

TZIMISCE'S CHILDER

Tzimisce are not just the most numerous Cainites in Transylvania — they are arguably the most diverse as well. Between 20 and 30 members of this profane clan stake out their territory at any given time in 12th-century Transylvania.

This is surprising — or indicative of the clan's current straits — for most Fiends are quite reluctant to Embrace new childer. Breeding revenants is far more efficacious. After revenant families have been dominated and exploited for centuries, their children are born with an inherent loyalty to their masters, which removes the need for the whole messy enterprise of gradually raising and educating a vampiric childer.

An entire estate of revenants can slave away in the shadow of a *voivode's* fortress for generations. This makes them promising candidates for the Embrace. However, a revenant servant typically does not receive his baptism of blood until it is evident that he desperately requires the Dark Gift. Defeating the most treacherous of their masters' foes sometimes requires enhanced powers and vampiric ingenuity. Only when this added edge is required is the servant buried alive to await rebirth.

Even more telling on the Tzimisce populace is the shocking warfare conducted between *knezi* (lesser landholders) and rival *voivodes*. Arrogant and power-hungry, *voivodes* make and break alliances as their passions seize them. Transylvanian *knezi*, in particular, are extremely territorial — each considers himself to be the rightful master of his lands. Feudal Tzimisce typically enlist few allies, generally relying on Oath-bound childer, horrific creations and legions of fleshcrafted servants. War is brutal and primitive in Transylvania.

Their treatment of their mortal "serfs" is overly brutal as well, contrary to what the Fiends may believe. Tzimisce have always considered their human subjects to be little more than cattle. While the Fiends harbor a conceit that the mortals would perish without them, humans have begun to revolt against their hidden masters. Likewise, many Transylvanian Cainites of other clans have come to believe that the prosperous Teutonic Ventrue, arrogant and insufferable as they are, would be preferable to the ruthless autocracy of the Tzimisce.

Frankly, the Tzimisce care little for such plotting. They are more concerned with stronger enemies — in particular, the Usurper Tremere. Where the Tzimisce are numerous but divisive, the Tremere are few yet unified. The Usurpers exploit their fanatic loyalty, innovative magics, and bestial Gargoyles as they stage an overwhelming assault on the Fiends.

The increasing tide of battle has necessitated a strengthening of the Tzimisce feudal system. Tzimisce lords have become more assertive in their rights to exploit the mortal populace of their domains as decade follows bloody decade. Despite appearances, however, the feudal system they created was not fully in place until the eighth century. Prior to those dark times, the most prosperous Fiends were more contemplative and introspective in nature.

TRANSYLVANIA BY NIGHT

THE METAMORPHOSISTS

The earliest Tzimisce of Transylvania were spiritualists who practiced secret rituals. They meditated on the true nature of abomination in darkness, having long abandoned the ways of humans (a lesser race that seemed quite alien to them). The Fiends enacted their rites in stone sanctums, and the most elaborate temples were entrances to twisted labyrinthine shrines beneath the earth. These "Black Churches" are still extant in many portions of Transylvania and are a testament to the horrors of the past.

By day, the dark priests' servants would construct stone buildings above the soil. By night, massive multi-armed *things* would burrow tunnels beneath the ground. Vampire artisans completed what their servants began within these darkened shrines. Safe from the rays of the sun, master craftsmen erected asymmetrical stone walls. Sacrificial victims were crafted into walls of flesh in more elaborate temples. The Cathedral of Flesh near the Red Tower Pass is an excellent example of this aesthetic.

The ceremonies suited the environments well in which they were staged. Long before the cult of the Nailed God, long before warrior tribes invoked the names of Dagon and Baal, the most accomplished Tzimisce attempted to transcend the limitations of mortal clay. Reworking the structure of their bodies, they reshaped themselves to conform to their visions — or nightmares — of perfection. Those who were most impressive became objects of worship, and servile ghouls carved their likenesses into statues, which were later venerated as images of pagan gods.

THE OLD CLAN TZIMISCE

It should be noted that not all ancient Tzimisce shared the same beliefs. One isolated sect, for instance, never accepted the practice of Vicissitude. Fleshcrafting was a method of tainting the soul to them. Centuries later, their descendants were eager to follow the philosophies of the feudal Tzimisce, yet they still preached against the dangers of body alteration. They typically distinguished themselves from their contemporaries by displaying curious anachronisms in attire and attitude.

For this reason, they were mockingly dubbed the "Old Clan Tzimisce." Even after Transylvania ceased to be a feudal country, this small, shrill sect still insisted on the old tradition of overseeing huge domains. As their isolationism and fanaticism increased, they manufactured elaborate legends to justify their extreme orthodoxy, such as the ludicrous tale of alien viruses infecting the rest of the clan. To this night, they are shunned by the remainder of the clan and considered a delusional atavism. It is no wonder that only the Black Hand tolerates them.

Metamorphosists adopted more subtle methods of practicing their idolatry and defending their territories as the clan advanced. Constructing shrines beneath the earth was too primitive, a habit too similar to the ways of the Nosferatu. Elaborate stone churches served as cathedrals for Metamorphosist worship, and after monastic orders began to spread further into Transylvania, defiled Christian churches proved especially useful to the fiendish priests. In civilized portions of the Voivodate, Black Churches have since been reclaimed by the Christians, who generally remain unaware of what lurks beneath their surface. Although Christian services are practiced in these places, the land surrounding them is difficult to consecrate.

Some of the lesser shrines have fallen into disrepair, and the most primitive ones have been abandoned by the Tzimisce entirely. Other horrid things have taken the Fiends' place: Cults of slugh, exiled Lupines who have succumbed to the madness of the Black Spiral, and escaped *szlachta* war ghouls all spawn in such places.

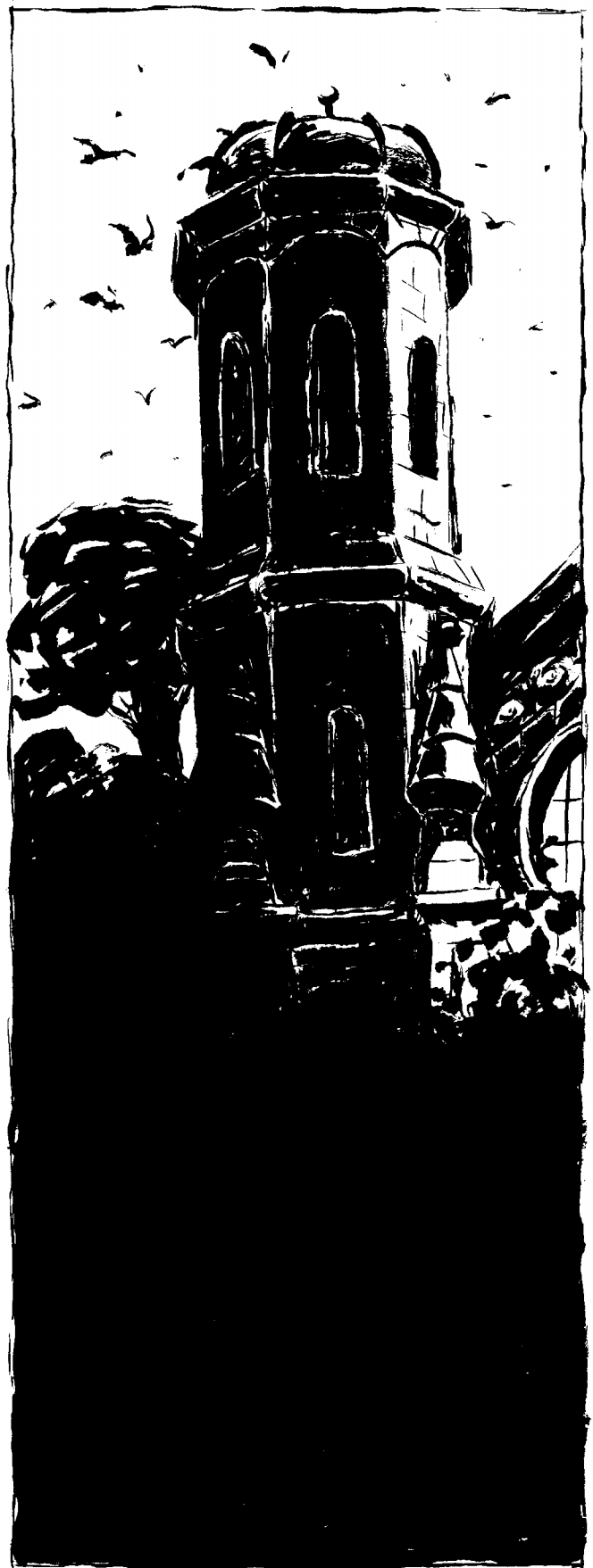
Rituals take the form of demented sorceries for more modern Metamorphosists. Dependence on a feudal estate is not so essential to them. They revile the primitivists who insist on using caves and churches. The most civilized seek out alchemical and mystical laboratories. Such sorcerers might control a small gathering ground resonant with tainted *vis* or other magical energies. Many are deeply obsessed with mystical pursuits, insisting that their studies are motivated by pure intellect.

In their modest domains, these Fiends avidly pursue insight, collecting vast libraries of knowledge and amassing occult lore. The morality of humans means nothing to them, except as a limitation to be overcome.

Other mystics quest in search of knowledge. As of late, more Tzimisce mystics have begun traveling from *tirsa* to *tirsa* to further their studies. Exchanging blood or favors for their services, they have become quite useful to the feudal lords of the clan. While their fanaticism garners them a certain degree of respect from any *knezi* they encounter, only a fool would fully trust them. Trust, after all, is a human weakness.

Mystics have a strong sense of where the land is tainted and they know the names of the spirits that corrupt the earth — the true names invoked by those who seek power. Calling to the ancient spirits of the soil, they can help or hinder the lords ruling over a domain. Crops wither and die at their bidding. The cattle and sheep of the fields give tainted milk and meat. Children and animals are born with hideous deformities. Thus, they command respect from the lords they encounter.

Therefore, as times change and the Black Churches crumble, Metamorphosists evolve as well; one can expect no less from them.



THE CHILDREN OF THE NIGHT

KUPALA'S NIGHT

The pagan ways are the old ways of the Earth, and sometimes Christians fear them with good reason. Just as there is light in the world, there is darkness, and during the festival of Kupala's Night, the force of darkness is undeniably strong. Tzimisce mystics and feudal lords often travel to the knezates of other respected rulers at this time, setting aside their feuds long enough to commune with the ancient spirits of corruption: the kupala. These spirits are the offspring of an ancient Slavic god of the same name — although Kupala's influence will be broken long before the 20th century, he is a force to be reckoned with in the 12th century.

Mortal pagans practice Kupala's Night on June 22nd. They also revere Kupala as a benevolent god. Tzimisce, of course, know both suppositions for the lies they are. The true rituals of Kupala's Night are performed on a different night each year. Only Tzimisce astrologers can discern the most efficacious day for performing the violent ceremony. The veil between the land of flesh and the realm of spirit is easier to rend on this night, and those who revere the old ways can see the very taint of the earth. Horrible apparitions infect the land, and where the soil has been corrupted, the hideous forms of the kupala can be seen by moonlight. They thrash and gibber, contorting their bodies into impossible displays of physiological degeneration.

The land and the ruler are ever one, and so the Transylvanian Tzimisce show their reverence for the land by sharing their blood with each other and the earth. With the assistance of mystics, participants enact an ancient rite involving the sharing of blood. A silver cup containing the vitae of all in the ceremony is passed around to be consumed and the last few drops are poured on the ground. This not only demonstrates their alliance, but it also fortifies them for the task at hand. The screams of the kupala stop as terror seizes the spirits.

Then the slaying begins. Vengeful Tzimisce distend their bodies and sharpen bloody claws. The spirits cry for mercy, yet none is given. Freely killing the maddening evil in the soil, the Fiends purify the land in obeisance to their ancient pact to protect it. Their fervor escalates into all-consuming frenzy much too often, and nothing in the vicinity is safe. By dawn, the madness fades and the evil of Kupala is weakened once again.

Hospitality is extended to guests who assisted in the reaving the following night. The truce between collaborators lasts long enough for travelers to return to their fiefdoms. In a week or two, the fierce fighting for control of the land renews, but by then, the greatest of the clan's enemies has been grievously wounded.

(For Storytellers using the spirit systems of **Werewolf** and **Mage**: On Kupala's Night, the Gauntlet in areas infected by the kupala drops to 2. Tzimisce *koldun* enact a Level Five Thaumaturgy or Koldunic Sorcery [see **Libellus Sanguinis I: Masters of the State**] ritual allowing the Tzimisce to enter the Penumbra and battle the spirits. Statistics for the kupala are provided in the Appendix.)

TRANSYLVANIA BY NIGHT

VOIVODES

More sophisticated Tzimisce disdain the primitive activities of the Metamorphosists. Why cower and creep in ancient crumbling temples like damned Nosferatu? Leave the caves to the lesser races — there's a world to be conquered. The churches and alchemical laboratories of the most advanced Metamorphosists are intriguing, to say the least, but there are more sacred (and profane) tasks to pursue. The feudal lords see their goal in unlife as far more noble: They protect and enrich the land itself.

By the dawn of the seventh century, Tzimisce nobles developed an extensive aristocracy throughout the Voivodate of Transylvania. By custom, the most esteemed Tzimisce *voivode* gained exclusive privileges over the human ruler of the region. Wherever a fortress could be built and maintained, a *voivode* would declare himself the master of the land and all who lived there. Lesser rulers maintained autonomy over smaller regions, still insisting on absolute rule and hunting rights. These overlords took the name of "knezi." In some regions, the Fiends employed different names for their rulers (as is the case in the territories of the margraves), but overall, the rulers of the largest fiefdoms saw themselves as princes.

As the seventh century gave way to the eighth, traditional territories were defined, and the names of their tirsas were established. This arrogant claim to land fostered the ferocious dispute between the Tzimisce and their Lupine antagonists, the Shadow Lords. The migration of tribes, which persisted long after the adoption of feudalism, was halted by the formation of the tirsas. The werewolves then unified to reassert their hunting rights.

By the account of the Tzimisce, humans followed the example of their masters. The boundaries of their domains (that is, knezates and tirsas) were far more open to dispute in the early nights. Even established territories could be challenged by upstart would-be *voivodes*. When two princes declared war, terrible battles were waged by moonlight. Trial by War was an accepted practice. *Szlachta* war ghouls and belligerent revenants settled the disputes of their masters. Thus, the local peasants learned the tradition of barring all doors and windows at sundown and not venturing forth until the crowing of the cock at dawn.

Epic stories of territorial disputes have become matters of family pride over the last two centuries. In the 12th century, *voivodes* often keep small armies or the means to produce one in case of dispute. Like chivalrous knights in their honorable duels, they often define the parameters and "weapons" of a Trial by War beforehand. Smaller trials might require the destruction of one creature, while larger battles might mandate the decimation of an army, or even the *voivode* himself.

The strengthening of the revenant families also increased the dependence on fiefdoms. Breeding an entire family of revenant ghouls can take centuries, and once a family estate has been established, it becomes a valuable resource to those who maintain it. Many families have become extended enough that they serve several knezi, though a family's inbred loyalty to its lord and master prevents many members from leaving the shadow of the ancestral castle.

While the Tzimisce itself is exceedingly divisive, there is still a measure of respect between *voivodes* and *knezi*. The prince of a *tirsa* must also have the support of his *voivode*. He is nothing without his master's notice. He must swear fealty to his ruler. In exchange for his rights over the land, he must be willing to muster troops in times of war. There are additional conditions as well, such as the exquisite hospitality one *knez* extends to another and a *knez's* need to acquiesce to the will of his *voivode* in settling disputes.

There is also a pact between the ruler and his land. Some vampires say that if the mortals of a fiefdom suffer, the pact is fulfilled. Others say that as the taint of corruption in the land grows stronger, the countenance of the *voivode* grows darker. Either way, an undeniable bond exists between a Tzimisce and his domain. If a Tzimisce travels abroad, he must bring with him a small sample of the soil from his fiefdom. While he rests by day, he will thus be closer to the essence of the land he has pledged to protect. If he does not, he will grow restless and slowly weaken.

While the *voivodes* grow in power, some neonates realize that times are changing. Just as the Christian West threatens the dark places of the Earth, many peasants are on the verge of revolting against their unseen masters as they accept the religion of the Nailed God. Likewise, some young Fiends do not seek positions of feudal responsibility. These Cainite failures become bitter prophets of doom, insisting that the nights of the *voivodes* are near their end. They roam the dark woods in packs, preying on anything they can catch, inflicting their hatred on anything they can destroy, and hiding from the *voivodes'* justice.

Packs display curiously strong bonds of loyalty, and some have been known to form communal bonds of blood during the festival of Kupala's Night. Many packs have begun to pervert the rituals of this night, reserving their greatest atrocities and displays of rebellion for it against their elders. The worst of the packs speaks Kupala's name in reverence, and perhaps one night they will spread their corruption to the rest of the clan. They reject the old ways and revile the old traditions.

This is an insult of the worst kind, as tradition is paramount to the elders. Despite the dissent of the embittered young, many of the beliefs of the 12th century will persevere into the 19th and 20th. The land lives or dies by the devotion of its protectors. The soil must be preserved at all costs, and the Tzimisce consider themselves the rightful defenders of the lands beyond the forest.

TZIMISCE OF RENOWN

Despite the depredations of Westerners and Tremere, the Tzimisce still form the largest vampiric population in the Old Country. As they consider all of Eastern Europe to be their domain, they do not acknowledge the domains of other clans. Princes formally recognized by the Western clans are often a trifle more than nuisances, and some become the victims of sinister Tzimisce conspiracies. Away from the villages of the humans and the hunting grounds of other Cainites, the Fiends hold undisputed sway over their fiefdoms. Some of the more notable Tzimisce are listed below.

SHADOWY MASTERMINDS

YORAK, HIGH PRIEST OF THE CATHEDRAL OF FLESH

4th generation, childe of the Eldest

Nature: Inscrutable

Demeanor: Visionary

Embrace: Millennia ago, at the very least

Apparent Age: Anything he wishes

Yorak, one of Transylvania's eldest Tzimisce, dwells in his labyrinth in the Carpathians. He has become the center of an elaborate cult of Metamorphosists. His Cathedral of Flesh, a mosaic of sinew and bone formed from legions of sacrifices, is one of the most important Metamorphosist shrines in the Old Country.

Yorak stalks his caves freely. Never will he leave his tunnels; instead, he slowly distends his body into forms more suited to darkness. It is said that forgotten things seek his audience, pledging their devotion and praying for his assistance. Yorak expects to be treated like a god because, in a way, he is. His supernal prowess has reached such heights that the fearful whisper of his omniscience.



THE CHILDREN OF THE NIGHT

Although he often assumes the form of a feeble old man, his appearance is exceedingly deceptive. He can channel the energies in his blood to augment his endurance, agility, and potency in mere moments. His superlative command of Vicissitude allows him to take exotic forms at will. Coupled with his mastery of Auspex, he can rend the minds of those who invoke his displeasure and discern the physical forms that terrify them the most.

Yorak's intellectual Disciplines are even more formidable. He has no need to travel outside his labyrinth; his powers of astral travel and psychic numina allow him to sense activities many leagues distant. His spirit roams the twisted forests as he sits in rapt meditation. It is rumored that he can psychically affect events countless leagues from the Cathedral, although such stories are difficult to substantiate.

Even the sacrifices torn asunder to form his unholy shrine worship him. Many of the victims in the Cathedral are kept alive to suffer for centuries through Vicissitude. Several have formed gestalts and group minds, desperately attempting to erect crude defenses against Yorak's psychic rape. A wealth of information is stored in this abominable temple, although trying to retrieve it would drive a lesser mind insane.

Yorak's cult is devout and well defended, and he carries enormous influence among his clan. Vampires may come and go in Transylvania, but Yorak remains. The Cathedral of Flesh will claim more victims, the labyrinth within it will grow, and his legend of evil will prosper as well. Time will only magnify his psychic powers, and his dark tendrils will spread farther and farther into the realms of Cainites throughout Eastern Europe.

The coming of Vlad Tepes will change all this, of course.

NORIZ, THE CORRUPTER OF LEGIONS

5th generation, sire unknown

Nature: Competitor

Demeanor: Plotter

Embrace: Centuries ago

Apparent Age: 30s

Noriz foresees the struggle his clan will have in the centuries to come. Evolution is a religion to him, and he has turned dozens of childer and set them loose upon the night. Many die, but the strong survive. All are instilled with the same motive: consume the souls of as many Cainites as possible. In this manner, Noriz has declared war against any who threaten his rampant paranoia. What he lacks in sanity, he compensates for with brilliant intrigue.

Spawned in the somber hallways of his castle in Moldavia, the childer of Noriz infiltrate and infect the smaller cities that harbor Cainites. Every soul reclaimed by these Tzimisce furthers their sire's crusade against all other Cainites. More importantly, this legion spawned by Noriz is part of his maniacal bid for power over lesser vampires. He is maneuvering for position until his childer can help him destroy and devour the souls of the Ancient Ones. Noriz wants no less than a place at the right hand of Caine.

TRANSYLVANIA BY NIGHT



There is no mistaking his consanguineous heritage, with his long black hair and jet-black eyes, elegant nose and cruel mouth, delicate features and resolute cruelty. His demeanor is the perfect combination of aristocratic barbarism. He is both a mastermind and a master adversary. Noriz's weakest childer become his tools; his strongest childer become his enemies. Forging them in the fires of political conflict, he prepares to engage in the greatest of all struggles. Once he drives one of the Methuselahs to the brink of destruction, he will destroy him and assume his place in the eternal struggle for power. All goals must further this cause.

He tests the defenses of other Tzimisce even now. His childer scout the territories of Yorak, sacrificing themselves as pawns here and there as they position themselves around the squares in the center of the chessboard. Were he to overtake Yorak, his power would be supreme. Then again, there are other threats. The Western Cainites insist that Transylvania, Wallachia and Moldavia should be part of their laughable Christian Kingdom of Hungary. Should he exert his influence against Bulscu, using him to weaken the Methuselahs of the Holy Roman Empire? So many choices, and so many opportunities for misdirection.

Noriz has a tendency to spread his resources too thin. Overconfidence, egomania and dementia undermine his devious plans. By spawning too many childer, he must sacrifice control of much of them. The chaos he spreads is always almost beyond his control...almost. Moldavia is in turmoil as legions of his childer prey on mortals, and Cainites for many leagues have come to curse his name.