

LAST NIGHTS ON THE ALPHAVINE

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INTRODUCTION: THE DARK HEART

For five hundred years the city of Baghdad has occupied the centre of the Islamic world. It is home to the Caliphs, the spiritual leaders of Islam, and the city is notionally capital of a great empire, stretching from the shores of the Atlantic to the wilds of Khorasan. It is renowned for its beauty, a home to palaces and pleasure gardens, universities, and monuments. Yet Baghdad is also a city of prisons and slave markets, the heart of an empire controlled by decadent and often cruel rulers. It is a city of great prosperity, though few consider the manner in which its inhabitants are fed and clothed by the labour of slaves toiling in the plantations of Southern Iraq. Those who visit Baghdad rarely see that beneath the city's genteel surface beats a dark heart, a malevolent force that shapes the existence of all those who reside within the Caliphate.

In the middle of the thirteenth century the authority of the Caliphate is in decline. Whilst the Caliphs once ruled over a great state, stretching from the wilds of Khorasan to the shores of the Atlantic Ocean, their power is now confined to the valleys and plains of Iraq. Yet from within these lands a hidden power grows. There are those Cainites who would wish to assert their authority over all of the Children of Caine, and who see control of Iraq as a means of spreading their influence across the known world. These Cainites, known as the Ikhwan, have a reputation for uncompromising brutality and aggression. From their base in Baghdad they have slowly, inexorably, spread their influence across the Islamic world, mercilessly dealing with their enemies, and wresting control of cities long ruled by ancient and powerful elders. They believe that there will soon be a time when they unleash their might upon the world, launching a ferocious tempest of violence which will subjugate their enemies. As each year passes the Ikhwan grow more powerful and now, in the year 1242, there are those observers who realise that the coming storm is fast approaching.

IRAQ BY NIGHT

The Last Nights of the Caliphate is a sourcebook describing Iraq, and the city of Baghdad, for *Vampire: the Dark Ages*. During the first half of the thirteenth century Baghdad was the largest city in the Islamic world, a powerful metropolis which acted as an important centre of trade and culture. At this time the city contains one of the largest Cainite populations in existence, and the chapters which follow define the city, its inhabitants, and the political struggles which dominate Baghdad in the medieval period. The material within this book is intended to support the work of a Storyteller who wishes to set a chronicle in Baghdad.

Whilst Iraq has long been considered the secure centre of the Islamic world, the power of the Caliphs is looking increasingly precarious. In the east, the rising power of the Mongol Khaganate has brought the conquerors of Central Asia into Persia, and into contact with the eastern frontier of the Caliphate. On the Caliphate's western borders, meanwhile, lies the Sultanate of Misr; whilst the sultans are notional allies of the Caliphs, there are few who doubt the rulers of Misr would expand their power into Southern Iraq should the opportunity present itself. Whilst the lords of Baghdad tell themselves that none would dare challenge the Caliphs, it is clear to all within the region

that Iraq is now in a dangerous position, threatened by powerful rivals on all sides.

The weakness of the moral rulers of Iraq is in sharp contrast to the growing power of the influential Cainites who reside within Baghdad. The Ikhwan, a faction which has dominated the city for over a century, has in recent years started to expand its influence; in 1242 almost every city in Iraq is under Ikhwan control, and Cainites loyal to the group are now settling in Syria, Arabia, and other regions, further afield. There are few who truly understand the sinister machinations of the Ikhwan, but they are unquestionably hostile to the majority of vampires who fall under their rule. There are many Cainites outside of Iraq who watch the growing power of the Ikhwan with fear, observing the reign of terror which has been imposed on Baghdad, Basrah, Mawsil, and the other cities of the region. It is apparent that much blood will be shed before this chapter of history is closed.

THE ORIGINS OF THE IKHWAN

The origins of the Ikhwan can be traced to the year 1099, and the conquest of Jerusalem at the end of the First Crusade. This was a highly symbolic event within the Islamic world; as the third most holy city in Islam, Jerusalem had been under Islamic control since the seventh century. Its conquest meant that, for the first time in five hundred years some of the most holy sites in the Islamic world were now under Christian control.

A year after the conquest of Jerusalem a delegation of Assamites from Iraq travelled to Alamut, to request that the Silsila act against the Levant's new rulers. The delegation hoped that an unambiguous ruling in their favour might act as a rallying call for the Assamites of the region, focusing their attentions on driving out the Crusaders and their Cainite allies. For seven nights, the matter was debated in detail, as the consequences of every possible response to the situation were examined.

The decision of the Silsila surprised many younger Assamites. Whilst the clan's elders sympathised with the concerns of their petitioners, the wisest amongst the Children of Haqim believed the Crusades to be an ephemeral affair, and that a forceful response might be more damaging than allowing events to run their course. The Silsila thus advised that the Children of Haqim should be guided by their own conscience in relation to these events, and that no unified response was required by the clan. This judgement would anger the petitioners; the refusal of the Silsila to engage with

what they saw as a matter of religious dignity was, the petitioners thought, insulting to their faith. As the news of the Silsila's decision spread across the Islamic world, a number of younger Assamites started to look for leadership away from Alamut.

In the year 1102, a number of more militant Assamites were invited to Baghdad by Nabukudracara, one of the city's leading elders, to discuss an appropriate response to the Crusader conquests in the Levant. For months a number of impassioned debates were held behind closed doors and, towards the end of the year, Nabukudracara announced the formation of a new brotherhood, the Ikhwan, ostensibly dedicated to protecting the interests of Muslim Cainites, and their herds. The group's formation went almost entirely unnoticed outside of Iraq.

In the years after the Ikhwan's formation, the group gained a reputation in Iraq and surrounding regions for the uncompromising nature of its members, and their willingness to use violence to further their political aims. Despite the notional purpose of the group in opposing the extension of Crusader influence in the Levant, the initial focus of the Ikhwan was on enforcing what their members saw as an appropriate Islamic morality on other Cainites in Iraq. In the decades after the Ikhwan's formation, members of the group worked their way into positions of power across Iraq. Baghdad and Wasit were strongholds of the Ikhwan's ideology from the group's formation in 1102; Baqubah, Tikrit, and Najaf followed over the next twenty years, whilst the Ikhwan had a major success in 1144 after one of their adherents became the undisputed Cainite ruler of the city of Basrah. Though they claimed that this was due to popular support, members of the Ikhwan often relied on violence to claim power. The group's growing dominance was noted by outsiders, and Cainite travellers to Southern Iraq in this period were often struck by the strict enforcement of Islamic law, and violent punishment inflicted on transgressors. Most saw this as nothing more than a reflection of the region's character, and little attention was paid to the Ikhwan's growing power.

Matters would change in 1210, when the Ikhwan brutally took control of the city of Mawsil, in Northern Iraq. The city's Cainite ruler, a Toreador elder named Parmys, was summarily executed, whilst the other Cainites in the city were forced to submit to Mawsil's new rulers or share her fate. These events were the start of a reign of terror in Mawsil, which has now lasted for thirty years.



THE SECRET HISTORY OF THE IKHWAN

The Cainite history of Iraq, and indeed, a great many events affecting the Children of Caine across the Islamic world, have been directly influenced by the ambitions of a single vampire. Few Cainites have met Nabukudracara, Qadi of Baghdad, and fewer would imagine that he is responsible for the rise of the Ikhwan. Yet his malevolent influence has spread across much of the known world, and has led to countless deaths, both amongst Cainites and mortals.

Nabukudracara was an old man, and close to death, when he was visited by a being of great power, and offered the gift of immortality. The embrace was, he found, an awe-inspiring experience, which restored not just the vitality of his youth, but also his ambition and determination. Moreover, as he learnt about Cainite society, he found that his sire was none other than Haqim, lord of the Assamites, and one of the oldest and most powerful of the Children of Cainite. This was, Nabukudracara thought, a sign that a great destiny awaited him.

Yet, as the decades passed, Nabukudracara found himself slowly becoming fixated on a problem, one which even his formidable intellect could resolve. Clever and independent, Nabukudracara felt little loyalty towards either his sire, or to the Silsila, a group of elders which acted as a council to fulfil Haqim's will. Nabukudracara's problem was that he could see no good reason why he was chosen for the embrace, and every reason why his sire had made an error in choosing to bring him into the clan. As he pondered this question over the centuries, an idea began to develop in Nabukudracara's mind.

Whilst Haqim was respected amongst the Assamites, it occurred to Nabukudracara that, not only could one of his ambitious childer take his place, but that such a step might even be considered a duty to the clan, to ensure that they were unified by a more powerful and capable leader. Of course, Nabukudracara realised that he was, perhaps, the only Assamite Methuselah who possessed the skill and ambition required to pursue this ambition. To fulfil such a goal would not be an easy task, and might, perhaps, require centuries of plotting and

scheming, but Nabukudracara was a patient man, willing to wait for as long as necessary. When the time was right, he would diablerise Haqim, and become the new lord of the Assamites.

It was immediately apparent to Nabukudracara that his goal would require a faction of loyal followers amongst the Assamites, a conclusion which led to the birth of the Ikhwan. Of course, it was necessary to conceal the purpose of the group; the disruptive influence of the Crusades upon the Islamic world would prove to be highly useful here, and most Cainites believe that the Ikhwan came into being in response to the Crusader conquest of Jerusalem. The group's formation was, in fact, a carefully orchestrated process, and the group's formation in 1102 had long been planned by Nabukudracara.

The first step taken by the Ikhwan, to support the ambitions of Nabukudracara, was to impose the group's authority on Iraq, a process completed with bloody efficiency. In the years since, the group has now expanded across the Islamic world, and the agents of the Ikhwan are now active across the Islamic world, from the shores of the Atlantic Ocean, to the ports of Southern India.

Whilst individual members of the Ikhwan enjoy the power they have achieved, Nabukudracara's main goal at present is to weaken traditional Assamite power networks, wherever they are found, and destroy any of the elders of the clan who are powerful enough to oppose him. To this end, he has promoted the Road of Blood amongst his followers, instilling in them the notion that it is not just permissible, but appropriate, to consume the lifeblood of the undeserving. Invariably, this means those Cainites who might hamper Nabukudracara's rise to power.

Whilst the Ikhwan is notionally an Islamic group, Nabukudracara has no interest in religion, beyond how it may be harnessed to persecute his opponents. Many members of the Ikhwan are staunch Muslims, and would be shocked if they ever were to discover the contempt in which Nabukudracara holds their beliefs.

The conquest of Mawsil surprised and shocked many Cainites throughout the Islamic world. Having previously seemed to be a conservative reflection of mortal religion, the Ikhwan now appeared to be an aggressive and expansionist faction, not content with ruling Baghdad and the cities of Southern Iraq. In 1232, the Syrian city of Raqqa fell to the Ikhwan, and it is no secret that agents of the group are now present in the Levant, preparing for further conquests. The Ikhwan is now a menacing presence within the Islamic world, a herald of inevitable conflicts to come.

IDEOLOGIES AND AMBITIONS

With the rapid growth of the Ikhwan, many Cainites in Iraq, Syria, and beyond have attempted to learn about how the group functions. This is a surprisingly difficult task; the Ikhwan has no scripture, and the elders of the group refuse to discuss their ideology with outsiders. Members of the Ikhwan are actively hostile to those who show too much interest in their activities, and Ikhwan domains are often cleansed of scholars, intellectuals, and other similar Cainites. It is clear that the Ikhwan is a group which is possessive of its secrets.

Despite the relative mystery of the Ikhwan, the following observations have been made about the sect and its activities:

- All members of the Ikhwan are drawn from the Children of Haqim. Though other Cainites are sometimes allied to the group, full membership is confined to Assamites.
- The Ikhwan identify as Sunni Muslims, though they are rarely observant followers of the religion. Their religious allegiances are, nevertheless, used to justify their high-handed and often brutal treatment of other Cainites.
- The Ikhwan despises the Ashirra, on the basis that the beliefs of the members of the sect rely heavily upon Shi'ite theology. The Ikhwan correspondingly sees the members of the Ashirra as apostates, and thus enemies of Islam.
- There is considerably hostility between those Assamites who are loyal to the Ikhwan, and those who are not members of the group. Whilst the Children of Haqim rarely discuss this relationship with outsiders, some Cainite observers believe that the rise of Ikhwan represents a schism within the clan, and that the lords of the Ikhwan have repudiated the authority of Alamut.

- The Ikhwan appear to believe that they have a right to rule all Cainites, and that members of other clans should submit to their authority; this belief seems to have motivated their expansion outside of Iraq.
- Prospective members of the Ikhwan serve an extended apprenticeship prior to the embrace. It is normal for a promising mortal to spend seven years as a ghoul, proving their worth, and then a further seven years of training after the embrace. Many prospective recruits will die during this period, either in the service of the group, or at the hands of their masters.
- Whilst the Children of Haqim are known as the Clan of Judges, the Ikhwan see themselves as warriors and assassins. Their propensity for violence has led the group's influence to be described as a 'web of knives'.

Members of the Ikhwan claim that the group is a fraternity, and that all members are equals. Nevertheless, it is clear to anyone that has had any contact with the Ikhwan that its activities are meticulously co-ordinated, and that its conquests are driven by some carefully-considered plan, designed to expand the group's power. Outsiders often refer to these shadowy leaders as the Lords of the Ikhwan though, outside of Iraq, few have an idea of the identities of these elders. Within Iraq itself it is more difficult for the rulers of the Ikhwan to hide their identities, though their plans and ambitions remain mysterious outside of a small, trusted circle of loyal believers.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF TERROR

The conquests of the Ikhwan in Iraq and Syria has been accompanied by a wave of violence, targeting the enemies of the group, both real and perceived. Whilst most Cainites are willing to use violence to achieve their aims, the brutality employed by the Ikhwan is far greater than that which normally emerges from the political intrigues between the Children of Caine. For the ghulams in the Ikhwan's service, it is not merely sufficient to defeat their opponents; instead, the enemies of the group will meet their deaths in cruel and painful ways. Within Ikhwan domains, torture and mutilation are common, and the violence used against notional enemies of the group will often appear excessive to outsiders. Whilst many of Iraq's Cainites are appalled by the conduct of the Ikhwan, few can deny

PRACTICES OF THE IKHWAN

As the Ikhwan has established its influence across Iraq, followers of the group have adopted certain practices which influence how they deal with outsiders. The most notable of these are as follows:

Fostering of Neonates: Younger members of the Ikhwan are often sent away from the cities of their embrace, to serve elders residing elsewhere. Not only does this allow neonates to gain experience, it also helps the Lords of the Ikhwan in deploying followers where their services might most effectively support the group's long-term aims. One consequence is that, even at a relatively young age, adherents of the Ikhwan are experienced travellers.

Freedom from the Oath: It has become common, in the medieval era, for elders to use the Blood Oath to control vassals, childer, and other subordinate Cainites. The elders of the Ikhwan, conversely, insist that the loyalty of their followers must come willingly. Although use of the Blood Oath is not explicitly banned amongst members of the Ikhwan, binding another Cainite in this way is seen as a mark of failure. On occasion, younger members of the Ikhwan have attacked or killed elders outside the group who have been known to bind others with the Blood Oath.

The Sign of the Ikhwan: Members of the Ikhwan frequently mark their territory with what is known as the "sign of the Ikhwan", a simplified form of the Great Seal of the Assamites. Most ominously, the sign of the Ikhwan is daubed upon the walls of cities targeted by the group in the nights before an attack is launched. It is unknown whether this is intended as a warning or a threat.

that the brutality of the group forms an effective means by which their enemies may be intimidated.

The cruel conduct of the Ikhwan is not mere casual brutality, but a carefully considered approach to gaining and retaining power. Long ago, the key thinkers of the Ikhwan realised that many Cainites are highly rational beings, able to protect themselves through both political manoeuvring, and a cautious and conservative approach to risk. In response, the Ikhwan has deployed an apparently indiscriminate wave of violence within their domains. Their intention is not merely to defeat their enemies, but to apply such overwhelming force that few would be prepared to oppose their rule. The arbitrary nature in which they act against those over whom they hold power means that it is difficult for outsiders to understand what might provoke violence reprisal. It is common for Cainites under Ikhwan rule may find themselves punished for any or, indeed, no reason at all. Under such a regime it is difficult to find reliable ways by which one might protect oneself.

Amongst Ikhwan adherents, the imposition of violence, and the brutal ways in which the supposed enemies of the group are dealt with, is seen as a mark of virtue. If those being punished are enemies of the race of Caine, then no punishment may be regarded as too cruel. Conversely, the violence inflicted upon others is seen as a justification in itself, as members of the Ikhwan believed that those who are punished must necessarily be guilty. Violence is, thus, always a reasonable response to almost any problem.

Understandably, many Cainites, confronted by the Ikhwan for the first time, find the group's brutality intimidating. Few are willing to openly oppose their activities, or even defend others accused of offences against Ikhwan rule. The philosophy of terror may be crude, but it has proven to be effective.

WORDS AND LORE

Although the Cainites of Iraq share much with their counterparts in Europe, the culture and history of the region has shaped the language used by its inhabitants. The lexicon provided below presents the meaning of some key terms used within this book.

LEXICON

Aristoi: A Greek Cainite faction, which settled in Mesopotamia in the century after the Seleucid Empire's collapse. The term implies a noble background.

Ashirra: A Cainite sect, found primarily in Arabia, Syria, and North Africa. The Ashirra believe in using Islam as a means of uniting Cainite society.

amsar: A garrison town, established by Arabs to impose their authority on a conquered land; whilst some amsars were no more than temporary camps a few, like Basrah, evolved into major cities.

basileus: A Greek term for a ruler, the word basileus was the standard title used by Cainites ruling over cities in the Hellenistic world. The plural of basileus is basileis.

Caliph: The Caliphs are the successors of the prophet, representing the highest political and religious authority in Islam. In principle, there should only be a single Caliph living at any given time; in practice, schisms in Islamic belief means that there are often two or more competing Caliphs in the Islamic world.

Caliphate: A Caliphate is an empire ruled by a Caliph; as the entry above notes, there should only be a single living Caliph at any single point, and thus a single Caliphate. The reader should note that whenever the definite article is used (“the Caliphate”), the text refers to the territories falling under the orthodox Caliph, recognised by Sunni Muslims, whilst a named state (“Fatimid Caliphate”) refers to a territory under the authority of heterodox rulers.

Crusader Cainites: The Crusades brought numerous Cainites to Syria and the Levant; these interlopers have become known in Syria and the Levant as the Crusader Cainites. Though they are a heterogenous group, the Crusader Cainites are generally perceived as aggressive opportunists, seeking to build domains in the Islamic world.

Crusades, the: A series of religious wars fought in the Levant between invading European armies, and the forces of the various emirates and sultanates in Asia and Africa.

emir: An Arabic term used to denote a leader, governor, or other important figure. In both mortal and Cainite worlds the term is a close equivalent of the term “prince”. Mortal emirs are notionally subordinate to the Caliph, though many are *de facto* independent.

fitna: A term which literally means “discord” or “strife”; in the time of the early Caliphate, the term was specifically used for a series of civil wars in Syria and Iraq.

ghulam: A soldier; amongst Cainites this is normally reserved for those warriors defend the interests of particular coteries.

Hajj: A pilgrimage to Mecca, an act which forms one of the foundations of Islam. Within the medieval period, few Muslims are able to make the Hajj, and Cainites who attempt the Hajj are hindered by the keening, a ghostly wail that disrupts the sleep of Cainites in Arabia, causing pain and discomfort. A person who completes the hajj is known as a hajji.

Ikhwan: An Assamite faction, which has risen to considerable power and influence in the wake of the Crusades. The Ikhwan is involved in aggressive territorial expansion in the mid-thirteenth century, though their motivations remain largely a mystery to Cainites outside the group.

Keening: A ghostly howl, originating in Mecca, which can be heard by Cainites throughout Arabia as they sleep through the day.

khagan: A term used by various peoples of Central Asia to represent a supreme leader; this is a rough equivalent to the terms ‘Emperor’ or ‘Sultan’.

Khorasan: The plains and deserts which sit to the north of the Iranian plateau are known as Khorasan. Within the Islamic world this is seen both as a wild frontier region, and as a gateway to the great empires of Asia.

mujrim: A criminal. The Ravnos, widely disliked within the Islamic world, are often known as the Bay’t Mujrim

Mutaween: The moral police of the Ikhwan. The body exists to ensure that the behaviour of Cainites in a given city conforms to what the Ikhwan believes is acceptable. The concept of suitable behaviour often varies between cities. The singular of Mutaween is mutawa.

noyon: A Mongol term for a person in a position of authority. The term is used by the Anda to represent the pre-eminent Cainite in a given domain.

qadi: In the Islamic world a qadi is a judge; the title has been adopted in Cainite society, with a qadi taking the role of an arbitrator, an intermediary between an emir and their subjects. It is traditional for qadi to be drawn from the ranks of the Children of Haqim.

gam: A religious leader in the Tengrist faith.

raqib: Literally an overseer or observer, raqib is an Arabic term used to denote a low-ranking military official. The Cainites who control the Ikhwan refer to themselves as the Raqibs.

riqq: The institution of slavery within Islam. Slavery is deemed legal in most circumstances, on the basis of the interpretation of various Quranic verses.

Sahabi: The sahabi are, in Islam, the companions of the Prophet. A small number of Sahabi were embraced and are highly-respected figures amongst the Ashirra.

Shepherds of Islam: A sect of Cainites who believe that their role is to guide mortal Muslims. The Shepherds have their origin within the Ashirra, though, by the middle of the thirteenth century, the two groups are strongly opposed.

shurta: Within the Caliphate, the shurta were a police force, employed to target dissent and disorder; the term may be used to denote any group used to police the behaviour of others.

Silsila: The Silsila are the spiritual elite of the Assamites. The group are students of the teachings of Haqim and advise the oldest and most powerful members of the clan on matters both spiritual and political.

sultan: A universal ruler in the Islamic world; the position was created by Seljuk rulers, who wished to usurp the secular power of the Caliphs, without claiming their religious authority. In principle, there

may only be a single sultan in the Islamic world at any given time, though in practice multiple rulers may lay claim on the term.

Tabi'un: Many early Islamic warriors were Tabi'un or "followers"; the term is used to indicate those soldiers who served with the Sahabi, representing a second-hand connection to the Prophet.

Tengrism: A religion of the Turks and Mongols, focused on a sky god who serves as the personification of the universe, known to members of the faith as Tengri. Historically followed by a large number of people throughout Central Asia, by the thirteenth century it has been displaced in many parts of the region by Islam, though still finds adherents in Khorasan and Mongolia.

vizier: In the Islamic world a vizier is a chief minister, an intermediary between a ruler and his or her subjects. Since the rise of the Caliphate, the term has come to be employed by Cainites as a key deputy to a city's ruler, roughly equivalent to the role of the seneschal in the cities of Europe.



LAST NIGHTS OF THE CALIPHATE

PRINCE, BASILEUS, AND EMIR

In the medieval period it was the norm for the Cainites of Western Europe to refer to the pre-eminent vampire in a domain as that domain's "prince". This title was derived from the Latin word "princeps"; the word meant the 'one who takes the first position'. It had initially been adopted by the Ventrue rulers of Italy prior to Rome's rise to power, and was adopted in many parts of Western Europe as the Roman Empire expanded. Despite the collapse of Roman power at the beginning of the medieval period, the term has remained in common usage.

In the Eastern Mediterranean, meanwhile, the administrative language was Greek; this had its origins in the conquests of Alexander the Great, and was continued by the Roman Empire as it expanded eastwards. In time, Greek would be adopted as the liturgical language of the Orthodox church, and was spread throughout the region by commerce and culture. The prominence of Greek meant that that "prince" did not become a common term amongst the Cainites of the Eastern Mediterranean world, with the Greek word "basileus" preferred in many of the region's domains.

Roman power in the Eastern Mediterranean would decline from the seventh century onwards, as the Arab conquests transformed the region's political landscape. One consequence of this, over the following centuries, was the gradual decline of Greek as it was supplanted by Arabic. In the twelfth century, only the oldest Cainites in the region remember a time when Greek was the language of trade and government. One consequence of this is that the use of "basileus" has declined, and has largely been replaced by the Arabic word "emir", a term denoting a leader or prominent political figure in a particular territory. Naturally, younger Cainites regard this as an appropriate term for the pre-eminent vampire within a domain.

PERSIA AND IRAQ

When the Greeks first visited the region of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, they referred to the area as "Mesopotamia", a word which means 'the land between the rivers'. This is, perhaps, a natural frame of reference; the area represents a fertile landscape, sitting between the arid highlands of Persia to the east, and the Arabian Desert to the west. Relying on Greek sources, the people of Europe adopted "Mesopotamia" as a general term for the region.

After the Arab conquests of the seventh century, the term "al-Iraq" emerged as a term to describe the region

surrounding the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. The exact origins of this name is uncertain, though the Arab habit of adopting place names from local vernaculars suggests that it may have a local origin. By the twelfth century, most people within the Islamic world refer to the area surrounding the Tigris and Euphrates as "Iraq".

Within *The Last Nights of the Caliphate*, both "Mesopotamia" and "Iraq" are used to describe the region on which this book is focused, with usage varying by context; in broad terms, the former is used to refer to the region as perceived by outsiders, whilst the latter is preferred for perspectives by those who are native to the region.

Similar considerations come into effect when referring to the region to the east of Iraq. Historically, these lands were known as "Persia", a term derived from "Parsa", a name for the region which was once home to the dynasty of Cyrus the Great and his kin. "Persia" was, of course, a term imposed by outsiders, and was not used by those dwelling within this area. Whilst a number of different names were used by the people living in these lands, the most prominent was "Eranshahr", or some variant thereof, meaning 'the Empire of the Eran'. The term "Eranshahr" is, of course, directly linked to the name of the modern state of Iran.

For the purposes of *The Last Nights of the Caliphate*, Persia is used to refer to the general region to the east of Iraq, whilst specific states, such as Eranshahr, are referred to by historically appropriate names.

A NOTE ON NAMES

By the middle of the thirteenth century the population of Iraq primarily consists of Arabs or Arabized Persians; one consequence of this is that most inhabitants of the region are known by Arab names, including many of the Cainites presented within this book.

Most Arabs are known by a combination of names, the usage of which varies by context. It is normal for an Arab to have a personal name and at least one byname. The personal name, known as an *ism*, functions much as forenames do in the modern world. This is combined with bynames, which are drawn from four different categories, the *kunya*, *nasab*, *laqab*, or *nisba*, each of which describe the bearer in different ways. The *kunya* is an honorific, which refers to a person by reference to their children. This can either be *abu*, meaning "father of" or *umm*, meaning "mother of", and, in most instances, refers to the eldest son in a family. *Kunyas* are used infrequently within the Cainite community, with the most famous use amongst Cainites being "abu Lazar", a

INTRODUCTION

NAMES AND PLACES

The towns and cities of Iraq bear many names, the product of imperial ambitions over millennia. As a general rule, *The Last Nights of the Caliphate* uses the contemporary names in use by the ruling power, controlling any particular region. To assist the reader, a list showing the different names in use is presented below.

City	Modern English name	Other names
al-Iskandariyya	Alexandria	Radoki
al-Qahira	Cairo	Heliopolis, Kashromi
Antioch	Antakya	Antakiyya
Ariha	Jericho	Ericha
ar-Ruha	Edessa	Antiochia
Dimasq	Damascus	Darmsuq
Erbil	Erbil	Arbailu, Arbela, Hawler
Halab	Aleppo	Beroea
Hama	Hama	Emath, Epiphaneia, Hamath
Homs	Homs	Emesa, Hims
Jerusalem	Jerusalem	al-Quds, Hierosolyma
Ladhiqiyah	Latakia	Laodicea, Ramitha
Mawsil	Mosul	Mepsila
Raqqa	Raqqa	Callinicum, Kallinikos, Leontopolis, Nikephorion

commonly-used reference to the progenitor of the Cappadocians.

In the mortal world it is considered polite to address elders with a kunya, rather than an ism. This convention has not translated well to Cainite society; few elders wish to be known by the names of their childer, with the implied status this may award to younger Cainites. Instead, it is more common for Cainites to use nasabs, laqabs, or nisbas.

The nasab is a patronymic, a reference to the bearer's father. This is either *ibn*, meaning "son of" or *bint*, meaning "daughter of". Whilst individuals will have pre-existing nasabs prior to the embrace, it is the convention within Cainite society to discard these and take on a nasab referencing one's sire. Thus Lazarus, childe of Cappadocius, is known amongst Arab Cainites as Lazar ibn Cappadocius.

The final byname forms are the laqab and nisba. These are descriptive bynames, referencing some personal quality or other distinctive aspect of a person. The laqab makes reference to a virtue which the individual either holds or aspires to, whilst the nisba

describes an occupation, a place of birth, or a clan or tribal loyalty.

An individual might be referred to by any of the above bynames, based upon the context within which the person is being discussed. For the sake of simplicity, the characters appearing within *The Last Nights of the Caliphate* are referred to with a single personal name and byname throughout the book, with nisbas and laqabs appearing most frequently. Storytellers should feel free to utilise other bynames for these characters within their own chronicles.

Of course, not all the characters presented in this book are Arabs. The cities of Iraq have, historically, been home to Greeks, Armenians, Persians, and Jews, as well as individuals from a host of other backgrounds, a product of Iraq's role at the centre of many great empires. These groups have their own naming conventions, shaped by ethnic, religious, and cultural considerations. The names of characters appearing within *The Last Nights of the Caliphate* are a reflection of this complexity, though constraints of space prevent a further discussion of such matters.

As a final note, the nature of medieval names, and the contextual nature of bynames, means that names within this book will be indexed on a forename-byname basis, rather than by the modern convention of surname-forename.

USING THIS BOOK

The Last Nights of the Caliphate is a reference book designed to support Storytellers running chronicles in Iraq. It provides specific reference material on the geography and history of the region, focusing, specifically, on the great city of Baghdad. The finite nature of this book means that certain choices have been made in terms of what has been included and excluded. As a general rule, greater emphasis has been placed on characters and social dynamics than on historical information. The intention of the author has been to provide a glimpse of Cainite society in Iraq, and it is assumed that the Storyteller will be capable of completing any additional research required for a chronicle.

Information with *The Last Nights of the Caliphate* is spread over five chapters, and two appendices, dealing with Iraq on a thematic basis.

Chapter 1: Dawn of the Caliphate This chapter covers the history of Iraq, from ancient times to the medieval era. It provides detail on both the mortal world and the conflicts of the Cainites which lurk, concealed, within the towns and cities of Iraq. This chapter provides details on the development of the Ikhwan, and how it came to dominate the region.

Chapter 2: The Land of the Rivers This chapter provides an overview of the geography of Iraq. It includes maps of both the region and of Baghdad, as well as an accompanying commentary to allow for the use of this material within a chronicle.

Chapter 3: Dark Alliances Baghdad has one of the largest populations of Cainites within the medieval world. Whilst this is a city dominated by the Ikhwan, numerous other groups and factions hide within the city's shadows, and these are discussed within this chapter, which also provides a series of coterie charts, indicating the relationships between particular characters.

Chapter 4: The Cainites of Baghdad Character profiles for the Cainites of Baghdad are provided in this chapter. Each character is presented with background

information, and a full set of statistics, to support the use of these Cainites in chronicles.

Chapter 5: Beyond Baghdad Whilst most chapters within *The Last Nights of the Caliphate* focus upon the city of Baghdad, this chapter provides a number of brief outlines of a number of other locations in Iraq. This provides readers with a broader context to the region, and its Cainites and politics.

Appendix 1: Key Dates This appendix is designed to function as reference material for Storytellers and players. This includes lists of the Caliphs and Sultans who had power over Iraq in the medieval period, and a timeline of Iraq, presenting key dates in the region's history.

Appendix 2: Destinies The history of Abbasid Caliphate in Iraq will come to an abrupt end in 1258 with the destruction of Baghdad. This appendix deals with these events, and the later history of those Cainites who survive the Mongol invasion.

THEME

Baghdad is a city in crisis. Whilst the Caliphs have managed to reclaim temporal power over a large part of Iraq, after a period of Seljuk dominance, their authority is weak, and their lands vulnerable to the aggression of outsiders. Whilst the rulers of Baghdad, and their supporters, claim that the land is undergoing a renaissance, the reality is that Abbasid power is in inexorable decline.

The state of the mortal world is reflected amongst the community of Cainites who reside within the city. For centuries, Baghdad had a reputation for possessing a sophisticated and cosmopolitan population, existing, within the world of the damned, as a bastion of culture and learning. With the rise of the Ikhwan, the Cainite community of Baghdad has become subject to an increasingly oppressive atmosphere. The streets of the city, once safe, have become violent, chaotic places in the hours of darkness, as competing Cainite factions battle for dominance, and the influence of the city's rulers seems to grow weak. Baghdad, once considered a place of refinement, now seems a sinister place, threatening to all those who reside within its bounds.

The theme of Baghdad is the nature of oppression and the abuse of power. From the viewpoint of an outsider, the decline of Iraq might seem to be an inevitable but unfortunate product of a number of external factors, ranging from the aggression of the

Seljuk lords, to the religious factionalism which has blighted Baghdad, and undermined the unity of its people. And yet it is the decisions of those in power which have led to this situation. Within the mortal world, the Caliphate has been progressively undermined by internecine conflict, and by the descent, of many Caliphs, into decadence and even depravity. Neglecting the defence of their realm, the Caliphs have allowed Iraq to be dominated by foreign powers, keen to plunder its wealth.

Whilst mortal society in Iraq may seem oppressive, particularly amongst the Shi'ites who have been persecuted for many centuries by their orthodox masters, the Cainites of the region are subject to an even more despotic rule in the form of the Ikhwan. Over the last two centuries the group has gained considerable power over Baghdad and over recent decades, dissenters and rebels have been treated harshly, and many Cainites have been executed to uphold Ikhwan rule. Not that this is necessarily apparent to the visitor to Baghdad; those who dwell within the city will speak openly of how the Ikhwan are their protectors, and that their rulers may occasionally be harsh, but that firm control is required in troubled times. Indeed, it is difficult to find anyone who is prepared to explicitly or openly criticise the Ikhwan.

This is a reflection of the reality of an oppressive regime. Adjusting to their environment, few are willing to admit to others, or even themselves, that they are a subjugated people. The brutality of their rulers, and those who support them, will be explained away as the necessity of circumstances, and those who fall to the oppressors are, in some way, deserving of their deaths. In time, this fearful submission begins to colour all aspects of society. The people who dwell under such a regime start to modify their behaviour in ways that they believe will protect themselves. Clothes, habits, modes of speech are all affected.

In time, people residing within such an environment will start to doubt their own perceptions. The notion of truth and falsehood become secondary to believing in the orthodoxies of one's masters. An outsider, when confronted with the apparent cruelties of such a regime, may not understand why those who are oppressed do not rise up against their rulers; in fact such outsiders may, naively, attempt to rally the people against their oppressors. Such efforts are rarely successful; fearful of their masters, and of the opinions of others, those who exist within such a system are more likely to resist those who set themselves up as liberators, than the oppressors

who rule over them. With sufficient brutality, such a system of oppression can be remarkably durable.

MOOD

For many decades, the Ikhwan were careful not to employ too much overt violence on the streets of Baghdad. Whilst they were prepared to act against their enemies, the most senior members of the group were careful to restrain their younger, and more zealous, associates. The most dangerous or hostile Cainites in Baghdad would meet their Final Deaths, but most who dwelt within the city were allowed go about their nightly existences without interference. Thus, the Ikhwan carefully maintained the illusion of freedom.

Such illusions were dispelled in 1210, with the conquest of Mawsil, and in the following years as the Ikhwan spread their influence across Iraq and Syria. The accompanying violence left no question as to the nature of the group, and, over the following decades, all pretence that the Ikhwan were neutral judges, working to maintain peace and justice, would disappear.

In 1242, the prevailing mood in Baghdad is one of fear, distrust, and suspicion. As we have noted, many of the Cainites who dwell within the city refuse to see themselves as oppressed, having found ways by which the actions of their masters may be justified. Nevertheless, an air of unease prevails within Baghdad, a product of many years of Ikhwan dominance. The violence which has prevailed in the streets has left most of those who live within the boundaries of the city feeling unsafe, and almost any long-term Cainite inhabitant will have known a friend or associate who has met their Final Death at the hands of an Ikhwan ghulam. The concerns of those who reside within Baghdad are not idle fears, but are the product of bitter experience.

The Cainites of Baghdad, for the most part, believe that the Ikhwan has spies hidden throughout the city. This is, to a degree, true, and the elders directing the group's activities have planted agents in many coteries. Yet, after many decades of Ikhwan rule, the greatest danger to many of Baghdad's Cainite inhabitants comes not from those who are inherently loyal to the sect, but from the ordinary inhabitants of the city. There are many amongst the Children of Caine who would betray others for wholly mundane reasons. Some may act out of self-interest, or the belief that it is a defensive act, and that the Ikhwan will act against those who do not denounce dissenters. There are a few who will betray others simply because that is the nature of existence in

Baghdad, an unthinking response to the fear and paranoia of the city.

For all that the Cainites of Baghdad will proclaim that they are free, many are imprisoned by the fears and anxieties which cloud their thoughts and leave them suspicious of outsiders.

HISTORY AND CONTINUITY

The city of Baghdad is, in 1242, a great metropolis, larger than any other centre of population in either Europe or the Islamic world. Despite centuries of decline, it still remains an important cultural and religious centre, a place of pilgrimage, renowned throughout the world.

Despite this, Baghdad has not figured prominently within the World of Darkness and, in particular, its absence from the Dark Ages setting has been fairly notable. The first discussion of the city appeared in the *Book of Storyteller Secrets* (1996), which provided a single paragraph on the context of Baghdad in the mortal world, giving no details of any Cainites who might reside there, and supplying an incorrect date for the city's sack by the Mongols. With the further exploration of the Islamic world which occurred within *Veil of Night* (2001), a small amount of additional information was supplied on the city, consisting of two-and-a-half pages of in-character text, and some information on three characters, including a brief introduction to the ill-fated Abd al-Hadi. Finally, a short story, best ignored, in the *Cainite Conspiracies* anthology (2016) was set in Baghdad.

The paucity of material on Baghdad might be considered somewhat remarkable. One of the reasons why this introduction has a section on continuity is that, in previous books in this series, it has proved to be a useful guide to existing writing on a particular subject, starting with *England Will Burn* (2019), which had to resolve the complex and occasionally contradictory past presentations of the British Isles in prior publications. Meanwhile, what was perhaps the largest city in the medieval world has almost no history in the World of Darkness.

There are, however, a few points which should be observed in regards to general continuity. The first is the question of population. In the first edition of *Vampire: the Dark Ages*, published in 1996, it was noted that: 'A city of 10,000 mortals may have a dozen resident vampires, with half a dozen resident vampires, with half a dozen more in the surrounding towns and villages.' *The Last Nights of the Caliphate* has been designed to

remain consistent with these population figures; indeed, Chapter Four, which provides details on the Cainite residents of Baghdad, only focuses on the 120 undead inhabitants of the city, without detailing with the 60 others who might be expected to form part of the wider Cainite community, residing in Anbar, Baqubah, and other nearby locations.

A further point to note is that *The Last Nights of the Caliphate* includes the appearance of a number of Cainites which will subsequently play notable roles in the modern world. These include Adonai, founder of the Salubri Antitribu, Djuhah, who will later become one of the Seraphs of the Black Hand, and Karif al-Numair, one of the first of the Assamite Antitribu. It is fitting that one of the most important cities in the medieval world features in the history of a number of Cainites who will later rise to positions of prominence.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Baghdad is a city which has been much mythologised. Its first incarnation, which lasted from the time of the early Abbasids, to the city's near complete destruction at the hands of the Mongols in 1258, is regularly represented as a medieval utopia, one of the great wonders of the medieval world, incomparable to any other city of the era. This narrative is supported by the dramatic loss of the city, in the middle of the thirteenth century, which bestowed it with an almost mystical glamour.

The reality of Baghdad is rather more complicated. The construction of the city was a great test of the engineering skills of the great builders of the Caliphate, a test which was regularly failed. The gates of the round city, intended to be the largest and most imposing in the world, had to be looted from other cities, as to make new gates exceeded the abilities of the Abbasids best artisans. In the event, the gates had to be stolen from Dimasq, Kufah, and Wasit, with the gates of the latter cities having previously been removed from cities built by the emperors of Eranshahr. Within the city itself, many other oddities were apparent; the Grand Mosque of the Round City, by accident or design, pointed not towards Mecca, but to the west. The Tigris, meanwhile, presented problems which completely exceeded the abilities of the Caliph's engineers and, throughout the medieval period, the river would remain bridged by pontoon structures, resting on boars. The degree to which the ambitions of the Caliphs exceeded the resources at their disposal would become apparent as the Abbasid era progressed, as large sections of Baghdad

INTRODUCTION

THE NATURE OF A SLAVE STATE

Whilst many observers, throughout history, have praised the culture and learning of medieval Baghdad, few have drawn attention to the extent to which Iraqi society is built on a foundation of slavery. The institution has, of course, a long history in the region; the Greek, Roman, and Persian rulers of Iraq all relied upon the enslaved. The rulers of the Caliphate, however, have been far more reliant upon slaves than the empires which dominated the region in earlier times, and it is hard to overstate the degree to which the Abbasid Caliphate was reliant upon slave labour.

Slaves are employed in a wide variety of roles. Slaves act as domestic servants in the houses of Baghdadis, work as porters, boatman, or as craftsmen or water carriers. The Caliphs rely upon slave soldiers, often imported from Central Asia, whilst almost all wealthy men keep sex slaves in the form of concubines. To the south, in the marshlands of lower Iraq, hundreds of thousands of slave labourers are employed in the intensive land management which is required to farm the land. The life of cultured leisure led by the ruling classes of Iraq is dependent upon the often-hidden labour of others.

Slavery of Iraq is supported by a massive network of slave traders stretching across the Islamic world and beyond. Russia supplies concubines and slave soldiers, captured from the wild borderlands known as the Ukraine, and shipped south, through the Euxine Sea and across the Caucasus. Central Asia had long supplied the Turkish soldiers who, for many centuries, dominated the military of the Caliphate, whilst, from the twelfth century, the Islamic conquests in the Indus and Ganges valleys have supplied hundreds of thousands of slaves, taken as military plunder, brought to Iraq in such numbers that the prices of slaves have met new lows. However, the largest number of slaves in Iraq are captured in Africa, either shipped from the ports of the East African coast, or else enslaved in the Sudan, and brought up overland through the Fezzan and Egypt. In the thirteenth century, the majority of Iraqi slaves have their origins in Africa.

Slavery is, of course, a brutal institution, and those who are labour in servitude often have short and painful lives. The defenders of the institution claim that, under Islamic rule, slaves are respected, though the reality is that many are mistreated and are subject to the whims of their masters or mistresses. It is common, for instance, for male slaves in Iraq to be castrated, as a means of controlling the enslaved, and inhibiting their sexual desires. This is particularly common with the domestic slaves, and with the African slaves employed on the plantations in lower Iraq. By depriving men of the ability to have a family, it was believed that their desire to rebel would be quenched.

Despite this, and the intimidating strength of the rulers of the Caliphate, resistance to slavery is not uncommon. Most notably, the African slaves in lower Iraq rose up against their masters in the late ninth century in an event which would become known as the Zanj Rebellion. The largest slave revolt in human history, the uprising would last for close to fifteen years, and would draw on the support of hundreds of thousands of rebellious slaves. At the height of the revolt, the Zanj would control a number of major cities in Southern Iraq, and would even threaten Baghdad. Although the rebellion would eventually be put down by the Abbasid military, it would remain an embarrassment for those who would wish to claim that the enslaved were well-treated, and content in their condition.

Whilst slavery is not a major theme within *The Last Night of the Caliphate*, the reader should note that it features at various times within the historical and character backgrounds presented within this book. The most notable visible aspect of this is within the racial composition of characters within the following chapters, with a very significant minority of Cainites in Baghdad having been born in Africa, or to slaves of African descent. Regardless of how explicitly the subject of slavery features within a chronicle, the skin colour of many Cainites within Baghdad should act as an implicit reminder of this cruel and inhumane institution.

would fall into ruin, and the monumental buildings of the past, such as the Golden Gate Palace, would fall into disrepair. The glamour of Baghdad exists more in the imaginations of those in far-lands than in the reality of the lives of the city's inhabitants.

The gulf between the imagined history of Baghdad and the reality of the city informs the content of *The Last Nights of the Caliphate*. This is not a book about the glamourised Baghdad of fiction, but the complex city which sat at the heart of the medieval Caliphate. The real and often violent history of Baghdad is reflected throughout this book, in its characters, and within the plots which beset its Cainite community. This is also reflected in the trajectory of Baghdad's history; its destruction by the Mongols was not some unexpected tragedy, where invaders overcome a city at its height, but the product of centuries of decline, against a backdrop of slave rebellions and religious conflict. Despite Baghdad's reputation as a cosmopolitan centre of tolerance and learning, it is not a good place to live for a Jew or Shi'ite, or for the poor or enslaved.

The reality of Iraq, and of Baghdad, is thus complex, with the learning and culture of the region being supported by slavery, brutality, and the exploitation of the weak and vulnerable. The Caliphate is, of course, an empire, and is subject to all the strengths and flaws of such a state; for centuries, the armies of the Caliphs marched across the known world, undefeated conquerors, sending slaves and plunder back to the imperial capitals of the Umayyads and Abbasids. Whilst the Caliphs were at their height of their powers, they were more able to maintain the pretence that they were the successors of the prophet, and representatives of God on earth. In 1242, the power of the Caliphs barely extends beyond lower Iraq, and the squalid nature of their state has become far too apparent.

The complex nature of the mortal world is reflected in the society of Cainites. At the height of the Caliphate's power and influence, the Emir of Baghdad, Abd al-Hadi, was considered to be one of the most

important Cainite rulers in the world, with few willing to make an enemy of the elder. Baghdad, as the capital of the Caliphate, drew in the Children of Caine, who saw it as a place where they could fulfil their hopes and ambitions. As the Caliphate has waned, and the Ikhwan have slowly exerted control over Iraq, and its cruel and baleful influence has become more apparent. In the middle of the thirteenth century, as the collapse of Abbasid power is becoming all too apparent, the Ikhwan, in their awesome and terrible glory, will dominate Iraq. For a brief few years, it will appear that the power of the group is unchallengeable.

The Lords of the Ikhwan, and their baleful influence over Iraq will be swept away by the Mongols; most of the leaders of the group will meet their Final Deaths in 1258, when Baghdad is sacked by the armies of Hulagu Khan. Without leadership, the rapid gains made by the Ikhwan will stall, and the group will dissolve, the product of bitter rivalries and internal dissent. By the twenty-first century the Ikhwan will be all but forgotten, even amongst those elders who remember medieval times.

Yet, within the ambitions of the Ikhwan lie many seeds of future events and trends. Some former ghulams will desert the Ikhwan after Baghdad's destruction, and will offer their services to Alamut; their descendants will, in time, come to form an important faction amongst the Assamites, known as the Web of Knives. Others, unrepentant in their war against the Silsila and their allies, will travel west; they will side with the rebellious Cainites in later centuries, aiding the Anarchs in their war against oppressive elders. Unlike the Anarchs, these Assamites, killers and diablerists without exception, will find no place within the Camarilla, and will be forced to join the Sabbat, forming the core of the Assamite Antitribu. Almost a thousand years after the Final Death of Nabukudracara, the cruel and ambitious founder of the Ikhwan, the seeds he planted in the wake of the Crusaders will still be bearing fruit.