void shines through.

• **Deadly Herbs and Venoms:** In one form or another, poison is an important ingredient of malicious spells — it invokes the power of the killing herb or beast, and reflects the venomous effect the warlock hopes to have on the world at large. Toxins are especially common in Renaissance maleficia; for more details, see "Health and Ill Will" in *The Sorcerers Crusade Companion* pp. 173-178.

• **Desecration and Defilement:** Infernalism is based on defiance; therefore, almost every form of diabolism takes the trinkets of the ruling god and extravagantly trashes them. Holy sites are defiled; holy objects are destroyed; holy books are burned or torn apart, occasionally with a few holy people tossed in for good measure. Such desecration serves three purposes: it scorns the god in question, marks a mystic connection between the defiled site and the insulted god, and attracts the favor of that god's enemies. More often than not, an Infernalist begins her Path of Screams by violating a holy object or place; thus, she breaks away from her old virtues and confronts her fear of Divinity.

• **Household Items:** Can you say "witch's broom?"

• **Inverted Prayers:** Many rites, especially curses, Black Masses and demonic invocations, require a prayer spoken backward. Through this inversion, the warlock turns the holy "spell" backwards and displays his contempt for the deity. According to some sources, witches and their kind cannot speak a prayer unless it's in reverse. As the Burning Times commence, many Inquisitors demand a perfectly spoken prayer as proof of innocence; sadly, even a perfectly

virtuous person can be too frightened to call upon God properly, and soon the tortures begin....

• **The Kiss of Shame:** At some point in his worship or initiation, almost every Infernalist abases himself before a Patronus and offers the Kiss of Shame — a solid smooch in some unpleasant location, usually the anus, genitals or both. Thus, the supplicant demonstrates his obedience to the devil, and tests his willingness to sacrifice dignity (and dinner) to win the greater gifts of Hell.

• **Sacrifice:** The cornerstone of Black Magick, a live (often human) sacrifice serves many purposes. In one sweep of a knife (if the victim is lucky), a witch-priest demonstrates her callousness, please her Patronus, harvests a soul for the Abyss, slays a weakling, and frees its life-force for her darker purposes. Every form of Infernalism — from Nhanga cannibal-rites to Prague baby-burnings, from the bloody parades of Tenochtitlan to the flayed skin carpets of Agade — features gory offerings, often made as painful and degrading as the officiant can make them. Although the magickal rewards are minimal (a human being has very little Quintessence to offer), the sheer bloodlust of the rite often makes it seem worthwhile... and if human sacrifice tends to bring do-gooders running, well, a blade that isn't bloodied often is no true blade at all.

(Note: In case anyone is stupid enough to wonder, this is in no way, shape or form an endorsement of demonic sacrifice, human or otherwise. Thank you.)

• **Self-Mutilation:** To break with her old life, a diabolist is expected — encouraged! — to offer her own body as freely as she sacrifices others. With scarification, tattoos, bloodletting, flesh-crafting, and even ritual dismemberment, the witch-priestess flays her soul as well as her skin. Marking her passage down the Path of Screams, she sometimes becomes hideous enough to make good company for demons. In the meantime, she seals pacts and weaveries with her own pain, then uses the experience to transcend human consciousness and embody the Void in her own flesh.

• **The Sabbat:** Call it what you will — the Black Sabbat, Walpurgisnacht, the Feast of Flies, the Danse Macabre — this celebration of evil has become, in just a few blinks of Satan's eye, a central rite in Infernal magick. A perversion of Pagan rites, a "devil's night" meeting calls up demonic forces, assembles their worshippers, and poisons the land for weeks, months or even years afterward.

Like the Black Mass, a Sabbat inverts rituals that were intended to be sacred. Forging a corrupt bond with the elements and the land, a group of Infernalists congregates under a full moon, pays fealty to various devils and demon-hosts, indulges in a banquet of sins, then heads home just before dawn. Spells are often cast at a Sabbat, but magick is beside the point; the revel's true purpose is to call up a well of perversions, dive into it, swim around



with like-minded friends, and leave a metaphysical stain behind. Whereas the original Pagan rites honor the earth and encourage fertility, the Feast of Flies degrades the land and fosters corruption. With anti-Christian elements added, the Sabbat manages to degrade two sacraments at once — a devil's bargain, indeed! Thus, it's become a mainstay of Infernal cults across Europe and the Holy Land.

During a Feast, demonic spirits rise to meet their servants. Soon the elements rise as well — storms, great fires, earthquakes, even occasional volcanoes follow in the Sabbat's wake. From dusk till dawn, any evil spell is considered casual in the rite's vicinity. Even after dawn washes over the land, evil traces linger; more often than not, a Sabbat site becomes unhallowed ground, tainted by the torrents of degradation the Infernalists unleash. Trees, stones, even simple dirt become dark Tass if they come from a place where evil meets after sundown.

- **Sex:** Carnality is a sin, at least as far as the God of the Book is concerned. Infernalists love *anything* sinful, of course, and sex is often the most entertaining sin of all. Most rituals feature carnality of the most perverse kinds imaginable... and considering the possibilities allowed by Life, Time and Spirit magick those kinds can be pretty perverse! Sex also provides a wonderful focus for charms, shapeshiftings and influence spells; after all, sensuality connects man with his bestial nature, and that link provides fertile ground (pun intended) for the Black Arts.

- **Torture:** Agony provides great focus. To the followers of Lilith, torture is an introduction to the Mysteries and a celebration of their power. Other diabolical cults prefer to cause their *victims* pain, although some dark Pagan sects and Nephandi display their courage and devotion to the Void through endless creative tortures; the priests of Ganzir are said to climb into cages filled with flaming cats, then prophecy in between their screams.

Excruciation, self-inflicted or otherwise, breaks down the conscious mind and reworks both flesh and soul into new and malleable shapes. Infernalists use it as punishment, preparation and pastime in one; with their magicks, they can prolong the fun past mortal limits. Even vampires shudder when confronted with a magus who knows the arts of pain — he clearly likes his work, and brings a little bit of Hell to earth.

Incantamentos Malevoli: The Warlock's Arsenal

Magicians perform miracles through personal contracts made with demons.

— Thomas Aquinas, the *Sententiae*

For those who Awaken to the Midnight Path, the gift of True Magick offers an array of outrageous powers. Since

they pay a steep price for their talents, most Infernalists make a point of using magick as often as possible. *Discretion and subtlety are for cowards*, they proclaim. *A true wizard lets the world know what he is— and what he can do!* (Not surprisingly, few diabolists escape the Scourge for long, but hey, you might as well have fun before you go!)

Most Fallen Ones specialize in scrying, charms, transformations, necromancy, summonings and various forms of spirit magick. Since many of these spells have already been detailed and collected in the **Sorcerers Crusade** rulebook (pp. 255-262, plus the chart on p. 241), it would be redundant to include variations of them here. Some spells, however, are specialized enough to merit a bit of description in this book. Good sorcerers may employ such weaveries too, but rarely without some risk to the soul. Like roses that bloom in the Pit, such spells are wondrous flowers touched by a more than a hint of malice.

An Hour in Hell (••• Mind, ••• Time)

Masters of torture or bliss take this secret straight from Hell. With it, a warlock prolongs a sensation — painful, pleasurable, or both — for an endless moment, then amplifies it beyond the point of madness. A simple touch and a whispered invocation sets the spell in motion; from that point, the next sensation the Infernalist inflicts will echo within the subject's mind. Even if his skin remains whole, he'll feel as if he were trapped in some unholy reverie. Combined with skillful seductions or torments, the effect can be hellish indeed.

[Time magick “hangs” the sensation in the victim's mind long after the touch has faded, and Mind locks her senses around it in an indefinite spiral. Depending on the caster's roll, the sensation could last for hours or even days. Although another powerful sensation can overwhelm the first and break the spell, diabolists often start the **Hour**, then leave the victim in chains until either the magick fades or the victim's mind snaps.

[It's hard to concentrate when you're locked in pain or ecstasy; a character who wants to resist the spell can make a Willpower roll to push the sensation aside long enough to focus on something else. The roll's difficulty depends on the stimulus: a minor touch is difficulty 4, intense pleasure or pain is difficulty 9, and everything else falls in between. Note that making the roll does not break the spell — only a sensation that's more powerful than the original stimulus can do that. Considering most Fallen Ones' carnal skills, finding a sensation that strong may be challenging indeed.]

Balefire (••• Forces, ••• Spirit, •• Prime)

Summoning the literal flames of Malefias, a Fallen One can weave a ball of flame that burns with unholy ferocity. Like Greek Fire, this spiritual flame cannot be extinguished by normal means — it must consume its fuel source before it gutters out. Balefire is not truly “fire”

in the elemental sense; rather, it's a scalding green blob of hellish ephemera channeled directly from an Infernal Realm. Primal cultists call it “the shit of the Wyrm,” and sometimes bathe in it unto death just to perish amid such a glorious revelation.

[A sickly green, napalm-like substance, Balefire combines elemental Forces, dark Prime Essence and hellish ephemera into one lethal package. When it hits flesh, it burns like normal fire, but cannot be soaked at all unless a victim knows the rare secret of pure healing (Life 3/Prime 2, preferably with some holy rite included). The flames burn until all flammable materials have been consumed. If a victim survives, his injuries take twice the usual length of time to heal, and leave horrible scars.]

Endless Parchment (••• Life, •• Prime)

The witch-priests of Ur concocted this foul rite, both as a punishment and as a source of writing material. A victim, spread-eagled for skinning, is prepared with unguents, incense and perfumed water. Minor demons are invoked (though not actually summoned), and the victim is flayed alive. As the Infernalist peels skin away, new skin grows over the raw muscles, enabling the Fallen One to flay the victim again, and again, and again....

[The systems behind this spell are obvious. We present it more for its horror value than for in-game utility.]

Satan's Song (••• Prime, •• Mind, •• Forces, •• Spirit; possibly with ••• Forces and •• Life/•• Matter added)

Old Scratch is known for his skill as a fiddler. When he calls the tune, winds rise, skeletons dance and demons come from all around to hear their master play. With this fell weavery, a witch with some musical talent can cause a similar stir.

By playing or singing in a suitable place (a festival, party, Sabbat, graveyard), the Infernalist opens a channel for malefic forces. The effects build slowly, with the music; as the tempo increases and the song grows wilder shadows thicken, evil spirits drift in, and all the darkest passions of the audience are roused to a fever pitch. A really skillful singer can literally raise bones or corpses to join this *danse macabre*, ripping open graves and whipping the living and the dead into a demonic frenzy. Even after **Satan's Song** ends, the aura of wickedness could persist for days to come!

[Music — played with gusto — provides the focus for this enchantment. Powerful Prime magicks raise Quintessence (preferably tainted Aesfotedia) to fuel the spell, creating a temporary Cray of sinful intent. While Forces Arts deepen shadows and strengthen winds throughout the area, Spirit magick calls nearby demons to the song. A Mind magick spins hallucinations through the audience and knocks their inhibitions out the door; this last effect isn't mind control *per se*, but it stirs up whatever lusts

the listeners might have already felt. Considering that attendees at a Black Sabbath or grand masque are already feeling frisky to begin with, the **Song** can cause mayhem of a rather dramatic kind.

[This spell is cast as an extended ritual (see the rulebook, p. 228); the longer the musician plays, the further the **Song**'s influence spreads. In game terms, the Infernalist makes several extended rolls against difficulty 6. As the successes pile up, the spell spreads out, engulfing everyone and everything in the area.

Successes Area/ People Affected

1-3	One or two people within 20' or so
4-6	10 people within roughly 50'
7-10	Everyone within 100' (clearing)
11-15	Everyone within 500' (town square)
16+	Everyone within 1000'+ (small town)

[So long as the musician neither falters nor botches the roll, the **Song** continues. This lesser version is usually casual, but will probably bring the local clergy and witch-hunters running.

[The advanced version of the **Song** literally tears graves open and sets their contents dancing. Demons with possession powers often "borrow" these whirling corpses, raising a small army of cannibal corpses or animated skeletons (see Chapter IV). Granted, the music will probably put them in a rather festive mood — for demons. One need only imagine the necrophiliac possibilities.... This *danse macabre* requires a difficulty 7 roll, as its effects are extraordinarily vain.

[Both versions of this spell leave the performance area tainted by sinister Resonance. Anyone who's sensitive to Infernal or mystickal energies will know that something powerful transpired here long after the **Song** itself fades away. Assume that this Resonance lingers for one day per success; if something *really* outrageous happens (Storyteller's discretion), the taint may linger for weeks or even months. Such potent **Songs** often consecrate (or, more properly, *desecrate*) locations for later Black Sabbats. Never underestimate the power of a song!]

Soul Cloak (••• Spirit, •• Entropy, •• Mind, •• Prime)

This complex but vital trick draws a false aura across the warlock's soul-colors. While a haze of kindly hue shimmers in the air around him, the true, sickly colors of his depraved soul remain hidden. Only a superior magus, or one with True Faith, can penetrate the disguise. Few people are willing or able to look that closely. To cloak his soul, an Infernalist must meditate upon the desired impression, weave designs in the air around him, and recite a prayer of innocence — backwards.

[With Spirit and Prime magick, the warlock "constructs" a false aura that fits his purposes, then leaves it "burning." The Entropic and Mind elements scramble a

watcher's perceptions and give her the false impression. Like most malefic magicks, this spell is utterly useless against someone with True Faith; all others need to make a Perception + Awareness roll, difficulty 9, to uncover the deception. See **Read the Soul** in the rulebook for further details.]

Witchwind (•••• Forces, ••• Mind, •• Prime)

A literally ill wind blows when a witch conjures this potent weavery. Tying a series of 13 knots in a hemp rope, she whispers curses and bad wishes, then dunks the rope in the blood of a black cat and three slain murderers. When the sorceress unties the knots, heavy winds blow up from the south. Soon storm clouds and lightning rake the land, washing it in sticky rain and clinging mud.

But the *maleficia* doesn't end there. As the storm blows through an area, the people within its fury begin to bicker, complain and fight. All their sinful thoughts begin to bubble up and over; soon, brawling, fornication, rape and even murder become the order of the day. By the time the sun breaks through and the clouds disperse, the poison inside has seared hearts. The **Witchwind** doesn't compel anyone to perform atrocities, but most people seem only a step or two away from sin even on their best days. The storm merely unlocks what has been hidden and scatters it like leaves in a tempest.

[A long casting sets the **Witchwind** blowing. Prime and Forces Arts conjure the storm, while Mind unlatches inhibitions in the people below. Essentially, this weavery becomes a plot device; the storm requires at least 15 successes (difficulty 7, if the Storyteller cares to roll dice for the character) and lasts for an hour or so. Anyone within a mile or two must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) to resist any temptation that comes their way while the **Witchwind** rages. Most mortals are not strong enough to hold their tempers long, and stubborn folk may have their hands full coping with the chaos that results.]

Soul-Forging (•••• or ••••• Spirit, ••• Matter, ••• Prime, plus ••• Forces, ••• Spirit, •• Prime to create the forge-fire)

A specialty of Hellsmiths and other sinister artisans: Trapping souls or dark spirits in matter, the Infernalist forges a Device or Talisman tainted with angry ephemera. Naturally, it's extraordinarily unpleasant for the ghost or spirit involved — even a demon, used to punishment, is said to scream as its forged into an object. Regardless of the brutality (often *because of it*), a Hellsmith takes great pride in such work. Rumors claim the Art derives from the hideous craft of Stygian soulsmiths, and was used to build the great cities of the Underworld — possibly even the gates of Ganzir and Hell itself.

Essentially, Soul-Forging involves conjuring a spirit (ghost, minor demon, Bane, etc.) at the forge, forging it into superheated metaphysical flames, and melding it with strange alloys until matter and ephemera become one. By

INFERNALISM: THE PATH OF SCREAMS

in this process, Hellsmiths craft weapons, machines, amulets and even buildings; the great temple of Ereskigal in Bhât was supposedly made of glowing black stones forged by artisans who revered the goddess, and those stones were said to have been hammered from the souls of several thousand human sacrifices. The magick obliterates the spirit's original form, at least temporarily, but a bit of its consciousness still remains. Soul-forged items whisper and cry out occasionally, and carry a definite air of malevolence about them.

This Art is not easy to master; a true Hellsmith must be both an artisan and a spirit-magus, able to shape both ores and souls with great skill. Stoking the forge-fire with obscene rites (that often involve live burnt offerings and corpse-ashes), the Infernalist prepares his workshop with special tools — a soul-forged hammer and tongs, buckets of Tass water, a bellows enchanted with Forces Arts, and so on. Drawing a pentacle around the forge-fire, the Hellsmith calls up the spirits and binds them within the flames. Smelting specially prepared ores over the forge, the smith draws his "helpers" into the metal and gradually works them together. The process takes hours; although most Hellsmiths use apprentices, it takes a callous person to withstand the piteous wails of the soul-forged spirits. After the ore cools somewhat, it can be worked into intricate designs. Diabolically

cal connoisseurs love artworks and mechanical toys crafted by Hellsmiths, and pay very high prices for them. Names like Black Michael of London, Theodosius of Rome, Jakob Sturms of Hartz, Gillanté of Damascus, Wan Fang of Bejing and Ja'afar of Istanbul echo in the braggadocio of wealthy Infernalists across the civilized world.

It has been said that souls make the most delicate yet durable materials possible. Some artisans employ similar rites to create tapestries, clothing and even paint from distilled spirit-stuff. Although most ephemeral items return gradually to their spiritual state, a good soul-forged object can last years or even decades. If you can bear the moaning of the trapped spirits (and the inevitable curses they bestow), the creations of Hell-bound artisans are exquisite indeed.

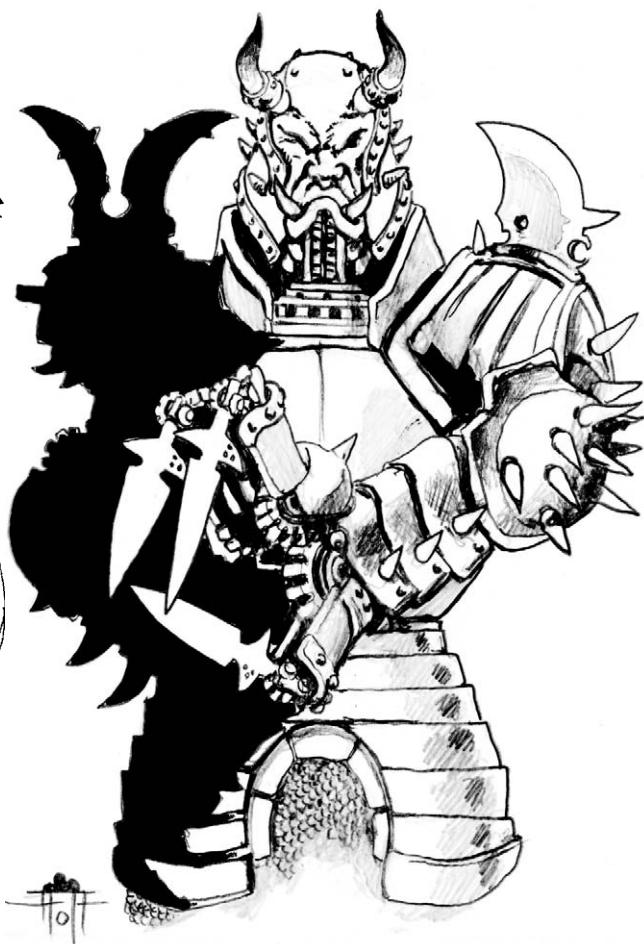
[Spirit, Prime and Forces stoke the fire; more Spirit, Matter and Prime mingle the materials together and make them pliable enough for the Hellsmith (or other artisan) to employ. See "Summoning and Warding" and "Magickal Devices, Fetishes and Talismans" for system details about spirit conjuration and Talisman construction.

[In game terms, **Soul-Forging** combines a Device and a fetish into one; the Hellsmith makes a Device, but draws a spirit entity into it during the process. Most often, this involves Spirit 4, although an "advanced" form uses Spirit 5 to actually yank the soul from a living being and imprison it in the object. Any form of spirit (short of a god or major angel or devil) may be forged this way, although a powerful entity can be extraordinarily difficult to trap and forge.

[The actual forging process demands a specially prepared smithery (see above) and an extended series of Dexterity + Crafts (blacksmithing) rolls. The difficulty of those rolls depends on the "materials" and the end product.

Source	Difficulty
Minor spirits (servelings, Gafflings, "young" ghosts)	6
Average spirits (minor demons, strong Banes, living human souls or ghosts)	8
Potent Spirits (servitor demons, powerful Banes, night-folk, ancient ghosts)	10
Object	Successes
Simple (spear-head, wheel, goblet)	five
Complex (simple tapestry, sword, jewelry)	eight-10
Elaborate (suit of armor, high-quality sword, torture machine)	10-15
Masterwork	15+

[If the Storyteller wants to actually make rolls for the process, each roll reflects an hour of work. A botch at any



part of the **Forging** ruins the item — the spirits rebel and deform the object, and the artisan must begin again.

[At the Storyteller's option, a **Soul-Forged** item may have special *minor* powers based on the spirits involved; an angry ghost might make a sword cut especially deeply (+1 Health Level of damage), for example. Any other magickal Effects must be built into the item at the time of **Forging** (again, see the rulebook for details).]

[Trapped spirits are not happy, and they curse whatever item they inhabit. In story terms, a **Soul-Forged** work has breathtaking beauty and power, but brings misfortune down on whomever owns it. Sometimes, if a particularly willful spirit or ghost was imprisoned in the object, it may influence or even command the item's owner. Voices begin to whisper when the owner is all alone, and they suggest terrible things.... In game terms, the Storyteller may have the owner's player make occasional Willpower rolls (difficulty 7) or succumb to temptation. If she fails a roll, the Fallen One may commit some rash, self-destructive act; if she botches, she'll immediately do what the spirits command. Even if she succeeds, however, the voices will taunt her whenever she comes near the item — many a rich Infernalist has been hounded to death by spirits trapped within his art collection....]

Storm of Crows (••••• Life, ••• Connection, •• Prime, • Mind)

When pressed to flee, a very skilled Infernalist can suddenly split into a flock of smaller animals — crows, rats, cats, even spiders or flies — and scatter. Each tiny beast becomes a tiny “self” that contains the warlock's full consciousness; he can see, hear and act normally in many different places at once. If one of his manifestations is caught, the Infernalist can make it disappear or crumble into dust while returning his consciousness to the other “selves...” unless, of course, a stronger magus captures one of the beasts first. In this case, the enemy can pluck some fur or feathers and connect herself to the warlock.

The enchantment demands some piece of the creature the Infernalist wants to become (a rat skull, raven feather, and so on). Most sorcerers who know this spell wear jewelry made of animal remains. A quick invocation triggers the change; suddenly the man breaks into a flock of beasts. The effect is, shall we say, unnerving. By the time onlookers have recovered from the shock, the Infernalist is long gone.

[With Life magick, the Fallen One breaks his body into a handful of smaller ones; Prime allows him to manifest these bodies and keep them alive in several different locations, while Mind and Connection keep his consciousness tied together.

[So long as the warlock's “pieces” remain free, he can escape clean away. If another wizard snares one of the animals, the Infernalist must best the captor in an initiative roll. If the warlock wins, he can make the animal disappear

in a cloud of brimstone; if not, the other magus can use the captive as a bridge between herself and the warlock's scattered “selves.” Any spell cast upon the captive affects the Infernalist in every one of his manifestations. If he's wise, the Infernalist will use his next action to disappear; as long as the enemy holds one of the warlock's lesser “selves,” she can work magicks on them all, wherever they might be.]

Crepundiae Gravis: Demonic Toys

*The art of necessities is strange,
That can make vile things precious.*

— William Shakespeare, King Lear

Compared to the bizarre secrets of the Qlippoth and the horrors of soul-smithing and living parchment, the diabolical odds and ends an Infernalist treasures seem almost insignificant. Even so, a wise workman has many tools. In this case, a few of those tools can be as deadly as the artisan himself....

• Witchward

Arete 2, Quintessence N/A, Cost 2

A warlock must be forever on his guard. Thankfully, this simple yet effective Talisman allows him to quite literally watch his own back. A Connection spell grants the owner a 360+ field of senses; although he cannot actually see in all directions at once, he can sense someone coming up behind him and react accordingly. Since treachery is common in all lands, this Talisman takes many forms, from polished golden medallions to twists of sage-grass sprinkled with herbs, wax seals inscribed with demon-names, or bone-jewelry that whispers when a threat draws near.

[Different Witchwards counter different threats. Essentially, this Talisman gives its owner one of the following magickal senses: panoramic senses (Connection), an instinct for noting disorder (Entropy), life sensing (Life), an empathic field (Mind), Quintessence flux sensing (Prime) or spirit warning (Spirit). In all cases, the ‘Ward’s wearer gets a normal Perception + Awareness roll to note things few people would be able to sense.]

•• Flying Unguent

Arete 2, Quintessence 10, Cost 4

A vile concoction of baby fat, herbs (belladonna, aconite, mandrake and others), water and often blood, this Unguent allows a sorceress to fly. Applied by moonlight (it will not work by day), the foul-smelling stuff works its way into the witch's pores and opens her senses to the Invisible World. Guided by the visions she sees, the Fallen One defies God's law and lifts into the air. By dawn, the Unguent's

power fades, although it may be prepared ahead of time and sealed in jars away from sunlight until it needed.

[This Unguent, which takes several minutes to apply to naked skin, serves a twofold purpose: It lets the Infernalist fly, and helps her find her way to and from her destination. Once in flight, the witch moves at roughly 10' per turn (15 miles per hour, or thereabouts). The poultice does not work on inanimate objects, clothing or armor, nor will it allow a sorceress to carry a great load (70 lbs.+) through the air. Each point of Quintessence represents one application of the Unguent, and the Background Cost covers one large batch.]

[Another classic witch's tool, the **Flying Broom or Wand**, employs the same systems as this Talisman, and costs the same amount. A Broom, of course, does not deplete itself — instead, the Quintessence reflects a mystick "charge" that must be renewed by sinister rituals each month.]

◆◆ Grimoires

Arete N/A, Quintessence N/A, Cost 4

These infamous "black books" distill the essence of the Pit through the written word. Bound in ominous leather covers (many of which obviously come from human "cattle") and filled with odd glyphs and strange designs, a grimoire is far more than just a book. Within its pages, mysteries are revealed in esoteric language. A reader who manages to plumb the book's obscure symbolism and unearthly designs learns just a little bit more about Heaven, Hell and the denizens of both.

This instruction is not as easy as it sounds. Madness lies on each page of any grimoire worth the name. Some of these books feature living diagrams, foldout pages, captured winds, and other uncanny phenomena. And then there are the revelations themselves — devil-summoning rites, the True Names of angels, corpse-poetry and brain-crushing metaphysics. A person who reads a grimoire is at the very least disturbed; one who actually *understands* it is a step or two closer to insanity.

In game terms, a grimoire resembles the Library Background. With one, a sorcerer may save experience points when she tries to learn (or add to) any of the following Traits: *Cosmology*, *Enigmas*, *Lore* (spirit), *Metaphysics* (any), or *Occult*. If a player's character reads a grimoire, her player rolls the book's Rank (difficulty 8). For each success, the character saves one experience point from the cost of the Trait. This only works once per Trait (you can only learn so much from the same book), but can be used more than once while learning different Traits. Any character can

use a grimoire, but non-Infernalists are apt to be disturbed by what they read.

Storyteller's Note: As an optional rule, certain Infernal works might send the reader into an involuntary Supplicium (see pages 68-70). Even the "milder" works make for disturbing reading; a character who peruses one might have to make a Willpower roll (difficulty is Rank + 5) to resist evil impulses, nightmares or unholy ruminations.

No true grimoire is printed on a press. Each one is hand-written, often with notes and cautions from the scribe. Hence, each grimoire is unique; even different "editions" of the same book betray variations. Some infamous grimoires include:

- **Akaa' Et Nuon Ta** ("Cry of the World"): Incredibly obscure text, translated into Akkadian, Greek and Latin but derived from a far older language. Vivid illustrations spring to "life" and enact dramas of unnerving perversity; if understood, these shadow-plays reveal the successions of past worlds and the eventual fate of this one. Rank 5.
- **The Black Bible:** An infamous anti-Christian text, noted for its "inverted gospels" and proud Luciferianism. Rank 1.
- **The Black Book of Manu:** A collection of esoteric Persian litanies, passed down by Angra Manyu to the first magus and describing the enigma of the Absolute in eerily poetic language. Rank 3.
- **The Codex Licentia** ("Book of License"): An elaborate Latin parable describing the Path of Screams (see Chapter II). Rank 3.
- **The Greater Key of Solomon:** The essential text for summoning, warding against, and binding spirits of all temperaments. Reputedly authored by Solomon the Wise, but wildly inconsistent from "edition" to "edition." Rank 2-4, depending on "edition."
- **The Grimoire of Honorius:** A Christian catalogue of Fallen angels and evil spirits, complete with "living" illustrations and instructions on how to raise and bind devils for one's bidding. Rank 3.
- **The Grmorium Verum** ("True Grimoire"): Detailed account of various demons, their provinces, and the rites to summon them. Rank 3.
- **The Lemegeton (The Lesser Key of Solomon):** Complete descriptions of Judeo-Christian demons and angels, the rites for summoning them, and the correspondences involved. Rank 2-4, depending on "edition."
- **The Liber Labyrinthus** ("Book of the Labyrinth"): A compendium of demented and obscene Wyrm-lore, including the names, correspondences and rites of the Urge-spirits of ultimate corruption (see Appendix). Rank 5.

The Sebel-el-Mafouh Whash ("Path of the Voracious Beast")

Rank 2-4.

Unlike the other books on this list, the *Path* is a description of Infernal servitors compiled with an eye toward fighting them, not joining them. Assembled by two Batini who went by the (probably fictitious) names of Abbah Rabbiniath and "Frater" Decimus, this text describes the vicious era known as the Devil-King Age, the struggle waged to end it, and the often bloodthirsty methods that an Inquisitor must employ against a Satanic enemy. Although the book specifically addresses the Batini's old foes the Nephandi, the *Path* and its Latin translations apply almost as well to most demon-cults. It may have even inspired the infamous *Malleus Maleficarum*; Kramer and Sprenger are sure to have seen one of the bastard copies of the book!

In its Latin, Christianized versions, the so-called *Malleus Nefandorum* emphasizes the hierarchies of the Nephantic host and their Infernal allies, and stresses demon-hunting techniques. The original version features these elements also, but addresses them through a haze of allegory and symbolism, as well as a deep reverence for the Muslim faith. (Batini credit the Prophet with turning the tide against their old adversaries.) Latin versions dispense with the esoterica and Islamic overtones in favor of a pragmatic (and very Christian) approach to Satanic influence. The differences can be profound; during the Dark Fantastic era, no less than 50 radically different versions of the basic text exist in Covenant libraries and private archives! Some of these are remarkably close to the original source (which has been preserved by Batini scholars in an underground Cairo sanctuary). Most are loose translation, and a few are obvious (to the educated eye) forgeries created by the Nephandi themselves. The latter include several mystick snares—chants that summon servitor demons, misleading information, and just plain gibberish. Even the gibberish can be fatal, though; one sect of Chakravanti was nearly exterminated by a titanic manifestation called, improbably enough, Gjquipp'l Haadba. The survivors learned an important lesson: never chant the contents of a book unless you know for certain what they mean!

- **The Second Key of Ablamerch:** Written by a Babylonian astrologer, this text explores the distant star-demons and their influence upon the earth. Rank 4.

- **The Six Seals of Ganzir:** A Babylonian text translated into Latin and Arabic, the *Six Seals* details six powerful demons and gives the rites for summoning, binding, and dismissing them. Often features six bound winds that turn the pages for you. Rank 4.

- **The Liber Spiritum (The Book of Spirits):** Actually one of any number of unique books — every *Liber Spiritum* is unique, inscribed by a sorcerer throughout his life. Each left-hand page contains the name and seal of a particular spirit; each right-hand page features the summoning ritual for that spirit. Once called, an entity "autographs" the Book, and can be recalled whenever the reader desires. Obviously, such Books can be quite potent if written by a powerful magus. Rank 1-5.

◆◆◆ The Black Cauldron

Arete 3, Quintessence N/A, Cost 6

When there's brewing to be done, nothing quite beats an enchanted cauldron and a mystickal fire. Cast from mysterious alloys (not true iron!) and smelted with Aesfotedia, this gigantic pot is large enough to boil a man alive, yet light enough to be dragged around by a single withered hag. When the fire has been stoked and the contents have begin to seethe, the Black Cauldron remains cool to the touch. If emptied, this vat can even fly through the air, carrying its owner to the Sabbat for her monthly revelries.

[With the exception of flight, the Cauldron's powers involve story elements, not game systems. With a snap of the witch's fingers, the Cauldron can fill with water or empty itself into as many as 13 different jugs; the liquids simply fly through the air and pour themselves into the containers in a grossly vulgar display of magick. Even more outlandishly, the Cauldron can fly at speeds of roughly 20 miles per hour — faster than nearly any form of Renaissance transportation! Naturally, this Hell-blessed treasure works only at night; if church bells ring while the witch is in flight, the spell breaks and both sorceress and Cauldron plummet to a messy doom.]

◆◆◆ Demon Mask

Arete 3, Quintessence 15, Cost 6

A ceremonial mask of obvious antiquity, this frightening fetish contains the essence of a cannibal demon. When the wearer performs the proper ritual, he becomes, in many ways, a channel for that evil spirit. After donning the Mask (often while crooning an eerie, wordless tribute to the darker forces), the Fallen One begins to dance. As

his steps grow wilder and wilder, the Mask melds with the wearer's face. Soon, his hands grow talons, his skin roughens like tree bark, and his intellect fades into a singular bloodlust. Suddenly he springs like a jungle cat and tears the nearest living thing into screaming rags. For the next hour or so, the Infernalist plays host to the cannibal spirit; when the bewitchment fades, the spirit often leaves a scared pattern across the wearer's face — a hideous mark that proclaims, "Mine!"

Although it's best known among the night-shamans of the Nhanga, this uncanny treasure has variations all over the world — elaborate jade disguises, skin-and-bone beast-faces, theatrical masques (popular among European *decadanti*) and unnerving Tibetan devil-masks are only a few of the possibilities.

[Essentially, this fetish invokes self-possession (see the rulebook, pp. 261-262). Once the evil spirit has entered him, the Infernalist gets the following "improvements":

- +2 dots in Strength
- +1 dot in Stamina
- Claws and huge fangs (Strength + 2 damage, difficulty 6 to employ)

[He also flies into frenzy. Anything he catches, he can eat without ill effects, even if it happens to be rotting, foul or even undead. Although the wearer may choose his targets if he makes a Willpower roll (difficulty 7), he usually won't care to.

[After an hour or two, the demon and the wearer both tire; until that time, the Infernalist indulges himself in a flesh-feast of sickening proportions. Once the demon has awakened, no force on earth can remove the Mask from the wearer's face; when the evil spirit retires for the night, it leaves permanent disfigurements behind. The Mask wearer's Appearance drops to 0, and anyone who knows demon lore will recognize that the wearer has been dancing with unclean spirits. It's also worth noting that most Demon Masks are cursed. Ill fates befall the owner of such a thing, whether he puts it on or not.]

(unique) Khalil aba-Malek, The Iron Satan

Arete 8, Quintessence (unknown), Cost N/A

The last and worst of the Arabian Devil-kings, al-Malek al-Majun ibn Iblis, was reputed to have been an artisan of unsurpassed imagination. It is said that his greatest creation, the Iron Satan, slew over a score of magi and several hundred of their followers before the Devil-king himself was brought low. According to legend, flames consumed the machine — a titanic monstrosity of scorpion-like design — as it carried its dead architect to Hell. Its metallic skin supposedly blazed like a falling star as the Satan melted the sand nearby to molten glass. To this day, the site of

the battle remains barren — a vast expanse of glass amid a sea of blood-red sand, skeletal tree-stumps and blackened stone. Of the Iron Satan, there is no sign.

Or is there?

In recent years, scholars among the Batini, Artificers and Sahajiya have collected reports that the Iron Satan has returned. Although it was last seen nearly 700 years ago, this malevolent contraption is said to be in perfect working order. Surely, demons possess the Device, which was named "the Friend and Son of the King" by the darkly humorous al-Malek al-Majun. These fell spirits have apparently preserved the working parts of this elaborate machine, protecting it from the ravages of sand and centuries. To mask its approach, these evil djinn scream up great winds. In the resulting sandstorms, the Iron Satan comes, devastates the land before it, then returns to Hell before it can be harmed. In its wake, many hundreds have died. Both the Council and the Conventions have put their agents in the Muslim Lands on guard. Both want the Infernal thing destroyed, but so far neither has been able to find it, much less fight it. And in his Pit, Iblis mocks their helplessness....



[In game terms, the “Friend of the King” is a possessed Device, self-animated and protected by minor demons. Despite its clearly supernatural abilities, the war machine appears to be a mechanical contrivance of incredible complexity. With gargantuan swords, it sweeps the landscape as harsh winds hurl sand in all directions. Anyone in its path must evade not only the slashing blades, but the blinding sand as well. People within the maelstrom add 3 to all difficulties, including magick-casting ones.]

[Essentially, Khalil aba-Malek is a clockwork automaton (see **Crusade Lore**, pp. 23 and 25) with the following Traits:

Speed: 8 **Armor:** 7 **Weapons:** huge blades (12 dice, difficulty 8); sandstorm (see above); fire “breath” (8 dice aggravated in a 60' stream, difficulty 5, 10 uses), spiked legs (4 dice, difficulty 7) **Strength:** 10

[Although the machine is vain beyond belief, it seems to function very well in the mortal world — for short periods of time, at least. It has been said that the Iron Satan walks across the Gauntlet at will, but that devout prayers to Allah can stop it in its tracks. If the latter were true, however, Khalil aba-Malek wouldn’t provide much of a threat. As it is, “he” seems nearly invulnerable. Perhaps only the prayers of a truly Faithful Muslim may end the reign of the Devil-King’s last creation.]

The Dance of Lost Souls: Sects and Cults

he practice of Satanism became rife in every country. During this era the minds of men as a whole appear to have become clouded and debased, so that all cruelty and wickedness held and incredible sway, life was of no account, torture a joy to inflict, power was to the strong and the rich, and lust and violence went unchecked. No man could look with certainty for charity and humanity from his fellows, and a woman even less.

— Rollo Ahmed, *The Black Art*

It would be all too easy — and too comforting — to say that all Infernalists believe the same thing and belong to one large group. People would *like* to believe that’s true. After all, it’s easier to heal a broken bone than a cancer. But the Infernal followers are legion, and their patrons wear many masks. Among their ranks, one might find Luciferians who identify with the Fallen Angel’s plight; Bahari who tend Lilith’s garden of pain; Tantrik alghori who consider rape a sacrament; and devotees of Chongo, spirit of fiery rage. Some are more common than others

in the Dark Fantastic world, but as the Batini scribes discovered when they compiled the *Sebil-el-Mafouh Whash*, the Devil has a thousand heads. To focus on one is to be bitten by the others.

Until recently, large Infernal cults were rare. Although whole cities might be dominated by a witch-priest or three, most demonic supplicants were (and still are) common folk who bowed before a devilish altar, nothing more. The average cult or coven usually featured one or two demonistic magi and 11 or 12 un-Awakened mortals with a touch of talent and a taste for perversity. The deeper levels of the Black Arts are too esoteric for most mortals to grasp, let alone follow, and so true Infernalists were often individuals who pursued their Arts in relative isolation.

No longer. As cultures join hands and cross swords, small sects of diabolists find new converts, allies and dupes. In the last century or two, Fallen cults have spread their influence like stains across the civilized world. The passion and violence of this age provide fertile soil for satanic gardens. And so, Infernal cults pop up like weeds, strangling one another as their members rush toward the Void.

In Europe alone there are dozens of cults: the surviving *Jacquerie*, with their secret Luciferian devotions; the *Order of the Dragon*, which claims Christian piety as an excuse for butchery and sorcery; the *Grove of Mars*, a dark Roman warrior cult; and the raging hordes of *Tezghul the Insane*, who follow no single creed except for the extermination of all that stands before them. Add to these the African *Nhanga* (cannibalistic corrupters), *Chisonzi* (“Locusts” who strip the soul bare along with the land), and *Bhtgha* (cultists of the Jackal); the Cathayan *Seven Jade Society* (flesh-eating dragon-priests) and *Wu-Keng* (transvestite shaman-wizards), and other bizarre sects — Indian Kaliites, Tibetan frost-witches, Lithuanian devil-fuckers, Chaldean astrologers — and you see the true scope of Infernal agencies on Earth.

Certain sects, however, are especially influential in the Dark Fantastic world. Some provide active opposition for Council and Daedalean magi, while others hover in the background and pick off stragglers in the Ascension War. These diabolical cults and subcultures include....

The Bahari

Like their Patrona Lilith, these diabolists consider agony a sacrament. To the Bahari, who cultivate lush gardens of strange and terrible fruit, pain provides the key to Enlightenment — the greater the pain, the more intense the eventual revelations. On their Path of Screams, they torture both themselves and others, hoping to inherit the legacy of power that Lilith discovered during her lonesome agonies in the Endless Waste. The Mysteries they inevitably uncover lend credence to their Art.



A primal cult based in dark mother-worship, the Bahari employ a rude sign language of evocative glyphs and plant-based symbols. Although they seem to have originated in Mesopotamia before recorded history, their philosophy of pain as a liberating, empowering force has spread to cults as far apart as Tibet and the Scottish Highlands. Despite the sect's feminine image, Bahari can be of either sex. The women among them, it's worth noting, do not accept the passive roles granted them by human society. More often than not, they lash out in bursts of appalling violence, then disappear into the night.

Bahari congregate in "patches" of three to seven members; some remain in contact with other sects through "roots" — vagabond messengers who live under the open sky and preach the gospel of pain wherever they go. Despite (or perhaps because of) a lack of organization or central authority, the Lilith cults have a frightening amount of influence; Bahari have allies and adherents in many a court, grove and manor.

Although all Bahari consider themselves fruits of the Dark Mother's garden, they practice a bewildering array of magicks; some preserve the ancient rituals of Greece or Babylon, while others invoke dark Celtic gods in between their invocations to the Mother. Lilith, under other names, seems especially strong in the distant east; some Bahari claim that Kali and Tou Mu are simply aspects of the Dark Mother in distant lands.

Lilith's followers gravitate toward elemental spirits rather than classical devils; even so, most Bahari revere Lucifer, who was supposedly the Dark Mother's truest love. Magickally, they prefer charms and elemental spells to devil-summoning and obvious *maleficia*. If she can, a Ba'ham will entice a promising initiate into a web of pain; if the

newcomer can see past his agony, his eyes open to the glory of the Dark Mother and he eagerly sets out on her Path. Among her worshippers, Lilith counts vampires (including the mysterious Lamia bloodline), magi (including many Verbena), un-Awakened mortals, and the occasional ghost or shapeshifter. When questioned, these Infernalists make a disturbing amount of sense; if tortured, they soar into ecstatic trances that even death cannot dispel.

K'wahhll

More a type of Infernalist than an organized cult, the "Howlers of the Waste" embody the bliss at the end of Creation. Demented beyond humanity, these deviants thrash around in freakish degradation, often eating their own flesh just because they *can*. Although they often wander alone in the wilderness, K'wahhll sometimes settle in warrens beneath cities and mountains; there, they breed like human maggots, feasting on anything too weak to escape — including one another.

Few K'wahhll are lucid enough to make conversation. Those who can speak express a fond desire to fuck the sky itself and give birth to dark stars and shrieking planets. Dormant in sunlight, they awaken each dusk and flog themselves with whips made of dried entrails and mulched tree bark. When hungry, these savages hunt in small packs and eat their prey alive while laughing prayers to the moon.

The Howlers have no use for organization or law. When a number of them get together, all would-be leaders fight each other until only one remains. That one dominates the survivors until he either dies or goes too crazy to function. Very few K'wahhll speak coherent human tongues, but they all seem to communicate through an instinctual empathic bond. What words they *do* know seem more appropriate to some Egyptian necropolis than to a Renaissance city-state. Hence, the revelations that brought them to this state are often lost to the Void.

K'wahhll worship at many different altars; some revere the great Wyrm and its Urge-spirits, while others bow before devilish Patroni or obscure gods. Magickally, they're obviously Marauds (or deeply degraded "normal" magi) whose wild Arts seem to flow from the air itself. Despite their apparent ignorance and total lack of tools or discipline, K'wahhll seem to be excellent magi. A lot of sorcerers would like to know how these lunatics craft their spells — and how a saner magus might emulate their example.

And that's where the "sect's" power comes from: despite their degradation, despite their total lack of any form of civilized humanity, these Infernalists possess immense personal power. While the rest of the world seems to be trying to escape its primal mire, the K'wahhll wallow in it. From their pits of blood and madness, they see the Void in unadulterated splendor. And from amid their grandiose

towers and arcane libraries, some wizards wonder if the screaming madmen have the right idea.

Decadanti

Some people just don't know what they're getting into. These bored sophisticates, jaded to tears by overindulgence, submerge themselves in devil worship and blasphemy. These so-called *decadenti* are only vaguely organized, but comprise a potent element of Italian nightlife. Scattered throughout several dozen courts and artists' quarters, the thrill-seekers stage Black Masses and demon-summonings as antidotes to boredom. Very few of them understand what they're doing, however, and fewer still can cope with the inevitable complications (and damnations) that follow their rites.

Most *decadenti* are artists, scholars or spoiled nobles; a few belong to the rising merchant classes, and occasionally acquire occult "treasures" from faraway lands. Rebell ing against the hidebound Church and Crown, these wealthy hedonists offer large sums of money to anyone who can show them something they haven't already seen. Most of them are dilettantes of the highest order, armed with ready purses and flesh but very little mystick talent; every so often, however, one or two take to their lessons with frightening aptitude, becoming sorcerers of some repute.

Magickally, these Infernalists are a mixed bag. Few of them have real mystick power, although many can boast extravagant investments or diabolical allies. The style of magick *decadenti* practice varies from coven to coven. Some, like the *Black Seal Brotherhood* and the *Grapes of Bacchus*, deck their temples with Pagan statuary and mix the Old Gods in with Christian demonology; others, like the *Weeping Ring*, the *10,000 Splendors* and the *Jade Cross of Saint Lucifer*, mingle bastardized Orientalisms in with surrealistic Catholicism. One group, the Florentine *Solomic Devociani*, actually demonstrates a working grasp of metaphysics and Eleusinian mysticism, but to most of the groups, true occult knowledge takes the hindmost. *Decadenti* do what they do for fun. Few really want to work hard enough to gain true mastery.

Like the K'wahhll, *decadenti* do not belong to a fellowship as such. They do, however, form small but virulent covens of both men and women. Meeting once or twice each month, the coven members use Black Masses and the occasional sacrifice as preludes to debauchery. Every so often, the Infernalists conjure minor demons (usually under the impression that they have called up Satan himself) and demand favors from them — wealth, influence, and most of all, sex. The demons are happy to comply, of course, and everything climaxes in a Bacchanal of scandalous proportions.

Of course, the possibility of discovery makes *decadenti* cautious, especially in these witch-hunting times. Although most coven members boast enough riches and respect to divert suspicions away from themselves (and usually onto innocent peasants, vagabonds and magi), *decadenti* protect their private misdeeds with genteel ferocity. When they can, these socialites use backstreet ruffians and courtier's charms to "discourage" anyone who gets too close; when subtlety fails, the gentlemen among them loose their rapiers while the ladies prepare carnal traps and magickal surprises. They might be dilettantes, but few of them are fools. Most *decadenti* have been suckled on court intrigue and social treachery, and they are clearly masters of those games.

The Gatekeepers of Ganzir

Many of the secrets of the old empires have been lost to time. Despite the Italian fancy for all things ancient, Babylon is but a fading memory preserved in a handful of scriptures, and Akkad and Eridu have all but vanished. Nevertheless, there are sorcerers who recall the days when demons went among the common folk, when witch-priests built high altars out of obsidian and cloaked their temples in flayed skins. The Gatekeepers of Ganzir, a covert fellowship based in Persia, preserve the ancient lore in hidden archives and buried temples. Although they have fallen far from those exalted days, they keep the faith with angry Old Gods and wield the bygone secrets of forgotten demonology.

Long ago, they say, two mighty floods washed the devil-cities away; encroaching sands then covered the ruins and bound the demons that once feasted on human misery. But some folk survived the catastrophes, and they spread their secrets into the cities of Memphis and Crete. As secret servants of kings and pharaohs, these magicians held the reins of their old demonic servants, freeing them for occasional feuds or midnight horrors. In high towers, they watched the dancing stars and probed the depthless Void with strange instruments. To satisfy their employers, these Gatekeepers disguised their devotions with the symbols and names of Egyptian deities, but beneath their temples they built secret chambers where the ancient gods were still revered.

Like the flies that scavenge carrion, the Gatekeepers devoured secrets. Under a thousand pretexts, the witch-priests begged lore about other deities, scraped out gossip, and watched their employers' every move. When opportunities presented themselves, the Gatekeepers started fights between other factions, then used the chaos to gather more influence and information. Soon, the chaos became an end unto itself, and the flies turned into termites. Many a prince or priest suffered disaster when ill prophecies became reality — with a bit of help from his servants, of

course! Over time, the Gatekeepers mastered the arts of misdirection; those who failed to catch on were staked out for jackals or mummified alive.

As the Egyptian Empire waned, the Gatekeepers faltered, too. Some went northward and set up cults in Greece and Rome. But a series of wars with other sects — notably the Mt. Ossa Calyx, the Collegium Praecepti and several Hermetic factions — decimated the ancient ones. Their charms broken, their archives looted, their demons fled to other masters, the surviving Gatekeepers faltered yet again and virtually disappeared.

Until the Devil-King Age.

Once again, the temples rose. Once again, black stones were hoisted into place by demonic hands and legions of victims screamed beneath the skinning-knife. A succession of powerful caliphs and witch-priests restored the glory of Babylon and Ur, and built small but decadent cities throughout Arabia and Persia. For nearly 600 years, the Gatekeepers and their allies enjoyed the fruits of mystick domination. By the time Mohammed's armies finally put an end to their return, the Devil-Kings had carved elaborate temples, libraries and catacombs beneath their cities. Not even the Prophet and his Batini allies could uncover them all.

For the last 800 years, the Gatekeepers and their companions (including the Nephandi, who have gradually drawn them to the Cauls) have kept a low head and a firm hand. Establishing new footholds in the Frankish lands (especially Italy), these secretive occultists have begun to pass their ancient lore into eager hands. Ironically, the sect's main clientele belongs to a group that would smash the Infernalists if they revealed their true allegiance: The Order of Reason.

Celestial Masters crave the gospel of the stars. They cannot learn enough about the mysteries high above them, and eagerly pursue any scrap of knowledge about the distant spheres. Although they take their name from the entrance to the Underworld, the Gatekeepers of Ganzir know old secrets of the stars. Like their forefathers, who worked within the Egyptian courts, these descendants of Babylon offer bastard versions of their lore to some Celestial Masters.

A pity so many Masters soon go insane, don't you agree?

Beneath the Middle Eastern sands and the ancient streets of Cairo, al-Kufah and Baghdad, there are those who remember the *truly* old ways. Someday, they know, the black temples will rise again.

The Nephandi

The so-called "Eaters of the Weak," who so long ago terrorized the people of Mesopotamia, trace their origins to the Void itself. Although many of them accept and even revere the cosmologies given to them (or by them) over the centuries, the Fallen Ones called Nephandi realize that all demonology is a show. The real power lies beyond the Void of Heaven... yet rests within the human heart. The Eaters of the Weak have spent millennia bridging the gap between the two, and in the Dark Fantastic world they grow one step closer to completing it.

When the first diabolists searched among the stars or beneath the waves for the source of their dark passions, they noticed the pull between their souls and the hungry abysses there. The demons they met and befriended seemed clever and powerful, but the searchers soon realized that even the darkest gods were only shadows. The true Void lay elsewhere.

Like dark clouds, these pilgrims floated through the night, picking up converts and occult secrets as they went. With the rise of empires, many Eaters of the Weak lived up to their name. Surrounded by blackened auras and clouds of demons, they carved paths through the ancient world. Some built cities and raised temples to the stars, but others clustered in the wilderness and spread a gospel of insanity. Somewhere along the way, they discovered (or created) the Cauls — spiritual cauldrons that strip away fear and delusion and refine an Eater to the core of his dark soul. These living temples and gates to infinity set the *Nif' ur 'en Daah* apart from all other devil-worshippers. They didn't merely dance with demons, they made love to the heart of the Void.

Under the lash and magicks of early devil-priests, voracious city-states arose: Agade, where magi struck pacts with wind-demons and blood-gods; Ashur, where witch-priests bathed a Child of the Absolute in blood and entrails, and were Assumed into the family of Caine as a reward (see **Clanbook: Baali**); Enoch and Carthage, where Infernalists and vampires supped on blood together and practiced unspeakable rites beneath the laughing moon; and Bhât, glorious Bhât, who stormed the very towers of Babylon and carted its children off to torture-wells and skinning-yards. But each of these cities eventually fell, dragged down by the vortex of its own oblivion. Amid the ruins, the survivors made new pacts, summoned new allies, and dispersed to sing the litanies of Darkness. Some, it is said, were even present at Thothmes' court, and whispered their secrets into many waiting ears.

The Cauls

If there is truly a Divine chain of being, the Cauls are the spaces between its links. Metaphysical black holes, these unearthly cocoons literally invert the soul of anyone who enters their embrace.

That inversion is a one-way trip. Although certain reincarnationists believe that a Nephandus can be saved if she passes through to another incarnation, others point to the *widderslainte* — those who are born Fallen — and claim that a soul that passes into the Caul is denied salvation forever. Understandably, even Infernalists quail a bit at the prospect of a total commitment to damnation. Many anti-Christians secretly hope that Jesus will extend his mercy to them in the end. The Caul would seem to sidestep even the grace of the Almighty, though, and even the most ardent devil-worshippers hesitate to go quite *that* far.

It is said that one must enter a Caul voluntarily. People shoved into its slippery folds usually die, though not without considerable suffering beforehand. Thus, the Nephandi are the most dedicated of their kind. They willingly turn their backs on all hope of salvation or escape. The Caul is more than just a metaphysical womb. It's a rite of passage, one very few people fulfil.

One theory hints that Cauls may be physical bridges to the Outer Dark, gates to the heart of the Absolute. If that's true, a Nephandus who undergoes the Rebirth has already spent a moment in Assumption and returned to Earth with the kiss of the Void upon him.

Physically, Cauls often resemble depraved placenta. Some are huge, gaping maws that open into foul orifices several yards across; others are small, glittering pockets of flesh, pulsating like a pregnant leper's belly. Like an immense and bloated flower, a Caul folds about a Nephandi's body and caress it with excruciating care. Inside the folds, a person literally enters Hell and writhes there for millennia, feeling each layer of his being slowly stripped, inverted and plastered back into place. Outside the Caul, a few moments pass, but to the soul inside time and space are compressed into a seemingly eternal knot of agony. By the time he emerges, all other experiences are pleasant diversions. Nothing a Nephandus can do to another person, no matter how horrendous, can match the time he spends within the Caul.

As the *Sebel-el-Mafouh Whash* recounts, these living shadows eventually crossed paths with the pilgrims of Fana — those who would soon become the Ahl-i-Batin. Centuries after the ancient kingdoms collapsed, the followers of balance crossed swords with the witch-priests of eternal discord. The contrast between the groups was immediate and deadly; for the next 2000 years, the Batini and the *Nif ur 'en Daah* would provide vicious counterparts for one another. To the Subtle Ones, the Eaters of the Weak became *Naffas Iblis* (the "Breath of Iblis"), *Whash* ("Beasts") and *Mafgouh Doudi* ("Lovers of Darkness"); moreover, they became warped mirrors of all the Batini hoped to attain. Although some Murshids studied the puzzle of strength through oblivion, most simply declared war on these obvious parasites. The witch-priests, for their part, used the running battle as a lesson in new and exciting terrors. In time, this rivalry would ultimately strengthen the Eaters of the Weak; from the Subtle Ones, the remarkably *unsubtle* witch-priests learned tactics of misdirection, concealment and seduction that proved far more efficacious than open carnage. The Batini, for their part, learned more than they ever wanted to know about the sweet temptations of oblivion.

The first Devil-King, Ishaq al-Iblis, began his bloody career as a turncoat Batini — a *barabbi*. Using his knowledge of the group, he began a sadistic purge and encouraged his allies to do likewise. As Subtle Ones screamed on roasting spits and djinn genitalia, the Naffas Iblis grew strong. Thus, the future Nephandi prospered throughout the Devil-King Age; over time, they spread their Cauls and secrets throughout the civilized world. But with the coming of the Prophet Mohammed, the Subtle Ones found a fire with which to purge their ancient rivals, and this sick prosperity was washed away in a wave of blood and magick. Once again, the cities fell and their Fallen masters crept away to make new plans.

In the centuries since that time, the Nephandi have changed a great deal. More a type of Infernalist than an organized cult, they nevertheless share certain common traits: the Dark Rebirth, a view toward the Absolute, and a steadfast dedication to challenge Creation and return it to Oblivion. Spread throughout a multitude of covens, sects, temples and circles, they work toward a larger goal. Other Infernalists may seek the Void, but Nephandi have already become it. Whatever demons they claim to worship, whatever Patroni they parlay with, whatever faiths they seek to undermine, all Nephandi carry a pulsating remnant of Oblivion inside them. This inheritance guides the Eaters in ways that even *they* don't understand. Now, as disparate cultures come together, the Nephandi unite.

INFERNALISM: THE PATH OF SCREAMS

There's a frightening kind of consolidation underway in the Dark Fantastic world. Just as sects that had existed for centuries join together in the Traditions and Conventions, so do the Eaters of the Weak attempt to meld all Infernal sects into one. Like merchants of damnation, their agents seek out other cults, join them, and slowly bring their members closer to their Cauls. Those who resist (and there are many who do) hear witch-hunters outside their doors or demons under their beds. Renunciates from other sects — the so-called *barabbi* — seduce their former brethren with an almost

religious zeal. Inspired by Gilles de Rais, a new breed of Nephandus assumes command; these Gilledians make the deals, find the secrets and unite the demonic allies to make the Eaters of the Weak stronger than ever.

After millennia of separation, these living clouds have begun to mingle, organizing behind a single council (the Fellowship of the Eye, a deliberate parody of the White Tower) and assigning ranks where once there was chaos.

There's a huge storm on the horizon, and in its thunder you can hear the Absolute laughing.



Nephantic Ranks

The Eaters of the Weak are not formal. Status is usually earned through treachery, age and raw power. Titles, when they're used at all, reflect a Nephandi's magickal might and enlightened degradation. The higher the rank, the less human the magus.

- **Galla:** "Demon" — an ancient and revered witch-priest, sometimes even a survivor of the Devil-King Age or some other bygone time. Unbearably foul by human standards, many Gallū are considered a step or two away from the Deep Lords of Misrule. Eventually replaced by Gilledians (for the most part, anyway...), these masters of corruption often retreat to realms beyond the Gauntlet.

- **Aswad:** A Nephantic anti-saint. Like a Galla, this powerful and respected Nephandus teaches the most esoteric elements of the Dark Path. Unlike the Demons, however, Aswadim prefer corruption of the soul over desecration of the body. Thus, these "holy men of unholiness" are rarely obvious for what they are, and frequently walk among mortals or other magi, winning souls to the Cauls with arcane logic and beguiling secrets.

- **Gilledian:** One of a new but powerful brotherhood founded by the mentors and allies of Gilles de Rais. Throughout the Renaissance, these vigorous Fallen Ones consolidate the Demons, Aswadin, lesser Nephandi and other Infernalists into a somewhat united, sickeningly powerful sect. Also known as Divs, after the Persian demons that followed Ahriman.

- **Prelatus:** A witch-priest, one of the enforcers and agents of the Gilledians. Powerful tempters or vicious warriors, the Prelati love to desecrate religions, and are foremost proponents of the Black Mass and Feast of Flies. Also known in the Muslim world as *Ibl'is*.

- **Lili:** A female Prelatus, or witch-queen. The title is said to have been inspired by Lilith, although few Bahari follow the Nephantic way.

- **Shaytan:** A war-magus of bloody appetites and frightening power.

- **Dregvat:** "Follower of the Lie" — a low-ranking member of the sect, callously referred to as a "pawn" by the Eurocentric Gilledians.

Types of Nephandi

If all faiths are a sham, all of them make equally effective roads to Oblivion. While the original *Nif ur 'en Daah* organized themselves in the Fertile Crescent, the Fallen maintain a vigorous diversity. Although the *Malleus Nefandorum* designates the following groups as "Orders of the Most Unholy Canticle," these "sects" seem to have been named by outsiders, not by the Fallen Ones themselves. In time, the Gilledians will adopt this terminology as their own, but for the moment the Eaters of the Weak use no such labels among their own kind.

- **K'llasshaa:** Primal mystics of complete insanity, these demented Nephandi worship the Void in its purest forms — either as the End of All Things, as the Absolute, or as one of a thousand screaming faces of primitive horror. Although most K'llasshaa are filthy degenerates, some of their recent "converts" hail from the refined halls of the Order of Reason, and bring an eerie stability to a viciously unstable approach to Oblivion.

- **Malfeans:** Devoted to the elemental Wyrm-spirit of corruption, these twisted folk dance the Black Spiral with hideous beast-men, or appear as frighteningly sane individuals whose devotion to annihilation assumes a reasonable guise. Many *decadenti* and primal cultists worship the demented gods of Malfeas, and gain strange Investments through them. (See "Primal Manifestations" in the Appendix, and "Fomor" in Chapter IV.)

- **Iblites, Satanists and other Infernalists:** By far the most common of their kind, these Fallen Ones simply take their cultural faiths and turn them upside-down. (See "Mocking God," Chapter I.)

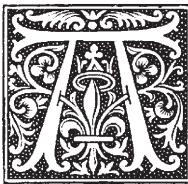
- **Barabbi:** Turncoats from other sects, the *barabbi* are considered the worst of the lot — although their eyes were opened by holier agencies, they have chosen damnation of their own accord.

- **Widderslainte:** Born with a hellbound soul, a *widderslainte* is considered both pitiable and unredeemable. By the Devil's hand he was born, and so back to the Devil he should be sent as soon as possible.



Stella

Chapter IV: Independent Covenants



We made our way together with ten demons:

ah, what ferocious company! And yet
“in church with saints, with rotters in
the tavern.”

— Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy: Inferno*

Lady Marianne de Tréronne, Fourth Watcher of the Viper, had finally found her threshold for atrocity. Trampling the cross had been easy. Eating cakes of dried shit had been a little harder, but she'd grown to like the taste. The carnal deviancies she'd discovered since her initiation were a welcome relief from the suffocating chastity of her former vows. Even the bloody offerings she made with her coven each month were bearable. She'd seen far worse in the market square, on the scaffold reserved for the King's justice.

But when it came to her own infant, Lady Marianne drew the line and would not step across. The night after he was born, she tried to have him baptized a true Christian to make him less tempting for her coven-mates.

That's when she'd been caught. Scuttling across the open gulf between the closed shops and the cathedral steps, she was pursued by fleeting shadows — hunting demons sent by Duc Bartron's men. Like dagger-winds, they slashed across her back and limbs, rending her mantle as she whispered counter-spells and hugged young Ethán to her chest. The empty yard gaped into an eternal plain as Marianne ran. Toward the end, she'd even

prayed to Jesus, breaking her renunciation and lapsing back to her old devotions. Please, oh Lamb of God, she prayed as the demons flayed her clothes to rags. Just keep my baby safe!

Finally, she reached the steps. Weak and bleeding from her delivery, she crawled the endless space between the courtyard and the cathedral's threshold. On sacred ground, she felt the shadows dart away, hissing their displeasure. Thanks be to you, oh God, she thought, too winded to speak aloud.

Before she could raise her hand to strike the doors, they opened. Gratefully, she held out Ethán to the waiting priest. “Sanctuary,” she breathed. “Not for me, for my child....”

That plea had been her last.

She awakened in chains, hung upside-down in an “X.” Her shredded clothes had been removed and the air was chilly on her skin. One candle burned like a lost soul in the gloom. Faintly, Marianne tasted blood. And so, she thought grimly, my damnation begins. The thought froze her deep inside. Already, blood thundered in her skull. Her eyes watered as the pressure built behind her eyes. Spread out, inverted like a cross, she felt naked beyond a simple lack of clothes. Her wrists and ankles had already begun to cramp and burn, and the sockets of her limbs howled from the strain.

Forever was going to last a very long time.

And then she heard the steps, far off in darkness. Sandals scraping on flagstone floors.

The thought blazed through her mind: I'm safe! I'm not damned yet! The Inquisition has me! Oddly, this relieved

her. In the Church's hands, she might suffer, even burn, but she could renounce her Fallen state and escape damnation! When in the darkness a door squealed open, Marianne felt her eyes burn from half-shed tears of joy.

The priest bore Ethán in his arms. The infant slumbered peacefully. "Thanks be to God," croaked Marianne, her voice cracked by thirst. "You have him."

"We do," the Inquisitor replied, his voice kindly, his eyes hard in the candlelight. "In the bosom of our Father, he is safe."

Then the infant stirred and showed his teeth.

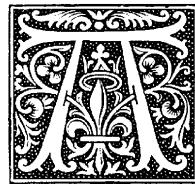
Viper's teeth. Rows of them.

Ethán began to cry with hunger. "And now," said the priest, "he needs his mother."

The Inquisitor held out the infant. Marianne clenched her own teeth in anticipation. This is my child, she thought. I will not scream.

But Lady Marianne was wrong again.

The Dance: Master and Servant



nd we have now with Horror seen the Discovery of such a Witchcraft! An Army of Devils is horribly broke in upon the place which is the Center, and after a sort, the First-Born of our English Settlements: and the Houses of the Good People there, are fill'd with the doleful Shrieks of their Children and Servants, Tormented by Invisible Hands, with Tortures altogether pre-natural.

— Cotton Mather, *The Wonders of the Invisible World*

The term Infernalist suggests a devotion to the servants of the Underworld, but the relationship between many diabolists and their helpmates is more complex than simple devil-worship. In reality, the dance between the Fallen One, her Patronus and the lesser demons who assist her is an endless round of favors and obligations. Even the dimmest Infernalist knows that she dances along the side of a bottomless pit, and although she expects, even craves, her final damnation, she's not about to give up on worldly power just yet.

And so the dance continues: The Fallen One makes her deals and scrounges whatever magicks she can get; the Patronus bides his time and offers sweet temptations while leading the magus to corruption; and the lesser demons find themselves caught in the middle, resentful of their servitude but too weak or dim-witted to do much about it. Pity anyone who crosses the path of this *danse macabre*. The combination of worldly and otherworldly evils is treacherous indeed.

This chapter presents a small sample of the infinite might of Hell — a scattering of demons from various common ranks. Many other demons, monsters and evil spirits can be found in the main rulebook, *Crusade Lore*, *The Sorcerers Crusade Companion*, *World of Darkness: The Bygone Bestiary*, *Vampire: The Dark Ages*, *Book of the Wyrm*, *The Thousand Hells* and the *Dark Ages Companion*. But remember that the true power of the Underworld comes not from the number of monsters it can throw at you, but at the unsettling things those monsters represent. Demons, after all, are forces of nature shaped (it is said) by human comprehension. In his own way, man crafts the mask of his tormentor, and in the dance of humanity and the spirits, it's often difficult to tell who's leading whom.

Splinters of Oblivion

Many lesser Infernalists take their demonic patrons at face value; Satan is King of Hell, other demons are his vassals, and all of them are angels Fallen from the grace of God. (Not that all Infernalists accept the Christian cosmology; see Chapter I.) Truly educated ones, however, recognize the dumb-show that devils present. To those who understand the Absolute, the denizens of Hell are simply splinters of Oblivion. To them, Satan is just a symbol for the adversary within the human heart — if he exists at all, it's because humans *made* him exist. Therefore, these diabolists reason, all devils are reflections of human terrors.

They are not exactly correct.

As those who know the lore of the Wyrm can attest, evil spirits are far older than humanity, and far more diverse than any hellish hierarchy. While it's true that spirits, in *Mage*, wear the masks humans give them, those masks are recent and changeable things. The darker spirits personify corruption. If they choose familiar forms and vaguely human names, it's because they're attracted to the Darkness within the human heart.

Some Infernalists go beyond this disguise. In demented rituals, they invoke deities that have no recognizable name or form. These primal manifestations overshadow mere "satans"; if the Infinite Darkness did indeed splinter into shadows of its former glory, these entities are those shadows. The diabolists who actually comprehend such "demons" are insane by all human reckoning. They have truly looked upon the face of Hell.

Demonic Traits

As spirit entities, most demons have two forms: a material form that they adopt when they cross over the Gauntlet, and a spirit form that reflects their true essence. According to the legends, the souls of devils are chained to Hell — both forms are just shadows of greater beings imprisoned in the Pit. Even these shadows have

Going Down....

What is Hell exactly? In later days, that question will inspire poets and philosophers to creative violence. Even now, as the Renaissance stirs both faith and terror, artists like Dante Alighieri, Luca Signorelli and Hieronymus Bosch create elaborate visions of a punishment the Bible only hinted at. In distant temples and torture-gardens, Buddhist painters and Tibetan artisans envision hells surreal enough to drive Dante himself to madness. So which hell is the Real Hell?

All of them.

An Infernalist who goes to Hell (voluntarily or otherwise) enters the realm he was told to expect. Most Christians find a lake of fire surrounded by various tortures. Buddhists fall into the Hell of Boiling Oil or are skinned alive in the hell of that name. Damned Pagans spend eternity in barren, dusty ruins, mourning their lost vitality; and anyone who makes a pact with a demon enters that demon's special realm — a little bit of hell made to suit the devil who "owns" it — and almost never leaves again.

The details of the Underworld are too extensive to present in this book. Several other supplements — *The Thousand Hells, Beyond the Barriers: The Book of Worlds, and Book of the Wyrm* — describe various Infernal Realms in case your chronicle literally goes to Hell. Suffice to say that these Underworlds are extraordinarily unpleasant, frighteningly permanent, and vast beyond even a mad cultist's imaginings.

to be summoned, or at the very least must be given some physical host to "wear," before they can manifest on Earth. Infernalists, of course, are all too happy to provide both, and so demons remain close by their mortal allies. This is the diabolist's bargain: *Give me what I need, and I'll let you come up and play awhile.*

On and around the mortal plane (including the Inner and Middle Rings of the Otherworlds), demons have certain powers:

- **Healing:** Demons and Infernal hosts can heal one Health Level per turn without effort. Really powerful manifestations can heal two, three or even four Health Levels per turn.

- **Fortitude:** Devils, in material form, are outrageously tough, and can soak aggravated damage from all sources except the holy magick mentioned below. (In *Vampire* terms, demons have one to five dice of Fortitude.)

- **Domination:** All demons are exceedingly impressive. With a glance, an Infernal creature can cow most mortal beings. In *Vampire* terms, demons have several dots

in Presence and Dominate; in *Mage* terms, they possess the equivalent of Mind 2 (**Emotional Pulse**) or 4 (**Soul-Stealing**), with a Dice Pool between 3 and 7.

- **Fire:** Although many of them do not use it, all demons can surround themselves with flames, and hurl fire at their enemies (5-10 dice of aggravated damage, depending on the devil's rank).

- **Immortality:** No demon or evil spirit can be truly killed — at least not by anything that walks on Earth. The creature's material or spiritual form can be destroyed, but that simply banishes the Infernal soul back to its Realm for a time... after which time it will be ready for revenge.

- **Immunity to Fire:** Accustomed as they are to the fires to Hell, demons cannot be hurt by any form of mortal flame (magickal or otherwise) unless it comes from a holy source.

- **Terror:** As masters of eternal torment, demons can inspire paralyzing fear in most mortals. In *Vampire* terms, this comes through the lower levels of Daimonion. In *Mage* terms, it forces an opponent to roll his Willpower (difficulty 7) when in a demon's presence; failure fills the victim with terror, and a botch makes him collapse in a screaming heap.

By the same token, Infernal creatures are limited at least slightly by several weaknesses:

- **The Barriers:** As previously mentioned, demons are usually banished from the mortal world. More often than not, an Infernal presence must be invited to Earth before it can walk here freely.

- **Holy Days and Places:** Just as certain days and places belong to the Darkness, so have others been claimed by the Light. It is said that demons cannot tread on sacred ground or manifest on holy days (Christmas, Ramadin, Beltane, Easter), although this might be a myth.

- **Pride and Greed:** Infernal entities may appreciate human achievements, but they refuse to take mortals seriously. Thus, a clever (and reckless!) human can play a demon's natural pride against it, flattering the adversary until he makes some fatal mistake.

- **True Faith:** The Faith Merit has double its normal effect on demons and host beasts. A character with the Merit can also inflict one die of aggravated damage, by touch alone, for every dot of Faith she possesses.

The true power of a demon, however, is not the Traits it possesses, but the effect it has on the world at large. When a true servant of Darkness appears, the element themselves rise in terror: winds blow, water ripples, flames flare and the earth literally trembles. Deep down, all Infernalists want to become demons. When you, the Storyteller, show the immense power that even the slightest manifestation has on the world around it, your players will see why the Path of Screams seems so seductive— and dangerous.

Infernal Ranks

Not even Infernalists agree about the ranks of Hell's minions. By even the most conservative Christian estimates, the Darkness shelters over half a million Fallen angels, ranging from crude fiends to the arch-enemy of God. For simplicity, assume that demonic creatures fall into the following rough classifications:

- The Absolute (who may be God, Satan, or greater than either)
- The Primal Emanations (which may include Gaia, the Wyrm and the Wyld)
- The Deep Lords of Misrule
- The Gods of this World (possibly including Lucifer and Jehovah?)
- Arch-dukes and Dukes (also Urge-Wyrm)
- Lords (also totem avatars of evil werewolves)
- Minor Lords (also greater Banes and Spectres)
- Tempters (sometimes classified as greater servitors)
- Servitors (also elementals, djinn and most Banes)

War-demons (also many Spectres)

Servelings

Infernal Hosts

Human cultists

For specifically medieval demonological ranks and distinctions, see the *Dark Ages Companion*, Chapter Seven. Be aware, though, that these classifications are by no means universal, even among scholars of Christian demonology. By the Renaissance, many occult scholars have assembled new hierarchies, or discarded them altogether.

Infernal Hosts

When darkness reaches out its left hand, it often sends some small token of its attention: a minor but decidedly Infernal creature that attends to the servants of evil. Ignorant folk assume that these obviously corrupt creatures are demons, but they're only half right. Most Infernal beasts are actually living (or once-living) creatures that have been possessed by minor demons; this possession gives these demon-hosts unearthly powers and a decidedly diabolical glow, but the change is only temporary. In a matter of months or even days, the Otherworldly corrupter wears out its earthly vessel and the host creature collapses into a fetid pool of bones and goo.

Infernal hosts have few demonic powers or Charms. Unlike most evil spirits, however, a host lives on the earthly side of the Gauntlet but has no problems crossing over into the Otherworlds, assuming that some other party brings it across. A host creature is fully material — it bleeds, feels pain, and can be harmed by anything strong enough to wound it. Like demons, hosts suffer extra damage from holy attacks and can be turned away by a person with sufficient amounts of True Faith. If someone manages to exorcise the evil spirit (which requires 10 successes; see "Exorcism" in the rulebook, p. 262), the host often falls over dead and immediately decays.

Most diabolists have at least seen an Infernal host beast; these creatures attend Black Sabbats, cuddle at the feet of witches, and chase a warlock's enemies through the night. Fallen Ones with the Familiar Background often have a host beast that preserves its earthly state by eating raw Quintessence. Despite their impermanence, demonic hosts are lethal by human standards. Many of them tend to be fairly mindless, but some display shocking cleverness and a truly morbid wit. The evil spirits that inhabit these creatures are a bitter lot, immortal but too weak to ascend in a hellish hierarchy. Driven mad by infinite tortures, they tend to lash out at whatever they can reach unless some greater force restrains them. Not even a diabolist is safe — if she crosses the host once too often, she might find herself writhing in a demonhound's jaws. And that would be a short but memorable introduction to damnation!

Common Infernal hosts include:

Cannibal Corpse

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5, Charisma 0, Manipulation 4, Appearance 0, Perception 1, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Brawl 3, Intimidation 3

Spheres: none

Willpower: 7

Quintessence: 2 innate

Health Levels: OK, OK, -1, -1, -3, -5, Incapacitated

Armor Rating: 2 (7 dice soak, total)

Attacks/Powers: Bite (6 dice damage); claws (5 dice damage)

Sometimes, the dead still hunger. Driven by demons, they spring back in a parody of life and attack any living thing nearby. In a voracious frenzy, these cannibal corpses rip flesh dripping from the bone, shove it down their decaying mouths, and continue the process until everything living has been devoured.

Supposedly, such things have always been with us. The Bible speaks of possessed people whose hungers could not be satisfied. It was the sorcerers of Akkad, however, who perfected the art of creating such creatures. With bloody

rites, these sorcerers invoked minor spirits of hunger, then locked them inside human hosts. (Not always dead ones....) Given the chance, the demons devoured anything they could tear up and swallow. Out of necessity, the necromancers devised rituals to hold these cannibals in thrall, and the flesh-eaters became new shock troops for the nascent Nephandi.

A cannibal corpse is a mindless thing guided by hunger, not intellect. When released near anything soft and edible, she'll tear into it with sharp, strong nails and teeth. A man in armor has little to fear from such a beast, but naked flesh is extremely vulnerable. The Gatekeepers of Ganzir reputedly pit cannibal corpses against their "dinner guests," or give them to *ghuls* during festivals of necrophiliac carnage. A corpse can gorge on roughly half her weight in flesh before she's sated; once full, she can go several hours until her next "feeding." Infernal masters chain their cannibals until just before a fight, then set them loose and flee the area. The resulting blood-feast lasts until all corpses have been sated, eaten, or destroyed. It's worth noting that a hunger-demon cares nothing for either fellowship or self-preservation. It will gleefully feed on others like it, or even on itself, until its stomach has been filled.

Demonhound

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5, Charisma 1, Manipulation 4, Appearance 1, Perception 5, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 4, Brawl 3, Dodge 2, Intimidation 3, Stealth 3, Occult 2

Spheres: none

Willpower: 4

Quintessence: 4 innate

Health Levels: OK, OK, -1, -1, -3, -5, Incapacitated

Armor Rating: 2 (7 dice soak, total)

Attacks/Powers: Bite (6 dice damage); claws (5 dice damage); unearthly perceptions (like a continual Life 1/Spirit 1 spell)

Possessed by spirits of the Pit, these demonic hounds grow lean and sinister. Balefire eyes blaze from skeletal heads, and boiling spit bubbles from flaming jaws. When such creatures appear, surrounding shadows lengthen and time itself seems to slow. Many Infernalists favor such pets as familiars, guards or toys; tales speak of screaming victims run to ground by these creatures, or chained naked in a courtyard while the hounds are set loose.

The rituals that summon such creatures involve gruesome sacrifices. Small animals or children are fed to slavering hounds, which are then butchered and tossed into an iron cage. Within the cage, a glowing pentacle binds the demon-dogs to the spot; until the summoning is complete,

the cage is kept shut. Once the rite is done, the hounds crawl from the pentacle to greet their new "master."

Supposedly, each demonhound is a descendant of the hell-guardian Cerebus; while most have only one head, some have three, five, or even (in one infamous example) nine. Naturally, a nine-headed hound is unwieldy at best, but it did what it was summoned to do. Of the four magi sent against it, only one survived.

Like most Infernal beings, demonhounds suffer great pain from holy magick or True Faith. Conversely, they heal when touched by a magus of great evil and power. The beast, of course, will befriend someone who radiates such power, and cower in the presence of a holy man or woman. Normal mortals are fair prey, of course. Unlike cannibal corpses, demonhounds make excellent watchers, stalkers or even unholy pets.



Devilfish

Attributes: Strength 7-10, Dexterity 3, Stamina 10-15, Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0, Perception 5, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness 3, Brawl 3, Intimidation 10, Stealth 4

Spheres: none

Willpower: 10

Quintessence: 20 innate

INFERNALISM: THE PATH OF SCREAMS

Health Levels: OK x 5, -1 x 5, -3 x 5, -5 x 5, Incapacitated
Armor Rating: 3 (13-18 dice soak, total)

Attacks/Powers: Bite (9-12 dice damage, difficulty 8); tentacles (7-10 dice damage; mass grab: difficulty 6; each success after the first adds one more die to damage); conjure storm (plot element — causes a tempest on the seas)

Description: The seas, it's been said, lead straight to Hell's portals. Occasionally, demons reach up from those depths to seize a passing vessel or swimmer. Mariners, especially those from the Explorators Convention, have documented vicious creatures — sea serpents, titanic sharks, and suchlike — that surely come straight from the Devil's throne. The worst of these, however, are those cephalopod monstrosities called "krakens" — tentacled horrors whose very appearance invokes insanity.

Squids and octopi are no real mystery. Divers and fishermen have known about them for centuries, and while they can be dangerous, they're nothing for a sailor to fear. Devilfish are another matter; possessed by demonic spirits (or perhaps created by them), these creatures swell to unholy size and vitality. Their limbs slip from waves or

crevices, wrap themselves around a tasty human morsel, and drag it into the devilfish's beak. Even if a ship or swimmer manages to avoid being eaten alive, the powerful coils smash anything less than steel into shapeless, pulpy ruin. (See p. 119 of *The Sorcerers Crusade Companion* for an example of a devilfish at work.) With their Infernal powers, these creatures often conjure storms to help them in their feeding. Between the devilfish and the raging seas, few victims make it home again.

In their deepwater grottos, Nephantic sea-witches keep devilfish as pets and guardians. As one might imagine, these creatures need to be fed, so the Fallen Ones set them loose upon shipping lanes... or captives. Explorators brave enough to dive into the sunless void have discovered odd cities crafted with inhuman geometry. These empty, haunted ruins seem to writhe with images of devilfish, as if the creatures were some sort of venerated patrons (or maybe ancestors?) of the city-builders.

Dust Man

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 1, Stamina 5, Charisma 0, Manipulation 1, Appearance 1, Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness 2, Brawl 3, Intimidation 3, Stealth 5, Occult 2

Spheres: none

Willpower: 3

Quintessence: 2 innate

Health Levels: OK, OK, -1, -1, -3, -5, Incapacitated

Armor Rating: 0

Attacks/Powers: Bite (6 dice damage); immortality/regeneration (two Health Levels per turn unless burned or treated with salt)

Like the cannibal corpse, this demonic host provides a temporary refuge for a necrophiliac spirit. But where the cannibal is a berserker, the dust man is a slow, quiet slave. In later days, these living-dead creatures will be known as "zombies," shambling testaments to slavery's terrors. To malevolent sorcerers from the African jungles and plains, however, they represent two of the worst dooms a person can experience: eternal thirst, and exile from the ancestors.

According to ancient lore, an evil witch tricked the earth god Pemba into surrendering a bit of his essence; the witch took the earth into herself and soon gave birth to a slave with skin of clay. Pemba was affronted, and he cursed the witch and her tribe with eternal thirst; he dried up the springs where they drank, caused their crops to wither, and made clay vessels shatter whenever someone from the tribe tried to carry water in them. Eventually, the whole group perished; but their ghosts, restless and thirsting, became demons. Whenever someone died, these demons inhabited the corpse and drove it from place to



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place in an eternal search for sustenance. Eventually, the hero Mawingu and his three brothers put the dust-ghosts to rest... but not before Haringa, the youngest brother, mastered a spell that allowed him to channel those demons in and out of their hosts. Later, when Haringa turned against his family, he used those spells to bring back the thirsty ghosts... and to make more of them.

Since then, tribal necromancers have preserved and improved Haringa's rituals. To create a dust man, a sorcerer takes a bit of a living person's blood, sweat or other fluids; he adds this to a potion of strange herbs and bone-dust, gets the victim to drink it, and reclaims the body when she falls down dead soon afterward. With a complex chant, he sings the ghost back into the body, then forces it to rise. Trapped, the soul must follow the *bokor*'s instruction or suffer horrible pains in addition to its thirst. Most sorcerers use their slaves as bodyguards or easy labor, but some send them against living enemies. As the saying goes, it's hard to kill someone who's already dead.

European and Indian necromancers have similar rites that enable them to craft zombie servants; the dust man, however, is an especially African monster; years from now, when white slavers drag Africans to the New World, the thirsty ghosts will haunt them both.

A dust man cannot rest until one of three things occurs:

- His body has been completely obliterated by fire or forced decay
- His spirit has been drawn out of the body by a powerful spell (Spirit 4, five successes)
- His ghost has been purified by force-feeding the dust man copious amounts of pure salt.

Until then, the shambling servant will do whatever its master demands. Unless it is hacked into giblets, the dust man will continue to follow its last instruction; even then, the pieces still "live." Obviously, such a creature is both horrifying and piteous. Anyone who speaks with the dust man knows the agony he endures. Still, that thirst often drives the dust man to savagery. Denied rest and nourishment, he often goes out of his way to make sure that no living thing can enjoy what he cannot.

Fomor

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 4, Brawl 3, Dodge 2, Intimidation 3, Melee 3, Stealth 3, Torture 2, Occult 2

Spheres: none

Willpower: 4

Quintessence: 5 innate

Health Levels: OK, OK, -1, -1, -3, -5, Incapacitated

Armor Rating: 2 (7 dice soak, total)

Attacks/Powers: (various Investments worth 10-20 points)

Description: In Celtic legend, these twisted folk were remnants of a bygone race that fought the gods and lost. The Skin-Changers, who have allies among certain magi, claim fomori are human beings who were corrupted by evil spirits. Clearly, there's nothing human about them now. Although some fomori can still walk among men undetected, most make lepers seem wholesome by comparison. Infested with strange, unholy powers, these possessed wights become avatars of decay.

Each fomor is unique. The demon (or demons) within twist the sinner's shape according to his desires. While demons *may* possess an innocent, a fomor chooses his damnation; some powerful sin opens the door for the infesting spirit, and offers arcane powers in exchange for a place to rest. Once "inside," the demon — often called a *Bane* — molds the mortal's flesh like clay. Soon, the fomor sprouts tentacles, horns, acidic bile and other sickening "gifts." These new "enhancements" often match the fomor's greatest sins: a wrathful man might grow talons and scales; a vain one might become hideous (or inhumanly attractive); a liar could vomit toxic filth, while a glutton



(Behemoth's chosen ones) eats everything he can fit into his gigantic mouth. As the inner sins take outer forms, the fomor's worst personality traits swell. Soon he becomes so unbearable to be around that only other fomori or Infernalists can stand his presence.

A fomor is a self-created monster; even so, many Infernalists love to bring out the worst in men. Nephantic sorcerers summon Banes to their Labyrinths, then stage orgies where sinners are invested with unclean spirits. The resulting fomori wind up bound to Nephantic service; where could they go, otherwise? Devil-worshippers who crave Investments often turn themselves into fomori, too — some Investments, like armored hide or fiery breath, are impossible to hide. And then there are the freak-makers (see Chapter III), who reshape mortal flesh and humors into travesties; these sick physicians create fomori and keep them locked within their dungeons. So despite their spiritual origins, fomori often play companion to Infernal mysticks and devil-cultists.

In game terms, the Storyteller has two options if fomori appear: He could simply use human characters with absurd amounts of Investments or beast powers. (See *World of Darkness: The Bygone Bestiary*, Chapter III.) Or, if the troupe uses *Werewolf* rules, he could build fomori with the systems given in *Book of the Wyrm* or *Freak Legion: The Players Guide to Fomori*. While the weapons given in the latter books are obviously wrong for this setting, most of the powers — and Flaws — still apply. Either way, a fomor should be a repulsive demon-avatar, too corrupt to live, too powerful to lie down and die.

“Living” Skeleton

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 0, Manipulation 1, Appearance 0, Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 2, , Intimidation 4, Melee 3

Spheres: none

Quintessence: 2 innate (from bone-dust)

Willpower: 3

Health Levels: OK, -1 x 3, -3 x 2, -5 x 2, Incapacitated.

Armor Rating: 0

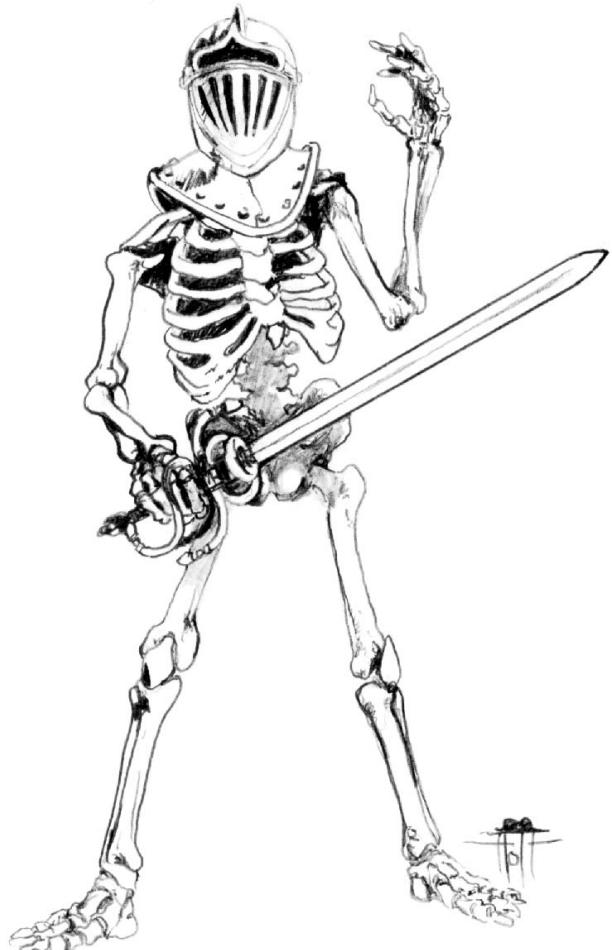
Attacks/Powers: Claw or bite (3 dice); attack with weapons; bone shards (2 dice, difficulty 6, Rate 2, Range 5)

Description: God may have providence over all living things, but the dead belong to the Underworld. As any necromancer knows, mortal remains may be reanimated with a few enchantments; a simple summoning calls minor demons into the bones, Matter bonds the bones together, and a touch of Prime magick animates the body. The resulting host is gruesome testament to the necromantic Arts.

The classical image of death itself, the animated skeleton stands through demonic will alone. Although such hosts are brittle, they're tenacious and continue to attack long after their bones have been shattered. Many wear armor to compensate for their infirmity; although they cannot be called intelligent, the memory of what they were can be seen in the yellow sparks that were once eyes.

Although immune to all mental influence and magicks, an animated skeleton is not mindless; perhaps the demon guiding the bones infuses them with its personality, or summons a Hell-borne soul to serve as a slave. Either way, this uncanny host hates the living, and will rend them to bits with their own finger bones if given the chance. Most often, an animated skeleton will snatch up any weapon or protection available before attacking a foe. If its limbs are broken, the skeleton will bite or fling bone shards at any living (or undead) thing within reach. Especially sensitive sorcerers claim they hear faint screams when a skeleton is near. Other than that, such Hosts are silent save for the clacking of bones.

Human remains are not the only kind of remains a demon can animate; tales tell of skeletal rats, dogs, horses and even elephants from the long-dead Carthaginian hordes. Such variants may have fewer Health Levels (or



many more) and specialized attacks that reflect the creatures they were in life.

Servelings

Someone has to serve the servants. When an Infernalist begs for a demonic lackey, the Patronus often gifts her with a very minor devil — sometimes called a *serveling* — that can fulfill her sinister needs. As evil spirits go, servelings are fairly easy to summon and command. Many of them, used to millennia of agony (or worse yet, boredom) in the Abyss, enjoy the exercise. Incarnated in the human world, a minor demon can still have a great deal of fun.

Some cults actually worship the servelings themselves; not every diabolist is powerful enough (or smart enough) to wrangle a demonic lackey. Although the following entities have been lumped into general categories, each one has its own name and identity. Every so often, an Infernalist (especially a rather dim or naïve one) might enter into a *Foedis* with one of these minor entities. Servelings are powerful enough to grant Investments, and they *love* to imitate greater devils; many a cultist has bragged about summoning Old Scratch himself, while the imp who has impersonated Satan giggles to itself in the corner. (Satan's thoughts on the matter are unknown.)

Despite occasional flashes of personality, servelings are still demonic entities. They can change shape at will, stir the elements somewhat, and call upon greater spirits when need be. Most of them give their service grudgingly, awaiting opportunities to subvert a "master's" will or lead her into the Abyss. Trapped between a powerful demon who orders it to obey (and has some very dire ways of backing those orders up) and a mortal snotling who thinks she's in control, the average serveling gets rather testy. To soothe its frustrations, it amuses itself on any helpless thing that crosses its path. Some servelings simply tear their prey to pieces, but others favor subtle torments — invisible visitations, eerie phenomena, cruel jests, and so forth. Even a minor demon has fairly impressive powers by mortal standards, and even the dullest one has a wicked sense of humor when there's fun to be had.

In one of the great ironies of the Path of Screams, servelings are most often the devils sent to retrieve an errant soul. When the pact has run its course and the Devil demands his due, lucifurgia pursue the Fallen One in a desperate (yet ultimately futile) wild hunt. While it's possible for a sorcerer to stand against these diabolical bloodhounds, the master — the Patronus — is sure to be close behind. For extra entertainment, the demons might enjoy letting the prey think that she has escaped, only to close the trap with an exquisite final touch. (See the story at the beginning of this chapter.)

Storyteller's Note: The elementals presented at the end of the *Sorcerers Crusade* rulebook may also double as serveling demons. Although Pagan magi claim that elemental spirits are neutral, many elementals are fairly malevolent, and pledge allegiance to dark gods or devils. Infernalists, especially blood-pagans and wildlings, can call upon these vicious spirits and "employ" them as if the elementals came from the Pit itself. Indeed, many demonology texts list elementals among the hosts of Hell. Perhaps the authors knew something the Pagans don't....

Although they have individual identities, servelings fall into several general categories:

Hobgoblins: "the Little Satans"

Willpower 7, Rage 7, Gnosis 7, Power 45

Charms: none

Materialized Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5

Abilities: Alertness 4, Dodge 4, Intimidation 5, Subterfuge 5, Brawl 3, Etiquette 4, Melee 3, (various Knowledges as beft the magus)

Attacks: Claws (7 dice aggravated); bite (6 dice aggravated)

Description: When a magus has been pushed past the edge of sanity, these demons come to torment her. Fed by the conflicts within the mage and nurtured on every bit of evil she has ever choked upon, the hobgoblins draw their strength from the power of the Enlightened One herself. The more powerful the wizard, the greater her hobgoblins grow; the more virtuous she tries to be, the more malevolent her inner demons become.

Birthed in the inner hells of the magician's own soul, hobgoblins are not demons in the "Fallen angel" sense. Rather, they're the dark reflections of the wizard's inner fears — personifications of her nightmares. It was hobgoblins that taunted St. Anthony, that assaulted the Buddha, perhaps even that tempted Christ himself. Each hobgoblin is a manifestation of the evil within. And as any philosopher knows, great good shelters deep reserves of evil.

As those who follow the Satanic Path know, the Adversary within is extraordinarily powerful. Most magi who encounter hobgoblins end up fighting them — which, in turn, makes the inner demons even stronger. A veritable saint can vanquish them by banishing her darker impulses, but a clever and resourceful Satanist who recognizes the hobgoblins for what they are can turn them into allies, even servitors. The demons of the mind become demons at her side; for all intents and purposes, the hobgoblins assume a limited life, to dance at their mistress' command.

In game terms, a hobgoblin is the product of the magickal madness brought on by the Scourge. (See *The Sorcerers Crusade*, p. 237.) Each hobgoblin is essentially a “living” character with one Health Level for every point of Arete the mage possesses; unless banished by destruction or the return of sanity, the hobgoblin lasts one day per point of Arete. A particularly crazy wizard (one with a Scourge Pool of 15 or more) might conjure two or even three hobgoblins with her insanity, at the Storyteller’s option. These creatures lack the special abilities most demons possess — they’re essentially monsters, nothing more. The forms they take depend on the Storyteller’s twisted whims.

A particularly demented Infernalist or Maraud may drive herself even crazier with an Entropy 5/Mind 3/Prime 3 spell. Hurling her mind down a metaphysical flight of stairs, she floods her consciousness with nightmare images and Quintessential energy. The Storyteller rolls the character’s Arete against a difficulty of her Willpower; each success creates another two hobgoblins... and adds one to the character’s Madness rating. (See the Maraud Madness Chart in the main rulebook, p. 283.) A “normal” Infernalist begins at Madness 1; a Maraud begins at her previous level. By drawing herself closer to her inner hells, the magus can conjure up a whole slew of hobgoblins. Of course, she can also immolate herself in the fires of her own inferno; at Madness 10, she literally rips through a hole in Creation itself and implodes in a huge flash of black flame, taking all her hobgoblins with her. Where she goes from there, only the Devil can say....

Imps: The Smiling Servants

Willpower 5, Rage 5, Gnosis 5, Power 50

Charms: Airt Sense, Appear, Armor, Blighted Touch, Corruption, Create Wind, Healing, Materialize, Mind Sense, Reform, Shapeshift, Soul Reading, Tracking

Materialized Attributes: Strength 2-4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2-4

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 2, Dodge 5, Empathy 3, Subterfuge 3, Animal Ken 2, Etiquette 3, Stealth 6, Survival 2, Academics 3, Animal Speech 5, Beast Lore 4, Cosmology 3, Investigation 2, Linguistics 5, Metaphysics (demonology) 4, Occult 4

Attacks: Claw and bite (4 dice aggravated)

Description: When a minor demon comes to Earth, it often adopts a human patron. To aid its “master” (and assure her eventual damnation), this spirit assumes a simple form, takes on a whimsical name like Knock or Skittlebones, and becomes a helpful “pet” — a familiar with a malicious sense of fun.

Not every imp is a familiar; sometimes one appears of its own volition to torment sinners, perform an er-

rand, or drive virtuous folk to distraction. Each one is a shapeshifter, and has mastered a range of animal disguises. Depending on its master or mood, an imp might appear as a cat, swine, raven, bat, owl, rat, snake, hound, horse or even a stag. Every once in a while, an imp might become a tiny humanoid, or even a normal-sized person. Nearly all of these forms are black or blood-red, and all of them possess a disconcerting gaze; none of them, it’s worth noting, resemble the imp’s real body. (Most educated Infernalists know this, but they play along with the game regardless; it’s better than seeing what the “servant” really looks like....) The inconspicuous forms that an imp adopts help it remain on the mortal world, where it can consume mystick energy while keeping a low profile. Switching form takes no time at all; a cat can become a stag, then a bird, then a spider in the blink of an eye. In all guises, an imp is clever and resourceful. Despite their diminutive “nickname,” these entities are quite powerful by human standards, and can raise a great deal of chaos simply by tweaking a few noses. Underestimating such a creature is a common but often final mistake.

Whatever skin it chooses to wear, an imp can speak — a dozen human tongues or more. Guided by the wisdom of the Pit, it imparts odd secrets to its “master” while holding a few enigmas in reserve. No imp tells its “master” all it knows. Intelligent almost to a fault, this minor demon might actually develop some affection for its human counterpart. That won’t keep the imp from ensuring its patron’s damnation, of course, but it could make the beast more helpful than the “average” demon. Tales speak of imps who risked harm and even destruction to save their “masters.” These stories might be true... or they might be lies spread to make Infernalists complacent. When in doubt, never trust a demon, not even if he calls you “master.”

In game terms, an imp may be treated as a “normal” creature. Although it radiates a distinctly unpleasant aura, this small demon can usually hide itself among mortal beings. A magus may summon one through the usual rituals, but the imp does not have to be conjured across the Gauntlet in order to appear among men. Although they are Otherworldly beings, these entities stand at the brink between matter and spirit, and may travel equally well in both realms. Unlike hosts and allied spirits, each imp is an individual creature, with a personality and power to match its name. For additional details, see the Familiar Background Trait. (*The Sorcerer’s Crusade*, pp. 100-101.)

Incubi/Succubi: Carnality Incarnate

Willpower 5, Rage 5, Gnosis 8, Power 60

Charms: Airt Sense, Appear, Armor, Blighted Touch, Corruption, Healing, Life Siphon (drains Quintessence from lover, 1 point/turn. Costs 2 Power), Materialize,

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Meld, Mind Speech, Possession, Reform, Shapeshift, Soul Reading

Materialized Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Artist 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Dodge 4, Empathy 5, Intimidation 4, Seduction 8, Subterfuge 4, Etiquette 4, Melee 2, Musician 2, Ride 2, Stealth 2, Linguistics 2, Metaphysics (demonology) 3, Occult 3

Attacks: Claws (5 dice aggravated)

Description: Some people can never get enough sex. Society, the Church, loved ones, even gods cannot curb their lascivious appetites. Debauched beyond comprehension, they pray for deliverance, for a blessing to quench their endless lusts. Occasionally, something answers: a demon or lust-spirit that knows a good ride when it sees one. So, it is said, sex-demons are born.

Although such creatures have existed since humanity's beginnings, no demon epitomizes the Renaissance like an incubus or succubus. As medieval prudery gives way to new sensuality, these infamous demons forsake their hiding-places and emerge into the world of men. As artists' models, sophisticates, merchant princes and courtesans, they walk openly through the streets. While

other demons snarl in dungeons and wilderness, these seducers enjoy themselves and gain new appreciation for human cleverness.

According to some tales, sex-demons all descend from Dark Mother Lilith. Born in the seas, they share its hunger and seek to drag all mortals down into their depths. Other texts claim that these lesser fiends were once humans with impossible lusts, possessed by devils and driven from bed to bed. All tales agree that incubi and their distaff counterparts drain the life-force from their victims through sexual intercourse. Perhaps the vitality they steal keeps them alive on this earthly plane while other demons and hosts retreat or die. In any case, these creatures appear to be immortal. Now, with mankind entering a new era of beauty and accomplishment, the sex-demons gorge themselves on aesthetics as well as sexuality.

Once, these demons were considered midnight horrors; in truth, they often had to resort to rape in order to survive. (No sex, no life-force.) But now, in this vivid and permissive age, they have no need for crude attacks. Whereas in the old days a succubus might have to straddle a sleeping farm boy, she might now seduce a wealthy priest or daring Explorator. Freed from the necessity of constant rape, these demons cultivate greater appetites: they converse with scholars, inspire artists, join conspiracies, and add a new and hazardous level to the Ascension War.

For these demons are drawn to accomplishment and beauty. After centuries of dull molestation, they indulge in carnal splendor. Certain mystick sects — especially the Seers of Chronos, Dream-Speakers and Ksirafai — become playgrounds for seducer-demons. But are these creatures, which change shape and tactics to please their "audience," trying to corrupt their Awakened playmates? Or are they, despite their Infernal heritage, just trying to have some not-so-innocent fun?

Whatever the truth may be, sex-demons make awe-inspiring companions. Well-versed in gossip, intrigue and treachery, these demons are master shapeshifters and performers. With inhuman sense, a succubus spots her prey, notes his weaknesses, and adjusts her appearance and personality to fit his lusts. When one of these seducers beguiles a victim, few human beings can resist her. But are her transformations malicious? Or has she lost herself so deeply in other peoples' lusts that she only feels right when she plays the object of desire? Only the Devil knows.

Lucifergia, Bloodhounds of the Soul

Willpower 5, Rage 9, Gnosis 5, Power 60

Charms: Airt Sense, Appear, Armor, Create Wind, Healing, Lighting Bolt, Materialize, Meld, Soul Reading, Spirit Away (back to Hell), Tracking

Materialized Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 4, Stamina 7

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Awareness 5, Brawl 4, Dodge 4, Intimidation 6, Melee 3, Stealth 3, Cosmology 3, Metaphysics (demonology) 2

Attacks: Claws, horns, teeth and other stuff (8 dice aggravated)

Description: Like any merchant, the Devil has enforcers on his payroll. When death approaches and a soul-pact comes due, many Infernalists try to cheat their way out of the bargain. Naturally, the Fallen One takes a dim view of this; so when the midnight hour approaches, Hell releases these horrid slaves to make certain that the Devil gets his due.

According to the *Cantycle of Thoryns* (a revered work of demonic lore), a notable sinner who has endured 666 years of torment is allowed to revisit the earthly plane one night a year. The trip isn't free, of course — the damned one must retrieve a dying soul before he returns. According to the *Cantycle*...

 Aynd the Dyvill stood agynst the Light;
 And shed His Shadow 'pon the Blight.
 Those touch'd by His lep'rous shade
 Wore fell transport'd in the imye of Hades.

The *Cantycle* goes on to describe how the favored sinners are transformed into lucifergia — minor shadows



of the Devil. Since the Great Beast has many faces, each luciferge assumes a different guise. Some become malformed bloodhounds; others turn into clouds of flies; the *Cantycle* describes a nameless Infernalist who became a ten-headed serpent, and another who melted into a sentient blob of translucent, screaming goo. When the transformations end, these abominations are sent to Earth at the stroke of midnight. As the Gauntlet lowers, the lucifergia pour through to enforce Satan's claim on the errant soul; by rights, they can remain among God's children until morning's light, at which time they return to Hell. If they cannot capture the dying man's soul by then, they'll never get a second chance to return....

For its one night of freedom, a luciferge bears gifts from Hell in its wretched grasp — Infernal powers that resemble Investments and Charms. Driven mad by the tortures of Hell, the demon still retains enough presence of mind to remember its errand: retrieve the soul or be bound to Hell eternally. For obvious reasons, these "bloodhounds" are merciless. Anyone or anything that stands between the dying man and the demon will be torn apart and left as an example to other mortals. The Devil is not mocked, you know. His shadows see to that....

Malebranche, Tormentors of the Damned

Willpower 5 Rage 8, Gnosis 5, Power 60

Charms: Airt Sense, Armor, Blighted Touch, Corruption, Create Wind, Lighting Bolt, Materialize, Meld, Soul Reading, Tracking

Materialized Attributes: Strength 8, Dexterity 4, Stamina 15

Abilities: Alertness 5, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 4, Intimidation 6, Melee 3, Torture 10, Cosmology 4, Metaphysics (demonology) 4

Attacks: Claws (10 dice aggravated); bite (11 dice, aggravated); whips and torture devices (varies, usually Strength + 3 aggravated)

Description: A soul that descends to Hell quickly becomes acquainted with these sadistic devils. Their tasks and pleasures involve the damned, the flames, an array of painful devices, and an eternity with which to play with all of the above. As skillful as Inquisitors, Infernalists, and even Tzimisce vampires might be, the malebranche overshadow them all in the arts of pain. These demons have had millennia of practice, after all, and their subjects can never die....

According to legend, the malebranche sprung from Lucifer's tears. When the hot drops sizzled on the plains of Hell, the parched earth cracked and broke; magma oozed from those crevices, and as the Fallen One hurled his curses at the sky the stone, tears and hot rock fused into

crusts-skinned demons. Still seething ages later with the heat of their “father’s” fury, the tormentors exact Lucifer’s revenge from the children of his foe.

Born and bred in Hell, these demons rarely leave unless summoned to the earthly realm. Most times, men who storm the gates of Hell meet these simple demons. Foolhardy magi who venture into the Underworld have returned with stories of malebranche cruelty— that is, those who have returned to speak at all. To one born in Hell, pain is the eternal truth. Those who meet these simple and remorseless demons often have a long time to contemplate that truth.

Urge-Devils, Imps of Perversity

Willpower 2, Rage 2, Gnosis 2, Power 4

Charms: Airt Sense, Blighted Touch, Corruption

Description: Man is a weak and fickle creature. He possesses innate divinity and a sense of purpose, but may be diverted by the simplest of urges. Passion and distraction make sinners of us all; even a wizard who can literally move heaven and earth can wallow in selfishness and sloth, or explode into a tantrum that could shake the pillars of Hercules. Such frailties are meat and drink to urge-devils, those “imps of the perverse” who feed — and feed upon — man’s basest desires.

Alone, an urge-devil is practically helpless. Other demons literally eat them as snacks, or trade them like copper coins. But nestled inside a human host, they gather and enhance his natural urges to sin: drunkenness, conceit, lust, sloth, rage, jealousy, deceit, gluttony... the demons do not create such urges, but they ride them, expand them, and encourage their host to act on them. A man possessed by urge-devils might go on a drunken spree, eat himself sick, stare at his own reflection for hours, or ignite in fury at the slightest inconvenience. Impulses he might otherwise ignore become compulsions when the urge-devils meet.

Worst of all, urge-devils like to ride in packs. A legion of them might set up residence in a man and drive him to bestial acts. The Bible speaks of many folk possessed by these fell entities; Jesus drove out multitudes of them, but the devils always found new hosts. Infernalists know how to call them, too. It’s a common tactic to summon a pack of these spirits, send them into an enemy, and watch as his bad habits turn into worse behavior. The diabolist doesn’t have to anything but watch — the target sows his own destruction.

Like men, urge-devils are fickle. They rarely possess a single host for long; after a week or so, they flee. These spirits are drawn to innocence, however, and love to corrupt a child or would-be saint who displays a bad habit or two. Urge-devils cannot create new passions; they must

feed impulses that were already there. But given the intemperance of the human heart, urge-devils never lack for entertainment. Every man has his vices.

In system terms, urge-demons possess their host and magnify his bad habits or darker passions with the Blighted Touch Charm. For every urge-devil in the host, the “pack” has four points of Power. From the time they take up residence, the demons will be encouraging the host to act on his worst impulses. To resist them, he must roll his Willpower against difficulty 6. Thus, it’s fairly easy for a stubborn man to stand against a single urge-demon; the bigger the pack, however, the harder it is to resist their constant temptations. Sooner or later, even a mighty wizard will probably give in....

War-Servitors

The battle-caste of the Abyss, these fearsome entities enjoy a good slaughter. More powerful than the pathetic servelings they tyrannize, warrior servitors nevertheless bow (in a manner of speaking) before the greater devils, and cannot hope to best a tempter in a battle of wits. Humans, on the other hand, make excellent fodder for these demons, and many of them consider man-flesh a delicacy.

Infernalists call upon these beings often. Raw force has a way of settling problems, and warrior-demons are force incarnate. Many diabolists pledge their souls to these entities, invite them to their revels, and even take them to their beds. If these Fallen Ones saw what they were feasting with (or bedding), though, they might go catatonic. All demons have hellish forms, but warrior-types seem more grotesque than most.

Impression, of course, is everything. In a mild mood (for a war-demon), one of these servitors might cloak itself in a powerful yet comely guise — a knight, panther, eagle, and so forth. Infernal Pagans and tribesmen revere war-demons that assume such forms, considering them totems of good omen. When the battle begins, however the disguise drops and a raging maelstrom of claws, tentacles and mouths flay both skin and sanity from everything nearby.

War-demons are harbingers of violence. It is said they walk with bloody footprints and poison the air with brimstone as they pass. When summoned, these things bring with them raging storms. All mortal beasts flee if a war-demon appears. These entities, after all, eat both bodies and souls.

Each war-demon is an individual. Several noted entities include Ablu the Render, Sheelha of the Thousand Tongues, Win-Fong the Silent, and Mal-hey-Oto the Whispering Night Owl. The template in the sidebar offers a Storyteller a rough guide to these devils’ Traits. Several samples include:

Warrior Template

Willpower 8, Rage 10, Gnosis 6, Power 100

Charms: Airt Sense, Appear, Armor, Blighted Touch, Create Wind, Element Sense (usually fire), Flood, Healing, Lightning Bolt, Materialize, Mind Speech, Reform, Shapeshift, Soul Reading, Tracking, Waves

Materialized Attributes: Strength 7, Dexterity 5, Stamina 8

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 5, Dodge 3, Intimidation 5, Subterfuge 3, Melee 5, Stealth 2, Academics 2, Metaphysics (demonology) 4, Occult 5

Attacks: Claws, teeth, tentacles, spikes, and whatever else you can imagine (usually Strength + 3 aggravated)

sniffing the air for cowardice. Like a dog, this demon smells fear; when he finds it, Markadu strikes the coward with his weapons or stings her with his gigantic barbed tail. If he can immobilize her, he'll take a moment to lay his diabolical eggs in her intestines. Unless some healing magick is employed, those eggs hatch the next night. The flood of immortal scorpions that erupt from those eggs will eat its way out of the "host," bringing her a little closer to the hells even as she dies.

Markadu is fairly intelligent for a demon, but in all his years he's never learned any language beyond a few ancient Chaldean and Babylonian tongues. Mouths, he reasons, are for screaming, not for discourse. The Ravager is impossible to bribe, threaten or bargain with, too. No mortal has anything he wants. When everyone around him is dead, Markadu returns to his dusty underworld. There are so many souls there to play with, so many other cowards to torture....

Puluhtu the Silencer

Willpower 4, Rage 6, Gnosis 7, Power 40

Charms: Airt Sense, Appear, Armor, Blighted Touch, Create Wind, Materialize (as a cloud), Meld (into air), Reform

Description: Newborn infants are an affront to demons. Their innocence and plaintive cries annoy these immortal entities — a baby knows nothing of right or wrong, and thus is impossible to corrupt. Many demons can be driven away by a weeping infant, but some, like the Silencer, prefer a more direct solution.

First noted in Babylonian times, Puluhtu is a parent's terror. Drawn by an infant's cry, the demon slides invisibly into the cradle. Manifesting as a fog, Puluhtu slowly strangles the child. Some demons might consider a dead child a waste — its soul returns to Heaven — but the Silencer doesn't care. The rage and despair of a grieving parent make up the loss of an uncorrupted soul. Some demonologists speculate that the parent herself draws Puluhtu. A crying infant is a burden, so the demon comes to "cure" the problem. Naturally, a parent who wishes that her child would *just... shut... up!* adds guilt to her grief if the child dies. And so, Puluhtu kills both parent and child; the child directly, the parent through slow suffering. What more could a demon want?

Puluhtu is a simple creature, a living cloud of smoke that drifts through the spirit world until "summoned" to a child's bed. (Some malicious sorcerers conjure the demon and send him to their enemies' homes.) Fortunately, this servitor is easily dismissed: A person with True Faith, a blessed item, or a simple warding charm can chase the cloud away. The difficult part is catching the demon before it kills; in game terms, Puluhtu hovers in the air for three or four turns (or some other suitably dramatic length of

Markadu the Ravager

Willpower 6, Rage 8, Gnosis 7, Power 75

Charms: Airt Sense, Appear, Armor, Blighted Touch, Element Sense (earth), Healing, Materialize, Mind Speech, Reform, Shapeshift, Soul Reading, Tracking

Materialized Attributes: Strength 7, Dexterity 5, Stamina 8

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 5, Dodge 3, Intimidation 8, Subterfuge 3, Melee 5, Culture (Mesopotamian) 4, Metaphysics (demonology) 5, Occult 8

Description: One of the six demonic servitors described in *The Six Seals of Ganzir*, Markadu performed the errands of Akkadian witch-priests during the reign of Sarrum-kin. He rises from the dust of Ganzir each night and picks through the souls that have descended that day, stinging them and implanting his eggs in their bowels. When those eggs hatch, tiny scorpion-demons swarm out to sting their host into further agonies. Markadu prefers to torment cowards; brave men, it is said, can compel him into service.

During an errand for the witch-king Saman the Blind, Markadu was bound by the six heroic magi. Since then, he may walk the earth only when someone has inscribed the pentacle that binds him and repeated the warding-spell that seals it. Since several Nephandi have copies of the *Seals of Ganzir*, Markadu (the weakest and most tractable of the six demons described within) has become a favorite "pet" within the sect. The Ravager doesn't care — he loves to visit the living world and lay his eggs in the many cowards he encounters here.

A scuttling clatter precedes the Ravager's appearance. On scorpion's legs, he picks his way across the ground,



time) before its prey expires. During that time, the demon is essentially trapped. It may be dispersed into the spirit world by anyone with Spirit Arts, a prayer, or a handful of salt. Sadly, Puluhtu is hard to notice beforehand. It manifests at the sound of a cry, hovers for a few moments, then silences the child forever.

Tempters

Mortals love a good bribe. Brute force has its uses, but sophisticated Infernalists look to greater pleasures: sex, money, power, knowledge. Naturally, the Abyss has this matter well in hand. Certain devils specialize in gossip, wealth and arcane secrets. Their prices, by demonic standards, are quite reasonable. Tempters appreciate the finer things in life (and death), and they genuinely like humans who recognize them, too.

It stands to reason that tempters are masters of deceit. Few humans, Awakened or not, can match wits with one of these devils and come out ahead. Although such creatures are still considered "servitors" by Hermetic muckety-mucks who have nothing better to do than compile demonology, it could truthfully be said that a tempter serves no one but himself. Unlike their boorish cousins, these demons are charming — beautiful to look at and fun to spend time with. Of course, they'll leave a supplicant's soul in a stain on the wall when they get done with him, but they'll probably still look good doing it.

Tempters are horribly vain. When summoned, they adopt charming guises — unicorns, swans, handsome playmates, even patches of flowers or showers of gold. (That Zeus thing still pleases the crowd!) Many of these demons seem genuinely pleased to be summoned, and while they brook no disrespect they spend a great deal of time sampling the newest delicacies mankind has to offer. To a temper demon, the mortal world (and its magickal side-Realms) is infinitely preferable to Hell. Even though most of these creatures have elaborate castles back "home," they seem almost sad when the game ends. Perhaps that's why they enjoy working the flock — it gives them an opportunity to enjoy this world before Oblivion consumes it once again.

Like war-demons, each tempter is his own devil. The Traits in the sidebar suggest guidelines for tempters of your own design. Tales speak of entities like Grossilio the Indulgent, Azuz M'Kahl (He Who Wanders in the Labyrinth), Gulfora the Succubus and Na Chen the Splendid One. Other noted tempers include:

Tempter Template

Willpower 10, Rage 8, Gnosis 10, Power 150

Charms: Airt Sense, Appear, Blighted Touch, Corruption, Healing, Lightning Bolt, Materialize, Possession, Reform, Shapeshift, Soul Reading, Spirit Away

Materialized Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 6

Abilities: Alertness 4, Athletics 4, Brawl 4, Carousing 5, Dodge 5, Empathy 8, Intimidation 8, Musician 4, Seduction 10, Subterfuge 10, Etiquette 10, Melee 5, Ride 3, Stealth 4, Academics 5, Linguistics 5, Metaphysics (all) 5, Occult 6, Politics 4

Attacks: Claws or weapons (Strength + 3)

Dorian the Demon Lover

Willpower 8, Rage 8, Gnosis 6, Power 60

Charms: Airt Sense, Armor, Blast Flame, Blighted Touch, Corruption (lustful and treacherous thoughts), Create Fires, Create Wind, Healing, Materialize, Mind Speech, Possession, Reform, Shapeshift, Soul Reading, Terror

Materialized Attributes: Strength 7, Dexterity 4, Stamina 7

Abilities: Alertness 2, Brawl 5, Dodge 2, Expression 4, Intimidation (domination) 5, Logic 3, Seduction 7, Singing 3, Archery 4, Etiquette 3, Fencing 4, Leadership 3, Melee (blades) 5, Riding 2, Torture 3, Academics 2, Occult 4

Description: From out of the night, this dark lover strides, full of all the things that make a man a man. Dev-

ilishly handsome, witty, strong of arm and courageous of spirit, he bears riches both material and physical. In his purse, a fortune jingles; in his arms, a woman might find comfort and fire. He's that most seductive of men — the kind that cannot be conquered. How fitting, then, that this perfect rake is far more than simply human.

Perhaps Dorian once *was* a man; he speaks in the cultured tones of a Venetian prince and knows something of courtly etiquette. Some spirit-scholars claim he was a libertine so bold that the Devil himself called Dorian to service. Other accounts claim he's far older — a powerful Roman, Celt or Norseman, the Horn'd One, or even Caine himself. Whatever the truth may have been, he's no longer human; when his passions ignite, Dorian's eyes flash with sparks and his black hair smolders. His skin darkens to pure black. His callused hands raise gooseflesh with caresses more gentle and knowing than the wind. His laugh rumbles like warm thunder, and his tongue darts like a serpent's when nestled between a woman's thighs. By the time his inhuman attributes appear, however, Dorian's lovers have already lost their common sense. He sweeps them up like a tempest wind, scattering their virtues like autumn leaves.

Dorian is attracted to lusty, powerful women—especially magicians. Sorceresses who pride themselves on beauty or allure find a suitable companion in this “perfect man.” Some

even summon him by name, knowing full well what they're getting. It's true: no mortal man can match his passion, ferocity or love-skill... but then, few mortal men can match his cruelty once the game is won. This spirit enjoys breaking his women on a wheel of desire and dominion. Demonic to the core, Dorian loves the agony he brings.

When he chooses a lover, Dorian rides to her on a black steed. After an evening or two of bantering flirtation, he shows up in her bedchambers and ravishes her, magically and otherwise, until morning. At first, he's as charming and considerate as any woman could want; soon, however, he starts making demands: *Leave your children, abandon your man, give your fortunes to me and work magick in my name.* Hard words and harder blows soon follow. With mind-games, spirit-Charms, tenderness and beatings, he breaks his victim's will. This devil is well-accustomed to magicians, and conquering a witch is one of his favorite games.

Soon Dorian tires of his lusts. One night, he disappears the way he came. Any man who angers him in the meantime is crushed with scornful words, strong fists and magical powers. Dorian enjoys being “a man among men,” and rarely misses an opportunity to humiliate a mortal— especially if that mortal is a wizard, too. Like many lesser rake-hells, Dorian's greatest weakness is his arrogance. He cannot and will not tolerate anything less than total domination. Once he achieves that, he grows bored and departs.

Dorian appears as a powerfully-built man with dark skin, curly black hair and a thick but well-groomed beard. He favors clothes that show off his physique yet display his wealth. In conversation, he's witty and sarcastic with a cunning imagination and a mind for sin. His seductions often begin as flirtations, then escalate from games to sex to complete domination. He encourages her to debauchery, then turns his affection inside-out by alternating cruelty with kindness. It may be that this Demon Lover grew from the imagination of a frustrated sorceress... he is the epitome of everything a woman wants even though she knows it's bad for her. Even if he comes to reward a vain mage (or in response to a summoning), the Demon Lover is a right bastard.

Lila Tammas, Eater of Tongues

Willpower 8, Rage 6, Gnosis 8, Power 100

Charms: Airt Sense, Armor, Blighted Touch, Corruption, Create Winds, Element Sense (fire), Materialize, Meld (fire), Soul Reading, Tongue of Lies (see below; costs 3 Power)

Materialized Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 6, Stamina 6

Abilities: Alertness 5, Awareness 5, Brawl 4, Empathy 5, Intimidation 5, Seduction 8, Subterfuge 8, Etiquette 4, Melee 3, Stealth 2, Academics 3, Culture (Arabian) 4, Metaphysics (all) 3, Occult 4



Description: A minor spirit of deceit, this djinniya quite literally speaks with a poisoned tongue. In the guise of a beautiful *houri* or beggar-girl, she seduces greedy or unfaithful men; sometimes she leads them to secret riches, or lets them into great and sacred archives; on other occasions, she simply charms them into carnal frenzies. Whatever service she performs, Lila demands a single kiss, deep and sensual.

While it lasts, it's wonderful.

Suddenly the woman bites down and rips the man's tongue from his mouth. As he recoils, she grasps her own tongue, tears it from her mouth, and stuffs it into her victim's face. The djinniya's tongue binds in place instantly, and from that day forward he cannot speak without uttering great lies or horrible truths. As for Lila, she disappears with the man's old tongue; according to *The Second Key of Ablamerch*, the demoness has a hall in the Pit of Dusts where the walls are decorated with the tongues of her old conquests. Sometimes they sing to her, or scream lullabies in unison. Occasionally, she takes them down, dries them in the heat outside, grinds them into powder and mixes them into love-potions and liar's brews.

Like all djinn, Lila arose from smokeless fire. Capricious and fierce, she was driven from the sight of men by Solomon, and might have been captured by that magus if not for the treachery of three soldiers, who betrayed their master for Lila's sake. She rewarded them well in her new home; while most of her lovers leave trophies on her walls, the three betrayers became immortals. Centuries later, it is said, they guard her hall in the Pit of Dust. Their only doom is boredom — if they leave the hell, they'll crumble into sand.

As for the men whose tongues are lost to Lila, they become exiles of a different sort. Everything they say becomes an insult, a vicious lie, or a prophecy of doom. (See the Flaw: *Bitter Tongue* in Chapter III.) In game terms, the spirit isolates her intended victim, then seduces him into kissing her (with a mystic Charm if need be). When he agrees, she tears out his tongue and replaces it; a successful Rage roll (difficulty 5) with three successes or more accomplishes the deed. If she succeeds with less than three successes, the temptress rips out his tongue but cannot replace it; if she fails or botches, the victim gets away with his tongue intact. Lila cannot rip the tongue from an unwilling victim — he must kiss the djinniya of his own volition (charmed or otherwise). If forced to fight (which she is loath to do), Lila uses her other magical Charms, or simply disappears in a cloud of acrid smoke.

Even when she isn't tearing out tongues, Lila is mischievous and perverse. She loves to curse, pit partners against one another, set heads of state at odds, and taunt children with her filthy jests. In most guises, she appears

as a dark-skinned Arab woman with breathtaking good looks; when revealed in her demonic form, her skin turns ash black and her eyes burn like tiny hells. Her voice, in either guise, is sweet and clear, which makes her coarse suggestions that much more disturbing.

Grand Demonic Manifestations

All servitors pale in comparison to the Lords — the arch-devils and demon-princes whose names ring throughout grimoire and scripture. Belial. Lilith. Beelzebub. Iblis. All Infernalists envy and worship these dark gods. They're the entities that give midnight its special chill.

But these Fallen angels cannot walk the Earth without help. The Gauntlet and God's will have banished them to the nether regions and spirit worlds. To cross over, they must be summoned by a sorcerer of some degree of power, or invoked by a congregation that promises them some fertile sacrifice to ease the discomfort they feel when visiting our plane. When these creatures *do* appear, they're quite powerful. Many a magus has lost his life and worse conjuring some manifestation he assumed he could control.

In game terms, greater demonic manifestations go beyond Traits and systems. These entities are essentially gods on Earth, and should be treated as story elements, not "monsters" of any sort. Although they're not omnipotent, most greater manifestations can do whatever you, the Storyteller, want them to be able to do. The greater devil might be subtle and refined, or he might smash through the side of a mountain and menace the town below. The form he chooses, and the feats he performs, are the Storyteller's prerogative.

Not all greater demons manifest in overwhelming glory; some appear to be mere mortals, animals or even clouds of smoke. In passing, it's worth noting that devil princes rarely come when they're called; the creature who shows up in the conjurer's circle and calls herself "Lilith" is more likely to be a demonic imposter or a meager reflection than the actual Dark Mother herself.

The following Appendix features several dozen demonic manifestations, dark gods and Fallen angels. You, the Storyteller, can get a general impression of their personalities and appearance from the descriptions given in that section. Bear in mind, though, that even gods are mutable. They take whatever forms please them, and if they wear the masks we give them, well, we've given each one of them an infinite supply.

And if Hell is so vast, consider the majesty of Heaven.

For if the Light did rebel against the Darkness, it must be powerful indeed to have lasted so long and burned so brightly.

Maybe Hell isn't so appealing after all.



appendix

Infernal Roll-Call



man is certainly stark mad: he cannot make a flea, but he makes gods by the dozens.

— Montaigne, Essays

If every word in this book was a demon's name, the book would comprise less than one-half of one percent of the devils that supposedly staff the 666 legions of Hell mentioned in medieval texts — and that's just the *Christian* demons! Add to that the tens of thousands of evil gods and spirits described in Hindu, Chinese and Buddhist myths; the "infinite spirits of the air and storm" known by the Mesopotamians; the bad gods and spirit-monsters of Africa and the Americas, and you have literally endless numbers of Infernal powers.

Nevertheless, some demons are more called-upon than others. When he works his malevolent Arts, a diabolist in your

chronicle might very well invoke any one (or more!) of the following corrupters. Bear in mind that many of these deities have other, less-sinister aspects; some have been perverted outright by their Fallen worshippers. In a way, this makes certain Infernalists more loathsome to Pagans than they are to Christians. After all, a Catholic priest would just consider "Freyja" one more servant of Lucifer; the Verbena by his side, however, would see the matter somewhat differently....

As Chapter IV indicates, these entities are not spell-fodder. Consider all of them (except maybe a handful of the "Exotic Devil-Gods") to be Grand Demonic Manifestation; at times, they might appear in a lesser form, but they never directly confront mortal magi, nor can they be killed by them. For all purposes, these beings are gods, not monsters. Most times, they'll simply be the names on the lips of Satanic foes. If they actually appear, play them accordingly.

Assyrian, Babylonian and Egyptian Demons

The most ancient Pagan deities are largely forgotten by the Dark Fantastic era. Nevertheless, some Nephandi and Arabian sorcerers recall these malefic Patroni. From their hidden corners, the Lost Ones are often eager to respond. They include:

Anubus (m): Jackal-headed god of the dead; although not truly evil, he safeguards gruesome rites of burial, resurrection and immortality. Worshipped in perverse form by some Nephandi and necromancers.

Apep (?): Titanic serpent that grants wisdom but eats everything it can catch. Considered an aspect of the Wyrm by some Nephandi.

Asakku (m; also Asag): Demon-king known for his affinities for fire, plagues and living stone.

Bast (f): Passionate, capricious cat-goddess, known for ferocity and cleverness. Often sends large black cats to aid anyone who treats felines with respect — even if they happen to be evil. Patrona of mysterious cat-folk with Infernal tendencies (the Bubasti; see **Bastet**).

Ereskigal (f; also Allatu): “Queen of the Great Below”; wife (and superior partner) to Nergal and mother of several gods and demons. One of the great Patroni of Bhât, Ereskigal appears nude, riding on the back of a dragon-sphinx and holding snakes in each hand.

Isis (f): Witch-queen, revered by necromancers for having defeated death. Rarely cruel, but often callous, Isis appears as a beautiful Egyptian woman who whispers arcane secrets.

Istar (f; also Ishtar, Astarte, Inana): Although not “demonic” or “evil,” this Patrona of war and sexuality is considered the “Whore of Babylon” by Christian mystics. Also referred to as the demon Ashtoreth (see below). For many reasons, a popular deity among both Pagans and Infernalists.

Lamastu (f): Bringer of disease and killer of infants; often depicted with a lion’s head and snakes in her hands.

Mâmitu (m): Punisher (yet patron) of oathbreakers and cowards. Often represented by a scorpion-man or half-griffin.

Martu (m; also Amurru): Fierce god of storms and barbarism, linked to nomadic tribes and fond of destroying cities. Appears as a dragon-sphinx, and sends lions and scorpions to his chosen.

Nergal (m; also Erra): Lord of the Underworld; although not “evil” *per se*, he’s known as a violent god of storms, plagues and warfare.

Ninurta (m): Birdlike god of war and anger, who also taught secrets of agriculture and fertility. Often invoked

as Nisroch or Misroch (see below) by anti-Christian Infernalists.

Osirus (m): Although this god could be seen as an antecedent to Christ, his worship has been perverted in the Dark Fantastic era. Now, vampires and necromancers perform vicious rites in the name of He Who Died And Was Reborn. (See **Vampire: The Dark Ages**.)

Pazuzu (m): King of evil winds demons; even so, he opposes Lamastu and makes war against lesser demons. (Featured prominently in the movie *The Exorcist*.)

Sekhmet (f): Lion-headed goddess of war; reviled by some Jews as an oppressor, and occasionally summoned by enemies of Judaism.

Set (m; also Seth): God of the Underworld, patron of Darkness and lord of all dead and undead. Worshipped by a cult of vampires (Followers of Set) who revel in corruption.

Siduri (f): A minor but vivacious figure, Siduri runs the alehouse at the end of the world and encourages people and gods to “make merry day and night, make a feast... dance and play.” Often invoked during orgies and celebrations.

Thoth (m): Baboon-god of wisdom and learning. Not malignant, but mysterious and somewhat eerie. Beseeched for hidden lore by Infernalists lurking in the shadows of Islam.

Tîamat (f): Primordial sea-goddess who warred on the sky-gods and birthed monsters to stand beside her. Supposedly killed by “heroic” Marduk (see Baal); her innards formed the mortal world. Despite her “death,” some Infernalists revere her angry ghost.

Christian, Jewish and Muslim Devils

Fallen angels? Bygone gods? Dark servitors of the Most High? Everyone has a different answer. Whatever the truth may be, this hellish pantheon merely hints at the true might of the Abyss. The most “popular” devils known to renunciates of the Book include:

Abbadon (m): “The Destroyer,” angel of the bottomless pit and Patronus of chaos and violence. Often appears as a huge, muscular man who beats upon things with his fists.

Ahriman (m; also Angra Manyu): Pre-Islamic “Satan” of Persian Zoroastrianism; evil twin of Ahura Mazda. Ruler of demons, lord of deceit; often seen as tall black man wrapped in robes and veils. Source of Nephantic term for “cabal.”

Apollyon (m): Dark angel of destruction who holds the keys to the Bottomless Pit. Sometimes seen as a dark cloud, or a terrible angel shining with black fire.

Asmodeus (m): Sybaritic devil of luxury and lust. Patronus of art; encourages men to squander wealth and women to surrender virtue. Often appears as a well-dressed young man, but sometimes appears with three heads — a ram, a bull and a beautiful man — and rides a dragon.

Astaroth (m or f): Debased version of Istar, sometimes seen as male and sometimes female. High-spirited, this devil rides a dragon backward and inspires both lechery and sloth.

Azazel (m; also Azael): Weapon-crafter and devil of vain pride; once a ranking angel, now the standard-bear of Hell and chief aid of Satan.

Baal (m): Warped combination of the sky-god Marduk (also Bél), the fertility lord of the Canaanites (referred to as Bal'al), and the patron of Baali vampires. This demon might not exist at all if not for linguistic misunderstandings — the word Ba'al means "lord," but was not a name in itself until human belief made it so. Now this demon lolls idly in Hell, a fat, spider-handed deity with three gross heads.

Beelzebub (m; also Ba'al-zubu): "Lord of the Flies," patron of envy, heresy and falsehood, and commander of all the legions of Hell. Often summoned in the form of a gargantuan fly, he sends plagues of insects against his enemies.

Behemoth (m): God of chaos, gluttony and destruction, Behemoth bears Satan's cup and loves to eat. Appearing as a swollen elephant-man, he promotes despair and self-indulgence.

Belial (m; also Beliar): Second among both angels and Fallen Hosts, this former prince of virtue became the master of deceit. Sometimes seen as the *original* Devil, joined by Lucifer after the Fall. Belial speaks well but never tells the truth, and he dresses in great finery.

Belphegor (f; sometimes m): Guardian of Paris and Patrona of the arts, she craves sensuous pleasures and inspires mortals to do the same. Often invoked at revels and feasts, Belphegor appears as a beautiful woman with unstoppable sexual appetites.

Carnivean (m): As his name (*carn* — "flesh," *vena*lis — "for sale") implies, a devil of license, lewdness and shamelessness. Commonly seen at Sabbats and orgies, he leads mortals to abandon inhibitions.

Cronos (m; also Chronos): Demon of time and space, this gigantic entity eats gods and men alive; often appears as a long-haired man with deep, gravely voice. Endless source of embarrassment to the Seers of Chronos, who swear their patron is a different entity.

Dommel (m): Invoked for fear-spells and treachery, this demon is the master of fear. In all aspects, his face is impossible to look upon; those who see him go mad with terror. Warlocks who call him up without first donning blindfolds often drop dead on the spot.

Dumah (m): "Angel of the silence of death"; this Prince of Hell still works for God, and warded Egypt during the plagues and Exodus. Often appears as a smothering shadow; never speaks.

Exael (m): Minor demon, now gaining power as the Patronus of machines and artisanry. Often appears as a blacksmith, painter or jeweler.

Forcas (m; also Furcas): Patron of politics, rhetoric, gamesmanship and logic; also favored by Renaissance Infernalists for his mastery of geometry, calculus and horsemanship. A dapper devil, Forcas often wears scholar's robes or livery.

Furcalor (m): Patron of rage and murder; often summoned for warlike matters, he appears to be half-man, half-griffin.

Honblas (m): Patron devil of dissonance; this Infernal trumpeter summons the legions of Hell to battle.

Iblis (m): "The Serpent," often identified with Satan, who traps proud souls and blinds them to Allah's truth. Often personified as a black-skinned man in white or blood-red robes, or a 12-winged, six-armed man with three faces. Patronus of the Devil-King Age.

Leviathan (f): The Great Devourer of damned souls (perhaps the monster that swallowed Jonah), Leviathan lives beneath the seas. Often summoned by Satanic Nephandi, who beseech this great dragon for watery servants and ocean tempests.

Lilith (f; also Lilitu): Demon queen, rebel immortal, or consort of Yahweh and Lucifer *both*? No one's quite sure. To the Bahari, she is the Dark Mother of pain and enlightenment, who ate of the fruits of Knowledge and Life, and became God's equal (and Lucifer's lover; see **Revelations of the Dark Mother**). Other legends call her mother of demons, leader of succubae and killer of infants. Either way, she is eerily seductive, often appearing as a nude or near-nude woman wrapped in thorny vines, accompanied by an owl, a cat and a serpent.

Lucifer (m): Fallen First-born, once an angel of light now counterpart (or aspect) of Satan. Some tales claim he was the lover of Lilith, while others insist he still works for God. Often manifests as a blazing angel with bloody hands and wings, or as a bright-skinned man with bloody eyes.

Mammon (m; also Midas): Patron of greed, envy and wealth, this fat hunchback dresses in fine garments and turns all he touches to gold. Rake-hells and usurers enjoy his special favors, as do Guildsmen who Fall from their Daedalean ideals.

Mastema (m): Accuser of the guilty and slayer of Egypt's firstborn, this terrible death-angel still performs dirty work for God. Dressed in white, he radiates blinding fire and points bloody hands as if to say, "Accept your punishment for what ye have done!"

Mephistopheles (m): Popular tempter and prince of deceit.

Moloch (m): Leader of Hell's army, and one of the most terrible of devils. Huge and muscular, Moloch demands the lives of innocents — often skinned, eaten, gored or burned alive — before he appears. Naked except for the blood of slain children, he stands like a fiery giant and drinks cups full of salty tears.

Nisroch (m; also Misroch): The Devil's cook, this griffin-headed demon stirs the fruit of immortality into Infernal concoctions. Patron of poisoners and assassins.

Paimon (f): A crowned woman riding a camel; bends the minds of men toward vice and distraction. Invoked for ceremonies, feasts and orgies.

Rosier (m; sometimes f): Beautiful and eloquent devil, beloved by poets and traveling players. Often called upon to lend grace to a would-be lover, or to grant seductive powers to stumbletongues.

Sammael (m): "Blind to God"; often equated with Lucifer and Satan. Sometimes considered the serpent that tempted Eve, or the second consort of Lilith. Appearing as a gorgeous red-haired man, Sammael loves art and assists magicians in their rites.

Satan (m): Devil of many faces; literally "the Adversary," he could be God's tester, arch-enemy, dark reflection or pawn. King of Hell, he may or may not be the latter form of Lucifer.

Surgat (m): Minor demon known for prophecy; opener of all locks and finder of secrets. Often summoned by those who have questions or puzzles; resembles obscene cross between lizard, bull and man.

Xaphan (m): Patronus of rebels, artisans and king-slayers; he suggested that the angels burn the gates of Heaven. When invoked, he appears in a conflagration that melts cold stone to slag. Anything (or anyone) outside a magic circle is consumed and sent to Hell.

Dark Pagan Gods

Although they recognize human evil and divine maliciousness, most Pagan pantheons lack devils *per se* — all gods have kind and cruel aspects. Even so, certain deities inspire diabolic rituals, especially during the Renaissance. They include:

Aphrodite (f; also Venus): Goddess of sexuality, often summoned during orgies or lust-craft. Vain, proud, jealous and unforgiving; appears as a temptress no man (or woman) may resist.

Ares (m; also Mars): Patron god of Rome, war and fertility, Mars loves human sacrifice and is invoked by violent Infernalists and Black Knights. Appears as a giant in black armor, or as a handsome, dark-haired man of sarcastic temperament.

Bacchus (m; also Dionysus): God of wine, women, song and revelry; called upon by rake-hells and libertines. Sometimes summoned during Sabbats or orgies, he may appear as a fat, drunken man, a transvestite, a young lover, or a panther. Inspires his followers to wild, sometimes deadly frenzies.

Balor (m): One-eyed god of death, renowned for his killing gaze. Patron of fomori and "evil eye" among Celtic Pagans.

Cernunnos (m): Horned god of fertility and hunting; incarnation of masculinity, but often identified with Pan and Satan in this period. Said to drive the Wild Hunt through forests in search of human prey. ("The Hunter" in **The Sorcerers Crusade Companion** is a slight manifestation of Cernunnos, but he has other, darker aspects, too.)

Chronos (m; also Saturn): Displaced ruler of very ancient gods, he supposedly ate his children; thus, sometimes considered a patron of cannibals. See Cronos, above.

Diana (f): Divine huntress, often mingled with Hecate by some Renaissance witches. Usually a patron of "white witchcraft," but sometimes invoked by blood-pagans or confused Satanists.

Freyja (f): Much to the disgust of virtuous Pagans, their malevolent cousins often call upon this beautiful goddess of lust and vitality during fearsome rites. In some aspects, she becomes a devil-witch, naked and riding a chariot drawn by huge black cats.

Gwyn (m): White-horned god of the Underworld, whose skeletal presence freezes even brave folk like statues. Not evil *per se*, but very tricky and often malevolent.

Hades (m; also Pluto): God of the Underworld, giver of wealth and king of ghosts. A grim-faced man in black Grecian robes, he's sometimes called upon by necromancers or those who would go to Hell and return.

Hecate (f): Three-faced goddess of the moon, this fertility Patrona assumes an eerie guise by night. Often called "the Witch-Queen," she appears as Maid, Mother and Crone in one, usually with huge hounds by her side. Gifts women with magical knowledge, but remains distant and fearsome toward men.

Hermes (m; also Mercury): Patron of the mystic Arts, trade and prosperity, this god aids sorcerers of all types. Also known to watch over thieves and rebels, and sometimes invoked for that purpose.

Hymdar (m): Patron of trickery, guile and cowardice. This frost giant attempted to cheat Thor, and violated oaths of hospitality. Sometimes appears to aid treacherous Pagans in double-dealings.

Jormungand (?): Known as "the Wyrm" to Nordic werewolves, this huge monster waits below the sea until the Day of Judgment. Occasionally rises to raise storms or eat ships. Called upon by blood-pagans and Nephandi

who see it as an incarnation of spreading, omnipresent hunger — the waiting Void beneath the sea.

Kullervo (m): Finnish sorcerer who rained vengeance upon his enemies; renowned for his grief and cruelty, he is considered by some a Patronus of those who have been pushed too far.

Kupala (m): Powerful Patronus of Tezghul the Insane and various vampiric cults. (See **Transylvania By Night, Transylvania Chronicles I-IV.**) Sadistic and bloodthirsty, he freely manifests himself across the northeastern wilderness and runs with Tezghul's horde.

Loki (m): God of deceit, trickery and shapeshifting; sometimes a jester, other times a brutal foe, he appears as a smiling Nordic man of lupine aspect.

Louhi (f): Witch-queen of Pohja, a cold and sorcerous land. Renowned for shapeshifting and vengeance, Louhi is given human sacrifices by Tezghul and his horde.

Lovitar (f): "Mistress of Pain" who lives in an ice palace and thrives on torture. Often called upon by Slavic and Finnish sorcerers who crave visions and sensuality, Lovitar sometimes grants visions or exotic poisons to her followers. Said to be Tezghul's mother.

Medea (f): Not a goddess at all, but a sorceress of timeless renown and ferocity. Often invoked by scorned women (who sometimes kill children in her name); appears as a coldly sad, yet beautiful woman.

The Morrigu — Badb, Morrigan, Nemain and Macha (f): The "battle-crows," war-deities of Pagan Ireland who dispense cruelty and valor in equal measure. Sometimes beautiful, always fearsome; invoked by blood-pagans of Celtic ancestry.

Nidhogg (m): The dragon coiled at the root of the world; sometimes invoked by Infernalists who view him as an aspect of the Wyrm or Satan.

Odin One-Eye (m; also Wotan): God of trickery, wisdom, runecraft and war; offered blood-eagles by Pagan Infernalists, who often torture themselves in imitation of his own sacrifices (he tore out his own eye, and hung for nine days on the world-tree).

Orpheus (m): Melancholy singer who went into the Underworld for love. This former mortal was torn apart by Bacchantes, but is occasionally invoked by necromancers, rakes and despairing lovers.

Pan (m): Lusty, temperamental satyr-god, known for terrorizing enemies and entrancing lovers with song. This goat-footed wildman is often summoned at Sabbats and battles. Affiliated with satyr fae, especially the unseelie kind....

Persephone (f): Kidnapped by Hades, she rises from the Underworld bringing secrets to the living. Invoked by witch-folk of all temperaments, and sometimes by necromancers, too.

Scathach (f): Warrior-princess of the Land of Shadows, she trained Cuchulainn but possesses a wicked temper. Invoked by female blood-pagans, she appears as a red-haired swordswoman trailing blood behind her.

Signy (f): Wife of Loki; considered a source of strength, endurance and love, especially by Norse blood-pagans, who recognize the virtue of love even in darkness.

Skoll (m): The Void, epitomized by a titanic wolf that chases the Sun across the sky. Often prayed to by Pagan diabolists who wish to bring on Final Night.

Surt (m; also Surtur): Fire giant of Norse legend who will set Creation alight at the end of time. Called up by blood-pagans who wish to consume enemies with flame. Sometimes identified with Lucifer, Satan or Loki.

Svantotvit (m; also Svantevit): Slavic war-god, beloved by Tezghul. Appearing as a four-headed man, this giant sometimes accompanies his minions on a massive white horse. Craves human sacrifice.

Tchernobog (m): Slavic lord of demons and the dead; in a cold Underworld, he sleeps until long winter nights awaken him from slumber. Sometimes manifests during blizzards, thunderstorms or eclipses as a titanic, winged devil. (Immortalized in *Fantasia*'s "Night on Bald Mountain" sequence.)

Thor (m): Patron of warriors, offered grotesque sacrifices by blood-pagans. Like Odin and Freyja, a virtuous god sometimes called upon for evil purposes.

Typhon (m): Gigantic spirit of storms; appears as a man with hundreds of poisonous snakes for legs and hands. Called upon to send tempests, earthquakes or volcanoes.

Ymir (m): First-born of all things. A cruel giant slain by Odin, his body comprises the earth and heavens. Identified with Tiāmat and Satan, Ymir's ghost is propitiated with savage human sacrifices.

Exotic Devil-Gods

Strangers to the Renaissance shores bring weird and terrible gods that even *they* do not fully understand. Most, like Kali, seem to have many aspects, beneficial and baneful. As mentioned earlier, some of these pantheons have millions of demons and devils; the following are only the ones you're most likely to hear about in a Dark Fantastic chronicle. (For more information about these odd deities, see **Euthanatos** and **The Thousand Hells**, or check books on Hindu, African, Native America, Aztec, Chinese and Tibetan mythology.)

Ahpuch (m): Mayan god of the dead; flies through the air bringing sickness and war. Dressed in flayed human skins, he appears as a giant with a naked skull for a head. When he manifests, stars fall and fires rage across the land.

Ananta (f; also Sesha): “The Endless One”; a mammoth, 1000-headed cobra floating through the Primal Infinite. One day, this monstrosity will breathe fire across all Creation, burning everything away and returning infinity to a Void. Worshipped by some Nephandi, who shape-shift into large, multiheaded serpents.

Chongo (m; also Shango, Chango): African spirit of fire and rage; often appears as conflagrations or a furious man with red or ash-white skin. Shouts a lot. Patron of vision-mockers, who crave the raw power he offers.

Ciuacóatl (f): Snake-woman, goddess of war, always hungry for live human sacrifice. An aspect of the Great Mother’s destructive tendencies, she appears as a woman clad in white, a living skeleton, or a hideous serpent-goddess.

Coyote (m): Eternal trickster, whose jests can be deadly. Revered by malicious shamans who feel compelled to teach by opposition — even if it kills.

Emma-o (m): “Lord of Torments”; cold and merciless, this Yama King punishes the wicked but promotes wickedness. Invoked by Infernalists for the refined cruelties he has mastered; sometimes sends female demons (*shikome*) to aid his future “clients.”

Evil Animal Spirits (varies): Many shamans commune with malicious beast-gods who teach them venomous magics, ghost-calling and shape-changing. Many of these beasts go by no name other than “Snake,” “Bull,” “Spider,” and so forth, although some are known as “Man-Bull” or

“Old Spider-Woman.” Although rarely evil by design, these spirits are callous by human standards and often send their “little cousins” to help those who make proper sacrifices. Treat as Tempter Demons.

Evil Ghosts (varies): Like animal spirits; many ghosts of evil folk live on after death. Shamans and necromancers who aid them win hideous favors — blood-breathing, skin-shedding, leprous touch, and other Investments. In Wraith terms, these would be powerful Spectres who offer

Shadow-powers and skin-riding to their worshippers.

(See **Wraith: The Oblivion, Shadow Players Guide** for details.) Otherwise, treat as minor demons who can grant Investments.

Huitzilopochtli

(m): Aztec war-god, known for cruelty. Demands heart-sacrifices. Unlike other “evil” gods, Huitzilopochtli is aligned with Light and the Sun.

Some sources claim the god’s name has been usurped by a vampire (See **The Sorcerers Crusade Companion**). If so, no one has noticed and the god (if he ever existed at all) doesn’t seem to care.

Jackal (m): “The deceitful son of God” bears striking resemblance to Satan, but takes the form of a night-stalking beast. Like Coyote, a trickster, but more malevolent — enjoys rape, incest and man-eating.

Kali (f): In truth, the Dark Mother is an *enemy* of demons; even so, she’s sometimes worshipped by Infernalists or Fallen Chakravanti for

her destructive talents and remorseless hungers.

Mara (m): Lord of Darkness and agent of temptation; tried to break the Buddha’s concentration by sending armies of demons to distract the holy man. Revered by Indian devil-priests for the power and sensual rewards he



offers. Often appears as colossal, indescribable collection of heads, arms and colors.

Monkey-King (m): Avatar of chaos who defied the Will of Heaven, desecrated temples, beat and even murdered gods, and stole the secret of immortality. Revered by Chinese Infernalists for obvious reasons.

Ravana (m): Lord of illusions and king of all *rakshas*; demon king of deception and ruin, he often aids corrupt Chakravanti and other devil-worshippers who prize lies and misdirection. Said to have 10 x 10,000 forms, each more terrible than the last.

Shiva (m; also Aghora): Like his consort Kali, a foe of demons who seems rather demonic himself. Lord of destruction, he brings all things to ruin. Devotees include Fallen Ecstatics and Indian diabolists who wish to return Creation to the Void.

Tezcatlipoca (m; also Yaotl): "The Smoking Mirror"; enigmatic shape-changer known for affinities with jaguars, smoke and warfare. Clad or painted in black, he manifests to fight other gods, or to drive men insane.

Tou Mu (f): "The Iron Empress"; Yama Queen of the Hell of Being Skinned Alive. Patron (and punisher) of selfish materialists, and matriarch of some of the worst demons known to Cathay. Manifests as a black-haired, three-eyed woman sheathed in spiked iron armor. Each of her 18 arms is said to hold some fearsome treasure.

Unkulunku (m): "The Irresistible Chief"; supreme god of Zulus. Originally a hermaphrodite that split into both man and woman, he also brought death into the world. Not evil, but fearsome; often invoked by evil shamans who crave his power over storms.

Wyrm (?): Some vision-mockers simply worship avatars of Wyrm-corruption, as the werewolves would call it. (See **Werewolf: The Dark Ages** and **Book of the Wyrm** for details.)

Yen-lo-wang (m): Supreme judge and king of all the Chinese hells; one of the Yama Kings, who sometimes send evil souls back to Earth as demons or Kuei-jin. (See **Kindred of the East** and **The Thousand Hells**.)

Primal Manifestations

In remote lands and blasted wildernesses, primal cults worship spirits of corruption that predate even Babylonian demonology. Every so often, these cultists bring their primitive brand of madness into civilized domains; compared to their wild gods, Satan looks sane by comparison. Worse, certain primal diabolists (often Nephandi of the K'llasshaa variety) distribute books like the *Liber Labyrinthus* among their occult associates. Thus, what was once hidden and exotic is beginning to make its way into the libraries of formerly-reasonable men.

(Storyteller's Note: Many, although not all, of these entities are the Urge-Wyrms spoken of in werewolf cosmology. For more details about many of these demented beings, see **Book of the Wyrm**, but remember that some aspects of the spirits may have changed with time.)

Abber'Dun (?): "Eater of Stars"; spoken of by Babylonian astrologers, recently rediscovered by Florentine Celestial Masters. Cannot manifest on Earth, but is sometimes seen as a titanic abyss in the heavens. Reputed to drive Skyriggers mad by its very presence.

Abhorra (?): "Flayer of Souls"; Urge-spirit of hatred and guardian of war. Invoked when a tribe wishes to harden its collective heart. Loves copious amounts of human sacrifice. Abhorra's rites often involve self-mutilation, genocide and fratricide. Manifests as a warrior bathed in blood.

Amarth-Hybeel (f): "Screamer at the Gates of Dawn"; Patronus of insanity, revered by some Marauds. Said to shift between forms so quickly that only the most demented eyes can see her clearly.

Angu of the Howling Entrails (m): Urge-spirit of cruelty and sadism; loves sacrifices that involve ingenious, prolonged torture. Occasionally invoked by zealous Inquisitors, torturers, and even the victims of excruciation, who consider their agony a sacrament. Said to possess certain Churchmen.

Ba'ashkai (m): "The Claws of Night"; Urge-spirit of raw violence. Manifests in two forms: the Hellbringer, a brutal warlord in spiked armor (said to resemble Gilles de Rais); and Malik Harjaq, a 12-armed Viking or Dervish. Loves bloodshed; invoked by Infernalists who lead violent cults.

Edlahala (?): "Drinker of Winds"; a malevolent, mass of storm clouds, this primal manifestation often appears to vision-mockers who wish to raise a huge and terrible maelstrom.

Foebok (m): "The Howling Blindness"; Urge-spirit of terror. Called upon when worshippers wish to cripple their foes without risk. Sacrifices are often buried alive in tiny cells or caskets. Manifests as a wave of bowel-emptying panic.

Furmas the All-Burning (?): Spirit of hellfire. Conjured by those who desire mass destruction, this mad god resembles a laughing column of flames. Demands arson and other burnt offerings.

Gree the Weeper (?): Patron of suicides, Urge of despair. Said to appear as a sexless being in gray robes, shrouded in fog and thick emotions. Rarely worshipped by tribes — the Weeper's self-destructive rites quickly deplete any group that worships it.

H'rugg (m): "Shadow of All That Dies"; worshipped by cannibals, drain-dwellers and catacomb-rats, this

patron of rot and decay manifests as a colossal, writhing pile of sludge.

Hoga, Master of Tears (?): An animate cloud of brimstone, Hoga is sometimes invoked by the waste-dwellers of Kharshoom or the Nephandi of Paris. No being, it is said, can withstand the choking smoke that manifests when the Master of Tears is called upon. Prefers burnt offerings and foul perfumes.

Hyree’ithtaa, the Unspeakable Queen (f): Patron of atrocities; beloved by some shamans in Tezhgul’s service. Often sends swarms of gigantic, misshapen spiders and centipedes to devour live sacrifices. Said to manifest as a cloud across the sun.

Karnala (f): “The Lighting of the Heart”; Patrona of wanton desire. Very popular among degenerate courtiers and rapacious tribesmen; sometimes invoked by very ugly people who cannot find a lover on their own. Enjoys sacrifices of painfully precious things; also sends large cats to devour human hearts in her name.

Khaaloobh the Voracious (?): “The Dark Fungus”; Urge-spirit of consumption and decay. Often sends a minor manifestation, the Knight Entropic, to retrieve sacrifices and execute its will. This figure, a blood-stained Crusader, bears a black dragon oroboros device on his shield; he rarely speaks, and his words are never remembered.

Lethargg the Swollen (m): Urge-spirit of apathy and stagnation, alive and well during this period. Worshipped by remote tribesmen who believe that all things are doomed, and by certain orthodox persons who trust in the coming Apocalypse and feel they are ready to meet it. Sometimes manifests as a black cloud of impenetrable darkness.

Mahsstrac the Dragon (m): “Destroyer of Life”; gargantuan hydra-spirit said to block out the sky when he manifests. The Urge-spirit of power, Mahsstrac inspires worshippers to acts of inhuman prowess and recklessness. In return, he craves human sacrifice, accompanied by pillage and rape.

Psuelak of the Thousand Tongues (m?): Urge-spirit of lies and deception, invoked by Infernalists who prefer subterfuge to confrontation. Sometimes sends demonic courtiers as emissaries.

Sykora, 10,000 Eyes of Night (m): Lord of paranoia, called upon by corrupt courtiers and certain Celestial Masters. Said to manifest as a shambling mass of eyes, hands and mouths, or as a cloud of impenetrable darkness.

Tes-la-Beel (f): “Mother of Krakens”; titanic sea-goddess of primal extinction. A gargantuan devilfish who resides at the bottom of the sea, often worshipped by Nephandi who create Labyrinths and Crays underwater.

Vorus (?): “The Eternal Hunger”; Urge-spirit of greed and avarice. Invoked by Dutch and Italian merchants who own the *Liber Labyrinthus*; said to be a secret Patronus to some Explorators. Invoked while standing in a pile of

riches. Loves sacrifices of beloved people and things. Often manifests as the Greek King Minos, and may be an aspect of the demon of that name.

Wakshaa the Poison Pool (f): “The Poisoned Lady”; increasingly popular among the *decadanti* of Europe, but originally worshipped by Pagan tribes who craved altered senses and oblivion. Also described in some alchemical texts as “the Brimstone Eve” or “the Lilithian Flower.” Often seen as an aspect of Lilith, but enjoys manifesting in mortal guise as Lady Yul (a pregnant matron with toxic offspring) or Contessa de Conquéte (a sweet-voiced courtier of undeniable charm).

Inspirational Sources

This place is too cold for hell. I'll devil-porter it no further: I had thought to have let in some of all professions, that go the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire.

— William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*

The Pit is wide and deep as sin. Everyone who visits it brings away a different impression. The books and films below have provided inspiration for this **Path of Screams**, and they have a lot to offer players and Storytellers alike.

Several books are notable in their absence. Their omission is intentional. Although this fantasy game supplement has historical and cultural foundations, it’s intended to be just that — a *fantasy game supplement* — not a sounding-board for pseudo-philosophical, would-be esotericists. Works I do recommend include:

- Ahmed, Rollo, *The Black Art* — As any Mage fan knows, this old but entertaining work has been a major (if tongue-in-cheek) influence on many of my later projects. The author had some... issues... with magic and its practitioners, but his colorful view of the occult fits the tumultuous World of Darkness beautifully. It’s also a lot of fun to read once you get through its convoluted archaisms. Highly recommended, if you can find it.

- Alighieri, Dante, *The Divine Comedy: Inferno* — Duh.

- Baker, Clive, *The Hellbound Heart* and *The Damnation Game* — The first, a novella that provided inspiration for the *Hellraiser* films, unlocks a whole new vision of demonology: the devil as an emissary of excruciating pleasures. *The Damnation Game*, a novel, presents a modern version of Faust that, while out of period for **The Sorcerers Crusade**, provides an intriguing look at the soul-seller and his predicament.

- The *Holy Bible* (King James version) — Always worth a read, no matter what your spiritual or creative persuasion might be. Words of mercy and faith contrast strongly with

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incredible amounts of carnage wrought in God's name (the Books of Samuel left me feeling sorry for the Philistines!), especially in the King James translation, which was crafted to appeal to a witch-hunting monarch.

- Black, Jeremy and Green, Anthony, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Illustrated Dictionary* — A wonderful source of concise information about Babylonian and Assyrian demonology, magic and religion.

- Chambers, Robert W., *The King in Yellow* — An eerie and disturbing collection of stories bound by an enigmatic and terrifying "grimoire" that brings madness to its readers.

- Constantine, Storm, *The Wraeththu Trilogy (The Enchantments of Flesh and Spirit, The Bewitchments of love and Hate, and The Fulfillments of Fate and Desire)* — An engrossing, surreal epic of dark magic and human passion.

- Cotterell, Arthur, *The Encyclopedia of Mythology* — A more accurate title would be "...of Western Mythology." Cotterell deals only with the gods and heroes of Greco-Roman, Celtic and Nordic/Slavic folklore. Still, it's a great book, lavishly illustrated with full-color art from the masters. Highly recommended.

- Dann, Jack and Dozous, Gardner, *Demons!* — A paperback anthology of modern demon-tales, ranging from the sublime (Harlan Ellison's "Grail" alone is worth the cost of the book) to the ridiculous (no comment).

- Daraul, Arkon, *A History of Secret Societies* — Another **Mage** mainstay, this book makes occult conspiracy seem fun.

- Early, Christopher, *The Maleficium* — Although it's an arduous read, this old *Ars Magica* supplement provides a thorough treatment of medieval Satanism and its uses in a storytelling game. John Cobb's illustrations make this book worthwhile, even if the text seems somewhat... infernal...at times. Recommended.

- Films, *Black Sabbath, Curse of the Demon, Dangerous Liaisons, Mark of the Devil, The Masque of the Red Death, The Prophecy, Prospero's Books, Twins of Evil, Warlock and Witchcraft Through the Ages* (silent) — Most movies about demons and their servants are pretty silly. While the films listed above have their idiotic moments also (or, in the case of *Prospero's Books*, a leaden pace), they're wonderful inspiration just the same.

- Kramer, Edward, *Dante's Disciples* — Another anthology of mixed but worthwhile tales, this one inspired by Dante's journey into the Underworld.

- Lewis, Matthew, *The Monk* — Despite its lumbering prose, archaic style, and occasionally laughable convolutions of plot and verbiage, this Gothic classic is still an engaging and sometimes disturbing read. Even now, over two centuries after its publication, Lewis's tale of a pious

man led to damnation by his own secret sins is a grand, gruesome epic. Highly recommended.

- Lovecraft, Howard Phillips, "Supernatural Horror in Literature" (a must-read for all Storytellers), "The Rats in the Walls," "The Outsider," "The Music of Erich Zann," "The Call of Cthulhu," "The Dunwich Horror," "The Shadow Over Innsmouth," "Imprisoned with the Pharaohs," "Nyarlathotep," and many others — Another "duh." Say what you will about his tortured prose or quaintly overused devices, no one has ever surpassed (or even equaled) Lovecraft in evoking the dread of That Which Lies in Darkness. Although his work often takes place in the 20th century, his Elder Races and Old Gods hearken back to far more ancient times. Highly recommended.

- Masters, Phil, *GURPS Arabian Nights* — Wonderful source for Persian and Arabian fantasy-culture in this period. Highly recommended.

- Marlowe, Christopher, *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* — The classic about demonic patronage and soul-selling, this play also provided a running joke in *Shakespeare in Love*. Highly recommended.

- Masello, Robert, *Raising Hell: A Concise History of the Black Arts — and Those Who Dared to Practice Them* — A fun, lightweight, and occasionally inaccurate view of magic, demonic influence, and the people throughout history who have succumbed to both.

- McCall, Andrew, *The Medieval Underworld* — A gruesome but intriguing look at the hells medieval folk made for themselves... on Earth as well as in the Afterlife.

- Messadié, Gerald, *A History of the Devil* — Tracing the idea of Evil incarnate, Mr. Messadié presents a thumbnail history of religion, culture, and their impressions of the Darkness. Highly recommended.

- Milton, John, *Paradise Lost* — Yet another "duh." This masterpiece provided the essential portrait of Lucifer defiant. Recommended.

- Morgan, Genevieve and Tom, *The Devil: A Visual Guide to the Demonic, Evil, Scurrilous, and Bad* — A lovely pocket guide to the Infernal, lavishly illustrated with work from Gustave Doré, Francisco de Goya, Hieronymus Bosch, and many others. Highly recommended.

- Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Thus Spake Zarathustra and Beyond Good and Evil* — Although Nietzschean philosophy arrives several hundred years after this era ends, many of his ideas translate frighteningly well into a "satanic code of morality"... a point that wasn't lost on a certain aforementioned "would-be esotericist," who cribbed mercilessly from Nietzsche's work. I prefer the original source, myself.

- Poe, Edgar Allan, "The Pit and the Pendulum," "Hop-Frog," "The Masque of the Red Death," "The Premature Burial," "Fall of the House of Usher," and many others —

Did I say no one had ever surpassed Lovecraft? My mistake — Poe's work evokes a sense of dread and darkness that must be read to be believed. Highly recommended, even though few of his tales deal explicitly in Infernalism.

- Richards, Monica, *The Book of Annwyn* — Intricate and beautiful collection of Welsh mythology, occult musings and pagan reflection. Highly recommended.

- Shakespeare, William, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *The Tempest* — Caliban, Edmund, Iago, and the Lord and Lady Macbeth... villainy doesn't get any better than this! Although *The Tempest* and *Macbeth* present the most obvious examples of dark magick and malevolent forces, the human evil embodied by Edmund and Iago offers a clearer and more devastating view of the Infernalist's personality. Classics all, and highly recommended.

- Stableford, Brian, *The Second Daedalus Book of Decadence: The Black Feast* — Wilde, Swinburne, de Lautréamont, Rimbaud, Baudelaire... nothing like a little Decadence-era literature to get you in an Infernal state of mind!

- Stanford, Peter, *The Devil: A Biography* — An entertaining and highly readable account of Satan's "evolution" and the factors that influenced it.

- Turner, Alice, *The History of Hell* — An enjoyable and accessible look at the evolution of the Underworld and the human reflections of Hell. Highly recommended.

- White Wolf supplements, **Vampire: The Dark Ages*, **Book of the Wyrm* (first or second edition), **Chronicle of the Black Labyrinth*, **The Book of Madness, Guide to the Sabbat, World of Darkness: Sorcerer*, **The Dark Ages Companion*, **The Sorcerers Crusade Companion*, **Clanbook Baali, The Cainite Heresy*, **World of Darkness: The Bygone Bestiary, The Risen, Wraith: The Oblivion, The Shadow Court, Transylvania Chronicles II: Son of the Dragon*, and **The Thousand Hells* — Invaluable resources for demonic influence in your chronicle. Asterisked books are especially helpful.

- Williams, Selma R., *Riding the Nightmare: Women and Witchcraft from the Old World to Colonial Salem* — Concise, readable overview of witch-hunts and the forces that drove them.

This book would not have been possible without music from the following artists (usually played at ear-splitting volume): Black Sabbath (first four albums only), Black Tape for a Blue Girl, The Changelings, Christian Death, Cradle of Filth, Dead Can Dance, Die Form, Faith & the Muse, Fields of the Nephilim, Diamonda Galas, Gwar, Iron Maiden, Mediæval Bæbes, Miranda Sex Garden, Order of Dying Knights, Qntal, Vast, Venom, Voltaire, The Wake, and White Zombie/Rob Zombie.

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