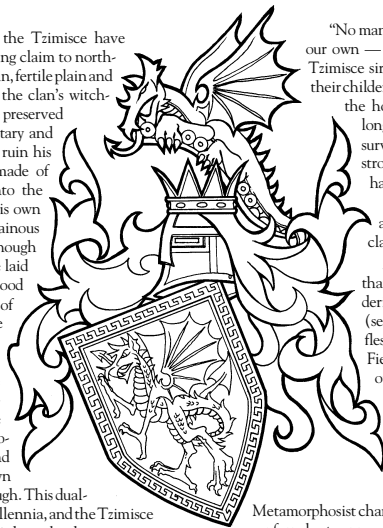


# TZIMISCE

From the earliest nights, the Tzimisce have haunted the European east, laying claim to northern marsh and southern mountain, fertile plain and trackless forest. The *koldun* — the clan's witch-priests and lore-keepers — have preserved the tale of how the Eldest, solitary and arcane, turned his back on the ruin his siblings' power-struggles had made of the Second City and went into the world to build a dominion of his own shaping. He came to the mountainous heart of their homeland as though called, and there he settled. He laid deep roots and forged pacts of blood and kinship with the old gods of the earth, binding his line to the land in a sacred union. God-touched through their unbreakable tie to the earth, the clan both ruled and served, offering sacrifice in the blood of the men and beasts within their domain to renew the earth, and paying the price from their own strength when that was not enough. This duality and symbiosis persisted for millennia, and the Tzimisce were unconquerable within their homeland.



All things come to their end.

In these nights, the Tzimisce are beset from all sides. From the very heart of their homeland, the sorcerous Tremere have violated both Tzimisce blood and domain and have provoked the most vicious nocturnal war since the fall of Carthage. In the north and west, Germanic Ventrue have taken the opportunity to invade territories left vulnerable by the struggle with the Tremere, assaulting pagan enclaves in Livonia and Lithuania through crusade and undermining the weak-livered Kingdom of Hungary with commerce. Worse yet, within the clan, hereditary rivalries and fresh resentments sabotage any attempt at unified action. More and more of the clan's eldest broods disintegrate amid petty struggles for power, and precious knowledge is lost with every *koldun* who falls.

Tzimisce pride is the red-hot goad that has blinded them to their own failings, to the undeniable fact that there are forces arrayed against them that can finally drive them to their knees. Within the most stable domains of the *voivodate*, unlife continues in traditional fashion — elders rule their childer, their childer scheme and serve in the hopes of earning favor, and they sire offspring of their own who do the same. Among themselves, the Tzimisce still value what they always have: respect for (and submission to) their elders, concern for personal honor, adherence to the demands of the family hierarchy and, above all else, a fierce love of and devotion to the homeland.

"No man may take what we have claimed for our own — we are the very soul of this land," Tzimisce sires whisper over the ritual graves of their childer. This is true. What is also true is that the holy ties of earth and blood are no longer enough. If the Tzimisce wish to survive, they must unite beneath a hand strong enough to shape them as they have sought to shape their world.

**Sobriquet:** Fiends. (Some *koldun* and more scholarly members of the clan refer to themselves as Shapers.)

**Appearance:** It is the rare Tzimisce that can be described as normal. Either derived from revenant breeding stock (see p. 286) or modified through their flesh-sculpting Discipline of Vicissitude, Fiends tend to be shockingly beautiful or stunningly hideous, with very little middle ground. Alterations in Tzimisce directly involved in the conflict with the Tremere tend to be of utilitarian, martial nature (semi-permanent "natural armor" and the like). Adherents to the

Metamorphosist change-cult twist themselves into whatever form best expresses the god within. Elders lean toward modifications that inspire awe, desire or fear.

## STEREOTYPES

**The High Clans:** Peers? We do not have peers, childer. There are those who covet what we possess and those who know their own place — and very little in between.

**The Low Clans:** Those who know their place. For the most part.

**Gangrel:** Our *Veela*, our *Valkyries*, our fierce and merciless pack of wild hunters. Respect their feral self-knowledge and the raw savagery they bring to our cause. If we must share our homeland with any, better these than the thrice-damned Tremere or the carrion-eating Ventrue.

**Tremere:** Kill them. All of them. Do not waste time on lessons they should not live long enough to appreciate.

**Ventrue:** Know this — our struggles with the Tremere are but a passing dalliance compared to the conflicts we have known against this clan of would-be kings. Never submit to the dominion of a Ventrue while Tzimisce blood still runs in your veins.

**Haven and Prey:** The Tzimisce claim one of the largest territories in all of Europe, from the isolated hinterland of Livonia nearly to the walls of Byzantium. Their havens and herds are likewise diverse. In the pagan north, where some Tzimisce elders are still worshipped as gods, richly sculpted temples, sacred hills and groves, and blood-cults of mortal devotees are not uncommon. In the nominally Christianized south, the Fiends tend toward less blatant displays, dwelling in fortified country manors and reigning as the cruelest landlords local villages have ever suffered. Consciously or otherwise, many Tzimisce place their havens near the summits of hills, one of the primal confluences of earth and sky in pagan *koldun* belief. Tzimisce cherish elaborate protocols of hospitality, fettering those whom they invite into their domains as princes and punishing trespassers with a viciousness that earned the reputation they enjoy.

**The Embrace:** Traditionally, young Tzimisce are selected from among the clan's revenant minions and groomed for the Embrace from a young age. More rarely, a particularly gifted (or lusted-after) individual captures the attention of a prospective sire, or a *koldun* suggests that the auspices are right for enlarging "the family." The war with the Tremere and other interlopers has added a more practical impetus to many recent Embraces, however. More warriors than "brides" or "pets" are selected in these nights and in greater haste. Even so, when at all possible, Tzimisce sires gift their fledglings with the funeral rites believed to cement the new childer's holy bond to the earth.

**Character Creation:** Most Tzimisce are Eastern European in origin — which can be anything from a pagan Baltic tribesman to an erudite Greek monk. Mental Attributes are usually primary. Domain is the most common Background, though Mentor (in the form of one's sire and immediate family), Retainers (most often revenant underlings or Vicissitude-sculpted human or animal ghouls), Herd and Resources are also popular. Most Tzimisce believe, quite simply, that they were born to rule, so the Roads of Kings is popular as

are the aspects of the Road of Heaven that glorify the follower. Few Tzimisce profess any open allegiance to the Road of Humanity, lest they incur the wrath of their brethren, (especially the hardcore monstrosities who follow the cult-like Road of Metamorphosis).

**Clan Disciplines:** Animalism, Auspex, Vicissitude

**Weaknesses:** The Tzimisce are arguably the most territorial of all the clans, sharing as they do inviolable ties of blood and spirit to the land they rule. When a Tzimisce rests, he must surround himself with at least two handfuls of earth from a place that was important to him in life — usually either the land of his birth or the soil of his grave. Failure to do so halves the player's dice pools every night that the vampire has not rested in appropriate earth.

This halving continues until all actions use only one die. Eight hours' rest amid the special soil negates it.

**Organization:** The Tzimisce are hierarchical, but they do not follow the rigid feudal chain of lord and vassal. Rather, the Tzimisce are familial, nearly tribal, in nature. Most Tzimisce families consist of a sire and her brood, but each of these families is connected to many others. Therefore, many regions of the east are dominated by networks of blood relations descended from a single individual.

Within the family, the elder receives great respect as the natural center of the household, while her childer compete murderously for acknowledgement, advancement and affection. Rival families often maintain running vendettas across the centuries, are similarly murderous, governed by maddeningly complex social protocols.

**Quote:** *This earth has drunk our blood for more years than your small mind can comprehend. This is my homeland, and I shall hold it or die trying.*



# VENTRUE

At the end, there will be war. Mortals speak of the Battle at Armageddon, Cainites of Gehenna. Either way, there will come a night when drawn swords and mustered armies are all that stand between the Damned and the saved. The Ventrue take these predictions as their marching orders. They are the fearsome knights, noble warriors and empire-builders of Caine's get. Let others "rule" as priests and potentates. When the last battle comes, they will beg for protection like all others covering behind the arrayed Ventrue knights.

According to clan legend, the Ventrue founder was the first child of Enoch, eldest of the second generation. Therefore, they are destined by special mandate to carry the mantle and the burden of leadership.

In more recent night, the Ventrue identify strongly with the late Republic and early Roman Empire, looking to Julius Cesar and others as great exemplars of the warrior-king ideal. In the later Empire, however, the decadent Lasombra and addled Malkavians were surely closer to the heart and soul of the Eternal City. The other clans rub the Ventrue's face in this transformation every time they call them "Patricians," the name of the Roman noble families who became an inbred privileged caste.

The Long Night was not a grand time for the Ventrue, either. Skill at arms was hardly unnecessary in the period after Rome, but the get of Caine were so isolated as to shrug off the urge for empire-building. In these centuries, many who could not prove their worth on the battlefield chose other methods. They became the guild masters, the courtiers and the seneschals who whispered promises of power to come.

In these nights, however, things have changed. After a tense build-up, the War of Princes rages at last, and the Ventrue know that their time has come. Several of their elders have returned to the fore to gather their armies and claim new kingdoms. The knight — a warrior-lord bound by his honor and judged by his sword — is the Ventrue ideal made manifest, and the clan has organized several orders of chivalry for the Damned. The Ventrue call themselves Warlords, and it is no empty boast.

But the corruption of late Rome and the indolence of the Long Night are not easy to shake off. The clan's warriors clash with one another as often as they do with outsiders, either in personal vendettas or under the banners of one of several great Ventrue factions. And still others refuse to return to the warrior's ways. They seek power in commerce and intrigue instead.

The greatest Ventrue factions are the Normans who follow Mithras, Prince of London and Monarch of the Baronies of Avalon, and the Germans, under Lord Hardestadt of the Fiefs of the Black Cross. Both courts rally around powerful Methuselahs and claim whole swaths of Europe as their extended domains. Various merchant princes who have been carefully constructing their leadership around a system of money-lending and cooperative guilds are strong as well. This new class of Ventrue still remains a strange aberration to many of the more traditional elders, but the power of these guilds is a force to be reckoned with. Other Ventrue warlords and nocturnal dukes stake



## STEREOTYPES

**The High Clans:** Nobility is not simply in the blood. It is in the deed as well.

**The Low Clans:** As long as they stay in their place, they have a role to play in the battles to come.

**Assamites:** Our counterparts among the paynim, they fail to understand the battles to come. Their hold on the Holy Land must be broken lest it condemn us all.

**Brujah:** Despite their pointless grudges, they are worthwhile. Listen to their theories and put them into practice. Call upon their warriors' skill and lead it to appropriate targets.

**Lasombra:** Masterful schemers, useful allies and very dangerous rivals all at once. They make good use of words and daggers, but this is a time of swords and lances.

**Toreador:** Do not be deceived by their reputation as mere artisans, as our tenuous alliance with this clan has proven them capable leaders. But don't give them any more credit than is due, either.

**Teimisce:** They say that our eastern lords have begun to adopt some of the customs of this clan.

claims of their own or under the banners of other lords, including the Arpad brood of Ventrue in Hungary and the freelances who fight in Iberia under Lasombra banners.

Mortal society is important to the Ventrue, but not nearly as important as what one gains after the Embrace. Only then can the true power and potential of the fledgling be realized. A few independents maintain influential positions within mortal political institutions and the Church, but not enough to truly impact society as a whole. Any Ventrue with ambition, however, should be viewed with respect, for the clan is a formidable force indeed.

**Sobriquet:** Warlords (some still use the less-flattering Patrician sobriquet)

**Appearance:** Whether merchants or princes, the Ventrue dress to their station impeccably. An impressive elegance goes a long way toward creating the appearance of leadership, and the Ventrue work to portray what they embody. Commonly present too are the various arms and weapons that prove that the Ventrue lords are both willing to and capable of defending their lands and leading their forces into battle.

**Haven and Prey:** Every leader requires followers, and so the Ventrue are never far from centers of political power or from the battles where it is to be gained. Old castles and mansions make excellent havens, as do fortresses built on the frontier, be it in pagan Livonia or in the Holy Land. Younger Warlords either serve under elders at a great court or head to outlying areas to gain power and position. Because of specific feeding habits of the Ventrue, they often choose a haven that allows them access to the specific type of prey that they require.

**The Embrace:** The Ventrue seek to Embrace those who personify honor, power and conquest. More often than not, they Embrace members of the existing aristocracy and especially tradition-oriented clan members even go so far as to Embrace only those of a specific lineage, keeping a pure line of descent throughout the ages. Other powerful mortals, be they military leaders, merchants or the occasional Knights Templar, also make excellent candidates

for the Blood. Sires often train childer for several years, forging vassals and lieutenants out of their progeny.

**Character Creation:** Physical Attributes and Skills are primary in the most martial of the clan, but rulership is more than skill at arms, so Social Attributes and Knowledges are also popular. Important Backgrounds include Allies and Retainers (for brothers in arms), as well as Domain and Resources (for lands that they hold). There are Ventrue on every major road, but the clan identifies most strongly with the Road of Kings.

**Clan Disciplines:** Dominate, Fortitude, Presence

**Weaknesses:** All Warlords have a specific limitation on their feeding habits. They may drink the vitae of only one type of mortal (priests, non-Christians, virgins, Englishmen, and so on), chosen at the time of character creation. While they can physically imbibe the blood of those mortals who are not among their selected prey, they gain no sustenance from it. This weakness does not extend to the blood of other vampires, however. The Ventrue can always gain sustenance from that.

**Organization:** The Ventrue believe firmly in Cainite feudalism, and they organize themselves accordingly. Oaths of loyalty (sometimes backed by blood) are common between Ventrue of differing rank. Others join chivalric orders of the Damned, some of which exist as a conspiracy within mortal orders. The largest one is the Order of the Black Cross, which is hidden within the Teutonic Knights.

**Quote:** *You think yourself a ruler? I will teach you the true meaning of power.*

