



# LADOS

## The Lion of Bactria

Lados surveyed the battlefield. Hundreds—thousands—of his brothers and countrymen lay broken and bloody, brought low by the ambitions of his fellow generals. After the death of Alexander, the outlying empire had plunged into kinslaying anarchy, with each of the *diadochi* trying to claim for himself a place where he might best reap the rewards of Alexander's ambition. The roll of the vying competitors read like a veritable who's who of the empire: Antipater, Perdiccas, Ptolemy, Leonnatus. Among them stood an ambitious but lowborn *peltast* who had a mind for fighting and a tongue for praise. With both these charms, Lados climbed the ranks of the Greek military and seized a position among the jackal-princes surrounding the carcass of Alexander.

Kindred society at this time was as factionalized as the world of mortal cultures. Greece belonged very much to the Brujah at their zenith, with the backing of a few enlightened Ventrue. Persia was the domain of the Toreador, interspersed with both Ravnos *gháls* (noble and common) and the indigenous Tzimisce of the paynim domains. The shattered remains of Samiel's brood held their territories against the barbarians further east and the fierce Gangrel of the northeastern steppes. Amid these clashing bloodlines and warring cultures, the landless and unwelcome Clan of the Moon had to make what it could of a world united under the banner of a fair-faced mortal son of a conquering Macedonian horse-king.

Thus, under a moonless sky, a philosopher crept into the fortress of Lamia and brought the soldier Lados into a world of eternal night. This philosopher, a Malkavian of unremembered name, sought to make the Regent of Athens a catspaw by Embracing his trusted advisors. Lados, he whispered into the fear-blانched face of his progeny, belonged to the night. It was then that Lados first knew fear. His was a fearful death away from the known violence of the battlefield, and a vile rebirth amid the blood and shit of his mortal corpse. The

depth of his isolation gripped him in that long, terrible first night of being a vampire, and his sire probed this wound with malice and Dementation. Over a year passed, in which the mad prophet tormented his child with extended bouts of abandonment that resulted in Lados being paralyzed by fear when left on his own.

So it was that Lados returned to Lamia by way of Athens, there finding the remains of his army out of shape and dwindling in ability and number. His lieutenants had all but exhausted the once-considerable war chest, preferring idle pleasures over the peril of the battlefield. What choice did Lados have? If he admonished his soldiers, they would leave. Reconnecting himself with Antipater's court, the Malkavian set himself up as a dependable but uninspired shadow of himself, the better that the Regent might overlook him while still giving him access to the wealth and influence of the Empire.

Politics can be ugly, however, and the Hellenistic Brujah resented the intrusion of "outsiders" into their domains. A league of Brujah nobles and generals took notice of Lados and planned to make an example of him. And though Lados had been fractured by the Malkavian Embrace, he was certainly no fool. The new retinue with which he had surrounded himself included not only Brujah spies, but also included a number of loyal thralls and lovers. When word of the planned action against him reached his ears, Lados turned the intrigues of the Greek Kindred against their architects.

Pledging a boon to one of the Kali-venerating Tzimisce of Bactria, Lados had one of his slaves fleshcrafted into an icon of himself. Through an extended regimen of both Dominate personality subjugation and the sensory sensitivity of Auspex, Lados convinced his slave that he was the body and true Lados the mind, a dualistic creature destined for divinity. Where Lados the Kindred traveled in thought, Lados the thrall followed in body. Hiding himself beneath a cenotaph to Alexander, the Malkavian used his slave to expose his rival Kindred

as demon-worshippers and Persian spies, orchestrators of a blood-cult bent on the subjugation of the empire and the regicide of Antipater. The Regent himself, no stranger to the subtle treacheries of the wars of the *diadochi* believed his “faithful general” — especially when the slumbering forms of the betrayers were dragged into the sunlight and burst into flame — and made a place for Lados in the vacuum left by the sudden paucity of the Brujah and their agents at court.

The Kindred Lados far outlasted Antipater, and reinvented his ghoul in the image of a descendant of the great family of Lados every several decades, to keep the suspicions of the courts allayed. Under the Seleucids, Lados and his slave brought a number of satraps under their sway, both through pledges of military support and through the damning power of the Blood. Indeed, Bactria was almost more Greek than Persian under Seleucid rule, which suited Lados admirably. For over two centuries the family of Lados — just himself and his identical ghoul with the occasional mortal lover who served as wife and later matron to the family before the Malkavian began the cycle anew — enjoyed power and prestige in the presence of kings. Cainite Princes rose and fell, and other Kindred looked to Lados as a model of how to dwell in the shadows, taking what one wanted without risking one’s unlife.

With so much time and comfort, Lados lost interest in the arts of war, and his armies transitioned from elites of the philosopher-kings to mercenary phalangites who raised their pikes only for pay to foul-tempered Yavanas who lived only to bully their pay from petty lords and drink their wages in wine.

Every general eventually faces his downfall, and Lados’ came in the form of invasion. The armies of Rajuvula marauded into what was by then the Punjab. Lados had grown lazy and complacent, embracing the decadence of the Indo-Greek Kingdom, unwilling to concern himself with the discipline of his soldiers or the tactics of the menacing Scythians. As the armies of Stratos took the field against those of Rajuvula, Lados found his forces in the unenviable tactical position of the fore. Scythian arrows perforated his lines and panic set in among his slovenly troops. He bellowed a desperate and wrathful advance — but found himself spitted on a spear wielded by Jaxartes, a river-folk hoplite from the times of Alexander and one of the scheming Brujah Lados thought he had ruined in his purge of Antipater’s courts. Indeed, Lados had ruined Jaxartes, who fled eastward and hid among the debased Toreador of Persia. With Rose Clan patronage, Jaxartes was one of the instruments of vengeance of

the Parthian Kindred, who resented the legacy of Alexander and the fall of the Achaemenids, and who spared no opportunity to strike back at the crumbling Greek domains. Staked on his slayer’s *assegai*, the world went dark for Lados, who was stomped, torpid, into the bloody mud outside Sagala. There, he spent almost two thousand years in a dreamless sleep, stirring beneath the earth only when the madness in his blood forced a defiant twitch.

A titan’s roar awakened the slumbering Malkavian, who had by then spent centuries tumbling through the nightmares of starvation made all the more harrowing by the curse of his clan. The titan — a smoke-belching metal monstrosity birthed from the loins of the gorgon herself — gouged Lados from the ground and spat him down, where her foul minions prodded him and gibbered in some corrupt form of an enemy tongue. The savagery of the fire in his deathless Blood ignited and, freshly torn from torpor, Lados entered a frenzy as much from fear as from rage. When the low men who had woken him lay in tatters and the titan slumped lifelessly in the shadow cast by the moon, Lados calmed, gathered his wits, and walked back into the city once held by his patron-king.

No stranger to the depredations of the Malkavian mind, Lados thought himself in the throes of a fit, but the insanity refused to relent. The stone castles and metal spires surrounding him, and the million-plus desperate, filthy, beating mortal hearts surrounding him would not disperse. This was no dream. The titan had woken Lados from his troubled torpor only to throw him into the jaws of the Ancients. The madness of the earth and sky assailed him. These must be the End Times.

And yet... they weren’t. This madness that surrounded him, that must have leached from his mind into the domains of untold years before, teetered on the brink of world-ruin without plunging over. Bit by bit, in the two decades since his emergence from torpor, Lados has gathered and synthesized what fragments he can of this reality. Its veneration of metal and speed, its hypocrisies, its wealth and licentiousness, and its thinking machines — these all elude Lados *just enough* to keep him forever on edge and occasionally beyond it. Oddly, he finds himself most comfortable with other Kindred, even when he knows they may oppose or betray him. At least, in his mind, their evil and frailties are understandable. The world-machine of the hateful demiurges, however, truly vexes him. Only in the unchanging culture of these Damned, whether they call it a “Camarilla” or “Sabbat,” does Lados find consistency.

How long can the world balance on the scales of Themis before it collapses into Typhon's gorge? How long until the blood-gods erupt from Haidou and drag their progeny, burning, into Tartarus? And how much of his own private empire can Lados rebuild before then? Enough to make the scorched husk of the world his final, solitudinous tomb?

**Sire:** Lykia (unconfirmed)

**Clan:** Malkavian

**Nature:** Conniver

**Demeanor:** Conformist

**Generation:** 8<sup>th</sup>

**Embrace:** 322 BC

**Apparent Age:** late 30s

**Physical:** Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

**Social:** Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

**Mental:** Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

**Talents:** Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Leadership 4, Subterfuge 3

**Skills:** Etiquette 2, Melee 4, Survival 3

**Knowledges:** Academics 3, Finance 2, Investigation 3

**Disciplines:** Auspex 3, Dementation 4, Dominate 4

**Background:** Allies (mortal family) 2, Resources 3 (non-renewing remains of the war chest)

**Virtues:** Conscience 2, Self-Control 4, Courage 4

**Morality:** Humanity 5

**Willpower:** 6

**Blood Pool/Max per Turn:** 15/3

**Image:** Lados has the classical build and striking features of antiquity. He is short by modern standards, with remarkably bronzed skin that looks almost stony with the pallor of the Embrace. Lados still doesn't have a solid grasp of modern style, and his clothing seems anachronistic if not outright bizarre as he finds the pulse of the modern world.

**Roleplaying Hints:** Lados moves with the efficiency and authority of a military leader. He is accustomed to being heeded, and doesn't understand how so many of the common folk seem to be so willful, so his interactions with modern people tend to be terse or even hostile. With Kindred society having forgotten him, Lados often oversteps himself, not realizing that the Status he enjoyed in the courts of the Indo-Greek kings has left him. He is used to being granted an audience with Princes upon demand... which, with no current Status to speak of, isn't how it works anymore.

**Haven:** The types of havens Lados seeks lie close to the territories where esteemed Kindred of power reside. Although he has fallen from favor, he seeks to introduce himself back into the society of the august undead, in whichever domain he may currently reside. Wherever he finds himself, he establishes a haven with a collection of artifacts from antiquity that will soon be a darling of the Harpies in any domain that considers itself refined.

**Influence:** Over the millennia, Lados' influence has waned and vanished, leaving him almost wholly alone, with the exception of a handful of his mortal descendants, whose connection to him is tenuous but reinforced by Dominate and frequent exposure to vitae. It has not always been thus, however, and Lados seeks to make powerful contacts in any domain where he settles, starting at the low end of the Status ladder, if need be, and clawing his way to the top. Despite his shattered mind, Lados recognizes that he is a stranger in a strange time, and unlike many modern Kindred, he doesn't cast aside those who aid him as soon as they have no immediate use to him. He greatly fears once again succumbing to the cold nightmare of torpor, so he tries to stay on good terms with as many of the Kindred who have shown him favor as possible, in the interests of making as few enemies as possible.

**Derangement:** With his recent emergence from torpor, Lados is obsessed with the unknown number of Kindred he worries may have met a fate similar to his. In his mind, every stretch of land is the tomb of a ravenous Kindred, and on the fast-approaching night of Gehenna, the earth-sea will roil with the Damned, boiling up bloodthirsty vampires who will consume the world before being consumed by their hellish progenitors. Indeed, the (comparatively) trusting nature Lados displays toward other Kindred he meets is justified by the fact that they're lucid and at least a known quantity, unlike the monsters who will pry themselves up from their unmarked tombs and devour the land and everything upon it. In most cases, Lados is actually remarkably calm for a Malkavian, displaying only a mild paranoia that isn't actually out of place in the world of the undead. When the true gravity of his fear grasps him, however, he is inconsolable – racked by fear and the agony of knowing that he walks upon a landscape made of millions of fallen men and vampires who await only the End Times to become the pave-stones on the road to Hell itself. Lados is nearly fearless in the face of threats he can understand, a soldier tempered by war and savagery, but the horrors of his imagination reduce him to little more than a quivering invalid when confronted with the terrifying loneliness of the final night.



# LIZETTE CORDOBA

## The Poet of the People's Occupation

Everyone warned her, of course. "What are you going to do with a degree in poetry?" they'd asked, as though they were the first to try and break the news to her that her dreams weren't worth shit. Her answer had always been a smug "Teach, of course," followed with a change of topic.

She did go into teaching: high school English Literature, while she worked on the graduate degree that would let her teach at the local university as she continued her own education. Poetry was her passion, and it showed in everything she did at that overpopulated inner-city New York school.

Her dreams of living out a real-life version of *Dangerous Minds* never quite manifested, of course. No one showed up to any of the Poetry Club events she sponsored, and the administration had to ask her several times to please stick to the lesson plans given by the school district.

It wasn't the lack of interest that really did it in for her, though. It was the violence. Students from across the borough attended the school she taught, students who were often part of rival gangs. The administration worked full-time to keep those enmities from exploding into open violence, but fights still happened. Conflict was inevitable in environments that couldn't really be controlled: the front of the school after the last bell of the day, or in the middle of a busy hall between classes.

After a year, Lizette developed trouble sleeping, and used up her sick time and vacation days hiding in her bed, traumatized by the thought of walking those halls again. But she went back nonetheless. She took a year off from her night schooling, just to allow her to focus on rising to meet the challenge of teaching.

Much good it did her. A half-year after she began to think of herself as capable of handling the rigors of teaching in the school long-term, her contract was terminated. Budget cuts, they said, the recession. They apologized because other, tenured teachers were

going to be kept on, you see, whose class sizes had just increased by half again, but everyone had to make sacrifices, right?

For a week, Lizette raged, writing angry letters to the district, the teacher's union, local newspapers, the mayor's office, and the governor. Ultimately, none of it did any good. Her anger collapsed in on itself, became grief, and then numb depression. She meekly collected unemployment and had trouble getting out of bed on many days.

It was during this time that she turned to the one thing that had helped her through such episodes in the past: writing. She filled one black-and-white composition book after another with her couplets, stanzas, and whole poems. The first week was catharsis. The second week was expression. On the third, she had her muse available on command. The words flowed from her the way they never did when she was happy, and she lost whole days to the scratching of ballpoint on cheap lined paper.

In time, she transferred her writing – edited, polished, and sharpened – to her laptop, and from there to a blog. She worked day and night on it, transferring her innermost feelings to something freely available on the web. It was a litany of her anger, her frustration, her helplessness, her grief. She railed against individuals, against the school district and useless unions, against the recession itself.

Two months later, she realized that she had come out the other side of all of that. She was still writing, but wasn't doing so as a lifeline, no longer producing just desperate scribbles beneath a musty duvet that hid her from the world. Her blog had a small but loyal following, with a whole pantheon of commentors and friends who were nothing more than usernames and clever little icons. Eventually, Lizette realized she wanted a bit more from the world. She took walks and visited friends she'd neglected.

On one of those walks, she saw them, a small body of protestors, gathered out in front of Wall Street's tall churches to money. She stopped, listening to one of them who was standing and shouting something to them. Shouting something that sounded very familiar.

With a start, she realized that it was *Burden of Scars*. One of her poems.

She walked over to listen, and to speak with him after he was done. His name was Elliot Kemp and they spent the rest of the day together, talking. The next morning she showed up bright and early to join the Occupy movement.

Lizette's life changed, dramatically and quickly. She found that her passion suddenly had an outlet. Not for apathetic adolescents or cynical administrators, but for people who shared what she had experienced: the stained gift-wrapping of the American Dream, as she said in one of her poems. The people roared their empathy.

The nature of her blog changed. There was still poetry, but it became fiery, inspiring poetry intended to goad her readers into action, and it worked in many cases. She volunteered for group-action committees and organized media responses, collected bail money for protestors thrown in jail and even got arrested a time or three herself. She self-published her poetry as an ebook that never made much money, but did earn the attention of both the publishing and academic world.

Lizette routinely performed spoken word renditions of her work at the Occupy gatherings, when she wasn't working the food table, organizing the medical tent or writing furious e-mails to the alternative news sites. These events began to attract interested individuals, among them the handsome redhead she couldn't help but notice. He showed up for a week to her performances before he introduced himself as Avery — just Avery — and told her how much he loved her work.

He was wealthy, it seemed, and he spoke not of her convictions and goals, but of the fire behind them. They discussed poetry while seated on the Wall Street sidewalk at midnight, and he made substantial contributions to the movement's food, clothing, shelter and legal needs. When she was arrested after one particularly ugly confrontation with the NYPD, he showed up first thing that evening with a lawyer in tow who bore an order from the DA to not only release Lizette, but everyone else taken that evening.

She thought she was falling in love, and hoped that he was, too. He asked her one evening to come and

perform a reading of her work to some of his friends. He was sure hearing her passion firsthand would convince them to support the work she was doing. Dressing in a new evening gown she bought for the occasion, she showed up to a salon that was all dark hardwoods, leather, and brass finishing. She shrank when she met them, though. They all seemed so cold and aloof, slightly amused at her expense. Even hostile. And one didn't even *feel* like a person.

Lizette started by reading to them, and when the sable-headed beauty with the long neck that made her look like European nobility snickered at her, something snapped in her.

Fuck them. These were the people who were responsible for everything she'd been railing against for months. She stopped reading to them, and read at them. Something shifted in the room, a presence like incipient violence and sexual tension consuming one another.

As she stood there, on their rich carpet, she blamed them for the ills she'd faced, for what was wrong in the world. She called them villains to their faces, in perfect flowing meter and cadence. They sat awestruck, faces indignant and horrified — but wholly unmoving. When she finished, Avery was beaming, his hands clasped in front of his mouth as though he were trying to contain his joy. The black-haired, swan-necked woman dabbed a rich lace kerchief to her left eye, and then simply said: "Out."

The others practically leapt to their feet, already snarling excitedly among themselves. She turned to Avery, who remained, and simply nodded. She stood then and crossed to Lizette, resting a single elegant finger on her chin and smiled. "Welcome," she said, and left the room.

Avery and Lizette made love on the rich leather divan that night. After her orgasm, he chuckled and said "One for the road." Then her world was sharp white fangs, sudden pain, dark blood and hunger.

Avery taught her about what it meant to be a vampire, what it meant to be a Toreador and what it meant to belong to the Camarilla. As she expected, his ardor for her cooled once she was his child, but that didn't really matter to her by then. She pursued her old goals with a new fervor, happy to use her newfound power to the benefit of the Occupy movement.

At least, until she ran afoul of the Ventrue. In short order, she found out who her enemies were, or at least who the hidden masters of the forces the movement

railed against were. The short conflict nearly resulted in her Final Death. Worse, it nearly broke the ever-important Masquerade, which resulted in herself and the dangerous Caitiff named Xavier Gonne being dragged in front of the Prince by the Sheriff. Both were warned against such recklessness in the future, and forced to drink of the Prince's vitae. Gonne had secretly warded himself against the foundation of the blood bond with a ritual, but Lizette had no such sorcerous aid.

Gonne was ordered to leave the Occupy movement alone entirely, no matter the trouble it caused him or his interests. In contrast, Lizette was given the Occupy movement as her domain in the city, with one condition: She must ensure that its efforts did not negatively impact the private domains of any of New York's Kindred.

In the time since, Lizette has carried on her work. Sometimes, she fears that she's stuck herself in a place of perpetual discontent, working openly to throw down the fat cats and make better lives for everyone, while working from behind the scenes to sabotage their efforts. The passion of the Occupiers is addictive, and continues to fuel her writing. To that end, the strength and significance of the Occupy movement as her domain has grown, giving her a degree of influence that the Prince likely hadn't anticipated. Making things worse, her anger sometimes yields to the will of the horror inside her, the Beast, resulting in depravities that make plundering the public treasure pale by comparison. Lizette has lied, stolen, taken blood by force, killed... and at the "coming out" party Avery threw for her, worse, at the behest of a truly awful Malkavian. Despite her passion, or perhaps because of it, she can feel her Humanity becoming brittle as she keeps the Beast on a taut leash.

Lizette continues to act as an unofficial leader for the Occupy movement, inspiring those around her to greater efforts and organizing its resources and recruitment. She frequently travels to other cities to help organize Occupy movements there, as well. During such travels, she is very careful to approach the Prince of that city and explain her purpose there. She does nothing involving the Kindred in such situations, if it can be helped, and even tries to avoid the use of her vampiric powers while she is there. Her focus is the movement, and nothing else.

But somewhere inside, she knows that there is a clock ticking. Fiery rebellions do not enter stasis. They overflow and succeed in their efforts, or they eventually

stagnate and boil away to nothingness in their failure. Furthermore, she asks herself, given her vampiric condition, how much does she truly want to see a more equitable balance of power? When she, or any Kindred, needs to feed, isn't it better to have a movement or an untouchable second class available, so that the search for sustenance isn't an ordeal? Does Kindred convenience trump the dignity of the human spirit? Or are the mortals, as some of the Damned contend, nothing more than kine for the consummate predators? Lizette plays a delicate game, keeping the movement boiling away steadily, neither succeeding nor failing, and asking herself questions that make her sleepless once again... but for how long?

**Sire:** Avery

**Clan:** Toreador

**Nature:** Dabbler

**Demeanor:** Architect

**Generation:** 10th

**Embrace:** 2011

**Apparent Age:** mid-30s

**Physical:** Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

**Social:** Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

**Mental:** Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 4

**Talents:** Alertness 2, Awareness 1, Empathy 2, Expression 3, Leadership 1, Streetwise 1

**Skills:** Drive 2, Etiquette 2, Performance 3, Survival 1

**Knowledges:** Academics 3, Computer 1, Investigation 1, Law 1, Politics 3

**Disciplines:** Auspex 2, Celerity 1, Fortitude 1, Presence 2

**Backgrounds:** Allies 3, Contacts 4, Fame 1, Herd 2, Influence 3, Resources 2, Retainers 2, Status 1

**Virtues:** Conscience 3, Self-Control 3, Courage 3

**Morality:** Humanity 5

**Willpower:** 6

**Blood Pool/Max per Turn:** 13/1

**Image:** Lizette presents the camera-perfect image of the modern Occupier. She wears slogan-emblazoned t-shirts over jeans or track pants, sometimes with a hoodie over that. She wears her fair brown hair choppy, and often in a ponytail as though she hadn't had time to see to it properly or because she's been out in the elements. She alternates between an over-stuffed messenger bag and a backpack, always with a laptop and an HD palm camera in them.



**Roleplaying Hints:** Lizette is somewhat awkward in social situations that don't involve the topic she's most passionate about. In these cases, her speech comes haltingly, giving the impression that she's afraid to say something stupid, and perfectly content to remain beneath everyone else's notice. If she can, she'll turn conversations back to the things with which she's most comfortable: socio-economic reform and early 20th century poetry.

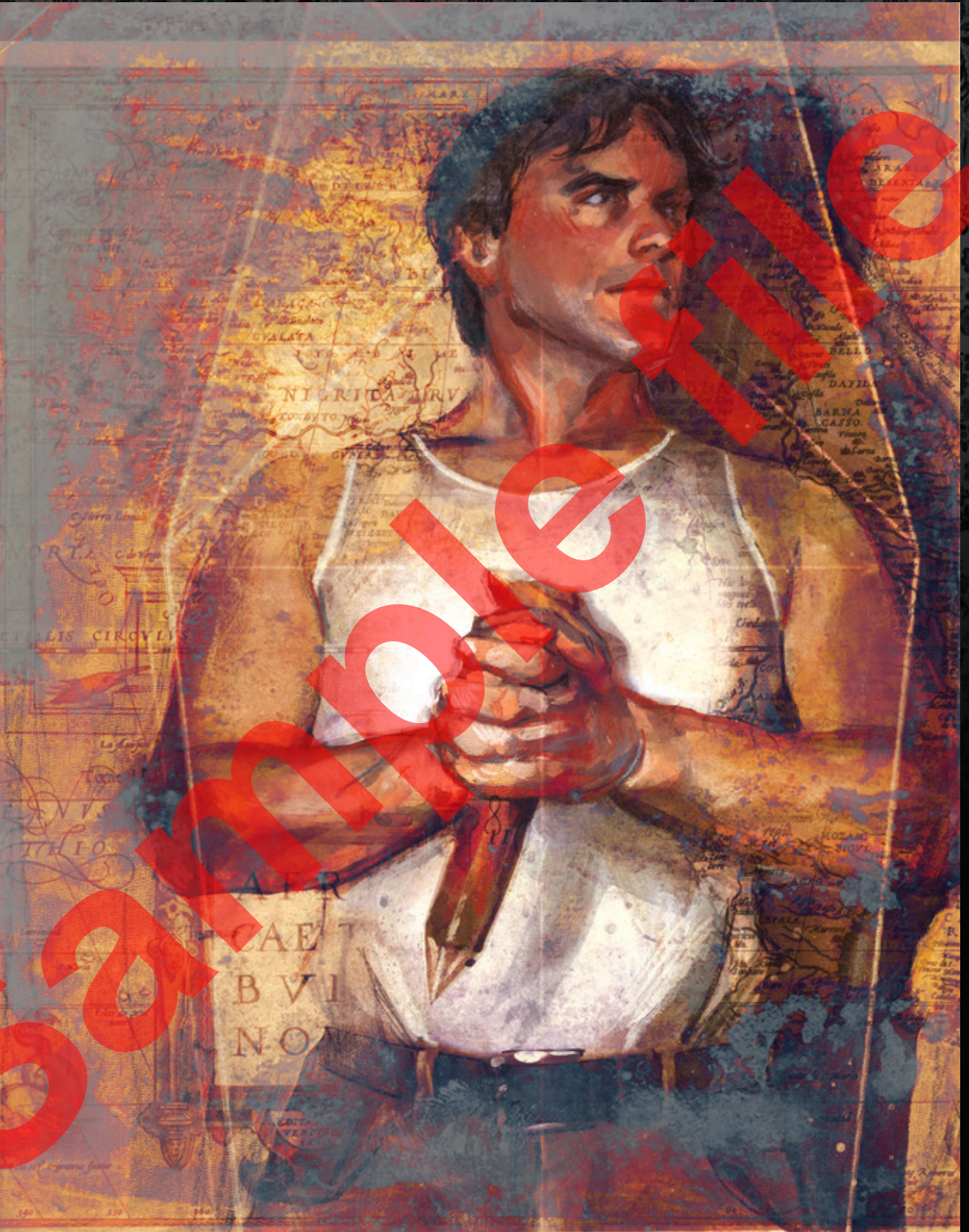
**Allies & Contacts:** Lizette's Allies are the people she's met working the Occupy protests. These include a very influential local political blogger, a police precinct captain who was a bit of a protesting firebrand in his youth, and a mid-level functionary in the city government. Her Contacts are primarily among the Occupiers, academia, the publishing world, and the local police.

**Herd:** Lizette's Herd consists of a small handful of people who tend to congregate around the Occupy protest sites. They're mostly other protestors, but also a

pot dealer or two and even a couple of street teens from the homeless population that flocks to these sites.

**Influence:** Although her kingdom is a tiny one, Lizette is definitely a queen of the Occupy movement in her city. Protesters look to her frequently for her input and approval, and though minute, she has access to the various resources the movement tends to gather for itself, such as donated food, clothing, and money, as well as volunteers from all walks of life, including lawyers and journalists.

**Retainers:** Lizette has a pair of ghouls, who serve her in different ways. Elliot Kemp is a fellow Occupier with solid people skills and a head for organization whom everyone recognizes as Lizette's right hand. He frequently tends to the Occupy movement during the day while Lizette is in slumber. Her other ghoul is Amanda Cortez, a beat cop who specializes in "crowd control" tactics, and so is at the forefront of any police presence at the Occupy sites.



# THE NABATAEAN

## Pawn of Ancients

*One by one, we fall from Heaven into the depths of the past. This, our world, is ever upturned, so that yet some time we'll last. Who are we?*

– Riddle of the Sheik

In the 363rd year of the Common Era, the hidden city of Petra (the biblical “Sela,” in what is now the nation of Jordan) was in the midst of its second bloom. The first came centuries before, when it blossomed into the premier stop along the trade routes between the East and Gaza, the most important port in the Levant, and the gateway to the markets of Greece, Egypt, Rome, and Syria. This important trade route was the family business and life’s blood of Petra’s inhabitants and civil overseers: the Nabataeans.

The intervening winter that allowed for this second spring came with the winds of change, blown from the west when Rome, which had been receiving tribute from Petra since the 1st century BC, invaded and claimed much of the surrounding territory, including several precious trade routes. Petra’s decline was swift and sharp in the wake of Rome’s avarice, but though drained of vitality, the mountain city remained. When Emperor Trajan annexed and established it as the capitol of what he called the Arabia Petraea, Petra slowly began to see a new revival – one that would, in part, erase its cultural identity, but an architectural and economic revival all the same.

By the year 363, Petra was the center of a diocese under the auspices of Constantine’s dream, the eastern Roman Empire. It had lost some of its luster from the glory days of the Nabataean kings, but the addition of Byzantine colonnades, finely carved chancels, and arrays of *opus sectile* mosaics certainly beautified the aging city....

...until the earthquake.

Records of the time indicate that the quake was felt as far away as Aqaba, and the devastation it leveled

on Petra certainly reflected such magnitude. Like most earthquakes, it began at a tumultuous locus and concluded with an aftershock some hours later. It toppled temples, sent broken columns into the walls of the Royal Palace, and utterly demolished the city’s only theater. Over half the residents took the quake, which killed hundreds, as a sign from above and chose to abandon Petra, bringing her short-lived Renaissance to an end, forever.

### Shaking Heaven and Earth

The quake that rocked Palestine remains an oft-discussed event. So great was its power that diviners and oracles, including some from as far back as the reign of Emperor Trajan, claimed to have foreseen the event. None of these prognosticators spoke in specifics, naturally, but the timing is certainly curious.

Just before the earthquake, in late 362, the Emperor Julian the Apostate had outlawed the teaching of Christianity (which had been the state religion for almost 30 years by then) throughout the breadth of the empire. Then, a month after the earthquake, Julian died at the Battle of Ctesiphon. Shortly after that, Julian’s successor Valentinian made his brother Valens the ruler in the east, and in so doing, created at last a permanent separation of the Roman and Byzantine Empires – an act that would ultimately precipitate the fall of both empires, according to some scholars.

Not every inhabitant of Petra felt so defeated. One man lived through the quake just the same as the others, but where they saw only ill-omen, he saw a need to pick up the pieces and soldier on. Like his father, and his father before him, the man worked the hydraulic engineering innovations that were the wonder of their place and time: conservation systems and dams to control the rush of winter waters that caused dangerous flash floods. He was a Nabataean, and his ties to the land and to Petra ran deeper than any Roman fear or

Byzantine superstition. Knowing what a mass exodus would mean for Petra's fortunes, he spoke out against her abandonment.

By that time, though, the word "Nabataean" had taken on pejorative connotations, such as "peasant," "boor," or even "bastard" in the very lands that had once comprised the Nabataean kingdom, a sad degradation of a people who had once been among the most tolerant and gifted of the ancient world. Although the man had done everything he could do to fit in and to be of use, including even converting to Christianity (as some Nabataeans had done, once Roman-occupied), to the ruling elite his word, was that of his people. And his people were "peasants."

One powerful individual did take note of the man's ardor and loyalty, however naïve it was; he just didn't do anything about it. This individual, one of the long-dead begotten of Cain, watched as the caravans filed along the city's Colonnade Street, past her nymphaeum and her fallen Temple of the Winged Lions, down her famous *siq*, and out her front gates. The city's structure never lent itself to prolonged Kindred habitation, but it was as perfect a way station for them as it was for the kine, and it was in this capacity that the vampire was in Petra at the time.

This dead visitor, a scion of the King of Shadows, did not bring the Nabataean into the endless night. He merely took note of the mortal's name, family line, and behavior before vanishing once more into darkness. In fact, one might say that his presence in Petra had been rooted in the same darkness.

The Nabataean's sorrow ignored, his city's star would fade slowly over the next 300 years, as trade routes shifted away from Petra and support from the eastern empire waned. By the year 747, it was a backwater municipality in the growing Islamic Caliphate, its population having dwindled from almost 40,000 during its heyday to fewer than 2,000 residents. But among those who yet remained was the last descendant of the Nabataean, who insured his line would keep faith with their land. This descendant, a humble laborer, eked out a living as best he could in Petra's decline.

And then it happened again.

If the events of the year 363 were the beginning of the end for Petra, the earthquake of 747 was the final nail in her coffin. The city had been reusing materials for centuries by then, and what little foundation they provided was sorely outmatched by the power of the quake's fury. It tore through not only what remained

of Petra, but all the cities of the once-Nabataean Negev, leveling temples, collapsing homes, and swallowing tomb and soul alike.

And this time, the Nabataean was caught in the middle of it. When the quake started, he was working on the temple of Qasr el-Bint ("the daughter's castle"), amending some of its masonry. Before he could even take a breath, the world was falling in all around him. In a last-ditch effort to find safety, he ran to the nearest aperture, and in a daze he thought brought on by the stress of the moment, he saw through the opening a beautiful white camel, smiling serenely beyond. Upon hearing a section of sandstone break loose overhead, he closed his eyes in preparation for death... but it took an unexpected aspect.

His eyes fluttered open and beheld a figure of nightmare, surely a djinn or one of the *ghûl*. Yet it stood with arms outstretched, an inscrutable look upon its weathered face, as if welcoming him back home. Looking up, the Nabataean saw the block of sandstone, suspended in mid-air... by shadows. At this, the mortal's fragile consciousness gave out and he collapsed in a heap on the temple floor. When he awoke, he was no longer among the living, but the Damned.

Like his ancestors before him, the Nabataean had adopted the religion of his place and time; in this case, Islam. The Nabataean people, like other tribal Arabs, started out as fully polytheistic, offering their prayers to the likes of Al-Uzza and Al-Qaum, Dushares and Manawet. When the Israelites conquered them, Alexander of Judea forced mass conversions to Judaism, and so Nabataeans born in that place and time accepted that faith. Under the Romans, the Nabataeans converted first to the Hellenized incarnation of their former pantheon, with Venus and Mars in place of Al-Uzza and Al-Qaum, and later, under the Eastern Empire, to Christianity – until, of course, the coming of Islam. Indeed, adapting to survive in peace seemed to be the Nabataean way.

When the Nabataean discovered that his undying savior had not adapted as his ancestors did – had adopted neither the faith of his place and time, nor those faiths that had come before it – he was dumbfounded at his sire's deed. He hadn't been especially religious in life, but on finding out that beings such as this existed, his mind couldn't help but frame the discussion in religious terms. After many nights, he mustered the courage to finally ask his sire why he had come to Petra in her decline, why he had saved a humble Muslim Nabataean only to damn him immediately thereafter.

"I have not slain you," came the response. "I have preserved you."

"But why? Why me?" said the Nabataean.

"Because one night, you might be the last of your kind."

## Two Worlds

On his subsequent travels around the Levant, the Holy Land, and the Fertile Crescent, the Nabataean learned a great deal about not just one world, but two: the world of the living, and the secret world of the accursed dead who walked in its shadow. As sire and childe, the pair toured the courts of the Ashirra, the Islamic brotherhood of undead, and conversed with caliphs, supped with sultans, and interviewed with imams. The known world took them in, and they in turn took in the world. And through it all, the bond between the two Kindred grew.

As is often the case with the Damned, this very engagement was the very thing that spelled the end of their time together. In the early 11th Century, following the emergence of the so-called Taifa kingdoms in Al-Andalus, the pair ended up the honored guests of a fellow Lasombra named Bakr ibn Safwan al-Qushari, the self-proclaimed Sultan of Málaga. When the sultan asked them to pray with him, the Nabataean's sire politely refused. The sultan, thinking him a fellow "person of the book" (i.e., a Christian or a Jew), offered him access to a local church or synagogue, instead. When he was again refused, the sultan realized that his guest was neither Muslim nor *dhimmi* (a non-Muslim freeman), but true infidel, and thus in need of some counsel.

So it was that the Cainite Sultan of Málaga challenged his clanmate and guest to a contest. Should the sultan lose, he would give up half his sultanate to form a new domain for his guest (who had, to that point, established no earthly domain of his own). If he won, his guest would agree to convert, if not to Islam than at least to another religion of the book. Thinking the contest a jest at worst and an evening's entertainment at best, the sire agreed. The Nabataean no longer recalls the manner of the contest, only that his sire lost and that they both suspected deception. Both Kindred foolishly believed their aged host to be above cheating on such a trivial dalliance.

When called to make good on his loss, the Nabataean's sire again politely declined, but made no mention of his host's own bad faith in the process. When a Cainite guest breaks faith with a Cainite host,

the results can be explosive, and this instance was no exception. Incensed, and feeling the honor of both clan and tradition slighted, the sultan brought the matter before the Amici Noctis, the quasi-secret internal tribunal of the Lasombra clan. Al-Qushari had been careful to cultivate alliances with both Muslim and Christian clanmates over the years, and his influence was heard and felt among those who sat in judgment of their nomadic clanmate. As such, their verdict was as clear as it was swiftly delivered. If the Nabataean's sire would not make good and convert, then he would face the Final Death.

Knowing his sire would never convert to a faith he did not love, the Nabataean, who had stayed silent through the matter, made a bold and decisive move. He offered his own unlife in exchange. To his surprise, neither his sire nor the sultan objected, nor even reacted with especial dismay. The sultan accepted at once, and sent word to the tribunal that the sire's verdict was to be voided, provided his Nabataean childe remained true to his word. After almost three centuries years together, sire and childe parted ways with nothing more than a lone knowing nod and a somber valediction.

Again the Nabataean prepared himself to meet death, as he had the night of his Embrace, and again was Death denied. The sultan, moved by the guileless integrity of his Muslim clanmate, though not moved enough to forgive the sire's trespass entirely, opted to spare him the Final Death... in exchange for an eternity of nothingness. Al-Qushari drove a wooden stake through the Nabataean's heart, boxed up his corpse, and kept it as the prize of his collection of treasures.

Before long, the sultan's penchant for contest again had the better of him, and he was forced to forfeit the Nabataean as the culmination of a very heated exchange with a rival Christian Lasombra. Word of the "Nabataean trophy" spread like wildfire thereafter, and his body found itself passed from one undead curator to another, ever at the whim of vampires more seasoned and cruel than he. For a time, he was bound to the crypt of a qliphothic sage, who unboxed him every few years to ask the same question: "What is your name?" When the Nabataean could no longer answer with certainty, his host sold him to yet another Kindred eager to possess the undying curio. The only constant in his indentured unlife was the ruling that bound him to coffin and clan, but it was that same ruling that prevented his soul from falling prey to the Amaranth or to the Final Death. After a few centuries, the Nabataean no longer knew whether he felt this to be a blessing or a curse.