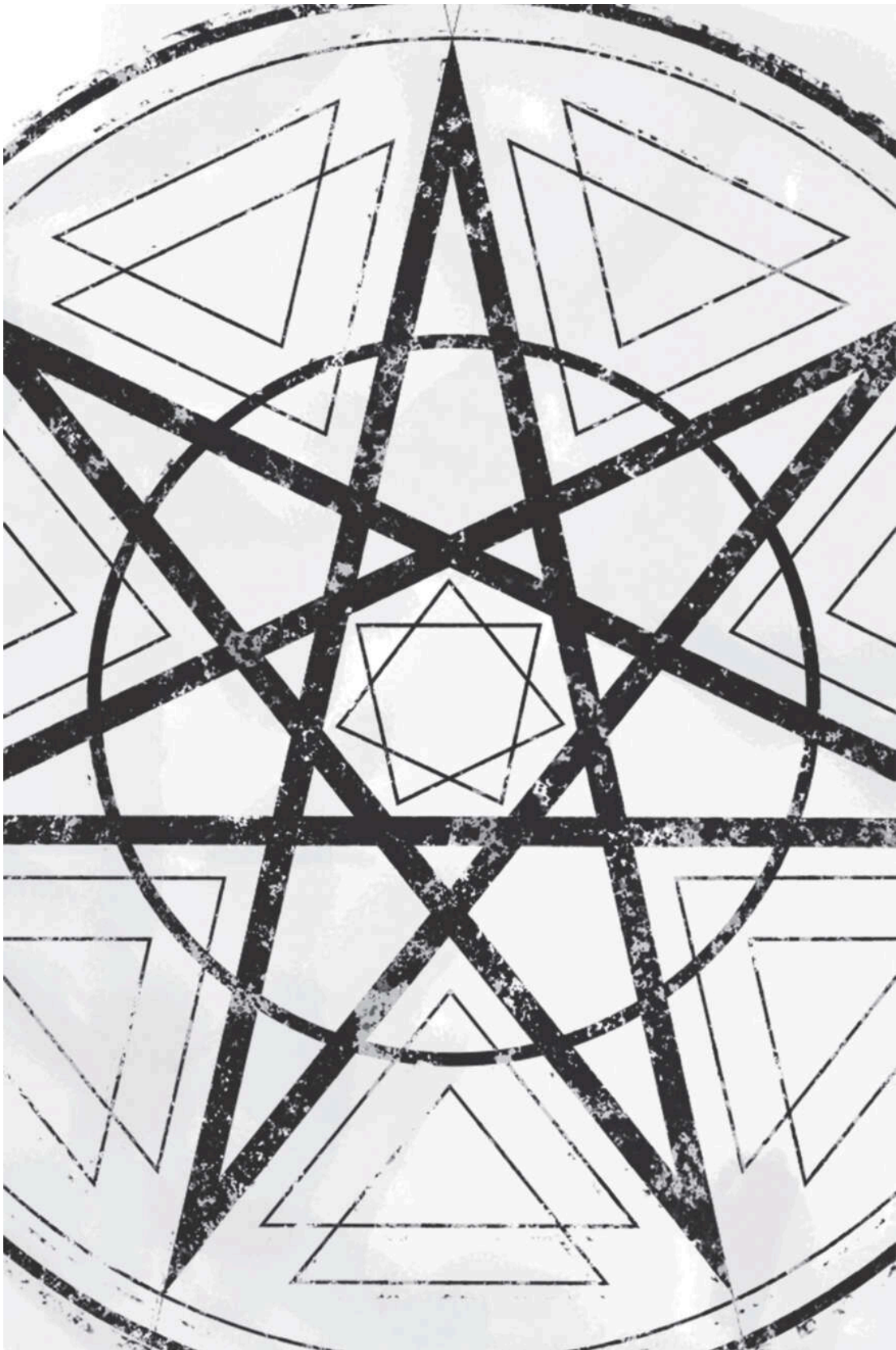


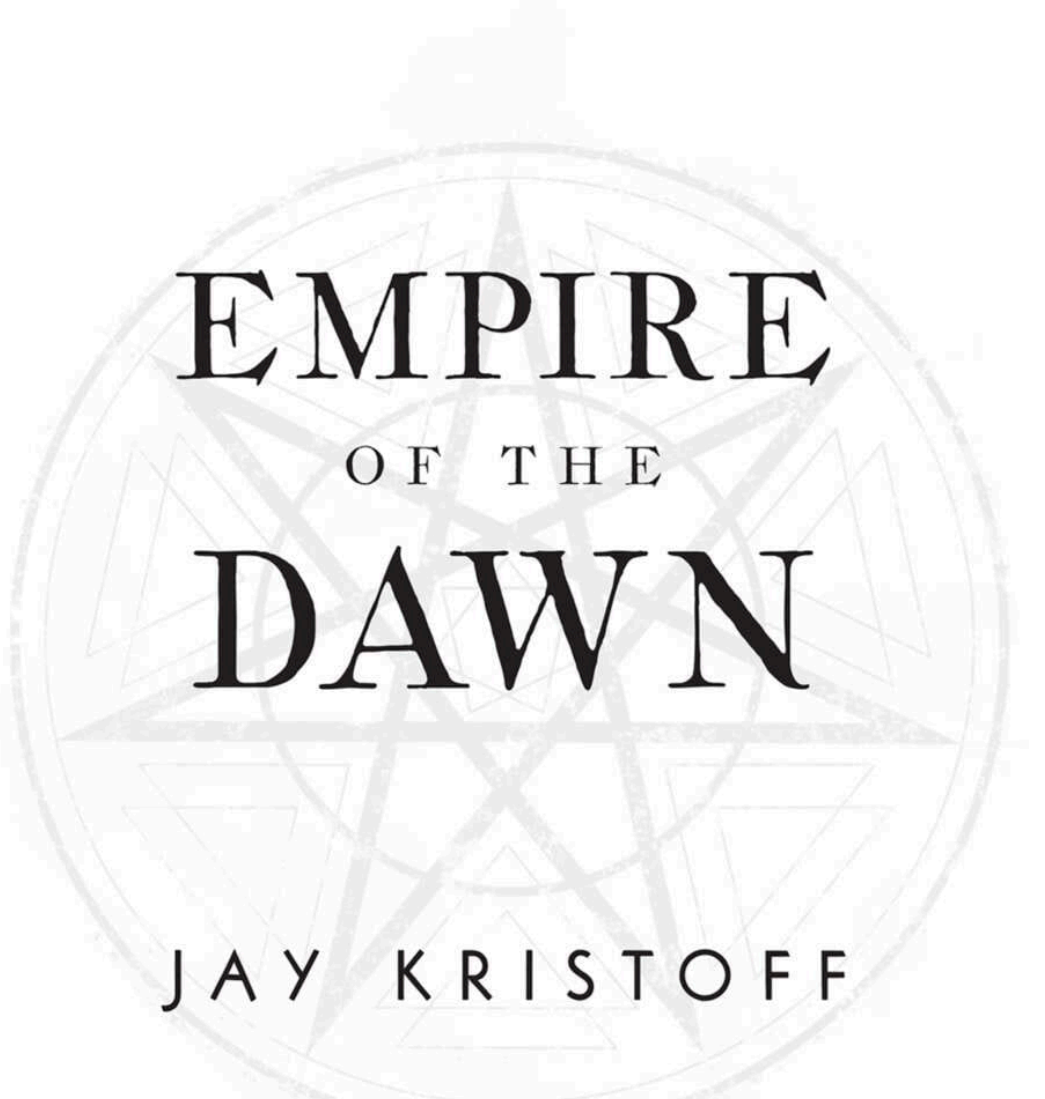
EMPIRE OF THE DAWN

BOOK THREE

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

JAY KRISTOFF





EMPIRE OF THE DAWN

JAY KRISTOFF

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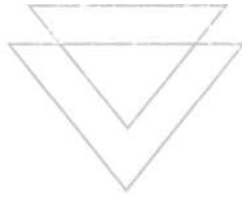
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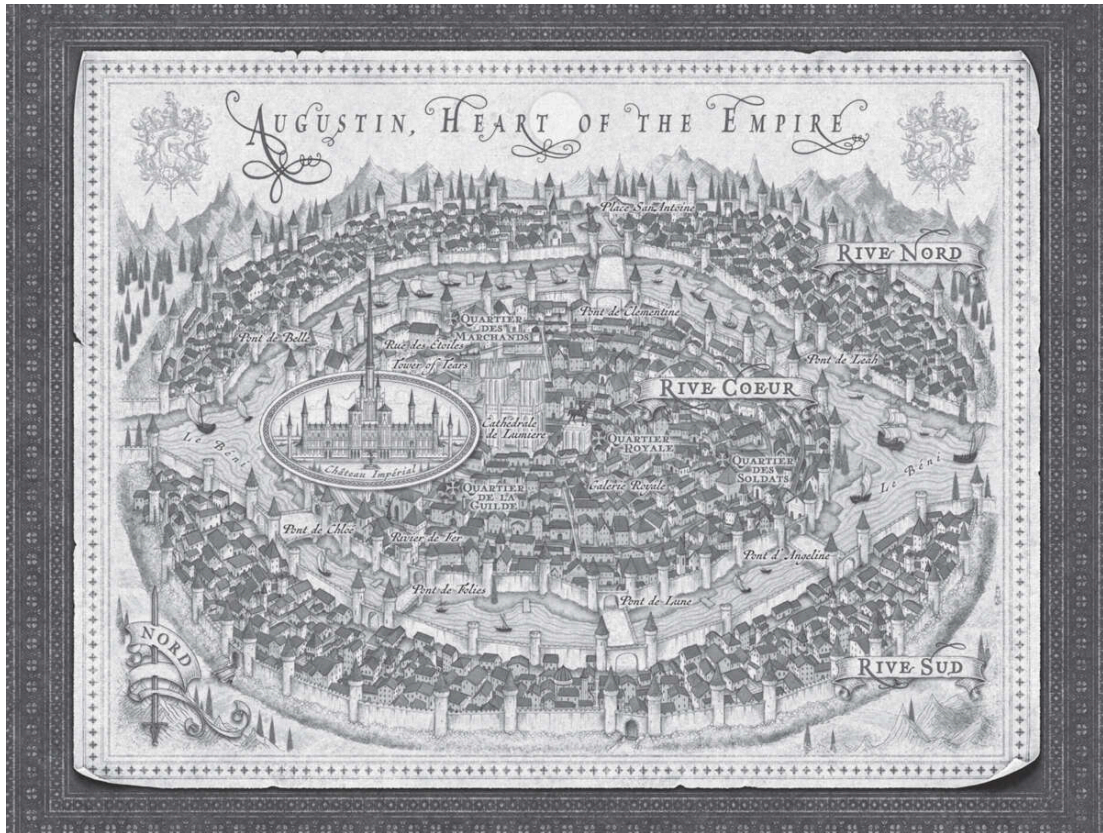
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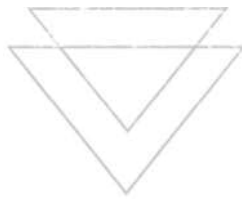
My Blood and Fire







DRAMATIS PERSONAE



TIME IS NO friend to mortals, dear reader, and who knows how many seasons have withered since last we spoke. Memory is an unreliable narrator at best, and at worst, a lying fiend. Having no fondness for either, your historian offers reminder of these, our players:

Gabriel de León—The Last Silversaint, the Black Lion of Lorson, and Sword of the Realm. Gabriel is a paleblood—born of a mortal mother and vampire father, inheritor of his sire’s power and bloodlust both. Born nine years before the fall of daysdeath, when the sun was blotted from the sky across the Empire of Elidaen, Gabriel was recruited into the Silver Order of San Michon at fifteen years of age. He became a paragon of that holy brotherhood, knighted by the Empress herself, before falling into disgrace for the sake of love.

And here I sit, all out of violins.

More than a decade after his excommunication, Gabriel was a broken man, bent upon vengeance for the murder of his famille at the hands of the Forever King, Fabién Voss. But after meeting Dior Lachance, he instead

devoted his life to the girl's protection, and came to care for her as dearly as his own lost daughter, Patience.

Seeking the truth about how Dior might end daysdeath, he was betrayed by his sister, Celene, and separated from Dior. Gabriel recruited an army of duskdancers from the Highlands of Ossway to wrest his holy charge back from the fiends who had captured her. But as is often the case with our so-called hero, tragedy awaited at the end of his road.

Delightfully consistent, is he not?

Dior Lachance—Daughter of a streetwalker, orphaned at eleven, Dior's life of petty larceny was interrupted by the discovery that her blood could heal any wound. Escaping execution for witchcraft at the hands of the Inquisition, she learned her power was no blessing of the Fallen, but a gift from heaven itself. Dior is the descendant of Esan; the daughter of God's own mortal son, the Redeemer.

Determined to fulfill her destiny by ending daysdeath, Dior fell into the keeping of Gabriel de León and his vampire sister, Celene. Pursued by children of the Forever King, she was instead captured by Nikita and Lilidh, eldest vampires of the Dyvok bloodline. Held in the cityfort of Maergenn, she learned her holy blood could break thralldom—the false love imposed by drinking from the same vampire three times over three nights.

Hatching a conspiracy with other mortals in the Dyvok court, Dior helped bring about the fall of their damned kingdom. At the last, she was slain by the ancien, Lilidh, her neck snapped clean before Gabriel could save her.

But in the sepulcher beneath Maergenn, three days after her death, Dior opened her eyes.

Celene Castia—Gabriel's half sister. At age fifteen, she was mutilated and murdered by Laure, youngest daughter of the Forever King, as revenge for her brother's actions. Sixteen years later, she re-entered Gabriel's life, calling herself *Liathe* and hunting Dior.

Though born of a Voss sire, Celene claimed membership of the mysterious Esani bloodline—the same line Gabriel's own father belonged to. Despite their mutual distrust, the siblings worked together for a time, seeking

ancient vampires of the Esani and the secret of how Dior might end daysdeath. But fearing Gabriel's rising bloodlust made him a threat to Dior, Celene eventually betrayed and tried to murder her brother.

The pair reconciled to rescue Dior from the Dyvok. But upon learning Celene was both the pupil *and* murderer of his own father, Gabriel's mistrust was rekindled, and when he learned the Redeemer himself was responsible for the creation of the first vampires, Gabriel flew into a rage that allowed Lilidh the opportunity to murder Dior.

Three days later, Dior rose from the dead. But in the bowels of the crypts beneath the city, Celene witnessed another awakening—an ancient vampire of the Esani line named Maryn, who may hold the key to ending daysdeath forever.

Phoebe á Dúnnsair—Phoebe traveled with Dior in the guise of a lioness for months before revealing her true nature—she is a duskdancer, capable of shifting between human and animal forms with the setting of the sun.

Separated from Dior by Celene's treachery, Phoebe pursued the girl with Gabriel. During their journey, the pair discovered a bond in tragedy—Phoebe's own husband had been slain in war, and like Gabriel, she'd also lost her daughter. The duskdancer and silversaint became lovers, their explicitly detailed amorous escapades unlocking a riddle that united the Highland clans in purpose to rescue Dior.

During the final battle against the Untamed, Phoebe was reunited with her husband, Connor—now revealed as a thrall of Lilidh Dyvok, trapped in wolfen form.

But their reunion would be deliciously brief.

Connor á Lachlainn—a duskdancer of the Ossian Highlands, and descendant of their mightiest queen, Ailidh the Stormbringer. Connor wandered the Empire of Elidaen for years before returning to the Highlands and marrying the younger Phoebe. Though apparently slain in war by rival clans, Connor was actually captured by Lilidh Dyvok, his mystical blood used to empower her line's conquest of Ossway.

Connor wore the shape of a great white wolf during his servitude in the Dyvok court, but when his bond to Lilidh was broken, he viciously defended both the Grail and the Princess, Reyne á Maergenn, from Lilidh's claws.

Maddeningly, he was slain by the Contessa before explaining why.

Reyne á Maergenn—fifthborn daughter of the legendary Nineswords, Duchess of Ossway. Reyne's father was an unknown wanderer, taken as a lover by Niamh after the death of her husband. Reyne's bastard birth was a source of shame for her mother, and the lass was raised in Elidaen by her older sister, Yvaine, far from the Nineswords' court.

Returning years later to defend her homeland, Reyne was captured during Maergenn's fall to the Dyvok. Her thralldom was broken by Dior, and the pair helped free the rest of the Dyvok slaves, defeat their armies, and slay their eldest.

How they found time to become romantically entangled during all this boggles one's mind.

Teenagers, oui?

Astrid Rennier—Astrid was the bastard daughter of Emperor Alexandre III, shuffled off to the monastery of San Michon when her existence became inconvenient to Alexandre's new wife, Isabella. Forming a friendship with Gabriel that blossomed into romance, she was excommunicated with her lover when she fell pregnant.

Astrid gave birth to a daughter and married Gabriel. The pair retired to the southernmost reaches of the empire, there to live as a famille in quiet happiness.

You know the rest.

Patience de León—daughter of Gabriel and Astrid. Her father had her name tattooed in silver across his fingers when she was born—a reminder to the former silversaint about what was truly important in life. She was Gabriel's pride and joy, the very sun in his sky.

She was eleven years old when she was murdered by the Forever King, Fabién Voss.

And folk would name *me* monstrous.

Ashdrinker—Gabriel’s enchanted sword, capable of speaking directly to the mind of her wielder. Despite not being made of silver, she is nonetheless a deadly bane to coldbloods, and she and Gabriel cut a swathe through the armies of the Dead in their days of glory.

Though she experiences moments of lucidity, Ashdrinker is often confused about where and even *when* she is—she has never been the same since her blade was broken on the skin of the Forever King. Exactly how Gabriel came to possess her is the topic of much speculation among minstrels, soothsingers, and pisshouse prophets of the empire.

And I for one would like some *bloody answers*.

Aaron de Coste—Aaron was the son of a baronne and a vampire of the Blood Ilon. He was apprenticed at San Michon with Gabriel, and their rivalry eventually blossomed into true friendship. He left the Order when his love for the smith, Baptiste Sa-Ismael, was discovered by their brethren.

Aaron and his beau settled in Château Aveléne, living an idyllic existence until Gabriel stumbled back into their lives more than a decade later. Subsequently, their home was destroyed by the Dyvok, and Aaron was slain by Kiara, daughter of Nikita, rising from death as a highblooded vampire. Taken to Nikita’s court, Aaron was thrall to the ancien’s service and became his lover, partaking in all manner of depravity in the Blackheart’s bloody boudoir.

His mind was finally freed from Nikita’s influence by his beloved Baptiste. But who can speak to his heart?

Baptiste Sa-Ismael—a former blackthumb of the Silver Order, friend to Gabriel, and genius of the forge. Baptiste left the Order with Aaron after the discovery of their relationship, and was captured when their home was destroyed by the Dyvok years later.

Thrall to Kiara, Baptiste was freed from his servitude by Dior. Taking up arms against his captors, he fought valiantly in the battle of Dún Maergenn, standing side by side with Gabriel and his former brethren in the Silver Order. He struck the killing blow upon Nikita, releasing his dear

Aaron from slavery and proving—even in coldest climes and darkest times—that love does indeed conquer all.

Yes, dear reader. That was sarcasm.

Chloe Sauvage—Sister of the Ordo Argent, and childhood friend to Gabriel and Astrid. Reunited with her old friend years after his excommunication, Chloe recruited Gabriel to help defend Dior Lachance. Driven by ancient prophecy, she intended to bring Dior to San Michon Monastery, where she believed daysdeath could be undone through a ritual unearthed in the library. When Gabriel learned said ritual involved Dior's sacrifice, he murdered Chloe and half a dozen other silversaints in the girl's defense.

Sœur Savage was doubtless a fanatic, but perhaps not *completely* insane: After the Battle of Dún Maergenn, a second half of Chloe's prophecy was discovered in a tomb beneath the city, which may indeed hold the secret to ending daysdeath forever.

Lachlan á Craeg—Gabriel's first and only apprentice in the Silver Order. Lachlan was the paleblood son of Tolyev, Priori of the Dyvok, his childhood spent in bloody servitude to his monstrous father. Captured at fifteen, Lachlan's eyes were opened to his family's brutality, and he was recruited by Gabriel into the Order. The pair became fierce friends—even upon discovery of Gabriel's affair with Astrid, Lachlan refused to betray his mentor.

Years later, the young 'saint learned of Gabriel's attack upon San Michon Cathedral while rescuing Dior. Mistaking the girl's hold over Gabriel for witchery, Lachlan hunted his former master across the empire, before finally becoming convinced of Dior's divinity. He mustered a band of silversaints to aid Gabriel at the Battle of Maergenn, and helped Baptiste slay his half brother, Nikita.

Yet the price for Lachlan's loyalty was steep—he was the only 'saint to survive the battle.

Joaquin Marenn—A houndboy from Aveléne, Joaquin was thrall to Kiara Dyvok after the destruction of his home. Freed from servitude by Dior,

Joaquin remained in Maergenn, determined to rescue his beloved—an Ossian lass named Isla á Cuinn.

Though Isla proved a traitor, Joaquin was instrumental in the final battle, helping Dior free the Dyvok thralls and rallying them to fight in the Grail's defense.

Brynne á Killaech—A duskdancer of the Highlands, of that breed known as úrfuil, or bear-kin. Like most of her kinfolk, Brynne has been irrevocably altered by the Time of Blighted Blood, and retains many animalistic features even when in human form.

She is a fierce warrior, and fought bravely at the Battle of Dún Maergenn.

Fabién Voss—The Forever King, and Priori of Blood Voss. Fabién was the first ancien to weaponize the wretched—a mindless breed of vampire that became abundant after daysdeath—mustering them into a vast army known as the Endless Legion. Fabién has since conquered much of the empire, his sights set upon the capital, Augustin.

He murdered Gabriel's famille, and since learning of her existence, has obsessively sent his children to capture Dior for some unknown end. Gabriel discovered Fabién was once capitaine of the Knights of the Blood—vampire warriors who destroyed the Esani line at the battle of Charbourg centuries ago. But in a tomb beneath Maergenn, a far more chilling discovery awaited the Last Silversaint about his nemesis: Fabién was one of five mortal priests responsible for the Redeemer's murder, cursed by God's son to a life of undeath.

One of the first five vampires to walk the earth.

Danton Voss—The Beast of Vellene, Fabién's youngest son, and one of the seven Princes of Forever. He was killed by Dior, wielding the enchanted blade Ashdrinker, which had been anointed with her holy blood.

Laure Voss—The Wraith in Red, Fabién's youngest daughter, and dam of Celene Castia. She was slain by Gabriel at the Battle of the Twins.

Alba and Aléne Voss—The Terrors, Fabién's eldest children. Sent to claim Dior from the Dyvok at Dún Maergenn, they were instead slain

themselves—Alba was killed by Gabriel in single combat, and Celene drank her Aunt Aléne to ashes.

Nikita Dyvok—The Blackheart, Priori of Blood Dyvok. Utilizing the corrupted blood of duskdancers to enhance the already terrifying strength of his line, Nikita fueled an invasion of Ossway, reducing that once mighty nation to a charnel house. He enslaved Aaron de Coste, and was in negotiations to hand Dior Lachance over to his former lover, Fabién, but was slain in the Battle of Maergenn by Baptiste Sa-Ismael.

Lilidh Dyvok—The Heartless, the Winterwife, eldest of the Dyvok line. More cunning than her warrior brother, it was Lilidh who discovered the magiks of duskdancer blood, and questioned the true purpose behind Fabién's pursuit of Dior. She was destroyed in the battle of Dún Maergenn, but not before snapping Dior's neck and killing Phoebe's husband, Connor. She is survived by her child, the Draigann, now eldest of the Dyvok line.

How low the mighty have fallen.

Illia—Former Priori of the Esani bloodline, and founder of their faith. It was rumored she was a dark sorceress in life, but after becoming a vampire, Illia found religion in the form of the One Faith, devoting her unlife to support of the Redeemer's bloodline.

She was murdered during a cataclysmic battle in the city of Charbourg, led by her great enemy, Fabién Voss.

Maryn—The Mother of Monsters, and now Priori of the Esani. The Esani bloodline were all but extinguished at Charbourg, reduced to only four in number. To safeguard their survival, the remaining Esani scattered across the empire, watching in secret for any sign that the Redeemer's line may have survived that terrible night.

Only a child in stature, Maryn is the eldest surviving member of the Faithless. She was entombed beneath Dún Maergenn in a slumber known as eventide, waiting more than a century for her turn to keep watch for the Grail's birth. She bears countless souls within her body—stolen in a cannibalistic act the Faithless named communion.

Who knows what they whisper to her in the dark?

Jènoah—One of the four surviving Esani. He was master of a grim keep named Cairnhaem, hidden deep within the Nightstone Mountains. Gabriel, Celene, and Dior traveled to his lair seeking his wisdom, only to discover the ancien had taken his own life. In a chapel atop his silent château, the trio found his final words scrawled in his own blood upon the floor.

“This wait too long. This weight too heavy. Father, forgive me.”

Wulfric—Gabriel’s father, and warrior of the Esani line. Little is known of him, save he dwelled for a time in León, where he was lover to Gabriel’s mother, Auriél. Abandoning his lover when she fell pregnant, Wulfric had naught to do with Gabriel’s upbringing, though he returned briefly at Auriél’s call when their son fell ill.

After her Becoming, Celene tracked Wulfric to his home in San Yves. There, she became his pupil before consuming him, claiming his power and all the souls he carried for herself.

Why, is the damned question.

Alexandre de Augustin III—Emperor of Elidaen, Defender of the One Faith, and Protector of the Realm, Alexandre has ruled from the Golden Halls of power in Augustin since he was seventeen. Now a man in his late sixties, it is rumored much of the burden of his crown falls upon the brow of his beloved (and far younger) bride.

Isabella de Augustin—Wife to Alexandre III, and Empress of Elidaen. She was a patron of the Ordo Argent, and knighted Gabriel after the Battle of the Twins. Isabella used the young Black Lion as her right hand in subsequent years, overseeing his rise to fame.

Maximille de Augustin—A warrior king who began the unification of five warring countries into the great Elidaeni Empire, more than six centuries ago. Maximille was killed before his dream came to fruition, but his descendants sit upon his Fivefold Throne to this day. The Church named Maximille the Seventh Holy Martyr as reward for his earthly efforts.

Michon—The First Martyr, a simple huntress who became a disciple of the Redeemer, and carried on his holy war after his execution upon the wheel. Unbeknownst to most, Michon was also the Redeemer’s lover, and

together, they had a daughter named Esan—a name meaning Faith in the tongue of Old Talhost.

Esan—Daughter of Michon and the Redeemer. Four centuries ago, Esan's descendants raised rebellion against the Augustin Dynasty; an uprising that became known as the Aavsenc't Heresy. Though supported from the shadows by Illia and her merry cult of cannibals, their rebellion was crushed by crusaders of the One Faith. Their capital of Charbourg was sacked, and most of their number slaughtered.

Dior Lachance is last scion of their line.

Blood Voss—The vampire lineage descended from Fabiën, who call themselves the Ironhearts. They possess a superhuman resilience to physical harm, and their eldest can also read and speak to minds.

Blood Dyvok—Spawn of dread Tolyev, also called the Untamed. All vampires possess extraordinary strength, but the youngest Dyvok can put even elders of other lines to shame. Their ancien can dominate folk with the power of their voice—an ability called the Whip.

Blood Ilon—The Whispers, a brood descended from great Ilon. Far subtler than the Dyvok, Ilon can manipulate emotions with a single word, and their eldest can bring entire ballrooms to rapture or terror with only a glance—a gift they call the Push.

Blood Chastain—The descendants of Empress Margot, also named the Shepherds. Chastain control beasts of earth and sky, and take their many forms—the older they are, the more forms a Chastain may assume. Shepherds are also uncannily quick, and their eldest can seem as the wind when they move.

Blood Esani—The Faithless. A heretical cult of cannibals and sorcerers who can manipulate blood through the dark arte known as sanguimancy. The less said of them, the better.

Palebloods—Half-human children born of vampire fathers. They possess weaker versions of their fathers' supernatural gifts, but also inherit their bloodlust; a curse called the sangirè or red thirst. This affliction can be

kept in check for years by the narcotic known as sanctus. But eventually, it reduces all palebloods to bloodthirsty animals.

And now, mes amis, we end.

*From holy cup comes holy light;
The faithful hand sets world aright.
And in the Seven Martyrs' sight,
Mere man shall end this endless night.
Before the Five, come unto one,
With sainted blade, 'neath virgin sun,
By sacred blood, or else by none;
This blackened veil shall be undone.*

—AUTHOR UNKNOWN

