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LORE OF THE CLANS

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piecing together lies

"My name's Beckett." The Gangrel stood in the empty parking lot, holding his hand out. Drusilla looked at it, skeptically, and Beckett sensed the neonate's hesitation. "I don't bite," he added, smiling to show his teeth.

After another moment, Drusilla took the hand and shook it. "I hear you're the guy to talk to about our history," she said.

Beckett chuckled as he took his hand back. "More of an archeologist, although I've picked up a few things here and there." He put the battered leather hat back on his head.

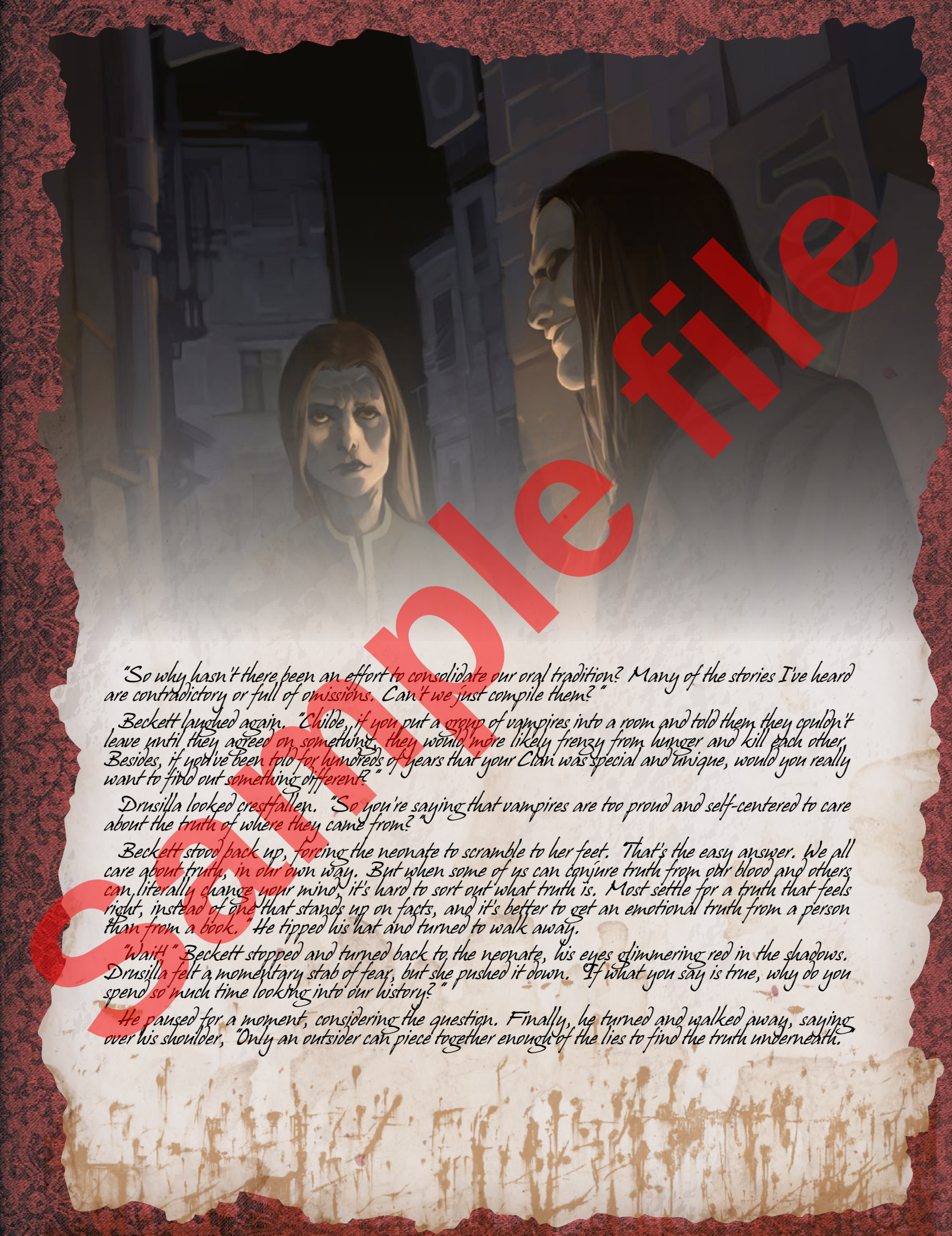
"I tried asking my sire, and she sent me to you. She said it was in exchange for a favor she did for you in the past."

Beckett snorted, and the hat slid over his eyes. "The translation wasn't even that good." He paused and slid the hat back to look at the neonate. "Not that you should pass that on to your sire, of course. Your question was—"

"Yes," she interrupted. She wasn't sure why, but something about the way Beckett smirked made her eager to get her answer and leave. "I asked my sire why vampires don't write down their history. Most of what I've learned has been through what other vampires remember. It seemed... inefficient."

The archeologist sat down on the concrete, and after a moment, Drusilla joined him. "That's not the right question. Vampires write things down all the time. I've seen writing about Kindred affairs as far back as Sumeria. I've even heard rumors of tablets written in some kind of proto-language that our forebearers used purely for vampiric needs."

Drusilla's eyes widened, but Beckett continued. "So the question really is why didn't we do it more often before the Masquerade? Most of the theories I've heard ultimately revolve around one truism: Vampires have a certain amount of faith in our ability to be... persuasive. If you lie to me, I believe I could make you tell me the truth, or whatever truth you think you know. I can't force a book to change its words." He adjusted the hat on his head again. "I have my own theories, of course, but that's one I come across time and again when I've tried to encourage others to document their experiences in writing."



"So why hasn't there been an effort to consolidate our oral tradition? Many of the stories I've heard are contradictory or full of omissions. Can't we just compile them?"

Beckett laughed again. "Child, if you put a group of vampires into a room and told them they couldn't leave until they agreed on something, they would more likely frenzy from hunger and kill each other. Besides, if you've been told for hundreds of years that your Clan was special and unique, would you really want to find out something different?"

Drusilla looked crestfallen. "So you're saying that vampires are too proud and self-centered to care about the truth of where they came from?"

Beckett stood back up, forcing the neonate to scramble to her feet. "That's the easy answer. We all care about truth, in our own way. But when some of us can conjure truth from our blood and others can literally change your mind, it's hard to sort out what truth is. Most settle for a truth that feels right, instead of one that stands up on facts, and it's better to get an emotional truth from a person than from a book." He tipped his hat and turned to walk away.

"Wait!" Beckett stopped and turned back to the neonate, his eyes glimmering red in the shadows. Drusilla felt a momentary stab of fear, but she pushed it down. "If what you say is true, why do you spend so much time looking into our history?"

He paused for a moment, considering the question. Finally, he turned and walked away, saying over his shoulder, "Only an outsider can piece together enough of the lies to find the truth underneath."

Introduction

"Fiction [is] fact distorted into truth."

- Edward Albee

My sire always told me, "There's no instruction manual for being dead, *strákur*." I believed her, because she was older and smarter than me, and the Kiasyd value knowledge if nothing else. Oh sure, there are a lot of traditions, and some of them even have Capital Letters.

Many sires spill a lot of poison into the ears of their childer, telling them the One True Way to be a vampire. My sire did, when she wasn't starving me until I could recite her lessons in perfect Icelandic. Some vampires don't even bother, kicking their errant progeny to the streets and letting them figure it out for themselves. A few smother their instruction in religious imperatives, philosophical tenets, or mystical confluences. But not one of them has a pamphlet with clear, easy instructions once you've become Damned.

Worse, all of them lie to their progeny, to their broodmates, and to themselves. All vampires lie, except me, of course. But the best lies are those that are told between two truths, yes? So-called "Kindred" swap tall tales in Elysium or spin wild sermons in their pack houses, but enough facts have to be right before someone discards the whole story. It's a tenuous balance.

However, there's a difference between *truth* and *facts*. Facts are dry things, scraps of information desiccated and pinned

to the page, bereft of all flavor and vibrancy. Our bloodline excels in collecting such facts. The truth, however, feels *right*. Once you hear the truth, it slots nicely into a groove in your worldview, and you feel smarter and better for knowing it.

Facts are static, something to collect in a book and preserve for centuries. The truth evolves and changes over time, as elusive as the wind. Some things are truer now than when the elders recounted them hundreds of years ago, and some things that fall from a fledgling's mouth start off as true, but they don't last the night. When a large number of Camarilla vampires get together to violently overthrow their Prince, or a pack of enraged Sabbat hunts down a Bishop for heresy and a taste of her blood, facts are the first casualty in the conflict. But I'll bet you dollars to krónur that they all think what they know is true. It *has* to be true for them.

I have made a special study of the Clans. Each Clan has its own version of the truth, one passed on from sire to childer over the centuries. Thirteen versions of reality shared among the undead, and each one tweaked and modified just a little in each telling. Sometimes it's because of a forgotten name, conveniently replaced with a more useful one. Other times it's to erase a moment of failure from history. And once in a while, it's because what really happened gets in the way of what everyone knows is the truth.

Here are those thirteen truths, childe. They may line up with other things you know, or they might not. What isn't said can often tell you far more about a Clan as what is said. Sometimes the narrators present tantalizing rumors and conspiracies, while others digress into areas not often considered by many. Some of what they say have no facts to back them up, but not everything is a lie, either.

But the narrators aren't as important to the truth as the stories, the messages, the "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not" that comprise their messages. Vampires slice and present the world to each other as they understand it, through the lens of anecdotes, propaganda, and whitewashing. What each listener and reader takes away from a Clan's lore will be different, but they all know in their hearts that they are closer to the truth.

Let us find instruction from amidst the lies, together.

What's In This Book

Each chapter addresses one of the thirteen Clans of the modern nights from the perspective of a vampire in it:

Silent assassins shackled with a number of curses, **the Assamites** are divided by an age-old conflict between three castes.

Once philosopher-kings of an ancient civilization, **the Brujah** struggle between rejecting and embracing their eternal anger.

The Followers of Set venerate a chthonic god in a variety of guises, as they work to bring others into their decadent religion.

The Gangrel are bestial and untamed, lurking in the untamed fringes of Kindred society as they struggle against Kindred and beasts alike.

The Giovanni are an insular collection of necromantic families who stole immortality to control both this world and the realm of the dead.

The Lasombra are proud nobles and leaders and rivals to the Ventrue who are willing to do anything to be on top. Anything.

The Malkavians are a Clan fractured and unified by madness, using their unique perception and gifts of prophecy to guide and educate the "unenlightened."

The Nosferatu are hideously deformed information brokers that lurk in the shadows, to avoid both their fellow Kindred and an ancient enemy.

The Ravnos are nomads and tricksters that travel all over the world to combat demons and spread the word of their fragmented beliefs.

The Toreador are artists and sensualists that laud their connection to humanity while seeking adoration and physical beauty.

The Tremere are masters of blood sorcery, a secret society that is both ally and villain to many of the Clans in the modern nights.

The Tzimisce are eldritch Old World lords that master flesh and bone to transmute themselves (and others) to a higher philosophical plane.

The Ventrue observe the ancient traditions and status quo of Kindred society, while working against those that would disrupt it.

Each chapter starts with some history of the Clan, followed by information about how the Clan interacts and works now. At the end is a wide variety of combination powers, Merits, Flaws, and other mechanical bits for players and Storytellers. Use them or ignore them as you like to expand, refine, and modify typical members of that Clan.

Concluding the book are a number of **Appendices** covering the *antitribu* of the Clans, various Kindred of Note, as well as those Kindred who claim no Clan at all: the Caitiff.

Storytellers, you're encouraged to read over everything, too. Decide what's true for your chronicles. The selected material presented here is from a wide spectrum across two decades of **Vampire: The Masquerade**, along with new and intriguing ideas never presented before. Some parts may work perfectly for your chronicle, while others won't. Use what makes sense, and cast the rest into doubt and heresy — this material is meant to work for your game, not to mandate the only way each Clan can be portrayed.



Assamite

"It will have blood, they say; blood will have blood."

— William Shakespeare, Macbeth

a silent conspiracy

Miniam bowed respectfully to the new arrivals and welcomed them in Arabic, Farsi, and Turkish before leading them down the corridor to the conference room where Tegyrinus and the other guests awaited. Inside, the newcomers hesitated as they took in the assembly before quietly taking their seats. It was a remarkable cross-section of the Children of Haqim. Indeed, it was nearly unimaginable that some of these Assamites would ever have sat in the same room, absent the hospitality of the Vizier himself. An enormous circular table took up most of the room, with place settings for each guest meticulously arranged so that no one was sitting next to a Clan-mate whom he openly hated. A half-dozen small TV screens circled the table, situated so that everyone could see. Only the most important guests actually had seats at the table, with childer and lackeys sitting behind, representing all bloodlines and factions of the Children of Haqim. Well, all but one, thought Miniam grimly. None of the Assamites present belonged to the Web of Knives.

From the scholars came the Vizier Tegyrinus, the mad Russian doctor Dmitri Borodin, and the mathematician/assassin David Wendt. From the sorcerers came Sarah Schneider, the Amr's favorite, and Badr Alkhalwani, the spymaster. From the warriors came the legendary Fatima Al-Faqadi and Hilel al-Masaari, who was once the Sultan of Cordoba. Behind each of those luminaries sat other, less infamous but still notable Assamites. Donya Tehreni of the Sisterhood of the Erinyes. Daniel Goldman of the Leopards of Zion. Perhaps most incongruously present, a stocky crew-cut soldier who could only be Randy Hopkirk of the informal "sniper society" known as the Thousand-Meter Club. Miniam idly wondered what the pale boy from Alabama would look like in a hundred years when his skin had darkened. Tegyrinus rose, his natural charisma making him the center of attention even among this collection of luminaries.

"I thank you all for coming and hope your journeys were not troublesome," he began. "We have much to discuss and then much to plan for. I have spoken with many of you before now. About changes on the horizon. About future challenges for our Clan. Indeed, challenges about what it meant to even be an Assamite. You are all here now because... because that future appears to be closer than I had previously thought."



He turned to Miriam and nodded, and at the signal, she clicked her computer. Each of the TV screens flickered on, showing video footage of an elderly Arabic woman who seemed to be in the throes of a drug high.

"I was given this video by the Amr. The woman you see before you served the Amr as a seer. By all accounts, she is — or rather was — a gifted propheteess whose visions have always been completely reliable. This is her final prophecy."

As the video continued, the old woman's eyes rolled back up into her head and she began to speak. "He is coming. The Black Shepherd comes to cull the flock. The Hateful Spawn. The Herald of Destruction. As the Lord of Death called his childer at Kaymakli, the Black Shepherd shall call the Children at Alamut." The old woman repeated those same words over and over in mounting hysteria. She didn't even seem to notice when blood started to drip from her eyes and then pour from her nose and ears. After less than a minute, she began to convulse before falling over, apparently dead.

Tegyrinus looked around at his peers within the Clan, whose expressions ranged from confused to horrified. "The Amr sent me this prophecy because he finds it credible, as do I. It appears that a 'culling' of some sort lies in store for our Clan." The Vizier's face hardened. "I do not intend to be a part of it. Do any of you?"

With that question, a conspiracy was born.

A History of the Children of Haqim

As I look towards an uncertain future, I find myself forced to consider and reconsider the past. There is much of our Clan's history for which I am one of the few extant witnesses, but far more precedes even my venerable age. Perhaps if we viziers had done more to educate the Children of our history and legacy... but no, events happened as they did and could not have happened any other way. What matters is where we are tonight and what decisions we make next. Still, history can still serve as our guide, and so I set my own history to paper for the benefit of my fellow Assamites.

As I have said, I am a vizier, and so my biases should be obvious to any astute reader. For the record, my sire and grandsire were... reticent about sharing the details of their own unlives, and there are few older than them who would speak at all about our collective past. Accordingly, much of what I know of our origins is hearsay and conjecture, likely with a healthy dose of deliberate misrepresentation. As a childe, I was naive. It would be many centuries before I would countenance the possibility that my kin might lie about our history.

The First Nights

There are two wildly contradictory tales surrounding Haqim's own Embrace and early unlives. The version that I believe to be closest to the truth is as follows, though I acknowledge the alternative origin, well-established amongst the extremist wing of the warrior caste before I joined the Children. Though I find it unpersuasive, it is not impossible that their version is correct.

In my preferred history, Haqim was a warrior and military leader during the age of the First City who received the Embrace from a member of the Second Generation. There is little textual evidence as to which one. Although his background was as a warrior and hunter, he devoted his early unlives to intellectual pursuits, making him learned for the time. It appears that he did not Embrace childer of his own until the rise of the Second City. His first childer were men and women of learning, and they laid the foundations of the vizier caste. As the eldest caste, we should have held dominion over the rest of our Clan to this very night. That we failed has been our gravest error.

In time (and supposedly in response to pressure from his fellow Antediluvians), Haqim created a second bloodline,

the warrior caste. Ask a warrior, and he will tell you that Haqim created their caste to serve as judges of the conduct of the other Cainites of the Second City. Rubbish. None of the other Clans would have ever tolerated a single Clan having the power of judgment over them, let alone asking for it, as some legends say. The warriors were to serve as elite troops to fight in military campaigns against the enemies of the Second City, primarily the thrice-damned Baali. When the warriors proved no match for the demonically empowered Baali, Haqim created a third bloodline, the sorcerers. Of the sorcerers, the most powerful (and most frightening) was the mysterious Ur-Shulgi, whose form was that of a horrific child whose skin had blackened as if burned. It took the combined prowess of all three castes, and especially the terrifying might of Ur-Shulgi, to finally end the Baali menace, at least for a time. My grandsire described an encounter with Ur-Shulgi once. I think it was the only time I ever saw him show fear.

From the beginning, there was friction between our castes, bound together by shared blood, but little else. Over time, the greatest issue would be population growth. For selection as a vizier, a prospect needed to demonstrate intelligence, political acumen, and some degree of education. In the Bronze Age, such qualities were rare. To be a sorcerer, the prospect needed to demonstrate the even rarer qualities of some degree of functional occult knowledge and, ideally, be able to work some form of magic as a mortal. Selection as a warrior... required only the ability to kill. Admittedly, the warriors only selected those who were the absolute best at it, but even the most accomplished fighters, soldiers, and assassins were far easier to find than suitable candidates were for Embrace as a vizier or a sorcerer. Is it any wonder that by the time our Clan relocated to Alamut, the warriors made up over half our numbers?

The Eagle's Nest

In the fullness of time, the Second City fell, its rulers cursed by Caine himself. Our history is unclear on whether Haqim and his Clan were present at the time. Some of our legends say that he had already relocated to Alamut by then, sickened as he was by the corruption of the other Antediluvians. Other less politically correct anecdotes say that Caine cursed us as well, that the peculiarities of the viziers and the sorcerers stem from the displeasure of Haqim's grand-sire, and the warriors also suffered punishment with a blood-borne curse at that time. There are few records of those nights, and no Children who observed them first hand are around to tell the tale. Exactly why there are no written records of the First Nights is a matter of some debate,

given the existence of an entire caste deeply concerned with record keeping. The consensus is that records dating back to that time were lost during the transition to Alamut, or else deliberately destroyed when the Web of Knives came into prominence. However, there are persistent legends of a “secret library” that the elder viziers hid away from their enemies within the Clan. As for the Curse, if Caine did levy one against us, he would not be the last to do so, and his curse was not as debilitating as those that would come later.

Whatever the circumstances, Haqim eventually led the Children to a new communal haven – Alamut, the Eagle’s Nest. I will not commit its location to writing. Indeed, I could not even if I wished, for that location remains occluded by the will of an Antediluvian who had mastered the ultimate expressions of Disciplines dedicated to stealth and silence. Haqim’s power shielded Alamut from discovery for millennia, and Alamut became the heart of the Assamite Clan. Typically, no more than a few dozen of the Children permanently resided in its labyrinthine tunnels at a time, although they shared space with enough ghouls and mortals to serve and feed the Kindred inhabitants. All loyal members of the Clan from the moment of our Embrace instinctively know the way home, just as the will of our Ancestor binds us all against revealing that home to outsiders in the face of the cruelest of tortures or the most seductive magic. Betrayers of the Clan give themselves away by the fact that they lose all memory of Alamut’s location. Only once did an outsider penetrate the veil that protects Alamut, and that was enough to change the course of our history.

While the elders of our Clan made Alamut the center of our power, the rest of the Children spread out across Asia and North Africa, in some places coexisting with other Kindred and in others dominating the region. Unfortunately, our founder Haqim took an exceedingly dim view of our entanglement with the Jyhad. While seemingly loath to outright forbid Assamites from involving themselves in Kindred politics, he communicated his unhappiness in increasingly obvious ways until, finally, he exploded after a fight broke out within Alamut itself between Children on opposite sides of the Peloponnesian War. Denouncing all sides for putting political machinations above Clan unity, Haqim left Alamut that night. He returned on a few occasions but only briefly, and he offered no input into the Clan’s affairs when he did.

The Rise of the Warriors

When Haqim abandoned Alamut, it provoked the most extremist and elitist of the warriors into an impulsive action.

Or perhaps, it merely gave them the opportunity they had been waiting for. Opinions differ. Since the nights of the Second City, Haqim had made a practice of leaving his childer to their own devices for decades at a time, and in his absence, a policy arose whereby the leaders of the three castes would choose an “Eldest” vampire to direct the Clan’s affairs in Haqim’s absence. With superior numbers and fighting skills, the extremist warriors staged a bloodless coup and established that henceforth, the Clan would always choose their Eldest from the warrior caste, using claims that it had been the viziers who were solely responsible for alienating the Clan’s founder.

Incensed but lacking the resources to fight back, the viziers and the sorcerers acquiesced, and for the next two millennia, the warriors would be the face of the Assamite Clan. To be fair, the warrior caste itself split evenly on the matter, with many of those outside the coup leaders indignant on our behalf. Ultimately, though, they chose to support their caste rather than allow the whole Clan to fall into civil war. Those dissidents were instrumental in protecting the viziers and sorcerers against hardliners who openly talked of our extermination.

Not all accepted the new status quo, though. There had always been Assamites who chose independence over Clan loyalty and had elected to make their own way: The Dispossessed. After the warriors seized control, the numbers of Dispossessed swelled with viziers, sorcerers and even many of the less doctrinaire warriors who felt unsafe within their own caste. All fled Alamut to pursue their fortunes elsewhere. During this era, two additional bloodlines were born: the Shango, Assamite sorcerers who turned their back on the Quietist discipline and became a part of the African Laibon community, and the so-called Bedouins, warrior nomads who wandered North Africa with little concerns for the plans of the leaders of Alamut. Those plans were ambitious indeed.

As the extremists consolidated their hold on the rest of the Clan, they followed the same course as other conquerors by rewriting our past in order to exalt themselves over their kin. In the newly approved history, the purpose of the Assamites was to judge and punish all other Cainites for their sins, real or imagined. In time, they even developed a new origin for Haqim himself. No longer had one of Caine’s childer selected him for the Embrace. Instead, he was a hero who fought against the evil Caine, murdering the nameless king and queen who had been Caine’s first childer and stealing their blood to make himself a vampire of the Second Generation instead of the Third. Afterward, he led his followers directly to Alamut where he commanded the