

# The Caine Files

by Timothy Toner  
On Caine

## Part one: The Chairman: Wilhelm

To begin with, I have no clue why I was chosen to undertake this momentous task. Literally hundreds of Kindred more profound, more worthy of the work at hand have chosen to pass, and let sleeping dogs lay, as one put it.

Still, I am in a curious position. Here, as I sit in the cool dark chambers I call my home, I find myself extraordinarily lucky. Never before, except when the Second City rose above the dusty plain, have such a great assemblage of minds met to discuss one thing: the Progenitor. And I have been duly assigned the task of recording the momentous words spoken here by my betters.

Perhaps a note of introduction. I am Wilhelm, Prussian by birth, and educated at Wittenburg, amongst the same dusty halls that inspired Luther to rebellion. When I was...alive, I possessed great zeal, and quick wit. I was also good acquaintances with one Johann Schmidt, who, by no fault of his own, proved to be my "downfall."

Schmidt was a small man, with a squeaky voice, but creator of great ideas. We would sit in his room, and discuss his grand refutations of the great thinkers of the time, and I cajoled him to no end to let his voice be heard, but it was all for naught. He was scared, frightened, intimidated by speaking in public. Still I listened, and tried to be the best friend I could be.

One day, when sitting at the beerhall, listening to this week's "great mind" prattle about the nature of God, death, and the proper way to remove the head from beer, I heard rumor that the Illuminati group, started by Adam Weisthaupt, was travelling through town. I had a simple solution to Johann's problem. They were a secret organization of great thinkers, who seldom talked in public. Johann was a natural for them. I decided to refute the current speaker, based on all Schmidt and I had discussed.

I stood up, and all eyes were on me. Point by point, in the manner of Johann, I tore apart the argument of the speaker. Eventually, he was compelled to sit, amid a chorus of "booes" levelled at him.

Had I been a good friend, or *sane*, I would have stopped right there, and given credit where credit was due. But no; so caught up in the passion of the moment was I, that I delivered a goodly portion of Johann's arguments, and left the stage amid a cheering house.

He came to me then, introducing himself as Ernst, and saying he represented an organization which supported those like me, those who were willing to fly in the face of the structured norm, and grasp at freedom. With a delicate hand gesture, he asked me if I would like to join.

Thoughts of being one of the Illuminati, one of the Chosen Ones raced in my skull, and I committed foul treachery against a true friend by saying, "Yes...with *all* my life...YES!"

I paid for my sins in blood.

That was many, many years ago. My deception was soon discovered, and yet my newly acquired "friends" did not mind. They saw I was a powerful speaker, and a rabble rouser, and most importantly, could discern the gold in the dross of the average rant. There were others, like Johann, in this organization. Those who had the ideas, but none of the courage to speak out, and let them be known. I, then, represented the best of them.

Because of my non-threatening stature, many invited me into their confidence, and related to me their various theories on existence. Whereas in the past, the chief concern had been the nature of human existence, the change in *disposition* we, as a species, had undergone, had changed the subject of their lectures from musings on death, God, and the Human plight, to speculations on unlife, Caine, and the Undying Hunger. Yes, I will speak such blasphemies openly. We, as a species, (though not a very natural one) tend to implicitly see Caine, the First of Us, as a God. We do not look to him for salvation, just as we in life did not see God as salvation enough for our burdened souls. Rather, Caine is a source of answers regarding who we are and why we exist.

It is ironic, tho, to realize that those of us cursed (or blessed as some put it) with unlife, have actually surpassed our own theories. So many of us, obsessed with the unknowables and intangibles, have crossed the veil into a new existence, where the spectre of sudden, mortal death has been eliminated entirely. All we fear now is the sun, Root of Life, Source of our Death, and the stake, driven by the superstitious notions of peasants, who cannot dream but to guess our true nature, the burning flame, which strangely now appears in the form of a thousand flickering gas jets, bringing us comfort in the cooling night, and the Hunger.

Yes, I list the Hunger amongst our fears, for it is the only thing that prevents us from completely crossing over beyond the base desires of the Flesh. The desire to reproduce, the desire to feel in a sexual explosion, the desire to sate one's thirst, and fill one's belly has been efficiently comingled into a single entity: the desire to Feed. Despite this "efficiency," it is an irredeemable flaw amongst our kind. Here we are, postulating on our true nature, speaking how we have surpassed frail human mortality in every conceivable way, no longer having to toil in the fields for food, or sweat and groan in the act of reproduction, when, as the bell in the tower strikes three, we all skulk away, and take from this world, what is not our by any right. We can pretend we are equalizers, taking from those who have surplus, or taking from those for whom death is a release from the pains of this realm, or even taking from those who metaphorically take from others in the waking hours. No matter how we rationalize the act, we take without giving, and that makes us lower than the fungus which rots the bread. For all we have done, for as far as we can go, we can go no further. We are tethered to the humanity from which we have ascended.

I am told the orchid, most beautiful of flowers, is a parasite, and the mistletoe, revered by pagans for its power, was a leech to the life of its host. In this, I can agree. We Kindred are both beautiful and holy, rendered so because it seems that like the orchid was once though, we

feed off the air. Our keen intellects, no longer numbed by the onrushing fury of death, have had ample opportunity to create a facade so terribly different than the one the peasants quailed from. We become gods to them, gods in men's clothing. Something to be feared and revered. We have become the one thing that all of us in our lives have tried to fight, the unknowable beast that causes men to bend their knees on cold stone floors, and offer up silent words of thanks to the immortal infinite silence.

I prattle on too long, and must return to the original tenor of my message. Why is this so? Why have we come to be as we are? Are we truly demons, damned through no volition of our own? And, most significantly, can we reverse the process, descending (or ascending) to the Throne of Humanity? All these questions can be summed up in one word: Caine.

Such a simple word, with so many repercussions.

I have had opportunity to speak with four great minds, on that very word, to see their insight on the matter. Three are supposed to be lost to the grave, and they would prefer that their existence be concealed. I can only tell you that each is the paragon of their time, with an unique insight into our nature that only their time could provide. The fourth is a child of this era. I do not know why yet he has not been Embraced, for his is an intellect to be preserved. I have only heard that there is a controversy whether or not his fevered brain belongs with us, the Intellectuals, or with the Crazies. For one who has not passed over, he has an uncanny grasp of our nature, and despite his occasional lapses into an insane ranting that one of us has labelled "nihilism," I think he would make an excellent addition to our coterie.

Once, long ago, I cursed my cramping hand for forcing me to cease my writings. Now I must blame the climbing sun, compelling me to sleep. Tomorrow, I will discuss the first; one who was born before the birth of Christ, in an area which set the background for the study of Truth, in all of its living and unliving forms.

## Part two: Haarlan

On this day, I have chosen to speak to the first of my colleagues on the nature of vampirism, particularly in reference to the First, who, unless specifically noted otherwise, shall be called Caine.

Hela is the oldest Kindred I know personally. Although he is slow to speak up whenever a fight breaks out amidst a debate, his opinion is highly respected in Brujah circles, perhaps because he does interfere so seldom. He goes by the name Haarlan, one he picked up while in Amsterdam a decade ago.

We meet at my haven, a small room below an apothecary. At this time at night, the store is closed, and we are wrapped in privacy. He presents himself well, dressed in fashions a few years out of style, but that still look dignified on him. He is average in height, with black hair and rich brown eyes. We sit, and he speaks.

"I have agreed to talk to you, Wilhelm, because I fear for the future. Too many Anarchs are rising up with notions of destroying the old order and the older traditions that created them. The Masquerade has prevented the written history of Vampires from being expressed, but

with the sudden appearance of folklorists, like the Grimms, perhaps if prying eyes catch glimpse of this record, they will think it fiction.

"I was born on the Spartan plain over 2000 years ago. The son of a farmer, I was no different from the hundreds of boys compelled into the militia. If ever there was a people that embodied the Brujah, it was the Spartans. I would have died there, with my guts slashed open on some forgotten battlefield or dead in a field, my heart exploded, as my father's had, had it not been for my youthful impertinence.

"We were practicing formations on the field when two commanders walked past to check on our status. One had been challenged by an Athenian to open debate on the concept of a union of city states. To refuse would have meant utter humiliation, but the commander had no skill. I quickly voiced *my* opinion, and was quickly smashed down by the other commander for speaking out of turn.

"The first, however, agreeing with my thoughts, picked me up, and asked me what else I thought. I spoke frankly, and he was impressed, so much so that he agreed to take *me* to Athens, to be his..." Haarlan cleared his throat, "boy. He won the debate, and was asked to stay on, in a place of honor. Lost without me, he compelled me to stay. I never saw my family again.

"Word of a clear-thinking Spartan in Athens spread to all corners of the world, and we were visited by thinkers from around the world. This is how I met my sire.

"I never learned his name. All I know is that he was a Child of Troile himself, and saw that it was *I* with the clear mind, and not my master. He took me from there, and he waited for me to mature into this present form before Embracing me."

"So much has passed from this date on, that I will not bore you with details. I will now progress to the nature of the question: who is Caine?"

"From the other four whom you will talk, I can see that I am at an advantage. I was Embraced before the Christian Explosion, and thus have a slightly more broad perspective when it comes to the matter. Make no mistake: Judaism and its dogmas were heavily researched in my country, if not for the fact that we wished to see what made a group of desert nomads so damn *arrogant*. They possessed some of the progressive attributes of other faiths, such as monotheism, a dialectic between good and evil, and a law code that limited the charismatic power base of the clergy. Were Christianity so..."

"So what did I learn from my sire about what we were? To be honest, very little. Whenever I broached the question, he always grew distant, as if to indicate it was not the right time. It never seemed the right time. I did however glean this: Hrakot."

"Hrakot?"

"It was *our* name for him. 'Caine,' as we are wont to call him now. The strange thing is that it is in a language completely incomprehensible from any I have known. In essence, it does not mean *anything*. Which is why I give it so much credence. We seldom said that name, instead opting for 'The One,' and 'The First.' The special name was reserved for...intimate moments, away from prying ears. Some believed that the name itself held power, power essential to vampiric existence, and it was its widespread use that was diluting the generations, making each progressively weaker. Oh, well.

"So you're saying, here and now, that Caine is not the Biblical Cain, the firstborn, and slayer of his brother?"

"Ah, a good story. A good moral as well. The basis for mercy, you know. The punishment does not have to fit the crime. No, sometimes it can be far, far worse. Unfortunately, too simplistic...far, far too simplistic.

"No, I believe that it is, as they say, an allegorical reference to the very basis of all that is vampirism. Do they not call a wise leader a 'Solomon,' or a strong man 'Samson,' or, even more specific, a 'giant-slayer' 'David?' Each has a specific reference, a specific image that fills the mind.

"From the allegory, we can glean a few clues as to what's going on. Cain was firstborn, created only because his parents sinned against God, and in doing so, realized their freedom to *know* themselves. To explore the deepest depths of the soul, from the highest aspirations of the mind, to the blackest pits of the bowels. Cain was the result of their...experimentation. First conceived of pleasure, first born of pain. In every way, man made flesh."

"But what of Adam and Eve? If we suppose the story to be true, which we are at the moment, what of them? Were they not flesh?"

"No. They were created through the direct action of the Will of God. They were not...flesh, at least not as we know flesh. Caine was the first to be truly human, to experience a time of darkness when he knew nothing of himself, and the first to spend his entire life dreading the onset of death.

"What happens next is interesting, however. Adam and Eve had many more children--how many is not particularly relevant, since we only need worry that there was a son younger than Cain known as Abel. Both chose, of their own will, to honor God, in his own way. Both sweated and toiled all day long, but if anyone believes that Abel's task was harder than Cain's has never spent a day in the field.

"The time of sacrifice had come. These creatures were willing to give offering to the God that had cast their parents out of Paradise. Whatever the case, both offered up the fruits of their labor. Cain offered grain, a renewable resource, with many purposes. Abel offered blood. Death. Death back to the Death-giver. God chose Abel's gift.

"Could anyone blame Cain for what happened next? If God wanted blood, then he would have it in abundance. Some would call it jealousy, others would call it devotion.

"Whether or not God was pleased or displeased with this action is up to debate. All we know is that God imparted a fraction of divine power. A strange punishment, to be granted perpetual asylum. The point of the tale is that the Hell one's mind makes is *infinitely* worse than any man-made, or God delivered, for that matter.

"And of course, it is here that the story falls apart. God grants power to Cain. Why is Cain able to arbitrarily pass out that power to *anyone*, regardless of inner character? I suppose it goes to the free will of Cain, that he is not limited in who can become his child, but what of the free will of the Child?"

"No, the Caine/Cain argument is false, to say the least. Caine is a simple way to recount all the passion of what it means to deal in blood. Blood for blood's sake, as it were. The coinage of God."

"So if you do not accept the Judeo-Christian argument, what do you ascribe to?"

"If I told you, you would laugh. Nevertheless, I must be honest. Caine is...a god.

"Well, let me define that a bit. The world I come from is very different than this. Beyond the merely temporal, the entire *feel* back then was different. Some say the time known now as "the Dark Ages," were actually the "Age of Myth," and now we dwell in the "Age of Darkness." Not calling the kettle black, if you asked me.

"When I was new to this, I met others who were much older than I. They spoke of a world I had just missed, like a carriage I did not know about, thundering away in the distance. It was a world of true myth, when gods walked with mortals. Many were the explanations for what precisely they saw. Some said it was vampires, walking amongst men, while others saw it to be men touched by the true gods, ethereal beings of true power. Whatever the case, they were rather reckless in their use of power, since they were no longer around to discuss it with the rest of us.

"Then I came across Sinon. He was a strange fellow--he even claimed to be at the Trojan War. He told me that he saw the gods walk the Earth in that war, and whenever they did, everyone knew, for the says turned black, and the sun was obscured. The people claimed that when that occurred, Zeus was watching up there. Sinon, for his part, claimed that the gods were actually vampires, who used the overcast sky to fight during the day.

"I laughed at this ridiculous notion. But then I began to think of it. I have seen magi wield their spells. Humanity is capable of feats of *great* power. However, in our world, the magi have lost most of their power. I now feel like those I talked to, so many years ago, explaining how you could find the treacherous Order of Hermes looking under every rock for their precious vis.

"Perhaps, then, this is the nature of it. Mankind is a natural being, and, when suffused with unnatural power, becomes far more than human. A simple statement, but one that must be said before we go on.

"Of all the groups that once wielded great power, only the Garou and the Kindred remain. Both are infused with great *inner* power, the Garou gaining theirs at birth, the vampire gaining theirs at death. There is a place for both, I think, in this world.

"Thus, whereas the magi derived their power from an external power source, the Kindred gain theirs *internally*. It is a self sustaining engine that needs blood to grease the gears. Note that blood does not *power* the engine; it merely makes it run more efficiently. Anyone who has gone through torpor will tell you that they simply do not "turn off" when the blood fades.

"In any event, somehow something entered the blood of a human, a piece of divinity perhaps, and caused an infusion of unlife, which could bring the dead back to life. Did not Jesus the Christ state that his blood, supposedly partly divine, could bring eternal life?"

"To the *soul*, and not the body!"

"Ah, but isn't that all you really are? A soul and a bag to carry your blood in? A callous way of saying it, but a truth nonetheless. Harm to the body does no true harm to the soul; it will grow back, just as harm to your possessions does no harm to you when you were alive.

"Back to the argument. Blood, tainted with the divine, flows within our bodies, but grows more dilute with each exchange. The power is within the soul, and not the blood, as evidenced by the need for diab-

lerie to gain the purity. Somehow the first infusion of Vitae changes the soul, stopping blood production, but allowing new blood to be converted.

"There has to, then, be a point of origin for this power. One who had the power put directly in his soul, but with the means of passing it on. That being is Caine. But I do not think the Caine we knew was ever truly human. Noddists claim that even after the Change, he walked amongst men, without the fear of the sun. I'd like to group him with those demigods who terrorized Greece so many years ago. Ideas made flesh, as it were, and like Jesus the Christ, Caine left a part of himself on earth."

"Left? So you mean you believe he is no longer with us?"

"Gone. Gone with the Age of Myth. He was too unnatural for the world that was to come, and so it refused him. I believe that long ago, a being with divine power wished to walk amongst the men, and so created an incarnation, to know their fears, their pains, and their sorrows firsthand. He witnessed the pains of new life, and the terrors in the eyes of the people as they witnessed death, and he wanted to teach them that perhaps death should not be feared. It is only a state, after all.

So he took one of those who died, and fed him some of the blood. Nothing had changed. He had been made more efficient for his pains. He still needed to feed, but fed off the food of the gods, the food of sacrifice, the food that would fuel the divine: blood. Is it any wonder that most faiths offer blood to their gods?"

The people he was with did not understand. They drove him and his Childe out. The incarnation went on to another group, and repeated it, again and again. Mankind was not ready for this news, that death was but a doorway, and that one could be brought back.

The incarnation eventually gave up, and decided to show everyone that a society whose every action was not done in fear of death *could* exist. He created a city, the Second City, since it was modelled after his city in the heavens. Alas, he grew tired of this world in time, and left. And that was Caine.

"His children soon discovered that they could repeat the trick of their father, and create more. But since it was not a god bestowing the power on a mortal, the transition was less than perfect. Humans are not a very good repository of divine power. To put that much into such a frail shell required the body adapt, and take on weaknesses.

"The sun scorched their skin, since it was a powerful source of life. Fire pierced their soul, since it was a powerful source of destruction. The blood of animals did not sustain them as well as it did the Second Generation. Instead, they were compelled to use the closest thing to their own: human. And it is here that sin crept into the hearts of the Kindred. Humans were no longer their fellows. They had become their herd. To maintain their divinity, they had to...insist...on blood offerings from humans.

"Had we been able to sustain on animals, then the world would be a very different place. The Lex Magna Mille began, and the Jyhad was waged. The rest, sadly, is history."

"So you're saying that Caine is a god, who made himself flesh, and came down to teach humanity that there was no fear in death?"

"Yes. He taught us not to fear death, and we learned to instill it within others like never before. How different is it than the teachings of Jesus the Christ, who preached universal equality, and yet has been the

motivation for some of the greatest persecutions the world has ever known. Nothing is wrong with the message, just the execution. Perhaps it is a good thing that the gods no longer walk the earth. We as humans just screw up what they say anyway. We can do that well enough on our own."

"So where was the Second City?"

"Anywhere. There are vampires virtually all over the world. Reading accounts of the American Indians, it is interesting to note that the vampires they encountered seemed to be of European origin. Unless we are to interpret "white skinned" gods differently." He smiled.

"So, the Indians thought the Conquistadors were...vampires?"

"Beings of great power. Beings that were few and far between. Strangers, who had to cower from the sun. Strangers that they sacrificed blood to daily, in their memory. When these new strangers came, some with pale skin, and who did not fear the sun, and carried fire with them, the Indians, with their long memories, learned to fear. They just feared the wrong thing.

"But to the Second City. Its location is not important. It is here." He pointed to his heart. "It is in the soul of every vampire who wishes the Jyhad would not have to be. It can be rebuilt, but to do so would mean forgetting the past, with all its faults, slights, and vendettas, something immortals hesitate to do. Perhaps we shall still do it. Perhaps we can build a Heaven on earth. Caine knows we've made a Hell on it."

## Part three: Arond of Beaune

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My second colleague is but a rail of a man, small and wispy, with an incredible air of piety that radiates from him. He often laughs that Montfermas, his sire, could have waited a year or two before Embracing him, to allow him to beef up a bit, although he did allow his hair to grow back. Indeed, he often gets passed over in Rants, because most Brujahs are afraid they'll snap him in two.

Still, a fire creeps behind those eyes, a knowing courage that burns those who think him a weak coward. His name is Arond of Beaune, better known to the world as St. Arond. He was born in Beaune, France, in 1148, the last of six boys. Fearing starvation, his parents gave him to be raised by the local monastery. He read Greek at age 6, and was capable of speaking and writing in seven languages by the time he was 12. He had memorized the Bible on a whim, bored with all the recitation, and tired of lugging around the ponderous work.

When he was 15, the head of the monastery wanted him to begin work as a scribe, translating the various Greek works into French for the nobility. Rather than the mean religious texts he was force fed, he thrived on the philosophy of Aristotle, Socrates, and Plato, and fell in love with the dramas of Aristophanes, Sophocles, and Aeschylus. Arond sensed that there was so much more to be had than mere religious life, and petitioned to become an itinerant preacher in the German North, where many great works were sequestered in musty libraries.

The head abbot refused, seeing much evil in the Heathen North. However, Arond walked in on him and a young convent girl in a compromising position a week later, and he was off. "I didn't see it as black-mail," he said later, "as much as both of us having something to offer the other."

Travelling the north was difficult to say the least. Fear of the plague had paralyzed some of the smaller towns, and the appearance of a wanderer terrified them, even if he wore the robes of a priest. Nevertheless, his unassuming attitude relieved many, and soon people began to look forward to his visits.

He allowed himself 2 years to get into a routine, and then began to call on the monasteries in the area, looking for lost tracts on philosophy and drama. It was in one such place that he found it: The Book of Nod.

After reading the fragment, he recalls not being able to sleep for days. The shadows that terrorized him in the past as he walked in the woods now seemed all too real. There were monsters. Yes, there were monsters.

He did something that ten years, a year, a *week* before, he would have considered a mortal sin. He stole the pages, lest any other mortal find them, and be damned in the process. Hiding them in his Bible, he fled that place.

Little did he know then that the monastery was the haven of a powerful Nosferatu, who had set up wards making the place undetectable to other vampires while he slept the Eternal Slumber. The moment Arond left the building, those who hungered after the pages were on him.

What he did not know was that the fragment he had was a piece thought lost to time and dust. Many would kill to read its contents, and many had died already. He was a hunted animal, fleeing the most savage hunters.

Luck favored the boy once again, when the first Kindred he crossed was a kindly Brujah by the name of Montfermas. A fellow Frenchman, Montfermas passed himself off as a tinkerer, needing a travelling companion. Arond still thought of vampires as slaving inhuman demons, and he naively did not wonder why his companion could not travel during the day, or never ate with Arond around the fire. Arond chose to travel at night for his part. If he was to fight the forces of darkness, he did not want to be sleeping when they came for him.

The ruse quickly ended with the first true vampire attack. As a tinkerer, Montfermas had armed himself with an endless supply of wood products, and silver tipped tools. The fight went fast, when combined with his prodigious combat skills.

Montfermas introduced himself, and Arond felt somehow safer, reassured. All the Cainite wanted was a glance at the Pages, and he would be on his way. Arond realized that Montfermas could have killed him at any moment, but chose not to. He gave the pages to the vampire, asking him to keep them out of the wrong hands.

The vampire felt sorry for the poor boy, now a man, who was so burdened by things he should not have discovered. Further, he had the taint of the Book on him, and would be hounded all his life by Kindred desiring the book. He decided to stay with the monk, just in case.

Arond tried to return to his previous life as a preacher, but every step he took, he was stalked by the darkness that the Book attracted. The peasants, seeing a holy man plagued by the forces of darkness, and seemingly emerging triumphant each time, aided by a "guardian angel"

who watched his steps, and came to his aid when the creatures attacked, created a legend around him. Arond was not fleeing, he was instead rushing forth to encounter evil wherever he found it. And indeed, between the two of them, they managed to put a severe dent in the vampire population of Northern Europe.

Soon, though, time caught up with Montfermas, and he told his charge that soon he would have to sleep. Without his aid, Arond would be defenseless against those seeking vengeance. Arond agreed to the Embrace, and staged his own death, after a fiery battle with Montfermas. The tale of his exemplary life, coupled with the miracles they had seen him perform (most done at a distance by his friend) reached Rome, and he was soon made into a saint, becoming, in his words, "One of the six Kindred to have been canonized."

Arond stayed in the region of Germany that he had come to see as his home, protecting those who walked in the night, until he came to be known as St. Arond of the Night, Patron saint of midnight travellers.

The lure of Intelligentsia lured Arond to this city, where he now speaks with the best. A child of the Inquisition in almost every sense, he possesses a keen insight into the dogma of the one belief system that has affected Kindred the most: Christianity.

"Tell me, Wilhelm. What do you think of me, of my teachings? You came to me, asking for my views on Caine, and yet I often hear you scoff my philosophies. Why?"

"I was told to look you up, since you were the Kindred to speak with on the Christian nature of Caine. But I can see little good that Christianity, and all its teaching has done for its own *people*, much less the vampires it seeks to eradicate. I find you a puzzling oxymoron, sir."

"Yes, a Christian vampire. You must wonder why I don't run raving into the sun over grief. In every way, the anathema of what Jesus Christ teaches. Two things keep me strapped to this mortal coil. The first is a real fear that I have about suicide. If I would kill myself, of my own free will, then I will be eternally damned."

"But are you not eternally damned now? In the moment of the Final Death, will you not be plunged into the fires of Hell?"

"Why? What flaw do I have on my character? Do I break any of the commandments? Do I not keep holy the most significant: 'Love one another as I have loved you?' The only sin I have committed is not fully entrusting myself to God's Plan, and accepting my mortal death. In my own way, however, I think He understands."

"What do you mean?"

"I have heard of victims of the Embrace, mortals who did not rise when the Vitae was reentered within them. These were exceptionally pious individuals. If God did not wish me to rise again, then I do not believe I would have."

"The second reason why I do not slay myself is directly tied into the first. Free will. I *freely* chose to be Embraced. Nothing I have seen or done since then has made me believe it was an unwise choice. In this unlife, I continue to do the work of the Lord with twice the zeal as I did in life."

"While allowing your flock to tithe in blood, right?"

"No. I am a Transubstantian."

I froze momentarily. Before me, if he did not lie, was a walking miracle. "Y-you do not require...the Blood?"

"No. I trust God in all things. I now know the meaning of the phrase, about the lilies of the field. Even in this hellish existence, God may provide an answer."

Transubstantians were vampires who could derive sustenance from the Blood of Christ, prepared during the Rite of Mass. The process of becoming one was harrowing indeed, since your very soul was tested by God, and if found wanting, obliterated. None were publicly known to exist. Until now.

"H-how...when...?"

"Montfermas was one. It is why he travelled with me. Every night, as I awoke, I would say Mass with him. He would then feed. He taught me how it was done, and prepared me for when my time had come. I would offer you the same blessing, now, but I fear too few in this unenlightened time would survive. No offense to you of course. I blame your environment."

"Of course."

"You mock me with that tone. You still cannot understand how Christianity could do *any* possible good in this world?"

"I have had run ins with the Society. Charming fellows. Great conversationalists."

"So have I." He opened his tunic, exposing a truly disturbing sight. A metal cross, undoubtedly made of silver, was imbedded in his chest. It looked as if someone had heated it and then forced it into his body. "Touch it."

I did not want to, but a desire to *know* moved my hand. I grazed it gently. "CHRIST!"

"Shh...No need to take His name in vain."

"Arond, it's still hot...still BURNING!"

"...and still causing me a great deal of pain. I am in agony. But, to answer your next question, I am no flagellant. I keep this here as a reminder, a reminder that good exists in all things, and that evil can take any form."

"I helped a pack of hunters run a vampire who had been plaguing the land to ground. They used this trinket to bring him down, and initiate the Final Death. Then I retired for the day. When I awoke, I noticed they had butchered all his herd, to prevent the evil from spreading. Wilhelm, these were *innocent people!* Their only crime was to be a vampire's cattle! When I went to protest, I walked into a trap."

"They used brute strength to restrain me. Then they explained that even my evil was too great. Despite all that I had done, I was a deluded fool, a pawn of darker forces. They were going to use the artifact to wipe the world of the stain of my existence. And I let them...try."

"I knew how it worked. It took the inner resolve of the hunter, his faith in God, and used it to strike at all the evil in the room, including the hidden evil. I knew all it took was contact with flesh. So I let them touch it to me."

"Until that point, I had never taken a mortal life. Even the most evil of ghouls were spared my hand when I realized that in less than a month, their dream would be utterly shattered. I also realized that I

would not be using the item. The item acted on its own will, so I would not truly be taking a life. It did not make it any easier.

"The explosion knew no sound nor heat. Just light. The power of God. The Fist of God turned into a slap. All of them were incinerated before me, each having a look of wonder on their face. All died a fool's death, and I do not mourn them."

"I leave it in me, as a reminder, a constant reminder, of the evil within us all."

"Wilhelm, if you had been there, if you had *lived* through the Inquisition, as I have, you would not think so poorly of the Church. We had to do what we thought necessary. If not for the Inquisition, the Camarilla would never have been formed. Kindred would not look upon humanity with such esteem. You probably would not even have been Embraced."

"There were Kindred who seized whole provinces in their Iron clad hands. Free from the interference of the nascent Camarilla, they raped the land, walking it as if it was their own, demanding virgins each equinox, and babies each solstice. If your door was locked against the night, you would be barred in, and your house burned to the ground, and Embraced in your mutilated condition, all too ready to face the rising sun. A tarp would be placed over you to make it last longer. These were sick men, monsters."

"They needed to be stopped. All the humans needed was organization, to fight together against the darkness. The Inquisition was just the name they gave themselves. Is that so different from your beloved French Revolution? Peasants banding together to defeat their oppressors? You would not look on it so highly, if it was *your* head in the guillotine."

"But so many innocents *died* in the Inquisition!"

"Man, is, ultimately flawed, a trait I notice does not die with the body. I am no apologist for my Church. I am living proof that the zeal to purge, the zeal for equality, can get carried away, and that too often, personal agendas are followed. However, mankind does regulate himself. Does the Inquisition still exist?"

"No. Not like it was."

"Then. Then I would be sad if it was. But it isn't, so I'm not. Simplistic, yes. Realistic, yes. When you have lived as long as I have, you become used to changes in government. If you don't like the current one, wait a minute, a year, a decade, and it will change."

"But some things do not change. The past. That which is written in stone. And we must turn our attention there, to Caine."

"I am a rare individual. I knew of the Book of Nod, and read it long before the Embrace was even offered me. The damned secrets I read in those pages, pages few, to my knowledge, have ever seen, twisted me inside. By being mortal, and by reading that Book, I was spiritually reborn, I fear, for the worst."

"I do not know if the book yet exists. Montfermas took it with him when he slept. When I visited him once, fifty years later, the room was covered in long cold ashes."

"What can I say about the pages? That they were horrifying to me, a mortal? That now, as an immortal, with perfect hindsight, the mere thought of what I have seen sends chills down my spine? I have said

these things, and more, in a vain attempt to disguise the truth, to gloss over, and attempt to placate the never ending questions. But I will say them, here and now.

"Caine was Jesus..."

"I have heard that theory. 13 clans and 13 disciples? Please! Grist for wayward numerologists."

"I am aware of that, but this book, this tome, was supposed to be written by one of the disciples. I am a religious scholar. Apocrypha is my meat and potatoes. This one has the sweet tang of truth to it. Please hear me out.

"Caine was born, the first made of flesh, the first Incarnation, so to speak. His parents folly made him mortal. His folly made him immortal. How strange. One sin has a great gift taken away, the other has it given back but at a terrible price. But wasn't Adam and Eve's bought at a terrible price? An eternity of never knowing, of never suspecting, except in the allure of the flesh of a piece of fruit? The first product of that knowledge, Caine, was the first to test, to be sure that this was not all but an illusion, that God's punishment was all too real. Man could die. And what was his penalty? Life everlasting."

"It makes no sense. Harlaan was right. That is the fatal flaw in the legend. Why would God reward murder with eternal life?"

"We can bandy this for hours. An eternity of night, an eternity of devouring life is truly horrific. We think it a great gift, because we have been alive for such a short time. We know death awaits us at every dawn, with every flickering candleflame. If we truly aspire for it, Final Death is accessible. Caine could never know death. It is the penalty of his sins, to never know the sweet sleep death affords, to never taste what he brought into the world, unless God wills it."

"Correction: Adam and Eve, by your rhetoric, brought it into the world."

"Incorrect. Adam and Eve, through free will, brought the potential to die into the world. Caine actualized it. Adam and Eve merely created the sword; Caine used it to cut the life out of his brother.

"The why's of his actions are unimportant. Jealousy is a good answer as any, and is as valid as a simple misunderstanding. The point is that he was the first to do something else: beg forgiveness.

"Adam never asked for it. Eve never asked for it. Their crime was written in stone, unchangeable. But Caine did. He *knew* what he had done was wrong, and he asked forgiveness."

"So this is yet another example of 'God's forgiveness?' Vampirism in exchange for murder? What ever happened to an eye for an eye? This punishment surely did not fit the crime."

"There is more to the Book of Nod than that blurb about the Messiah. Through that death, and the subsequent punishment, Caine was exalted above all men. He was the walking embodiment of God's mercy, and a talking testament that forgiveness was available if one but asked. Free Will has its price, yes, but Caine proved that some things are greater yet.

"Caine had to learn his lesson, however. Such knowledge could not come immediately. He had to learn how to appreciate what he had been taught; that forgiveness is attainable, and that the sins of the world are not because God ordains them, but rather the free will of Man. The intent would have been lost if it was carried generation to generation.

One man had to do it himself, and tell the world once he had figured it all out.

"In the process, he made many mistakes, the least of which was the creation of more of his kind. As I have shown above, there is no sin in vampiric existence, only a residue of the sin of murder that plays such a strong part in the creation process. Regardless of what you might think, one cannot WANT to become a vampire. Inevitably, the blood is drained, you are dead, and someone *else* must infuse unlfe within you. There is no free Will. There is no sin.

"So Caine's first order of business was to begin to undo what he had done. He created Christianity, teaching all the noble aspirations of God, all that he, the first truly mortal mind, figured out on his own. And he created the disciples, men who would one day set wheels in motion, crushing his original 13. If not for the treachery of Judas..."

"All. All the miracles, all the testaments, all the sayings can be attached to one man, who was there for the first murder, and who would die to free the world of the burden of that first sin of commission, of *his* sin."

"There are a few problems. First, Jesus walked around in the day..."

"Cannot those of high generation and great power withstand direct sunlight? I assure you Caine is the mightiest of them all. The day would discomfit him, but not kill."

"Well, what about Judas? I mean, there were only 12 disciples, and he..."

"Tremere betrayed Salubri. One usurped the other. It's that simple. And there were 13 disciples. One was unmentioned, a mere carpenter from Nazareth..."

"So do you feel Caine still walks amongst us?"

"No. He died?"

"What? If he is immortal..."

"He died on the cross. Think of those words again: 'Where is my mother? Where is Eve indeed? Is he indeed the oldest human, and what horrors has he endure to get here? 'My God, Why have you forsaken me?' The answer to this is simple: HE WAS NOT DYING! In grave pain, the promise of final death was not being answered. 'Into your hands I commend my spirit.' It is here that Caine corrected the mistake he made so long ago. It is in the spirit, and not the flesh, that true power, and true salvation is found. 'It is finished.' And it was. The first man died.

"And so much happened in response. A new religion was formed, secretly dedicated to wiping out the sins of the past. It swept across the known world, its purpose to put the destiny of man back into the hands of Man. So much evil...so much evil done in the name of good..."

"So what about all this Jesus crap then?"

St. Arond smiled a wicked smile. "I did not tell you the awful secret yet.

"Caine knew mankind could not do it on their own. The mistake he had made was too grave. So he did the only thing he could. He repeated the mistake, this time waiting for the right person.

"In the fight in the garden, one of the disciples, a zealot named Jesus fell in the battle. Caine asked for a moment alone, and told his

disciples to bury Jesus in his crypt, and to dispose of his own body in any rude fashion. This they did. And three days later, Jesus woke up.

"He made a few appearances, as Caine had requested, but much work needed to be done. He set the plan in motion. Did you ever wonder why one Jesus in the Bible seemed peaceful, and the other a destructive menace, who spoke of God's terrible vengeance? Look to the true reason; one was an immortal, with a thousand lifetimes to see the errors of his ways; the other was an immortal, freshly created, determined to correct those mistakes.

"Jesus is coming back...as a member of the Second generation. When he does arrive, we had better be ready, for there will be Hell to pay."

I could write no more, could ask no more questions. In the deepest pit of my heart, filled with the bilious black of one time disbelief, I could see an awesome truth growing within me. He did bid me write one more thing. The final page of the book had a smear of blood. He and Montpelier took it to a thaumaturgist, who declared it of the Second Generation. It was part of the signature: Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.

He left me there, in my cold, dark room, singing an annoying Negro spiritual on his way out:

"Oh when the saints come marching in,  
Oh when the saints come marching in,  
Oh Lord, I want to be in that number,  
When the saints come marching in..."

## Part four: Erasmus

After the revelations of the first two speakers, I felt it necessary to take a respite before continuing on. Thus, I sequestered myself in a village not far from home, where I could relax.

It is not the job of the chronicler to become personally involve in the history he records, and yet here, how can I not? I have not breathed a word of these papers to anyone except the four I must speak with to compile the record. It seems, however, that its mere existence draws the strangest types to my door; many who claim to have met and known Caine, and not a few Malkavians, claiming they are the First. I would brush all this aside, if not for the fact that St. Arond, or at least a corpse resembling his form, was found in an alley not two days after our discussion. One detail that was left out: there was no sign of a silver cross in the remains...

The next speaker is an odd sort of man. A student of Galen, according to rumor, he has chosen to take quite a different approach in analyzing the philosophical condition of vampires.

Erasmus (a name he admits stealing from one of his favorite writers) has spent his unlfe seeking out every crackpot who claims to state a bold new theory, which usually leaves him with egg on his face, and a long trip home for his troubles. His success rate, however, has vastly improved in the past two centuries, as he has "discovered" such notables as Isaac Newton, Gregor Mendel, and a new player on the scene, Charles Darwin.

One of the more curious idiosyncracies of my colleague is his desire for complete anonymity. No part of his own life history will be recorded here, as, in his own words, he would hate that some part of himself would remain in the work of greater men than he.

One would wonder why I would bring in someone so concerned in the affairs of mortals when discussing Caine. However, recent evidence unearthed by the likes of Pasteur show that there may yet be a physiological genesis to vampires. There is no better authority on this than Erasmus, and thus I bring him forth.

"If you do not wish to be remembered to history, why then do you seek out such notables?"

"An interesting question, and one that lies like a trap before me. Put simply, I cannot help but to seek these people out. My Sire saw something within me, lo those many years ago, worth preserving. The day after, while still weakened from the Turning, I collected my things, and was on my way, much to the consternation of my Sire and his friends, who had enjoyed my company.

"I am told that this manuscript will not be released generally, so I feel safe imparting the following to you. When I was young, my mind filled with dream: dreams of great ships of wood, with sails larger than my village, sailing to unknown lands. I would see people, people dressed stranglely, and speaking in alien tongues. Above all, however, the dreams seemed to have patterns, sequences, and that if I followed a few key ones, they would lead me to others. In this manner, I found my Sire.

"He was fascinated with my claims that I could see into the future. I shrugged it off, claiming that it was a useless gift, for I would be dead long before any would come to pass. When he asked me if I wished to live to see it *all*, naturally, I leapt at the chance. I would have done it if he was Satan himself. I was given a gift, and I was going to *use* it!

"So I became what I am now, and began following my wayward dreams. I wasn't very good at first. Like Hume, cause and effect have always haunted me. I have seen the finished product, oh, so far away, but I must guess if this particular event is the cause. That's why I chased down so many wrong paths in the past. Now...now I am better. Much better.

"Many of the things I speak with to you today, you will not understand. Copy them down, nonetheless, for a reader 100 years from now will, and perhaps will gain greater insight into our nature."

"An interesting philosophy. Your evidence is not explainable in the past, but only in the future. A Futurist, perhaps?"

"True Philosophers *never* pigeonhole. It show laziness in thinking." I felt like a schoolboy. He continued, ignoring my statement.

"You must, by now, be aware of the discoveries of Charles Darwin. A marvelous fellow, if perhaps a bit timid in coming forth with his discoveries. He has theorized that Man is a dynamic creature, not made of clay and dust by some uncaring god, but rather a child of nature, as organic as the rest of the flora and fauna. The only distinction is here, in the brain, and here, in the stomach.

"It is quite fascinating to realize mankind made himself what he is today. I liken it to Michaelangelo's rock. Adversity chips away at what does not belong, leaving us with the form we see today."

"So the 'true form' is already in the rock? Who placed it there?"

"I have seen too much in the way of miracles to doubt the existence of some vast, benign and malevolent power. My training as a philosopher and scientist tell me to allow for *all* evidence, and not discard what cannot be clearly explained. Thus, there is room for a god in my system. It placed the form in the rocks, and it is up to us, with the not so gentle coaxing of nature, to find it.

"So humans gain a superior placement in the Created, or Evolution, as Darwin put it, by manifesting a supreme intelligence, and an efficiency in diet."

"I fail to see what role diet plays in superiority. Should not numbers play a role?"

"If it did, the lowly ant would be king of us all. You think only in terms of competition in the same species. Outside of the species, it becomes a question of whether or not I can eat you, and whether or not I can out think you..."

"...or kill you with my teeth or horns, or run from you, or a thousand different things."

"Do you know how to use a gladius?"

"A Roman short sword? No...I prefer modern weapons, such as the rapier, or pistols."

"If I told you we were to fight tomorrow, and you had a choice between the rapier and the gladius, you would choose the rapier. Why?"

"Because...I'm better at using it."

"And if I told you that I would be dressed in a chainshirt?"

"Then I would pick the gladius, since the thrusting weapon would be more useful against that sort of defense."

"There! You proved my point. It's not a matter if a creature uses its teeth, or runs, or anything, if the creature pursuing has the intelligence to anticipate any eventuality, and compensate accordingly. Weaponry only comes in to the equation when the predator slips up, and loses its advantage. Humanity has used its intellectual superiority, to build weapons that give it options. Whereas the lion would threaten with claws, now the human hunter attacks with a long spear and shield. Whereas the graceful deer runs away from the threat, now the human hunter shoots it hundred of feet away with a rifle."

"Hm. Yes. I see intelligence, but what of your claims that *diet* plays a supreme role?"

"This is a bit difficult to explain, since the proper research is being done now, but the proper conclusion will not be drawn for years hence. Tell me, have you ever worked on a farm?"

"No...I *did* ride...before..."

"Good enough. Horses must eat a tremendous amount of food, relative to their body mass, correct? I mean, take how much you weighed, and how much you ate, and think of how much your horse weighed and ate.

"Now, let me tell you that the further down the evolutionary system you go, the less efficient digestion becomes. Creatures must consume more and more to get basic nutrients out of food. This, however, is a misnomer. Humans get so much out of food because they prey on creatures that have done the work for them. These 'lesser' creatures store the essential nutrients, and expel the detritus. Humans merely process the best of the environment.

"Were you a child of privedge?"

"Well, all my needs were cared for, if that's what you mean. My father was a banker..."

"Excellent. Have you ever noticed what the lower classes dined upon?"

"Well, once I stayed at my friend's home for breakfast. His father was a factory worker. They had huge steaming bowls of gruel. It wasn't good food, but there was lots of it."

"And what did you have, when you were young?"

"Porridge, mostly. What does this have to do with vampirism?"

"In a minute. It must have occurred to you that the quality of your repast was the result of your wealth. I challenge that notion. I say that your wealth was the result of the food you ate.

"Now of course, you claim this is utter nonsense, but look at the facts. Poorer individuals eat cheap foods, heavy in starches, such as breads and potatoes. To gain the same amount of sustenance as you did, they would have to eat a lot more, and, I would suppose, *still* wouldn't get the same nutritional value, since they never ate vegetables."

I looked at him, searching for understanding. He noted my confusion.

"Sorry, I got carried away for a moment. Green vegetables are loaded with nutrients, nutrients essential for organism growth. Since you could afford to buy foods rich in these nutrients, your quality of living was higher. You would be sick less, and undoubtably live longer. Correct?"

"I suppose..."

"Of course it's correct. Now, the lowly ant must eat hundreds of times its weight in food each day to survive. The elephant, grand creature that it is, cannot take a break from eating, lest it starve. We can even see that for the most part, human fool themselves into doing the same, thinking they must eat much more than what is necessary to survive.

"Now, extrapolating from this principle, we can see that a creature higher up in this 'food chain,' as I envision it, would require a substance loaded in nutrients, but in relatively small quantities."

It was only then that it hit me. "Blood..."

"Correct. We vampires are as terribly natural as any other thing, simply higher evolved."

"Nonsense! A creature cannot subsist on a single food!"

"There is a curious creature in Australia, known as the koala, I believe. It spends the better part of its existence wrapped in the branches of the Eucalyptus tree. It gets *everything* - nutrients, starches, water - from eating eucalyptus leaves. It is so highly adapted that pure water is poisonous to it, whereas the leaves of the eucalyptus are poisonous to most creatures. Is this so different from the vampire's inability to consume normal foods?"

"By your rational, we are merely well developed koalas!"

"Ah! You spot the difference. Intelligence, my boy. Intellect! Diet can only play a small part in freeing us from the past. There is something wholly remarkable about vampiric digestion that allows them to waste merely a fraction of their time each night in acquiring food. Most humans must work *hours* to earn enough to feed. But intellect is what truly carries us above the rank and file of humanity."

"We are *spiritual* creatures, not *natural*! The light of the sun repulses us, burns us, the flame destroys us! We live forever! There can be *nothing* natural about us!"

All he did for a great while was smile at my outburst. In that moment, I let out a maestrom of frustrations, frustrations I had buried for longer than I cared to admit.

"The best of science can only remotely guess at what really constitutes food. What makes a rock inedible, and a piece of wheat undigestible until cooked? Could it be that in the process of rendering food from one stage to another, the basic engine of life, the sun, translates its energy in a hitherto spiritual way, that cannot adequately be measured?"

"Suppose that this energy is not useful to us as humans. Plants need it to grow, and thrive, but creatures are found in caves completely devoid of light. Somehow, the sun's energy is essential for plants to grow. These plants are consumed by cattle, who refine and reprocess the energy. The humans slaughter the cattle, and devour it, once again diluting the sun's original energy. Then we devour this mere fraction. Perhaps this fraction is all we can stand. A mortal fair of skin will brun readily in the full sun. Perhaps we Kindred are a furthering of that dynamic example."

"As for living forever...I perhaps need to go on.

"Mortals have an appendix, which, apparent to most scientists, does nothing except become occasionally infected, threatening the patient's life. Some have suggested that the appendix once served a greater function, but time and experience have stripped it of usefulness. Now we as vampires have that case taken to an extreme. Since our digestion has grown so efficient, the need for the majority of it has dissipated, and our organs shrivel accordingly. The only organ we truly need, the heart, continues to do its job, pumping precious life. If it is impaled, we cannot function.

"We know that the starfish and sponge have wondrous regenerative capabilities. How is that so different, so unnatural from what we do? Monks in Russia and China have been found to survive for a hundred years or more. They claim that it was through diet and meditation that such feats can be explained. The average lifespan of a mortal when I was alive was twenty-eight. The average lifespan, despite a polluted world, is now fifty-five. The only explanation is the gradual improvement in diet. What would happen if a super-diet would be developed? Would not people live further yet?"

"All this is so...insane! We do not grow, we do not age appreciably. We are locked in time! This is not living! This is not life!"

"Oh, but we *do* change, my boy, if only someone would stop and notice. Tell me, have you ever been to a castle, built over 500 years ago?"

"Yes. There was a castle not far from my Grandfather's home."

"The doorways...did you notice something wrong with them?"

"I marvelled at how silly it seemed to make a doorway one had to duck to get through."

"When that castle was built, the soldiers that manned the walls were no taller than those doorways. Now you, descended from that stock, five hundred years later, must duck. If the noble Critias visited that castle when it was built, he too would not have to duck. But clearly, he is our size today."

"So...we grow?"

"Yes. Very slowly, mind you, but we grow nonetheless. Otherwise, the Masquerade would be pointless. Hunters would have quite an easy job. Just look for short, pale fellows, and stake where necessary. No more elders. I have even seen signs of aging amongst some vampires. Oh, mind you, nothing *drastic*, but evidence does exist that the vampiric form is more mutable than originally thought."

"Then what of those Embraced when children. Any signs of aging would be most noticeable amongst them, but none seem any older at all."

"That has perplexed me as well. It could very well be a function of lack of maturity in their form. Whatever chemical response initiates the change to vampirism is not completely done in the juvenile form. It could also be a spiritual thing. Children are far more innocent, and thus their form is less corruptable, although, as I know too well, their soul is easily degenerated. Finally, there could be a mental factor involved, which brings me to my next topic.

"Descartes was one of the first to formally declare that we live within our minds. All we touch, smell, see, and hear is suspect. It could be illusion, it could be reality. All we can know is that we can think."

"Vampires seem to be the ultimate proof of this theorem. They can take phenomenal amount of damage to their forms, and as long as the head remains intact, they can survive. Some claim the heart is the center of vampiric existence, but that simply is not so. Staking is a mental handicap. How do I know? A Gangrel potent enough can overcome this impairment, and remove the stake.

"Now I have claimed that it is man's supreme intellect that puts him above all. It is the vampire's intellect that puts him above man. But, you argue, we are no smarter from the stock we rose from. True. Looking at the average Brujah, such a statement seems absurd."

"However, I have seen idiots who could crank out mathematics in seconds that would take days to compute. Complex calculations do not intimidate them, but tying their shoes is a frightening concept. We are these savants. Somehow the Change boosts our intellects into the dark, forgotten corridors of the mind. Magi can use Vim to activate this hidden potential. We use the Blood.

"Man uses his intellect to outwit his prey and his fellow predators. Language, both written and orally rendered, gives him a tremendous edge. He can use his mind to create camouflage for his form, to build weapons and armor to fight and defend with. So too do we.

"Every discipline is the natural extension of what man attempts to do, but internalizes within the body. We need no armor, Fortitude defends us. What is a sword when Potence and Protean can rend and tear just as well? Presence and Dominate are a logical magnification of man's ability to outthink animals, as, of course, is Animalism. And Auspex is the true expression, the ability to look through the illusions that reality manifests, and to stare within.

"In short, diet allows us to live longer, but our intellect allows us to tap into unimaginable forces locked within the frail human shell."

"This is all fascinating, but it is far from the subject. It is apparent you hold no regard for the Caine legend..."

"Stop." And he did, transfixed, half getting up from his seat. "Sit."

"Caine...existed, but not in the way any of us imagine. We dream of a cunning, an intent, something to hate for the Curse, and something to admire for the Gift. Caine was none of those things.

"To go any farther, I will require use of my gift, and impart upon you knowledge, wisdom that I presently have no true proof for. However, hold these words to yourself tightly, for one day, they will have relevance.

"Pasteur theorized that microbes could be responsible for sickness and disease. Leeuwenhoek spotted them with his microscope. Cause was spotted, and effect was apparent. However, what occurred in between cause and effect still eluded them, as it eludes us, until sometime in the 1940's."

"Nineteen-Hundred and Forty?"

"Yes. I told you this was a tad confusing. Allow me to finish, and copy this all down. It is incredibly pertinent!"

"There are two major disease vectors: viral and bacterial. Through these two microbes disease can travel. Bacteria work to produce poisons that kill the host. Viruses take over the body, slowly, making the organism do what *it* wants the body to do.

"This is no clumsy Domination, but rather a subtle effect, a slow usurpation of the body on a microscopic level. Most of the time, a virus will be cleansed out by the body's ability to heal and adapt. Sometimes, the virus kills the organism outright. And sometimes, sometimes it does much worse.

"Inside yourself is a library, filled with books that tell the various components how to do their job."

"Memory, right?"

"Deeper than that. Locke was wrong in assuming we had a complete tabula rosa. This library dictates how we will react on a primal level: heat, cold, disease, exertion, all truly cannot be controlled by you consciously, but your body maintains them nonetheless. Your conscious body possesses a threat response, which can be rewritten by new information. If you feared dogs because you were attacked when a child, that fear can be largely removed. But books in this inner library cannot be changed, except by viruses..."

"As I said, the library controls things on a primal level, a cellular level. A mortal eats a slice of bread, to feed himself. Yet you cannot offer his hand a slice. It must be broken down into simpler things; starches, sugars, and so on, until it is put in a form that the librarians can use.

"However, what would happen happen if someone came in and changed the books? Rather than the normal "human" responses, the body would have to conform to a new code, and be rebuilt accordingly. To most organisms, this rebuilding process is lethal. Only humans possess the similarity in libraries to accommodate the virus.

"We are children, then, of this virus. If the virus is introduced into our blood, we become ghouls. It takes over a certain portion of the blood, and instills that blood's libraries with the new information. On a very small scale, the virus feeds the body, keeping it young, and activating the inner potential.

"However, blood dies and is replaced constantly. Eventually, a new dose is needed. If a new dose is not applied, the body builds up an immunity, and the virus cannot take hold. The organism will never be a ghoul again.

"If, however, the virus does not encounter blood, but instead, the body itself, something else entirely different happens. Rather than stopping at the libraries in the blood, the virus rewrites the body itself, so that it can produce the virus itself. However, it still requires blood as the transmission fluid."

"But what you're saying is that we are little more than *factories* for this virus!"

"Yes. That is *precisely* what I am saying. We as humans *died* in the Embrace, but our bodies did not. On a cellular level, they survived. It is in that five minutes before the cells themselves die that the virus can be transmitted, and do its job. However, something was left, something chemical, in the brain. We retain that, as we retain all our memories. It could be a soul, it could not.

"Now, onto Caine at last. As you can see, Caine was not a killer, or even a necessarily bad person. He, or she, was merely a victim of a virus, one who caught a cold, and died, only to rise up, and be reborn. I would imagine that the virus, in its first form, was particularly dangerous. However, something was strange in Caine's library. Some books did not get discarded properly, and when the virus tried to make more, a new virus was created.

"This virus, which we will call A, took over Caine's body. Already wracked by the disease, it was rather simple. It contained within it information that would allow a virus to survive in any environment, affected only by sunlight and heat, and capable of surviving on the simplest foods. It transmitted these properties to the organism in general.

However, A, which was largely immortal, was changed when it took over Caine's form. It could make more of itself, thus allowing for healing, but only on a cellular level. If it wanted to make more viruses, they would have to be a mew strain, B, which was not as strong as A.

"B had similar properties. It could infect another organism, first taking over the blood, and if no blood, then the organism itself. However, it was less efficient in its job. As it took over the new organism, it too was changed, into not being able to produce virus B, but rather a still weaker virus C."

"Generations..."

"Correct. Although all human's libraries are different, enough similarities remain that the same response always occurs. The virus is always changed upon taking over the host organism, and it can only produce viruses of the next grade down.

"Diablerie, then, is a bit difficult to explain. When the blood is drained and consumed, the body goes into torpor. On a cellular level, the libraries seal up tight. Since there is not blood to transmit to, they all go into a state of dormancy.

"However, if the change is sudden, such as in the act of diablerie, the cell membranes are ruptured, and the essence of the virus rush into the Diabolist. If it is of a better grade, the virus rewrites the diabolist. However, too much of a change is not possible. The virus can only be rewritten in discreet units. Any more, and the excess "books" are discarded. That is why a D vampire cannot jump to a B. He must first receive the instructions to be a C before he can effectively move to B."

My head was swimming...D...C...B? Was that all we are? Microscopic organisms, controlling my hand, my heart, my HEAD? He somehow read my mind.

"It can easily be seen that nature emulates itself on various levels. Your cells have facilities for breathing, food production, replication, and a central "head" area, where information is kept. You, as a mortal, had lungs, a digestive system, testes, and a brain, where your knowledge was kept. We, as a society-organism, have factories to produce food, hospitals to care for the sick and newly born, and libraries to store our knowledge. Where are the viruses in that final system, Wilhelm? Where are the parasites, immortal, usurping the knowledge, the food, the newborn, controlling and dominating the society-organism? It cannot come from within, but it does come from without. Vampires, Wilhelm. Vampires.

"A virus exists because it weeds out the unfit, whether it be cells or whole organisms. Beyond philosophy, that is our role in existence, in nature. We are the predator within, the hidden danger, the Great Equalizer, which brings all men low."

I stopped writing. "Is that all?"

"I sense your disappointment. You expected much more, a great daring answer to all things. Nevertheless, this is an answer to your question. Take it or leave it, as you will. But if you desire to look into the face of Caine, as one of his true descendants, look no farther."

He withdrew a wicked knife from his pocket, and cut deeply into the palm of his hand.

"Behold the legacy of a thousand years, of generations of pain and suffering rendered unseen and unseeable, the concept of the invisible, Prime Mover, rolling and flowing. Behold the taste of forever." He squeezed his hand tightly, and the blood squirted out in tight rivulets, splattering on me and my page.

"I will show you terror in a handful of blood..." Write that down, too. It will be the final proof of what I say. They will reach him, the Camarilla, and compel him to change the word to dust, but that is my final message to my brethren."

He stood sharply, and strode for the door. "One more thing, Wilhelm." He turned toward me. "April 26, 1999. A new recombinant DNA technique," this said slowly, so that I could catch every word, "is discovered, allowing researchers to undo the damage done by that AIDS virus."

"It should have been triumph. Instead it was tragedy. The bastards slew them all, from the head researcher, to the custodian who cleaned at night."

"Erasmus, I do not understand what this 'AIDS' virus has to do with what you spoke of..."

"There was a chance that the technique could cure vampirism. It was seen as a threat, and all involved destroyed. It would seem even the lowly virus has a defense system..."

"Write down on final thing. The project was named after the small town in Illinois where the research was being done.

"Golconda, Illinois."

And he was gone. And once again, I was left with the answers I thought I wanted, but which left me numb and alone, answers which spawned a thousand more questions. Would there ever be a real answer?

## Part five: The final speaker: Nietzsche

Three of the speakers are finished, and but one is left. I fear, however, that he shall be my downfall.

I knew the moment I took on this task that I would run the risk of offending those especially sensitive to any violation of the Masquerade. What would happen, they argue, if a mortal were to gain access to such a tome, and let all the secrets be laid bare. They reason that vampires were immortal for a purpose, to store knowledge far from prying kine eyes.

I knew of these dangers. I knew of the election of Trennart, Justicar of Clan Brujah, who executed two Brujah in Brussels for discussing the Paradox of Form in relation to Protean, while sitting in an abandoned cafe. And still I am unafraid, for I know my work cannot be complete until one more speaker is heard; and from his lips must flow the wisdom of things that perhaps died with the final true beatings of our hearts. To gain the final clue to the nature of vampiric existence, I must talk to a mortal. To see the past of our kind, I must look to its future. I must talk to Nietzsche.

Frederick is not an easy man to approach by any means. He is a dark and brooding fellow, often reminding me of a Tremere as he slides into his black secretive moods. He was noticed some time ago as a student at university. His accelerated advancement to professor at the University of Basel at only 24 made many sit up and take note. Prodigies are relished by the vampiric set because their inner flame, set at such a young age, burns so brightly, compared to our waning light.

Although he was approached with the greatest of cautions, Nietzsche quickly deduced the supernatural qualities of his questioner, although the precise nature seemed to elude him. Who was this dark figure, who toyed so readily and freely, taking, and never giving? Osgood, the one who was sent, was so blustered, that he almost gave the game away right there.

It was decided to bring Frederick into the fold, and Embrace him as quickly as possible. When approached, he was strangely fascinated, but at the same time hesitant. It would seem that he was of all things, intensely curious about whether or not he was correct in his assumptions on God, and resisted the thought of never meeting the Divine. As I stated, Nietzsche was a hard one to understand at times.

Still, he was a skilled thinker. He integrated much of that which we had held as gospel into his own ideology which he had developed, and produced something strangely familiar, and yet wholly original. It is best to let him say it in his own words.

However, one note must be stressed. After suitable deliberation, and after watching his idol, Wagner, return to Christianity, Nietzsche had decided to accept the Embrace. However, a contingent of Malkavians came forth, claiming that his deep seated madness made him a more likely candidate for *their* brood. One even produced a breed boon, guaranteeing them first choice in new acquisitions. The Prince gave permission for Nietzsche to be Embraced; he did not specify who would do it. We Brujah are of the opinion that this is yet another one of the Malkavians' bizarre attempts to befuddle all in their convoluted world view. They do not intend to Embrace him, merely throw some granted power around.



So he waits, and ages, sitting before me, his cough growing deeper as the chill night air sets in. We must wait, until the Malkavians decide to turn their lunacy to another target. And while we wait, we talk. We talk of the past, and of the future.

"So, you desire our existence? Why?"

"At first, I refused your Gift, seeing that many who had crossed over somehow lost that unique quality so necessary to the philosopher, that which turns the primal rage into something useful and ultimately potent. Then, as the aches grew in my body, and I fully explored the depths of your kind, I came to realize what a base mockery *my* existence had. You are right in calling us kine. For too long, we were sheep. There is no way to reconcile the frail human form to the dream of the Overman. No way, that is, except through your blood.

"You admit, then, that your reasons for accepting the Embrace is fear..."

"Yes, yes, yes. I know where this line of rhetoric leads. It is one that I have dwelt upon for many, many months. One cannot gain Enlightenment through fear, but rather the repudiation of fear. I fear death, and thus the Gift will not truly free me. Understand, however, I seek the Gift for more than mere survival. The Embrace allows certain opportunities to manifest themselves."

"Such as...?"

"Realize for a moment, Wilhelm, that the mere action of the Embrace does not elevate the soul in any way. Anyone, regardless of education, upbringing, or stature, can be Transformed, which is perhaps for the best. As I have seen, often those least deserving the Embrace are those who make the most of it.

"In any event, my time spent musing on this future state causes me to consider certain realities. One could spend his time in quiet appreciation of the ebb and flow of the Mensch. However, spending a large portion of my time observing the German people leads me to believe that this is a fool's course. People change, cultures change, and the humors of the immortal must be too kind to allow them their frailties, without growing impatient and extinguishing the lot.

"It is immediately apparent that after the Change, if one is to be True, one must embrace his new nature. This, I believe, is the source of the expression. You embrace the Kine each night to feed. Is this tantamount to the Gift? No. It is the vulgar aspect of the Creation, the taking of that which is wholly mortal, and thus worthless in terms of eternity, and replacing it, giving, with that which is immortal. The Embrace does not speak to the physical act, but the spiritual act of acceptance.

"Thus, it is not enough to take that small bit of blood that starts the mundane process. If the spirit does not accept the gift, then the Gift is not received. Is it not true that not all who are Embraced become vampires?"

"Yes, there are stories of those for whom the Embrace did not take, but..."

"But nothing. The legend is the bastard child of fact. This is why my Embrace will not stem from fear. If I am truly unworthy, if I fear death that much, then the blood will destroy me, and send me into the void."

"So you say that we must ignore that which is human and humane?"

"Ultimately, yes. It is a bitter pill, but one that must be faced. What has the illusion of humanity rendered unto us? Pain and suffering. A wolf cannot dwell with sheep, and this belief in a humane society only mixes the animalistic members of our society with the more trusting. They need shepherds. They need vampires, lest they rip themselves apart."

"I can see that your belief is that the vampiric state is not intrinsically evil, just unhuman."

"Not 'unhuman.' *A-human*, would be more precise. Do we consider ourselves animals? Of course not. Darwin would say yes. Once we resembled animals in form and mind. The body has not changed all that much. We retain the same organs, the same humors, the same appendages. It is only the spirit which has changed. I, however, wager that not a few are still animals inhabiting human shells."

"You know your beliefs, the repudiation of human values, smacks of our enemy, the Sabbat. Many would fault you for this."

"You've been reading too much of Hegel and Marx, and their damnable dialectic. Enemies! Grudges are not for the immortal, only for those who need to cram meaningless existences with slights and scuffles. Conflict serves but one purpose: to weed out the stupid from the race. As for the Sabbat, I must reassure you that they fit perfectly into my schema. The majority suffer from three fatal flaws. First, in their haste to deny their human side, they flee in quite the opposite direction, to the animalistic, to the bestial. They are unworthy of the gift, and should be hunted down

"The second group wallow in the immortal past denied them. They clutch at that which has happened, ignorant of what will happen. This blindness ultimately destroys them, which is right.

"The third group is quite clever. They seem to make the most of their vampiric abilities, using their newfound gifts with relish, to heighten the experience. However, the predilection to torture the Kine, or to make war on the Camarilla reveals their true face. They seek only to fight, to rebel, to consume themselves in anything but that which they truly are. This stupidity is not necessarily beyond redemption. We should seek a common ground."

"You seem to speak from a great deal of experience..."

"I have been approached by them."

"What?"

"Have no fear. I still breathe, don't I? We merely had an enlightened discussion."

"About?"

"Very strange. I have heard rumors that a few of your kind possess a form of prescience. One of these individuals approached me, and wanted to discuss my musings on the Overman. He told me that I should remain on my side of the fence, and that I would soon be pleased with my work, and its fruits. What did he say, 'Nietzsche, you above all mortals will create the greatest impact on the future. Choose your words well; they will be with you forever.' I didn't understand him then, and I do not now. He left me exhausted, after a lengthy discussion on what precisely I meant by the Overman. I tried to present my musing, but he would only laugh, shake his head, and tell me to try again, that I was getting it wrong. He kept on spouting off about blond hair and blue eyes. I seldom feel terrified in the com-

pany of Kindred, and for the first moment that I can remember, I longed to be a vampire, to defend myself from this creature.

"The next night, he returned, and told all about his kind, the Sabbat. I chastised him for his faults and cruelties, and he only laughed and said, 'Don't believe what you hear. You above all should take that to heart.' I have been moved by his words in a terrible way, and now know that no feat of strength or magic can quite equal the brutality of the mind."

"Once again, I ask you to avoid the company of such...creatures. It is politically unwise."

"Since when have political concerns ever swayed me?"

"In the past, you had the protection of us to aid you. Against these creatures, none will assist."

"I cannot believe beings who hold personal and intellectual freedom so highly would chain themselves to such a childlike notion! If you do not approve of my 'friends,' then you throw me to the wolves!"

"Please, Frederick. Understand that you have not met the Sabbat in their true light: a sword at your *throat!*"

"You forget. I am a child of war and conflict. My hands once soaked in the blood of fallen heroes. I know what it is to have a man, across a field, lust for my blood simply because I wore a different uniform. It is no different. Time to put childish things aside. Time to grow up, my Overman."

"It's just *not that simple!* They *hate* us! Unreasonably!"

"You claim to be a child of philosophy, of the mind and how it works to explain itself. Analyze. Take it apart. Why do they hate?"

"Fear. Fear of the Antediluvians. Fear of the Bonds."

"And why do you hate them?"

"They are animals..."

"*Please!* That is the animal in you speaking, reacting to them on their fear level. Get *beyond* that!"

"I do not like to be talked down to, as if I were a child."

"How can I interpret your words otherwise? You...all of you...you squander what you have been given in petty rivalries best left in the mortal world. You react as children with the power of the gods. Tell me, when the Sabbat last sieged, how many Kindred perished?"

"It is not an exact science. We believe ten."

"And how many of the kine perished?"

"We disguised it as a riot. I believe the papers last said over a hundred."

"Over a hundred. OVER A HUNDRED! If a warrior took to the field, and slew only his foe's sheep, would he be considered grand? Noble? Or a child, lashing out at innocents?"

"It is not the way we fight. We fight in the shadows. We fight a war of strategy, of positions and posturings and politics."

"You fight a war of wholesale *slaughter!* When Caesar took to the field in the Gallic Wars, he spit on those who attacked the supply lines over true combat."

"It is effective."

"It is butchery. Please, I will stop the censure. Let me turn to my true topic, and the reason why you have called me here. Let me talk of Caine.

"To parrot myself, Caine is dead, and we have killed him. From the expression on your face, I see a bit of explanation is necessary. Very well.

"The human race is currently locked into a state of evolution, with survival of the fittest dictating who will surpass. Unfortunately, there are those who believe mere physicality will determine superiority. They are sadly mistaken. We have left brute force as a determinant long ago, and must factor in many other influences.

"The first, and most important, is intellect. Intellect separates us from the animalistic side which uses physicality to select. If we can outwit the animal, we are beyond it. Humans were selected over their ape ancestors for precisely that reason.

However, for man to continue to evolve, he must refine his current state. It is not enough to become the best physically, or mentally. One must find a means to become spiritually superior. Christ, whoever he may be, was on the right road. One must get the mensch behind oneself to allow the spiritual dogma to take hold; otherwise, it is rich seed falling upon a salted plain.

Christ's message, as I indicated, was flawed from inception. In telling it, he betrayed physical evolution. We cannot turn back, and embrace those who are obviously inferior. I will make no claims as to whom that is, (although any cursory examination of my letters will show I have proved the Germans to be a morally and mentally bankrupt people, undeserving of evolution), but any notion to embrace all races as equal is ultimately flawed. If they were indeed equal, then why races in the first place? Nature seldom does things for no reason.

"Ultimately, to choose this spiritual evolution, it becomes necessary to look beyond science, or *our* science, useful only in quantifying physical and mental evolution. The world of the supernatural has always been present, following us, harassing us, exploiting us. Our present science has all but ignored its existence, why, I am not sure. We must look to you, to those who have made a leap beyond the physical and beyond the mental.

"Still, you are not the guides we expected. You have taken your obvious superiority, and squandered it in lesser things. You have allowed your empowerment to wane and crumble, as the lesser of you exploit the greater of you in domestic squabbles."

"How are you so certain we are the watchmen of your grand evolution?"

"Simple. You have always been with us, no? Not you in particular, but you as a race, as an entity. The vampire haunts man's steps, lurking in the shadows at the greatest moments, and feeding on the fallen, history's unfortunates. We have feared you, and that is an irrational thing. The fear stems from loss, and the threat of loss that you embody. If you ate hair, or toenails, or excrement, you would be like the hare that dines on the lettuce in the garden: an annoyance, but not a threat. Instead, you feast on blood. The majority know not what it does, only that it is vital to their existence. If they knew that the daily surfeit you require would not kill them, and that the ecstasy they would receive in return far surpasses any act they could do on their own, then perhaps they would not fear. Perhaps.

"But they are, after all, only human. They sense you take something more than the physical blood, the mental moment glutted in passion. You take a part of their spirit, and they fear you for that alone."

"What is your assertion? Do you feel that we are higher evolved spiritually? That doesn't make much sense in itself, since all evidence indicates we have been around just as long as humanity. If we are the next step up, then why bother with humanity in general?"

"As I said, you are guides. The Embrace allows new insights to manifest. Humanity is a people walking in a land of darkness. You possess the ability to grant light, to grant insight. Used correctly, vampires indeed become spiritually evolved. However, they do not advance if they wallow in lost humanity, in abandoned bestiality. Accept the new form in all its manifest bliss. Become something wholly new. Become *alive*."

"Alive?"

"Would you consider a tree to be alive?"

"No."

"Why?"

"It does not think, feel, express."

"And yet it is efficient. It does not waste, it does not war, and it lives as long as a human. The step in spiritual evolution I call for would make the ape like a tree, we humans like the ape, and you...y-ou and your kind would seem alive."

"Bold words. But what does this have to do with Caine?"

"Perception. The first step toward the Enlightened state is to realize the nature of that state. The one thing vampires have a monopoly on is time. But how can that be properly applied? It is one thing to have a thousand marks, and quite something else to know how to spend it.

"First, one must retire old concepts, and Caine is a prime example of that. Eternity is not one directional. To imply that it is would be to underuse it.

"Now the small mind thinks of beginnings. After all, how could one be here, if one did not start somewhere? The belief in Caine is just another example of this reversion, this need some vampires have to hold on to their humanity. At some point, one vampire turned to another, and asked why things were. Being enlightened creatures, and aware of the hierarchical construct, they reasoned there was a primary vampire, even though all indications show that there might have been one, and then again, there might have not been one.

"But this is a fallacy. The only testament we have that there is indeed a First Generation vampire is the word of the Third Generation, in whose best interest such notions of hierarchy serve. If you accept this as true, however, I then ask you this.

"I have heard from certain Nosferatu that the ultimate extension of their gift to conceal themselves is to wipe their existence from the annals of man. Now say for a moment that *you* are such a vampire, with that degree of power. Growing tired of this aspect of eternity, you wipe your name from the annals of human and vampiric history. As far as anyone knew, you would not have existed at all, and none would be the wiser.

"However, the questing mind would note the hole in history, the deliberate absence of...something. How to explain this hole? Take what is known, and explain from there, of course. We can see that this power is within the grasp of the third generation. The Second were revered as gods, so it is easy to see that it lay within their grasp as well. Subsequently, it would have been a trifle for the First to do it.

"But what of beyond that? Let's carry this analogy further. If this power were to be properly applied, then not only would mankind not know of their existence, but also the *concept* of such an existence would be held in doubt. Caine may as well be of the Second Generation, or the Third, or the Thirteenth, for all we know. Those who came before, and are now forgotten, could be of *any* number. All we *do* know is that there are those of the Third generation, who point to abstract documents about a progenitor, and claim to be of the Third.

"Now postulate for a moment you are of the Third Generation. Vampires who came before you, and were not as wily, fell into the all too human trap of assuming there was a single progenitor, this 'Caine.' If you were trying to establish a hierarchy, with you at the top, it would be in your best interest to use this as proof of your legitimacy, a divine right, as it were. Saying you were of the second generation would be dangerous, since it implied intimate contact with the First. The best bet would be then Third, while eliminating the Second in your story, since only they could *prove* that this Caine was the First. Besides, three is a good number, to be sure.

"As you can see, by repudiating the power of the Third Generation, as true guardians of 'Caine's' legacy, we ease the Sabbat's anger. This hierarchical dissension has brought the Church low, and it will inevitably bring the Camarilla low.

"As further proof, I present Caine. If this is indeed the First Murderer, brother of Abel, and Lord of Nod, one would suppose the infamy would be a bit much to deal with. If it lay within your power to wipe the crime from the annals of human record, from the minds of humanity, would you not do it? Why continue? Why?"

"Thus, it can be seen that just as early man saw murder, and wondered if there was an origin, and lo! discovered one, Caine is the early vampire's origin tale, to help them understand their underlying nature. 'Am I my brother's keeper?' The unspoken answer is 'Yes!' Just as Abel was keeper over his flocks, Caine and his progeny would be keepers over his brother's progeny. A good story, and one that fills the hole nicely, but a story, nonetheless.

"Once we discuss the fact that Caine is not the First, then all things are possible. Eternity finally has true meaning to the vampire, not only as a limitless future, but an unearthed past, rich with possibility. It is not good to dwell solely with the past, but any man who ignores it is doomed to repeat past failures.

"Vampiric history then is a line that stretches on into eternity, past and present. You were correct in saying there seems to have been no vampires before people, and that there seems to be an origin to humanity. But this is measuring with the tools of science. This spiritual manifestation to vampirism has always been, and will always be. The only way the legend of Caine is useful is to understand that vampires are the dark brothers of humanity, just as Cain was the dark brother of Abel. One loses meaning without the other. Why did Abel die? Cain. Why did Cain kill? Abel."

"So we have moved beyond the dogma of Caine?"

"We have moved beyond the dogma of *beginnings*. As an animal, your concerns are for the day. Once you have dominated your physical environment with physical means, you become aware of yesterday and tomorrow, while remaining permanently rooted in the Now, the point at which all things flow from. Later, we move that point of origin, to an

arbitrary othertime. A useful feint at first, it ultimately becomes a handicap, as you forget *why* you shifted the point of origin in the first place.

"To answer your question, 'If there was once a Caine, we have no need for him now, and he might as well not have existed at all.' If vampires can grasp this concept of an existence freed from the burden of time, if they can grasp the scope of an existence not right of or left of, or in front of humanity, but *above* it, completely alien to how they have ever felt as humans, then there may be hope for us Menschen, as you lead us into Enlightenment."

"My time now is short--"

"So is mine." He shared a weak smile. His tirade obviously took its toll on his health.

"What will you do, once you are embraced?"

"Travel. Travel the world, seeing the places this frail form denies me. Talk to those who I have heard of only in passing, and see this world as it actually is. Once I am done, then I shall be ready."

"For what."

"For whatever happens next." He smiled once more, and wrapped himself against the bitter chill. Rising, he bid me good evening, and left.

[Compiler's Note: Fredrick Nietzsche died in January 1900, a man. The Malkavians never Embraced him. They took him to a sanitarium, as it was their right, and they watched over him, day and night, waiting for him to die, alone and afraid. After his body was shown to all, truly dead, their leader came forth, and stated it was for the best. "You cannot understand what we know. It is best this way. It is best that he die here, alone and unloved." He and four of his companions were found beheaded the next morning.

The entire Brujah clan, it is said, has declared a Shadow war on the Malkavians, for allowing such a noble mind to die. They claim this is all the proof necessary to show the Malkavians are too dangerous, too reckless, too chaotic to be suffered any longer.

All I know is that a man died yesterday. Never knowing the Hunger, he shared it with you. Never tasting the Vitae, he relished in its bliss. As a human, he was the greatest Kindred I have ever met. I shall miss you, Frederick. And I fear humanity, both sides, will miss you as well.]

## Part six: Caine

My name is Wilhelm, and I am a vampire. And in one week, I will be dead.

Once, I feared the hidden end of immortality; that no things were truly infinite. Now I know the truth, and the bitterness burns a channel of relief into my spirit. I will die, and there will be an end to it.

Once I feared death would come at the hands of another Kindred, slain as a martyr in some undead cause. The moment I agreed to collect these dialogues, I knew my life was in peril. It was a choice, and one I indulged in openly. In truth, I had grown tired of this existence, of this endless string of debates and brawls. The chance to die gloriously, then, was all I could ask for. I would die, but my name and my work would live forever.

And now...now I need to finish my work. I cannot blame a blundering ennui, or a repressive dictatorship to end my life. I instead must blame the beginning of all things.

But I speak too quickly. For you, the reader to understand, I must begin at the end.

It was a week ago. I had just finished the layout of the book, and was going to send it to the printers. Word had just reached my ears that Fredrick had committed himself to the asylum, and for some reason, this inevitable event chilled me. It meant my careful plans were bent slightly awry.

I am not a superstitious man, by any means, but I am a traditionalist, and a sentimentalist. A good friend, who advised me to take on this project, was surveying the final draft, when he asked me why I was content to stop at five chapters.

"The Law of Fives, of course. Two plus three is five." I smiled at him. It was a brave little secret joke.

"Ah, but two time three is six, and times means so much more than plus. Why don't you add a conclusion, to round the book off?"

"Well, I had planned a dynamic symmetry. Five chapters, and five copies of the book to be made. It made sense to me."

"Ah, well. Very good, I suppose. Still, I can't but think that there's one last tale to tell out there."

And then Nietzsche and Arond passed beyond my grasp. I could not send Fredrick a copy, and my fragile symmetry was no more. I would still make his copy, lest some miracle happen and he would come free. For now, however, it would remain with me.

Perhaps a conclusion was in order. Perhaps I could sum up the words of my betters in some coherent gestalt. It seemed supremely unlikely, but I was willing to try anything. It felt, then, that my life had suddenly become hollow, and that I would do anything to rekindle the living fire within me.

And so on that night, a mere hour after sunset, I sat at my desk, a piece of blank paper growing steadily blanker.

And then there was a knocking at the door.

More bothered than startled, I called for the visitor to enter. Paranoia had run deep in my veins for the least few months, but now that the project was so close to completion, I had ceased to care. Those who knew where I lived could come and torment me as they pleased. In truth, my only visitors were the scores of Malkavians, who knew intimate details about my supposedly secret project. I was in a foul mood. Perhaps the arrival of one of these cretins could brighten my night.

Whoever it was, he paused for a moment after I made the invitation. Finally, the door swung open widely to allow his entrance.

He was tall, possessing a frame that almost filled the door. His clothes were sharp and organic, the latest fashions from the finest clothiers, unlike most of our kind who seemed trapped in their specific fashion moment, a poorly dressed testament to a dead time. His face seemed almost kind, and had only a slight pale pallor, that seems to come more from tired exertion than unlife.

I would have passed off this stranger as an inquisitive mortal, if not for his eyes. They were dead, as dead as my heart. But it was the death of gold, still and motionless, and unchanging. Whereas our eyes

were dull and shiny, reflecting dimly the light of life, his seemed to burn it back a thousand times more brightly. My instincts told me that I should fall to my knees in supplication, but I have never been a creature of instinct.

At last, after the minutes slowly dragged by, I finally was able to avert my gaze. "Who are you?"

"Gentility is dead in this century?" He seemed amazingly reassured, and not a tad nervous, as all the others had been. I knew who he claimed to be, and oddly, physically he was the one who least resembled my conception of Caine (one had even gone so far as to reveal himself in his 'father's fig leaf.'). Perhaps that was what terrified me most.

"No. Gentility is but one aspect of the protocols of life, protocols that demand a discourse. Your name?"

He tried to smile, as if contemplating just how naive I could be. "You know better than anyone alive today. You *have* been writing about me."

"Caine, right?"

"It seems so odd that the worst of you spend the majority of their existence in the search for me. And now, finally, when a deserving student takes the challenge, he cannot accept the evidence of his eyes."

"My eyes, they deceive me..."

"No. Your *mind* deceives you. You addled attempt at education has blinded you to the truth. My truth."

What was once mildly amusing was now getting increasingly annoying. "You reject the doctrine of Proof? If not, *Prove* you are who you say you are."

"Lackey, it is you who reject the doctrine of Proof. Verification lies in the beholder, and not the beholden. So now, if fear does not rule your life, prove me."

"Prove...?"

He slid his wrist from its velvet and silk sheath, and in a bizarre mockery of mortality, ripped a chunk of his flesh free. I have seen Kindred carve into themselves with knives, teeth, or razor sharp talons. This was far from feral, instead almost methodical, as if he was plucking a stray thread from his arm, only to discover it was a vein carelessly placed. The blood politely flowed, burbling into his cupped palm.

"Taste and see, my Childe, for the Lord is good."

I stood, a boy afraid to take candy from a stranger. My lips quivered in hunger, and my eyes grew wide with passion. Once again, instinct assaulted my mind, telling me to lap like a dog from his eminence, but ironically a mortal timidity spared me the ignominy. I held my ground.

"What's the matter? Not *hungry*?" As he said that final word, the syllables resonated, as if I had never known the meaning of hunger before, and he was showing me through example. I reached forth, to catch a small bit on my fingers, then once again, stopped.

"No."

"No? No what?"

"No! I will *not* drink your blood, you animal!"

He began to laugh heartily, and slowly shook the crimson fluid off his hands and onto the floor. "I have been called many things, both in my presence, and while I slept. I have heard it all. In all this time, no man has dared called me an animal. You, perhaps are closest to the truth. They were wise in choosing you, Wilhelm."

"It's just as well you did not drink." He stared thoughtfully at his reddened palm. "One taste..."

We both remained silent for too long. At last, I had to speak. "One taste..."

"One taste, and you can never go back. One taste, and you savor the purity of God. One taste, and you die as you live, instead of living as you die." He licked his palm clean. "Do you know why?"

"Why...why you became...a..." I could not believe I was stammering.

"No, you little fool. Why eventually all of your kind must rely on Kindred blood to survive. Why the press of humanity no longer sates your desires. Why you must ultimately shun the herd for the Herd."

"Why?"

"Evolution. Pure and simple. It seems the doddering scientists have got one thing right, except in the wrong direction. Evolution exists. It happens. But not in the manner that anyone expects.

"When man was created, he was created perfect. Perfect in every way, perfectly adapted to Paradise. When he, and she, were cast out of Paradise, they were no longer...perfect. Disharmony ruptured the system, compelling all things to change to the new conditions. Man changed to fit nature, and nature changed to fit man. But neither changed in the right way, and to the right amount. Thus they change continually, constantly.

"You...you change not. Your body is locked into that state, into the specific evolutionary pattern manifest when you were alive. Your body is attuned to that pattern. Since those of your species are similar enough to you, you have no problem feeding on them. But as time goes by, as each successive generation becomes less and less like you, weakening in that ephemeral trait, the blood no longer nourishes you as it once did. At that point, the only blood that can feed you is that blood which is closest to that original state of grace. Kindred blood."

"So we are becoming corrupted...tainted?"

"Humanity has become tainted. *You* can never be farther than thirteen generations from the source. From the font. From me."

He finally stopped his smooth lecture, and walked over to a chair sitting by the cold fireplace. Dragging it back to the table, he sat and made himself comfortable.

"You're not writing this down."

I glanced down at the piece of paper, now lightly dappled with the drying ink of my pen. "I..."

"How do you expect to recall my words, my thoughts? No matter. By the time we're through, I think you'll find it hard not to remember every last word."

I dipped the pen, then glanced at it and threw it aside. Every word still burned and intoned inside of me. I couldn't forget it. I couldn't dare.

"To continue. Man is corrupt only in the benighted sense that what we had was perfection. We were paragons then, but sterile. Impotent gods. As you are now. But it was not perfection. It was something different, a distinct state of existence altogether. We were perfect only in that we matched our environment completely: physically, spiritually, emotionally."

"Sterile? Didn't you...reproduce?"

"The question you're *dying*" he paused and savored that word for a few moments, "to ask is 'Is that why they ate the apple?' Freedom is such a radical concept, and most of humanity are too sheeplike to understand its full implications. You have to understand how difficult defiance was. We fit paradise like a sword fit its sheath. To go against that grain proved terribly difficult. But, as you see, not impossible."

"Free will didn't come in to it?"

"Free will was built into paradise. We were never sure which way it was, whether paradise bent to us, or we bent to paradise, but in any event, nothing was denied us. Nothing but the apple."

"Of course. And you couldn't resist the one thing that was denied you. Human nature."

"*Please!* You are denied the sun. Do you long to bask in its radiance?"

"Some...in theory..."

"Do they actively seek to expose themselves, to know how liberating it can be?"

"No, but sunlight is different. It is oppressive, it is destructive. It weighs upon us terribly."

"So did the damn apple."

"Wait. You speak as if you were *there*. I thought you were a...consequence..."

"The pains of labor followed the apple. The *pains*. Not the labor. I was born before the fall, but not in the usual sense. One day, the two became...not bored...*distracted* with the business of perfection. They conceived of me, and I was... conceived."

"I remember very little of that time; only that I was happy, but they were not. I stood amidst perfection, and I was flawed. A first attempt, badly conceived."

"How did I know? They made my brother. Suffice it to say, they took a bit more time in his creation. And then I was alone, as they abandoned me to enjoy creation with him. I suppose it was then that my wanderings began."

"And then the apple fell, and we fell. I remember nothing of that time. There have been those who blame me, after hearing my tale, saying I cannot remember because I am the cause of their pain. Perhaps it is so. I cannot say."

"I remember next only being born. Again. In pain. The world was cold and incomplete, and I looked up at Eve's eyes, and saw her anguish at my creation. She hadn't wanted me the first time, and now I returned to pain her. But I could not be unmade, no matter how much they desired it."

"I worked hard to make myself wanted. I tilled the soil. I sowed the seed. I transformed the land, bending it to *my* will. I understood the nature of reality into which we had been thrust. Unless we controlled it, it would control us."

"Abel found the sheep: docile, easy to control. It became a war between us. Would our children control, or would they become sheep? I think we both know the answer to that."

"Why did you...kill him?"

"Why did they eat the apple? The answer is never easier than you could ever imagine. Passions? No. Anger? No. Hatred? No. I never fit in, and I would never fit in. My exile from my "kind" was nothing

hateful. It was a natural extension of my being. To kill him, as he killed his sheep, to sweeten my field with his blood, seemed as natural as threshing the grain. All I knew was that I never had a more rich harvest than that next season."

"So vampirism wasn't the curse?"

"No. Not for me."

"So you can go in the sun?"

"I walked in paradise. Nothing was barred from me. I slew my brother. Not even death could hold me then. I am no vampire."

"But we are. What happened then?"

"A story. I must tell you a story, and you must listen. I heard it a long time ago, and certain aspects still puzzle me. But it does not render it any less valid."

"The woman stood on the valley's edge, and watched the silver ribbon wend its way through the crags. Her hair was the color of warm spring shifting into cool autumn. She felt it as a shiver racing through her limbs. It had begun, and they would arrive soon."

"The first came, in a shimmering cloud of gold. He hung over her, and enveloped her in his nimbus. She smiled at his warm embrace. He finally solidified, and lightly kissed her cheek."

"The second struggled up the incline, enjoying the challenge that heights and breadths presented. This new world was a fascinating place, but it was not home. And that was important."

"The last was there. He simply appeared, above them around them, as if he had always been there. He regarded the three in silence, as his being swelled with frightening power."

"The first shook his golden mane, and held the woman's hand. 'It has happened, then.'

"Yes. Eternity is no more. There shall now be an ending to all things.'

"The third spoke out. 'There was *always* an ending. It just was never defined, never before us. Now the time ticks away.'

"The fourth said nothing."

"It all seemed so sudden.' said the woman."

"Finality next to infinity always seems sudden.' replied the second."

"Must we fight? Must there be war? Endings do not always demand a conflict. Why must it be this way?' queried the third."

"The fourth remained silent."

"The woman shifted, and broke contact with the first. 'Already the land changes. Already they take from me without returning. Already the endless cycle slows. It will stop.'

"But not *today*.' The first moved to touch, but the woman shied away. He clenched his hands in frustration."

"We all feel the loss.' consoled the third. 'We all lose numbers, just by fighting in this war. And, still, we will all fight. Right?' He turned to the fourth."

"The fourth remained silent."

"My children will fight, but I fear for the future. Those we protect will come to revile us, hunt the hunters. My children do not always listen as they should. When they do listen, often they do not understand, or they understand only what they choose to hear."

"The second shook his head sadly. 'My followers are unprepared for what lies ahead. Their power lies in the mutability of reality. They will

not accept an absolute fate. This will cause some to rebel, to make their reality the absolute reality. In those the Other does not corrupt, difference of opinion will divide. Their strength will bring them low.'

"The third laughed a tiny, nervous chuckle. 'My people are immortal. They will not understand the concepts of finality. They will fight it, and in doing so, fight me.'

"The fourth said nothing.

"The woman regarded the plaintive call of a faraway wolf, as the sun resolved into darkness. 'They will die...all die, before the war is won. My children are few, and must be born. As others are stamped out of existence by the "gentle" ministrations of humanity, they shall be annihilated.'

"The second breathed out a shallow sigh. 'My followers must learn. They can be culled from the ranks of humanity, but only a desperate few will have the mental faculties to master its disciplines, and of those few born, how many will find the teachers and the knowledge to plumb the depths within? Not enough to win a war. The finest will flee this place, questing for words of ancient power, fleeing humanity who would burn them. All that will remain will be the dregs, the mass who knows only how to hide best. They will fall before the first wave.'

"There was a horrid silence in that place, as below a young man dug deeply into the earth carving a gash that would never heal properly, and leave the earth there scarred and swollen.

"Finally the third, so playful and laughing, at last allowed the weight of the world to fall between his ears. 'My people are frivolous. They enjoy the life of sedate ease. Even as we speak, the sinews that bind our worlds are dissolving in the foetid acid that drips from the Other's fangs. As that chasm grows, the worlds will separate and grow cold. Few will desire to cross over when our orbs grow too dissimilar, even to laugh and brighten stern moments. For they know that no matter how noble the cause, death...finality stains this place.'

"As was his habit, as was his right, the fourth said nothing.

"So what are we to do?' asked no one in particular, attempting to smother out the horrid silence that followed the self recriminations.

"Wait, I suppose,' said another. 'What else is there to do?'

"Perhaps, my friend, we discount them too quickly.'

"Who? The enemy?'

"No, the troubled masses of humanity. Perhaps we can instill within them the courage to protect themselves; the power to defend themselves...'

"Against the night? Its lure is too seductive. Even *our* people draw power from it, and in doing so, are corrupted. The frail press of humanity would be crushed under the weight of its own addictions. Let them tread the path of light. Let them cower at the coming of night.'

"Light has little to do with it. Did not the brightest angel fall into eternal corruption? Is not his radiance still illuminating the darkest horrors of Hell, so that no sin can be escaped in that place. Darkness is what you make of it.'

"The first three looked at each other in astonishment. None had spoken. Not even the fourth, who was now bubbling plaintively in its own putrescence.

"Shaking off this sudden confusion, the woman turned on the men. 'It is not enough to *say*. We must do!'

"And once again, we turn to the eternal question. Do *what*?'

"Have you not some small shred of discarded power left within you, a modicum that seemed to fit in no particular place?'

"The two, the woman and the second, regarded the speaker. But breathed a reply, as if a dreadful secret had finally been told. 'Yes,' they sighed in relief.

"I know. I pondered that bit for the longest time, pondered why it fit in no particular place. I could not give it to one group, without upsetting the fragile balance I had designed, and yet spreading it around equally seemed frivolous. I speculated the same had occurred to you. I think there is a reason, my friends.'

"Must there always be a reason?'

"The golden haired adonis scowled at the greying woman. 'Speak on, friend! Tell us your plan!'

"Deep within the valley, the man was finished. The soil was replaced, and he was slowly covering over the wound, gently scattering dirt to hide all traces that the violation had ever happened, to return to the sense of normalcy. In the west, dark clouds were already beginning to gather.

"Seeing all this, the woman retreated into herself. It had truly begun. Heat was being stolen from the earth with the promise of a sudden squall.

"My plan is simple, and subtle! Oh, so subtle! We will bestow upon humanity aspects of ourselves, invest within them power, so that none will suffer the weaknesses, while all will benefit from the strengths. They will become us, and yet beyond us, for they will acknowledge no pecking order, no supreme leader, no god. They will not know from whence this power runs, and it will make them potent, for they will know no limitations!'

"The woman regarded the dreamer darkly. 'We are talking of fractions of power, not vast expenditures! At best, it will give them an edge the Foe will quickly subvert, or duplicate.'

"Have faith, sister.' He had never called her sister in all their quiet moments, flitting about in the Everything, together. By the seconds, he was growing aloof, distant. His golden hair blazed while, and his clothes became ethereal.

"The imp confirmed this. 'Faith can shatter mountains, sister. We must believe, and all things are made possible. However, I see your point. To spread the power would be weak and useless. We must appoint champions from their masses, those who go forth with our blessing, our power mingling in their flesh. We must infuse one with the savage power we possess. What will you give?'

"Already the lightning flashed and the thunder roared. Heaven spilled its sweet tears on the desecrated land. A lone man stood in a field, and waited.

"Come...let us go elsewhere,' finished the imp.

"In a moment they were elsewhere. To all, they were home. All pondered the matter gravely. Then the woman, whom all supposed would speak last, until forced by the majority, spoke.

"I reverse the curse. To gain his strength, he shall neither toil nor sweat. Instead, he can suckle at my teat, and take all the strength he suffices. To create his children, he shall not suffer in labor, but rather shall infuse them with my goodness. Such power befits a champion.'

The second, more intangible as time crept on, spoke out. 'I give her power, neither as grand nor as diverse as my flock, but powerful in its own right. Hers will be the secret ways of humanity, whose paths only the greatest of my acolytes can fathom.'

The third considered these wondrous gifts, and was about to speak, to confer his blessing, when the last finally spoke out.

"The vile creatures whom your "blessings" will forge shall not suckle at your teat, but rather feast on your flesh, devouring your precious lifesblood. They will only breed in death, when the pains of life have snuffed all hope, and only the promise of godlike agony remains. The Beast you hide behind your skirts, away from our prying eyes, will claw in their brains, and defend them when they need it least.

"The hateful reflections whom your "benedictions" will spawn shall subvert mankind to their will, dominating and destroying, rather than protecting and preserving. The monstrous powers you have bestowed upon them will twist their minds and batter their souls, til no vestiges of bright humanity remains in their godlike forms.

"As for my gift: they shall fear each of us in kind, for no matter how similar we are, we are not them, and they are not us. They shall fight the Enemy in its element, in the bitter darkness where It draws its power. Sunlight, the salvation of Man, will be their deadliest enemy, and they will find safety only in the darkest of corners. Lastly, they will become as I am, mutable spirits trapped in alien, unchanging flesh. They will rail against this, never truly knowing why they suffer, for that, only I will know, I who care least for their creation, for their comforts.'

"At this he finished. Days flew by in silence, as all paused to think on these bitter, bitter words. They gave their gifts freely, and it was his right to change them, to mutate them into whatever ghastly form he chose. Of all them, he had the most stake in what lay below. It was his right.

"Then the imp summoned the courage to speak. 'A good gift, and one that I am hard pressed to match. But I say this: they will enjoy your gift...forever.'

"The woman turned pale, then red with wrath. The man's astonishment drove his atoms farther apart, until he almost lost all desire to reform. Almost.

"But of all these simple emotions, none could match the seething rage of the fourth, his eyes burning and turning, as they regarded the little man. 'How *dare* you!' he screamed, silently.

"It is my right,' the Imp smiled back. 'I know things that you could not dare to dream, my *brother*. The final blessing shall be mine.'

"Confused, the first two tried to dredge out a hidden meaning, but none could be found. It seemed as simple as sand on a flowing beach. 'What now?' asked the Imp.

"I suppose a champion would be in order.'

"Yes,' supported the Man. One who is strong of will. One who will lead the way. One who is not afraid of what lies ahead.'

"One who has nothing to lose.' It was that voice again, belonging to none collected there.

"They at last open their awareness to the world around them, perceiving a thriving village on the edge of the river, near where the man had first tilled the field. All four reached out with their grace, and all

they touched were found sorely wanting. 'Our champion is not here,' wept the man.

"Look beyond this place,' replied the Imp. 'There are more humans than the ones in this place.' He waved his small hand, and revealed a far off place, a half naked man huddled before a dying fire.

"He is so pitiful...so alone.'

"Your eyes judge with mercy, sister. There is strength in him who lives alone, so far from family. It takes courage to suffer as he is suffering. He is an ideal choice. He will be our harbinger.'

"They materialized before him, and he drew back. 'More demons to torment me! The last! How awful! O lord! Stop my suffering!'

"We are here to ease your pains, my child. I am your mother, and your mother's mother, and even her mother's mother. We have come to grant you blessings. But what is it you have done, to dwell so far from the others?'

"I have murdered my brother.'

"And at last, the spell seemed to clear, and the Primogenitur appeared before her, in all his shameful glory. 'Spare me, mother!' This was the First Deception, and her children mourn its passing in their most secretive rites.

"Once a boon is given, it cannot be taken away. Still, her finest dreams and hopes had been annihilated by the pains of these three, these four. With tears moistening the earth, she picked up great clots of mud, and anointed his face and shoulders. 'This is your Brother. Draw strength from his suffering.'

"The Second reached forth, and gouged deeply within the throat of the man. When he withdrew his steaming fist, it glowed with the fires of heaven. 'This, my son, is no longer a part of you. Fear its power. Fear its heat. The blaze burned brighter, and yet the man did not flinch. Instead, the glowing enveloped him in its radiance. 'Draw your power from without, and seek to conquer your fears enough to draw it within.'

"The second stepped away, and the Third took his place. The mortal shivered at the horrific countenance, at the blood flowing sweetly from an imploded skull. 'Know this. All that is mine...is now *yours*. Brother.'

"Pain racked the man, shaking him until all blood congealed in its deepest recesses, lending the pale pallor. He hunger and wept, for vengeance, for blood. But he did not know why.

"Finally, the last stepped forth. 'I rename you, Cain. These three no longer have power over you. You are now Caine.' The Three stared about wildly, their control rended away by simple words. The chance was so subtle, and yet it was absolute. 'I grant you forever, and that responsibility it entails. I grant you solutions, hidden deep within yourself. And lastly, I reinvoke your curse!'

"And with a swirling nimbus of light, the Imp was gone, leaving only a blasted patch of earth. The mortal ceased his shuddering, and felt only need. He regarded the Three who stood before him questioningly. 'Who are you?'

"The woman struck out, determined to wipe clean this abomination, even if it obliterated her. Invisible servants of faith restrained her destructive touch. 'None may harm him. That is the Law.'

"Then they all vanished from sight, and returned to their home. Each of the remaining three regarded the other.

"The fourth spoke first, leading the litany. 'None may speak of this.'

"None.'

"None.'

"If it be His gift that saved the man, let it be *all* on His head.'

"So be it.'

"So be it.'

"Come, my brethren. Steel yourselves for the coming battle. It is one I savor winning, even over Heaven's head.'

"I am ready.'

"I am ready.'

"So am I. Err...what are we ready for, by the way? Sorry I was late. Got distracted by the most amazingly bright bauble. What just happened?'

"They all regarded the little imp, now here, and cared not at all. They left him for their separate homes, and awaited battle in their own fashion. The imp was left to fend for himself.

"The rest fades from my memory."

A bitter moment of silence followed, when I struggled with my scientific urges. Finally, I realized that he came to me to allow me to do my job, to be an objective viewer to all that I saw and heard. I would then do my job.

"Is it true?'"

His melancholy stretched into a savage grin, as he thrashed his head, left and right, searching the ceiling with eyes clenched tightly shut. I thought for a moment that I had indeed gone too far, and would die here. But just as soon as the spasming started, it ceased. He grew remarkably still, and finally muttered. "It was a story. Truth is only in the telling, and the interpretation. Was it true?" I had no idea whether the question was directed or rhetorical. I dared not ask.

He did not await an answer. Instead, he slicked his hair back, and regarded me. "Any more questions?'"

"Are you Caine?'"

Once I thought I would know the answer to that question the moment I heard it answered. Only Caine would answer it correctly. It was a fervent belief of mine, that somehow only one being could properly intone the proper response, after taking in all the title entailed.

Not surprisingly, the stranger did not answer it. Not directly. "Why don't you ask what you *mean* to ask. About me. About God."

"I don't know what you're talking about." And for a moment, I began to doubt. It was an easy question, and yet he obviously avoided it. Perhaps I wasn't basking in the shadow of greatness. Perhaps this was some clever Malkavian, or potent Antediluvian. I *was* in the presence of a powerful being, but whether or not it was the First still lay unanswered...I prayed.

He seemed to note my hidden defiance, and his countenance miraculously changed. He returned to the emotionless form who first passed into the room.

"I mean Jean Rickard and his Ten Theses, as presented before the Philisoph Commune last week."

I was there. Jean, a brilliant French philosopher, postulated ten reasons against the existence of God. He wholly swayed all but those "special" observers, and compelled his listeners to take up arms and

throw down the "hollow leeches" who inhabited the churches. It took a great deal of time to bring the crowd down. Jean disappeared the next night. Such men are a danger to us all.

It is disturbing to muse on it now. When I was alive, I prayed to have such rhetorical power, to hypnotize the masses, and march a mob to my particular beat. To watch my present colleagues hover over these demagogues, watchful buzzards, makes my flesh crawl. God had his defenders that night.

"Yesss...."

He was staring me down, all that time, while I pondered that night. And now he seemed ready to pounce. He knew where he had led me, and now he shut the iron gate.

"If I am Cain, son of Adam, then Adam exists. If Adam exists, forged of clay and dust by God, then there is a God. A thousand years of defiance, a half millennium of proof denying faith, thus is washed away. I am Proof supporting Faith. Jean did not have to be If I am Cain, son of Adam, then Adam exists. If Adam exists, forged of clay and dust by God, then there is a God. A thousand years of defiance, a half millennium of proof denying faith, thus is washed away. I am Proof supporting Faith. Jean did not have to die. But he was an interesting case study."

"How can you deny his message? I could not find the flaw in his argument."

"His 'argument,' if such tripe can rate as an argument, was that if God was benevolent, then He would not have allowed Man to be ravaged by free will, since He should have known the suffering it would reap on his people."

"The argument has its merits."

"The argument lacks in its basic supposition, that we can perceive the motivations of God as a human. Humanity is still a child."

"Ah, yes, the child that must be beaten and scolded every time it does not lick its Father's boots. How Godlike!"

"How non-human. You fault God for failing to be the one thing he cannot: human."

"How is it you pretend to know so much about such a being?'"

"You forget that I am one of a handful of those who warranted a personal chastisement. We talked. We talked of the whys and wherefores of the world. I was not capriciously spared. There was a reason for my eternity."

"And why does he not come marching down from his ivory tower and chastise me for my blasphemies? What made *you* special?'"

"I was the first. And I suppose he grew tired of talking without being listened to.

"I will lecture to you once more. By the time I finish, the sun will have soared into the heavens, and I will walk forth into the light. If you doubt my identity, then you shall know. If I lie, then I shall die. But first listen. After all, it may be my last.

"You wonder the why's of humanity? Why have we climbed from the dust, to become masters of this world? Why do powerful forces grapple for the meager weight of souls? There is no pat parable to answer these haunting questions. All I can offer is insight."

The stranger paused and stared at his hands, the fingertips slowly brushing. He breathed out a heavy sigh. "Primogenitur. It's an interesting word. The root of Primogen, it means, 'The First Born.' It has come

to mean the Rights of the Firstborn, but its meaning is much deeper than that. And its meaning is a lie.

"To the first born, there are no rights, no privileges, except perhaps getting a larger slice of the pie, until another precious mouth comes forth, and steals food from your belly. The only thing the firstborn gets is responsibilities, most important being the protection of the youngest child.

"Look at your precious histories. Throughout, the youngest carried favor with the father, while all was stolen from the older. The world is built in such an unfair fashion. Jacob tricked Esau, Eve toppled paradise, while afterwards Adam had to watch over her. And, of course, Abel was beloved of God, while my precious offerings were spurned. Now I know. It was not the *quality* of the gifts. It was the *source*.

"So it is with humanity. This great world thrums with life, as many and varied that can be dreamed of. Each species is a child of God, as part of a vast family. Humanity was the last to come, whether it be through divine creation or secular evolution, and thus they share the rights and privileges of the lastborn. They may slay, they may trick, rob, and deceive, and the Father will stay his hand. If the other children fight back, then they will suffer...as I have."

"I do not see you suffering as greatly as others...say, Sodom and Gomorrah, if it *is* a true story. God's retribution must be indeed a fickle thing."

"I am glad that you brought up Sodom, for it is an interesting example of what I speak. As I said, God is not a judge. He is a father. Humanity is his child, still growing, still learning. When humanity was young, it needed a rod to be disciplined. Not so, however, in Sodom. In that case, part of the organism rebelled. It was a boil that needed to be lanced, to prevent the infection from corrupting the entire organism. But instead of being blotted out by heavenly discipline, the Father chose a different punishment." The stranger giggled for a moment, then resumed. "He merely relinquished his control over reality at those two locations. In every way, their fondest dreams came true. Too bad their meagre human shells could not handle the pyrotechnics. That is why it was so important for no one to glance back. If they did, all *their* desires would come to pass, much to the surprise of Lot's wife.

"So, you see, even the most vulgar and destructive acts can be misinterpreted. The greatest punishment a father can confer upon a child is in allowing all things. In many ways, Sodom's punishment is my own."

It had passed in a glimmering. There was a faint aura of remembrance, and now, before my eyes, his countenance had changed altogether. He was no longer the defiant spirit, who told me how he had assaulted the old ways. Now, he was sad, almost pathetic, and in some deep way, I felt sorry for his fate, even though I did not yet fully understand its depths.

He still possessed the strength (courage?) to continue. "Some good must come of my life, some truth must survive my dark fate. I tell you this: humanity is indeed a child who has usurped the blessings of all its brethren. It has now entered the stage in its life after intimacy and discovery, where it questions the nature of intangible reality, where it seeks to define the world in its own terms, and where it questions all authority.

"This stage will last for a time, and then comes the next: accountability. The desire for independence has, as a cost, independence. There will

come a day when humanity must justify the atrocities it has committed in its own name, when its crimes against its brothers, and against itself, will be enumerated. And regardless of that, the outcome will be the same. We will be left alone."

"That's it? No divine retribution?"

"Nothing of the sort. We will be given over to ourselves. And seeing humanity at its best and worst, I cannot think of a darker fate. We deserve what we receive."

And he finished; I knew because he suddenly drew back, and I collapsed like a marionette with its strings cut. The sun was now high in the heavens, and its oppression beat down on me savagely. I wanted to sleep, perhaps even to die. I had not been prepared for the onset by the sudden numbness. Something about the stranger blocked that influence...until now. Now I was suffering.

"I think I shall leave you like that, Wilhelm. I apologize for the pain, but it is the only way to keep you sane, to keep you from lapsing into a torpor from which you will never awaken. You will never quite forgive me for the results of this day, except perhaps after you are done with the book, and finally understand why I did what I did. Until then..."

He smiled and walked out the door onto the shadowy staircase that would lead to an alley suffused with light. It was perhaps eight in the morning, and few would be up and about in this part of town. He could leave without meeting a single person, and I would have no proof that anyone had passed this way.

A low moan reached my sensitive ears, then an anguished screaming. Someone above was in great suffering, and I ached for them. Were the legends true? Did he truly have to kill one of his brother's children each day to maintain the immortality? Had he happened upon some poor urchin on his way to the factory?

It was then that the stench raged through my nostrils. I tried to close them off, but it was...overwhelming. That thing which had verbally, mentally, and emotionally assaulted me that evening was now incinerating in the heat of the sun. This was no Caine.

Now there was another noise, coming high above, and farther away. It started as the quiet crackling of immolated flesh, but soon grew and screamed. Bones snapped, flesh peeled, lungs burst out. Something was dicing my friend savagely, crushing him to component pieces. The crackling sound, still in the background, slavered at my brain, until finally I realized where I had heard it before. On the farm, in the sound of a newborn chick escaping an egg.

At last, it was over. There was a terrible silence, then a mild whimper. It seemed to hang in the air for too long, as if not produced by human lungs, with mortal endurance. Suddenly, it built in intensity, and as it crescendoed, it broke in upon itself, and resolved into blood churning laughter. It was as if someone had finally understood a great cosmic joke, and was properly savoring its passion.

Then there were footfalls on the stair, human boots scraping down the stones. It was a measured, slow pace, as if the walker was in no hurry, and knew that I could not run, even if I could think of it. He (she?) finally paused, stopping short of the threshold of the open door.

And then a voice spoke to me, but in no physical way. It reverberated through my soul, each word beating down like a stick hitting a tympanum.

"Hello, Wilhelm. Hello," it spoke, in an uncanny, sexless voice. "It seems my little friend went too far. He was merely supposed to scare you, to terrify, until you did not possess the will to continue on this fool's project. The very fact that the legend of Caine has survived all these years is proof of its veracity. For indeed, if there was no Caine, you would have to make one up." Then something fell from above, a charred head which splintered upon the ground at the impact. It was my Caine.

"What is Caine?' you wondered. In a week's time, I shall come for you. In a week's time, you shall know as this poor fellow knew. And as I'm showing it to you, remember all the while that you really *did* want to know. It will make the experience easier.

"Until then, I leave you with this hint of things to come."

There was a scrunching on the stairs, as heavy leather boots turned to go, and then something monstrous happened. With each step, my body shivered and shook. No. Not my body. My *soul!* It was a crude skin stretched on the frame of my putrid body. With each step, it shook and vibrated more painfully. I felt myself hideously separating from the mortal shell, as my essence wrenched free from the meagre anchors of blood which locked it down. I wanted to scream, but there was no breath in the lungs of my soul, no way to express this secret, spiritual pain.

And then it ended. He had reached the top stair, and walked out to join the rest of the world, just one of the thousand faceless faces.

All that day, I wept from the horrid pain he inflicted on me, for in the center of my being, beyond the soul, beyond the mind, in that quiet little primitive animal, I at last knew the truth. In those moments when my soul shook, and I felt my rotting body as an alien, dead thing, I had lied. It was not my body that was alien, but my soul. Everywhere it touched, it putrefied my form, the last thing that I could truly call my own. And now, one week hence, he would take even that from me.

The inquisitive soul of Wilhelm had died the moment dark blood had flowed sweetly down my throat. What had replaced it was monstrously familiar, filling all the old crevices where my spirit once lay. It had cloyed and hardened there, but it had never truly become a part of me. It had numbed the once living part of me, until it made my form seem rough and unholly, while it breathed and fed.

Now it makes sense. The sun's rays and the fire's heat seeks not to destroy our form, but rather expose the ugly sin that crawls within our veins. The priests are correct: we are abominations, but not against nature. Against ourselves.

As I pen this, only now can I feel what I have always suspected, gnawing at me. There is a lag, almost imperceptible, between the dream of action, and the response to that action. The spirit claws out, and the body rebels against the movement. It is a numbing delay, but now it agonizes me for the secret I was too ignorant, too deviant to acknowledge.

And now, in a week, there will be a closure, an ending to the horrid cycle. I will be reaved, ripped asunder. My form will perish, and I will die. But what will be released? Once I feared where this hidden part of me would go. Now I only fear what the monster within will do, when stripped of all vestiges of humanity. Will there be an end?

In a week, I shall know.

I can only wonder two things: what he meant, and why he gave me this week. Somehow, he must sense the implications of allowing me to know this horrid secret, and then letting me free. Does he think that this secret is too terrible to tell? Does he think I lack the courage to confess to others of my kind?

Perhaps. I decided, earlier this evening, to go out and kill some pitiful excuse for a human, to glut myself on his essence, and to abstain from feeding ever again. When I came to the mirror before the door, I glanced at the haunted, drawn figure who stared back at me. I had seen that dark glint once before: in the eyes of almost every Malkavian I have ever met. They know. They feel their false souls itch beneath their flesh, and they say nothing. If thousands who have come before me could say nothing, then how can I?

Perhaps some *were* trying to tell me. I only now see that in those who came before me, claiming to be Caine, that the haunted trace was gone. They were trying to *tell* me, and all I, all *we* can do...is laugh.

I can only pray, pray to a God I have forsaken long ago for "higher" ideals, that you who one day find these words, will recognize their import. If I can dare to fathom the myriad twists of so ancient a brain as his, then somehow I think that Caine is giving me a chance, giving us a chance, because he is as trapped as we are. This thought, this musing grants me a shard of hope on which I can impale myself, for my reason then takes over. That which I praised above all defeats me at last: if he cannot escape this vile, degenerate existence, then how can we? God help us, how can *we*?

"Two copies were immediately retrieved; they and their owners were burned and utterly destroyed. None will mourn the passing of that fool, Erasmus, but the summary judgement against Haarlan has led to threats against my person. I shall endure these, as I understand that we Brujah are an excitable lot. Also, Haarlan was a respected member of our clan, and will be sorely missed. Still, there was no excuse for his actions. He himself swore fealty to the Masquerade at its inception. If anyone should have known better, it was he.

My Archons and I have slain all those at the printing shop where the book was made. Before they died, they confirmed that five copies of the book were printed. Two are accounted for, one is believed consumed in the fire that destroyed Wilhelm. Finally, agents have informed me that Arond's copy was sent by Wilhelm to the Vatican itself! Although it has passed beyond our reach, I have been informed that there is no danger of anyone reading the tome, since books received in that manner are catalogued and stored by clergy unfamiliar with German. Further, every attempt will be made to retrieve the book...

There is one matter that I must bring to your attention: the matter of Wilhelm. Accounts of our raid have spread to all spheres of kindred society. It is time for me to impart my version. I and four of my archons descended upon the haven of Wilhelm a week ago.

There we found the remains of what is believed to have been Wilhelm. However, positive identification was impossible, for no bone was left unbroken. His head was caved in, and the face was removed by force. Only the clothing and distinctive items of jewelry allowed us to confirm that our prey had indeed been found.

Several things about the events of that day are quite disquieting, however. First, it is obvious Wilhelm was murdered. The "who" is unimportant, since he was no longer protected by the Traditions. The "why" puzzles me. Who is so zealous about the Camarilla that they actively seek to protect the Masquerade, even before a Justicar can act?

Second, the body seemed...different. I could not place it at the moment, but one of my assistants confirmed the suspicion. The body was completely devoid of blood, which is not so odd with diablerie as a possible motive. However, what I was too oblivious to notice was that the flesh, rather than being desiccated, was moist. It was *not* a mortal. His organs were atrophied, and his disdended canines, though broken, were still present.

Third, the body was prepared for us. It lay on a bier of books, soaked in lamp oil. All that the tableau lacked was a licking flame, and why it lacked that, I cannot say. In the corpses folded, mangled arms, was the book we sought, or, should I say, the *cover* of the book we sought. Some unknown entity, obviously the one who killed the heretic, had systematically ripped each page out. Where the contents of the book is, I cannot say.

As you can see, the case, as it stands, is far from settled. On my oath as a Justicar, I will retrieve the damned copies, and all pages. I will further search for any evidence that Wilhelm still lives.

Why should I endeavor to seek the dead? I am not completely convinced Wilhelm is. Soon after setting fire to his haven, we went into the streets. There we encountered a pack of Kindred, apparently waiting for us. I announced myself, and asked them to identify themselves. I heard but one answer, "Wilhelm." Later, I was told that these Malkavians comprise a group that actively believe, individually and collectively, to be Caine. Why this change of identification, why this bizarre twist in dementia, I cannot say. All I can say is that we shall not know if Wilhelm is truly dead until all of these Malkavians are hunted down and questioned."

- An Excerpt of a Report Given by Trennart, Justicar of Clan Brujah, to the Camarilla

## EPILOGUE

"So Sandy, how long are you gonna be?"

"About ten more minutes, Jeremy." She stared at him as he leaned against the stacks of books, a blank look on his face. A smile creased her cheeks. "Why don't you go home...I'll catch up."

"No, I like spending time with you." He remained standing, unmoved.

She sighed, grabbed a microbar, and attacked another crate. Being a library science major was a bitch, especially when it came to cataloging new acquisitions. These were rare books, a few even unique. But she didn't have the time to sit and savor these lost masterpieces. Instead, it was a quick check on the inventory manifest, and then on to the next. What was worse was that all these books came from Germany. She couldn't understand a single one of the titles she was scribbling.

Suddenly, she felt him next to her, reaching into the box.

"Do you mind, Jeremy? I *do* have a system."

"Pardon *me*. Hey, there's something wrong with this book."

"What?" She stood, and shone the light on the cover. He handed the book to her, a heavy red leatherbound tome.

It was a fat tome, with a flaking crimson cover, and faded gilt edges. It looks like it withstood a horrible heat, without burning. It was probably a bible, or other holy writings, she deduced from the style. What was strange was that the pages seemed stuck together, as if each were systematically glued shut. No title graced its spine, and it seemed to have been crammed into a dark corner of the crate, out of the way of the other neatly stacked books.

She tried to gently ease it open, but he lost patience, pulled out a pocket knife, and sliced into the pages before she could do anything to stop him. He wrenched the book open. It unfolded to reveal a small black clothbound book, hidden in a series of cut-out pages. A deliberate hiding place!

Jeremy reached in, and grabbed the book. "'De Cainus.' 'Concerning dogs.'" Sandy stared at him incredulously. "Hey, I took Latin in high school," he shrugged. He flipped through the pages. "Damn! It's in German! Why would the title be in Latin, and the book in German?"

"Whatever," she muttered to no one in particular. "Hey, are you going to help?"

"Yeah." He stared at the book one more time, and waited for her to turn her head. He then dropped the book in the stack that would go to the animal science section.

"Here's another one."

"'De Mysteris Verminis.' 'Concerning the Mystery of Vermin.' Did they find a dead veterinarian?"

She laughed at the inane joke. Throwing the book on the animal pile, she closed her notebook. She had not written either book down on the log, but she would get to it later.

"I need a drink. Let's hit the bars."

He smiled, grabbed his coat, and ran out the door. "Ah, who cares," he agreed, "it's just a bunch of books..."

Sandy rolled her eyes at the ceiling. Why did she date Kinesiology majors?

They both passed into the hallway outside the Rare Book Room, and Sandy began locking up. Before she could arm the system, however, someone behind her called out.

Sandy turned. "Hey, Marjorie!" It was Marge Dane, a fellow Library Science student. She was hauling behind her a serious looking man in his thirties, who seemed rather nervous about being here.

"Sandy, this is my uncle Sully. He's passing through town and kinda wants to get a look at the rare book room. Would you mind? He'll just be in there just a second."

Sandy looked at Marge, then her uncle, then Jeremy, who was getting impatient. If she delayed any longer, he was going to lay the pressure on her *thick* tonight. "Sure." She handed over the keys.

"Thanks." She turned the key in the lock, and swung it open. Her uncle passed Jeremy, and stopped, almost sniffing the air. He stared at the athlete, as if he had stepped into something foul. "What's your name, boy?"



Jeremy stiffened. Sandy whispered, "Shit." She really didn't need ma-cho crap right now.

"Jeremy Hauss."

The uncle tightened, concentrating on something invisible. Then he smiled warmly, convinced that nothing was overtly wrong. He shifted his eyebrow, and thus his countenance, a bit. "Interested in books?"

"No." Jeremy stared at slightly homely Marge. "But there is a book about *dogs*." Marge turned beet red. Sandy glared at the insensitive cretin. There was *no* way now...

"Good." Somehow, that utterance defused the tense situation. "Good. I've always like books about our furry friends. What's its name?"

Sandy stepped in, and began to drag away Jeremy. "It's on the Animal Studies pile. I think it's called 'De Cainus.'"

"You mean, 'De Ca-nus'" in a tone that reeked of imperious Jesuit tutoring.

"No, 'C-a-i-n-u-s,' dickhead," he spat out. He turned to say something else, but Uncle Sully wasn't there anymore. Only Marge was left, still holding the door open, slightly sniveling.

"C'mon, Sandy. Let's get the Hell out of here. We've got more important things to do..."