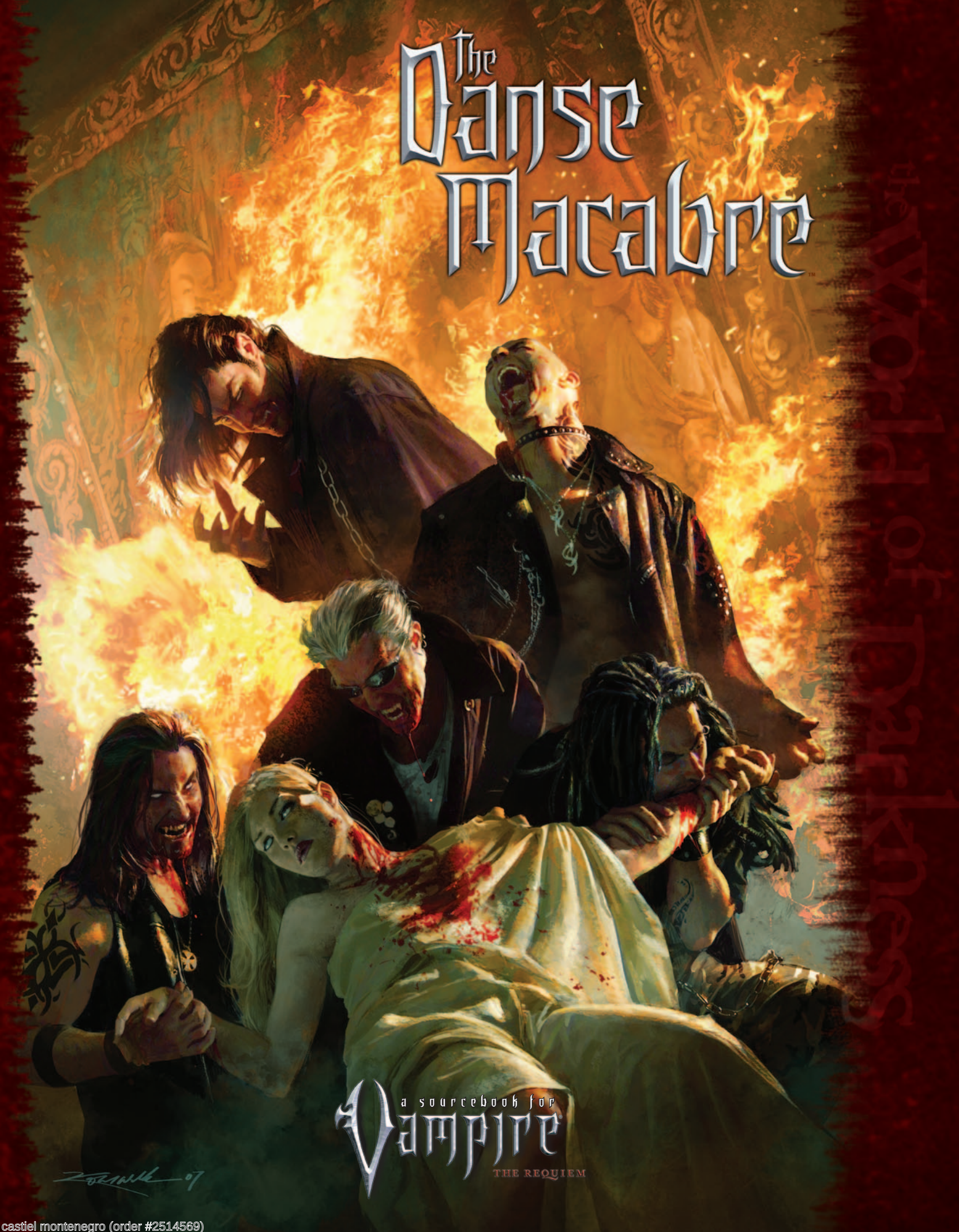

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Sun's rising. So what?

This party's still going. I still have blood to drink. I still have one more song in me.

Across the city, some of us are crawling back to our hovels, our mansions, our coffins.

But some of us aren't.

Some of us are still hunting for something. Down in the closed-off subway tunnels. Up in the mightiest penthouses. Here in the warehouse district. There at the docks, under the docks, around the docks. Always hunting, forever hungry.

A lot of us, we don't pale when the sun comes up. We know we're bad folks. We know that if we get caught out there and those white teeth bite off a bit of our long shadows, well, then maybe we deserved it. We deserved it because we're stupid and we're selfish and maybe the combination of those two things means we're evil incarnate, I dunno.

If it happens, it happens.

Me, I'm going to give the finger to Sol Invictus, the Ol' Sun, Big Bright Happy Face.

You hear that, sun?

We don't give up the night that easy.

*—Some F** king Vampire*

This book is:

- A look at how to play Vampire: The Requiem at three different tiers of play: coterie, city and conspiracy
- Classic covenants made global, and a handful of entirely new covenants, including the Brides of Dracula, or the Children of the Thorns.
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PRINTED IN CANADA
978-1-58846-385-2 WW25314 $39.99 US

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Vampire THE REQUIEM

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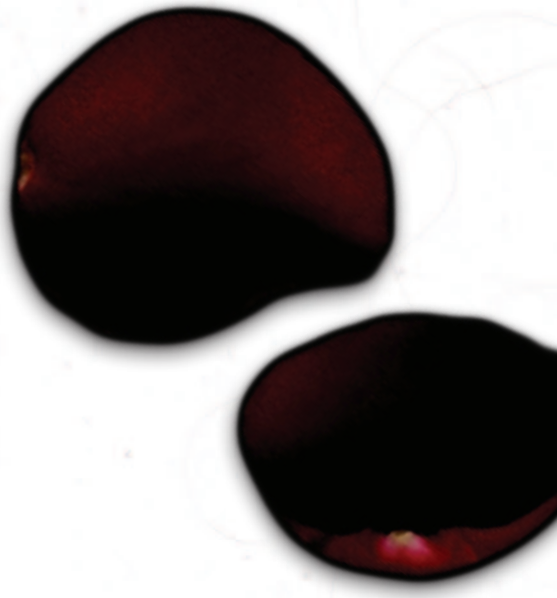

WHITE WOLF PUBLISHING
2075 WEST PARK PLACE BOULEVARD
SUITE G
STONE MOUNTAIN, GA 30087

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Check out White Wolf online at http://www.white-wolf.com PRINTED IN CANADA.

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I quit White Wolf (the first time) just before we planned to do another edition of Vampire the Masquerade, and came back specifically to work on revised. I worked on that for several years, then we relaunched the World of Darkness and I worked on Requiem for a while. Then I quit again.

And then, I came back again. Vampire brought me back.

It's a powerful draw. I'm addicted to it. It's my vitae.

When I started here, I was a dewy-eyed youth, afire with my love for games and the World of Darkness in particular. Now I'm married, have a kid, and have been here for fourteen years - and I still love Vampire as much as I did almost two decades ago when my then-girlfriend introduced me to it.

It's been a wonderful experience for me, among the most gratifying things I've ever done. It's indescribably fulfilling to peek in on people's chronicles, be it at conventions, in online journals, at LARPS, or in person, to see what people have done with the world. How people feel about the World of Darkness is amazing: It's resounded with gamers in the way precious few other worlds have. I'm proud to have been a part of something that has touched people's lives so profoundly. The joy people take in the experience makes all the hard work worthwhile, death threats and anonymous Internet name-calling notwithstanding.

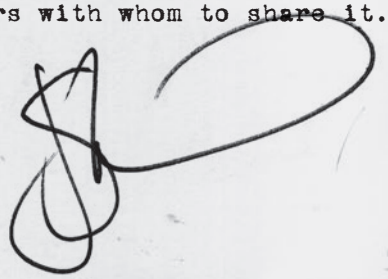
That part of the story where we publish a new Vampire book every month has come to a close, though. Not the game-playing part, because so long as people get together around a table or in a social group and someone has a copy of Vampire, the game can happen infinitely. It's a little bittersweet, I have to say, but looking forward means that we'll be able to take what we've done here and apply it to something new.

I hope you'll join us. Just because we're publishing in a different format doesn't mean there's not still going to be a world out there for you to make yours. I'm part of making that world, and I want to see everyone who ever had any portion of love I had for Vampire bring that same enthusiasm (or deviousness, or treachery, or subterfuge) into what happens next with Vampire. Without you, I'm just a lone weirdo clattering away at a keyboard in a room.

And if you've been any part of the ride over that almost-two decades Vampire's been out there, you'll know that the night is nothing without a few other monsters with whom to share it.

I'll be there….

Justin Achilli



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Introduction

A great empire, like a great cake, is most easily diminished at the edges.

—*Benjamin Franklin*

The Bereavement Boogie

Welcome to *The Danse Macabre*. The name means *dance of the dead*, and speaks to the society of the Damned—these awful creatures must interact, and when they do, it is a waltz of knives, a whirl of fangs, a floor filled with pirouetting monsters. In this wretched dance, none are equal, all are separate, and nobody's following the same rhythm.

And yet, the name has other connotations, too: the *dance macabre* is a medieval art-form, an allegorical look at a parade of skeletons or corpses leading other dead men to their grave. What it means is that, guess what? We're all going to the same place. We're all in the great big Conga line to the crypt, baby. All things end. We're all just dancing skeletons.

Hence, the irony. The vampires think of the Danse Macabre as the endless dance of unequal monsters, and yet the term itself implies a finality and an equality. We all go to the grave. We are all equal in our passing.

In that tension, between finality and eternity, lies our game.

Okay, But What Is It Really?

All that metaphorical shit aside, this book is meant to be another, deeper look at how to get your hands bloody when tinkering with **Vampire: The Requiem**.

It's not a player's guide. We already did that.

It's not a Storyteller's guide—er, sorry, "Chronicler's guide." We did that, already, too.

It's somewhere in-between. It's something bigger. Something weirder.

We want to tear apart the whole game of **Vampire: The Requiem**. We want to look at all the greasy, gore-soaked constituent parts and more importantly, we want *you* to look at these spare parts, too. Consider them. What happens when you put them back together? What happens when you staple this here, and duct tape that there, and then zap it with lightning and feed it a mouthful of ancient demon's blood? What lumbering monstrosity awakens?

This book, that's what.

This book is us saying, "But there's so much more you can do with this game, and goddamnit, I still have the talking stick."

You want social combat? Done. You want Vampire Noir in the Dark Metropolis? Amen. You want new systems for Devotions, for humanity, for how vampires deal with each other? We got your ass covered. We have new covenants. We have *old* covenants done up in a new way. We have all kinds of viscera-caked thought-meats shoved into this sausage casing (and as you surely feel in your hands, this is not a small book).

How to Use This Book (The Bloody Parts, Arranged)

The whole of *The Danse Macabre* seeks to crack the breastbone with a rib-spreader and take a new look at many of the key component parts of **Vampire: The Requiem**. The chapters are laid out as follows:

A Season Of Secrets: Throughout this book you'll find fiction in four parts. This story—"Season of Secrets," by Greg Stolze—returns us one final time to the vampires of Chicago who suffer an upheaval when a grotesque deviation of the Traditions occurs. Can the city survive this transgression? What do they make of the transgressor?

Intro: You're reading it. Don't get excited.

Chapter One: Life After Dark first introduces you to a whole new way of looking at and playing **Vampire: The Requiem**, which is the "tier system." We break the game out into three tiers (similar to what's done in **Hunter: The Vigil**) and give a host of new rules that helps you rejigger the game with whatever awesome hacks suit your game table the most. After that, it's time to chop apart the clans and see what makes them tick. Why would you play them? What do they *mean*? We cut right to the heart. Finally, we give you a look into the roles vampires play, and mechanically bolster these roles (the Masquerade and the Requiem).

Chapter Two: The Bonds of Covenant rips apart what you already know about the existing five covenants in **Requiem** and reinvents them as gonzo, global conspiracies lording at the tippy-top of the third tier of the layer cake.

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After that, it's a deadly parade of fresh new covenants for use in your game whether as antagonists or as groups players may choose for their characters.

Chapter Three: Bloody Business is not your typical rules chapter—these rules are as wide and varied as arterial spray on the wall (each spatter its own piece of art). Social combat? Mental combat? New rules for Humanity? New ways for players to roleplay through the creation of unique Devotions? Yes, yes, yes and yes. Want new combat rules? Montages? Time compression? New Disciple-Skill marriages? All these rules (and more) seek to give you new ways to play **Vampire: The Requiem** at the game table.

Chapter Four: Dead, Dread Chronicles gives fresh meat to both Storytellers and players in terms of conceiving new chronicles—*unexpected* chronicles, even—within the mode of **Requiem**. Can **Vampire** support a noir chronicle? Hell yes, it can. What about Romeo and Juliet? What about the end-of-days apocalypse?

This Book Is No Unitasker

If you work it right, this book can earn you a lot of mileage.

In fact, this book isn't good for just **Vampire: The Requiem**. No, really.

The social and mental combat play well across any of the games within the Storytelling System.

The banes could be used as an alternate Morality or derangement system for monstrous characters, be they werewolves or changelings or, who knows, heart-eating death-unicorns.

The new covenants (and new looks at *old* covenants) could make good enemies for, say, **Hunter: The Vigil**. Heck, one of the new covenants (the Children of the Thorns, p. 92) could fit right into your **Changeling: The Lost** game.

We're just trying to give you more bang for your buck. These pages can go far if you use them right. This book multi-tasks quite nicely, we hope.

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Sun's coming up.

I know it the same way you know it: I can smell it.

It's a thing. A palpable thing. It hangs in the nose. It's like the whiff of ozone before a lightning strike, or the scent of a big bad wolf hot on your tail. What does it smell like? It doesn't smell like any one thing—it isn't like, the bitter tang of gun oil or the sweat from behind a scared girl's ear (or from between her thighs). It's a smell of finality. Of flowers withering, of gasoline on the highway, of blood curdling on the sidewalk, of sugar cane burning and roadkilled cats and hope and possibility and promise fucked in the ass and left to bake on the desert ground.

See, humans—the mortal herd, those shitheads—they look at the sunrise as the dawn of a brand new day. Pink cheeks! Happy thoughts! Kiss to the wife, a tousle of the kid's hair. Morning coffee and eggs and toast and Sweet Jesus let me deep throat a shotgun.

To us, though? Well.

Sunrise means hot death. Big orange ball—its fat-fuckin'-face—rises up over the horizon, and for us, that's it. Finito, the end game, goodnight Gracie. It's like, either you sleep (which is death), or you get caught out there (which is double-death).

Sun comes up, it's a thing with teeth. Long bright teeth biting away the long shadows, chomp chomp chomp. Except, we live in those shadows. Hell, some of us are those shadows.

So, as I said, sun's coming up.

But you know what?

Fuck that shit, hombre.

I'm like a kid that don't wanna get up for school. Five more minutes, Mom, you goddamn slag.

Sun's rising. So what? This party's still going. I still have blood to drink. I still have one more song in me—hah, nah, two more songs and at least one more piss break. Not that I piss, but those club boys on MDMA damn sure do, and nothing like a tight bathroom stall to make quick work of one of those bubble-headed boy-toys (and any blood that spills flushes just fine, thanks).

Across the city, some of us are crawling back to our hovels, our mansions, our coffins.

But some of us aren't.

Some of us are still hunting for something. Down in the closed-off subway tunnels. Up in the mightiest penthouses. Here in the warehouse district. There at the docks, under the docks, around the docks. Always hunting, forever hungry.

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Me, I'm going to give the finger to Sol Invictus, the Ol' Sun, Big Bright Happy Face.

You hear that, sun?

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A Season of Secrets

Part One - Greg Stolze

The magical fool did not observe the niceties, did not show proper respect to the Prince of Chicago, but Maxwell let it pass. He had bigger fish to fry than contorting the thoughts and feelings of some uppity white boy who'd be dead soon. Even if he lived out a man's, what, six-score and ten now? What was the 20th century average, and had it changed in the 21st? Even if he lived out a lifespan, and Maxwell had his doubts, it would still be *dead soon* by the reckoning of an immortal.

"And so we're quit," the magician or wizard or whatever said to the vampire, and didn't bother to keep the smugness out. "Warning you about this wasn't even that difficult, you know. Your rival sends out ripples no matter how subtle he thinks he is."

"Mmm," Maxwell replied, his hand stroking the black fur of the puma lying beside his desk. Probably no good, but every little bit helped.

"Now, for the next thing," the magician began, and Maxwell turned brown, steady eyes on him. No occult power underlay his words, just the strength of authority.

"We've discussed the terms. I understand them. You understand them. Surely you don't need to go over them again?" *Because you're a weak, frightened pussy* went unsaid.

The living man was spared a reply by a knock on the door. Instead he put his hand on thick manila folder. He had been instructed not to open it and he did not.

"Enter," Maxwell said, and in walked Norris the spymaster, flanked by two members of the Ordo Dracul. Maxwell knew one, and knew that while she wouldn't be able to wrest control of his puma from him, or of the boa coiled above the door frame, she could certainly confuse and delay them enough to take them out of the equation. Maxwell didn't even nod in satisfaction, but he thought, *Simplify things when you have the upper hand*. Norris was no fool.

"My lord," Norris said—and like the living man, he was careless with formality, to the point of rudeness—"I have received disturbing news that I hope you can shed light upon." His smile was a reflexive simper, but not a sincere one.

"Mm?"

Norris glanced at the human, who smirked. With an easy hand gesture, Maxwell indicated that the man could hear whatever Norris had to say. Norris assumed, as Maxwell had expected, that this meant the mortal was food and it didn't matter what he learned. *Dead soon*.

"My colleague Bawdry here," he said, indicating the stranger, "has traveled from Memphis, seeking a rogue member of the covenant."

"And you are now presenting him to me, of course."

"Actually, *my lord*, Bawdry has persuasive evidence that the fugitive is here, in your home. I told him that you would never knowingly act in poor faith against the Ordo Dracul, but he furthermore makes the extravagant claim that *you are trying to learn some of the mystical secrets and... capabilities of our order…*"

"Oh, we could go back and forth, couldn't we, Norris?"

The spy runner frowned at the interruption and fiddled with his fingertips. One hand had a handsome manicure; the other, only exposed pads where the nails had been torn out during his living days. He touched one set of fingertips with the other, then switched, as if reassuring himself that nothing had changed. "My Prince?"

"I could feign ignorance, and you could investigate, and gather all who fear or hate me behind the Ordo Dracul and create a stink and a grievance while I played the wronged ruler schemed against and it could all be a big *thing*. Or I could just confess that, just as you've long suspected, I've aged to the point where men are no longer food. No, you— and you and you," he said, nodding at the other Kindred, "are my meat now. This one," jerking a thumb at the one person in the room who was breathing, "is not. In fact, from what my prisoner— no, not a guest, though she's been made comfortable— has told me, I probably need to learn more from your order than I had originally thought."

"So you're converting?" Norris said, eyes alight.

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"No," said the mortal, in the impatient tones of one who wants his importance acknowledged. "He's going to kill you. Or really, I am. These are your reports, right?" He waved the folder. "A little piece of your nastiest self. Your truest self. Are you familiar with the phrase '*creo ignam*'?"

"A willworker." Norris' lip curled. "And a weak one, since I don't have a file on *him*. That's the best ace you could pull out of your hole, 'Prince'? Let's see how it plays against Garret."

At the name, the Prince's right-hand man, his Seneschal, sauntered into the room and stood behind Norris. "He has dirt on me, boss," Garret McLean drawled.

"Garret," Maxwell began. "I understand. All I ask is that you keep out of it."

"I know, friend," Garret said, and with casual strength— almost like a yawn— his arm swung into the head of the woman from Norris' order. She shrieked, and Norris blurred towards the magician, the snake dropped and the puma struck, the magician shouted living words from a dead tongue as Maxwell upended the desk and charged across his office.

Then something *really* unexpected happened.

•••

Persephone Moore was out having a casual hunt and bitch session with Aurora Hatch, and she was happy being "powerful, knowing, experienced" for once. She was happy being the ancilla to Aurora's neonate, to use the antiquated speech of the Kindred, as the two did. They had developed a joke of pronouncing it "*annnncilla*," very dramatically. They were contemplating crashing a bachelor party when Garret McLean strode into the club and casually shoved aside a woman who was just drunk enough to be extremely forward. Cushioned on a chorus of incredulous noises (because the drunk and horny chick had been gorgeous) he bee-lined for Persephone.

"Keep it cool," Moore said to Hatch in a low voice— well, actually a normal speaking voice, but with the cover of music only Aurora could hear it. "Stand your ground, he's not going to hurt us." She'd seen Aurora twitch and stare and was mentally warming up a lecture about why Aurora should go to Elysium, so that she'd be more used to powerful Kindred, but when McLean reached their table and *snarled*, raising a fist as if to strike, Aurora snapped and fled towards the bathroom.

"What the *hell*, Gary?" Persephone stood and glared down at the vampire only she called "Gary." In stocking feet, she'd be two inches taller. With the spike heels, she towered.

"I need you now," he said.

"Oh, Gary, I like you but *as a friend*." The sarcasm was automatic and so was his slap. She blinked, then flushed.

"I am not fucking around, this is a four alarm problem. *He* needs you, I've known him since Solomon was Embraced and I've *never* seen him like this. He needs…" For a moment, Garret looked harried, almost worried, but after nearly a hundred years of never showing fear, his face just couldn't form the look any more. "He needs to be around people he can trust while he gets himself together. So you can do that, or I can tell your childe Aurora there that you were the one what broke her daughter's mind. You're smart and this is simple."

"Lead on."

He took her wrist and, delayed only momentarily by a group of bouncers, led her out to the SUV.

•••

"Who the dead man, yo?" Earth Baines' curiosity was mild and professional.

"His name's Douchey O'Douchebag for all I know," Garret McLean replied. "I got a Crone chick throwing hoodoo on his wallet and keys and library cards. I don't want to know his name, you don't want to know his name, fuckers like these? Their names are like bear traps. You read his social security number one time and his pals will be able to track you to the end of the Earth. Think about the pun there while you plan how to get rid of him."

"How come it's on me?"

"Shit, Baines. You wanted to move up in the world, right? Tired of sucking hind tit? Welcome to the big leagues."

"Big leagues? And this DOA is, what, the world series of trash haulin'?" He wasn't really resisting the job— in fact, he was transferring the plastic-wrapped corpse from SUV to Hyundai trunk as he spoke. He just wanted to show token resistance to the role of piss-boy body hauler.

"No, *this* DOA is a will-worker."

Baines blinked. "Speak English. I don't know what the fuck that means."

Garret gave him a long, level look. "I mean this gent, this dead guy with no blood in him and two big-ass holes in his neck, was a magician. I don't know who he has as his lovely assistant or who's volunteering from the audience but I do know that the balance between us and the wand wigglers is fragile. No one wins if that relationship goes out of whack." Garret slammed the trunk as emphasis. "Now do you understand what you've been entrusted with?"

"Mos def."

Garret groaned.

•••

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"I remember you from Persphone's funeral," Prince Maxwell said.

"Yeah." Bruce Miner— 'Bruise' to his friends— didn't know where to look and didn't know what to do with his hands. He was bulky, inarticulate, and his skin looked like spoiling meat.

"And you were involved with that ruckus Solomon raised in Elysium."

"He killed my *dog*," Miner replied, and something truculent and ominous in his voice made Maxwell look at him sharply.

"You loved that dog a lot, didn't you?" the Prince asked.

Bruise looked away and nodded. When he looked back, he was surprised to see that Maxwell had slumped and was staring at his immaculate loafers.

"It's just one loss after another for us," Maxwell said. "Sacrifice upon sacrifice, and it's hard to tell which hurt more, the ones we choose or the ones we don't get to."

"Yeah. Hey. I'm… I'm sorry about the… this." Bruce gestured vaguely around him.

Maxwell looked up, as if he'd noticed only for the first time that he was sitting in a dusty storage locker with no air conditioning.

"Don't be ridiculous," he said. "Your hospitality is greatly appreciated and I assure you, I will remember your generosity."

"What? Man, don't you, like, have some fancy brownstone?"

"That's where everyone goes when they want to betray me," Maxwell said. "Being unobserved is a tremendous luxury, and one I can rarely procure for myself."

"You just need to learn the hiding mojo, right?" Bruce was confused and his voice was low.

"What's the worst thing you've ever done?" the Prince suddenly asked, his eyes bright and his voice warm with interest. "Tell me."

"Aw gee." Lying, or refusing to answer— these thoughts were unthinkable, in the light of the Prince's gaze. "Well, I killed this child molester once, but the worst thing I ever did was punch my daughter into a coma."

"Oh."

"Yeah." Bruce's voice and posture were perfect grief.

"Did she recover?"

"Someone ghouled her out of it."

"*Mon Dieu*."

Bruce shrugged.

"What's she doing now?"

"I don't know, I… I stay away from her, from my wife. Um, ex-wife, I guess. She got… remarried…"

When Bruce started to cry red, the Prince sat by him and put an arm on his shoulder.

"Fuck," the hideous creature said. "I thought this was over. Y'know? Like I'd moved on."

"If we could move on entirely, it wouldn't mean anything."

"So how 'bout you?" Bruce looked up suddenly. His red eyes were as pitiful as the Prince's were commanding. "What's the worst thing you ever did?"

Maxwell opened his mouth, then closed it. There was no force of supernatural command, but that part within him that longed for justice demanded he repay this sad creature in kind. Moreover, his pride would not let him rob or cheat someone so weak, so transitory, who had still opened his haven (such as it was) to him. So he said, "Promise not to tell?"

"If you won't tell mine."

"Okay." He held out his hand, and when Bruce shook it, he said. "There's a long list. I've betrayed friends, broken oaths, enslaved people in the most horrible of ways… there are murders of course, enough for a graveyard all my own… but the worst thing… the worst thing I ever did, I did tonight."

Then he told it, and Bruce inched away from him despite himself, despite knowing it might offend this powerful Prince, despite knowing that it would do nothing to save him if Maxwell decided to destroy him.

They were silent for a long time, and then Maxwell asked, "Where's Persephone?"

"She went to get you something to drink."

•••

"C'mon, girl, live a little," Persephone said, trying hard to keep her impatience and desperation masked because nothing would unsell a smart and successful businesswoman on coming to "a really fun house party" quicker than stalker's desperation.

G.F. Hannigan was sharp, pretty and educated. They'd met when Persephone was still alive, and G.F. had never drawn the connection between Linda Moore the lawyer and Persphone Moore the… well, G.F. wasn't exactly sure what Persephone did, other than go to art openings and nightclubs and the opera and charity fundraisers. It was an unexamined assumption in her mind that, somehow, Persephone's job was to be fabulous. They'd had interesting conversations about art, music, real estate and the place of a successful businesswoman in Chicago society. They'd shopped together, with G.F. getting sensible heels and Persephone picking up platform shoes that made G.F. laugh out loud.

Persephone always had this aura of danger about her, and G.F. wasn't sure what to do with that. Her instinct was avoidance— caution had made her a winner in the down market. On the other hand, her first name was Gladys and no matter how pretty you are, growing up

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Gladys can make you long for some glamour and excitement in your life. Persephone always twisted the strange, unfocussed dread that accompanied her into awe or intrigue or a joke, a fun scare like Halloween, but way down deep, there was a primal and uneducated part of Gladys' brain screaming that this woman was *death*. And of course, that was why G.F. stayed in Persephone's orbit, to prove that she had overcome her primitive instincts, that she was educated and modern and *in control*.

So G.F. was half relieved and half disappointed when Persephone's phone rang.

"*Mi scusi* for a minute, G.F. I should take this. Hello?"

On the other end of the line, Bruise sounded nervous. "Um, yeah, it's the Prince."

"What about him? You didn't *lose* him, did you?"

"Whaddaya mean…? No, he's here he's just… um… he won't stop laughing. I mean, it's been like five minutes and it's starting to freak me out."

"*Laughing*?" Persephone cut her eyes away to G.F. and tried to reshape her face into amusement, as if someone incredibly witty and well-spoken was telling her a priceless *bon mot*.

"I told him you were getting him someone to drink on and he just… I mean, he's, like, hyperventilating and rolling on the floor. It's like some kind of fit."

"Why don't the two of you meet me at my place?" she asked.

"If you think that's best." Bruce sounded dubious.

"Okay, that'll be great! I think you'll really like G.F. if she doesn't decide to be dowdy and stay home…" Persephone looked away to see the effect of her words, then swore when she realized G.F. was pointing at her watch and backing rapidly towards the door.

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"Yo," Baines said, knocking fists with the amused motherfucker in the parking lot. "'Sup?"

"Just TCB, Earth."

"Takin' care a' bidness?"

"No, The Country's Best." He grinned. He'd been born Alphonse Largo, but these days went by 'Large.' He was six feet tall and a solid 270 pounds, but he looked petite next to Earth Baines, whose do-rag, fat gold chains and FUBU wardrobe did nothing to hide the fact that he had blonde hair, blue eyes, and hawkish Scandinavian cheekbones.

The first time they'd met, Largo and his pack of wolf-men had ripped Baines' sire to chunks and had only spared the big vampire when they heard his name and connected him to a series of cryptic prophecies.

Baines had only heard the first of these prophecies— "The time will come when you may choose to spare Baines," which might well have ended with "Banes," which had another meaning entirely to the other shape-changer who'd been with Large at the time. But as it happened, her tendency to blab had left her dead at the bottom of a New Orleans canal. Now the only remaining member of that pack, Beth, leaned against the seat of her motorcycle and rolled her eyes.

"Tight," Baines said. "Look, I'm in a thing and I was wondering if y'all could stick in a hand. I'm rollin' these days, I can tuck some bank in your paw and I know you're always a buck short."

"I'm listening."

"I got this body I need to dispose of and I mean, like, reduce to nothing. Sounds like someone may be looking for it in with all kinds of spooky mystic shit, so just dumping it in the lake isn't gonna *suffice*, y'know what I'm sayin'?"

"What did you have in mind?" Large's prophecy had tied him to the fate of a man who was 'Neither black nor white, neither living nor dead.'

"I know you all… go places. Like, off the map, am I right?"

"If you think stowing the body somewhere… um, outside… is going to stop anyone with meaningful spiritual resources… hell, it might be *easier* to find…"

"Well, maybe, but what if you ate it first?"

Then came a moment of incredulous silence.

"What if I…?"

"Crap the body out wherever, spread it around, you're on the road to Philly tomorrow morning, right?"

Earth was starting to get desperate. The Kindred he knew who specialized in getting bodies converted into dog, rat, or mouse feces was a racist, had laughed right in Earth's face. His second plan had been to grind the body into mush and mix it in with concrete in some building's foundation, but the first couple blenders he'd tried had jammed and Home Depot had refused to rent him a wood chipper after spotting his driver's license as fake. Moreover, he wasn't sure when the mixers started churning, and if it wasn't getting poured until after sunup, he wasn't going to be on hand to make sure no one noticed the red gunk. Finally, he'd tried to get it underground to Chicago's deep tunnel— he'd heard that it could hold a billion gallons and that anybody dropped into it would be squished to paste and diluted beyond recognition. But after three fruitless hours stumbling through

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shit-encrusted sewers, he'd come up with *this* idea, getting his 'lupine friends' (who, to be more accurate, were more like 'murderous shape-shifting acquaintances') to haul it for him. That would make it Plan D and he was starting to wonder what E might be when Large grabbed him by his lapels and hoisted him onto the hood of the Hyundai. Earth's head slammed back into the windshield and cracked it.

"Do you have *any* idea what you're asking?" he seethed.

"Chill man, yo, chill!" Earth stammered, eyes wide as Large's partner Becky started to circle to the front of the car, her look grim. Then Earth felt Large's hands swelling on him, saw the changer's face getting longer and he opted for Plan D, Sub I. His hand stole into his pocket and emerged with a rather crudely fashioned three-finger ring. Its design celebrated the Cubs' 2008 Division Championship, but that mattered much less than its solid-silver construction. Baines mustered all the strength he could (which was a lot) and slammed it into the side of Large's head.

"AaaahhrrOOOOUG!" Large howled, and Earth would later swear that it set off all the car alarms in the lot. The lycanthrope also reeled back, releasing Earth in order to clutch his head.

Earth could move fast when motivated, and he got the car between himself and the two, then put his hands up.

"Whoa, whoa!" he shouted. "My bad! Chill, get it under control!"

"You son of a bitch," Beth gritted, circling the car. Earth couldn't help noticing that she was wiping drool from her chin. He turned towards her and curled his hands into fists.

"Yo, y'all probably kill me but it will *cost* you, all right? And then the dead wizard be *your* problem."

That gave Beth pause. She glanced at Large, who was struggling to keep his form and his temper controlled. "We'll just tell them the vampires did it."

"Think they'll believe you? After the vampires talk at 'em with the slave-eye turned on?"

She looked from Large to Baines again. "The prophet told me, 'One day you will decide if Earth survives or is destroyed. Show mercy.' Get in your car and drive, dead thing. But if you ever tempt us with man flesh again, all the silver in the world won't save you."

Baines scrambled behind the wheel, thinking *oh shit oh shit oh shit*...

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Maxwell turned a critical eye on the suit coat. "Mmh, it really ought to be let out a bit, but it's better than the next size up."

"I don't need a suit," Bruce mumbled.

"You should *want* one, though. Clothes make the man."

Bruce muttered something. Maxwell heard it.

"I've actually seen a train wreck, and your face really exists on a different sort of aesthetic plane. It's smaller, more poignant, less grandly tragic. It's like comparing a stadium rock concert to a jazz club performance… oh, don't sulk. Where we're going, people won't care about your face. With an off-the-rack suit, you can *just about* make it, as long as your accessories carry more than their weight. How are those shoes?"

"They feel funny," Bruce said, glancing down at his new Italian loafers.

"That's called *comfort*," the Prince offered as a tart reply, then smiled as Persephone came into the store. "My childe! Just in time. Do you think this palette really compliments Mr. Miner here, or is he more of an 'autumn'?"

The sight of the suit stopped her cold.

"Bruce… this isn't exactly his… style…?"

"Inasmuch as it didn't get peeled off a dead hobo's back, you're right, but I think it makes a nice change and it'll help him blend at the Discarded Image."

"Wait, you can't take Bruce to the Image!"

"Can't?" The Prince struck a contemplative pose. "Can't… 'can't'… oh, you mean I 'cannot?' I haven't heard that word applied to me in ages."

Her mouth worked, but no sound came out.

"Why the Image?" she finally asked, as Maxwell flipped out an Amex Black Card with practiced ease and paid for his purchases.

"Why *not* the Image? It's an open Elysium and we're all Kindred."

"Shouldn't you be…" She moved closer and whispered, "...resting?"

"I'm not tired." His eyes glittered with manic energy, then suddenly sharpened to the shrewdness he customarily hid. "And if there's any fallout from this evening, it'll be bandied about there first. So this is, *primus*, a scouting expedition. But *secundus*, if I'm going to be hiding from the public, as Garret suggests, I'll want to conceal my concealment. A well-timed appearance before the talkers and harpies gives me at least a month before any other absence becomes notable to the masses. Moreover— *tertius*— accompanying Mr. Miner makes him an object of interest." He turned to Bruise and said, "Sorry, my man. It's going to be uncomfortable, but I'll make it worth your while."

"I'm not sure…"

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"Trust me," the Prince said, guiding the other two out the door and into the street. "Soon, everyone will wonder what the connection is between you and me, and if you play your cards right it will catapult you to the top of the ladder."

"I never play cards right," Bruce replied.

"Learn. That's what I did."

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The Discarded Image was a hyperbolic combination of style and unfriendliness. The owner had recently remodeled after some unpleasantness, and while the look of chrome and porcelain remained, the shiny-shiny metal was now subtly distorted with curves and swirls and bumps. Its touches of gleaming white and glossy black accented the warped reflections. Reminiscent of a funhouse mirror, if "fun" was replaced with "clinically induced nausea." Plus it was full of dead people.

The first two corpses the unlikely companions spied upon entry were girls who'd died as teens. Their clothes were expensive, too mature for them, what Persephone would have described as "Business Barbie" if she'd been relaxed enough to be snide and judgmental. Each had a Campari with soda sitting untouched in front of her. One had a twist of lemon, and the other had a twist of lime. Lime had her back to the door, so she just kept on talking as the Prince walked in.

"...first thing he grabbed was a jar of grape jam— a *big* one, a three-pound bulk buy special— and he hit her across the back of the head. Well, you know Evangeline's hair, it's a big frizzy mess, and jelly with broken glass didn't…"

"Psst," Lemon whispered. "Behind you."

The pair quieted and turned. The Prince gave no sign of recognizing them and instead went to the bar. "Double Johnny blue for me please, Persephone… Skyy and cran still? Mr. Miner?"

Bruce had been warned not to drink whatever he was given and struggled to think of something high class. "Um… whatcha got for wine?"

The barman blinked slowly. It looked mechanical. "Would sir prefer red or white?"

"How 'bout a Cabernet? Sauvignwhatever?"

"We have a nice 2002 ZD reserve. It's Californian, but…"

Bruce shrugged. "I guess it'll haveta do."

"There is an unspoken, indeed, unconsidered subtext to drink choice here," Maxwell said to him as the dead thing went to get their beverages. "Your drink is emblematic of your identity."

"An' it all just gets thrown away when we leave?"

Maxwell grinned. "I'd never considered that aspect of the metaphor."

"You've chosen the drink of a bold traditionalist," Persephone said. "Red wine here is unsubtle… it says 'I have no time to contemplate my message and whatcha' gonna do about it?' Very in-your-face."

"I just didn't want to look like a fag or a hayseed," Bruce said, resigned.

Maxwell, in the meantime was inclining his head to eavesdrop. The Image had been laid out to inhibit such nosiness, by and large. While the myriad hard surfaces did a fine job reflecting sound waves, they got intentionally crossed and blended and the gentle clink of ice in glass seemed suddenly able to drown out whispers and low voices. Unless, of course, you knew exactly which stool at the bar was positioned before a clear spot, hovering above the counter. A minor miracle of acoustics, one who knew about it could casually lean in and hear clearly, if his ears were sharp. Maxwell's ears were very sharp and, of course, he knew all about that special spot.

A barely perceptible shift of posture and he was spying on arch-gossip Tobias Rieff. Had he been human, the pulse of blood in his own ear canal would have drowned out the words, but for Maxwell? Not a problem.

"...spy is still closeted at the Prince's brownstone, I don't know what Maxwell's doing here. It's possible that Norris left incognito, but why? Where's the stranger he had with him, and his Dragon muscle?"

"I couldn't say," drawled Tobias' companion, a well-coifed woman in the garb of an unusually fashionable librarian. She put the stem of her spectacles between her teeth, a sexy gesture wasted in the Discarded Image. "Norris has been on thin ice since that horrid business with Justine. Perhaps the balance between he and the Prince finally shifted?"

"You mean 'him and the Prince,' dear." She would have blushed if she could, but Rieff continued. "You can't seriously mean to suggest something… permanent?" Rieff was too good to look over at Maxwell, but the woman with him had far less composure. But by the time she looked, Maxwell was clearly turned away from them both.

"Lohhhki," Persephone purred as a leathered young body slouched through the doors. Loki pulled up as the Prince gave him a mild smile.

"Oh. Hey." He blinked, then inclined his head. "My lord."

"Let us dispense with the formalities," the Prince replied. "Everyone else here has." There was an edge— a slender, razor-thin edge— of bitterness underneath his genial tone, and those who caught it felt

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a chill. Tobias made a mental note to do something very nice and very respectful to the Prince, soon. "Join us. What brings you to the Image?"

"Um… I'm actually looking for Baines."

"Young Mr. Earth? Is this official business?"

"I'm not even sure, to be honest", Loki said, standing idly next to their bolted down trio of stools. "He called me asking about… a disposal thing, said it was important and very *hush hush*." His eyes flicked to Bruise. "This isn't really the place…"

"It's fine. Mr. Miner has my trust."

Loki shrugged. "As you will. Baines wasn't real specific, just that it had to be, and I quote, 'maximum gone' and that I ought to call him back. When I called him back it went to message. I don't know where he is now or what he's doing."

"So you came *here*?" Persephone asked.

"I was looking for Stingo," Loki said defensively.

"I believe Mr. Stingo is up in Boystown this evening, but I wouldn't swear to it," Maxwell said, and then the door slammed open hard enough to crack its mirrored glass.

"Solomon," Maxwell said, with a smile.

"Solomon," Miner grated, glaring with hate.

"Is it true?" the priest of the Sanctified demanded, waving papers at the Prince. "Have we clutched a viper to us for so long?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean this!" He flung the papers on the bar. "Garret betrayed us. Decades ago! We always wondered how Old John knew, knew our plans, how he found us… it was McLean! Garret told him everything!"

"My my," Maxwell said, glancing down at the documents. "That was quick."

All around them, there was a quiet chorus of phones flicking open.

"You knew all along," Solomon whispered, staring at the Prince, the man he'd trusted, who had stood by him in his rise to power and who held him tight in the bonds of public blood slavery. "You knew Garret did it."

"I'd hoped to avoid a scene."

Now only the faint sounds of thumbs on keypads, furiously texting.

"But… how could you…?" The minister's voice held a plaintive note that few present would have ever imagined.

"Hey fucker, the look on your face is *priceless*." With that, and a synthetic click, Bruise Miner's cell captured the look of baffled betrayal.

Solomon spun on him, eyes mad and rimmed with blood tears, only to feel Persephone's thin hand encircle the wrist of his rising fist.

"Careful," she cooed. "You really can't afford to break Elysium *again*, can you?"

His head swiveled back to her, then to Bruise, then to the Prince before he wrenched himself free and ran to the door. More phone clicks chased him out, catching his haste, his panic, the arm over his face to hide tears. Within seconds his disgrace was flying across the airwaves to the PDAs of eager and hating undead.

"I can make you all pay," he hissed through a bitter smile. Laughing—a sound without mirth—the High Priest of Longinus backed slowly through the door and then was gone.

"Oh my," the Prince said, turning back to his untouched whiskey. Bruise forgot himself and automatically took a sip of wine, prompting gasps from the Campari girls. Maxwell then raised his own glass in salute and followed suit. Tobias and Persephone were neck and neck behind him, and after them everyone in the Image drank.

"They say we're so stagnant," Maxwell chuckled. "But look how easily things can change."

He drained his glass and started to laugh.

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Life After Dark

You're born, you take shit. You get out in the world, you take more shit. You climb a little higher, you take less shit. Till one day you're up in the rarefied atmosphere and you've forgotten what shit even looks like. Welcome to the layer cake, son.

—*Eddie Temple, Layer Cake*

Go on, then. Picture a cake. The sponge tastes of skin, of salt and sweat and fear. The frosting is butter and blood (pinkish, then). Sugar roses circle the top, each as red as… well, you know. The bottom is beaded, white pearlescent blobs—they call to mind a chain of pearls, broken, or an ivory garter on a porcelain thigh.

The important part, really, is that the cake has tiers.

It has the base. The broad, fat circle. Bigger than all the others. It's where most of the baking materials went. It's the part from which everybody will get their *taste*.

Second tier up, a bit smaller. You start to see the roses, here. The cake gets a little more ornate at this stratum because, hey, not as many people are going to get a bite. Those who do, they're special.

But not as special as those who get to eat the smallest, most refined tier. Third tier, smaller than all the others, and higher up, too. The flavor might be different: better, sweeter, more quality ingredients, some extra panache, some extra ganache. Only a few tongues will taste this sweetness: the bride and groom, maybe. Or the birthday boy. Or the man who will die in a few years because he's old, and because he's old he deserves a taste of refinement.

It's a metaphor, of course. The Danse Macabre—the nocturnal society of the incestuous Damned—is one big three-tier cake. Cut it open and blood runs fresh. Dead fluids from spongy folds. Oh-so-sweet.

A Taste of the Cake

We'll get deeper into it, but here's the initial taste; how the flavor profile shakes out.

The first tier is what we'll think of as the ***neonate*** or ***coterie*** tier. It's where most of the vampires wait. Everything rests upon them. It's sure to be crushing—their backs support the rest of vampire society. They're also the first ones to get eaten. Of course, "eaten" can mean a lot of things amongst the Damned, can't it? It goes well beyond being consumed for one's blood. One's soul might be part of the meal. Or one's influence. Or haven. Or "friends." But you understand the idea: the vampires at this tier are the bottom-feeders and the bottom-fed. The most numerous, and the most ignorant.

Second tier of the bloody cake is the ***ancilla*** or ***city*** tier. It's higher up and it's smaller—the vampires of this stratum look down and see those upon which they stand: the weaker, the more numerous, the cattle. They have a better view from here. The vampires of the first tier are at the ground-level. They see the oil-choked puddles and the car exhaust and the dead bodies. For them, it's all darkness and fog and piss-colored streetlights. But those Damned at the second-tier can see out further. They sit above the dance floor, watching the throng move. They sit above the city, and from the penthouses and rooftops those piss-colored streetlights start to look like twinkling stars of glittering gold. The shadow above them is small, so maybe they think they're alone here. Maybe they think they're top of the pops. They're not.

Because above them yet is the final tier, the third tier, the tier of ***elder*** and ***conspiracy***. The veiled and ancient creatures up here get a view like none other: they can see out over the whole puzzle, can see how it all fits together. They are the rarified tastes, the hidden flavors. They stand on the backs of everybody else, unseen sentinels. They watch the watchers. They tug the puppet strings. Their heads are up above the black clouds, and the only thing they really have to worry about is the heat of the sun melting away everything.

Tiers, Two Ways

Tiers break out the World of Darkness and the Danse Macabre into strata of existence—the vampires at each stratum discover different experiences. They suffer different ills, and claim unique rewards. Of course, this carries over: the vampires confronting different experiences means that, by proxy, the players and Storytellers are confronting different experiences, too.

So, let's say you want to use the tiers. You want to look up and look down and see how the play experience changes when you start fiddling with the knobs. First

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things first, you need to figure out exactly what you want the tiers to *mean*, and that means looking at the tiers in one of two ways.

At Present: Requiem

By and large, **Vampire: The Requiem** *as it stands* has a setting and system that largely reflect the second tier—i.e. the ancilla/city tier. That doesn't mean that all the characters are ancillae, or that everything takes place in the city. But conceptually, that's where the game hovers: *most* of the game's action plays out in the middle. Most of the movers-and-shakers are ancillae. Most of the setting comprises the city to its edges and goes no further beyond those borders. This chapter is about possibility, about breaking out of that mold and offering both Storytellers and players a new variety of play experiences to behold. Vampire fiction and folklore illustrates a wide variety of monstrous engagement, and the tiers aim to provide a down-and-dirty way to conceptualize this into new play styles and story modes for **Requiem**. Don't like it? Scrap it—but we think it'll at the very least give you a few new ways of thinking about the game.

The Encompassing Model

One way to utilize the tier concept in your **Vampire: The Requiem** game is to say, "Okay, the tiers are going to serve as a model of their nocturnal society." In this case, *all* the tiers co-exist in your game. The play experience may hover at one tier, but that doesn't change the fact that you expect all tiers to have some effect on the story and the play experience.

This isn't conceptual. It's a hard and fast map. Neonates are at the bottom, and their unlives are driven nominally by what happens to them as individuals and within their coteries. Ancillae make up the next level, and the city is their playground. A rare few elders wait at the top, and have taken their power level beyond the city, and arguably beyond the physical—their power is something that goes outside the temporal, into the loose and unanchored power stratum of information, personality, blood, boons, banes, and the like. Moving up and down the tiers is okay (and you'll find advice on doing just that in a game later in this chapter). Characters who exist at one tier will still be affected by what happens at other tiers, though they may not know it.

It's not an unreasonable model, and has facsimiles throughout society: think of the way government works in the United States. First tier, you have small town folks and their small town politics (school board, county commissioners). Second tier, you have state politics with people who hold considerably more power and whose power extends over a far greater area. Finally you have the third tier, the federal government, the ones who make big decisions and big changes and could *conceivably* start a war that would destroy us or spend money in such a way that it leaves most of the citizenry penniless—the power here is concentrated, it is deep, and it is all-encompassing. (Though, you could argue that the federal government actually sits at the second tier, and the third tier remains an unseen conspiratorial presence, a New World Order with its withered, greasy finger on the pulse of the entire globe.)

The Exclusive Concept

Here, the tiers are not a map. The nocturnal society of the Damned is *not* scaled into three tiers, because all the tiers do not exist in your game.

You say, as Storyteller or as player, this game is about one tier to the exclusion to the other tiers. So, say you take the first tier (neonate/coterie) and want to use that.

The entire vampiric experience is encapsulated, then, in that one tier. No examples will exist in your game that reveal big movers-and-shakers, or blood-bloated elders pulling puppet-strings. It never gets to that. *All* vampires are ground-level. They're all lost and ignorant and deep in the mire. Think of it like street gangs. Street gangs are generally unconnected to other gangs in other cities (though some tenuous strands connect them in a kind of grim criminal fraternity, but that's not really important). Life as a member of a gang –whether you're freshly inked and initiated or whether you're the big dog in charge of the pack—is still a street-to-street, block-to-block affair. It's about your brothers and your family and taking territory one blood-spattered street corner at a time. It's all street-level, all on-the-ground. It doesn't *go* higher. That's the coterie-only experience. Nobody is in control. No Prince shepherds the sheep. It's *Near Dark* through-and-through: you are your coterie. You eat and fuck and run together. Maybe someone's in charge of your little cabal, and that's fine. But beyond that? Everything is the night-to-night, everything is about the next taste of blood, the next thrill, the next inch carved out of a city block.

Or… maybe you decide to go with the second tier, the ancilla/city tier. No problem. It just means that *all* vampires lurk at that level. While you certainly will find strata within this tier, ultimately it means that you won't have roving gangs of blood-starved neonates just trying to get some answers and some peace (or *a* piece). That doesn't mean you won't have *neonates*, only that those

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new to the Danse Macabre aren't wild-eyed gang thugs disconnected from the larger society. A neonate post-Embrace is shown into the world. He's given a glimpse of the Danse Macabre and made a part of it at the city level. He is given some understanding of the machinations that surround him and, to some degree, control him. The vampires in this game mode can move *within* the tier—they play at clan and covenant politics, they become prisci or Princes or whatever, they are given over to the modes of feudal cruelty, and so forth. But this mode never leaves the tier. The block-to-block doesn't matter. What happens at the city level is everything, even for fresh blood, even for powerful elders (if they exist).

Finally, it's possible you'd rather use the third tier to the exclusion of all the others. It doesn't necessarily mean that *all* the vampire characters will be elders (though it might), but it does mean that all the vampire characters exist as part of a nocturnal society that is global. This society works behind the veil as the puppet-masters not only of their own kind, but of humanity in general. *All* vampires have the potential, then, to have their hands on the strings. Characters don't just control territories or people or businesses. They control institutions. They control entire cities. Hell, they control *ideas*, which is perhaps the most dangerous and most insidious control of all. The third tier offers a game of kings and madmen, of gods and demons (sometimes, literally). If you use neonates or ancillae in this play experience, they're part of the conspiracy. They're servants not to city politics or to their own baser instincts, but instead to the lunatic whims and perverse desires of ancient monsters. Whether they know it or not is debatable.

A quick breakdown—one that will be explored more completely below—works like this:

- A first tier game is a game about the *vampiric experience*. It's a game about feeding, about fleeing, about a scene-by-scene struggle with the Beast. The human has become monster. This game is based very strongly in *emotions*.
- A second tier game is one about *vampiric society*. It's about the grim hierarchies, about predator-and-prey dynamics writ large across a complex societal stratum of night stalkers and bloodsuckers. The monster has become specifically vampire; the human trappings still exist, but it's mostly just a suit the creatures wear. This game is based on *politics*.
- A third tier game is one about *vampiric influence*. At this tier, that influence is obscene and prodigious, playing out across the globe and across great heaving spans of time. The vampire is no longer just a vampire, he has become something truly alien and inscrutable. The humanness is gone, now—if it exists, it's as embers in a fire, fading and untouchable lest they burn the hand (and the hand will extinguish the flame regardless). This game is based on *ideas*.

First Tier: Neonate and Coterie

Hunger is everything. I kick down the door and Petey's close behind me, and it's like we haven't had anything to eat in years, even though it's only been a few nights. The woman screams and runs for the kitchen; the man gets up out of his recliner and thinks he's going to use that beer bottle as a weapon, but he's not. I break his arm. Not because I want to, but because I have to. Because that's what the thing inside needs me to do.

Petey's on the woman, and I'm already doing the Violence Tango with the husband—we have our dance partners, and I dance. His neck is fat, I don't bite there. I grab the broken arm and lift it to my mouth. In the doorway, I see Petey sucking on the woman's tongue as her eyes roll around in their sockets.

We try not to kill them. We manage. This time.

Outside, the hunger continues, but smaller now. But it's everywhere. The city's hungry, too—it's just one big dark mouth, I tell Petey, with the buildings as teeth and as the asphalt as the tongue.

I hear howling, cackling, I hear sirens. The jackals are approaching. They're not as kind as we are, or as we want to be. They're coming for us because we pissed them off two nights ago. I hear the keening wails and the mad laughter and I know that the city's working on an empty stomach, tonight. Like me, the city's always hungry.

Themes

Operating at the first tier, a few themes will potentially come into play. Note that these themes are not necessarily exclusive to one another. Generally in literature, a single theme is present, but in a game like **Vampire: The Requiem**, every session or story can highlight a different theme. These themes work nicely in conjunction with one another.

Theme: You're Fucked

It's true. At this level, you're fucked. The story will likely prove this at every turn. How badly is a vampire at this tier fucked?

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- Ostensibly, your character is weak. Even if he's not technically a neonate, this isn't a tier of big stats and crazy Discipline use. The good news is, most of the other monsters out there are probably similarly low-power, but that doesn't mean they can't gang up and break your character into little bloody bits.
- Being at a lower level of power *and* a lower level of awareness (see "Ignorance Is Not Bliss," below) puts your character at far greater risk from mundane threats. Police? Gang thugs? Bad weather (the blood in a vampire's undying body can freeze if it gets cold enough)? The single vampire isn't strong enough to rule the night. The human herd doesn't need to stampede—a few drunken frat-boys can ruin your character's evening with a thrown bottle or a baseball bat. Trying to drink from the wrong victim, and your character might end up left in a gutter with previously-pilfered blood running out of a hole in his throat or from a bashed-in skull.
- While we'll talk about this in more abstract terms, the fact is, a vampire at this level still has ties—too many ties—to the mortal world. If vampires at this tier don't belong as part of covenants or conspiracies and don't have a well-oiled society to cradle them and protect them (which is really just another way they're fucked, by the by), then they still have to play the human game. If the character isn't slumbering in the sewers during the day, then he'll need a haven. But unless he's fortunate (and he's probably not), havens aren't actually free. Where does a vampire get money for rent or a mortgage? Certainly the vampire has some in-built ability to game the system—criminal endeavors are easier when you have the strength to tear a safe door off its hinges, or a vampire could just do his voodoo (Dominate or Majesty) and coerce a woman's purse off her shoulder the same way he'd coerce blood from her veins, but that has a limit. The vampire at this tier doing those kinds of activities left and right is just scrabbling to keep up; eventually, someone's going to notice. Again, the nocturnal society is not there at this tier. It will not help the vampire. It will not cover up breaches of the Masquerade.
- This is predator-or-prey time. Maybe your character is gaining in power and comprehension of her own unliving state. But the shadows are deep. The streets are labyrinthine. The city is always home to a bigger fish (probably a shark, or a whole school of them).

Theme: A Hunger Like Fire

At higher tiers, vampires are like tumors. They establish themselves and route a blood supply to themselves. There they sit, growing fat and happy, nursing on whatever blood they've got coming to them (meaning, their ghoul servant brings them prey, or they buy up a nightclub that makes for a perfect hunting ground, or they have a herd conditioned to show up on certain nights).

At this lowest tier, though, the neonates are effectively free radicals—unstable compounds looking for a home, stealing to survive, disrupting living cells without much of a plan. No tumor will be formed, because most Damned at this tier can't really manage it for long. Those that do are rare, and while they might sit like spiders in a web, their Skills and depredations pale in comparison to those at higher tiers.

This means that blood is going to be harder to come by. It just is. Without being able to "farm" a blood supply, the hunt is everything, but the hunt is privy to a number of unpredictable complications—a drunk girl leaves the vampire woozy, a bad bite or suspicious action draws

Uh, What Fun Is That?

Playing at this tier sounds awful, doesn't it? Well… it is, in some ways. But that's appropriate, and counter to expected notions, playing a doomed or at least constantly-troubled character can actually be pretty fun, provided you know what your character is in for.

First of all, conflict in stories is important. In life, we avoid conflict, but in fiction, we strive for it. Without conflict, where's the tale? Where's the hook? John McLane in **Die Hard** is interesting because of the trials he's put through, not because he gets off the plane and has a lovely evening with his wife. No—he gets a face full of terrorists and blood and a strained relationship. It's hell at every turn. And we eat it up.

Second, while playing a vampire at this level is a tough scrabble for survival, it doesn't mean the character can't exult in her predatory state. She still has access to Disciplines. She still can take a chest full of bullets and keep on running. She can still seduce some club rat boy or heroin-addled stripper chick in a hotel room. In fact, at this tier, sometimes the vampiric experience is distilled down to that predatory state should the character choose to ride the slippery slope downward—fuck politics, forget the machinations of ancient elders, it's all about *being* a vampire.

And that sounds like fun.

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attention from the police, a feeding attempt in a dark alley turns into a makeshift blood hunt as the coterie that *claims* that alley comes to punish the poacher. And so on, and so forth.

Because the hunt is ever-pressing, it means that vampires at this stage are likely to be always at the edge of hunger. It gnaws. It waits. Hunger for the vampire might be enlivening in a mad way, but it also clouds the judgment, painting everything in that haze of red. Control is harder. Comprehension fails.

Theme: Night to Night, Block to Block

Ever just… wander a city? On foot with maybe a couple bus or subway rides thrown in for good measure? Ever do so *at night*? The city can be huge. Daunting. It offers a tangle of streets and alleys and dead-ends, a mélange of confounding smells (garbage, curry, sex, blood, exhaust), a tapestry of shadows.

To a vampire wandering the city, the streets are a hunting ground—he is hunting, and things are hunting him. Every cross-street is a new territory, and make no mistake, the city here is divvied up into cruel little fiefdoms and domains. The same way that human gangs mark out turf and protect it, vampires do the same. They scratch out hunting grounds and don't take well to poachers.

The Kindred at this tier are mired in the present; an irony given their apparently immortal state. What happens tonight is important. What happens on *this city block* is important. Tonight's about getting fed. Or getting paid. Or getting laid. Tomorrow night is a whole new bag of popcorn. It's hard to execute long-term plans, because the vampire has little context in which to form such plans. Who else is out there? How will his condition adapt and evolve in ways good and bad? Too many variables wait in those long shadows.

Theme: You're Almost Human

This is perhaps the biggest curse of existence at this tier: vampires are *this close* to still being human. Their Requiem might've started two weeks ago or two years, but here, one's human life still lurks nearby as a cruel reminder.

On the one hand, an ignorant and relatively unpowered vampire can't just pick up and leave. He has an apartment the night before he's Embraced, and he has that apartment the night after; why leave it? To go where? A dumpster? The sewers? So, for a time, he remains in that apartment, but it has all the reminders of his human life—pictures of the girlfriend, answering machine messages from his mother, food his body no longer wants, a gas burner that terrifies him like a boogeyman waiting in the closet (*don't turn it on or you'll freak out again*).

On the other hand, the vampire has all those human feelings even after he leaves that apartment behind. It's like an old suit; he can't quite shake that human smell. Drinking blood is delicious, erotic, empowering… but it's also an aberration, a sin, a disease-ridden grotesquerie. Depression sets in when one realizes he'll never see the sun again. He tries to see his girlfriend or his mother and has to leave, lest he sink his canines deep into the meat of his loved ones.

At this tier, every vampire has his Beast. But every vampire also has the opposite: a tiny, human voice within. The Beast wins, certainly. But that doesn't quiet the little voice. The one that warns of guilt, that cries out in pain. The voice is forever accusing.

Theme: Ignorance Is Not Bliss

It's already been said, but the Damned at this tier are fairly unaware of what's really going on. Think about it: you're dragged kicking and screaming into your Requiem. Maybe your sire sticks around. Maybe he runs like a rabid dog into the night. If he sticks around, great—maybe he can provide some insight. Of course, his insight is probably broken. His twisted upbringing will lead to *your* twisted upbringing. He knows little about the history of the Kindred. He doesn't know the myriad facets of a vampiric existence; he just knows enough to get by. Plus, who knows how many false assumptions he's made about the Requiem? He thinks crosses repel vampires because psychosomatically they repel *him*. Any of his false assumptions pass to the childe (*you*).

Now, on the other hand, what happens if he runs off into the night? The result isn't any better, and is likely far worse. You're alone with a physiological and mystical condition that abides by certain rules—rules that are *entirely* unknown to you initially. Oh, sure, you'll figure it out over time. But how many frenzies must you endure? How many terrible burns from sunlight or fire? How many botched feeding attempts? Any of these can lead to you getting knocked into torpor until the sun arrives. Never mind what happens when another pack of hungry vampires (sure, we call this the "coterie" tier, but really, vampires at this level travel in jackal packs) comes upon him. It'd be great if they offered a helping hand and a comforting bit of advice, but c'mon. This is the World of Darkness. These are blood-drunk or blood-starved predators. You're meat to them. Or a punching bag. Or the target of all their rage and humiliations. Even if they're good enough to offer some help, you're back at square one—you're learning what they've learned, which could be distorted through some eternal "whisper down the lane" game.

Point is, nocturnal society does not exist for the vampires at this tier. They aren't brought before a Prince.

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Sanctified priests do not come to them to light the dark path. The Sheriff doesn't clean up their messes. Ignorance isn't bliss.

First Tier Requiem

Below is an exploration of what the setting of **Vampire: The Requiem** looks like when the entire play experience exists at the first tier.

Clans

What might the clans of **Vampire: The Requiem** look like exclusively at this tier? (Note that you'll find more about the clans later in this chapter.)

Daeva

The Daeva at this tier is the supermodel who's gotten a taste of the *real* life, the *real* job; it's not just about smiling pretty and staying thin, oh no. It's about eating and puking, about feeling stares from all sides, about riding the highs and lows offered by the narcissistic rollercoaster of the night-to-night. She wants to eat, fuck and kill *and look good doing it*, but she also knows that this really is a rollercoaster and that she's buckled in and can't get out no matter how much she wants to. She's like the heroin addict chasing the dragon time and time again, always trying to catch the high before getting caught herself.

These Daeva reach out for the social ties that bind, but can rarely manage relationships with more than a few before it all becomes about the backbiting and stake-stabbing and weeping sanguine tears in dark alleys.

They aren't Succubi at this level; they're not in-control enough for that. No, here they become Fiends and Followers, desperate and needy and out-of-control. You'll find them in the art galleries, gathering in dark suits and red dresses toward the back, with trying-too-hard smiles; they're in shantytowns and tent cities as mad ecstatics convinced that their own shallow hallucinations are real-deal prophecies; they gather in cabals of prostitutes so debased, they'll do *anything at all* not for a wad of cash but for a thimbleful of blood.

Gangrel

She sits alone with her dog. She's a bit dirty, but it's not like she's been rolling around in filth or living out of a garbage pile for the last six months; no, it's more that she doesn't seem to care or know why she *should* care. The dog is mangy and lean; she is, too. Both have a hungry stare, like they want to eat but aren't sure if it's the right thing to reach out with open jaws and take the food yet. This is the Gangrel at the first tier.

The wildness is inside the Gangrel at this level, but no comfort level has been reached. She might not even be fully aware of it. The Beast rattles the cage, but it's likely she doesn't even know what that sound *is*, yet. She has some distant sense that The Hunt is a real thing, a living thing that calls to her and asks her to serve it, but she hasn't answered the call of the wildness within.

She hasn't gone that far, and hasn't "self-actualized" her predator's nature, so it'd be a stretch to call her a "Savage" at this tier. Rather, they are Mongrels and Mutts: mixed-breed monsters who still cling to their domestication. They still like the smell of man, or think they do. They still want to do what society tells them, even if a wilder, more distant and ancestral voice is asking that they break the chain, ditch the collar, and run howling into the streets. At this tier, you'll find the Gangrel slowly receding from the world: a pack of hunters pulling away from the cities and suburbs and trying to figure out a way to live off the land (or the blood that the land offers); a gang of pissed-off kids wandering the streets with pit bulls and black cats following close behind; a band of wild-eyed thrill-junkies chasing the next rush because they know they're tough and the pain helps them ignore what they're becoming.

Mekhet

The wallflower, the one you don't notice, that's the first-tier Mekhet. He doesn't want anyone to notice him, because he doesn't even know what he *is* anymore. Is he human? Is he monster? Why does he feel so goddamn *hollow* inside? He's mired in thought. His eyes are searching things both seen and unseen, internal and external. He's judging everybody he lays eyes upon. He's judging himself. He's judging his chances of getting a taste of blood, of killing that girl in the corner, of *rescuing* that girl in the corner, of starting a fire and getting out before it consumes him (and maybe it's okay if it doesn't). The Mekhet is conflicted. His internal compass is spinning wildly.

Mekhet of other tiers, they maybe have it more figured out—they have philosophical bents, they have *ideas* that drive them, cults that support them. Not here. Here they're still feeling along the dark well with naught but a flickering flashlight to guide them. They're comfortable with the fact that they might not be human; what makes them uncomfortable is simply not knowing.

They're not Shadows. Not yet. Shadows are complete. Shadows are full-on dark. At this tier, they are merely Shades and Specters, like human ghosts who are not-yet-complete, not-yet-certain of the world in which they walk. Is it the world of the living, or the world of the dead? You might find them nesting beneath university libraries;

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bolting down the street in anarchic mobs, throwing bricks through department store and chain restaurant windows; or gathering in mean little thief-gangs, stealing whatever isn't bolted down in an effort to either distract them from what they don't know or to help fill in the dark spaces and meandering gaps of what they *do* know.

Nosferatu

You've seen him, and you feel bad for him, *and* you're scared of him at the same time. Something's not right about him. His eyes are too big. He has a *smell*. Maybe he's too tall, or his fingers too long and thin (like spider legs), or he just has a mean and bitter look on his face like someone duct-taped roadkill to his upper lip and he can't stop smelling it. This Nosferatu's not full-on fucked-up, not yet, not at this tier. He's not a walking corpse with a skull nose and worms crawling out of his tongue. But he's off. Off-kilter, off-course, with an off-odor. We all went to high school with him. Or worked a job. Or saw him in line behind us at the Mickey D's. He stands apart, and we try to watch him without him *noticing* that we're watching him.

The Nosferatu here is a creature apart. He's not the bogeyman; he doesn't have that sense of understanding or purpose, yet. He's hungry for blood, but equally hungry to find a place for himself because nobody will have him.

At the first tier, the Nosferatu cannot be the Haunt. Here they are Bugs and Worms: too low and too strange to belong to this world, haunting society not the way a ghost might, but the way a fly or a centipede could. These are the Nosferatu of the first tier: the chattering trio of seemingly schizoid homeless, their beards and wigs kinked up with dried blood; the pack of freak-show contortionists deciding that it's better to scare the rubes and straights rather than belong to them; the despairing wanderers who will do anything to try once more to fit back in with the humans they once knew.

Ventrue

The businessman who stumbles out of the bar at three A.M., his tie askew, his jacket forgotten on a stool, a lost and penitent gaze on his face? That's the Ventrue at this tier. He doesn't know what the fuck's going on. He's drunk—but not on alcohol, you can tell by the blotted beads of red on his too-starched collar—and doesn't want to be anymore. He knows he's different now and he can't stand it. He still wants to show up for work. He doesn't want to eat the whispers of the rats in the gutter or talk to goddamn pigeons or suck on the carotid artery of that trashy girl at the end of the bar, but he's going to, and he hates it.

At this tier, the Ventrue are the ones who most want to be human, but they're also the ones who have the greatest struggle because they're *hungry*—for blood, for power over those near them, to belong, whatever.

They aren't Lords at this level. They're Lads and Cads. You'll find them in roving good-time cadres of wild-eyed stockbrokers; in trailer parks fortified like castles; in press-gangs of callous country club wannabes with blood-caked golf clubs and hungry looks, each wondering silently, *have I gone too far?* but never speaking it aloud for fear of what the others might think.

Covenants

The covenants at first tier aren't really that; rather, think of them more like "cults." They're expressly local, and do not carry past the borders of the city. In some cases, they might not even carry past the lines separating one neighborhood from the next.

The Carthian Movement (The Movement)

If anyone is going to attempt to carry a first tier nocturnal society into the second tier, it's the Carthians—though, one wonders, would they refer to themselves as Carthians? A bit lofty, isn't it? Perhaps they'd think of themselves only as "The Movement," then.

Whatever they call themselves, the point remains the same: these will be the vampires that want to ascribe some kind of meaning, some manner of human hierarchy, to the city's Damned. They see a city of monsters and madmen, of viciousness and victimization. These Damned will gather in secret meetings (a boiler room at a local high school, access tunnels beneath a parking garage, the archives of a library) in an effort to gain some kind of solidarity, to move the local vampire population beyond the tribal.

What stops them? Other vampires, for one. But more importantly, themselves. Remember, at this stage, the Damned don't really even know what they are. They're lost, they're confused, they're hungry. They haven't developed the internal fortitude to quiet both the Beast and the Man within; the moral nature of such creatures is a wildly bouncing see-saw, flinging between callous turpitudes and desperate grabs for compassion and sanity. A group composed of such uncertain monsters is sure to encounter gruff turbulence, and is likely to self-destruct. Ah, but there lies the power of the Movement at the first tier: they can always bring in new members who reach for sanity, forever churning through the ideologies of the hungry Damned.

The Circle of the Crone (The Circle)

The Circle of the Crone is already a loose confederation of cults in **Vampire: The Requiem**, so what's the difference between that and what you'd ideally create with a first tier

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frame of reference? Easy. Lose the "loose confederation" part—it's now just one cult in the city. It's a handful of Damned—half-a-dozen to a dozen—who err on the side of Beast rather than man. Whereas the Movement is certain that some kind of humanity can be forged by the city's Damned, the Circle will instead mythologize the monstrous whims within.

Do they necessarily put a Crone figure front and center? Maybe, maybe not. Depends on how this cult reaches the idea that it's more than just a handful of hungry vampires and is instead a cabal of creatures with mythic underpinnings. Reading up on vampire lore, they might end up reading about the Lamia, who is arguably a crone figure, and they might go from *strega* to *strix* to "owl" to "Lilitu" to "Lilith." Then again, they might instead adopt a more generalized approach, seeing that religions throughout time have often necessitated blood sacrifice, or that sometimes the idea of "god" is fairly analogous to the idea of "monster" (or at least the idea that gods often act monstrous, or that monsters can sometimes be born of the gods), which takes the notion of the Crone out of the picture entirely.

It's safe to assume that whatever this cult does, they make it up as they go: they do not have a long-standing liturgy codified by prior cults. All they're really doing is ascribing religious meaning—some chants, some religious tools, some lofty sacred notions—to the many acts of vampirism (feeding, Embracing, enthralling mortals, etc.). They find a god or goddess. They spill blood on an altar, which might be a stone bench at the park or a sideboard bar table covered in crimson linens. They invoke names. They pray. They pretend their acts are divinely sanctioned as they open a man's throat and wet their ceremonial daggers in the red cascade.

It's possible one of them really *is* having divine visions. Maybe they're real, or maybe he just has a habit of taking blood from those kids at the park who are always dropping acid and eating 'shrooms. That central figure is likely in the same vein as a cult leader: a Svengali who is happy to love bomb those lesser vampires who gather around him. (Love bombing is, in short, a cult technique whereupon the cult heaps love and rewards upon a novitiate *until* the novitiate breaks the rules in even the slightest way. Break a rule, and all that love is immediately withdrawn—usually along with food, shelter, and sleep. It's a simple but effective brainwashing technique.)

THE INVICTUS (THE ESTATE)

No feudal system, here. And the term "The Invictus" probably is too hoity-toity for the night-to-night; so too with the "First Estate." Rather, they think of themselves as "The Estate."

What are they? Assuming that the Danse Macabre gladly takes prince and pauper alike, it's a loose cabal of trust-fund monsters, yuppie fangs, corporate head-hunters, and other creatures of privilege. Feudality doesn't likely figure into it, yet; their numbers probably don't support that system of vassalage. Rather, think of them like a gang of golf buddies or bar-room brokers. It's a gaggle of Patrick Batemans from *American Psycho*: nice pants, clean jackets, empty relationships, the finest finery. Maybe a little Huey Lewis on the radio? Of course, no matter how nicely they dress, no matter how pristine the lifestyle, the monster waits beneath the surface, drawn out whenever the competition gets thick. Just as Patrick Bateman screams inside when someone has a nicer business card than he does, so it is with the callous fiends of the Estate. They're an incestuous, self-congratulatory cabal, sure; but they're also violently in competition with one another.

That, then, is the defining trait of this covenant at the first tier: *competition*. Everything is a game of one-ups. Sometimes it's about the shallow, sure: a nicer pen, a better day at the markets, the newest cell phone. Other times, it's far deeper and far worse: who fed first, who fed worst, who hid the bodies, who took home the prettiest corpse?

They exalt selfishness. They make competition a blood-sport. They are the roots of an economic recession laid bare. They are power-hungry suits with needled fangs.

THE LANCEA SANCTUM (THE HAVEN)

Looking back through history, you'll see that the earliest days of Christianity is carried on the backs of various cults. Before the First Council of Nicaea, that's what you get: various disparate groups of Christ worshippers trying to figure out their new religion. It was a struggle for the survival of the fittest, at least regarding the Christ meme: some ideas survived, some didn't.

The Lancea Sanctum at the first tier is exactly that (and if you have **Requiem For Rome**, you'll see that reflected there). As with the other covenants at this level, the name "Lancea Sanctum" is probably too *elegant* a term for a cult of God-head vampires, so you might go with the "Sanctum," or, to use a word with a loaded meaning within the society of the Damned, the "Haven."

What you have at this tier is probably a group of vampires who are trying to find the meaning in what they've become, and are reaching for the spiritual and mythological to answer that question—like the Circle, they've found an answer, but that answer is in the patriarchal monotheistic religions (Christianity, most likely).

On the one hand, you might have a group who is simply hoping to excuse their dark urges by assuming that God created everything, even down to the lowliest parasite, so surely he created the vampire, too, which makes it all okay.

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On the other hand, you could have a small cult who will rewrite old dogma to not only include vampires into the paradigm, but also to give themselves a new means of salvation (since "die and live together in Heaven" isn't properly viable for theoretically eternal beings).

The one angle is more selfish than the other, of course—the first is an excuse for wanton parasitism, the second is a reach for compassion beyond the monstrousness. Honestly, most probably net out somewhere in-between. Some of the cult members will see this as a chance for forgiveness; they know they're going to do bad things because, like addicts, they are driven to those bad things by their nature. Others will use forgiveness as an excuse to do whatever the hell they damn well please ("Forgive me father, for I have exsanguinated a prostitute and tasted her syphilis upon my lips, and I left her body for my buddies to deal with, amen").

Another question will be: Catholic or Protestant? Catholic is certainly the primary mode of the current Lancea Sanctum, what with all the rigmarole and ritual. But you might want to dial down the pomp and circumstance when using the first-tier "Haven," and go with a group of pseudo-Baptists—they gather in church basements, have prayer circles, group-think new psalms, and try to puzzle out their natures by talking directly to God.

Ordo Dracul (The Order)

Forget all that pseudo-Victorian science. Forget the Coils, forget the Dragon's Tail or any of that Dracula-business. This isn't the Ordo Dracul; it's just the "Order."

They're like a skull-and-bones society, a local fraternity of Damned who just want to know what the fuck they are. It's not a moral conundrum. It's scientific and supernatural; *what are we?* Limits exist to their condition, and they seek to find them. They push themselves. They experiment. How hard is it to stay up during the day? What happens when the sunlight touches a hand ("Not *my* hand," the vampire said). Can they Embrace a weeks-dead corpse? This is the beginning of a legacy, not the middle or end of one.

You'll find this group as a cult of surgeons, scientists, occultists, and academics. Certainly some want to figure out the limits to their condition for power, but for the most part, it's a genuine exploration of what it means to be biologically and supernaturally a vampire. It can go sour pretty fast, of course: pushing oneself to certain limits is sure to invoke frenzy, or even drive one mad (because, frankly, being a vampire is hard enough without all this "pushing the envelope" business). But even those results are notable, and worth studying, aren't they?

Rule Shifts

What follows are a handful of optional mechanical changes you might want to make to the game in order to reflect the first-tier in the game's systems. Again, they're optional, and can be used or discarded as you see fit (or even change them story to story). They aren't exclusive and do not need to be used in conjunction, but you may want to use a number of these as opposed to merely selecting one.

- Humanity is easier to lose. The Damned do not have a set of Traditions in place, nor do they offer up a cogent and connected nocturnal society, and so the characters have no examples of the "slippery slope" in action. All degeneration rolls suffer -1 die automatically.
- Humanity is easier to gain (and this can be paired with the above optional rule to reflect a more vibrant but unstable moral condition): it's now new dots x 2 to regain lost Humanity.
- It's now easier to frenzy: -3 to all Resolve + Composure rolls.
- Frenzy doesn't last long: as many turns as equals 10 minus the character's Humanity score. (Paired with the rule immediately above, this creates a condition by which mad tempers flare easily, but are also swiftly quenched—more of an explosion than a long-burning conflagration.)
- Discipline rolls no longer allow the Discipline dots to enter the dice pool (e.g., Dominate •, "Command," would now have a dice pool of only Intelligence + Intimidation).
- The character cannot add Blood Potency to any resistance rolls.
- Players can create their own clan strength/weakness pairings: choose one strength from any clan, choose one weakness from any clan, and pair them together. This infers that "clan" is not a meaningful identifier.
- Bullets do lethal damage, as per normal mortals. This attempts to bolster a more dangerous game where vampires are—at least biologically—a *little bit* closer to being human. (Besides, a bullet might mushroom inside the body, or break apart and bounce around breaking bones and disrupting dead organs. It's on par with a blade cut, or worse.)
- Vampire claws and fangs always do aggravated damage. This also goes to create a more dangerous and unstable environment for the Damned.
- Resilience is no longer necessary to exist unharmed in sunlight; the vampire has a number of turns equal to his Humanity score.

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Second Tier: Ancilla and City

We're at the edge, tonight. The periphery. The highway where the city limits end (definitely not where they begin, not from our perspective).

"Miss," Harcourt says, "they're here."

And they are. A red sedan slides up under the cone of streetlight, and the trunk pops. A Middle Eastern fellow with dark eyes and a braided beard steps out, adjusts his suit, then walks to the trunk and flags us over.

"Miss Berlin offers you this," he says, sweeping his arms in a game-show gesture. In the trunk, I see two young girls. Early 20s, probably. Each in skimpy pajamas, yet still wearing mascara (I know because it's forming greasy tracks down their teary cheeks).

"This is just the sample," I say. It has to be.

"Of course. We can offer you a dozen more like this. They will make lovely guests for your party."

"Salon," I correct.

"Of course. Is this acceptable, Miss Quinn? Miss Berlin offers her most serious apologies, again; sometimes, her worst urges are spoken aloud. A curse of your kind, a frailty she hopes will be forgiven."

I twist my lips into a sneer. "I have caged my baser instincts, and I entreat her to do the same, lest she find the whole ladder come crashing down on her pigtailed head. Remind her that I have the harpies in my pocket, that the Sheriff is my childe, and that the few times I have let my… baser instincts out to play, we had to burn the house down just to rid ourselves of all the sticky blood and drying skin. Will you tell her?"

The man nods, his hands trembling.

"Good. Leave these two. I'll let my friends have a sample."

Themes

What follows are a handful of themes potentially present in a second tier **Requiem** game. Remember: you don't need to rely on just one. Mix and match. It's your game.

Theme: The Costume of Humanity Matters

The vampires at this tier are doing a dance… whirling this way and that, moving in step to old music that begs to be forgotten. See, at this tier, vampires are what they are, which is monsters. They're sin-driven blood addicts whose human instincts are lost beneath a surging tide of beastly hungers. Whereas the vampires of the first tier still have that mitigating human voice, the vampires of the second tier *want* to have that voice, but for the most part, don't.

So they pretend.

They pretend so well, in fact, that they sometimes convince themselves of their "humanity," but that's really like you donning a Halloween mask and staring in the mirror long enough to believe it to be your true face—it doesn't make it any more real, but *reality* and *fact* needn't ever intertwine.

The human voice within is just an old echo for the vampires at this tier. (You could suggest that this is represented by the Humanity score, which goes back to the costume metaphor: as the vampire sheds those tattered pieces of the old costume, he similarly sheds dots in Humanity; this in turn brings him closer to a state of "true" vampirism, where Beast and Hunger and Blood are the only things that matter.) Again, the vampire may very well have convinced himself that this voice isn't an echo, but a fresh reminder of an internal human compass. Or, maybe he mimics having that voice so others will notice. The Damned can go quite a long time playing at this illusion—some go for months, others for decades. Eventually, though, the echo grows faint. It stops repeating. The creature starts to slide toward that yawning mouth, that hungry shadow. Maybe he tries to clamber back to a more comfortable illusion. Or maybe he just allows the controlled fall downward (at which point you could say that the vampire either retracts to the first tier, where it's all just night-to-night hungers and hunting, or ascends to the third tier, where he embraces a new monstrous mindset, so to speak).

Theme: And Don't Forget Humanity's Trappings

Why is it, then, that vampires gather in their nocturnal society? Why do they establish Byzantine rules that must be followed on the threat of castigation or death-by-rooftop-sunrise? Why do they gather in catty salons, or go to nightclubs to watch the hot new DJ, or set areas of the city as strange places-of-refuge? They put themselves in contact with humans all the time—blood doll sycophants, adoring herds, ghoul advisors. They have *meetings*, for God's sake, meetings that might look like boardroom presentations or Church sermons.

Again: *why*? What's the purpose? The purpose is twofold.

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First, it's confirming and congratulatory. The internal illusion held up by vampires at this tier—"Oh, I'm still human, or at least *human-ish*"—is far easier to keep when everybody else is keeping it, too. A Prince might be complimented on the blush he brings to his cheeks. A Harpy mocks another for the dress she wears. A Sheriff punishes law-breakers. All of this helps to reinforce the illusion.

Second, it's survival. The vampires have convinced themselves (often subconsciously) that humanity might be a mumbling, shuffling herd of cattle, but a spooked herd stampedes and crushes the lofty men sitting high on their horses. This is true, to a point—vampires at the first tier are far more entrenched in the nightly race to survive. Then again, it's also false to another point—vampires who ascend to the third tier, who become something *beyond* the base and the vile, who climb the ladder and become more like mad blood-hungry gods (or at least the children of gods)… well, they survive just fine without the trappings of humanity, don't they? It's all a matter of adaptation. At the second tier, this mode of adaptation is miming humanity's larger organization—the dances, the hierarchies, the laws, the faiths.

Ah, but there's the rub: once more, this is just a mask, and once more, the mask cracks. They play at humanity's trappings, but one needn't look too hard to see that it's just monsters. At the boardroom meeting, they pass around a carafe of warmed blood. In the pews and at the pulpit, the faith offered comes in a cup held beneath the neck of a bound sinner, his arterial life dribbling into the chalice with the murmuring burble of a water fountain. One Harpy comments on another's dress, and the next night the insulting maven is found atop a tractor-trailer, a wooden stake and a handful of chains binding nothing but a pile of smeary ash and assorted expensive jewelry.

That's really what the Danse Macabre is—a dance of death, the dead monsters playing at being alive. The weave and weft of the nocturnal society of undead monsters is really best emblemized by the second tier.

This is not how humans behave.

Second Tier Requiem

Since we're suggesting that the game as it's written already—meaning, the game you find in the **Vampire: The Requiem** book—is roughly analogous to the second tier. The game focuses largely on the city-wide setting, and deals most prominently with a nocturnal society populated by ancillae. As such, it'd be redundant to offer clan- and covenant-based information, since you can just open your **Requiem** book for that very thing.

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Rule Shifts

The rules in the **Vampire: The Requiem** game already reflect what is ultimately a "second-tier" reality, as noted, but you may still want to hammer home the idea of a city-wide ancilla-based tier with some mechanical tweaks. These are a few optional rules that can be used in conjunction with one another, alone, or not at all.

- Vampire society is strengthening, so belonging to that nocturnal society is equally strengthening. Those who belong to the society in some fashion can take an experience point cost break on buying Humanity equal to dots possessed in the Status Merit (maximum of five).
- Alternately, buying Humanity isn't cheaper, but resisting degeneration is—the vampire gains bonus dice to degeneration rolls equal to half of her Status points (rounded down, maximum of +2).
- Or, that same bonus listed above (half Status, rounded down, max +2) can be applied to rolls made to resist frenzy (the idea being that fear of public shame in one's social circles is enough to tamp down the Beast for a time).
- Characters created at ancilla level could start out with Blood Potency 3 and 75 experience points.
- Given the strength of the bonds holding together nocturnal society (those bonds being the only thing that keeps nocturnal society tumbling into a first tier representation of wandering blood-hungry monsters), you might want to make the rules "Taste of Family" and "Blood Sympathy" automatically successful without a roll (they can be found on p. 163, **Vampire: The Requiem**).

Third Tier: Elder and Conspiracy

I eat his marrow while he's still alive. His leg is stripped bare of meat and blood by this point, and I suck at the femur like a human child with a lollipop. The marrow tastes of sweet jelly, fatty and rich, but it's so much deeper than that. I can taste an injury from his youth—he fell out of a tree, I believe. I can taste the fear in him; not the fear he has right now, which is certainly most prodigious, but the fear that drives him, the many-handed thing that reaches for him any time he closes his eyes, a thing with his father's face and leering stare. I can taste his fear of flying, and his fear of rejection.

I have dressed him in an orange jumpsuit because it delights me.

I tell him, "Senator, you have disappointed me," and I list the many ways. "How dare you vote to close this place?" I ask him. The fluorescents buzz above us like flies. The jail cells—walls of plastic glass, no longer the iron bars I expect—reveal men watching this all unfold, me sitting cross-legged on the floor, noisily siphoning a United States senator's marrow from his broken leg bone.

This place, this black prison, has long been where I bring my friends to feed. Some of them live here (so to speak), in the rock tunnels and in the walls. This is where we come to discuss how the world will change, how men will die and how children will live.

"I'm going to have to call in a lot of favors to make this work," I tell him, but I don't think he hears me because now I think it's gotten too much and he's dying. I explain to him that it's okay, the world has many senators and dictators and scientists, and if he won't help me and my friends, someone surely will.

Themes

What follows is a look at the themes present at the third tier, the tier of elders and conspiracies. As noted, these are not exclusive to one another, and can easily be used in conjunction with one another.

Theme: You Are So Far From Human

Vampires at the first tier are ostensibly still human, or at least still maintain aspects of humanity. The struggle of monster versus man is implicit and strong at that tier. At the second tier, the vampire moves away from human *feelings*, perhaps, but still mimics a lot of human society. They gather in grim bureaucracies, hold political offices, reap money as well as blood—they still gambol about amidst the trappings of the human world.

The vampires at this tier are no longer beholden to acting human. They are monsters, and so they exalt their monstrousness. Humans have limited reach. They have a weak grasp of power, *true* power. Humanity's like a flock of birds—ever notice how birds in a flock always stay near to one another? Humans go the way of other humans.

Gods, on the other hands, do whatever the fuck they want. And that's who vampires are at this level. Gods. Or aliens. Or nightmares. At least, that's how they see themselves. If they act human, it's just to get what they want—when they have it, they drop the costume and the monster emerges. Their ideas are no longer cogent. Both the vampiric needs and the greatly expanded history contained in the vampire's mind break the mold; they no longer *think* on a human level. It doesn't mean they're

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smarter, exactly, only that they're operating on a different axis of thought. (A good way to look at it might be—what if you gave a tapeworm a human-level intelligence? Or a shark, or a wolf?) They're like giant ids and egos without the mitigating moralizing factor of the superego. Vampires at this tier—even neonates—are basically driven on a reptilian pleasure principle. Their ego seeks only to feed the id: cunning plans and alien blueprints come together simply to provide delight and sensation to their dead minds and bodies.

Theme: You Are The Secret Masters

As discussed, vampires in this mode of play are old and strange and very powerful; they are ancient creatures who are equal parts blood addict and control freak with powers that allow them to twist mortal minds to their whims. Why *wouldn't* these alien-minded bloodsuckers attempt to play one big chess game with the world around them?

In **Vampire: The Requiem**, for the most part a vampire's influence is local and concealed. Few vampires get too ostentatious with their reach, because overreaching so often leads to a breach of the Masquerade—pride goeth before a fall, Icarus' wings melt when he flies too close to the sun, and so forth.

In this theme, that's out the windows. Vampires *are* ostentatious creatures by their very nature. They are dead, and yet they walk. They can make loving siblings turn on one another with silverware from the dinner table. They can burn blood in the hot channels of their dead veins and as a result pick up a car or tear a door off a bank safe. Why *not* be ostentatious? Why *not* overreach? At this tier in particular, vampires are mad narcissists, ego-driven kings and gods.

Hence, they become humanity's secret masters. Hell, they *have* been for centuries, even millennia.

Why? Well—what's the fun in just tweaking the head of the mayor's aide? Go big or go home: get the mayor himself. Or a senator. Or a pharmaceutical CEO. Find all the president's advisors and circle the wagons with ruined minds. Build an army of deranged gang thugs or club kids and march them against your enemies on the dark streets at midnight. Because vampires at this tier are so much more… *grandiose* in their reach, they are able to fetter puppet strings to a whole host of elements within the world. Fuck with bank stock? Toy with—or outright manipulate—political elections? Release a plague and see what happens?

Why do this? Isn't it risky? Yes. Of course it's risky. At any point the herd could catch the predator's scent and turn to run, or turn to stampede. But that's *part of the charm*. Vampires in so many ways are self-loving *and* self-hating. At this tier, the Damned molest the world because it pleases them, but also because it has that precious chance to snap back and take off their heads. Huge reward, but huge risk. The double-edged sword is a beloved concept amongst the vampires of this tier, even if they don't consciously realize it.

Theme: Fuck Local

Same idea applies here—the vampire has a theoretically powerful reach, but in **Vampire: The Requiem**, that reach is largely kept local. A vampire's home is his city—it's equal parts prison and sandbox, and that's where the creature nests and invokes his will.

Well, forget that. The vampires at the conspiracy tier recognize that they have a far longer arm, and as mentioned, they're ego-fed nightmares with a thick, red narcissistic streak. Hence, they reach far beyond the city limits.

How? To where? Why? Let's reason it out. Humanity is mobile. People aren't kept to their own city limits anymore, and vampires are more than a little like parasites… so, wherever people go, vampires go. Or, at least, the influence of vampires.

The vampire knows of a shipping boat captain, or a cruise ship captain. He breaks down that man's mind. The vampire nestles a seed of his own power within that now-broken mind, so wherever the boat captain goes, the vampire goes by proxy. That captain can now do all manner of things for the vampire, things that are in no way limited by the city's borders. The captain can carry contraband. He can bring in blood slaves. He can kidnap people off his boat (ever wonder why *so many* people go missing off of cruise ships?) and provide them to the vampire. He can pollute the waters, he can crash his boat into another, he can establish a mad, floating playground for monsters way out in international waters.

Take that same idea and apply it to an emissary from another country. Or a major banking head. Or an up-and-coming political celebrity. This is *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* type of stuff, in a way—the vampire hooks his string to the minds of many, and they go out and are capable of doing the vampire's will. That's how they become the world's secret masters.

Theme: The Individual Is King

At the first tier, coterie is key. That's all a vampire has is himself and his coterie, and if he wants to survive, well, that's probably the only way to do it. Alone equals death, so to speak. The vampire has his extended family or pack or cabal—however you think of it, that's what comprises his safe existence.

At the second tier, the entire city structure becomes a kind of vampiric super-organism. The vampires define themselves by their place in that blood-sucking

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hierarchy—are you someone's slave, or are you someone's Prince? Are you a lay worshipper, or do you lead the city in a predator's prayer?

At the third tier, the vampires are above this structure. That doesn't mean they don't necessarily gather in coteries or that the city doesn't have a nocturnal society of Damned. It only means that the vampire is never *truly* a part of it. He goes through the motions, but really, at this tier vampire society is one composed solely of individuals. They work together as long as their selfish orbits intersect, and that's it. Sure, the vampires of the second tier *think* of themselves as selfish individuals, ultimately they still can't help but be married to the hierarchies and conventions of their own self-made society.

These vampires are not bound in that way. Yes, you have the notion of a "conspiracy," meaning a cabal (big or small) of third-tier vampires who extend control over major elements within the world—a star chamber presiding over the banking industry, an assassin's guild changing the world one swipe of the straight razor at a time, a global network of monsters televising atrocities on a concealed frequency. And yet, the conspiracies are only formed out of individuals whose needs and desires intersect. They still operate as individuals, and that may create a kind of callous push-and-pull within these conspiracies—some might even say this is part of why they *join* such conspiracies. It's a competition of sorts: who will stab whom in the back with a sharpened stake? Who will steal the other's ghouls? Who will clip puppet strings from the shadows, secretly working against the conspiracy simply for the delight of doing so? Plus, given that vampires are so often secretly self-hating (or at least self-destructive) it makes sense that they'd step into an arena where they're almost guaranteed of having to suffer the slings and arrows of hidden betrayers.

Theme: It's One Big Pyramid Scheme

Two things. First, one of the key conventions of noir as well as the conspiracy thrillers of the 1970s is that the conspiracy is effectively build of an invisible pyramid. Every time you think you've found the top, you haven't—keep climbing, because the conspiracy goes far higher than you'd think. And it always starts low, too—your wife, your business partner. By the end, it's all the way to a senator or president or the entire Catholic Church.

Second, consider pyramid schemes. The idea of a pyramid scheme is that a person gets three people to work for him, and they each get three people to work for them, and so on down the line, but everything trickles *up*, not down. The guy at the top of the pyramid gets a cut of everything. The lower you are, the less you get.

The pyramid is thus the structure of the conspiracy at this tier. The elders—or those beyond the elders, the most truly ancient Methuselahs—sit fat and mad at the top, and everybody else is beneath them. Everything is tithed up; nothing tithes down. It doesn't mean that the players will necessarily be controlling characters at the top (though that's certainly a compelling option, especially when they discover that even at the pinnacle there always exists a bigger and faster predator), but it does mean that all characters will be a part of this. Even those that fancy themselves outside the scheme are somehow roped into it, or have been unknowingly a part of it all along.

Third Tier Requiem

If you want to take the setting and mechanics of **Vampire: The Requiem** and dial the knob up so high that it snaps off, you'll want to read on. We'll provide you with some ways to tweak the setting so that the vampires present are true nightmares, characters that act as demi-gods with deep, undying hungers.

Clans

The vampires of the third tier aren't monsters the way that a mad dog is a monster, or the way that a spree killer driven by his rage is a monster. They've gone well-past that point. These fiends are the Hannibal Lecter type; elevated, strange, unknowable. These aren't wild, hungry *draugr*. They're calculating architects with alien outlooks and only the barest shreds of humanity left whispering in the wind. So, what do members of the individual clans look like when used at this upper echelon? (Note that you'll find more about the clans later in this chapter.)

Daeva

Strip a character bare of everything but its base desires (meaning, its Vice) and you have the Daeva at the third tier. One does nothing but endlessly feed, drawing the city's vagrants and cast-offs into her lair so she may drink till the blood is trickling from her eyes and nose and bulging cheeks, till she's sick and expends it all in a giddy rush, only to start the feeding anew (Gluttony). Another makes a list of slights against him over the last 300 years, insults both real and imagined, and then he begins to exact a slow and steady revenge against each name on that list (Wrath). A third invokes Byzantine schemes to collect all the objects and people she's ever wanted, creating a series of interlocking tombs beneath the city for her beloved "treasury" (Envy).

At this stratum, the Daeva are no longer mere Succubi: they are full-on Devils and Demons, horrible arch-fiends and callow phantoms whose minds work endlessly to provide them with whatever satisfies their extreme whims.

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A Daeva at this tier might be an urban legend serial killer, one who's said can never die, one who can appear wholecloth out of a drop of blood dripped on a mirror; or a creature whose Majesty literally bleeds and pulses in euphoric waves, infecting not just the city but its suburbs and satellite towns; or an artist who sees the entire country as a canvas for her work, a tabula rasa of asphalt and meadow grass, with each orchestrated twist of fate, each bloody accident, each horrible atrocity acting in tandem as the paint colors on the monster's palette.

Gangrel

Civilization no longer means anything to these creatures—and creatures, they truly are. You look at some animals, and you see just a rutting beast—the way a pig roots in the earth, say, or how a dog rolls around in filth to cover its scent. But other creatures commit to actions that we cannot hope to understand: the tilt of a mantid's head, the odd and almost neurotic behaviors of some predatory birds, the inordinately complex lifecycles of various parasites. It's these wild-yet-incomprehensible behaviors that define the Gangrel at this level. She is both "wolf on the hunt" and "alien parasite" all rolled into one. She doesn't care about what she looks like. She doesn't care if you understand her. She only cares about her land, her beasts, her territory.

Savage as a term is too simple, too base and foul. No, here the Gangrel become both Huntsmen and Horrors, ancient and eldritch hags, harridans, and stalkers of the night. They grow consumed by the pursuit, and by the protection of their territories. They cease to remember who they were because that doesn't matter anymore; the fog of eternity serves not to cloud their minds but *clear* their minds, wiping clean a chalkboard once filled with so many meaningless scratches and hash marks.

A Gangrel at this tier might be a lone and distant hunter like the Unholy, having claimed the highways as his hunting ground, forever patrolling those long dark stretches for other vampires on which to feed; or a fat, mad spider in the center of a web, setting herself up a system by which food forever imperils itself, inadvertently tumbling into her complex traps and ending up as just another in a long line of tasty blood-and-bone snacks; or a self-determined river hag, laying in the muddy bottom of an old river, demanding the sacrifice of sweet, sweet children lest she tear the towns to her left and right asunder.

Mekhet

The world is nothing but ideas and knowledge, and the pain caused by both—at least, it is from the perspective of Mekhet existing at the third tier. They seek to be filled up and consumed by information and understanding, but ultimately their souls are nothing but giant, sucking maws; great dark mouths swallowing all they throw into them. (Think, if you will, of the madness put forth by the craziest conspiracy theorists: a man sitting in an archive of his own dementia, hunkered over stacks of newspapers, deranged flowcharts on every wall with lines connecting unconnected things, code words and phrases carved into his own arms—that, then, is the Mekhet of the third tier, mired deep in the madness of information and the darkness of moral lack.)

The term "Shadow" is too insubstantial for the Mekhet at this echelon; they've become too consumed by the darkness within and without (shadows, after all, are lost in total darkness). The Mekhet here are both Eidolons and Angels of the Abyss, with intimate knowledge of the great, deep dark.

A Mekhet at this tier might be an unliving archive, his mind a tortuous tangle of names and faces, of addresses and numbers, of facts and fictions; or he might end up obsessed with *cause and effect*, forever orchestrating small happenstance to see what storms are brewed from the flutter of a butterfly's wings (riots, murders, floods, school shootings, plagues); or he might end up the keeper of a dozen cults, even a hundred, serving as a mysterious god-like figure nestled at the apex of a worldwide pyramid scheme, with blood and knowledge tithed forever upward.

Nosferatu

The lesson has been learned at this point: *we must always dwell apart*. From there, it's just a short walk to accepting and even exalting one's own grotesqueness, and that's the Nosferatu at this echelon. He has become fairy tale monster, a glorious wretch, the king of the bogeys, the queen of the grave. On the one hand, this is very much about physical deformation: while not all Nosferatu suffer from physical anomalies, by the third tier most of them have certainly developed some. Many in fact either force their bodies to make… unusual shifts (double-jointed limbs, "gills" cut in nightly with a razor, eyes removed with arthritic claws until they heal at which point they're removed *again*), while others can't control the changes that happen (bones snap, new limbs grow, tails emerge, old fangs fall out and give way to a crooked nest of osseous shards).

No longer merely a Haunt, the Nosferatu is now both Legend and Leviathan, a mythic monstrosity that can barely be imagined by mortal mind. Curiously, while most vampires of the third tier tend to be alone (even in social groups like their vast, mad conspiracies), the Nosferatu buck that trend: they seem to work well together, gathering like ancient rats in labyrinthine warrens.

A Nosferatu at this tier might be a blind, subterranean freak lurking in the sandhog tunnels beneath the city,

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finding ways to trap victims and force their blood to dribble down the cracks and fractures into the darkness (and the monster can *hear* the snap of a trap two miles up and the slow burble of blood drizzling downward); or she might be a horrific hag queen, a true closet-dwelling monster delighting and drinking in the mortal fear of stupid children; or he might be a great bloated Underworld god with an army of ghosts and bats and eyeless dogs at his command, occasionally slipping from this world into the world of the dead to commune with truly ancient specters.

Ventrue

They are control freaks extraordinaire: nothing must fall outside their reach. This attitude is steeped in paranoia, to boot, because if you want to control everything, then someone else does, too. Which means they're willing to take it from you. Which can't happen, can it? The world becomes binary: everything is either *asset* or *enemy*, something to be controlled, or someone that wants what you have. The Ventrue at this tier have enormous sway and influence, but are so mad and fucked up that they're willing to explode it all to get revenge for a sour look, a perceived slight, a depressive's whim. Whole worlds can fit in their grip, but when even a little bit slips through their fingers (and it inevitably will), then they'd rather break their toys than allow anyone else to play with them.

No longer content to merely be Lords, Ventrue at this echelon are easily both Puppet Masters and Prime Movers; their individual identities are less important than the sum of all they control.

A Ventrue vampire at this tier might have his puppet strings attached to a world-spanning host of disparate marionettes (bankers, politicians, market forces, street beggars, disaster monitoring stations, etc.); she might instead find herself in the Third World surrounded and protected by a militant mercenary army whose collective paranoia matches her own; he could be a degenerate whose mind has devolved to that of an impudent child—of course, he's a child with *profound* levels of Dominate and a mad toychest full of invented Devotions.

Covenants

You'll find expanded information on covenants at the conspiracy level on p. 64 of this book in **Chapter Two**.

Rule Shifts

Below are a few "rule hacks" you might want to put into play when running a story at this tier. These are optional; feel free to choose or lose, or even to change them to suit your needs.

- Fog of Memory, Begone. Lose the fog of memory (pp. 39-40, **Vampire: The Requiem**). The fog prevents elders from remembering things easily, and it throws their minds into confusion and derangement. Now, to a point, those things are still thematically appropriate—elders are strange creatures and this serves to reinforce it. But, that element is a limiting factor. It's what ostensibly keeps elders from getting *too* powerful in **Vampire: The Requiem**, and it's also what keeps history veiled deep in the shadowy folds of mystery.

  Conceptually, we don't want that at this tier. The vampires here aren't meant to be limited; the fog of eternity is a cage. At this tier, the cage door is kicked wide open—the monsters are allowed out to play.

  Now, another option is that you don't limit memory, only sanity—so, for every two points of Blood Potency gained, the vampire takes a mild derangement (or a severe one if the mild version is already possessed). This way, the vampire remembers everything that happened, whether it was last night or 4,000 nights prior. But, what she *does* with those memories is beholden to the many lunacies intrinsic to her blood.
- Vampires at this tier may become all the more difficult to stop—bullets continue to do bashing, but so do *all* normal attacks. Bashing can still fold over and become lethal, and aggravated is still aggravated.
- Avoid using the clans. Third tier vampires might be considered wholly unique; players are encouraged to come up with their own "bloodlines," except that bloodline only applies to the character (and, in theory, any vampires that character sires through the course of the game). Alternately, scrapping both clans and bloodlines and relying on only the third tier covenants (p. 64) is an option, as well.
- In pushing third tier vampires away from their Humanity, assume that for every two points of Blood Potency, the vampire gains a -1 persistent penalty on all Social rolls involving non-thrall human beings (and this doesn't carry over to Disciplines). So, a vampire with Blood Potency 1-2 would suffer a -1 penalty, and that goes all the way to Blood Potency 9-10, which confers a -5 penalty.
- Allow changes to an elder's code of Humanity, as noted below under "Inhumanity."

Inhumanity: The Elder's Code

Sink your teeth into this conundrum: elders are deeply strange creatures, especially when reflected as they are here in the third tier. They have become something both more than and less than human. So, how do they retain a Humanity trait? The short answer is, they don't. But the short answer doesn't explain one thing—how then, do they stop themselves from becoming mindless, rampaging monsters?

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The slightly-longer answer is, many don't. An elder who goes that deep and doesn't salvage the vestiges of his human nature is an elder who becomes so debased and bestial that he's little more than a feral id driven by endless hunger. Oh, and he's got the power to back up his reptilian desires.

The *long* answer is, yes, many don't stop themselves from that fate, but a few certainly manage the trick. How? Through slow shifts of their innate human code—a creeping drift away from Humanity might allow them to maintain that inscrutable alien nature while still being in relative control.

Trigger Points

The way it works is this: anytime an elder character commits an action that would force that character's player (or the Storyteller) to roll for degeneration, the character may *instead* choose to adopt a new tenet of her Humanity. She may "swap out" one sin at one level of Humanity for a sin of her creation and choosing.

The replaced sin and the new sin must be in context with the event that could've caused the degeneration—the player may be called upon to defend the choice to the Storyteller or troupe in an effort to keep it thematically appropriate.

An example: a Daeva elder is exploring her new "art installation," which amounts to pinning still-living thralls and unliving neonates dressed up as moths and butterflies to her wall using railroad spikes and other sharp implements. Maybe this isn't quite "utter perversion," but it damn sure counts as torture, which is a sin at Humanity 2. Since our elder sits uncomfortably at Humanity 3, this would necessitate a degeneration roll.

Except! The further she slides down that blood-slick slope, the more bestial and vile she theoretically becomes. So, perhaps it's time for her Humanity to shift to Inhumanity. Her player takes the tenets of Humanity 2 (casual/callous crime, such as torture or serial murder) and decides that this moment represents a Trigger Point for her elder.

She now chooses to replace that Humanity 2 tenet with a *new* sin: "Casual/callous crime of a *human being*." Because her, er, "artistic peccadilloes" drive her only to torture other vampires and her thralls, the shift doesn't affect her. Her mind has created a key divide: thralls and other vampires are not human beings to her. She may do with them as she pleases. (Alternately, another elder might go in an opposite direction, believing that her thralls and blood-sucking peers are the ones deserving of mercy, while humans are little more than chatty cattle.)

Perhaps a different elder might go a different path, actively switching one sin on the chart for another—perhaps, to him, a planned crime is noble. Temperance and moderation are key. Impassioned crimes, on the other hand, are base, vile, driven by callow emotions. So, a trigger point (perhaps where the vampire sits in a puddle of clotting blood, surrounded by a tangle of dismembered limbs, all after having given himself over to a wretched frenzy) might allow that elder's player to switch "impassioned crime" (Humanity 4) with "planned crime (Humanity 3). The one is now more favorable than the other to this vampire's code of Inhumanity.

One might suggest that it's of little value to adjust or swap out the sins at higher levels, as the vampire almost surely doesn't exist at those levels. Except, not only might she still remain at those elevated levels, but experience points also allow for one to repurchase lost Humanity. The tricky spot is, the Storyteller must approve repurchased Humanity, and a vampire that doesn't act remorseful will have a hard time climbing back up that ladder. That is, unless she's shifted her Humanity to a code of Inhumanity. The more of the higher tenets she changes, the easier it is to manifest those tenets and climb back to the top of the charts, so to speak.

The Cost

Choosing to shift one's moral code away from Humanity to a slowly-adjusted path of Inhumanity still comes with costs.

The first cost is that, for every trigger point reached that results in a shift away from Humanity to Inhumanity (meaning, one tenet on the chart replaced), the vampire gains a persistent -1 Social penalty when dealing with human beings.

The second cost is that it affects the vampire's aura. Her aura seems shot through with fractures—these may appear as spider-webbed cracks, or may beparts of her aura gone "missing." Those viewing the aura may not know what it *means*, but they know it isn't good. The more one shifts away from Humanity, the more pronounced this "fractured" effect becomes.

The third and final cost is that, despite the fact that this ultimately pushes the Beast a bit deeper while still allowing a vampire to *be* the vampire she wants to be, it doesn't actually destroy those bestial urges. For every tenet changed, the vampire must add an additional success to resist a frenzy (see "Systems for Frenzy" in **Vampire: The Requiem**, pp. 178-179). So, if the vampire shifts her code twice, and must try to resist the anger frenzy that might result from being "betrayed by a partner in a deal," her target number of successes is now seven instead of five. This doesn't *penalize* the roll—it just makes the goal harder to reach.

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Why Third Tier?

Third tier is representative of a vampire's transformation away from "human," and to some degree even away from "vampire." Thematically, the impact of Humanity loss and degeneration toward a feral thing driven only by undead hungers is felt keenly at the first two tiers. At the third, though, it's less significant—more significant is the "chrysalis" effect that takes place, whereupon a vampire emerges from his unliving shell (metaphorically for most, though some bloodlines may display some kind of discarded carapace) as something wholly different and utterly strange.

(Be advised: **Chapter Three, Bloody Business**, also has alternate looks at Humanity, including Atrocity dice and Banes.)

Fresh Blood: The Clans, Revisited

We've talked about the clans a little already—you've already got your heads around how to look at the clans through the distorted lens of both *first tier* and *third tier* player- and story-experiences. That was just a taste to whet your appetite.

Now, it's time to go back to basics. It's time to pick the scab and let the blood run free.

Let's look once more at the clans. Let's speak frankly about what to do with them and why you as the player might choose to play them.

Each clan is written up as follows:

Quote: A quote relevant to the clan.

Description: Another look at each clan, breaking down what they are, what they mean.

Character Creation Advice: A direct look at what it takes to make the clan on the character sheet.

The Blood: A look at how it *feels* to play a member of the clan. Being a vampire is a visceral experience, but each clan embodies that visceral thrill distinctly.

Optional Rule: Each clan is given over to a new optional rule that the Storyteller may decide is appropriate for your game.

Why Play?: We ask the question, why would you want to play a member of this clan? If you're not sure which clan fits your play-style, then these sections should be useful.

Daeva

"You invited me in, served me a cold imported beer, put on something more comfortable. You won't turn shy on me now, after being so brave and forward in the club? You walked up to me, remember. Hush, you're much prettier when you don't talk."

Description

You might assume you could spot the Daeva in the room just by looking. Pick out the one with the six-pack or the skin that looks airbrushed. Or maybe it's the guy with the artfully tousled hair and the pearly smile? The pale redhead flirting madly with the three grinning frat boys?

The Daeva vary wildly in appearance—as wildly as people have 'types.' Most Daeva Embrace spontaneously (indeed, spontaneity is both one of their greatest weakness and strengths). They Embrace to perpetuate the passion. Romance is a disease the Daeva transmit to others, but sometimes suffer from themselves, and the culmination of the undead romance is either the tragedy of death or the comedy of immortality. For every social circle, you'll find a succubus adapted to hunt in it.

These vampires are all mystique but offer little actual mystery—they're creatures of raw physicality, their urges and desires firmly rooted in the flesh. Powerful, graceful, and enchanting, like some strange mix of "jungle cat" and "house cat." *Here, kitty kitty kitty*. But even as you admire their feline virtues, consider that all the qualities we prize in cats only serve to make them more efficient killers.

The supernatural potencies which come most easily to them are among the simplest—the raw physical power of Vigor and the speed and grace of Celerity. These root the Daeva firmly in the physical, in the flesh—power in motion. Capping this is Majesty, their signature Discipline. It's an influence that reaches past the conscious mind, down to the animal brain, where concepts like 'love' are burned away in the forges of lust. It's a terrifying power, because it makes victims betray themselves, debase themselves, and do it willingly. If they catch the romance too, they might even convince themselves the way they feel is genuine, and not the influence of a cynical undead predator hungry for an easy meal.

The Daeva are spontaneous for another reason—if they stop to think about it too long, the awful reality of their existence creeps up and slides a blade between their ribs. If a child is told he's brilliant and wonderful and charming and smart over and over without ever actually *doing anything* to warrant that praise is going to end up with a warped idea of his own value and what he's entitled to. Being liked comes easy to the Daeva, and there's few drugs stronger than praise and affirmation. The Daeva tend to go weird, like aging pop stars surrounded by yes-men and sycophants who say, "Oh yeah, I think buying the bones

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of the Elephant Man is a *fantastic* idea! And you want to sleep in a hermetically-sealed coffin? Done and done, boss."

Character Creation Advice

The Daeva are optimized to take the best advantage of Social and Physical Attributes and Skills. Some Daeva are great thinkers, but given their advantages they don't *have* to be to do very well in their Requiems (and some Daeva actually believe "thinking" is a bug, not a feature). Social Merits serve them extremely well, but if you want to kick some ass, consider a fighting style with Vigor and Celerity: with these they can be terrifying combatants. Or, optimized mostly for social action, augmented with Majesty, a Daeva might never need to fight at all.

The Blood

The Daeva's Embrace is inevitably sexual, but also fetishized. They objectify everything, but especially themselves, recognizing that the vampire is itself source of sexual fascination. Its often also wrapped up in a confection of romance, a pretty story which would justify the crime. It's often saved for "just the right moment"—candles lit, music swells, deep lingering eye contact, the kiss...! Even when the Daeva rage, they somehow manage to look good doing it. Their Majesty runs wild, and onlookers will almost ache for the vampire to murder them. The Daeva Beast is a beautiful angel, and it comes and takes control, leaving the Man to watch as mute dissociated witness. When they feed, the kiss is like being fucked everywhere all at once, like sex in the veins, like your skin itself is orgasming. (Once more, a distinctly *physical* pleasure.)

Optional: Steeped in Sin

The Daeva are such creatures of impulse, that denying their worst urges requires enormous reserve of will—they hemorrhage Willpower when they must avoid wallowing in their Vice. Yet, when they exalt the impulse—riding the wave of compulsion, making it their choice to indulge rather than a burden forced on them—they're mightier for it.

When taking dramatic action in pursuit of her Vice, a Daeva may add +3 dice to all her actions.

A lustful Daeva can claim this bonus when seducing, a slothful one when avoiding responsibility, and a wrathful one when stomping the motherloving hell out of some unlucky bastard's skull.

These actions can serve a larger purpose, and that's really the point—the Daeva make their sins work for them, and when they throw themselves into the teeth of their Vice, they can redirect it towards other goals. An enemy beaten and gorged upon, and left a pale shriveled corpse might serve a Daeva's gluttony, but he's *also* a dead enemy.

Why Play A Daeva?

They're sex on legs—Majesty means the Daeva have rock star charm, no matter how plain or ordinary they might look. They've got "It," and people will do themselves stupid to be close to "It." They have an easy time feeding through seduction, and their glamour grants them great influence in Kindred circles.

Raw physical power—Vigor and Celerity mean the Daeva are among the fastest and strongest of the undead. If they can't break an enemy, they can outrun him, and a victim immune to her charms might still be taken by force.

Charming monsters—the Daeva embody the intimate social horror of the vampire more than any other clan. Play a Daeva if you want social conflicts, complications, and drama to figure heavily in the chronicle. Play a Daeva if you want to talk enemies down, or seduce them away from their masters.

In the moment—the Daeva are impulsive, and some say rash, though one could also say that they are passionate and decisive. Play a Daeva if you like improvisation over planning, and quick decisions over careful nuanced debate.

Leave a beautiful corpse—they're sexy, they're strong, and they know it. It's hard not to relish being so effortlessly gorgeous and wonderful. And popular. And dangerous. And did we mention gorgeous? And, and, and...

Gangrel

"For me and mine, everything is binary. What? You think I don't know that word? Fuck you. Binary. There: I said it again. You're either something to me, or you're nothing. You're friend or you're foe. You're pack or you're nobody. You're predator, or you're motherfuckin' prey."

Description

Most Kindred fight like hell against the Beast, against its whispers and taunts, its urges, its most terrible *rage*. It's the terrifying extinction of that dwindling mortal *identity* preserved in the immortal corpse, and every frenzy incurs a tiny holocaust of the soul.

So it's no wonder the Gangrel unsettle so many.

They Embrace their Beasts like no other. They don't conquer it, but they do find some way to live with it. Also unsettling is how their powers strip away the disguise of human flesh: these dread powers transfigure the man into a beast of the flesh, making actual the spiritual struggle raging within. Looking into the ruddy eyes of a Gangrel's wolf shape is profoundly disturbing. It says, "Look here, and fear what you are becoming."

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They have a reputation for being antisocial loners, but it's not that simple. They're intensely social creatures, like the wolves whose shapes they steal, but not in the abstract. Something in the Gangrel blood imparts an immediacy to the Kindred's reality—friends are the people standing next to you when things go to shit, enemies are the people you're trying like hell to kill. Often they seem like babes in the dark woods of Kindred politics, with its long-view planning, multifaceted alliances, convoluted rivalries, and abstract loyalties. Yet, sometimes their immediacy is the knife that flenses, hanging the damned political beast up from a tree and gutting it beforepeeling off strips of delicious dripping fat.

Their advantages make them uniquely suited to a nomad's lifestyle, and among the undead there's more unaligned Gangrel wandering the back roads and forgotten byways than any other clan. The restlessness of the Beast itself drives this, but also the emergent culture of the clan. Wanderers chose other wanderers to Embrace, and the tradition perpetuates unconsciously. The powers of Protean eventually give Gangrel the power to sleep safely in the earth, and they can evade watchers and hunters easily. Find a place off the highway to park your bike, and slide down down down with the worms and next decade's sleeping cicadas.

Their inclinations and blood-born weakness means intellectual Gangrel aren't common, and this is magnified by traditions of Embrace which try potential Kindred, and test (sometimes to destruction) their newly made childer. They listen to the Beast's songs of savagery and dominance, but also to its urgings towards survival—persist, endure, escape, and then return when stronger to destroy.

Character Creation Advice

Overwhelmingly, the Gangrel favor physical Attributes and Skills, with Social coming in second—Intimidation and Animal Ken being very common. Traits which serve them for perpetuating their survival are valued. Most Gangrel learn at least one way to fight, at least a bit, for those times when relying on savage instinct won't be enough.

Physical Merits like Fast Reflexes, Direction Sense, Fleet of Foot, and Giant are not uncommon.

While they don't have much use for Mental Skills, the Common Sense and Danger Sense Merits offer a shitload of benefits (especially considering their nomadic lifestyles).

Don't neglect the Social Merits either. Allies is a very Gangrel Merit, and these usually imply personal loyalties, friendships, respect, or other immediate interpersonal bonds. Contacts too, to describe the networks of acquaintances they meet on their travels. Some will surround themselves with packs of humans, thralls, or animals so Retainer is also prized. Haven is uncommon for the Gangrel, and even the rare Gangrel prince sometimes makes do with no permanent residence, instead sleeping in secret and even random places beneath the earth.

The Shattered Mirror: Daeva And Gangrel

It's hard not to see the comparison between what we just told you about the Daeva and what we're telling you now about the Gangrel.

Physical and Social? Decisive creatures? Act in the moment?

What's the key difference, then?

The Daeva are bound to the base and vile *world of man*—the Beast lets them become one with the herd.

The Gangrel are shackled to the *world of beasts*—the Beast keeps them from being one of the herd.

Daeva are the cats. Gangrel are the dogs. Lions versus wolves.

And yet, despite the surface distinctions, might we suggest how interesting it would be to form a coterie of only Daeva and Gangrel? Sexy. Dangerous. Claws out. Lips pursed. *Beautiful wanderers.*

The Blood

The Gangrel Embrace is savage and fast, and many fledglings are abandoned to see how they'll adapt and survive, watched from concealment. It's like being attacked by an animal, and then becoming one (and here, the "werewolf" myth is ascendant, as is the idea of transmissible rabies). Urges and instincts cloud the mind, but there's a new clarity too. When the Gangrel frenzy, there exists a purity to it. The Beast rises and swallows the Man, then fight or flight kicks in. The Gangrel's Beast is powerful, but not sophisticated enough to actually *hate* the man. When they feed, the Kiss brings a bone-deep surge of animal pleasure to vampire and victim, the urge to rut and howl, a drumbeat tempo increasing as the mortal's heart speeds up (and then slows). It's the urge to abandon everything but the pleasure of it, that of a hunger satisfied, to accept the extermination of consciousness and the rise of the primal.

Optional: A Little Less Conversation, A Little More Action

Abstract thought and long-term planning aren't where the Gangrel shine, but part of what makes them so terrifying to mortal and Kindred alike is how quickly they can go

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from stillness to furious action, leaping into the fray or vanishing into the night before they muster the conscious decision to do so. All vampires are driven by the Beast's instincts to dominate, feed, and flee danger, but in the Gangrel this instinct is much closer to the surface, and doesn't need the extremity of frenzy to unleash it.

When reacting to a situation in the most primal way—sudden violence, rapid flight, snarling explosions of temper or savage lust—the Gangrel may add +3 to her dice pools, and if it's relevant, to Speed or Initiative for the first turn of a conflict, when the surge of instinctual reaction allows the vampire to act faster than thought. This initial burst vanishes in subsequent turns (maximum five turns) as everyone else catches up, however. To use this, the vampire's actions must be simple and lateral, with immediate results. Fight or flight. Gangrel may also add this bonus when detecting or reacting to ambush.

Why Play A Gangrel?

Act, don't think—There's something almost Zen about the Gangrel and their Beast, about the way they can focus their existence until there's nothing but the crystallized moment, like blood frozen on the edge of a knife—nothing exists but *this* punch, *this* rage, *this* fuck, *this* stretch of highway. Money comes and money goes. Plans fall apart. Thrones crumble. Time is a monster that'll eat the whole world eventually, so deny it and live only in the now. Play a Gangrel if you want action and you want it now, and leave the planning some thin-blood lick.

Fuck the man—in Kindred society the Gangrel have a reputation for anarchic tendencies and disrespect for the rightful authorities, and whether this is actually true or not, it means princes tend to cut Gangrel some slack—there's rarely any percentage in trying to beat the Savages into submission, with meager political advantage. There's limits, but Gangrel are often seen as something to be managed rather than something to be dominated. The Gangrel are primed to be the rebels many princes fear they already are.

On wolf's feet or night-black wing—Alone among the Kindred, the Gangrel shrug off the human facade, and walk as beasts. Some never go back. Shapechanging grants a host of special abilities, but also different perspectives on the world, different mindsets. A wolf-form Gangrel isn't a man driving a wolf-shaped proxy: he's man, monster, and animal all in one, a creature of complex instinct and urges. Play a Gangrel if you want to explore the role-playing possibilities offered by the transformed flesh but also transformed *mind*.

Burn it all down, then walk the fuck away—the Gangrel can be wholly unattached to both the trappings of humanity and the society of the vampire. A haven can be a prison. Wealth comes with chains of responsibility. Politics are a collar and you never know who's holding the leash. They *need* so little, and what they do require can be taken. If you want a character who isn't reliant on the existing Kindred social structures, then the Gangrel might be for you.

Be a stand-up guy—what they lack in abstract loyalty to principles or political factions, they make up in personal loyalty to friends and allies on the level of wolf-pack bonding. Fuck with her people, and you fuck with her. Gangrel are not wholly unattached to others, no. Rather, they needn't be attached to symbols like ideology, money or the static security of fortresses. They're *dog loyal* rather than *cat loyal*, to the man and not to the throne.

Mekhet

"I see you're not one those seekers given over to feeble credulity. I appreciate your cynicism, so I'll be straight with you. There's no truth here. We're fractals of light and shadow. Squint your eyes, and lean closer and the mysteries are made of smaller mysteries. Truth is a process, not a product. May I teach you how to find it?"

Description

What is true? It's a dangerous question to ask in the dark, because one of the shadows there might answer you.

By far the most scholarly of the clans, the Mekhet blood brings with it clarity of thought rather than a clouding. So many distractions are removed—the lungs need not breathe, the heart need not beat, the eyes need not blink, the guts need not digest. The hormones and the sex organs cease their demands. In the security of their dark halls, the Mekhet enjoy a focus monks would envy.

Their awareness is expanded, they see what is hidden: visions of past and future, of thought, of spirit. They become aware of the textures of darkness, the fine woven fabric of the night. And of the secrets hidden everywhere.

Mekhet tend to enjoy privacy, and take pains to conceal and secure their havens. Some cloak themselves with their Obfuscate, and never reveal themselves, dissociating themselves from any ordinary interaction, and some even live among mortals like an unseen roommate, making their haven inside the apartments of the ignorant living. Many find the lure of unseen watching irresistible, and spend hours following mortals and observing their lives in obsessive detail, lurking breath-close through their most intimate moments.

Yeah, that can be just as creepy as it sounds.

The Mekhet have great powers of escape and concealment and insight, but alone among the clans they lack the power to directly influence others, inspiring

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awe or terror, or commanding obedience from people or beasts. But the vampire aches for control, and so the Mekhet make this for themselves with their conspiracies and cults, centuries-long schemes, mystery religions, pop-psych self-help programs. They recognize their own ache for insight when they see it in others, and know how to tempt it. They're an infinite onion, layers and layers of initiation, each a taste of revelation, each further binding the initiate to the cult's manifesto.

The Blood

For the Mekhet, the Embrace is more like dying and being reborn than for any other clan. The mind is preserved through the process, given perspective on the trial of death and transformation, it is shown the spiritual alchemy underlying the gross physical act. This is their first insight, and the knowledge that no other bloodline shares this perspective, their first secret. The Mekhet's Beast is not a screaming savage thing, it hardly feels different at all. Shadows have trouble discerning the difference, whether their actions were their own conscious choice, or were driven by something else. Their frenzy is a cool precision which seems to make perfect sense at the time, yet there's no volition, it's as automatic and precise as Swiss clockwork. Their kiss feels like revelation, like a corpse-cold epiphany, and their victims experience it like a surge of enlightenment, like they are on the verge of realizing some great secret or insight. The Shadows themselves feel this too, like every victim is a puzzle to be solved if only they can penetrate the mystery before the mortal slides away.

Character Creation Advice

Mental Attributes and Skills tend to be primary. In fact, the older a Mekhet gets, the more this turns out to be true: as the Blood thickens, a Mekhet becomes more and more like a corpse (in mind, if not in body): as cold and emotionless as a metal morgue table. Any purchased traits tend to go toward the refinement of knowledge and the uncovering of secrets. Physical Skills might be more sophisticated (Weaponry rather than Brawl, and Stealth to hide), whereas Social Skills are geared once more toward manipulation and secret-seeking (Subterfuge over Socialize, for instance).

Optional: Mother Night

The sun burns them away as it banishes the dark, but while cloaked in their favored element, the Mekhet are frighteningly potent. It's a secret they guard, because the sanctified dark is so easily spoiled in this modern era of cellphone backlight and keychain LED's, but when acting in total darkness, a shadow may add +3 to all her dice

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pools. It requires very little light to break this effect—as little as a candle in a large room.

There's a reason dread of the dark is so instinctive, so universal—monsters lurk in that darkness, and if you go in, you may not come out. When they must deign to engage in physical conflict, the Mekhet prefer to use their speed and invisibility to stage deadly ambushes, first plunging the kill-zone into complete darkness, and then unleashing hell on their victims.

Why Play A Mekhet?

The Adventures of Judy Midnight, Girl Detective—If you enjoy mystery stories, investigation, and secret archeology, then the Mekhet are for you. They're fascinated with secrets, and equipped with the tools to crack them—a great chronicle might take it as far as running each chapter as an episodic occult police procedural.

Go anywhere, learn anything—it's pathetically easy to learn a mortal's every secret when you can render yourself invisible, and lurk behind him as he enters his passwords, hides his pornography, calls his mistress, or accepts bribes. If you want to steal, you can do so just as easily. Combined with the shadow penchant for plotting, a Mekhet is capable of scripting an entire long con down to its final moments (even before it begins).

Power behind the throne—we're not saying the Mekhet can't make good rulers (their clinical detachment can help as much as it hinders), we're only saying that they are positioned perfectly to whisper in the ear of the one who *does* rule. Advisors outlive rulers too, coming to whisper in the ear of usurpers.

NOSFERATU

"Come closer. You afraid? Let me look at you. Hmmmm, nice. I could eat you up. Don't move! One twitch of your little beady eye and I'll kill you and drink your bones. I just want to see how long you can stand there."

Description

Even among monsters, there are those considered monstrous. The Nosferatu are *just not right.* Anybody near one can sense it, even if the Haunt doesn't show any obvious signs of deformity or lividity. Like a rubber-skinned robot or a bad CG character, the Nosferatu live at the bottom of the uncanny valley. The mortal mind recoils from them. Children cry when they walk past. Adults shudder. Even the Kindred curl a lip.

The Nosferatu rarely Embrace people they like. You'd have to be a fucking asshole to do that to somebody. There's a surprising number of Haunts who were Embraced for revenge, because the victim wronged the

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vampire or one of his people or reminded the haunt of someone who did.

"Sorry. You just reminded me of my bastard ex-husband."

Some Embrace entirely at random, letting statistics be the asshole. Somebody gets killed by a hunk of frozen urine broken from a leaky 747's toilet vent at 36,000 feet. Someone else goes to plug in a laptop at a coffee shop, and is electrocuted. Another gets bitten by a spider, and in three weeks dies of septicemia from the necrotizing wound. And somebody gets grabbed at random by an unseen hand, dragged down a storm drain, and turned into a monster.

Of course, the rare Nosferatu Embraces another because... well, he's alone. Hard to stomach an existence where everybody thinks you're little more than a worm gone belly-up on cold asphalt. Sick as it sounds, the Embrace is one surefire way to make a "friend" that will be around for, ohhh, an eternity or so.

That said, the thing about the Nosferatu that's perhaps the most unsettling for other Kindred is this: the Nosferatu are honest.

There's no hiding their 'otherness,' no way they can ever forget what they are, have a few hours or fitful hope that perhaps it might all be OK in the end. They're freed from that by a face like a kicked November Jack-o-Lantern or an invisible aura that never fails to raise gooseflesh on those who pass nearby. The Embrace was all the horror one human mind could ever endure. After that, there isn't much that can get under a Haunt's skin. They don't back down, and they can't be cowed. A prince trying to swing the support of the Haunts needs to can the threats, and make them an offer: stopping the gentrification that'll soon see favored Nossie territory turned into a hipster hangout would be a good start.

Character Creation Advice

Nosferatu generally favor Physical and Mental Attributes and Skills—their weakness means social actions are fraught with complications and failure, but their signature discipline Nightmare does make use of Presence, Manipulation, Intimidate, and Empathy to name a few. Skills facilitating navigating the urban jungle and caves, such as Athletics and Streetwise will serve all Nosferatu well, and most learn how to fight. Keeping in mind that true invisibility isn't possible until the third dot of Obfuscate, Nosferatu can make good use of Stealth, Survival, and Streetwise Skills.

With their social difficulties, Social Merits are actually quite valuable as they represent social influence which isn't dependent on circumstantial checks. Allies, Contacts, and Retainer are all quite useful.

The Blood

When a Haunt comes out of nowhere and takes you, it's every nightmare of suffocation, violation, trying to run and being unable to move, powerlessness, and paralyze and it only gets worse. You get dragged through a fear so bad it kills you. Your heart convulses, and stops. You can't draw breath to scream, because your lungs are dead, and then your mouth is full of shit, pond water, or acid. You can't puke with your dead throat, but somehow you can swallow the filth. The change is rough business, and can take months or years to finally set—the flesh distorts and deforms slowly, as if uncomfortable even touching itself. If the flesh doesn't reshape, then the mind certainly does. A Nosferatu's frenzy is the rebellion of the flesh and mind in jerking stop-motion, limbs jerked about in unnatural postures, face impossibly contorted, hissing, spitting, sometimes flushing scarlet or erupting in boils. A real horror show. When they feed, it's a fear that shuts down a mortal's mind, and fills them with adrenaline. If they live, the relief and endorphins bring a skydiver's high. The Nosferatu feels the living blood recoil in her guts and veins like worms in a hot skillet.

Optional: I've Seen Worse

The Nosferatu Embrace is rough, and after it there's not much left that makes a Haunt afraid. They automatically gain +3 bonus dice when resisting Intimidation or other forms of Persuasion based around coercion or doubt. They may even add this bonus when resisting the effects of a fear frenzy or riding the wave, but only in situations where the Storyteller rules the Nosferatu is the keeper and creator of the fear and not the sufferer: so, if the Haunt has left a trail of bodies and the last victim is in the corner waving a torch, the Nosferatu is in control because that torch-waving fucker is only waving that fire around because he's afraid. Alternately, if the Nosferatu is gazing into the steely eyes of a vampire far more ancient than he, well, then he's not in control of shit and the bonus fails to apply.

Why Play Nosferatu?

Never back down—The Nosferatu have seen some shit, and they do not back down. If you want to lock eyes with the world's bastards and make them look away first, then the Nosferatu might be for you.

At the margins—The Haunts favor places at the fringe, those border and boundary locales populated with people on the edge living in extreme situations. There's drama, and tragedy, and desperation—some intense stories to tell, and themes to explore.

The monster in the closet—As a Nosferatu, what people are afraid of is you. Fear is your goad and lash. You can

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do more with a glare than a fist. Stalk victims and drive them crazy with terror. Fear is a marvelous motivator, too. Nosferatu are always in high demand in certain circles, for sending 'special messages' to inconstant associates.

Dark avenger—the Nosferatu are weirdly positioned to play superhero. They're street level (or sub-street level), with their ears to the ground. They live in rough places where the law is cursory at best. A civic-minded Nosferatu can carve out a protectorate, and *unleash hell* upon those who violate its sanctity. You get to be a tragic misunderstood hero too, because the people you save are still going to be afraid of you.

Ventrue

"I'm sure we can come to an amicable arrangement. The alternative is... well, you won't like it. Frankly neither will I, because I prefer people to serve me of their own free will."

Description

The Ventrue rule. It's in their blood, this slavery to hierarchy (with the natural assumption that if not now, then soon they will be sitting at the top). Not every Ventrue is a prince, but every Lord carves out a little domain for herself, a realm she can rule. Scale is the only thing separating the Prince of New York from a mob boss, a crew leader, or some deranged Ventrue in the park lording over a flock of crows and a pack of pit bulls. Some Ventrue are princes of cities, others of trailer parks, classrooms, factory floors, homeless shelters, or police stations. Every Lord finds her realm.

The stereotypical Ventrue is a creature of breeding, selected as a mortal for her wealth, family, or temporal power. As a vampire, she can trace her ancestry back to famous notables. Yet, these stereotypical Lords represent only one justification for rulership—*obey me because it is tradition*. Some Ventrue Embrace nobodies, or those in whom they perceive a frustration with society and a helpless desire to change it. The transformation from powerless to powerful can awaken something in the right mortal, a potency unguessed at were only the accomplishments of their mortal life reviewed.

There's a strong tradition of mentorship and careful grooming of one's newly made childer as well, but you'll find no altruism in it. The relationship implies control; the mentor shapes the student. The old patterns hold true, with young and hungry and energetic leaders rising to displace their elders, before themselves becoming the elders, but of course with vampires this process is attenuated and forestalled somewhat by the elder's longevity. Of course, the creeping paranoia of power and the Ventrue blood (and some say other things—occult madness as disease, boring through Lordly brains like syphilis or rogue prions) do eventually weaken their hold, and they are supplanted by those who swear they themselves will never fall thusly.

The Ventrue remain unconvinced that power corrupts. They continuously test this hypothesis. Most would leap at the chance to see whether absolute power corrupts absolutely.

It's not surprising that the Ventrue do so well in Kindred politics—they're bred for it, after all. Also, the complex traditions and roles of the society are artifacts of Ventrue creation, shaped to suit the Lords best. Whether a domain is built on the old feudalist principles, or the modern notions of democracy and pluralism doesn't matter because in the end political systems are power games, and the Ventrue wrote all the rules primarily for other Venture to play and the other clans stumble along, trying their best in a system subtly engineered against them.

The Blood

To survive a Lord's Embrace, a mortal must surrender, wholly and completely. Cushioned by this submission, the transformation is a easy as waking up after a long sleep. The more the mortal resists the Ventrue's will, the more the Embrace hurts, and the more it feels like violation. Submit completely, and it is the Embrace of a loving parent, protective and confident. When the Ventrue deigns to feed, the kiss brings a sensation of pleasant listless and involution. The Lord instead feels power and authority—it feels *right* that it be so, the mortal sacrificing its life so the immortal might survive, like a good servant should. When frenzy threatens, something of the inherited instability that afflicts the Ventrue emerges, and a Lord's wrath can emerge like a thunderstorm. The frenzy feels righteous, and no matter what a spectacle of herself the Venture might make, when calm returns, the frenzy is justified easily, and any friend or subject so disloyal as to suggest otherwise is... well, better keep an eye on them.

Character Creation Advice

Ventrue are social animals, and favor those Attributes and Skills though Mental Attributes come close, as the game of Politics is played with the mind. Given their position in whatever domain they rule, most Ventrue will be assailed physically at some point, and some domains demand a strong hand to rule. Physical Attributes can serve a Lord well, though when it comes to violence, most try to have 'people who handle that sort of thing.'

While a Ventrue can find a use for most Merits, he never met a Social Merit he didn't like. Mentor and Retainer (given the interplay between *greater* and *lesser*) are perhaps the most common.

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Optional: Hate the Game, Not the Player

You can still be paranoid, even if everyone really is out to get you. The Ventrue have a unique insight into Kindred politics, because they invented it (er, or so they claim). There's also the Lordly instinct for hierarchies and power dynamics. A Ventrue can look at a power structure, and tell you its strengths, deficiencies, stress points, and where it will all break down eventually. They have no particular insight into the working of any individual in such a system, but have an intuitive grasp of the whole. They may add +3 dice when examining a power structure or playing at politics themselves. This can include Social rolls made within the context of such a structure, such as during official court functions or while performing the duties of their office.

Why Play A Ventrue?

Power—One word says it all. The Ventrue have power. They have connections. Being made a Ventrue is like being a made man—it means access. The Venture network might be a snakepit of vicious internal politics, but all Ventrue instinctively agree that internal strife must not distract form their most driving goal—to keep the rest of Vampire society under a well-manicured thumb.

Politics—If you enjoy intrigue, plotting, wheeling and dealing, then no clan gives you better access to it than the Ventrue. Whether you're playing the minors, and toying with mortal politics, or trying out for the majors in dominion politics, the Venture are built for winning.

Something to stand for—It's hard for many Kindred to believe in anything and to stand up and risk their immortality for anything. The Beast cares nothing for such niceties as faith or commitment. But being part of something greater than yourself, and genuinely standing for it can be a bastion against a monstrous descent. The Ventrue believe in the power structures they're so good at using—though of course, each individual Lord believes their cause would prosper if only *they* were in charge.

The Grand Tragedy—*King Lear* with fangs? Perhaps. With their positions of authority and control, when Ventrue fall they tend to take others down with them. The stories of kings gone mad with power and paranoia, mistrust, or misplaced trust are grand spectacles of ruin. If you're going to fall, do it big.

Of Masks And Dirges: Masquerade And Requiem

The newly-made monster shapes a mask for itself from the face of its dead human self. It might not seem that way now (though, the Embrace takes everyone differently—the Daeva will leave you feeling like you just got your brains fucked out, the Nosferatu like they were beaten out instead), but that's what's happening. You're dead, bucko, and the thing you've become will wear your old human skin like a costume, and traipse through your life making all the right sounds, and you'll think it's you doing it.

A vampire must be two things—in the human world, they must maintain their Masquerade, but among their Kindred, it's their Requiem they play to.

The Masquerade isn't just disposing of the bodies, and not turning into a bat while a hundred school kids with camera phones stand by gawping—the fiction of life you present must run deeper than the bare-minimum caution needed to keep the mobs from remembering the torch and pitchfork routine.

If you're a young lick, your *Masquerade* might be who you were before the Embrace, your old life hollowed out and worn like a protective shell. If you're still working, the source of legitimate income isn't a bad thing, nor is the paper-trail generated by a living human. Older Kindred who have outlived their mortal selves have to reinvent themselves sometimes, and it's getting harder and harder to build naturalistic identities that hold up to investigation. Old or young through, Masquerade defines the facade you present to the mortal world—who you know, who knows you, where you live, and what sort of people you might one day kill. Careful hunting is well and good—learning to feed well away from your counterfeit life helps protect it, but there will come a time when care and time are not on your side, and you won't have the luxury of stalking strangers in some other burg. You'll come home with the sun chasing you, a gut full of mushroomed hollow points, and knuckles split open from beating someone in the face, and that nice girl in the apartment next door holds the door open for you because you don't look so good...

Requiem is different. It's a role you choose for yourself, inherit from a sire, or have thrust upon you by arcane tradition or a whim of the powerful. This is how you behave in Kindred society. Requiem isn't impossible to change, but vampires are creatures of habit, and if your fellows are used to seeing you act as the Martyr, they may be slow to accept you if you assume the role of Enforcer. Requiem shapes the arenas of Kindred society and politics in which you frequently find yourself tested, and how other Kindred treat you.

What does this mean in terms of gameplay? If the Storyteller allows you to, you may choose a Masquerade role and a Requiem role. Masquerade is your human

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Time And The Changing Of Masks

Torpor can be like a psychic enema, flushing away decades of accumulated mental shit. It's also a patient weapon that can see the end of any mortal's life—a vampire need only find a safe hole to crawl in, and let time pass (and during that time, humans expire). Problem is, when she crawls out of her little hole the world she finds isn't the one she said by-by to. Times change, and so too must lazy vampires who scene-skip though history. Requiems are pretty constant through the ages, as they're relevant to the undying society of other immortals, but some vampires take the amnesiac rebirth of torpor as an opportunity to redefine. The Courtesan might become the Horror, abandoning the niceties of society and the greasing of the social clockwork and lurk at its periphery, making sure the undead can never become too comfortable.

Masquerades however can change fairly easily. Most are adaptable from one era to another—there are always Artists and Junkies and Youth and Investigators, the specifics being what changes. But emerging into a world untouched by their hands, there's a temptation towards reinvention.

If the Storyteller agrees, then you can swap either your Masquerade or Requiem for another. You lose the Skill Specialty this gave you, but you can pick another from the Skills of the new one. Depending on the demands of the Chronicle, this may be handled with a quick montage, carrying you though you awakening, your trial and error as you establish a new role, and then acceptance under those new terms. Other Chronicles may benefit from playing the process out in more detail, perhaps even making the reinvention the focus of the story for awhile.

The length of the torpor required to break down habits and memories this much is also something of a chronicle-specific variable. A rule of thumb might be if the waking vampire's favorite new song when he went to sleep is a golden oldie when he wakes, then he's got enough psychic distance to shatter and reform himself a bit.

mask. Requiem is the vampire face beneath that mask. The Storyteller can require every player to purchase one of each for their characters, or instead may choose to allow the players t purchase the Masquerade and Requiem Merits if they seek to make use of these systems.

Both Masquerade and Requiem are primarily game-level concepts. A vampire would not say to another, "I think your Executive Masquerade is interfering with your Courtesan Requiem." By mixing and matching clan, covenant, Masquerade, and Requiem you can easily create playable ersatz versions of your favorite vampire characters from pop culture. An unaligned Daeva with a Masquerade of Investigator and Requiem of Martyr makes a perfect good-looking broody undead detective seeking to atone for past atrocities.

Masquerade gives you two Asset Skills. You may choose one free Specialty in one of these Skills. Further, it's now cheaper to increase all aspects of those Asset Skills—Specialties cost two experience points instead of three, and new Skill dots cost new dots x 2 rather than new dots x 3.

Requiem gives you a Key Discipline which closely aligns with your Requiem's role in Kindred society. Improving this Discipline is easier and cheaper: if it's a clan or bloodline Discipline then the purchase now costs new dots x 4; if it's out-of-clan, then the cost is new dots x 6, instead.

They can both be further enhanced with the Masquerade or the Requiem Merits found immediately below.

Merits

Masquerade (• to •••••)

Effect: Your Masquerade is more than a thin veneer. You live it, and invest effort into rendering the illusion more believable. You gain additional benefits as you increase your rank in this Merit. Masquerade is hierarchical, and you can't gain the benefits of later ranks without getting the proceeding ones, and some lower-rank benefits improve in effectiveness with overall rank.

By investing this time and energy in your Masquerade, you are also committing somewhat to have your mask play a role in the chronicle. You may need to take dangerous action to preserve your Masquerade from being blow open, or get involved in some entirely human struggle as the social contacts you maintain to hide your true nature spawn trouble.

• **Networking**: As you work to improve the depth of your Masquerade, you meet people and form relationships, personal and professional. People start treating you as the role you're playing, and the more people who know you there are, the more people who you can call on in a tight spot. Networking works like Contacts limited to the scope of your Masquerade, and who you can reasonably meet while pursuing it. Pick a fairly focused sub-set of the possibilities implied with your Masquerade with the first dot of the Masquerade Merit, and each additional dot adds another strata of Contacts.

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Example—Jackie is a hundred years old today, but she's at the Rose Creek Galleria pretending to drink an orange Julius, and talking about boys with Samantha, Caite, and Hunter. Her Masquerade is the Youth, and she has a dot in the Masquerade Merit which gives her contacts among the Popular Girls, but the company is trying, so for a change when she improves her Masquerade Merit, she selects another clique to gain some contacts in, picking the Skaters who hang around outside under the sodium lights in the parking lot, taunting mall security.

•• **Vouchsafe**: The point of forming all these social ties is to strengthen the Masquerade, and when you gain this benefit the people you know will defend you against accusations of strangeness or aberrant behavior. If someone from outside your circle of Masquerade contacts comes asking questions or poking around, your peers will put them off, defend you, deflect their inquiries, and if possible let you know somebody was asking.

For every level of this Merit purchased (starting at two dots, so maximum of four) you gain another Retainer. Further, every Retainer gains +3 dice on any Subterfuge rolls used to lie about who you are *really*.

••• **Deep History**: A careful campaign of records manipulation, influence, forgery, computer tomfoolery, and planted artifacts adds a historical depth to your Masquerade which will stand up to all but the most aggressive background check. You can now present childhood photos, official records like birth certificates, medical records, report cards, college transcripts, criminal records, financial history and credit score, minor mentions in the local media clippings from the place you were supposed to have grown up. If you were recently Embraced, and are still maintaining your mortal identity, this gives you an entirely new and fictional identity to segue into or alternate between.

Deep History works like Vouchsafe, but instead deflects research and background checks by imposing a penalty on such efforts equal to your dots in the Masquerade Merit. Further, your background will stand up to any casual inspection, and won't raise suspicion for any routine review, for example you can apply for credit cards without worrying about revealing your lack of financial history.

Drawback: The drawback to being in the system is that you're *in the system*. You will occasionally have to deal with the crap mortals spend so much of their time dealing with. Jury duty, identity theft, junk mail, telemarketers, spam promising harder longer erections, and the occasional lawsuit.

•••• **Expertise**: Do something long enough, and you'll get good at it. Performing credibly does a long way to making a Masquerade convincing. When using your Asset Skills, you use the 9-Again rule. If some other advantage already allows this, then you instead use the 8-Again rule.

••••• **Living Mask**: You perfect your Masquerade, and it takes on a life of its own. You surround yourself with a glamour of sorts, an aura of the ordinary and the expected which occults even the most egregious demonstration of your inhuman nature. At the worst, people within your Masquerade's scope will suffer a psychotic break, and end up institutionalized for awhile as the two incompatible realities smash together in their brains. People caught up in your Masquerade are so conditioned that they simply *cannot believe* you are anything but what you appear to be. Your nocturnal lifestyle never raises any questions, and people stop wondering why you don't seem to get any older. Even when these things are pointed out by people outside the penumbra of your Masquerade, those caught within it just shake their heads and dismiss it unless the evidence is both overwhelming and presented with conviction.

Getting them to believe you're anything outside their assumptions requires a Presence + Persuasion roll with a penalty equal to your rank in the Masquerade Merit.

Drawback: Being this plugged in means that the humans around you will call upon you for the myriad little things humans rely on each other for. They'll ask you to help them move, give them lifts to the airport, borrow some money. They'll try and set you up on dates with their recently divorced sisters. Maintaining the required level of connection to these people is a lot of work, and it'll intrude into the chronicle fairly often, usually by complicating things.

Requiem (• to •••••)

Effect: Your Requiem becomes more than an inclination, and begins to define you and your actions. As you dedicate more energy to developing the Requiem and you commit to living it, you gain further advantages from it. Requiem is hierarchical, and you can't gain the benefits of later ranks without getting the proceeding ones, and some lower-rank benefits improve in effectiveness with overall rank.

By investing this time and energy in your Requiem, you are also committing somewhat to have your role in undead society figure more into the Chronicle. The higher your rank in the Requiem Merit, the more widely you're known in the court for the abilities and inclinations the Requiem describes, and the more it defines how other vampires will treat you and what they'll expect from you.

• **The Gathered Flock**: For every dot in this Merit you gain another dot of Herd—in this case, the Herd is specific to your Requiem and "flavored" accordingly. The Herd of a Horror is a wretched, wailing group. The Herd of a Manipulator comprises a group of sycophants and

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yes-men (though to each other they may be incestuous and equally manipulative).

•• **Authority**: You begin to gain some sway over others of the same Requiem due to mutual respect, fear, or solid rep. You gain a bonus to rolls based on Social Attributes when dealing with others of the same Requiem equal to the dots you have in the Requiem Merit. Further, if your character has more dots than the opponent in the Requiem Merit, it may invoke Predator's Taint as if that character had a lower Blood Potency (if even if that's not true).

••• **Reputation**: Increasingly, you're known to others of the same Requiem as an authority within the loose association that mutual interests create. Others will being to defer to you, and when vampires of other Requiems seek one of yours for consultation or aid, they'll be more likely to pick you. The Requiem Merit acts like Status. At one dot, you're known within your court for a modest authority, and at five dots your name will be known in other domains, and especially within your Requiem.

•••• **Adept**: You gain the use of the 9-again rule for any roll related to your Requiem's Key Discipline.

••••• **Mastery**: Once per game session your character may make use of a +5 bonus on any roll related to supporting her Requiem: a Horror seeking to repulse a scene of partygoers can claim that bonus, but a Horror looking to merely leap a fence cannot (as leaping a fence has nothing to do with the theme or nature of that Requiem).

Masquerades

Below you find the following information regarding the Masquerade masks a vampire may wear:

Quote: A quote embodying this role.

Description: An overarching look at what this mask means for the vampire.

Pulling It Off: How can they vampire maintain the mask given her vampiric unlife?

Background: What kind of vampire suits this role best?

Concepts: A handful of potential "ready-to-go" character concepts within this role.

Common Victims: Those that comprise the vampire's "feeding circle."

Anchor Relationships: Those that comprise the vampire's "social circle" (feel free to have this overlap with the Common Victims).

Asset Skills: Two Skills suited to the Masquerade in question (gain one free Specialty in one of the two; and as noted on p. 141, buying Specialties and dots in these Skills is now cheaper).

Artist

"That over there? No, that's just random blood spatter. Here. This is my latest painting."

Description

The Artist is a reliable mask to wear for Kindred of a certain air. Mortals forgive a great deal from those who create. Art has a magical quality—those ignorant of the hard work, the long practice, the endless failures and the disappointments seem to think an artist is a mystical Buddha, from whose naval springs finished masterpieces. Artists are forgiven for erratic behavior, loutishness, unpredictable mood swings, and explosive tempers: the 'artist's temperament.' This aura of acceptable eccentricity serves a vampire as excellent cover.

The bohemian company an artist might keep also makes for a reliable stock of victims if need be. With proper grooming, some might even consider their participation in a performance piece involving some bloodletting an honor rather than a horror. Artsy circles are full of oddballs, so one more pasty Byronic profile that refuses to see the sun doesn't really stand out, and some artists (like touring musicians) are practically nocturnal anyhow.

Artists of all sorts exist—musicians, painters, sculptors, web designers, industrial artists, hair stylists, fashion designers, car choppers, game designers, special effects gurus, model makers. There's one guy in Vegas that makes custom vinyl action figures. For five hundred bucks, you can have a super-deformed caricature of your city's prince made to order.

To those who know the trick, art can be a cipher too—Artists often add layers of meaning to their work only the Kindred would understand, or perhaps only a specific one. This makes covert communication nearly untraceable. The Artist who knows the subject keys the message off shared mutual experiences, or universal ones only a vampire would recognize. These call attention to the layers of hidden meaning. To another eye, this just seems like embellishment or complexity, yet can communicate volumes. A secret conspiracy planned with only the paintings hanging in one conspirator's haven.

Art also remains the way vampires can preserve their image. Photography and other modern short-cuts don't work. Portraiture is still a valuable Skill in Kindred circles, as are other art forms which can capture and preserve the Kindred. There's a little ironic pointlessness to this: the undead are their own monument, after all. A careful vampire will outlast his own image painted on canvas or carved in stone or worked cunningly into the lyrics of a classic rock anthem.

Here's a sticky question. Can the undead truly create art? The Lancea Sanctum would have it that the Kindred

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are dead and sterile in body and in spirit, and thus incapable of truly creating anything. Ask an Artist, and she'll tell you she's too busy right now, but maybe you could talk to her at the opening party for her gallery show. There's stodgy academics that will rip your face off over questions of what constitutes real art, and there's certainly no lack of inspiration in a vampire's life, so really who's to say if a vampire's bowl of fruit still life is art or not?

Pulling It Off

In a perverse way, the Artist's mask doesn't *require* the vampire to produce any actual art. At least, not that frequently. Many mortal artists get by fine playing the role themselves, using it to part legs and secure loans, or another semester's cash from Mom and Dad to pay for the art school they dropped out of two years ago. Playing one of these destitute leeches feigning artistic insight isn't hard, but it is depressing. If one must wear the mask and dance in the Masquerade, then at least let the required role be *interesting*.

Pulling it off as a real art-producing artist is trickier, because it requires more than a willingness to leech socially, and because this is about being seen as an Artist as much as being one, the work must be shown. People must see it, and must believe it. Perhaps much of this isn't true art, but it's what many people think of as art, and they remember it. A good Artist soon realizes that there's invisibility behind the easel once people start paying attention to the painting and forget the artist's painstaking work.

(Some vampires don't even bother creating their own art; they keep a mortal hidden away to do that for them. When that mortal dies and a new is gained, the vampire can claim a "change in style.")

Background

Most Artists segue into the Masquerade from a human life spent in the pursuit of art and its creation, as picking up the techniques and mindsets after the Embrace is tricky for some old vampires. But some newly made vampires find inspiration in the Embrace, and with no previous aptitude or interest find they have something to say, and remake themselves as Artists.

Most Artists have the Skills to pursue their mode of Expression, and many will have a certain sensitivity to the human condition exemplified mechanically by Empathy, and the more social Artists will find Persuasion and Socialize extremely useful. They defiantly favor Social and Mental Attributes, and the Skills that fall under them.

Concepts: Kinetic Sculptor, Alt-Porn Auteur, Spatter Painter, Tattoo Artist, Composer, Singer/Songwriter, Weaver, Performance Artist, Graphic Designer.

Common Victims: Starstruck Fan, Art Student, Corus Member, Roadie, First-Time Porn Talent, Artist's Model, Groupie, Barista.

Anchor Relationships: Manager, Art Dealer, Gallery Owner, Reviewer, Rival Artist, Collaborator, Critic, Art Store Owner, Student Apprentice

Asset Skills: Craft, Expression

Criminal

"I got a guy with that kind of hardware. He'll want six for each of them, but I get a grand up front to play matchmaker even if you and he don't set it off."

Description

There's as many kinds of criminal as there are birds in the air, some petty and opportunistic, some feral and predatory, some plotting and cool-headed, others desperate. Where there's money to be made breaking the law, someone is doing it. To serve a vampire as a mask though, the Criminal must be more than an occasional lawbreaker, he must uphold the outlaw lifestyle and find a niche. The important thing is that others perceive the vampire as a Criminal of recognizable type.

Many people break the law opportunistically, without considering themselves criminals, without deliberately moving in criminal circles, or adopting the lifestyle trappings. For this mask to serve, it needs to plug a vampire into a particular criminal subculture: gangs, illicit grow operators, long con players, meth cookers, mafia, dealers, smugglers, human traffickers, drug runners, pimps and madames, and so on.

Vampires coming from an outlaw lifestyle and into the Embrace transition fairly easily. Their morality is already atrophied, and the new obscenities they must indulge as the walking dead sting less than they might were they coming fresh and innocent into the Requiem. Many criminals already have experience of violence, as victim and as perpetrator. Many have also served time in prison, and jailhouse politics are disturbingly similar those of the Kindred courts, where too often it's fuck or be fucked shower-room factionalism.

There's also something utterly prosaic about the Criminal. Once mortals peg somebody as a gangbanger or a mafioso or a thug, then their minds are made up: once a big sin is discovered, few scratch the surface looking for something bigger. They feel they've hit bottom already, and that's just what the Criminal wants. ("Sure, I boost cars and am involved in illegal smuggling operations. No, of course I don't leave a trail of bloodless bodies across the pier.")

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Pulling It Off

Actually doing crime is sometimes shamefully easy for a vampire, but what's most important for maintaining the Criminal mask is balancing criminal activities against the risks of exposure. In pursuing the Criminal Masquerade, because attracting the attention of the mortal authorities or wrathful criminal rivals is the worst sort of attention a vampire can be subjected to. When mortals with institutional authority or street influence begin poking around a vampire's operation, there's a risk the mask might be pulled away. The careful Kindred Criminal measures his successes and setbacks, positioning himself in the middle ranks of the criminal set, never rising too high in an organization or food chain, paying the right bribes, showing the right people the respect their egos demand. The Criminal is rarely the big boss, but might be a trusted lieutenant.

Being a Criminal with hideous unnatural powers can also be extremely lucrative. The careful application of almost any Discipline can give a vampire an edge in the pursuit of crime. The legal fringes are also a relatively simple place to feed. Criminals go missing all the time, and the first assumption people make is that somebody killed them, or they got out of town ahead of a warrant. It's not a buffet though, because criminals tend to hail from the lower socio-economic levels, where religiosity and superstition also like to live. An uneducated street criminal might have an easier time believing there's something unnatural about the new dealer selling on the corner of his street than a better educated and privileged citizen might, and he's likely got a larger capacity for terrified violence.

Background

It's easy to keep living the life even after you die. Criminals of all stripes find it pretty easy to keep doing the same things. It's not like they need to keep regular hours or do a desk job from 9-5 to pull it off. Many can even keep the same company before and after. Most criminals like to think they have certain standards, that there's some things they just won't do, or lines they won't cross. Others have degenerated to a monstrous degree, and live to feed the Id on meals of violence, dominance, rape, and indulgence. Some are just crazy and unpredictable, while others see the benefit in seeming crazy and unpredictable—a rep for being fucking nuts can keep opportunists off your back.

Being a vampire is like this dialed to 11.

Mechanically speaking, Criminals favor Attributes and Skills that help them in their particular specialties. Armed hijackers need Firearms, con-men need Persuasion. Criminality and violence go together like chocolate shanking peanut butter in the exercise yard, so most Criminals have more than a passing familiarity with hurting people, and the Physical Attributes needed to bring the hurt.

Concepts: Street Dealer, Bookie, Greaseman, Con Player, Legbreaker, Torpedo, Fence, Trafficker, Grower, Pimp

Common Victims: Criminal rivals, Streetwalkers, Random Victims of Gang Violence, Stoolies

Anchor Relationships: Mob Boss, Cellmate, Fence, Money Guy, Right-Hand Man

Asset Skills: Larceny, Streetwise

Executive

"No, I said by Monday! Mitchell had better have the account tied up with a fucking bow, or he's out on his ass. Hang on, I've got another call. I have to take this. Hey, Mitchell! Yeah, man, I was just talking to Carl, and he's pissed about the account. Yeah, you got to get this thing wrapped or it's going to be my head. Literally."

Description

Here's what you need: a sharp suit, a cellphone, a Lexus, and a mind sharp with predatory aggression. Not that much difference in the ambitious executive and the undead monster, is there? In the modern era, the Executive is most often a role found among the obsessively working over-stressed business community, but can include anyone positioned within an organization in the upper quarter of the hierarchy where rivalries turn ugly, and ambition leaves the water bloody. Any sufficiently large organization can provide a habitat for the Executive—government bureaucracies, churches, charities, NGO's, law enforcement, and of course private enterprise.

The Executive was a fairly hard mask to wear until fairly recently. Once upon a time, when the world was smaller, Execs kept banker hours, working while the financial world woke, and decompressing when the markets closed. But it's a whole new world, and it's always daylight somewhere, and the office is as close as a cellphone or a laptop. Deals have always been done in salubrious surroundings, during after-hours drinks or in VIP rooms at Gentleman's clubs. Putting in an appearance at the office while the sun shines high is easier to avoid without raising comment now.

It's this independence that makes the Executive a good mask. Managers are tied to the office, to personnel evaluations, and weekly meetings. CEO's and bosses are even more bound to conventional schedules. But mid-level Executives (in the sorts of organizations a vampire can safely hide within) have a great deal more freedom so long as they produce results.

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Scheduling itself can provide a great deal of cover for the ambitious young undead Turk. "Oh, yeah, Friday doesn't work for me. I'm in with the accounts guy all day. Let's do it at Harry's after hours. Brew and wings on me. Seven work for you. Great."

A personal assistant who can answer the phone and lie convincingly for you is also a pearl beyond price (or rather, a pearl worth exactly the price you pay, which is around 100K a year plus benefits and 401K). A PA clued into your particular status (vis-a-vis diet and unlifestyle) can also help organize the interface between your Masquerade and your Requiem, so you don't find yourself missing a Court function to attend a team-building exercise at work.

For the truly wealthy Kindred there's another way to approach the Executive Masquerade.

Money can buy all the trappings of the Executive life. The suits, and cars, and smart-phones, private chartered jets. It's quite possible to create a fictional company to serve as a fictional Executive, or simply wear the clothes, and talk the talk, but never do the actual work. A mask this thin isn't a great disguise, and official examination of it will reveal its falsity pretty fast. The vampire must sometimes step into the role and show her face.

Why do it then? Doing the Executive lifestyle requires actual *work*. Yeah, but it also means power, influence, access *to* the powerful, and perhaps most significantly, it's an outlet for the aggression and ambition that could get a vampire in real trouble in Kindred politics. Living to work is just what some people do—the urge to hunt and stalk, back-stab, dominate, and in the end *win* are primal, and certainly not unique to the vampire. Hell, there's nothing the Beast drives the vampire to do that a mortal human hasn't already done without any supernatural urging. For some people, it's not a job, it's who they are.

Pulling It Off

The Executive is tricky, requiring a fair effort to play. Being plugged into a mortal organization means there's expectations and demands which can sometimes be difficult to deflect, and some of them just aren't compatible with the vampire's lifestyle. But with some clever time management, verifiable results, and a good wireless plan a suitably adept vampire can dominate their department.

The trick with wearing this Mask is to do well enough to excuse any eccentricity, but not so well as to court promotion into a less flexible position. The ideal Executive role is the aggressive and hungry junior, not the cautious senior with her vested stock options, and personnel management problems. This also necessitates occasionally switching companies, and even identities, Junior Exec

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becomes an increasingly inaccurate descriptor. The judicious application of vampire mind tricks can stretch the time you can hold the same position, but eventually you'll need to start sending out resumes.

Background

The Executive mask is made of equal parts competence and appearance. Knowing the lingo for the business you're in, how it works, and how to do it is essential if you're going to make any effort to play the role well. What's equally important are the trappings of the role, and the expected attitudes. Dressing just so, driving the right car, being seen in the right bars and clubs, mixing with the right people socially. The executive clique demands more than 9-5 attendance on work, it also demands a commitment demonstrated with the sacrifice of off-hours and personal leisure to the work set.

Equal parts *social schmooze* and *canny thinking* carry the Executive, and in game terms this means Social and Mental Attributes dominate. Skills such as Politics, Intimidation, Socialize, and Persuasion will be invaluable.

Concepts: Junior Partner, Commodities Trader, Revenue Agent, Headhunter, Personnel Specialist (aka an Axe-man), Efficiency Consultant, Auditor.

Common Victims: The Intern, Suicidal Ex-Employees, Business Rival, Boss who keeps riding your ass, Secretary, PA, After-hours cleaners.

Anchor Relationships: Rival Executives, Boss, Personal Assistant, Attractive Consultant, Flirty Receptionist

Asset Skills: Politics, Persuasion

Guru

"And next, we move into Snake Pose. Jeanie, that's perfect! Stick around after we break, I'd like to talk to you about an... advanced class I'm starting."

Description

The Guru is a teacher, but one with a particularly charismatic take on teaching. Not simply an instructor, the Guru's personal magnetism is as much responsible for his students' dedication as his actual wisdom. "Cult of personality," indeed.

There's always been a place for this mask. In the ancient world, the Guru might have been a charming priest, a hermit, a philosopher, or thinker with a dedicated following. In the modern world, with the Western culture of self-improvement, a Guru author might patent a self-help program and tour the lecture circuit, become a personal trainer specializing in weight-loss, or become a life-coach for rich neurotics.

So long as the human animal feels incomplete or empty of meaning, the Guru will have a place.

This is not to say that a Guru is all charisma and his lessons a scam. The Kindred often have unique insights, and can teach them to willing students. They might even believe the lessons they teach, though that's not necessarily better than the cynical scamster manipulating the credulous truth-seekers. The charismatic cult leader is doubly scary for being a true believer.

This mask provides cover not unlike the Artist, because people expect Gurus to be somewhat strange. Because of the Guru's relationship with her students, cognitive dissonance also helps maintain the mask. The student seeks something from the Guru—meaning, a better way to live or outright happiness—and that initial effort and credence given to the Guru means the student is more inclined to explain away disturbing things. The deeper into the Guru's teachings the student becomes, and the more they define themselves by what they've been taught, the more they'll accept, especially if the weirdness is sold to them in terms of 'deeper mysteries' or 'private lessons.' The potential for abuse is awesome, and few Kindred who pursue the Guru Masquerade can resist taking advantage of it at some point.

Pulling It Off

Whether the Guru actually has anything to teach is secondary to their ability to *play make-believe*. They pretend to have something to say, and that's all that matters. Profundity? Not required. At least when it comes to maintaining the Masquerade. This isn't incompatible with genuine insight and willingness to share it. Not every startup religion or life-philosophy is an excuse to scam the believers and lure them into bed. It's just a lot easier to approach the Masquerade from that angle.

The trickiest thing about maintaining the Guru is keeping students close enough to create the scene of intimacy and connection, but not so close that they start to get an inkling of your true nature.

Background

Most Gurus have a background in their philosophy from their mortal lives, which they carry with them into their Requiem. Perhaps changed as they themselves are changed, this ethos forms the basis for their teachings when they adopt the Masquerade. Some however have no particular insight or desire to teach before the Embrace, but something happens in the hallway between life and death, and they emerge with an insight they feel compelled to share.

In terms of mechanics, Gurus benefit greatly from strong Social Attributes and Skills, especially the ones who lack any real insight. Stringing students along is much easier. But if you want to have some kind of actual lessons to each, then you'll need Mental Skills as well, related to the particular school being taught.

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Concepts: Self-Help Guru, Pop-Psychologist, Yoga Instructor, Sensei, Narco-Estatic, Evangelical, Cult Leader, Neo-Economist, PoMo Philosopher, Psychonaut, Fundamentalist

Common Victims: Naive Student, Angry Ex-Follower, Infiltrating Reporter, Cult Deprogrammer

Anchor Relationships: Senior Student, Nonbeliever, Confidant

Asset Skills: Academics, Persuasion

Healer

"And does this hurt? How about this? Good. Everything looks good, but to make sure we'll just draw some blood... for the lab."

Description

There have always been those who seek to heal the sick and the afflicted. Early traditions of herbalism and faith healing still persist, even if science has supplanted them in much of the word with a mechanistic approach to healing.

Adopting the mask of the Healer gives vampires an authority few other Masquerades offer. The Healer is trusted and ministers to people at their most vulnerable. They tend to their people when those people are weak, ill, worried, and exposed—often literally naked before him. The sick give themselves into the hands of the Healer, and trust he will make them well.

It's a position even the most saintly find lures them into arrogance, and few are further from sainthood than the Kindred.

Outwardly, the healing professions are seen as honorable and prestigious. Doctor is right up there with Fireman, Astronaut, and President for what kids want to be when they grow up. People want their healers to be trustworthy, because they know the vulnerability of sickness. This is especially perverse when the Kindred hide in this guise, because they're nothing if not a pestilence in human skin, sapping the strength and taking the lives of their victims.

So the Kindred Healer already has an investment of societal trust, and is surrounded by potential pray that's weakened and trusting, isolated and vulnerable. It's not a Masquerade just any Kindred can manage because of the self-control needed. A hungry vampire along in a room with a hemophiliac, his body marbled with gorgeous bruising, or the would-be liquor store robber shot by the owner, brought in covered in blood, hemorrhaging from a deep gut wound. If the Beast tempted to run wild even once, it can destroy the whole Masquerade for a Healer.

Yet there are so many opportunities for the clever and cautious Healer to feed—blood draws, anemics, and the high mortality rates with certain illnesses. Patients can be gently fed upon, and then their blood replaced with transfused plasma before its loss harms them overmuch. And if one or two of them do die, the doctor calling their time of death certainly wouldn't be suspected of their murder. With some care, the Beast will rarely grow so wild that it can't be managed.

Healers are also positioned to aid their fellow Kindred in maintaining the larger Masquerade. Surviving victims can be silenced or transferred to other institutions- ones wholly controlled Dead victims can be sanitized by vampire medical examiners and coroners. In emergencies supplies of cold blood can be lifted from the blood bank to feed a desperately hungry vampire.

Pulling It Off

The key to maintaining the Healer Masquerade is control. Ironclad self-control and self-awareness are both essential. The Healer must never grow so hungry that the Beast usurps control at an inopportune moment, and must keep a cool head in a high-stress situations. Not all Healers work as physicians, of course. What really makes the Healer Masquerade is how society perceives the role—if the Healer's specialty is viewed as something of the lunatic fringe, then it lacks the credibility and authority to be a proper Healer. There exists some cultural variance to this—in China, herbalism and traditional medicine is still widely regarded as effective and prestigious as modern medical practice, but in the US, it falls under the catchall of 'alternative care,' which often means for its practitioners 'not a *real* doctor,' and the healer must be a 'real doctor' in her cultural context (otherwise, she's likelier fulfilling the Guru role).

It's harder to fake your way through it as a Healer than some of the other Masquerades. You've got to actually know something about your methods of healing, and to practice in an official capacity, there's usually some form of licensure process that's hard to fake.

Background

It's tricky for a vampire to assume the Healer Masquerade without already having access before the Embrace. Doctors in the West especially are closely regulated, highly educated, and must be licensed. By the time they begin practicing, they have already amassed a huge paper trail describing their progress into the healing procession. Getting a position at a hospital or other institution would be extremely difficult without this supporting documentation, or a significant exertion of influence (admittedly not impossible, given how far Kindred hands reaches).

So for those transitioning from mortal healer to undead, they're likely to have significant Mental Attributes and

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Skills, with Social or Physical coming second (depending on bedside manor). Those healers who seek to sooth mind as well as body will have Empathy, Socialize and Persuasion to a significant level.

Concepts: Old Country Doctor, Surgeon with a God Complex, Morbid Medical Examiner, Hospice Nurse, Angel of Death, Intense Shrink

Common Victims: The Dying, Hospital Staff, Candystripers, Grieving Family, Cancer patients

Anchor Relationships: Fellow Physician, Trusted Nurse, EMT, Administrator, Regular patient

Asset Skills: Empathy, Medicine

Junkie

"Hey man, how about a little something to keep me warm tonight? It's cold tonight, man, real cold. Yeah, no, that's not what mean. It's not money I'm looking for. I need something warmer than cold hard cash, brother."

Description

The Junkie is a catchall Masquerade, lumping all kinds of down-and-outs and fringe dweller with similar hard luck and bad habits and addictions. You might call them drunks, bums, hookers, tweakers, street kids. They're the lowest strata of the lowest class, perpetual victims, and petty criminals. The forgotten, the abused, the bottom-feeders.

In this company, a vampire hardly rates a shrug. There's so many ways for the fringe people to suffer and die. A cold winter will kill them. A hot summer, too. A bad batch of Mexican tar. A dealer they can't pay. Another junkie defending his squat. Disease. And the whole genus of all-too human street predators who might curb-stomp a junkie because... well, because it's Tuesday. Because inflicting misery can life on incrementally out of the same misery.

Cops don't make it better. Getting picked up is almost as bad as getting fucked up. The cops take you in, and you'll detox in the holding cell. They'll burn all your clothes and toss your shit because it's unhygienic. When you get out you won't have anything. It'll be back to blow-jobs for spare change. And too many of the police who patrol the breakdown zones in the city are afflicted by the same soul-rot as the town itself, like they're the avatars of the dying metropolitan god. Get picked up by the wrong cop, and it won't be a possession rap, it'll be your teeth beaten in with a night stick. Maybe the cop's trying to bleed the poison out or something, leave the awfulness in the city so he can go home to the suburbs free and clear.

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Playing the Junkie is so easy, almost any vampire can do it. There's an instinct for it that transcends background. Bottom feeders wearing the Junkie's scabby mask blend in so well at these depths that the illusion is perfect. Even late-stage licks about to cash in their chips and go feral can pull off the Junkie Masquerade. Corpse-pale skin and eyes yellowing like congealed fat give one a look like hepatitis, and the Beast's insanity twisting the face hardly stands out amongst the unmedicated schizophrenia, withdrawal, bipolar mania, and PTSD. People don't look at those short timers (when people do look at junkies on the street) and think, "Oh God! The walking dead!" They think, "Jesus Christ, that junkie looks half-dead." And beyond that, it requires no more thought.

Some vampires develop a taste for this kind of feeding, too, drinking from the diseased and the dying, the polluted and the abused. To the untrained palate, the blood is foul and rotting, but to the back-alley epicure it's *piquant*, like artisanal cheese.

Living on this level is easy. It doesn't take much effort to appear filthy and hungry and desperate Junkies are invisible too—they've got their own magic for remaining unseen. Just watch the men in suits walk past them, ignoring their jingling cups of change, and their sores, and their filthy clothes. A vampire can go very well here. The Masquerade almost keeps itself too, as nobody really believes what street people say. Claims that they've been abused and fed upon by supernatural monsters would hardly raise an official eyebrow. Random puncture wounds? Needle marks. Animal bites. Anemia? Everything else? Syphilis. Addiction. HIV. Bum fights. And on and on.

Pulling It Off

Goddamn, this one's almost too easy. Knowing the score on the street is just about all that's required to blend in and maintain the mask. There's a culture of silence, of not looking too hard, of not asking questions. The people on the fringes also know more than you'd expect, and there's a general acceptance that there's some weird fucking shit out there, and not all of it is *delirium tremens* or detox. Among the true junkies, the addicted and the desperate, there's also a fundamental breakdown in basic human reactions and social order. The drugs get inside the brain and change it, hijacking the reward system that's supposed to make us feel good when we do something worthy or something to further survival. The things that bind people into relationships—the feelings of warmth and connection, of desire—gets eaten by the drugs, and junkies don't really give a shit about each other when the addictions have run past a certain point. The scary guy with the eyes killed Billy, but he gave you the three rocks Billy had been holding (and not planning on sharing!), so maybe it'll be all right for a little while.

One of the biggest obstacles to sliding down to this level for those who aren't Embraced from it is pride. That old aching human pride (which soon grows into *in*human pride, thank you very much). Dumpsters are full of perfectly good stuff and fresh food, but oh the shame of being seen jumping into one! People might think you were *poor* or something. And then, what about feeding on strung-out junkies? It's easy. It's free. It hardly takes any real effort, and when they gets a taste of the Kiss, half of them come looking for *you* next time because they need the fix. Yet, vampires slog their guts out schmoozing, and flirting, and stalking, and grooming herds when all they have to do to eat like gluttons is cross the tracks in second-hand clothes somebody pissed on.

Background

It's not hard to slide from being a human junkie to being a vampire pretending to be one, but when granted the power and freedom of undeath, many fringe people try their damnedest to rise up, and claim some of the stability and comfort their circumstances denied them. Moving in the other direction is easier, and some vampires slide down into the Junkie Masquerade deliberately or just naturally. Some people, when freed of all their human obligations and human expectations, realize they don't give a fat fucking shit about clothes or cars or status or money or anything else, and find the depths perfectly to their liking. A quick introductory period to learn the feel of the streets, and they're happy as a pig in shit.

Mechanically, Skills that let you live rough are useful on the streets. Physical Attributes are immediately useful, for fighting and running away. Vampires have a dramatic advantage in a fight on the streets anyhow, as they don't have to worry about infection or dealing with the hospitals if they gets banged up. They don't have to hold back, and most junkies aren't willing to fight past a certain threshold of pain. Learning to fight a little better to fend off the opportunists and human predators is a good idea though. Social Skills are useful, Persuasion for panhandling or Expression for busking, and of course the Fix-All of the Junkie social world—Intimidate.

Concepts: Panhandler, Hobo with a knife, Hollow-Eyed Hooker, Bucket Drum Busker, Self-Medicating Headcase

Common Victims: Addicts, homeless people, street kids, hookers, abusive cops, gangbangers, poor bastards who have to live here

Anchor Relationships: Decent cop, homeless advocate, drug dealer

Asset Skills: Streetwise, Survival

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Investigator

"It took me a long time to work my way back here, to follow the snake and find it with a mouthful of its own tail. I've just got two questions, lady. Why'd you kill your husband, and why'd you hire me to find out who did it? What's your game? Because I have my own games to play."

Description

There's always somebody sniffing around where they shouldn't, and there's always people looking to learn things that in the end they wish they didn't know. Somebody hires a Dick to snap pics of their husband slipping the sausage into another dame's bun, what's it they're really wanting to know? They want you to come back and tell them it ain't true. They want you to say you're sorry, but he really was playing poker with the boys or volunteering with retarded kids, or whatever other shit he was telling them. But that's never the way it works out because people don't hire a professional snoop when they don't already know, deep inside, what the answer is.

Show them the pictures. Maintain a professional but sympathetic distance. Recommend the name of your buddy who handles divorce cases if they ask. Try not to think about the kids at home who're soon going to have their lives torpedoed.

Being an Investigator—whether an official one (police, licensed PI), or a private citizen trying to squeeze a living out of it—you're going to be dealing with people in extremis. People who've lost loved ones to violence or carelessness or stupidity. People who're hurting, and looking to hurt others to even the score.

The job is nine parts boredom and waiting, one part screaming hell and panic. Just when you're willing to give up the romantic notions soaked up from black and white Bogies for years, a dame really does walk in, and she really got legs that know the path to paradise. (And vampires can do more to change that 9:1 ratio; earn a rep for solving the really fucked-up cases, and more fucked-up cases come walking through that door.)

There's not much difference in being an Investigator and playing one on TV—the Masquerade's pretty much the real thing. About the only difference is that it's harder to get drunk as a vampire, but easier to sleep. If you're doing it for a paycheck, then you have to make sure you're working nights, and don't have to testify in court. The union will stand by your disability claim for Porphyria, and you can testify in special session after sundown if need be. If you're working private cases, then who cares about the hours you keep? The people who hire you don't want to know you. The people you investigate only care about what you're going to find. You're a window, invisible because people are looking through you at something on the other side, something *you* show *them*.

Pulling It Off

Not too hard, really. It's trickier for Investigators working official beats, and they've got all the paperwork and official bureaucracy to satisfy. It's also harder to hide your true nature when you're surrounded by people whose job it is to notice trouble about to happen, and the vampire is damn sure a sign of trouble. Even getting in the door in a proper police outfit is hard unless you're already a cop before the Embrace. You can't attend the academy after you're undead, after all. With some careful forgery and some even more careful records-fudging, you can arrange for a fake transfer from one department to another, preferably one a long way off without much official communication.

Opening up your own storefront detective's shop is way easier, and securing a PI's license is pretty straightforward if you can pull some short strings. With a vampire's unnatural powers, digging into the petty ugliness that pays a P.I.'s bills is going to be pretty easy. If you've got an insect's ethics, you can help things along in a direction you'll find more lucrative or acceptable. Sure, Hubby is banging hookers in fleabag hotels, but who's to say Wifey has to know? Put the guy up against the wall, and put the frighteners into him (meaning: any good mind-bending Discipline), kick down the doors of his mind and rearrange the furniture. Tell him, "Go home to you wife, and never do this again or I'll fucking kill you. Oh, and here's your bill." Followed by a bite, and some bills from the billfold.

Next day, give the lady a shrug and a smile, and tell her, "He played poker all night, just like he said. I don't think it's anything you need to worry about."

In the end, *you* know the truth.

And you got fed.

Sometimes, that's enough. Most times, that's all there is.

Background

Becoming a private P.I. Post-Embrace is pretty easy, but getting an official position with a law-enforcement outfit is trickier without some tomfoolery. Regardless, most Investigators came into it with the Skills, and more importantly the instincts for investigation. Part stubbornness, part obsession, mostly the bloody-minded sense that secrets are inherently offensive.

Mental Attributes are most important for an investigator, with Physical or Social taking second position based on style and inclination. Investigators who favor the hard man's tactics of kicking in doors and slapping around stoolies will favor Physical Attributes and Skills, while those who play it cooler, talking their

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subjects into confession or revelation favor Social Attributes. There's few Skills that won't be of some use to an Investigator, but most tend to focus on the cores of Investigate, Socialize, Brawl and Intimidate and outsource the specialties

Concepts: Sort-Timer Detective, Working Stiff P.I., Transfer from Canada, Insurance Investigator, Nosy Old Lady

Common Victims: The Dame, Johnny Numbers' thugs, The Fat Man

Anchor Relationships: (Ex-)Partner, Spunky Receptionist, Wiseass Coroner, Street Kid, Matronly old lady at the records office.

Asset Skills: Investigate, Persuasion

Scholar

"Oh yes, this is interesting. You've told no one else about this? Good, good, yes. It's fortunate you came to me first. Please, come in, and bolt the door behind you."

Description

In nature, it's common for harmless creatures to evolve the appearance of dangerous ones. King snakes look like deadly coral snakes, and a moth's wing-spots appear to predators like an owl's eyes. When a vampire Masquerades as a Scholar, so the process is reversed and the deadly creature feigns the appearance of something generally considered harmless.

A Scholar's pursuit of knowledge can get aggressive in the competitive circles of University academia, but intellectual rivalries rarely explode into violence (except when they do). A scholar's pursuit of knowledge can see them sometimes playing Investigator as they've got both a large knowledge-base and the tools for increasing it.

Scholars come in at all levels, some playing the role of students, others as experts in their fields. What this Masquerade lacks in regular social contact, it makes up for in privacy. Unless they have some professional obligations to teach or meet with other researchers, many scholars can pursue their studies solo, which affords them plenty of opportunity to see to their needs.

Scholarship also places a vampire in the right place to bury knowledge that too dangerous to let propagate. Oh, the delicious irony when the nation's foremost expert on the folklore of the vampire turns out to actually be a vampire when the plucky young hunters come seeking vital information.

Certain clans of the undead are certainly better suited to this quite Masquerade, but even the rangiest Gangrel can find a suitably outdoorsy field of study if she's intent on wearing this mask, and really for field research into nocturnal animal habits, who could be better?

The Scholar gives a vampire access as well—it can link them to an educational or research institution, and the resources it can bring to bear. Don't discount the hunting opportunities such places offer either, especially universities which are filled with young, often foolish, frequently intoxicated good-looking people.

Pulling It Off

Pulling off the Scholar is pretty much a matter of doing it, and not giving the game away. Maintain a modicum of caution with feeding and the revelation of inhuman powers, and few will look to closely at you so long as you publish, and your TAs cover your classes. As rarely as some professors are seen, one might wonder if the whole of American academia is overrun with the undead.

For less nebbish and monomaniacal scholars, or those with a taste for the politics of scholarship, the vampire›s instincts (and yes, powers) can come in handy. If working in a university, it›s important to avoid having to teach classes in person, unless you can schedule night classes. Independent scholars have much more freedom, but need the means to support their own research.

Background

There's no practical barrier against a vampire adopting a Scholar's Masquerade even if they showed little inclination towards scholarship prior to the Embrace, but it's not that common. Frequently, scholarly vampires will Embrace like-minded mortals to assist them, so the focus on study perpetuates.

By far the most valuable Attributes and Skills for the Scholar are Mental ones, with Social or Physical coming next based on personal inclination Those who pursue their research in the field will benefit from Physical Attributes and Skills such as Survival. Those expecting to undertake their research in dangerous climes could benefit from a combat Skill or two. Those sticking closer to civilization (or at least, to academia) Will find Social Attributes more useful, and Skills such as Socialize, Persuasion, and even Intimidate serve them well.

Concepts: Old Eccentric, Antiquarian, Bookstore Owner, Arrogant Professor, Hungry Grad Student, Garage Researcher, Gentleman Scholar, Librarian

Common Victims: Clueless Undergrads, Teaching Assistants, Hot-For-Teacher Types

Anchor Relationships: Research Assistant, Your Book Guy, TA, Head of Department, Rival Researcher, Publisher.

Asset Skills: Academics, Science

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Socialite

"Darling, have you met Mirabel? Oh for shame. Really, you two have so much in common! Here, you two talk amongst yourselves, I see someone I must say hello to. Oh, Miri, make sure to ask him about his boat!"

Description

The Socialite is someone people know because... well... because they know them. When they hit it big enough to make the national gossip rags, they're sometimes called 'celebutants' (or *celebutards*), but no vampire wants that kind of attention. Kindred Socialites play to a more local audience, perhaps getting the occasional mention in the local paper's Style section, but otherwise staying off the national radar.

Being a Socialite usually implies independent wealth, because people with real jobs rarely have the time to pursue Society in a semi-professional capacity, and also the prohibitive expense in keeping up with fashion, attending the right parties and events, and entertaining in style. Vampires using the Socialite Masquerade can sometimes fake it for awhile, using their powers to acquire what they need as they need it. Fashionable clothing can be stolen or had with mental influences, as can walking-around money, and the more socially-gifted vampire can charm her way into the right events without much difficulty. But there will come a time when a major outlay is expected, and it will challenge the faker to make the cut. It's a dilemma faced by mortals who've conned their way into social circles they've no way of affording, though sometimes the con is the point. It's not an uncommon headline in the World of Darkness: "Socialite Bilked of $255K by Charming Con-Man."

Moving in society circles doesn't usually translate directly to influence over powerful people, but it does offer access to such people when it might otherwise be tricky to arrange. Society parties often include politicians, industrialists, artists, celebrities, and scions of the nations surviving old-money dynasties This access means both the chance to influence the powerful in subtle ways, and the opportunity for some, ahem, *fine dining* as well. It's fairly common when vampires are bullshitting that someone will claim the *Celeb du jour* as a past snack. But if the bullshitting vampire successfully Masquerades as the Socialite, then it's not impossible that she had the chance at sneaking a nip off a starlet or three.

Pulling It Off

So much of what the Socialite does is faking it, so much so that the act of faking it practically makes one a Socialite (think Paris Hilton, and how her popularity feeds on itself). Having the money to pull it off comfortably helps, but being known, knowing others, and getting the right invites is the first step, and then after that maintaining the thing is like surfing, each social season a different wave to be caught and ridden. It's a lot of work, being that well-liked. It requires either a devilishly fascinating personality, or boundless energy for schmoozing. Either way, the fame is pretty much a paper tiger, but that's fine for the Socialites. It doesn't need to be real for it to be *real*.

Getting in the door is one thing, using that access is another. Socialites can apply a great deal of very subtle sway over the powerful with as simple a thing as arranging the seating at dinner so the right people can be introduced to one another, and discover some common interest.

Background

Even odds for a Socalite vampire to have come from the circles she now moves in, or to have been raised to them by her new inclination or her sire's desire. Those who start already part of a high society have an initial advantage, but face trouble within only a few years. The Socialite's life demands regular personal contact, and fairly quickly old friends will notice the vampire is not aging as they are. If the Socialite is reasonably new to the game, and unknown to the other players, then she's got some longevity before she needs to move into more secluded circles, or reinvent herself somewhere else.

Obviously, Social Attributes and Skills are the most important, with Mental Skills coming second, and Physical trailing a distant last.

Concepts: Fashionista, Trendy Writer, The Charming Host, The New Hotness, The Dead President's Wife

Common Victims: Pretty Young Things, This Year's Model, The Help

Anchor Relationships: Social Secretary, The Cynical Ex-Socialite, The Senator

Asset Skills: Persuasion, Socialize

Youth

"I know how this works, mister. I'm older than I look."

Description

It's only recently that the concept of adolescence became accepted to describe the transitional stages between childhood and adulthood. In the past, children were promoted to adult much faster. Marriages at 12 were not uncommon, with children of their own by 13. Acts we'd now consider statutory rape were... just how things were done. With disease, poor diet, no dentistry, and short lifespans the bloom of youth so many vampires Embrace to preserve occurred at what now we'd consider at-best late childhood, yet among the Elder Kindred there are many whose small stature (another relic of the past) and

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early Embrace make them appear to modern eyes as strange teenagers.

These youthful elders often themselves Embrace young mortals for much the same reason their own sires did, but also because changes in Western society make access to older adults tricky... to *catch a predator* indeed. A five-hundred year old undead noble, at the height of her powers, and peerless in her master of her clan's occult arts might find herself with two easily accessible social circles—online perverts or the loutish local high school boys. Trying to hunt the Rack at an eternal 14 years old is just impossible.

The Youth Masquerade is for those vampires trapped with the seeming of adolescence, not exactly children, but not really adults—caught in that troublesome zone modern society has such difficulty defining. In other words, jailbait.

The culture exalts youth, fashion sexualizes girls at an earlier and earlier age. Lolita and her legions of sexy school-girls stalk porn and erotica, and men give each other high-fives when another attractive female teacher has sex with a male student. The urge to treat teenagers as adults is there, just as it was in Shakespeare's day, but now they'd charge Romeo and Juliet with a crime.

If the vampire can stomach it, this Masquerade is easy to adopt. Watch some MTV, wear the right clothes, and go to the mall. Going to school is probably impossible, but once a peer group is obtained, the modern world of social networking means they can stay in touch and meet-up just after dark.

Some of the younger-seeming Youth might go so far as to groom thralls to play parent to them, for the added cover it provides, and also because it's good to have someone who can drive you places.

If their actual age and experience exceed those of their teenage peer-group, a Youth might become tired of the inanity of it, but there's not many places our perpetual 13-year old can find adults willing to converse intelligently with a kid. Perhaps spitefully, some take particular pleasure in pedophile baiting, and find they have a remarkably easy time justifying it afterwards.

Pulling It Off

If you look the part, Pulling It Off is easy. Just don't do anything to give the game away completely, like scowling at the world with your ancient eyes, and cursing in dead languages when you should be texting Madison about how cute you think Derek is. Wear the clothes, and hang out with the flock, and most people will look right past you. It really is a low-maintenance Masquerade.

Eventually, you'll have to shop around for a new peer group, pick some new clothes, put some new music on your iPod because your peers are growing up fast, and you're not.

Background

Since looking the part is the first step to pulling off this Masquerade, it's all about the timing of the Embrace. While some of those Embraced young can pass for older with the right clothes and attitude, some just can't manage it (or don't make the effort). Passing for a Real Boy isn't too hard if you do your homework, bone up on teen pop-culture and slang, and employ your *hide0us m1nd powerz* occasionally to ensure you balance popularity against notoriety, and hover somewhere between them.

A Youth can benefit from any combination of Attributes and Skills, though a certain amount of social-fu helps maintain the clique that serves as cover.

Concepts: Runaway, Homeschooler, Disaffected Goth Kid, Righteous Dude

Common Victims: The sportos, the motorheads, geeks, sluts, bloods, waistoids, dweebies, dickheads

Anchoring Relationships: Clueless S.O., Fake Parents, Big Brother or Big Sister volunteer, Mall Cop

Asset Skills: Athletics, Subterfuge

Ah, Yes, The Standard Disclaimer

So, playing potentially-sexualized 13-year-old vampires is a little bit fucked up. It's not like it doesn't make sense; our culture sexualizes people far too young for it—culture and law war against one another. So, it's not unreasonable that you'd want to take a look at making use of this in your game.

The caveat is, of course, to work with the rest of your table-mates to make sure nobody's really uncomfortable with this. It's your table, and the level of maturity there is yours to determine, not ours, but when it comes to sensitive topics, it's best to ask around and make sure nobody's going to find discomfort in a game that's supposed to be fun.

Requiem

Below you find the following information regarding the Requiem roles a vampire may fulfill in her unlife and in vampiric society:

Quote: A quote embodying this Requiem.

Description: An overarching look at what this mask means for the vampire.

Tonight: What does the *night-to-night* look like for vampires in this Requiem?

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Background: What kind of vampire suits this role best?

Concepts: A handful of potential "ready-to-go" character concepts within this role.

Key Discipline: The Discipline associated with this Requiem—as noted on p. 41, vampires may purchases this Discipline more cheaply.

Courtesan

"Thank you, I'm so glad you're enjoying the party. Have you tasted the pretty confections wandering about yet? Oh, you simply must. Each is high on one exotic narcotic or another. Mix and match, the effect is delightful."

Description

She's the life (metaphorically speaking) of the party. The Courtesan's territory are the social functions, parties, and gatherings of the Kindred, especially those less formalized gatherings where tradition and rote don't rule so absolutely. Vampires are social monsters, but their politics are the politics of wolves—dominance, temper, ego, and aggression always threaten to break lose in vampire gatherings.

So to the Courtesans fall the duty of greasing the social wheels, easing tempers, keeping enemies on opposite sides of the ballroom with casual grace, and seeing to it that the gather doesn't curdle into factional clots. It's a bit like being a chemical engineer in an explosive factory. Keep stirring, monitor the temperature, mix new ingredients carefully, and if it all blows up make sure the walls are strong and the roof is weak to channel the blast harmlessly upwards.

Courtesans are influential, but generally not leaders in their courts or covenants, rather they facilitate the powerful. Without an able hand managing tempers and keeping the party jovial, even the most able prince may find this gatherings turning somber, and his own instincts interfering with his desired impression.

Courtesans also help make introductions, and as they generally know everyone in the local Court's social scene, they're in a position to get people talking. Brokering these meetings is one of their most overt forms of power, and places those who request their aid subtly in their debt. As fixers, they facilitate alliances, betrayals, and political overthrows. Their neutrality is something most prize, and the key to their survival as social brokers is maintaining their usefulness regardless of who rules. They may conspire like any other vampire, but do so with more care less they commit to the losing side.

While they're valued, their neutrality makes it hard to trust a Courtesan.

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Tonight

You wake, and check your messages, email, texts, and Fangbook to see if there's any news or upcoming events you might want to get in on, anybody looking for advice, or introductions. You review your calendar, noting any events tonight, and any prep for events coming up soon. You dress carefully, crafting your public persona, and go to meet your intimates at a venue chosen to convey a certain message. You take a call from a new arrival in the city who wishes to meet a representative from the local Circle of the Crone adherents. He mentions that an old ally of yours gave him your number, and the recognition phrase he uses when you answer tells you the call is on the level. You take his info down, and then on a whim invite him to the little gathering you're attending that evening. The recognition phrase also included code-sign for "potentially interesting" and "hot," and appearing at an event with a good-looking stranger never hurts ones social stock. A few more phone calls between barely sipped espresso arranges an arms deal, ruins the career of a mortal politico who'd unwisely defied the Lancea Bishop, and starts a rumor that will dog your chief rival at tonight's event, distracting him while you discuss the Prince's upcoming wedding plans with her.

Background

Most Courtesans are socially adept before the Embrace, quickly allowing them to start playing the same role in Kindred society, but it's not required. Some are Embraced by sires who also pursue this Requiem, and are selected for artistic facial features, charisma, or even as a challenge. My Fair Vampire.

Some antisocial people find to their surprise that they're better at being social after they die, and segue into the Courtesan Requiem entirely on their own. Not every Courtesan is elegant and cultured, and not every Court responds wells to that anyhow. In some places a good old boy brogue and back-slap supplant the air kiss, and in others fortunes are made and broken over Xbox live chat between smack-talk and Halo teabaggings.

Concepts: Airhead Mastermind, The Magnification Bastard, Social Assassin, Matchmaker, Courtly Chessmaster

Key Discipline: Majesty

Enforcer

"We can do this the easy way, or I can break your other arm."

Description

Somebody has to be the Bad Man. When you strip away all the political bullshit and flapping noise-holes, vampires are creatures of violation and violation. They kill people to go on living. If a vampire wants to drink a beer or fuck, he's got to use a little stolen life to do it. Even something as simple as having a piss means somebody had to die a little bit. Instincts demand dominance, and can turn the thinking mind off like a light, and send even the most cultured Kindred into a blind killing rage.

In the end, the only thing imposing a semblance of order in the pressure cooker of court politics is the implicit threat of horrible pain and extinction looming over everyone who defies the hierarchy. Every domain runs a little different, but even the most liberal Carthian cities have their heavies lurking at the doors, waiting for the signal to unload on somebody threatening the order of things.

Enforcers use violence or the threat of violence to impose order. They're forces for stability in the Kindred world—keeping in mind that that world has been described not-inaccurately as a 'neo-feudal hell.' It might be oppressive and primitive and unfair, but it keeps the vampires from ripping each other's faces off most of the time.

And when it doesn't, there's you.

Enforcers can serve the Prince, the Court, within Covenants, or even local Clan hierarchies. Enforcers with official roles often judge and sanction actions, while less management-oriented Kindred hit the streets and pound the pavement then hit people and pound them into the pavement.

It's not a complicated Requiem, but then there's the investigative angle some Enforcers miss entirely. There's got to be some determination about whether somebody is a danger or not, whether a crime was committed or not, and just who should suffer for it. Enforcers with some brains to go with the brawn often find themselves having to do their own digging, infiltration, interrogation, and then judge whether to bring the hammer down.

Tonight

You wake up still hurting, and the burns across your back wept all night, and stuck to the sheets. A shower helps a little, but your phone is ringing before you're done. It's the 'office' calling, and they're asking whether the message was delivered last night. Yeah, it was, and if there's nothing else, a night to eat and recover might be... ah... yeah, all right. Somebody's thrall tried to deliver a message to the new gang downtown, let them know the score, but they put him in the hospital. Going to be a goddamn slog tonight, then. With gangs, it's got to be all or nothing in one night, or they'll talk themselves into trying some kind of payback bullshit. You gotta hurt the whole thing bad enough to make it stick. A couple of calls, and you know who's running it and where they live—where they're

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moms live too. File that one away in case they need things explained to them again. From the closet, your hand lingers over the cut down shotgun, and then goes for Old Reliable. The rebar with its duct-tape wrapping brings back memories of early days, and you scratch blood from the rough iron with a thumbnail as you call in your status for the night.

Background

Enforcers come from all walks of life and unlife, and are loosely divided between those who favor investigation and those who tend towards the hands-on aspects of the Requiem. An Enforcer can get by fine without thinking, and asking as an instrument of somebody else's policy. Go here, smash X person's face through Y breakable surfaces, and remove Z fingers with a bolt cutter. The moderately intelligence are going to occasionally wonder *why* they're inflicting all this pain, and then they'll either have a crisis of conscious (if they still have one), or possibly get promoted to a more brain-intensive aspect of enforcement.

Concepts: Big Fucking Thug, Bouncer, Bloodhound, Sympathetic Torturer, Undead Gumshoe, Legbreaker

Key Discipline: Protean

Horror

"Hello, little chicky chicky chicky."

Description

There's a reason even vampires should fear the dark. Hunger, rage, and fear are such defining traits of the Kindred. The Horror plays to the last. These vampires are just *terrifying,* sometimes for no obvious reason. They embody all the things most vampires try and forget about themselves—the unnatural truth of the Curse, the predation, madness, and the perversity of human imagination put in service to inhuman hunger.

Every court has one or two vampires who do nothing to break the edicts or openly engage in insane atrocity, yet who unaccountable give everyone else the willies. "Goddammit, that crazy fuck is looking at me again."

Sometimes Horrors are the Boo Radleys of the undead set—more talked about than seen, about whom baroque rumors grow up. Other times, they're right out in the open daring other Kindred to penetrate their mystery. When they act, Horrors are capable of doing things to shock even the jaded Kindred sensibility, even when those actions are wholly in the service of community's wellbeing. Yes, the interlopers had to die but... what did he do with all the faces?

Tonight

You're not sure if you're awake. You can still hear the dream-voices. They stay with you for hours now, and sometimes you think you recognize them. You'll ask the Heads later about them, but it's a workshop day. The fat should be rendered down now. You can start greasing the clockwork baby's worm-gears. One of the Shadows reminds you about tonight's party at the Botanical Gardens. The one you weren't invited to. It's a game you play with the coquette. She throws a party, and does not invite you, and then you go anyway. Oh, but what to wear? Well, you do know where the coquette's mother is buried. Her dress. Her skin. It's an outfit.

Background

Becoming a Horror, embracing the terror of others, and the isolation it causes, isn't something the healthy and undamaged do. It takes a brush with oblivion to make your whole immortal existence *about* being an object of revulsion and dread. While many Horrors enjoy the isolation (or at least are resigned to it), there's a perverse contingent who take pleasure in forcing their company on ordinary undead society. They'll lurk at parties and court functions, well dressed and polite yet horrible as cancer erupting through skin. Here, they stand too close to others, and make eye contact last too long, yet give no outward reason to take offense.

How does somebody get that fucked up?

It's usually a reaction to soul-breaking trauma. The sort of thing that'll make somebody cut off their own face while singing lullabies and sew on a hog's face with twine.

It's not impossible that this trauma came before the Embrace, or even that the Embrace itself did the damage. Regardless of the source, there's something just not right about vampires who follow this Requiem.

Unless it's a cunning artifice, like a bank robber wearing a monster mask to hide his true face.

Concepts: The Charming Murderer, Clockwork Killer, Torture Artist, The Lurker, Crazy-Eyed Girl

Key Discipline: Nightmare

Manipulator

"Don't feel so bad. Yeah, I played you, but I played everybody else too. Don't complain too much. You're still alive because I like you."

Description

The civic-minded vampire so easily slides into this Requiem that it's almost the default. The vampire application form practically says, "SELECT YOUR REQUIEM, IF UNCHECKED REVERTS TO MANIPULATOR."

Manipulation is what happens when the Beast's instincts for dominance and control find shape through the vampire's intelligence. Something of the immortal's long-view also creeps in. Elders for who've outlived their

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mortal selves being to think about time differently, and plots which take years and decades to unfold aren't at all daunting.

There's an inherent lack of trust in the Manipulator—if she really believed others were competent to make decisions she'd let them get on with their lives. She does not believe this. Conspiring with this mistrust is a deep arrogance—others can't be allowed to decide things, but she knows so much better how things should be.

Manipulators can hold official positions of power, or be the Iago to a prince's Othello. Access to others is all that's required, plus the requisite cynicism and arrogance.

Some Manipulators serve a cause, pulling strings to further their agenda, while others selfishly serve only themselves and their own ambition Regardless, the methodology is the same, and as old as human communication.

Tonight

So many irons in the fire. You forced yourself to stay awake for two hours into the morning, and now you're paying for it. You're having trouble with the mental juggling that usually comes so easily, as you toss and catch all the lies you have up in the air right now. Action News at 6 is reporting live from the warehouse fire, which is burning as hot as it should (the accelerant they were supposed to use was said to burn hot enough to break down water, and the firefighters are indeed standing off and not spraying the inferno). Check. And check*mate* in... well, you'll have to see what she does with her rook before calling mate. Later tonight, you have to go out and be seen, to discuss this arson, and what it means for the lady's money laundering operation. You'll commiserate with her, and enjoy the irony that you're the author of all her troubles, waiting for late into the evening to apply the gentle suggestion and goad that will aim her at your real enemy.

Background

It's hard to get this focused on playing others without some natural inclination that way. True, vampires learn to do this (and some learn to do this really *really* well) via on-the-job training, but those who start out as manipulators comfortable with wielding lies like knives, and calculating their risks do it quicker. Being a high-functioning sociopath without any sexual sadism to muddy your thinking really helps too.

True Manipulators find themselves locking horns with each other. While the rest of Kindred society might muddle along, unaware of who's pushing their buttons, manipulators have a better sense for when they're being

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played (or perhaps that's just paranoia sneaking in and widdling on the mental carpet)—at least, they *like to think* they know when somebody else has a hand up their asses to puppet them.

Concepts: Trusted Advisor, Wide-Eyed Not-So-Innocent, Old Player, Cold Avenger, Long-Con player

Key Discipline: Dominate

Martyr

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

Description

The Martyr never wanted to be a vampire, or she's come the long hard path to regretting it. Most vampires who can remember what it felt like to breathe both regret their condition and are repelled by it, but time erodes those memories, and eventually they'll realize they've been undead longer than they were alive and just settle into it for the long haul (the slow decay of their humanity also helps ease them into a comfortable rut). But the Martyr regrets it like heartache, and is soulsick with the urge to somehow atone for the horrible things he's done.

The older the vampire, the deeper the hole when his sins finally catch up with him, and the burden of atonement seems more and more impossible. There's a prime age for Martyrs, and most fall somewhere in the middle of their first century. They've seen the world they remember from their childhood vanish, and every living person they knew as a mortal is dead. It's a make or break point, where they either go with the vampire thing and get on with it, or have a crisis of conscience about it (sometimes, it's just a matter of whether there's enough humanity left in them to give a shit about atonement).

Other Martyrs experience some kind of traumatic revelation. Probably in the rain. Cue the swelling music, drop to your knees, spread your arms wide and scream heavenwards as your tears are washed away in the blah blah blah. That's a problem for martyrs right there—their weakness for misery masturbation and self flagellation that'll get laughs or disgusted head shakes from some of the better adjusted (or at least, more resigned) monsters in the community. It's possible to seek some kind of redemption without being a complete tool in the process.

Martyrs tend to stay connected to regular people, to help them out. There's the occasional temptation to play superhero by protecting a neighborhood and working to improve it. A vampire's got power, and there's no reason it can't be used to help people, except for the bit about how you have to hurt people to get the power to help them. Atonement isn't about adding up the columns and making sure Good totals more than Bad: no amount of "only feeding on evil people" is going to clear a troubled vampire's conscience.

Some Martyrs really do work to help people, others look for ways to control their condition, or pursue the proverbial cure. It's best they not think to hard about how much blood is needed to fuel a ten year research program because if they were really genuinely committed to atoning and preserving others from the monster they've become, then taking a walk outside at noon is the fastest way to make that happen.

Tonight

God*damn*, you're hungry. It's an animal trying to gnaw its way through your belly. Got to find something... *somebody* to eat tonight. It'll go bad otherwise. Put it off too long. There's that party the bitch invited you to tonight to just to fuck with you. There'd be willing people there, young, good looking. Some of them wouldn't live through the night. You could go and take one out of there with you, save him from your Kindred. Just take a little off him to steady yourself, and drop him off somewhere safe. That's... that's how it starts, isn't it? Save somebody, and then feel a little entitled to something for your trouble. No, go see your guy at the hospital and choke down a few units of O neg. You'll feel like crap afterwards, but nobody gets hurt. Go out? Stay in? Hard choice. Go out and there's no telling what kind of damage you might do out among the mortals. Stay in, and you're trapped in here with yourself all night. You go out.

Background

Some few vampires come through the Embrace and immediately regret it, and become Martyrs. They'll alternate between elation at their new powers and guilt when they come down from the thrill. Feeding is an ecstatic pleasure, followed by crippling shame. Sometimes a mortal's sexual hang-ups get confused with feeding, but other times there's no clear reason why some never get over their early squeamishness and get used to the new normal.

Many Martyrs lived other Requiems until something shook them up and made them question their existence. There's no way to say who'll suddenly have a crisis like this. It happens to enough vampires at various points that some think it's part of the Kindred life lifecycle, part of the evolution of the psyche from human to immortal, perhaps a last grasping effort to reclaim something that's slipping away.

Concepts: Dark Avenger in the Night, Sullen Asshole, Jiminy Cricket, Obsessed Virologist

Key Discipline: Obfuscate

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Nomad

"I'm moving on. Might stop in Laredo. Any message for your people there?"

Description

The Nomad is bound to no domain, and owes no Prince obedience. She's got freedom, for what that's worth, but also no protection or authority or safe place to crawl back to when the world gets cruel. There's something unsettled about the Nomad that makes staying put an exercise in willpower.

It used to be damned near impossible for a true nomad to wander between domains, back before the interstate highway system, air freight, ocean liners, and the telecommunications. Now all an anarchic misanthrope needs is a car and a roll of tinfoil and duct tape for covering up the motel room windows. At 65MPH, you can cover 600 miles of road easy. Get a room on the other end, or park the car somewhere safe and sleep in the trunk. When it was travel by horse or on foot, only the Gangrel could do it safe, sleeping in the Earth's Embrace. Now any itchy-foot neonate can hit the open road and cruise into a domain ahead of the sun.

But, who's going to welcome them?

A domain is a carefully balanced social ecology, and outsiders have a way of fucking such careful balances up pretty bad. The young Nomad will soon realize how unwelcome she is in most places. Princes take a dim view of unaligned unattached Kindred rolling into their towns without knowing the score, and the power players tend to start licking their lips thinking about the new tasty morsel. The flipside of the modern ease of travel is the speed that news travels- as soon as somebody spots you squeezing the local fruit, their texting your description to their allies, and moving in to see if you're a resource they can exploit (or worse for you, one their enemies can exploit), a threat to their plans, or just somebody to keep a close eye on.

Surviving as a Nomad requires patience and diplomacy, and it requires the ability to quickly create working rapports with the local big kids. Arriving at a new city you've never been to before is nerve-racking, but a place where you know some people, and where some people know you is much more hospitable. Presenting yourself to the Prince ASAP is always a good plan unless the domain has gone feral. If it's a democratic anarchy, then it's trickier because you have to figure out who the big players are before making yourself know. But once you're let the local boss know who you are, and that you're not going to make any trouble, they'll usually give you only the minimum amount of grief. They might ask you to take some letters or a package to an associate in another domain, and the more letters of introduction you can collect by playing nice with the politicos the easier time you'll have.

Some princes employ Nomads as messengers, using their impulse to wander to their advantage. A prince's messenger is usually a pretty tough individual, as there's many who'd like to get their mitts on a Prince's private correspondences.

Tonight

Panic for a minute before you remember you've zipped yourself up in an inside-out army body bag in the trunk of your car. Unzip and work the trick catch on the trunk. Once upon a time, you drove a big black muscle car. Aggressive as hell. But it attracted all kinds of attention. Now it's always an anonymous late-model sedan with a roomy trunk kitted out to lock from the inside. Find a parking lot outside an office park or anywhere else people arrive early and leave late, and there you go. You got in too late last night to make the proper appearance, but you dig out your cell and call the guy you know who works for the local head honcho. You set up a meeting, but of course he can't see you till past midnight, and that leaves you spinning in the wind for hours, but the guy throws you a bone and puts you in touch with a lady who can help you sample the local "cuisine" while you wait. Not for the first time you get that urge to just get back in your car and blow out of this place rather than deal with the bullshit, but there's the guy you have to see later on, and the letter you have to put in his hand.

Background

The wandering urge comes on some Kindred slowly, sneaking up on them when they think they've settled into things. Some rise to prominence in their courts, perhaps even becoming prince, only to bug out one day and never look back. Some are Embraced on the road, already wanderers, and just keep doing the same thing. Slowly, Nomads build up networks of contacts spanning many domains, and find themselves inadvertent players in many cross-domain intrigues.

Concepts: Long-Haul Trucker, Biker, Traveling Salesman, Prince's Messenger, Shiftless Outsider

Key Discipline: Animalism

Magus

"Yes, I can answer your questions. But I won't, unless you can answer some of mine first."

Description

The Magus Requiem's most distinctive signifier is the follower's obsession with the occult—literally, in *that which is hidden.* Ever secret is another tiny revelation, another

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step closer to the spiritual alchemy and the perfection of the self. There's a voyeuristic quality to the way the Magus gazes into occult windows- the obsession driving it isn't healthy.

The newly made modern vampire tries to make sense of his condition, resorting to half-remembered lessons from Biology class. It's a virus... that makes people allergic to the sun... slows down the metabolism... makes us anemic and crave blood... it also lets us control animals and jump over cars. Ah! It all breaks down when they look in the mirror, and see the smear where their face should be. Light doesn't bounce off a diseased body differently than a healthy one, and there's no heartbeat. There's no breathing. There's no... it... it doesn't make sense, it's like...

Magic.

And there it is.

It's an unholy miracle— the corpse rising up every sunset and walking about and talking and seeking to fuel its life on the blood of the living. The vampire's existence is fundamentally dependent on hidden occult forces. It isn't science or rationality which will explain it, but magic and metaphysics, and only by pursuing those things can this whole hideous thing be finally understood.

There's also power. Once can't forget the power. Some Magi lose track of that quandary which first drove them into occult research, and become enamored with the power implicit in understand magical principles, learning litanies, demon names, ritual invocations. Some covenants teach magical practice, but that's not enough for most Magi, and the progress comes too slow.

The obsession of the Magus can be a dangerous one. True horrors have in the past been born by the curious meddling of such individuals, but there is no atrocity so great that another won't attempt the same operation later.

Tonight

You wake refreshed. The ceremonial cleansing last night was liberating, and the sacrifice of your acolytes left you flush with vitae. Your night is well-planned to not spoil the sanctification of the previous night's ritual, and to further prepare you for the midnight ordeal. In your mind, you go over the steps again and find no flow. Scraps of wisdom carefully stitched together again to show the opening of a window, and through it a glimpse of a truer reality.

Background

Magi usually begin with the requisite intellectual curiosity, even if they lack the formal education before their Embrace. The spark which drives them to study esoterica can come at any time, but often hits early as they're trying to come to terms with their new condition. The impossibility of the vampire can break a certain kind of rationalist, turning her into a spiritualist.

Concepts: Cult Leader, Bookish Collector, Hungry Skeptic, Enigmatist

Key Discipline: Auspex

New Character Creation Considerations

This chapter offers new considerations in terms of creating characters for **Vampire: The Requiem**.

These changes are made to the "vampire template" portion of character creation. Consider all of this a "Step 5.5" (reference pp. 90-94 of **Vampire: The Requiem**).

1. Confirm with Storyteller what tier the game will operate at—if the game is tier one, then it's likely that no covenant will be selected. Alternately, if tier three is on the menu, you may need to look at the following chapter of this book.
2. Choose one Masquerade.
3. Choose one Requiem.
4. Masquerade and Requiem Merits are purchased in Step Six, as usual.

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A Season of Secrets

Part Two - Greg Stolze

The picture was blurry. Of course it was. Anyone who believed that photos capture the soul, or a piece of it, would hardly expect Solomon Birch to show up as anything other than a washed out smear of malice and self-righteousness. So Bruise Miner's lucky, insolently timed snapshot looked a bit like the Bishop, if you knew that's who it was.

It was vague, but that didn't matter. In fact, anyone looking at it could see almost anything they wanted. It was compellingly easy to look at those ghostly features and project upon it one's own despair, betrayal, heartbreak and self-pity. It was, for the undead of Chicago, a Rorschach mirror reflecting their own most despised weaknesses.

The night after it was snapped, posters appeared, hundreds of handbills plastered throughout downtown. They were glued on the windows of El trains, stapled on bulletin boards in pickup bars, pasted up in repeating rows on construction scaffolds, left under the wipers of cars in outdoor parking lots. Most said, in bold letters, "OBEY BISHOP" but a few turned up near popular racks and Carthian stomping grounds with "OBEY VAMPIRE."

The picture was fuzzy, but the blizzard of words that came with it was excruciatingly precise. First the text messages, the emails from Blackberries, the tale growing and refining itself. The Discarded Image would have been well past capacity if everyone who claimed to have seen Birch break down had actually been there. But, like the muddled graphic, that didn't matter. The facts mattered less than the truthiness of the story, Birch blustering and being put in his place by the creeping filth-feeder whose dog he killed. And afterwards, the Prince drinking a toast.

•••

"'Zat the man?"

"Yuh huh. You want I should introduce you?"

"I dunno, man. Is he genuine, or just… mm, the punctuation of Maxwell making a point?"

"Why can't he be both? No, look, Bruce Miner is no genius and, as you can see, he looks like something that got left way too long in the sun. But I will tell you this. Of all the Kindred I know, Bruce is the least full of bullshit."

"That's faint praise."

"You'd prefer a vivid put-down?"

A month had passed since Solomon's disastrous loss of face, and the Kindred of Chicago were gradually dividing over it. Persephone still had trouble accepting it when Kindred— some of them powerful, respected, *feared*— came up to Bruce to shake his hand, congratulate him, *schmooze him*. He had become, simply by being in the right place at the right time with the right resentment, an emblematic Everyman vampire. Honestly, it kind of ticked her off.

"Ned… 'Foot… how are you guys doin'?"

"Can't complain. You met ever Duce Carter?"

"Pleastameetcha," Bruce said. "You know Persephone here?"

"Oh we've met," she said, giving Duce a look that leveraged her eyelashes to maximum effect.

"Hey, you've become the man of the hour, stickin' it to the power, y'know?"

"I just took a picture of a guy who was a dickhole to me."

Duce looked at the man who'd introduced them. "I see what you mean." He turned back to Bruise. "You're a hero to the Carthians now, y'know."

Bruce shook his head. "They must be hurting for one, then."

"More than you know. You should come down to the next meeting. Lap it up, right?"

"While I'm still flavor of the month?" Bruce shrugged. "Eh. Honestly, I don't… the attention, it's not for me, you know?"

"We are creatures of status," Duce said. "Attention is our currency and, like money, it'll make trouble if you don't put it to work for you."

"Aw c'mon," Bruce said, and his discomfort was obvious.

"Amazing," Persephone said, after Duce had given his card and left. "This city is rotten with Kindred who are desperate for nothing more than to *matter,* to impress their peers, to make a mark and get respect. All their

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clamoring and favor grubbing gets them is contempt. You don't give a rat's ass about all that, and respect is practically giving you a lap dance."

Bruce just shrugged. "It's like Murphy's law or somethin'," he muttered. "I just want people to stop caring about me so I don't have to…"

"Hush!" Persephone hissed.

"No one's listening."

"Someone's always listening." They were at Elysium.

Held in the aquamarine glamour of the Shedd Aquarium, the monthly meet-and-greet of the Chicagoland Damned was well-attended and bubbling with talk. Lines were being drawn. Solomon's hardline followers had closed ranks around their leader, many of them calling it another orchestrated coup attempt against a Bishop too strong for the ignorant shirkers to tolerate. But that narrative, no matter how logically argued, was hard to sell in the face of OBEY VAMPIRE.

In fact, Solomon's perceived conflict with Bruise was far slighter than his grievance with Garret McLean. Garret, in turn, was trying to run the city in the conspicuous absence of Prince Maxwell, an absence that Bruise's small celebrity could do but little to mask. Less obvious but more ominous to those with the perspective to see it was the gaping power vacuum left by the disappearance of Norris the spy.

The vampire with only five fingernails had been personally unobtrusive, but he dropped off the grid in a cloud of drastic revelations. Norris had held back the vengeance of a dozen powerful Kindred by threatening their secrets. Now, those secrets were becoming known.

Rowan, the Crone elder, was tied to a family of mortal descendants. They were all under Invictus or Sanctified vinculum within days. Rowan herself, who could not stand to see children of her mortal life enslaved, killed them within weeks.

The details of Sylvia Raines' mortal Satanism were dismissed as merely embarrassing, like wearing leg warmers in the 80s. The more telling revelation was a detailed description of her primary occult fundraising scheme. Again, no one was going to judge her, but there were territorial issues with her selling cocaine (of whatever type) in Carthian domain without approval.

Tobias Rieff's compromises with the previous ruler. Earth Baines' defiance of a Princely order. Ogilvie's unrepentant Masquerade breach. Ludmilla Marana's early double agency between the Ordo Dracul and the Invictus. Every night seemed to animate another skeleton from the closets of the powerful and connected.

Turmoil was inevitable. Beatings into torpor. Disappearances. Judicial proceedings in every covenant, fresh feuds within the clans and old ones between them given new life.

The usual low-lying stink of rivalry and retribution was stirred into a poison hurricane. The disappearance of Earth Baines was a minor turd in the shit-storm.

Under all of it, however, in the background, was Maxwell. Not even an issue, yet, but the Prince's shadow fell on the minds of his subjects. Why was he hiding? What had happened?

Persephone knew the Prince's enemies would watch their words in her presence, so when she overheard speculation about amaranth, about the forbidden feast, about *soul-eating*, she knew that no matter how hard she and Garret tried, how gamely Bruce went along, their distraction had failed.

She'd suspected the first time she saw Maxwell fiddling with his fingernails. Before the supernatural senses of someone like Sylvia Raines or Rowan or that crazy chick running the River Snakes… they'd know in an instant.

Unless he found some kind of solution, the next time Maxwell appeared in public he would confirm his commission of the ultimate crime.

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The Bonds Of Covenant

A compromise is the art of dividing the cake
so that everyone believes he has the biggest piece.

—*Ludwig Erhard*

Vampires are not solitary predators.

They like to think they are. Hell, some of them are downright proud of it—the lone survivor, the rogue hunter, the wild animal stalking the veldt.

It's bullshit. Vampires need one another, whether they like it or not. (Hey, the *Danse Macabre* isn't much of a dance when you have one pathetic vampire shaking his money-maker in the middle of an empty warehouse.) It's why vampires gather in coteries. It's why they engage in the political process in the city.

And it's why they join covenants.

That's what this chapter is about. It's a fresh look at the covenants in **Vampire: The Requiem**; we're shaking it up a little, mixing up the puzzle pieces and seeing what image forms out of the chaos.

First up, you'll find the five covenants found in **Requiem** reexamined as third tier, full-bore conspiracies: gonzo globe-spanning organizations whose power transcends the local.

After that, you'll find an unholy host of *new* conspiracies for use in your game.

Covenant As Conspiracy

It's time to take the volume knob on the covenants of **Requiem** and crank that knob all the way up to "11." Then we're going to break the knob off and stick it in some poor fucker's neck and let him bleed out on the linoleum.

The *third tier*—in this book listed as the tier of both *elder* and *conspiracy*—is one where we move beyond local or regional interests and envision a world of clan and covenant that is infinitely better connected. As it stands now, **Requiem** envisions a world where the darkness outside the cities is deep and mysterious, where what happens in Philadelphia has minimal connection to what happens in Los Angeles (or London, or Shanghai). It's a local game. A more intimate game. A game hemmed in by claustrophobic walls.

Let's kick those walls down. Let's reimagine the covenants as conspiracies. Assume that they are global, not local. Assume that they are far more richly and densely layered. Assume that they have long puppet strings that travel far and are damn near impossible to see. Assume that they have plans that go well beyond this year, or five years, or even ten years—they are looking so far down the pike they might as well be envisioning a whole other world.

Yes, this changes the mood of **Vampire** a little. It asks that we inject a little *gonzo pulp* into the mix. It demands that paranoia is now not about what the Prince in *this city* will do to you, but rather, what some unseen perpetrator 1000 miles away will do to you for unrealized crimes. The conspiracies have a long reach, after all.

How You Wanna Play This?

The conspiracies can exist together or separate. We don't necessarily recommend that they exist together *with* their second-tier reflections (i.e. the Invictus existing in the same game world as the Prima Invicta), but hey, it's your game. You could do a mix, of course, creating a game world with, say, three regular covenants and two full-blown conspiracies (Ordo Dracul, Lancea Sanctum, Circle of the Crone, the Commonwealth, and Prima Invicta, for example).

The other question is, if the conspiracies *do* exist together, then are they aware of one another? The Devil's Eye does its best to stay hidden, but the Covenant does not. If they know of one another, how do they feel? The political factions won't play nice together. The Commonwealth and Prima Invicta surely oppose one another. The Mother's Army and the Covenant are also at odds. The Devil's Eye stays so far under the radar they probabl haven't pissed anybody off directly.

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The Details

Each covenant is now a conspiracy. With that in mind, they get a new name, a new look, and some fresh mechanics to enforce their faceless and nigh-limitless nature.

Each conspiracy gets the following information:

Overview: Open with a brief overview of the conspiracy.

Goals: What are the conspiracy's overarching goals?

Weakness: What weakness makes the conspiracy vulnerable?

New Roles: Each conspiracy has a couple new roles different from the second-tier iteration. These roles needn't be bound to any particular Status dot level; the Storyteller should determine if a character is right for the role, or if the role is best served by a Storyteller character.

Secrets: These are conspiracies. They have secrets.

Status: Members of each conspiracy gain bonuses for belonging. These bonuses (often an experience point break) occur at one dot, three dots, and give dots.

THE COMMONWEALTH

Reform isn't a four-letter word to the vampires of the Commonwealth (sometimes called, "The Commonwealth of Carthage"). No, these vampires mean it. You can *tell* they mean it, because as they unroll blueprints across the table and fire up Powerpoint presentation, they speak with wild and fiery eyes, they speak with *verve* and *zeal*. Their hands clench so tight you can almost hear the hairline fractures forming along fingerbones.

They want change. Change they can really believe in. And *change* doesn't just mean a new political model. Stopping at "one vampire, one vote" still keeps the old systems in place, because elder vampires with potent Disciplines can endure that the *reality* ends up being "one hundred vampires, one vote."

No, what the vampires of the Commonwealth want is change across the board. They want a city designed for them. They want a relationship with mortal beings. They want to incorporate the other supernatural denizens of the world (provided they can be properly controlled and willing to contribute to the health of the process, of course). They want a revised—dare we say it, *revamped*—world where vampires are no longer just a parasite suckling on the host body's juices but are a symbiotic part of society.

It's the only way to move forward. And anybody who does like it, well. You're either *with* reform, or you're *against* it, and if you're against it, then you're a obstruction. And the only thing to do with an obstruction is to blow it sky high to get it out of the way.

Goals

To say that the goals of the Commonwealth are *ambitious* is like saying hurricane-force winds are *breezy*.

First, they want cities *designed* to suit vampire needs. At present, cities are designed (obviously) for human needs. Transportation, food supply, living arrangements—all the elements of the urban and suburban environment are purposefully created with human convenience and functionality in mind. The Commonwealth wants to do that for vampires. They want to ensure that rail systems not only run all night but that they are designed for expedient delivery of resources (meaning, *blood to your front door in 30 minutes or less, or this one's for free!*). They want bars open till sun-up. They want streetlights in certain places (makes the herd feel safe and doesn't inhibit feeding). They get people on city council and in the mayor's office in the hopes of making this happen—but it doesn't just need to happen on the city level. They want it on the national, even *global* level. Fewer airline delays (which can be costly to a vampire). Light rail from city to city. Shipping containers allowed to pass easier inspection (hey, those shipping containers might contain blood slaves).

Second, they want to obliterate the generational power gap between vampires—they show figures that demonstrate the gap between *elder* and *neonate* has never been wider. How do they seek to fix this? Democracy can go to hell; socialism is the way forward. If everybody is on equal footing and the *un*stratified society of the Damned seeks to bond together and provide for the whole, not just the individual. This means elders must act like neonates and neonates must be allowed to act like elders. Just to make sure everybody is on the up-and-up, this further means that *everybody* should be drinking *everybody else's* blood. City meetings often verge on frenzy since this practice is enforced within the Commonwealth.

Third and finally, they plan on tearing the collective scales from the eyes of the world and announcing themselves to the mortals. Yes, that means this conspiracy has as one of its goals the undoing of the Masquerade.

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They've been planning for this for 20 years, seeding major media outlets with slaves and servants. When the time is right, they plan on taking over every airwave, every social media stream, every antiquated newspaper, and they plan on "coming out" to the world.

Weakness

They haven't really thought this through. They push ahead regardless of whether or not it's a good idea. They move forward despite opposition from existing power structures, from other conspiracies, from mortal hunter groups. They just don't care.

And that could be their downfall. They're like the technology that moves too far too fast for moral or legal considerations. They want what they want and they want it now; damn the consequences. Never mind that vampires *can* play well together, but most choose not to. Never mind that revealing the entirety of the Damned to mankind will probably cause the herd to stampede and crush them beneath panicked boot (and wave after wave of Molotov cocktail).

The creatures of the Commonwealth say, "If you're going to have principles then they must stand even when it's inconvenient," which is all well and good. But this goes beyond mere inconvenience and borders on outright suicide.

New Roles

Below you'll find new roles for use within the Commonwealth conspiracy.

City Planner

The Commonwealth has a host of city planners: vampires who take civil engineering and turn it toward the needs of the Damned. City planners are not prized for their social abilities or their physical skills but rather for their utopian design of infrastructure meant to support the Kindred and their nocturnal blood-feeding habits. It's for this reason you'll find a lot of Mekhet in this role (but don't discount the Nosferatu, who have their own subterranean perspective).

Liaison

The Commonwealth sends liaisons out to mortal communities—be they charitable organizations, political groups, academic groups, military—to interface with them. They don't make clear their vampiric nature (not yet): no, the

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goal at present is simply to *make friends*. The Commonwealth wants to give people what they want—or, more important, what they need—so that when the time comes to reveal themselves to the world, they already have allies on the inside who know that the so-called "monsters" of the Damned are really just *life-challenged humans*.

See, when the Commonwealth finally decides to throw open the door and reveal their nature to the world, they don't do it with the aim of overthrowing the mortal dominance of the world. No, they want to *integrate*. They want to belong. They want to act openly and freely and without fear. (Good luck with that, guys.)

Steward

It sounds nice, doesn't it? "Hi, I'm a Steward for the Commonwealth." Except, it's not so nice. Stewards are vampires within the conspiracy that are in charge of the defense of the conspiracy's ideals. And "defense" easily equates to "enforcement," and "enforcement" can often mean a boot on the neck, a gun to the temple, or a stake through the chest.

The stewards are soldiers. They're trained to be revolutionaries and act as insurgents; they fight dirty, and they fight in ways the existing power structure don't understand (use of technology, use of dirty tricks, etc.). They're the dark side of the Commonwealth. For the most part, the zeal of the Commonwealth vampires is driven by utopian ideals, however insane. The stewards represent the way forward for such utopian ideals, meaning that they must be gained on the end of a sword and under a carpet of fire.

Secrets

- They have towns. Whole towns in the middle of nowhere. And the purposes of these towns? To integrate *human* with *vampire*. They walled the towns off. They kidnapped whole populations and brought them there in the hundreds (and in some cases, by a thousand or more). And they told them the truth, kicking the Masquerade square in the nuts. "Yes, we're vampires, yes, we've existed for millennia, and we want to be friends." The arc always goes the same way. It starts off sketchy, because who wants to be abducted and taken to a town built by monsters? But then it evens out. A little mental massaging, a little utopian reward, a friendly vampire neighbor or two. And then, just as things are looking good, everything goes to shit. The vampires feed too much, or the humans off a vampire, and tensions rise, and restrictions clamp down, and bigger walls go up, and next thing you know some poor kid is Tasered in the town square and a coterie of vampires can't help themselves and frenzy on the teen and—well. That's that. But they keep on trying. Somehow.
- They have spies in every other conspiracy. They have to. They don't do it to be aggressive, but rather because they want everyone on the same playing field. Really, the Commonwealth loves its spies (though they call them "diplomats").
- They've set a date for their "reveal." They plan on tearing down the Masquerade on New Year's Eve, calling it the "New Year's Revolution." They figure, everyone's drunk. Everyone's happy. It's a new start! They're sure it'll work out *just fine*.

Status

• One dot of Status gives the vampire one automatic dot of Herd; the Commonwealth wants to "integrate" its vampires with a mortal herd as early as possible.

••• The city planner is now willing to help the character find a better Haven—any Haven Merit dots bought for a *brand new* Haven cost half the experience points that it normally would (round up).

••••• Your proximity to human beings allows you to buy back Humanity dots more cheaply: new dots x 2, now. (The Storyteller must find this buy-back appropriate, however.)

Gonzo Factor

You want to amp up the gonzo? Here goes:

- Those towns the Commonwealth keep? Yeah, one went south somewhere out of the desert and the tables were turned—the humans revolted and offed their vampire "neighbors" and got loose. Now a group of humans are out there, off-the-grid, and they know vampires are real. They're building an army. An army of vampire hunters.
- Fuck it. It happened. The New Year's Revolution is on. What now? How does mankind react? Is it like with V, the television series? Or is it like when the Cylons revealed themselves to the humans in BSG? Is this Daybreakers, where suddenly it's all "human farms" and a receding blood supply? Or can mankind strike a final blow against the Damned?

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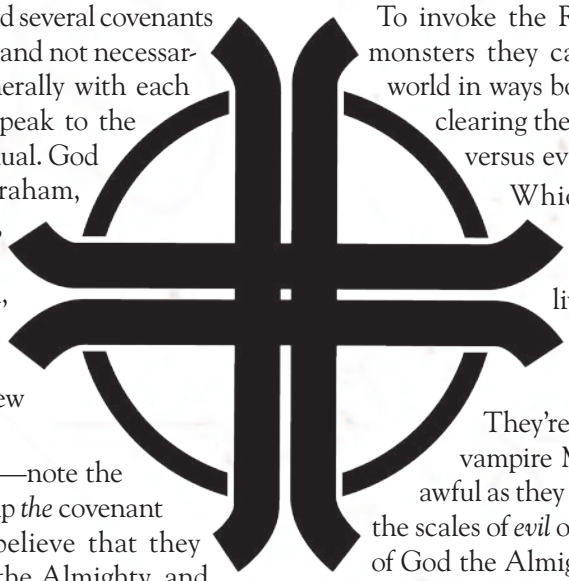
THE COVENANT



It's like this: God and man have had several covenants (by which we mean an *agreement* and not necessarily a vampire organization). Generally with each covenant God comes down to speak to the people—or, rather, to one individual. God first made a covenant with Abraham, then with Job, then *through* Jesus, then with Saul (who becomes Paul), then through Mohammed, and potentially through Joseph Smith. And with each covenant rises a new religion, or at least a new flavor of an old religion.

The vampires of the Covenant—note the ego it takes to call your entire group *the* covenant when other covenants exist—believe that they have made their own pact with the Almighty, and this pact transcends Judiasm, Christianity, Islam, and Mormonism. This, unlike the Lancea Sanctum, is not a new face on an old religion as much as it is a whole new offshoot of Abrahamic monotheism.

At its center is God, as always. Also at its center is the notion that a vampire cannot be "saved" and made a part of God's plan unless he gives himself over bodily to one of the Covenant's intermediaries, the priest-like figure known as a Confessor (see below).

The tenets of the religion are not dissimilar to that of the Lancea Sanctum: the vampires still believe that they are God's chosen predators, and that they are most certainly part of God's plan.

But here we start to see some deviation. They do not have Longinus as a central vampire figure, though they do still tell his story as a parable. Rather, the Covenant keeps as its Patron the Roman general known as Julius Marius, the man who marched into Thebes and met an angel of the Lord and brought back with him the secrets of Theban sorcery. He formed a new covenant with God, a covenant that supersedes any put forth by mortal man before or after.

They also have at their center a strong salvational notion: they believe that they cannot attain salvation at present due to their immortality—and Final Death does not open to them a way to Heaven. No, what *will* earn them salvation is the end of the world.

They seek to invoke the Rapture. They believe that by putting in motion the End Times, then Heaven will descend to Earth and God will rule here, and when that happens the vampires will be allowed to join the ranks of the saved.

To invoke the Rapture involves being the best monsters they can possibly be. By ruining this world in ways both small and profound, they are clearing the way for the Final Battles of good versus evil.

Which means that, yes, this conspiracy is a very widespread and entrenched apocalypse cult of the living dead.

Goals

They're an apocalypse cult, a group of vampire Millennialists that want to be as awful as they can be to the world in order to tip the scales of *evil* over *good* so that *good* (in the form of God the Almighty Father) must come down to earth and clean up the mess and usher in a new world.

At the center of their argument is that throughout history God allows evil to exist because evil is necessary. God himself commits acts that are against the morality of man and even against his own precepts (*murder is wrong*, except when God does it), and so they have at hand easy proof that they are not the righteous servants of a good God, but rather the diabolical servants of an angry God.

What does being monstrous entail? At the simplest, it's corruption at the base human level. They enslave, abuse, corrupt and destroy individual humans. But it must go so much further than that; they must set in motion events that help to undo the goodness of this world. An oil spill? A train crash? A nuclear meltdown? A civil war? They spur in motion anything that destabilizes and inspires despair over hope.

Beyond that, the second goal is conversion, and conversion is done through seduction and trickery rather than outright threat or violence. It is far crueler to trick one into accepting this awful mission, and so in doing so that way they further the concept of "God's necessary evil" in this world.

Weakness

Their biggest weakness it that their behavior doesn't earn them any friends. This whole "screw over the entire world" approach puts them at clear odds with any group that requires safety and stability to hunt without bringing down the Masquerade (such as the Prima Invicta or the Commonwealth), and also puts them at odds with a group like the Mother's Army, who are a matriarchal

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group supporting the Crone rather than a patriarchal group supporting God the Father. At the second tier, a group like the Lancea Sanctum works pretty well with the Invictus. Here, though, the Covenant and the Prima Invicta share few common goals.

Oh, the other weakness? Evil, even if performed in the name of God, does little for a vampire's Humanity. A legion of monstrous blood-suckers who have a "divine excuse" to do wrong in the world is not a safe or sane group of individuals.

New Roles

Below are a few new roles to put in play if you're using the third-tier Covenant conspiracy.

Confessor

It's worth taking a moment to address the new (and relatively simple) hierarchy of the Covenant. At the base of the conspiracy are all the "lay vampires"—those who belong and worship and pray to God. They are all blood bound through Vinculum to a central figure in the city known as the Confessor. The Confessor's job is just as it sounds: to worship in the Covenant one must do evil in God's name, but evil is still evil and thus it requires confession to mitigate that evil. The Confessor hears those confessions and absolves the vampire of his sins, allowing him to continue on and do more evil.

The Confessor, having vampires bound to him, can also tell them where to go, what to do, and how best to serve the Covenant and God Himself. In each city is a single chapel, and at the head of each chapel is a Confessor.

The Confessor is himself bound to one of the Council of Thebes, a group of 100 vampires worldwide who are the "Covenant Elders." They are the "big picture" vampires—they are less concerned with lesser corruption and more interested in how to break the world apart at its seams. They are the ones who put in motion the larger designs.

Above them is one figure, and to him they are bound: The Patriarch (see below).

Scrivener

The Scrivener writes. Or, rather, *transcribes*. He sees things in nightly unlife and copies them down as if they are messages from God. He contributes these to the Confessor who contribute them to the Council of Thebes and they examine these prophecies to see if in them lies any validity. It seems like nonsense, but this is really how the Covenant gains its inspiration to bring fresh corruption to the world. Those who are allowed to act as Scriveners are seen as quite fortunate.

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Patriarch

The Patriarch is always a man, and if you believe the stories, has been the Patriarch since the beginning (and is supposedly Julius Marius himself). It's a lie; since the Covenant's origins in the third century, the Patriarch has changed at least five times.

The Patriarch acts as pope, as father, as president. He is no doddering elder, though; he is sharp, clear-headed, and stridently political. He's also wholly monstrous.

Secrets

- You know how the Catholic Church has its own city? How it has the Vatican? Yeah, well, the Covenant has its own vampire city, too—it can be wherever you want, though we are fans of Prague as a choice, or perhaps on Cyprus (and dare we suggest Thebes?). It's here that the Patriarch and a number of the Council of Thebes dwell. It's only vampires, their servants, and their herds. It's reported to be a hedonistic blood-soaked hell-fired playground of evil—I mean, if you're doing evil in God's name, you might as well go big or go home.
- They have an Inquisition. Except, this Inquisition works a little differently than one might expect: they seek out those who are secretly striving to improve themselves and do good in the world (on purpose or inadvertently), and *they're* the ones who get put to the screws (and the ghouled biting maggots).
- There *might* just be someone above the Patriarch. Shh. Don't tell. But he's basically the conspiracy's own version of Jesus—they believe they have a *vampire* that is the dead form of God His Ownself. He's like an, ohhh, I dunno, let's just call him an Anti-Christ.

Status

- The character may take a free Specialty in any Social Skill—remember, the Covenant use their words first and foremost to make evil happen in this world.

••• New Theban sorcery rites now cost only "level of the rite" in experience points.

••••• If the character loses a dot of Humanity, *even during play*, that character gains five experience points. However, set those experience points aside—none of them may be used by the player to upgrade that character's Humanity score.

Gonzo Factor

Time to up the "gonzo factor" of the Covenant.

- God is real. Not just real—but, like, *hanging around*. That doesn't mean the Mother can't exist. Or Dracula. Or Nergal or whoever else you want as part of the game. In fact, the more competition for God, the better. God is a real figure, a massive character that the characters can see, touch, even interact with. And, for the record, he's as much of a psychotic Daddy Figure as you'd find in the worst parts of the Bible: knocking down cities, asking people to kill their babies or slaughter bulls in his name.
- Hey, screw it, start the end of the world. The Covenant wanted that, and now they got it. Is it everything they wanted? Probably not. It's probably a lot worse. Heck, this could even transform into the apocalyptic scenario in the Dead, Dread Chronicles chapter (p. 226).

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The Devil's Eye

Vampires don't make good monsters. At least, that's what the members of the Devil's Eye think. The Damned suit that name just fine; they are cursed and bound to too many restrictions, too many anchors that keep them from realizing their full potential. Can't go out in the sunlight. Addicted to blood. Have to hide in shadows. And on and on. It's like having a million-dollar sports car, but one wheel's off, and it can only drive on backroads, and if it doesn't have gas in it every day it freaks out and drives off a cliff.

The Devil's Eye has little interest in hewing to such restrictions. Then want to take the shackles off the vampiric condition and make them bigger, better, faster, stronger.

And they want to do it for every vampire out there. Even if every vampire out there doesn't want the same thing.

It works like this: they're a very literal conspiracy in that, few know anything about them. Oh, sure, their name is whispered and bandied about, but the misinformation (and *dis*information) about them far outweighs any of the truth.

They're also markedly different from the other conspiracies in this section in that they are fairly small, and comprised almost entirely of elder vampires.

These elder vampires have one purpose: to exalt the vampiric condition and to eradicate any and all restrictions. This isn't much different from what the Ordo Dracul would've wanted, no, but what's different is *how* they go about it: they abduct and experiment.

Well, they're not going to try untested methods on themselves, are they? Hardly. Instead, they capture neonates (preferably) and ancillae (when necessary) and they imprison them and brainwash them and experiment upon them. Their techniques are a pastiche of "mad science" and "occult magic."

They count as their founder the same as the Ordo Dracul: Vlad Tepes, or Vlad Dracul, or Dracula, or the Dragon, or the Devil. They are his eye in this world, and what they see, he sees. He's still around and sometimes he even still visits and checks up on the experiments (performed in hospitals, sewer tunnels, asylums, abandoned factories, wherever they can hide and get away with such atrocity). Thing is, Dracul doesn't consider himself a vampire anymore. He thinks he's transcended that. In fact, he can walk out in the day time, stakes don't bother him, and most of the other restrictions have fallen away like dry scabs. Problem is, the conspiracy doesn't yet know how to *replicate* it. The Coils are the closest they can get to cracking the powers that Dracul possesses.

Goals

Their goal is to change the entirety of the vampiric condition. They want vampires to be better monsters but *also* to be closer to humans (at least in all the ways that count).

Do they care about ley lines and Wyrm's nests and all that mystical stuff? Not really. In fact, they differ in a number of ways when it comes to the Ordo Dracul:

First, *nothing is permanent*. Well, that's the problem, isn't it? They want permanence. They want to be eternal, *truly* eternal. Maybe nothing is permanent right now, but if they have their way with their mad science and occult experimentation, it damn sure will be.

Second, *change must have a purpose*. No, not so much. Change *is* its own purpose if you ask the elders of the Devil's Eye. Isn't it enough to want to be different? To see the possibilities? To become something greater, stronger, stranger?

Weakness

As a conspiracy, they are a global organization—their doctors operate in every city. But, while being a secret society and a hidden cult has its advantages, it also means that this conspiracy is not as big a player on the global stage. Their power is relatively limited, at least until they manage to come up with some new Coils (not impossible) or solve the entire curse of the Damned condition (far less likely).

New Roles

Doctor

The doctors of the Devil's Eye needn't be actual doctors, though quite a few were in their mortal lives. Some are scientists. Others are occult masters. Many are both—a kind of "sorcerer-scientist" cross-breed. The doctors are almost always elders (and with that come all the madnesses of *being* an elder), and are the ones who choose what procedures to try and what direction the Devil's Eye should take their experimentation. The doctors report directly to the head of the conspiracy, Dracul himself.

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Good Patient

Not every "patient" of the doctors turns into someone that supports the conspiracy tooth and nail. Admittedly, most don't meet Final Death under the experimentation, but many are scarred mentally, if not physically, from the procedures. Some vampires are kept for decades, and some are thrown out onto the rain-slick streets only a few weeks later. Some, however, stick around for a lot longer. These are referred to as "Good Patients," as they are patients who experience conversion to the conspiracy's motivations and methods. These initiates become proselytes for the group and are effectively brainwashed. They cease to be actual patients for the most part and become servitors for the group. They might be soldiers, or they might just be gophers.

Devil's Tooth

The Devil's Tooth are the abductors of the conspiracy. The doctors each have access to a handful of these vampires, and they're usually quite capable (and are sometimes the childer of the elder doctors). They're the ones who find, hunt, and capture the proper Kindred for experimentation. The doctors give them their 'prescriptions,' and the Devil's Tooth vampires *fill* that prescription.

Secrets

- The doctors have access to a whole other wealth of strange Coils that are as-yet-*unreleased* for general consumption by the vampires of the conspiracy. These Coils include things like the Coil of Flame, of Humanity, and of Fear.
- These are not, by the way, the Coils of the Dragon. They're the Coils of the Devil. The Devil—really, Satan, Lucifer, whatever you want to call him—is a spiritual patron to this organization. They don't literally believe in the Devil, exactly (though Dracul may differ on that), but they see Lucifer as a powerful metaphor. He went against God's own restrictions, he sought light in darkness, he was made a monster for his transgressions and is forever looking to surpass his own permutations and leave Hell.
- Dracul sometimes checks on operations directly; members of the conspiracy never know when he may show himself. He is an active leader, and walks amongst his people frequently. He also has an active hand in aiding the doctors and even going out on "runs" with the Devil's Tooth abductors.

Status

- The player should choose either the Occult Skill or the Science Skill for her character when that character

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joins the conspiracy. This Skill is now considered an Asset Skill and she gains one free Specialty in that Skill for every dot of Conspiracy Status purchased.

••• Increasing the Coils of the Devil (mechanically the same as the Coils of the Dragon from the **Requiem** corebook) now costs only new dots x 5.

••••• The character is gifted at learning or creating Devotions. If the character is learning a pre-existing Devotion, she can take three experience points *off* the cost of that Devotion. If she is creating her own (perhaps using the new Devotion system found on p. 202 of the following chapter) she can cut that experience point cost in *half* (round up).

Gonzo Factor

- What if something really weird is going on? What if the members of the Devil's Eye don't really know what they're doing? Maybe they're all dupes of Dracul, or maybe Dracul is duped by some other shadowy figure. By destroying the curse of the Damned, are they really unlocking something awful? Are they destroying the Seals of the Apocalypse? Are they spitting in God's eye and earning his world-drowning wrath? Are they secretly helping to awaken the Crone Mother? Are they actually unlocking the chains that keep the Devil bound to Hell?
- The conspiracy unveils its latest secret: they have a surprising host of Princes operating as Good Patients or doctors. That's right; the cloth drops and the curtain parts and suddenly a number of major global power-players turn out in favor of the now-not-so-secret Devil's Eye conspiracy.
- Finally, what happens if it works? What happens if they remove some or all of the restrictions? What happens when vampires can walk out in the daylight? And they can breed without fear of repercussion? And fire no longer harms them? They could become like gods among mere mortals. The balance would shift. Would the Devil's Eye teach these new uber-Coils only to its members? Or would the curse for all vampires fall away like dead skin?

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The Mother's Army

This is what you'd call a *hot war*. It's brutal. It's bloody. It's on till the break of dawn.

The Mother's Army knows that the Crone is real, and that she birthed vampires. They know she's not human, she's not vampire, and she's something altogether weirder and worse. They know all this because she's out there. *Somewhere*. Sleeping beneath the earth—maybe in a glacier, maybe beneath the seared desert sands, maybe at the tippy-top of some impossible mountain. And from her earthen barrow she whispers. She whispers to anybody and everybody that's taken a taste of her blood. Which, by the way, is every vampire within this covenant.

So—why a war, exactly? Because the Mother demands it. The Mother will only awaken and lead her people through the long dark night when conditions are right. And one of those conditions is to get the rest of the Damned on her side. She wants them all to take a taste of her blood. Any who will not submit to this must be cut from the cloth and cast into the fire—and fire is a very powerful motif for this conspiracy. Fire cleanses. Fire burns. Fire is the tribulation, the forge on which power is hammered strong.

So many vampires believe so many silly things: they believe in God, they believe in democracy, in royalty and transcendence. It's all a precious waste of time. The only thing that matters to the vampires of the Mother's Army is the Beast and the Blood, for those two things are the gifts the Crone has given them. The things that make them *special*.

Goals

Every goal the Mother's Army keeps supports the ultimate uber-goal, which is to awaken the Crone Mother herself. She is their foul and glorious progenitor, and when she arises she will tear the curses afflicting the Damned asunder and change the world by destroying it.

Three goals support this end result.

The first is, *get everybody on board*. Nobody's allowed to slip the leash. Any vampire that isn't willing to drink the blood of the Mother and accept her whispers in her ear is a vampire whose only fate is the howling flames of the sacrificial pyre. The Mother likes vampires however she can get them: as soldiers or as sacrifices.

The second is, *awaken the Mother's children*. The Mother created the Kindred from her own monstrous flesh and blood, and those children, like her, are sleeping. They must first be roused from torpor. These children—often called the *Igigi*, or the "second gods"—are sometimes thought to be the clan founders, though nobody really has any evidence for that (and the Mother's whispers indicate that at least thirteen such children lay slumbering, which obviously outnumbers the extant clans by more than double).

The third is, *learn all the Mother's secrets*. Nobody knows exactly what this means, though the Crone delights whenever the conspiracy discovers a new Crúac rite. (How can they tell she's delighted? Because she screams and howls and gibbers in what could only be described as a "frenzied paroxysm of ecstasy." And yes, every member of the conspiracy hears this in their minds and in their Blood.) So, it's easy to assume that once the conspiracy learns all her lost rites, then that is the third piece of the puzzle. Of course, you know what happens when one assumes...

Wait. They Drink the Crone's Blood?

You said it. It's the first Crúac rite a member of the Mother's Army learns:

The Mother's Touch
(Level-One Crúac Ritual)

The vampire expends two points of her own Vitae into a proper vessel (often an animal's bladder; the vessel must be organic) and then mixes into the blood a series of reagents in small portion: clay, medicinal herbs, animal fur, animal blood, the blood of a human child, and the tears from a human mother. The vampire then prays over the vessel for one hour, and then consumes it. The blood, prior to consumption, transubstantiates into the blood of the Crone. Once the vampire drinks this blood, she begins to hear the occasional mad whispers (usually once per night) of the slumbering Mother. She does not regain her two points of spent Vitae.

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Weakness

They're a big conspiracy, unlike the much smaller Devil's Eye (p. 71), but that doesn't mean they're particularly *effective*. Some of the other more human conspiracies thrive because they contain themselves or find proper vents. The Mother's Army does no such thing. They accept their own awfulness and seek to be the monsters the Crone desires. Yes, they still support "creation" and tend to mad gardens and raise little battalions of ghoul servants, but none of this really goes toward keeping their human sides dominant.

As such, they're pretty monstrous. Lower Humanity is not uncommon. Frenzy is a feature to them, not a bug. And this is a weakness. They work because of their brute force (imagine a tide of army ants and you get how they swarm), but that doesn't give them finesse or intelligence; strategic thinking is often drowned in a bathtub.

New Roles

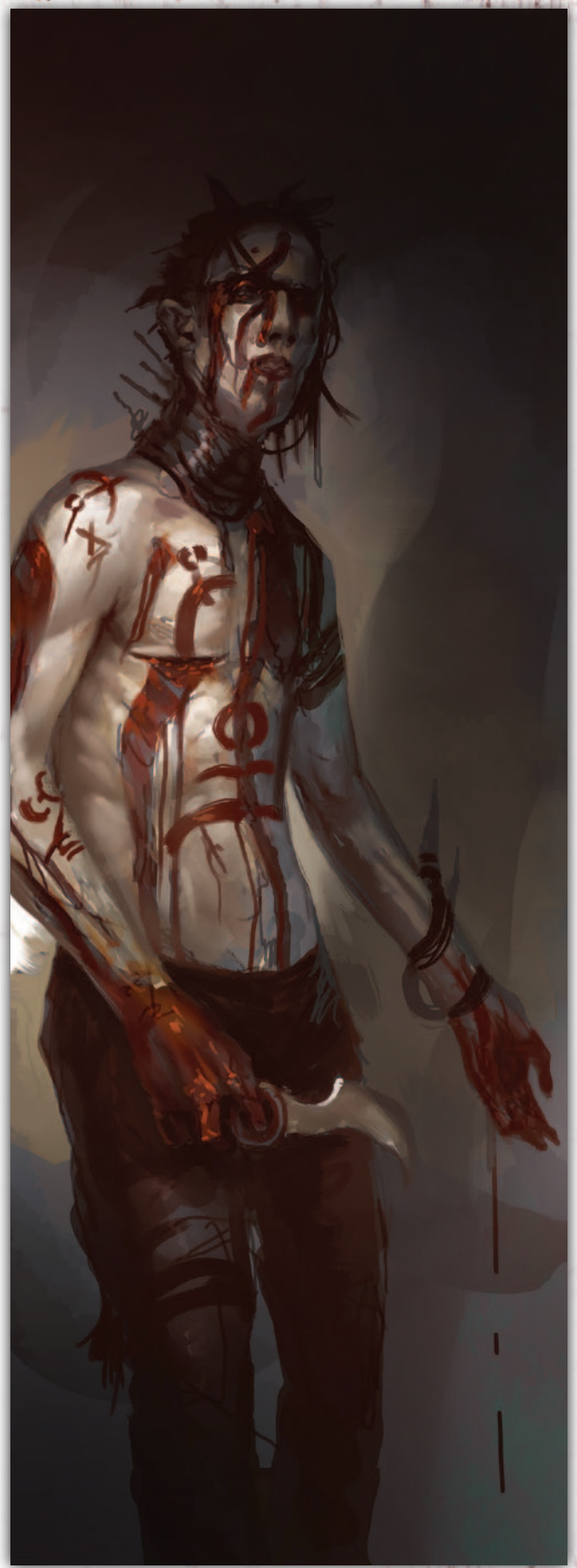
What follows are three new roles for use within the Mother's Army.

Unearther

If you were to think of these vampires as "psycho-pagan ecstatic archaeologists," you'd not be far from the mark. These Damned of the Mother's Army have a single purpose: to find the secrets of the Mother and the slumbering Igigi and unearth them. They are equal part "globe-trotting academic" and "frenzied vampire clawing at the earth with callused fingers."

Persephone

The Persephone—or "maiden"—is meant to be equal parts "recruitment tool" and "sacrificial lamb." This is how the Persephone works: the conspiracy selects a vampire (often a female, though not necessarily) to go amongst the other vampires and convert them. She is meant to be non-violent, beautiful, even seductive. She walks among the other Kindred and seeks to bring them over to the other side—always with honey, never with vinegar. It rarely works out. Someone usually takes advantage of her. Often enough she ends up on the wrong end of a beam of sunlight. And that's okay. Because when the carrot fails, it's time for the stick; the maiden perishes, then the conspiracy has full license to send in its howling throngs to tear out the throats of the obstinate. What's fascinating is, wise vampires *know* the deal with the Persephone and thus choose to treat her well and not provoke the "stick" reaction. But that means the Persephone has time to work her magic and seduce other vampires over to the Mother's side. So,



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by *not* dispatching her, they're potentially allowing the Trojan horse to open.

The Anakim

The Anakim are the "children of the Igigi," or more easily thought of as the grandchildren of the Crone herself. Obviously, a lot of these vampires remain in torpor, too (and most of them are over a thousand years old, though from time to time the Igigi have awakened over the years and sired younger childer), but a great number are awake and serve the Mother's Army in various forms. Some are wild siroccos of violence, where others are mad oracles.

Secrets

- Of the thirteen Igigi, five are already awake. And oh, are they wretched, mad creatures. Creatures *this close* to being wholly inhuman. Creatures with unending power. Every one of these "second gods" that awakens gives the Mother's Army an additional edge.
- The Mother's Army doesn't know it yet, but the Mother isn't buried in one location. She's in seven different locations. In this way, her body is like Osiris; torn asunder and kept separate. Each "part" of her is locked away in a box. And each box is mystically sealed. And each mystically-sealed box is hidden at the center of a dangerous subterranean labyrinth. If you're thinking, "**Vampire: The Requiem** dungeon crawl," then you're right on the money.
- Who said that Crúac needed to stop at level five rituals? This is the third tier we're talking about. If you're going to accept the notion of a Mother's Army, you might as well grow comfortably with the fact that this conspiracy has access to some incredibly potent blood magic.

Status

• Upon joining, the vampire gains an automatic two-dot Mentor within the conspiracy (though the player may choose to increase the dots on this Mentor with experience points); the conspiracy does not let its vampires exist in a vacuum. They are all connected and must learn the ways of the Mother.

••• Purchasing new blood magic (Crúac rites) now costs the vampire the level of the ritual only (as opposed to level x 2).

••••• You have earned the Mother's favor; her Blood pumps within your own, and her whispers give you power. Purchasing Blood Potency now costs new dots x 6 in experience points.

Gonzo Factor

You want to up the gonzo factor found in the Mother's Army?

- Imagine that they've uncovered all the blood rites of the Crone. All of them. And imagine that these rites give them immense powers: the ability to boil blood, the ability to enthrall others and form Vinculum with but a glance, the ability to turn the oceans to blood, and so on. Can the other conspiracies band together to stop the swift and sudden rise of the Mother's Army?
- The Mother is awake. Yeah. Uh-oh. And turns out, she's a thousand miles from human. She damn sure doesn't *look* human. Instead, she looks like some massive Wyrm—a thing that is half-dragon, half blind serpent. Or maybe she looks like some other flesh-shifting chimera. Or maybe she's a giant specter formed out of animated blood. Either way, she's out, and the members of the conspiracy *had no idea what they were conjuring*.

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PRIMA INVICTA

This isn't the New World Order. It's the *Old* World Order. It's the shadow vampire government. It's *blood banks too big to fail*.

The Prima Invicta are the entrenched vampire estate, a conspiracy of the Damned that pierces every layer of mortal and Kindred society. Ever seen a dog's heart taken over by heartworms? It's like that. Worms wriggling unseen in the heart of the animal.

Whereas the Invictus saw themselves as sharks (*swim forward or drown*), the vampires of the Prima Invicta view themselves as sleeping lions (*put yourself in the right place and wait for the gazelle to come traipsing by*). Really, though, they're like tumors: fat sacks of blood in the worst places possible, positioning themselves so they get a Herculean dose of the body's blood supply. They're a cancer.

And, like cancer, they're everywhere.

This is how it works: they call it "The Great Chain of Being." The offer, when it goes out, is simple: "Do you want to belong to the Great Chain? Do you want the things you could never have before?" They appeal to desire. To sin. To *need*.

They push on those pressure points. They find the right people in the right places, and they turn them. They turn them in one of three ways: the *tilt*, the *twist*, or the *takeover*.

The *tilt* isn't much more than your everyday run-of-the-mill carrot-and-stick (coupled with a liberal dash of magical head-tinkering). The CEO's secretary has a gambling debt? Pay it off and earn a favor. The police commissioner has a thing for teenage girls? You can make that happen—or, at least, fuck with his head enough so he *thinks* it happened.

The *twist* goes bigger. The victim needs blood. *Your* blood. Enough to hook him at first, and if need be, enough to make him a forever thrall ("forever" meaning, "until he no longer has value, at which point he's a garbage bag full of bloodless body parts"). Sometimes, you need to make some of them really loyal, and your sticky red stuff is just sublime enough to make that happen.

Third comes the *takeover*. Sometimes, you have no other choice: the target needs to die and be reborn as one of your own. Low on the ladder, of course—just a minnow swimming around in the pond. But those who served well, or those who can only serve well with the right power, well, they need to be taken over and turned.

This gives them a damn good spread. And yes, it really means they're everywhere, like roaches or the common cold. Big banks? Universities? The FBI? The CIA? Microsoft and Apple? Anywhere money, blood and sin can get them influence, they take it. They take it even if they don't need it because this is about the long con, *the big game*, and what they don't need tonight they might need tomorrow night, or ten years from now.

It also means you can't really escape them. You fuck with the Prima Invicta—hell, you say "boo" about them—and they'll know. They're a faceless majority. They're the Body Snatchers with robust bankrolls. They can make anything happen.

Goals

They want it all. They want to be the rulers of the Danse Macabre. But why?

They have all kinds of reasons they tout publically: "It'll make the Masquerade impenetrable," or, "We are driven to be the top-most predators of the top-most predators," or they spout off some bullshit about the Great Chain and how they deserve what they can take and so they take everything and blah blah blah.

Really, though, it's this: they're vampires and they want to get away with whatever they want. They want to fuck, kill, and eat, and not always in that order. And having absolute control and possessing deep penetration into all strata of society (live and undead) guarantees them a rather profound safety net. If you own the lawmakers, if you control the money, if you become the authority, then you have *ultimate permission*.

That's really what they want.

And earning that permission means taking over the world. Anybody who goes against them either learns to join the team real fast, or faces the brunt of an unending wave of conspiratorial turns (wife gets killed, money goes bye-bye because it was really just numbers on a computer screen, kids go missing, herd turns on you, cops come looking, property gets rezoned, you're on the no-fly-list, you're on the *no-get-to-live* list, and on and on).

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It's good being the king. It's not even that bad being the lap-dog of the king. Of course, it's being the lap-dog of the lap-dogs that starts to grate...

Weakness

First: they're *too big*. No, really. Look at any big government—say, for instance, the United States. Nobody "up top" really knows what the fuck is going on at the bottom tiers. Sure, every member of the Prima Invicta is supposed to have his own little network of tilts, twists and takeovers (and in this way the conspiracy is equal part neo-feudal organization and pyramid scheme as everybody kicks up tithed blood and power to those above them), but that also means it's a richly disconnected network. The right hand doesn't realize that the left hand is plotting to cut it off.

And there's your second problem: incest and treachery run rampant. Everybody is fucking everybody else, both in the *good* way and the *bad* way. It's not a hive of like-minded bees. It's a widespread organization of free-thinking monsters. Does that sound like a good idea? Does that seem like the paragon of efficiency? Everybody's trying to claw their way to the top while kicking down hard to keep their "lessers" right where they are. Everybody's a pawn. Nobody's a knight.

Third and finally: the pawns don't like being pawns. And the ones who are really low on the totem pole sometimes get toothy about having a boot in their face and a fang in their necks. The conspiracy is rife for a rebellion—and, once in awhile, it even happens. Of course, the tables turn but in the end it's just new faces at the top and bottom, but the top and bottom are still firmly in-place.

Plus, the conspiracy keeps itself safe (relatively) from all of this by promising *just enough* comfort and sameness. Nobody likes to rock the boat. And nobody wants to bring the whole thing crashing down on *their* heads.

New Roles

Below are three new roles found in the Prima Invicta conspiracy.

Fixer

Hey, sometimes the system gets busted. Things get broken. It's a complicated web, and once in a while, someone goes rogue, someone gets uppity, something goes awry.

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Enter the fixer. The fixer is a globe-trotting vampire (though, honestly, the role is often assigned to a whole coterie rather than a single vampire), and he goes wherever he needs to go to clean up the mess. Different fixers have different skills, and again this is why a coterie of fixers is preferable to a lone individual—each can bring a toolbox of abilities (head-shrinking, claw-ripping, shadow-hiding) to the table.

They negotiate. They mind-rape. They dispose of bodies. They appease.

And yes, they kill. Whenever a part of the mighty spider's web gets torn asunder, one or several fixers show up to patch the silk. It's for this reason that a fixer is sometimes known as a "spider," though this is often considered derogatory slang.

King (or Queen)

Every city has its Prince. And every nation has its King. Okay, it actually gets a little fuzzy—North America has one king, but South America has over 10 (with 13 nations), and the lines of a king's domain don't always correspond to *actual* national boundaries.

Still, it's a good guideline. What does a king do and how does he differ from a Prince? Obviously, the king watches over a far larger swath of territory. The king makes proclamations that ideally ripple throughout the entire territory (though kings given over to slothfulness may not actually *enforce* those laws). Every king, like every Prince, is his own creature. Some are monomaniacal control freaks and bring the hammer down on every indiscretion. Others are just figureheads—and happy to *be* figureheads. Some see being such a figurehead as a reward for centuries of work. All the blood, money and power that trickles upward to the king is a delicious dessert.

Emperor

One world, one emperor. If the Prima Invicta one day conquer the moon, maybe they'll manage a second emperor, but for now? It's one and done.

The role of Emperor—or Empress—is not a gift. It's not a reward.

It's a punishment. Those who have committed the grandest crimes against the Prima Invicta run the risk of being placed in this most unenvious of positions: a cackling flock of Harpies and Princes and ancient socialites groom the new Emperor with an unending dose of mind-twisting Disciplines and threats.

It's a sentence. The Emperor does an amount of time based on the severity of his crimes. (It's usually between 10 years and 100, though stories tell of a single Emperor who stood vigilant over his empire for the first thousand years after the fall of Rome.)

And how does it work, exactly? How does the Emperor serve if this is a prison sentence as much as a political position? Remember the flock of vampires fucking with the Emperor's head? They're the power behind the throne. They number *nine*, this flock, and they change with every Emperor. They are chosen by the mightiest kings and in return get to choose the new Emperor. And they fold, spindle and mutilate that poor bastard into doing what they want and issuing *their* proclamations.

It doesn't always work out so well. The last Emperor—Empress Serena Svadosky, diablerist of the nastiest order—broke free from the nine and made them all "disappear." It's rare, of course, but it can happen. And that's okay that it happens. Any Emperor who breaks the shackles deserves to serve, doesn't he?

Secrets

- They have competition. From among *mortal* conspiracies. Vampires think they're the only monsters with power—hey, fuck that. Humans have been doing this for just as long, and they can go out in the daytime. Bilderberg? Illuminati? The International Banker Jesuit Templars? They're out there, conspiring in their star chambers, and they're not happy about this group of fanged assholes trying to take a bite out of their pie. (FYI: the conspiracies of **Hunter: The Vigil** make excellent competitors.)
- Every good conspiracy has another conspiracy nestled within it, and the Prima Invicta are no different. This sub-rosa conspiracy calls itself the Black Estate, and is doesn't give one whit about mundane power. It thrives on occult power, and it believes in names and information exist true supernatural control. The more connected they can make the vampires of the Danse Macabre, the easier it is to gain their names and hold their souls and make the whole of Kindred society dance to *their* beat.
- The most recent Emperor is said to be a shape-changing shadow-hiding faceless criminal who—with the approval of his (or her) nine handlers—walks amongst kings, princes, even neonates, and reports back.

Status

• You gain a free Specialty in Politics or Subterfuge (choose one).

••• Buying dots in either the Dominate or Majesty Disciplines costs less now due to the fact that the conspiracy has so many within the group willing to teach: the cost is new dots x 4 if the Discipline is in-clan, and new dots x 5 if the Discipline is out-of-clan.

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••••• At this stage, the world is the vampire's blood-filled oyster. She can have pretty much anything she wants with minimal effort: any Social Merits now cost 1 experience point per dot. No multiplication necessary: going from four dots in Resources to five dots would cost, yes, just one little experience point.

The Gonzo Factor

Want to get gonzo with it?

- Assume that the Prima Invicta control *anybody* worth controlling. They have shackles on the POTUS, on the British PM, on Osama bin Laden and Oprah Winfrey.
- Play with an alternate world: the symbols of the Prima Invicta are hidden everywhere: on the Masonic facade downtown, on our money, as one of the trademark symbols of a major television network.
- What happens when they're exposed? What happens when the massive conspiracy cannot find the one little leak—the one whistleblower that slips through the cracks—and the whole thing is ruined? They can't Dominate the entire known world. What happens is: they go on a rampage. Their empire is exposed, and so they use their most powerful human allies to clamp down on the herd and create total tyranny... out in the open. Blood camps? Giant body choppers? Nazi-esque uniforms? Fuck it, why not?

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Brethren of the Hundred Faces

What makes you yourself? Is there any factor that, if removed, would obliterate your identity? Or is 'identity' so amorphous and vague that it's only a convenience, a label bandied about by lazy thinkers?

Is it your beliefs? If so, does that mean a man who converts from Judaism to Christianity has become an entirely different person? Is he truly 'born again' even if he still beats his wife and cheats his business partners?

Perhaps it's your experiences, your unique memories? But if that's so, does that deny humanity to amnesiacs? Do we cease to be ourselves when asleep? Are we less human when we're too distracted to recall this event or that one?

No, there's something more. Identity is spiritual. The *soul* shapes belief, interprets experiences, guides every action, is stained by wrongdoing and cleansed by righteousness. Your soul is your identity.

And when you die, your soul goes away. Even if you keep walking around, believing, remembering and drinking blood.

Overview

As a vampire, you don't have a soul. Deal with it.

You are stripped of something essential, running on fumes, momentum, and all the liveliness you can steal from the living. It explains everything—the blood-need, the emotional deadness and the descent into brutality. Those covenants who think the Beast is some primal nature-god have it exactly wrong: The Beast is just the biological programming of the human body, bursting free when the restraints of the immortal soul cut loose.

Say it. Say "I have no soul." C'mon.

Isn't it kind of a relief?

Sure, it's a shitty fate, but pissing and moaning isn't unringing the bell, putting the juice back in the orange or reattaching your soul with tiny little nails. Instead of denying reality (like some covenants one could mention) we face reality. That's the real reason we're called Facers.

Well, that and the blended identities. But don't worry about those yet.

Members

Many who seek out the Brotherhood of the Hundred Faces are introverts, navel-gazers who turn inward for answers to the haunting questions of "what have I become?" and "what do I do now?" If the covenant hadn't found some very concrete and practical strategies for managing the Requiem, they'd be a tiny sub-sect of hermits, quietly getting off on acknowledging inner deadness.

But the Facers have their Hundred Masks, a program for dealing with the Beast that (just incidentally) gives the covenant leaders a presence that Majesty can't duplicate and a form of durability that Resilience can't provide. That juicy plum draws an entirely different crowd, a group of ambitious go-getters who would thrive as piranhas in the Invictus fishbowl, along with philosophers-of-the-deed who'd make fine Dragons if they were willing to be called 'slave' and spend a decade bowing and scraping to some funerary tutor.

The intellectual snobs match uneasily with the arrogant greed-heads, but at least neither has to deal with the kind of idealist-by-denial who thinks vampires can *make a positive difference* for mortals or for the world. Facers are in it for themselves, pure and simple. It's just their definition of "self" that makes things polluted and complex.

Membership Privileges: My Conscience Is My Pilot

When a vampire is overwhelmed by her circumstances, she runs the risk of falling prey to the Beast. If she's too weak, her instinctive hunger bites bleeding chunks out of her humanity until she's a draugr, a conscienceless creature of bloodshed.

The Facers can't silence the Beast, but they can give it competition. Those who undergo the Brethren's *Alignment* (see p. 84) have a second personality (called a 'Pilot') overlaid on top of their own, like a double-exposed portrait. The Pilot is a copy of the beliefs and behaviors of one of the 100 elders of the covenant, the ironically-named "Consciences." The stronger an individual's Humanity, the harder it is for the Pilot to communicate. But as the

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individual's personality disintegrates (through failing Humanity), the Pilot becomes more and more prominent. If the original personality—the 'Captain'—weakens, the voice of the Pilot becomes clearer and more influential, eventually nearing parity. Should the Captain fail, the Pilot takes over forever.

Humanity 8-10: Sailing Solo

At the upper reaches of Humanity, the connection to the Pilot is so weak that it manifests only as the occasional moment of *deja vu* or of a mild interest in something like opera, French pop music of the 1960s or the fate of Manchester United. Only the hobbies and preferences of the Pilot are leaking through, and those hints are easily dismissed.

Humanity 5-7: Hearing Voices

At Humanity 7, the voice of the Pilot can be heard as an interior whisper in times of stress and struggle. Usually it's simple advice:"Are you sure?" "You're too hungry, feed first," "You can't trust a Crone." At 6, the Pilot can be heard whenever the character is nervous or uneasy, giving advice like, "You can trust your friend to mean well, but he's weak," or "In the long run, that robbery is more trouble than it's worth." The exact advice depends on the nature of the Conscience. At 5, the Pilot can easily comment on anything the character does or thinks. It is a constant companion.

Humanity 1-4: The Face Emerges

At this level, *physical* alterations occur. At Humanity 4, the character's appearance shows subtle differences. Hair changes texture and color by a shade or two, skin lightens or darkens just a bit, the features shift in small but perceptible ways. The character may gain or shed up to twenty pounds.

Humanity 3 is extreme. If the Captain and Pilot have different genders, the character becomes an androgyne, or a hermaphrodite with both pairs of genitals in small and unformed shapes. Even if the sexes match, the changes are now visible to even casual view, unless the host and the Conscience were already very similar in appearance.

At Humanity 2, the character is evenly divided between his original appearance and that of his guiding Conscience, while at Humanity 1 he could be mistaken for his Conscience. Even his friends would need a close look if they'd last seen him with high Humanity.

On the plus side, at Humanity four and less, the Pilot's task memory can come through, with a little effort. By spending a Willpower point, the character can, for a scene, gain the Conscience's Skill rating for mundane actions. This means if your Conscience was a master seducer with a high Persuasion Skill, the Captain can borrow that talent to get a young art student to come look at his etchings, but *not* to use Majesty or any other supernatural power.

Humanity 0: The Captain's Abandoned Ship

The Conscience persona takes over completely, and the physical transformation is complete. The character is now a "Faxist," as described on p. 85.

Dangerous Waters: The Pilot and Frenzy

The greatest benefit of the Pilot is that it's always there when the Captain needs it most, to help with a struggle that other Kindred face alone. The Pilot is in the character's corner when the Beast starts howling.

The character gets a +1 bonus to all Resolve + Composure rolls to resist frenzy, of any type. Pilots stand against the Beast, not out of any morality or principle, but because frenzies endanger a body that is of use to the Conscience.

We Are All Mad Here: The Pilot and Derangements

If a character with a Pilot gets a mild Derangement, he may choose to suffer from being **Subsumed** instead of taking one of the listed derangements in ***World of Darkness*** or ***Vampire: the Requiem***.

Subsumed (mild): When the character has to put himself at physical risk for gains that are purely moral, ethical or of benefit to others and not himself, he might retreat from the challenge and permit the Pilot to steer him away. Roll his Resolve + Composure to keep him on course. The character must be in a real danger of injury, and it must be a selfless or virtuous act to prompt the Pilot to attempt such a coup. In other words, it has to be an act that looks foolishly noble to a Conscience. It has to be something that someone with a soul would do.

Effect: If the roll fails, the Pilot takes over. The primary personality can still experience the body's sensations, but is only a passive observer as the Pilot gets to safety in the most expedient way possible. Leaving a friend to die (a frequent trigger for subsumption) may prompt the character to make a Humanity check. Luckily, it's be one with the Pilot cheering him on.

If the character would receive a severe derangement, he may choose Multiple Personality with his Pilot as the alternate persona. If this is the case, when the Pilot takes over, the character passes out and knows nothing until he once again takes control.

Philosophy

While the Brethren have a direct, arguably *coarse* approach to undeath, they do operate on some principles.

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Sure, they're (paradoxically) self-interested even as they deny they have full self-hood, but they don't go out of their way to be assholes. Stay out of their way and they have no reason to put a boot on your face. They survive, pursue what pleasures they can, and leave the pursuit of 'total social control' or 'liberation' or 'enlightenment' to the losers stuck in denial.

Ethics Beyond Sin and Virtue

Whatever *esprit vital* served as a moral guidepost in life is gone in the Requiem. Sins won't send vampires to hell. Good deeds won't bribe St. Peter and get 'em into heaven. They have tonight and when they cease, there's no 'more.'

Is this a license to kill wantonly? Sure, if you want Masquerade hassles. Kindred still have an urge toward self-preservation. (If they don't, the Brethren heartily encourage suicide. It reduces competition.) But there's no obligation to be evil. Do what helps you, keeping a broad perspective in mind.

'Right action,' absent a spiritual scoreboard, means making yourself comfortable.

Broad Materialism

With 'comfort' as an value, the Facers can sink into laziness, but most don't. The compulsion to seek blood, and pushy *other* covenants ensure that sustenance takes work. But at least the Facers are working toward things that matter. Their prizes are met needs and desires.

A good blood supply gets you through emotional crisis better than smugness gets you through starvation. Get your herd and haven squared away, and *then* worry about what other licks are doing.

The older and stronger a Facer becomes, of course, the more "ensuring comfort and security" encompasses. Dealing with others within his covenant is enlightened self-interest when he may need their help some day, or enjoy their friendship. (Sure, it's questionable whether soulless beings can really 'love' or 'trust,' but if the illusion brings pleasure, why spoil it?) Interactions with outsiders are often unavoidable, and if their behavior is unpredictable because they're confused about their spiritual lacunae, the sensible thing is to pay *more* attention and stay on their good side.

Strangle Your Dreams

Redemption is impossible. Your soul is gone. The process of mourning is painful, so get it over as quickly as possible. Lingering in denial for centuries makes you a wet, mopey danger to everyone around you. Strangle that false hope of 'Golconda' right now. You are not going to clean up crime in your neighborhood, or rid the system of injustice,

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or take down the corrupt phallocentric hegemony. The absolute pinnacle of Kindred accomplishment is to be well fed, safe, and to hurt as few people as possible. Aiming higher than that is a recipe for humiliation and tragedy. If you hear stories about 'virtuous vampires' uplifting the downtrodden, they're lies. Even if they aren't, those guys are rarer than megabuck lottery winners. Did *you* ever win the PowerBall? Then you don't get to be a 'good guy' either. When it comes to good deeds, Kindred are eunuchs in the seraglio. You don't have the equipment.

Rituals and Observances

The Brethren of the Hundred Faces have no real 'rituals.' Their observances emphasize pragmatism and the realpolitik of the free market. Even their peculiar blood manipulation resembles a medical test more than a black Sabbath.

Alignment

'Alignment' is the process of joining the covenant, and it's not cheap, easy or comfortable. The core advantage the covenant offers is leverage against the Beast, and that leverage comes in the form of the Pilot (described under "Membership Privileges," above).

To become a full member of the Brotherhood, one must apply to the local Mentor and, if accepted, wait for a Medical Traveler to arrive. (In a large city, it's possible that a Conscience might be in residence, but those cities are *more* likely to get a Medical Traveler sent for their new members, as distant Consciences try to increase their personal influence and keep an eye on the local honcho.) Travelers arrive by whatever means they can, hauling along about seven quarts of frozen Vitae. This Vitae has been extruded by one of the Consciences, and the new member gets their own blood completely drained, then replaced by the thawed fluid of the Conscience. The problem is, the joiner has to be drained of *every drop*, down to the dregs. Some Travelers take care of this the old-fashioned way, siphoning by mouth. Others starve the newbie out and subdue him when he frenzies. Still others show up in big semi trucks with massive centrifuges in the back, machines set up to catheterize the heart and then spin the fluids out at high RPMs.

However it's done, the new infusion always feels icy and invasive. Afterwards, the Facer feels a presence. The process of meeting their new Conscience has begun.

What Can't My Conscience Do For Me?

Having a second layer of resistance to the Beast is pretty choice, but just how much does the Pilot know and understand? Not as much as one might hope, unfortunately.

Pilots have no innate contact with the Conscience. It's like the difference between a document on a word processor and a printout. The printout (or Pilot) doesn't change just because the document on the computer gets updated. Your Pilot is a snapshot of the Conscience at the moment the blood was withdrawn. The Conscience may change its opinions (though, given Kindred inertia, that's not likely) without the Pilot altering.

Pilots' skills are weak. Task memory is hard for Pilots. The Conscience may have been an expert surgeon, but until your Humanity hits 4, your Pilot is just too suppressed to give you any help with first aid or medical treatment. Pilots can't access their full range of capabilities until you're gone.

Pilots have no Disciplines. Whatever gives Kindred their mystic powers, it can't be jugged in pints of blood and transfused.

Pilots' knowledge is cloudy. Just as their ability to get things done is hard to access with the host's skills in the way, their memory of events from the Conscience's life or Requiem are shaky and imperfect as well—especially if the Conscience has gone through Torpor before the blood was withdrawn. Until Humanity hits 4, the Pilot has only the sketchiest recollection of events before it got installed in you. It may not feel like sharing, either.

So the big transfusion isn't going to make you smarter, more powerful or let you in on covenant secrets. You don't get beneficial side-effects. Other than the benefits of becoming valuable to an old, cunning vampire with agents spread far and wide.

Staff Meetings

Also known as "face time," these are official meetings of covenant members, convened by the local Mentor. She may not be present: Often a staff meeting starts with her saying, "You, you and you; Carthians are knocking our racks on the North Side. Convene at 8:00 PM tomorrow in the back room at Casa Maria and whip up some action proposals. I want at least three—one diplomatic, one military, one with nonviolent confrontation. More is better, list pros and cons." Tradition, as handed down in burgundy binders thick with implication and vague catch phrases, dictates that the Mentor set the time, place and agenda.

Complete staff meetings are held in secure Elysiums with attendance mandatory, and that's where the Facers hash out internal problems, make covenant-wide announcements, celebrate promotions, introduce new members, and keep people up to date on any confusing physical transformations.

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Face Markets

Face markets are open meetings of Brethren from which non-member Kindred are barred. Held in Elysium when possible, they are simply pre-scheduled swap meets for favors and services. Some Facers even go so far as to set up a table with a poster-board sign reading "*Will Beat People For Food*" or "*Windowless basement apt. w. halon fire/intruder suppression system in North Side suburb for sale or trade*" on it, but this is generally considered crude, even by lenient Facer standards. It's a schmooze-fest, wheeling and dealing for advantage in a refreshingly open and blatant mercenary atmosphere.

Monopolized Domains

Each Conscience is permitted one monopolized domain, and sometimes they get more as concessions in negotiations with other Consciences. A monopolized domain is one where every Facer is given that Conscience as a Pilot. This gives those domains *high* coherence. Though the kinds of people who become Consciences are usually so competitive, their attitude is "I'll butt-surf the other guy even if he's essentially myself." Nonetheless, they close ranks against outsiders with frightful speed.

Interestingly, any Facer with a different Pilot who comes to a monopolized domain is immediately exiled—if not murdered outright.

Often Consciences keep their original bodies, the source of the Pilot-installing blood, in strongholds in monopolized domains. But some don't trust their Faxists not to try to murder and replace them.

Titles and Duties

Faxist

The title's a mocking combination of "facsimile" and "Fascist," carrying some meaning of each. A facsimile is a duplicate or a clone. A Fascist is an authoritarian who subsumes the individual to the group. A Faxist, then, is one of the Brethren whose initial identity has been completely overwritten by one of the hundred Consciences. As the influence of the Pilot grows, the host's body changes to resemble the Conscience's form, but one is not a true Faxist until the transformation is complete and the original personality is utterly gone.

Faxists occupy a curious position in the Brotherhood. Many look down upon them as weak, since they no longer represent two minds locked together against the Beast but only one, abandoned by its Captain. But the Pilot that remains is one of the Hundred, and it pursues its original's agenda by instinct. Indeed, most Faxists are in contact with their Conscience through email or telephone, meaning that their actions are, at least tacitly, supported by one of the covenant's ultimate masters. While Faxists are barred from becoming Mentors, they often serve as Medical Travelers, though only to transport the fluids of their own Conscience.

Most Faxists start out extremely loyal to the Conscience from whom they were copied, but it's not uncommon for them to envy their progenitor as they age.

Medical Traveler

Medical Travelers deliver and administer the bioengineered Vitae required for the Alignment of new members. Many, if not most, are Faxists, but the Consciences usually trust a strong individual (for whom they serve as Pilot) over a weak Faxist. They may have no choice, as the road is dangerous for Kindred and the well-justified fear of hijack or corruption is ever-present when the precious essence of a Conscience is being transported.

Medical Travelers, then, have to be tough, capable and trustworthy. But the turnover is high enough that Consciences often settle for less-than-ideal couriers. Service as a Medical Traveler is a good first step to becoming a Mentor.

Mentor

A Mentor is the local equivalent of a Lancea Bishop. He's the authority to whom the rest of the covenant defers. Mentors are locally elected in a process that the Consciences cannot *directly* influence, nor do Consciences have the authority to overturn appointments. But of course, depending on how eroded the original Humanity of local members is, various factions of Pilots may have a powerful influence on getting one of their own appointed Mentor.

Mentors call meetings, set agendas, settle disputes and often toss out business slogans like "My door is always open" or (even worse) "There is no 'I' in 'Team'!" They can only be removed from office by (1) Torpor, (2) Final Death, (3) falling into Faxism or (4) being promoted to the level of Conscience. That last option is by far the rarest, and is always a cause for great celebration.

Conscience

The legendary "hundred faces" are vampires who have access to some sort of bioengineering process that can imprint their essence upon their Vitae and communicate it to any vampire who replaces his blood with theirs. The weaker the recipient becomes, the more influence the Conscience can exert over her opinions and behavior (see p. 82). The oldest of the Consciences have armies of Faxist second selves, all over the world, acting in

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accordance with their values even if they aren't taking direct orders from the original.

(Naturally, Consciences hate one another.)

Entry is restricted, of course—it's the *hundred* faces, not 'as many goddamn faces as we want.' The only way to become a Conscience is for one of the Hundred to meet Final Death. When that happens, a Mentor is voted in by the 99 who remain. If the dead Conscience was popular (or well-tolerated or had lot of valuable alliances), they're likely to select someone who had the old Conscience as a Pilot, and also someone who was close to going Faxist. But the desire to keep checks and balances between Pilots on the local level usually pressures locals to vote in Mentors with *high* humanity, and once they're in that position they can arrange things to keep their Humanity intact (by foisting risky and unpleasant shit duties on underlings, through Staff Meetings). So if a new Conscience position opens up, it could be a real change.

Of course, the Faxists of the dead Conscience may be really, really pissed.

Attitude Towards Others

Carthians: Replace "justice" with "Jesus" and these guys sound as ridiculous as Christianity.

Circle of the Crone: Doubling down on 'spooky' doesn't make you a holy monster. Just a pain in the ass.

Invictus: Their methods are solid, but their pretensions to nobility spoil it all.

Lancea Sanctum: Their faith is a chain. Either you can lead them by it or they'll beat you with it.

Ordo Dracul: Their awesome tricks would almost be worth enduring the hero worship and bullshit philosophy. Not quite though.

Unaligned: Usually as practical as us, though out of necessity rather than realism.

Face Brethren at Street Level

Street level Facers are brash, often arrogant and dismissive to outsiders. But as competition, their practical focus, advantages in resisting frenzy, and the growing unity of their opinions makes them tough to beat. From the inside, there's a pushy, boiler-room startup aura around their meetings. "Sorry pal, the best havens are for closers. You do a little better with your rack project and we'll talk, 'kay?"

If they're a monopolized domain, all those factors are multiplied.

Face Brethren at City Level

As Ancillae, the Brethren can be refreshingly free of pretense, at least with other Kindred. "Yes! I want to use you! I want you to be my tool in this matter. But I keep my tools clean, and at least the payment I offer is *real*, not vague, new-age wishful thinking." Metaphorically, they may piss on your leg as much as everyone else, but at least they don't tell you it's an unusually warm rain storm. They keep their word to the extent that they value a reputation for square-dealing and their disdain for anything smacking of 'higher purpose' means they're unlikely to take risks for moral, symbolic, or mystical gains. They're often a bloc of amoral swing votes, available to the highest bidder. Some of them even stay bought.

Face Brethren at the Top Tier

Once they're jet-setting and dabbling in Secret Mastery, the party line about small, attainable comforts starts to look disingenuous. At this level, the covenant looks less like a comprehensive survival program and more like a pyramid scheme. Who's at the top? Why, those Hundred Faces. They're *right in the name*.

You don't get to be in the Hundred without a shit-ton of ambition, clout and ruthlessness. But once you are, you're in a position to infect other Kindred, all over the globe, with your personality and preferences and, hell, even your *looks*. Creating a small army of vampires who agree with you because, as far as memories and behavior go, they *are* you? That's a goal that draws the cruel and megalomaniacal. And as they clawed their bloody way into the covenant's top tier, they probably took careful notes about the competition, both within the Brethren and on the outside.

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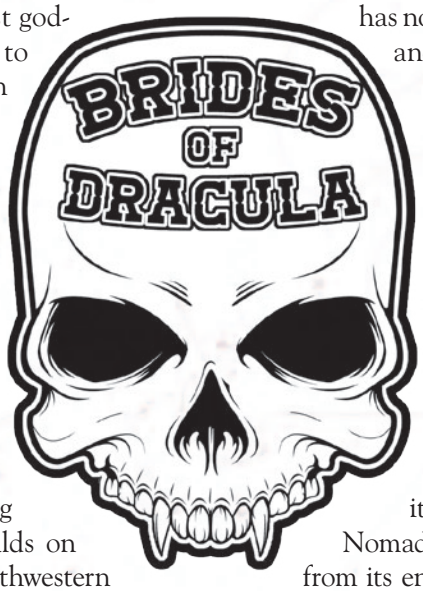
Brides of Dracula

The Brides of Dracula are the meanest goddamn sonsofbitches that ever took to the road, fangs or no. They'll spit in an Elder's face soon as look at him, and fuck any Sheriff who think he's going to rein them in. That's what they'll tell everyone they get a chance. As with all things Kindred the truth is more complicated.



Like many covenants, the Brides began as a cult of personality. But unlike the other, older covenants, the Brides have a physical certainty that their founder exists and still roams the earth. His is the Count Motherfucking Dracula, and the Brides are his heralds on wheels. In the summer 1995 a minor southwestern motorcycle gang called the Desert Raiders terrorized the Arizona highways. Their leader, Ken Salk, guided the gang through a number of acts of extortion, armed robber, and brazen road-side abductions. Eager to prove their worth against the Big Four, the Raiders also made it their mission to pick a fight with every unpatched biker they found. This led the gang to no small degree of trouble on September 9th, 1995, when Salk picked a fight with the Count Dracula. The popular story in among the Brides is that the Count soundly beat down the entire gang, sired Salk, and between them embraced the rest of the gang before sunrise. The gang rechartered itself as the Brides of Dracula, and has rained hell ever since.

Over the years word spread of the exploits of Count Dracula and his Brides. Although few have ever met the Count directly, any Kindred has the opportunity to join the Brides.

Overview

The Brides of Dracula are not just a group of vampires who model themselves after an organized motorcycle club, they *are* a fully organized motorcycle club. Like most mortal clubs the Brides organize themselves into chapter houses based on location. A sparsely populated state may support one charter across the whole thing, as in the Brides: Montana. A dense city can have a charter all to itself. A major metropolis could theoretically be divided further between multiple charters, though the violent and restless nature of the Brides makes any shared power short lived. Any chapter that claims a territory but has no established home is considered nomad, and adds a "Nomad" patch to their cut.

Above the local chapter level presides the mother chapter. This chapter is populated predominantly by founding members of the Brides. The mother chapter presides over any inter-chapter disputes, and unofficially dictates policy when the need arises. They also have the sole ability to call a war, rallying all Brides to the aid of one of their sister chapters, though this power is rarely exercised. Unlike other chapters the mother chapter claims no territory of its own and rides exclusively under the Nomad flag. This protects the mother chapter from its enemies, vampire and legal, and has the entertaining value of keeping everyone else just a little more paranoid.

Each charter pays dues to the mother chapter. The dues can be in whatever form the mother chapter requests, ranging from blood, bodies, and drugs. (Cash is rarely called for anymore. No self respecting Bride pays for shit.) Any chapter that does not keep up with its dues will have its status revoked, and the mother chapter may call a blood hunt on the former members unless a final severance payment is made to the mother chapter's contentment.

Thanks to their illicit activities and violent excesses, the Brides are one of the rare vampire covenants widely known to mortals. Naturally nobody dreams that the gang is comprised of the Damned. This is not because the Brides make any effort to hide their nature. Rather, their behavior feeds directly into the popular image of the outlaw biker gang already. Even if an eyewitness lives to report something obviously supernatural, their account is so full of emotional trauma and fear that nobody believes it. Police departments across the country know to remain wary of the Brides of Dracula. The DEA itself has twice tried, unsuccessfully, to infiltrate the gang. The larger biker world is also aware of the Brides as a growing influence. None of the Big Four outlaw clubs have yet to approach the Brides officially, but each fears the others will successfully absorb the Brides and gain their momentum. Unknown to the Big Four the Brides' dismissal of the mortal clubs will prevent any such union.

While it was once true that the Brides began as a strictly American covenant, in recent years the club has gone international. Central and Northern Europe in particu-

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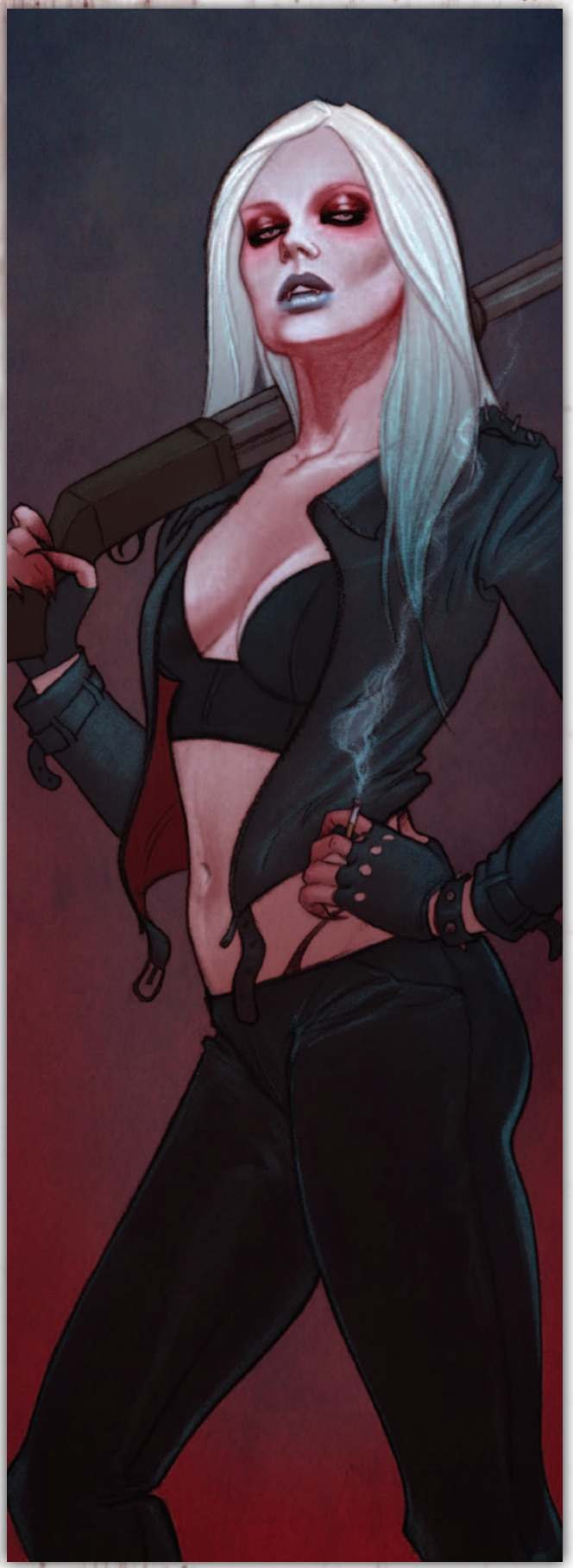

lar have proven a suitable home for numerous chapters. Germany alone is host to nearly as many chapters as the whole of the USA.

Unlike their American counterparts, who generally just want to have a good time, the European Brides direct more of their energy to challenging the established powerbases of the other covenants. With centuries of Elder plots and class struggles at work in Kindred society, the European Brides have a lot of anger to work with. This political direction results in a increasing amount of tension between the American and European chapters. During major votes the European chapters push for direct conflict, while the American chapters care little for their sister's political hangups.

Members

The Brides of Dracula are not the most cosmopolitan of covenants, but their membership varies far more than in mortal motorcycle clubs. The Brides accept both men and women, a practice which earns them more woman mortal prospects than men, being the only ostensibly equal opportunity game in town. Only Kindred are allowed to be fully patched members, though embracing prospects is not uncommon.

The violent and brash lifestyle of the Brides appeals primarily to neonates. A fast track to power and freedom is most appealing to the recently Embraced. Why labor under the yoke of your sire, your clan, the covenants, when you can patch up, ride fast, and party hard? To many the Brides can even be romantic, appealing to every power fantasy the Kindred harbored since their adolescence. Few elders join the club. There's little point in jumping on a motorcycle and making an ass of yourself when you've survived long enough to establish your own power base. Even more elders are dissuaded from patching by the number of known diablerists that within the club's history.

The predominant clans in the Brides are the Gangrel and Daeva. The Brides make a natural home for the predatory natures of both clans. The Gangrel make natural hunters out on the open road, and the Daeva excel in the bar and party settings the Brides love as interstitial activity. Nosferatu are frequently found within the ranks of the Brides, too. The biker culture that celebrates outcasts and cultivates intimidating personas is almost custom tailored for the Nosferatu Requiem. If the Nossie can ride, then she's as valued as the next Bride. The second least common clan is Ventrue. The violent and grimy lifestyle of the biker is a far cry from the polished marble halls of power many Ventrue crave. Those Ventrue that do ride with the Brides are often the loudest of a chapter, feeling they have the most to prove. By far the rarest clan is the

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Mekhet. The Brides are not known for their intellectual pursuits, and they pride themselves on being anything but subtle. Occasionally a Mekhet will patch up, however. These Kindred are often a chapter's wild card, as none of the Bride's enemies think them capable of the clandestine abilities the Shadows bring.

One bloodline in particular deserves mention when discussing the Brides: the Bruja. This Gangrel bloodline was once synonymous with biker vampires. They were small but effective, causing as much trouble for the local powers as any Kindred could hope. With the disappearance of their founder Carlos, the Bruja gradually became less directed. This provided a prime opportunity for the young Brides of Dracula to move in and claim new territory. Hunting ground disputes quickly spun into an all out way between the two gangs, one that the Brides are currently winning. More embarrassing for the Bruja: most of their numbers lost have not been kills, but patch overs. The Brides have accepted many Bruja defects, to the point where nearly a full quarter Bruja in the world ride with the Brides. The Bruja gang itself still limits itself to members of its own bloodline, severely hurting their ability to replenish their ranks. At the current rate it will not be long before Bruja in the Brides of Dracula will outnumber the entirety of the Bruja gang.

Philosophy

No hallowed halls of learning are found in a Bride clubhouse. No theological or transcendent political imperatives guide them towards a new world for all Kindred. To dismiss the actions of the Brides of Dracula would be to gravely underestimate their members, however. Every one is a drunken philosopher and a gun-barrel politician. They may appear as aimless anarchy, but their selfish, supportive, and unexpectedly structured philosophies are what separates them from the nomad gangs that came before. Most of their core tenets are often summarized by acronyms sewn on to the front of their jackets.

Fuck The World

The world is cruel, unfair and out to get you. Becoming one of the Damned doesn't change that. Most Kindred and kine cope with this harsh truth by putting on monkey suits and becoming part of the system. Only difference is kine can rely on their jack-off boss dying some day. The Brides have opted for an unlife outside the system. There's no thought to obeying Kindred laws, paying respects to the Prince, or keeping up a Masquerade, let alone obeying speed limits and paying taxes. This is not to be confused with lawless nihilism, mind. The Brides follow their own set of internal laws, and always heed the club. In the end their brothers and sisters are the only ones they can count on. It will always be them versus the world. The world can go fuck itself.

Top of the Food Chain

Say you're an outlaw biker, a one percenter type. You're a badass of badasses, and you take what you want. Now you're made a vampire. How fucking awesome are you? The top of the food chain.

Every Bride believes that he's entitled to whatever he can get his hands on. His authority is inherent, and expressed through his actions. Robbery and extortion are barely even crimes. If the victim couldn't hold on to it, it was never really his to begin with. Assault is just fun past time, with no greater moral consequence than throwing dirt-clods at cows. And murder, hell, that's what being a vampire *is*.

In a troubling turn for most Princes and the other covenants, the Brides apply much of the same logic toward other Kindred. To a Bride other Kindred are better than kine, sure, but only if they can prove themselves. Being a predator means you have to stay better than the competition. If a Prince can't handle a little partying in his town, then maybe he shouldn't be Prince at all? So the thinking goes. For the most part Brides will leave other Kindred alone (unless it looks like fun). Should someone challenge the Brides with "laws" or "rules" without demonstrating an immediate ability to back it up physically, the offender can expect the full force of the Brides banging on their door.

Rituals & Observations

Contrary to their image as chaos incarnate—one they will gladly nurture—the Brides have a very strong sense of order and a proper way of doing things. To ride with the Brides means casting away all things week and false, but it also means fanatically holding on to what the club deems sacred and true. Certain events must be marked, and certain respects must be paid. Just because the gang may mark it with reckless mayhem does not mean the occasion is not sacred. A Bride can be proper without being a pussy.

The following rituals are the ones followed throughout the club at large. An individual chapter may have dozens more, or simply stick to the bare minimum.

Patching

Once a prospect has proven herself, the other Brides take her on her patching ceremony. The ceremony begins with a night of intense partying, usually involving extreme acts of vandalism and violence, particularly on the prospect's part. After several hours of bacchanalian excess, the prospect

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then must chase down and select her own human kill. The mark can be any mortal, indoors, outdoors, or on the road. The only consistent element is that the killing wound must be made with the prospect's own fangs, and the victim must not be Embraced afterward. After the kill, the prospect is officially presented with her "cut," the leather vest or jacket adorned with the Brides of Dracula patch. After putting on the cut, the prospect wipes her hands and mouth of any blood on it. The resulting stains (a cut is never washed) mark her first kill as a full member of the Brides.

Rally

Biker culture, both legal and illegal, revolves around the rally circuit. Some rallies are held in small Midwest towns just for the freedom of the expanse, while others are meant as more solemn occasions, such as prison runs and war veteran events. Although participation is up to the chapter, most Brides make it to at least one of the major rallies a year.

There are numerous reasons the Brides do this. First, biker rallies are perfect feeding opportunities. Traveling bikers are suitable meals on the go. Once at the rally, the chaos of hundreds of drunk bikers crammed into a single location makes picking off victims ridiculously easy. Second, Brides of Dracula have achieved a celebrity status at rallies, even among mortals. A Bride wearing her colors at a rally can expect to be showered with attention from wannabes. A narcissistic vampire can ride that wave for months after. The biggest reason, the one no Bride will admit, is that it's the one time they can pretend to be human. As one-percenters they're viewed not only as heroes, but human heroes. They can party, and nobody runs away screaming when things get heavy. It is this nostalgia and fondness that prevents any major violent actions from the Brides at the rallies.

Title & Duties

President (P)

The leader of a given chapter is known as the president, or P. Contrary to the name a president is not elected by any formal process. The role goes to the strongest fuck that can best his competitors either mentally or physically. The P has final say in any chapter business, though a P that expects to reign for any meaningful length of time would do well to keep his sisters happy, lest they depose him.

Sergeant-at-Arms (SA)

The right hand man of the P, the Sergeant-at-Arms keeps order within the chapter. She is the master of ceremonies and the keeper of the club constitution. She makes sure everyone pays the club and its ceremonies the respect they deserve. The SA knows every club policy forwards and backwards, and has the power to enforce each as she sees fit. The club comes before chapter, and chapter comes before the individual. Anyone who forgets that can expect a nasty visit from the SA. This goes especially true for the P. Should a chapter P prove himself unfit, the SA is authorized by mother chapter to remove him immediately and hold temporary power until mother chapter decides if the P was at fault.

Prospect

A prospect is someone who wants to join the gang and has entered into a probationary period. A prospect is technically not considered a full Bride, and is treated more as property than an individual. The role of the prospect is to do anything any Brides tells him to. Legallity, morality, none of it should enter into the prospect's mind when he's told to do something. Usually the prospect is merely humiliated with petty tasks, such as picking up the same piece of trash for hours on end. A prospect's life is rarely endangered in a meaningful way. Most prospect fatalities are the result of practical jokes. Prospects can be either a ghoul or outside Kindred. Little preference is shown to Kindred prospects. The Damned do have an easier time proving themselves during their prospect period, but ghouls surviving long enough to be patched are not unheard of.

Red Tooth

Of all the patches that a Bride can earn for her cut, the small, understated patch of a red tooth is the most notorious, as the only way to earn the it is to commit diablerie. Even among the Brides diablerie is seen as an extreme act of monstrous cruelty. But in the Brides even this sin—especially this sin—is a thing to be celebrated. Diablerie is the greatest expression of the predatory superiority a Bride can accomplish. When a Bride not only has the strength and cunning to take down another vampire but the spine to go all the way to Diablerie, she has proven she one of the toughest Damned on earth. Although technically not a rank, when any other Bride encounters a red tooth the diablerist is always given preferential treatment.

Devotions

The Brides are an eclectic gathering of the Damned. Years of mixed coteries and chapters riding together have led to the development of several Devotions exclusive to the club and its members. Despite the useful nature of many of the Devotions, the Brides are not fond of frilly Latinate names.

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Toughest SOB in the Room

(Majesty ••, Resilience ••)

Sometimes people won't listen. Sometimes things get physical before your done talking. But goddammit, they're going to listen, because you're the toughest sonuvabitch in the room.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: No dice roll necessary

Action: Instant

Way this works is this: the character turns this power "on" for the scene, and during that scene, every point of lethal or aggravated damage she takes can turn into a bonus on any Majesty rolls (to a maximum of +5 damage). Trick is, if she *heals* this damage, she loses the bonus (to a 1:1 ratio: one damage healed, one less bonus die).

This power costs 12 experience points to learn.

Cowboy Shot

(Auspex •, Celerity ••)

Aiming a gun on the move is hard. Aiming a gun on motorcycle is impossible. But for one gun-happy Bride the two great tastes of bikes and guns coming together was a personal challenge. After years of development he came up with the cowboy shot. By harnessing the speed of Celerity and the quick eye of Auspex, he learned how to steady his shooting hand by anticipating the bumps in the road before they happened.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Wits + Celerity

A vampire that uses this ability negates any penalties from firing a weapon while on a moving vehicle. Any penalties incurred from the target's actions remain unaffected. Intrepid vampires have translated the ability to hand-held weapons as well.

This power costs 9 experience points to learn.

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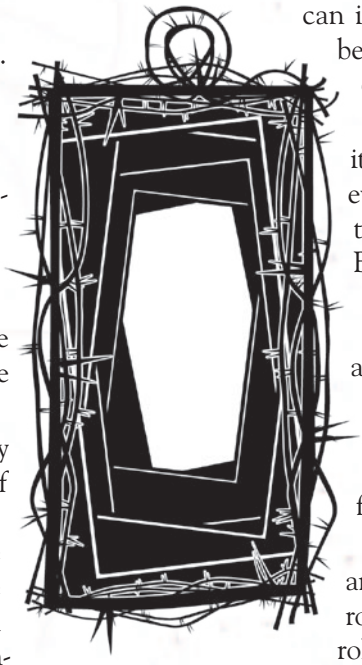
The Children of the Thorns

Some vampires have a secret.

Of course, *all* vampires have a secret. They're secret feeders, secret killers, secret immortals. But it's possible for Kindred to get wrapped up in their local political ploys and forget that they're unnatural, unwholesome. A Thing That Should Not Be.

Some vampires don't have that option. They know they're weird and they've found a link to something stranger—a place and an entity that have become the core of a covenant.



Do you know the urban legend of Bloody Mary? Children the world over say that if you close your eyes in front of a mirror, in the dark and by yourself, say her name three times and then open them, you'll see her staring back at you. Brave kids even try it. Many claim they tried it and nothing happened, and they're probably being honest, most of 'em.

(Though thousands of children disappear every year, worldwide, without a trace, as if they'd been yanked out of space entirely while by themselves, perhaps somewhere dark.)

The Children of the Thorns know that Bloody Mary is real. They know that the mirror trick only works if you anoint the mirror with your own blood. Vampire blood. But if you do it, you can wind up somewhere else. You can travel to the Crypt.

Membership Privileges

One can only join the Children of the Thorns by making the Pilgrimage (described on p. 94). But once that trial has been survived, the new Child gains several privileges.

The Bloody Divide: All Kindred (except the monstrous followers of VII) suffer from the Predator's Taint, but for those who pledge themselves to Bloody Mary, it changes. When seeing another Child of the Thorns, the Beast still snaps or cringes, but there's a sullen listlessness to it. But with an outsider, alien to the Crypt, the reaction's bitterness intensifies.

When first confronting a fellow Child, every Child gets a +2 modifier on their frenzy or Rötschreck check, and can immediately recognize that the other has been to the Crypt. But when making such checks against outsiders, the modifier is -1.

Mary's Compassion: It's not verbalized, it's not the result of brainwashing, it's not even something like Dominate or Majesty that can be resisted through mighty blood. But when one Child asks another for help, there is an urgency that seems to galvanize every word. The Children still refuse one another, they still quarrel, but two strangers who've been to the Crypt have a connection that charges their discussions, an intensity absent even in the arguments of friends, lovers and coterie-mates.

When one Child of the Thorns attempts any ordinary Empathy, Persuade or Socialize roll with another Child of the Thorns, the roll gets a +1 modifier. This does not apply to Disciplines based on those rolls.

Mirror Travel: The primary advantage of being one of the Children is also a risk. Any vampire who has made the Pilgrimage can return to Mary's Crypt with a simple ritual. To perform it, she must (1) be in utter darkness, (2) be facing a mirror through which her body could fit, if it was a door, (3) spend a point of Vitae, smearing it on the mirror and (4) recite the name "Bloody Mary" three times. If she's interrupted before she can say the third, or the darkness is incomplete, or the mirror is too small, nothing happens. But if all the factors align, she vanishes to the thorn-shrouded Crypt. Note that if the mirror is slightly cracked, the traveler takes a point of lethal damage. If the mirror is mostly broken, the traveler takes a point of aggravated damage.

The Child who activates the Mirror can bring, at most, two others with her. This is the only way to get to the Crypt, unless one makes it through the thorn maze.

The Cemetery and the Crypt

The Crypt of Bloody Mary and its cemetery environs don't cover a lot of ground. There are a few tombstones around, most eroded from the passage of centuries. Here there's a date from the 1790s or 1800s, or one might make out a fragment of a name—"Noach Van Ri…" "Aernoud Deblie…" "…ietje Nijs" but mostly it's illegible or grown over.

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Vines and ivy are thick on the ground, crawling on the stones and few hunched trees. The only structure bare of them is the Crypt itself. They thin near to it but grow denser as one moves away, until they merge overhead and there are only mazy tunnels lined with inch-long barbs.

In Mary's Cemetery, the sun never rises and the night sky is overcast. Kindred who bring lights with them see a gray stone Mausoleum, undecorated except for the word above the gaping doorway: MARY.

Every Child of the Thorns has been into that crypt. Few could speak of what they encountered within, and none do.

Night, Always

Because the sun never touches the cemetery, Kindred there never need to rest, nor do they spend Vitae to stay awake, no matter how long they're there.

The grasping plants around the Crypt thicken as one moves away, but with determination, it's possible to get through. Most of Bloody Mary's followers who persevere find a transition to scrub brush, pines and thorned flower bushes (like the South African *fynbos*). That, in turn, gives way to a rundown area of Cape Town, South Africa, just south of the mountain called Duiwelspiek. Some Crypt Walkers can get to the mausoleum from Cape Town. A few Kindred stumble into the maze by accident (or, if you prefer, fate) and so do rare mortals.

But not every explorer who leaves the leafy labyrinth emerges in Cape Town. Some find themselves walking out amidst cactus stands in Arizona or finding the plants growing denser and wetter until they end up in New Zealand. Others have claimed to find places under alien stars, neither the Big Dipper or the Southern Cross visible, places with curious animals and people with strange clothes and strange languages. Some return from their explorations mad and some never return at all.

Stolen Away, Then Returned

Yes, if you have **Changeling: The Lost**, this covenant could serve as a covenant of vampires taken away just like the titular characters in that game—Bloody Mary then is a strange True Fae with a penchant for taking home vampires who call upon her per The Ancient Contract. Are the vampires then infused with blood-tinged Glamour? Or are they fetches, the constructed facsimiles? When the vampire reaches Final Death, will she turn to worms and bird bones and loose thread instead of just dust?

Members

Becoming a Child of the Thorns means submitting to a larger and more powerful force, one that seems determined to remain a mystery—assuming that it *could* explain itself to mortal minds, even if it chose to.

As with all covenants, some join because their sires belong and they are Embraced into it. These Children are raised to serve Bloody Mary as a matter of course and some assume that all vampires are Crypt Walkers.

Others convert. Rarely do Kindred of the Lancea Sanctum switch loyalty to the Crypt, since it simply means replacing one holy and inscrutable monster with another. Carthian and Invictus defectors were usually on the losing end of some political ploy. Not a few of them thought that the Crypt Walkers were a bunch of gullible mystics, right up until they got in the pitch-black bathroom. As for members of the Order and the Circle, the Children of the Thorns promise a focus on *one* entity and *one* mysterious location with (at least potentially) world-spanning influence. Additionally, the Children's small numbers make getting to a position of power look far more achievable.

Philosophy

The Crypt Walkers stand at the threshold where mystery meets material. Their occult elements aren't symbolical or abstract: There's a crypt you can touch, a name whose utterance has tangible effects. But it's only natural, when faced with a naked mystery, to clothe it with ideas. The Children of the Thorns have drawn three principles from their initiation.

Unity of the Chosen

Crypt Walkers are meant to be together, destined for some great and unknown purpose. Rabble Kindred are driven apart by suspicion, selfishness and the Predator's Taint. Only to those who have found the bloody truth of Mary can recognize one another without word or gesture and resist the urges that normally set Kindred upon Kindred.

Is the ease with which they negotiate a result of their initiation, or does it arise naturally from an unspeakable insight? If the former, they are clearly being moved by a greater power. If the latter, it's a benefit of being elite and elect.

For make no mistake, the Children of the Thorns have no interest in unity with those other Kindred brutes. They happily use them when useful and may even have some small affection for them, but until they've been to the Crypt, they exist on a lower level.

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Obedience

The great danger to the Children as a covenant is not in discovery, since anyone who gets into the cemetery can't get back without either entering the Crypt or finding another Child to provide egress. No, the danger is betrayal from within. The Children know how eager many other Kindred cliques would be to investigate their private unworldly refuge, and the worst way that could happen would be for a Child of the Thorns to convert.

To preempt that disaster, the Children emphasize obedience. Obedience to Bloody Mary first and foremost but, since she's a distant and inscrutable figure, obedience to the Attendants and the Oracles. Let the Carthians natter about 'engagement' and 'participation.' If you're a Crypt Walker, you obey Mary and those who speak for her. If you think you deserve a better place and a louder voice, the door is open. Go talk to her and see if you come out an Oracle yourself.

The penalty for disobedience usually starts with a warning or perhaps a vinculum to an Oracle. Given how persuasive the Children are to one another, greater strictness is too much to expect. A second warning usually takes the form of being given to an Explorer to work as an aide, guard or bearer. Being part of a successful expedition would certainly wipe any debts clean, and disappearing on one? That solves the problem too.

Disobeying a third order is unlikely to earn any real disciplinary action. Instead, the locals drag the sinner to the Crypt and fling him inside. Most never emerge from this punishment, but the few who do are usually regarded with some respect. If they've earned release from Bloody Mary herself, who could hold a grudge?

Faith

All this assumes, of course, that Bloody Mary gives a damn about her Kindred servants and has a coherent plan that involves something a human could comprehend as 'reward.' All the evidence that supports her as a guiding force with some ambitions for the material world can, just as easily, support her as chaotic and capricious, with anything that seems relevant to Kindred being observer error. (In other words, even though the inkblots seems to indicate a plan to you, it doesn't mean the *inkblots* have a plan.) A third option is that Bloody Mary is playing with Kindred for her own abstruse amusement.

In the face of something powerful and inexplicable, the Kindred who've survived their encounter in the Crypt believe they're working towards their own ultimate reward, or at least that their labor prevents punishment. To do otherwise is to admit, not only helplessness, but being complicit in their own exploitation. Who wants to believe that?

Rituals and Observances

The Pilgrimage

The Pilgrimage is a journey, though its destination is a mystery even to the Crypt Walkers. It begins facing the black mirror with a Child willing to show you Bloody Mary, or more rarely with a jumble of jabbing plants on the southern tip of Africa. When one reaches the Crypt, the Pilgrimage is no great distance. Just to the door of the vault, and then within. Some stone steps are barely visible, descending into utter darkness, and sooner than onlookers would expect, the footsteps of the pilgrim fade to silence.

Some Pilgrims are gone for weeks. Others for just a few hours. Still others never emerge at all. But those who come out don't speak of what they saw, and most have absolutely no recollection of it. Going in, then coming out, with all time between lost except for glimpses that return in torpor. But something happens in there, because when one emerges, the connection to other Crypt Walkers is clear and visceral.

The Price of the Pilgrimage

Anyone who emerges from Bloody Mary's crypt comes out with one less Willpower dot, one less dot of Humanity, and at least one less Vitae.

Oracular Proclamations

When an Oracle (see p. 96) receives word from Bloody Mary, it's a big deal. Sometimes he calls together all the Children within his domain and reveals the vision (with or without explanation). Other times, they gather and are only told there *was* a revelation, not its contents. (Individuals who are indicated by the message, or who the Oracle picks to carry out a related mission, are usually pulled aside privately and given their directions.)

Regardless of whether the vision is public or private, the announcement is a time of formal praise for Bloody Mary (though the details of worship differ from city to city), followed by the Oracle journeying to the Crypt to offer a blood sacrifice in gratitude for the guidance. Any Child of the Thorns who wishes to accompany the Oracle may, as long as he has an offering of his own to contribute.

After the Oracle returns (through a Cryptic Rendezvous, described below), it's generally an open forum for Crypt Walkers to air grievances, make proposals and gossip. This phase often lasts until the hour before dawn, or later.

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Cryptic Rendezvous

Bloody Mary's cemetery can be entered from anywhere, but there are only two ways out (not counting "down"). One is to wander off into the thorns and hope you're aimed for South Africa. But it's also possible to exit as another Child enters.

From the perspective of someone waiting around the Crypt, a new arrival looks like a thick place in the air, a foggy shadow that deepens and spreads until the traveler (or travelers) begin to emerge from it. The darkness persists for another few minutes. Someone leaving can even ask where the new guest came from and, perhaps, get a warning to stay away before committing to travel.

But control-freak Kindred are unlikely to rely on the vagaries of fate when they don't have to. The practice of the Cryptic Rendezvous has arisen from the Crypt Walkers' desire to turn their secret into a resource.

There's no need for mystical chants and trappings (though some prefer them). A Cryptic Rendezvous is simply when two or more Kindred schedule a mirror ritual ahead of time so that someone from the cemetery side can reach the broader world. So, for example, suppose Arden from Cape Town has business with Prince Maxwell in Chicago. He sends an email to Stan the Crypt Walker in Cicero, requesting access when the sun goes down on North America. Then Arden travels to the Crypt and waits. When Stan enters, Arden leaves.

Note that the mirror window doesn't let you stand between. It opens to permit entrance, and one can't immediately turn around and leave through the same portal. Arranging a Cryptic Rendezvous is no small thing, then. Usually, a return trip is scheduled beforehand so that the first gate-maker isn't stranded. Though, of course, sometimes there are problems.

Titles and Duties

Cemetery Attendant

Just because one *can* get to the Bloody Mary cemetery doesn't mean one is necessarily welcome. Bloody Mary demands sacrifices, not company. Someone who drips a pint of Vitae down the mausoleum steps is unlikely to be summarily killed if he finds himself alone by the Crypt. But it happens.

One Cemetery Attendant thinks the whole setup is like a chicken coop. "Mos' the time, dear Miss Mary, she content to take eggs. But now'n again, she just gets her taste set for a drumstick, y'heah?"

Cemetery Attendants are those who are most welcome at Mary's grave. They can go there when they want, stay

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as long as they like, rest up and heal in a place where the sun's cruel rays never tread. Anyone else who presumes to crash at Bloody Mary's domain like it's a buddy's futon is likely to disappear when no one's looking.

Cemetery Attendants are tolerated because they've been in the covenant long enough to build a reputation (usually ten to twenty years). They've also made a sacrifice to raise Mary's esteem for them. The nature of the sacrifice is a secret, taught by Attendants to those who are about to *become* Attendants. There must be some risk involved, since a few people have clearly been candidates for the position but have failed to return from the crypt after sacrificing… whatever it was. (Popular theories include: A virgin mortal; a Kindred of great Blood Potency; or your soul.)

There are usually a few Attendants around the Crypt all the time, though given the covenant's international nature there's no guarantee they have a common language with any visitors or with each other. Their duties are to enforce an Elysium in the graveyard and to repel any invaders or unwanted guests. Considering the large and oddly-shaped skeletons that Attendants sometimes have to dump, it's not always a cushy position.

Oracle

Oracles are those who speak for Bloody Mary (or, at the very least, claim they do). As such, they're the highest authorities in the covenant, and in those few domains where the Children of the Thorns are in charge, an Oracle often serves as Prince.

To become an Oracle, one must be accepted as such. Any Crypt Walker can claim to have revealed wisdom from Bloody Mary and try to get others to act on it. As with mortals who claim to speak for Allah, or to Buddha, or with Jesus, this can be hard to carry off.

Most Oracles say that her commands are painful to receive, obscure and difficult to express in words or images. Bloody Mary's commands are more likely to read like an I-Ching passage (or a description of a schizophrenic's nightmare) than a simple string of commands. Some Oracles interpret these visions (often without sharing them or, in some cases, even *having* them) into legitimate courses of actions and, if things turn out well, more Children are likely to follow that Oracle.

Then again, false Oracles aren't tolerated. Oracles who lead Crypt Walkers into disaster may be summarily destroyed, devoured or (most commonly) brought to the Crypt and flung down the steps for Bloody Mary's judgment. An Oracle who comes back from that is likely to be highly respected and lividly enraged.

To break it down, there are really only a few classes of Oracle.

- Genuine Oracles who are getting nightmare communiqués from an extra-real hell-hag.
- Lying Oracles who are playing their Crypt Walker followers for suckers. Some can probably maintain this charade for years, but eventually someone's going to realize the Oracle hasn't gone to the Crypt in a long time, and that's a hard absence to explain.
- *Crazy* Oracles who mistake the static in their attic for Words from Beyond. Whether Bloody Mary accepts this, destroys them or can actually communicate best with lunatics is anyone's guess.

Sacred Explorer

The covenant is based around a mystery, but unlike many in the World of Darkness, the thorns and Crypt offer an obvious next step.

Those who declare themselves Sacred Explorers are those who intend to plumb the mysteries of the mirror and find answers. Or, if not answers, advantage over other covenants.

The three major quests of the Explorers are (1) find a reliable path from the Crypt to Cape Town, (2) explore the maze and see where else it leads and (3) map the Crypt itself.

To become a Sacred Explorer, one must only be a member of the covenant and declare oneself to be such. Every Child of the Thorns is obligated to provide haven and sustenance to each Sacred Explorer… once. After that, the debt is discharged. Some may quibble over how *much* defense must be provided to a fleeing Explorer (for the role seems to draw those who get in trouble) or whether a single taste of Vitae is sufficient. Some Explorers insist that offering blood from oneself (and, therefore, the chance of vinculum) violates the spirit of the duty. But by and large they expect food and a place to hide out the day.

In return, the Explorers journey into the unknown and make reports to Attendants and Oracles. If they return at all.

As with Oracles, there's little pity for frauds. Someone who declares an intention to explore and spends years claiming privilege with nothing to show for it is likely to be set upon the third quest whether he wants to go or not.

Some Explorers claim there is a fourth quest, which is to find out exactly who Bloody Mary is, or was. But to date, the covenant does not consider this an undertaking worthy of special rights.

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Attitude Towards Others

Carthians: Good clients for travel, but mystically unaware.

Circle of the Crone: They worship shadows, but can be shown the truth.

Invictus: Practical, arrogant, blind and dangerous.

Lancea Sanctum: Hidebound sanctimonious bastards.

Ordo Dracul: They would take what we have if they all knew, but a chosen few can be brought in.

Unaligned: Lost, weak and wasteful.

Crypt Walkers at Street Level

A street level game with Crypt Walkers should emphasize how little they know. At this level, the vanishing trick is a good one, but one to be balanced against their role as pawns of a greater power. Street Level Oracles are ranting out 10% signal and 90% noise while their followers make some good escapes but, with distressing frequency, disappear into the thorns or are dismissed with, "Mary took him." A second descent into the Crypt is a guarantee of death, or madness, or mad ballsy respect from the other Children. Possibly two or more.

Children of the Thorns at City Level

In a typical "Prince of the City" setup, the Children are just one faction among several, and an insular and secretive one. With their social advantages among one another (and their altered Predator's Taint making misunderstandings with non-members more likely) they work among themselves more easily than they cooperate with others. But they surely interact with unbelievers—especially since they have the opportunity to travel to other places while bypassing the uncertainties of the road. For a city level game, Crypt Walkers are a tight little cult that has semi-reliable ways to get to a few other towns (probably including Cape Town) *fast*. They're peerless transporters of goods and individuals, but they're probably constantly fending off spies from the Order and/or Circle while the Sanctified fulminate about their heresy.

The Sisters of Mary at the Top Tier

The covenant really comes into its own at this level. The others manage to have a global reach, if not a global grasp: the Sisters are global by their very nature. Where other power groups have to deal with the perils (or, at least, inconveniences) of globe-trotting, the Sisters need only darkness, mirrors and blood. They're probably numerous enough that big cities can have two Crypt Walkers whose sole duty is to swap places between the cemetery and an Elysium, shuttling travelers back and forth as needed.

The horror of the top tier is the leverage of the few over the many, and nowhere is that more visible than with the Crypt Walkers. It's not a secret cabal of shadowy figures who can be played against each other. It's *one monster*, a legend you can *go visit*, who speaks through Oracles and leaves her followers weirdly loyal to one another.

At the global level, Storytellers need an agenda for Bloody Mary herself. She needs to have tasks she's pursuing through her followers, and those tasks must *imply* what she's after. The answer of exactly what Bloody Mary wants should tie in to the mystery of what she is. If the PCs can unravel that, it can be the capstone of the chronicle. If they choose not to, it should always be maddeningly opaque, but with just enough detail to fuel speculation.

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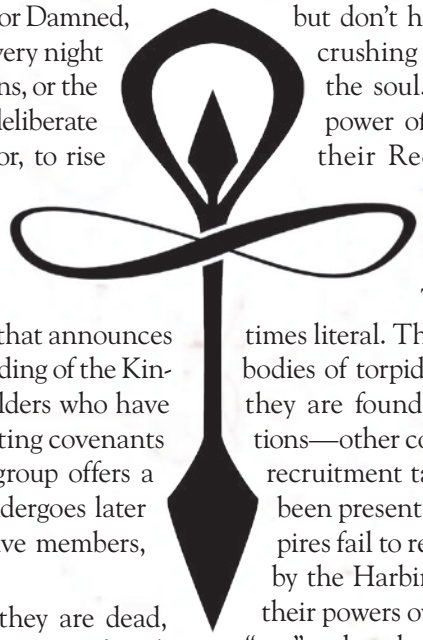
Harbingers



Even as they describe themselves as dead or Damned, the Kindred cling to life—they steal it every night from their victims, until the blood thickens, or the mind weakens, or accident, violence or deliberate effort conspires to send them into torpor, to rise and repeat the cycle until Final Death. covenants exist that answer "why?" or to distract from the process, but most Kindred never understand "how?"

The Harbingers are a small covenant that announces itself as being dedicated to the understanding of the Kindred "life-cycle," comprised mostly of elders who have experienced torpor and found their existing covenants lacking for an explanation of it. The group offers a rationale for the changes a vampire undergoes later in "life" that satisfies enough prospective members, and the tiny covenant grows.

The Kindred tell one another that they are dead, but not gone. The Embrace freezes a vampire after the point of death, forced to steal life as Vitae for the power to continue existing. The Harbingers disagree on one fundamental point. The Kindred aren't dead, the covenant tells new members, but *dying*—very slowly dying. The clock marches on at a pace described in decades and centuries as the amount of necrosis slowly builds up in the vampire's soul, what should take an instant slowed to a trickle by the Curse and expressed as symptoms such as the thickening of the blood, the urge to enter torpor and the deadening of emotion. When torpor finally does come the Kindred is so far dead that they can no longer animate their body and slip into the underworld.

The clock can, however be rewound. The Harbingers have mastered the Discipline to alter the "amount of death energy" (or "Necrosis") within their souls. But through some quirk of the World of Darkness Necrosis cannot be decreased or increased by any Discipline known to the covenant, only moved from place to place. The Harbingers will never have to go into torpor again but that Necrosis has to go into a suitable vessel.

Oh, by the way—the very best vessels are other vampires.

Overview

The Harbingers are a morbid covenant, though one enthusiastic about recruiting. Members see it as their mission to convert ancillae and elders to the teachings of the covenant, rejecting the philosophies of the mainstream covenants which, to a Harbinger, sound comforting but don't help when one is facing torpor and the crushing weight of centuries of damnation on the soul. The covenant relies on the personal power of members who often at the height of their Requiems when the covenant recruits them to protect them against any other covenants angered at the Harbingers stealing their members.

The stealing of other vampires is sometimes literal. The covenant has a habit of removing the bodies of torpid vampires from whatever resting place they are found in and moving them to secret locations—other covenants assume that this is a misguided recruitment tactic at first, until the Harbingers have been present for some time and the kidnapped vampires fail to reemerge; in fact, they are used as vessels by the Harbingers, the elders of the covenant using their powers over death to cause the torpor victims to "age" rather than themselves. Those powers are rooted in the covenant's beliefs about the nature of the Curse, and their belief that the minds of torpid vampires drift into the Underworld to suffer the nightmare-dreams that accompany the condition.

The Harbingers preach that the trauma associated with torpor, the fog of eternity and the tendency of Kindred to madness are all caused by ineffectually struggling against the process of slowly dying, which they call "Rigor." They point to the fact that once in torpor, as the Man no longer struggles against his fate and gradually dissolves into the Underworld, the blood of a vampire thins again until they eventually wake. It is not the Fog of Eternity that interests them—that, to the Harbingers, is clearly the result of damage sustained in the Underworld—but the thinning, which the original Harbingers realized must be the result of the Underworld acting upon the Curse. Somehow, being in torpor means that the accumulated Necrosis of a vampire is released. By achieving the stillness of torpor even while active, the blood can be thinned without the sleep of ages. By understanding how the energies of death build up in the vampire's soul, they can be manipulated, drawn in or bled off, allowing the careful elder to choose how quickly she dies.

Achieving the stillness of torpor involves reproducing, in part, the conditions of the Underworld on Earth. Harbingers surround themselves with the images and symbols of death, seeking out sites known to be haunted or that are looked upon as morbid for their havens. The covenant looks on members of rival covenants as being

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obsessed with pretending to be alive, or trying in vain to change the nature of the Curse while the Harbingers see themselves as manipulating the way it already works. Elders of the Harbingers do not spend their days in mortal accommodation—leaving the penthouses and mansions to the Invictus, they build their havens in tombs and crypts. The covenant point to what scraps of evidence exist about early vampires—especially the Necropolis-dwelling Camarilla and the ancient Egyptian Kindred—as proving that their ways are more valid than dwelling among the living.

Despite the covenant's morbidity, it is acceptable and even encouraged for one of the rare neonate members of the covenant to be preoccupied with mortal concerns for as long as they take to be resolved. The neonates are not long Embraced, after all, and they have only just started to die, with several decades to go before Rigor reaches the point of having to be managed. The covenant actively supports such fledglings in resolving any "mortal" issues they might have, gaining any necessary revenge and fulfilling any fantasies the neonate still clings to from living days. Once the mortal family has been out-lived, however, members of the covenant are expected to put the mortal world behind them and withdraw from contact with the living.

Members

The Harbingers have a skewed membership tending towards high potency of blood and age. Elders have the perspective they need, having long since dealt with any remains of their mortal lives and begun to feel torpor dragging at the corners of their minds. The typical recruit is approaching her second bout of torpor; having experienced the fear and uncertainty of the long sleep for a first time, she is in no mood to do so again and despairs that any existing covenant teachings fail to offer comfort. As respected elders, the Harbingers can make the approach as concerned peers.

Younger members make up the distinct minority, but are looked upon as the future leadership of the covenant thanks to their head start in learning the techniques for trading in Necrosis. The covenant cannot recruit neonates by using the fear of torpor—they're too young and in most cases haven't realized that even immortality as a vampire is limited—so concentrates on those that require assistance with moving beyond their mortal lives. Harbingers will murder, protect, guide and manipulate mortal friends, enemies and relatives of newly Embraced Kindred, helping the new vampire to get past the first few years of Rigor until they're willing to reject living ways. Ancillae Harbingers are the success stories; having learned the covenant's magic much earlier in their Requiem, they display the properly morbid attitude to existence and, when they are powerful enough to survive the Predator's Taint without embarrassment, are sent to new cities in a conscious effort to seed the covenant in new domains.

Lastly, the Harbingers are often keen necromancers, and cultivate members of appropriate bloodlines such as the Burakumin, or those with a talent for producing the necessary conditions in the world, such as the Morbus.

Philosophy

The Harbingers are the result of the Antiquarian movement in the 19th century, which was mirrored in the Danse Macabre by a rise in interest among the Kindred in seeking their roots. The relatively new studies of Egyptology and other revelations about the ancient world led many Kindred to look for traces of their own kind in the past. One common factor rang out through the Fog of Ages: Kindred of the past had a tendency to dwell in the houses of the dead. The combination of these beliefs with Acolyte teachings about Kindred being part of the life cycle of the world and Dragon investigations into the nature of the Curse produced the Harbingers.

Rigor

A vampire is different to other walking dead—she is not a zombie, not a ghost, not a Sin-Eater. She steals life from others and resists change, her body undoing alterations unless they are fixed by effort of will. Over time, she becomes more deathlike until torpor sets in, the taste for blood growing more rarified with age.

The Harbingers call the aging process of the Kindred "Rigor" by way of comparison with the changes a mortal body undergoes after death. Through the Curse, the split-second advance of death is turned into the process of centuries.

Hollow Mekhet and the post-mortem Embrace

So, if a vampire is actually trapped within the split-second of being both alive and dead as the Harbingers say, what about the rare cases of Embrace after death, explored in **Mekhet: Shadows in the Dark**?

It's up to the Storyteller. The Harbingers could be mistaken. Alternatively, Hollow Mekhet and other post-mortem Embraces might be immune to (and unable to learn) the Thanatology Discipline. Their unusual Embrace puts them apart from other vampires, a curiosity for Harbingers to study.

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Necrosis

Necrosis is the covenant's term for the "death energy" that builds up in a vampire and which causes the advancement of Rigor. It cannot be sensed directly, only by symptom—a "touch of the grave," the presence of a ghost or the psychic stain of a graveyard. It is a truism among the Harbingers that death calls to death. Ghosts frequent areas high in Necrosis because they are attracted to it somehow. Necrosis is especially attracted to the Curse of the Kindred; the vampiric soul is protected from Necrosis to a great extent by the Curse, but that protection is not total and cuts both ways, preventing Necrosis that builds up within a vampire from easily being released.

The Underworld

Within the Underworld, though, Necrosis is everywhere. That strange realm, known to the philosophers of the Kindred as the place in which torpor dreams originate and to their Necromancers as the abode of Ghosts, is so flooded with Necrosis that a curious effect takes hold on a vampire's soul—the Necrosis within, the Harbingers say, is pulled without by the sheer amount of it present in the Underworld. The pull of the land of the dead is greater than the pull of the Curse, and so torpor lowers the amount of Necrosis within a vampire.

Transference

The Curse can be manipulated by great effort, and the Harbingers point out that most Kindred do it without thinking about it—the same effort that, when exerted, allows a vampire to appear in a reflection or fix physical changes to their waking state. Most profound is the act of the Embrace itself, forcing the Curse into another being.

Through will, the Curse can be forced to ease its grip over the Kindred for an instant, allowing Necrosis to move in or out of the soul and the clock of Rigor to be wound in the direction of the Harbinger's choosing. Miscalculation can be deadly for the Harbinger as that same force is the one keeping an elder's body from crumbling to dust, but with care the Blood can be thinned or thickened, given a suitable donor or receiver for the Necrosis.

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Rituals and Observances

Gravetending

The primary observance of the Harbingers is the creation of the appropriate conditions for their rituals; in order to bleed off Necrosis and free themselves from the specter of torpor, the covenant need access to an environment saturated in free Necrosis that can serve to attract or be attracted by that within themselves. Because of this, Harbingers spend much of their time cultivating areas that are filled with the symbolism of death, haunted by ghosts or otherwise regarded as "morbid." This process of cultivation is known as "Gravetending," and is the great occupation of much of the covenant. The site of an atrocity is a popular choice, and one can always be arranged if there are no suitably ghoulish stories in the city's past.

However, for reasons still debated by the covenant's theoreticians, death energies cannot simply be bled off into the landscape and require a new home similar to the one they are being evicted from; a ghoul made by the Harbinger using the power will do in a pinch, but the best transfers are made between two vampires. The Harbingers are understandably wary of the risks involved in lowering their own Blood Potency by increasing that of another active vampire, so the covenant collects Kindred that have fallen to torpor, hides them in as secure a location as can be found and uses them as Necrosis batteries—with a coterie of Harbingers all transfusing excess Necrosis into them, the unfortunate victims don't reduce Blood Potency with time spent in torpor and remain trapped unless rescued.

Interference

The covenant is by no means the only group to actively go out seeking areas that have been touched by death—the sites they pick may turn out to be Wyrm's Nests, Stygian Demesnes, Verges to morbid areas of the Shadow, Wounds or other "interesting" sites, many of which are guarded by supernatural beings that have their own ideas about vampires moving into the neighborhood.

No Survivors

The ritual of No Survivors is a solemn affair that marks the graduation of one of the Harbinger's rare younger members from neonate to ancillae, named for its only condition; the Kindred must have resolved all ties to mortals in a permanent fashion. Some neonates kill those linked to them, while others are content to simply gather their strength, learn their moves in the Danse Macabre and wait for everyone they knew to die of old age. In either case, No Survivors resembles a wake for the Kindred crossed with the reverent destruction of any keepsakes and mementos from living days. After the ritual, the ancillae is expected to participate fully in Gravetending and abandon any further non-feeding contact with the living.

The Crossing

When a Harbinger falls to torpor despite her best efforts, the covenant gathers in a ceremony to mark her crossing into the Underworld. Unlike the vampires gathered for Gravetending, members of the covenant are not used as receptacles for Necrosis for fear that such behavior would be returned in kind should the perpetrators ever fall to bad luck. Instead, the fallen Harbinger is carefully shepherded through torpor as best as their colleagues can.

Titles and Duties

The Harbingers are still a small covenant, and only have a few official titles within their membership.

Pilgrim

A Harbinger who joined the covenant unusually early in her Requiem, a Pilgrim is a recent elder who combines the age, experience and Potency of an elder still decades from torpor with the full command of Thanatology of one many years her senior. Pilgrims are those Harbingers tasked with spreading the covenant to new cities, making the arduous journey to a new domain in order to find new converts.

Watcher of the Graves

Publicly, the title of Watcher of the Graves refers to the Harbinger with the greatest skill at Gravetending or the one on whose territory the covenant focus their efforts at encouraging a morbid atmosphere. In fact, the title refers to the member charged with identifying, acquiring and keeping safe the torpor victims that make the practice of Thanatology more convenient for the Harbingers.

Legacy

The Harbingers have refined their study of Necrosis, Rigor and the Curse into the Discipline of Thanatology. Using this Discipline, the covenant is able to transfer Necrosis between vessels to achieve startling effects.

Thanatology

Thanatology is affected by external factors, being best practiced in areas the Harbingers have been Gravetending, and carries a risk to the vampire using it. Failure to manage the careful balance of forces within the user's soul can lead to the mystical properties of the Curse that keep

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a vampire's body intact and unchanging being disrupted; a mistake using Thanatology can lead to excruciating pain as body parts rot or crumble to dust.

The following modifiers based on location affect all uses of Thanatology.

Location	Modifier
Supernatural place of death (gateway to the Underworld)	+ 4
Resting place of corpses (Graveyard, Cemetery or Mass Grave)	+3
Site of multiple unexpected deaths or place corpses are routinely handled (Scene of a car crash, Funeral Parlor, Morgue)	+2
Site of regular expected deaths (Hospital ER)	+1
Site of a single death (Murder scene)	+1
Haunted	+ 1

In addition, the transfer of Necrosis is most effective when used on other Kindred, but can be attempted against other supernatural beings. Apply the following modifiers.

Target	Modifier
Kindred with Blood Sympathy to user	+ 1
Other Kindred 0	
Ghoul created by user	0
Other Ghoul	-1
Non-"Kindred" vampire	-1
Ghost	-2
Other Death-Aspected Being (Promethean, Sin-Eater, Moros mage, zombie, Risen)	-3
Any other being, supernatural or mundane	-4

Note also that most Thanatology powers have a cost in Willpower, representing the effort of manipulating the Curse. As with Theban Sorcery, the limitation on spending Willpower in a scene still applies to the Discipline so the roll to activate those powers cannot be improved by spending Willpower.

• *Taking the Measure*

A Harbinger first learns to sense the tug of death on the Necrosis within his own soul, feeling how it is drawn to other centers of death. This sense reveals the relative strength of other vampires, the presence of Ghouls, ghosts and any powers calling upon the forces of death.

Cost: -

Dice Pool: Composure + Investigation + Thanatology

Action: Instant. The roll may be contested by Obfuscate or other concealment powers as with Auspex (**Vampire: The Requiem,** pg. 119)

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character loses grip on her own Curse, and suffers one aggravated wound.

Failure: The attempt fails.

Success: The character senses the presence of death in her immediate vicinity (Blood Potency in yards). Kindred are recognizable as such, and she knows whether they have a higher or lower Blood Potency than herself. Ghouls, non-Kindred vampires and other beings or objects that contain Vitae are recognized as being vampiric but not Kindred. Ghosts can be sensed even if not materialized. Other supernatural creatures linked to death are discerned as being present, but the power gives no understanding of their nature or capabilities.

Exceptional Success: As per success, but the character knows the exact Blood Potency of Kindred within reach of her senses. Any ghostly anchors within the area are highlighted as such.

At Storyteller's discretion, a separate Composure + Occult roll may be used to discern further details about supernatural beings highlighted by the use of this power.

•• *Necrophage*

The Harbinger takes hold of the Curse and, by an act of will, forces it open. He lacks the ability to purge his existing Necrosis, however, and the death within attracts more which at this level of understanding settles into the part of himself the vampire has the most experience moving his Vitae. By the use of this power, the vampire can feed without feeding, leeching power from those around him and using it to recharge Vitae that has been spent. The power is best used on other vampires or ghouls who have Vitae of their own the Necrosis can be drawn from—but more esoteric sources can be used in a pinch. Those without suitable reserves of Necrosis—supernaturals not

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linked to death and normal living beings—cannot be targeted by this power. The target must first be touched or grappled. Ghosts must be materialized for the character to be able to use this power on them.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Strength + Occult + Thanatology versus Stamina + Blood Potency

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character suffers two points of aggravated damage and may not attempt to use Thanatology powers other than Taking the Measure against the target for 24 hours.

Failure: The attempt fails.

Success: If a vampire or ghoul, the target loses Vitae equal to successes. Other supernatural beings lose equivalent traits, such as Essence for ghosts. The character then gains Vitae equal to successes, halved (round up) if the trait absorbed is not Vitae. The Vitae gained cannot cause the character to exceed his maximum Vitae pool.

Exceptional Success: The character gains Vitae equal to successes, regardless of the Trait absorbed.

Because this Discipline transfers the power seated within the blood, but not the blood itself, use of it does not count as drinking from a source for purposes of blood addiction or the feeding restrictions experienced by characters with high Blood Potency. The user does not risk the Vinculum, and the power cannot be used to commit diablerie. The sudden loss of Vitae can send targets into hunger frenzy or in extreme cases torpor.

••• *Purge*

The core of the Harbinger's Necrosis—that underpinning her Blood Potency—is still beyond her reach, but she has refined her ability to control that contained within her Vitae to expel as well as absorb it. With this power, the Harbinger can burn Vitae and push the Necrosis released out into a target that must be touched or Grappled if unwilling. The power is an obvious display, the now-inert blood seeping from the Harbinger's pores as the transfer takes place.

Cost: 1 Willpower plus any Vitae lost to the transfer

Dice Pool: Stamina + Empathy + Thanatology (versus Stamina + Blood Potency for unwilling targets)

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character is wracked with pain, and suffers three points of aggravated damage. She may not attempt to use Thanatology powers other than Taking the Measure against the target for 24 hours.

Failure: The attempt fails.

Success: The player chooses an amount of Vitae up to the successes rolled and his character character loses that much Vitae. If the target is a vampire, she gains Vitae equal to that lost by the Harbinger. Supernatural beings able to process the energies of death gain points in their appropriate power Trait, such as Essence for Ghosts.

Beings unable to generate their own power Trait (such as Ghouls), supernaturals not linked to death (such as non-Moros mages) and normal living beings cannot process the energies of death pouring into them. They instead suffer lethal damage equal to the Vitae lost by the character.

The sudden drop in Vitae within the character can cause hunger frenzy if it takes her below the "hungry" level as defined in **Vampire: The Requiem**

Exceptional Success: As per success, but the character only loses half (round up) the Vitae transferred. The character does not risk hunger frenzy from the use of the power.

If this power is somehow successfully used against an invalid target (such as against an illusion or a spirit), the character loses the Vitae but the Necrosis is dissipated. It can be sensed as a taint on the surroundings by users of Taking the Measure, Auspex powers or other psychic powers for up to the character's Blood Potency in nights.

As with Necrophage, this ability transfers the power contained within Vitae and not Vitae itself—it does not cause the Vinculum or Blood Addiction and it cannot be used to create or feed a Ghoul (indeed, as they are unable to process the Necrosis usefully, attempting to do so will seriously injure the Ghoul). A vampire may gain Vitae from the power regardless of feeding restrictions that may apply.

•••• *Shifting the Scales*

The Harbinger has now achieved the fine control needed to manipulate the potency of her blood. Unlike lesser uses of Thanatology, this can only be used with another Kindred as the target—the Curse calls to the Curse. The Harbinger must touch her target, which involves a Grapple if the target is unwilling, and then attempts to open both their souls, allowing the Necrosis to flow from one to the other. She may attempt to raise her Blood Potency at the other vampire's expense, or cast off the unwanted thickness of blood onto the other.

Cost: 1 Willpower plus dots in Blood Potency temporarily lost in the transfer.

Dice Pool: Stamina + Empathy + Thanatology versus Stamina + Blood Potency

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Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character suffers four points of aggravated damage.

Failure: The attempt fails.

Success: The player chooses whether the character loses or gain a dot of Blood Potency, while the target gains or loses a dot in reverse. This transference lasts for the character's new Blood Potency in nights, after which the traits return to their normal ratings. No character may be reduced to Blood Potency 0 or be pushed above Blood Potency 10.

Exceptional Success: As per success, but the character may choose to transfer up to successes in Blood Potency rather than a single dot. The affect lasts for the character's original Blood Potency in nights.

••••• *Blight*

A Mistress of Thanatology can purge the Necrosis within her Blood Potency without the need for another vampire to act as a participant, holding herself still or regressing along the progress of Rigor. The highly potent Necrosis manifests as a wasting blight on the vicinity, or a devastating attack on a target that then suffers the accumulated and long-deferred death of the Harbinger.

Cost: 1 Willpower and 1 Blood Potency.

Dice Pool: Stamina + Occult + Thanatology, resisted separately by beings in the area of affect with Stamina + Blood Potency

Action: Instant.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The user suffers five points of aggravated damage as the Curse cracks bones and flesh and incurs spiritual damage.

Failure: The attempt fails.

Success: The character permanently loses a dot of Blood Potency, which can only be restored through time or experience. The accumulated Necrosis washes over the immediate area (new Blood Potency in yards)—any beings present that are able to process Necrosis as defined for Purge gain the character's new Blood Potency in the appropriate power trait up to their normal maximums. All other beings suffer the character's old Blood Potency rating as points of lethal damage.

If the character wishes, she can instead focus the Blight onto a single target within the area. That target suffers the character's old Blood Potency as aggravated damage.

Exceptional Success: The Blight both strikes the immediate area and focuses on a particular target. The target nominated only takes the aggravated damage, not the lethal damage inflicted on everything else nearby.

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Holy Engineers

We are the beloved of Death, the forgiven, the first of humanity to escape, in part, the dark chains of earthly mortality. We bear the Radio Sickness to work our will on the world, which is the will of Death and the God Machine. We have been chosen to receive the signal and privileged to seek knowledge from beyond.

The Unvoiced Name, the Fury at the center of the sun, despises us and so our flesh is scoured by the solar broadcast. The Unvoiced Name demands that mankind remain imprisoned and ignorant and seeks to thwart our communication with the God Machine and usurp the signals for its own use. But our lover and lord has prepared for us a haven on the moon's dark side, and there our blistering enemy will touch us not.

But as the Pain Prophet teaches, the ancient Fury of Death is broken. Not only is it broken in purpose, as it permits us to recover from the grip of the annihilating Earth, but it is broken in self. Its spirit remains upon the moon, in the Temple of the Black Sun. Its body, however, was stolen in 1972.

The first transmission to us, Death's chosen, came to me in 1964. I had the first case of Radio Sickness and as I weakened I desperately sought to uncover what was happening to me and what the message meant. I had been studying the physical implications of extra-dimensional mathematics since Oskar Klein's 1926 refinements of Kaluza's work on General Relativity. This, combined with my Kindred *nature and occult studies, equipped me, perhaps uniquely, to interpret the message and realize it was an answer to a question I had yet to ask, a message to the past from a future self.*

Having deciphered the code, I achieved a basic grasp of how to query the God Machine. I immediately broadcast the question "How can I broadcast a question to the God Machine?" Once the time-loop was resolved, the hemorrhages, electromagnetic distortions and headaches ended.

When next I experienced Radio Sickness, I knew the cure was to find the essential question and ask it. That time it took me only a few days follow the answer's hints to the works of Marco Singe and ask, "What is the nature of the cosmos and what is the Kindred *place in it?" That was in 1965. By 1967 I had identified Death as my patron and learned that the first message had been permitted after a powerful prayer-broadcast from Death to the God Machine in 1971, when its lunar temple was violated by the astronauts David Scott and James Irwin. More messages led me to program Irwin and Scott to unwittingly complete an Egyptian ceremony during the Apollo 15 mission, trampling a falcon feather underfoot to symbolically break the power of Horus—Horus (like Apollo and all solar deities) being a mask for The Unvoiced Name, our enemy.*

In this way, I separated our master's soul from its body and permitted it to remain in its sanctum while its body (the Freemasons' 'Packet Theta') was stolen.

This, then, is our mission. We must recover the physical remains of the Angel of Death. We must return them to their rightful place in the Temple of the Black Sun. When that is done, we shall be fully forgiven and return to life, fully human and immortal. While the resentful sun may still strike us on that glorious day, we will have a restored and awakened Ancient One to protect us. Some who have learned the sacred sickness believe that on that day, lunar eclipse will become permanent and shield us from the Unvoiced Fury for all time.

Overview

The Holy Engineers (or "God Talkers") believe they are capable of rituals that broadcast questions to an all-knowing (but mysterious and obscure) "God Machine." Because the God Machine exists outside the normal flow of time, the answer to the query arrives *before the question is asked*.

Clearly, this is a time travel paradox waiting to happen, since the vampire might get an answer and simply not ask. But the Engineers dismiss this impossibility by insisting that this has, in fact, *happened*. The energy required to offset information traveling backwards is taken from the questioner, weakening him until he asks the question or perishes. If he asks, the loop is resolved. If he dies, the loop is irrelevant.

This wouldn't satisfy a college logic professor, but that logician doesn't have radio messages leading him to riches, danger and peculiar missions.

Members

The Engineers attract absolute thinkers. People who believe in right actions, final solutions or (so very rarely) happy endings. The hope that they can *get out* of the Requiem, simply by stealing a highly protected mystical

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artifact from the US government and then flying it into space, is powerful to the point of intoxication, and it draws people who seek hope (or intoxicants).

Unlike other covenants, there is rarely built-in opportunity for easy political gain (though, for those who seek it, the guidance of Radio Sickness is one thing that politicians *can't* expect). God Talkers are Kindred who resist the selfishness of their condition, replacing it with fanaticism that often borders on masochism.

Membership Privileges: Radio Sickness

When an Engineer receives a prophecy, it comes in the form of what they call 'Radio Sickness.'

The early symptoms are weird electrical phenomena: Lights flicker, TVs get static, MP3 players skip and ATM screens get flecks of random ASCII garbage as the Kindred walks by. That lasts about a night. As the night goes on, the effect intensifies. Half-faces groan out of video screens, lights seem to pulse in rhythm—even disconnected car headlights. Credit cards get erased, computers get errors, ball lightning or St. Elmo's Fire appear clinging the tops of buildings. Sometimes compasses start spinning or northern lights appear, but when the vampire rests at dawn, the effects abate. Until nightfall.

The second night, it returns with redoubled fury, building up until every speaker near the sufferer starts blaring out in unison, no matter what channel or input it's using. Cryptic words, phrases, numbers, foreign phrases… the prophecy is obscure, different for every Engineer. But it beats an imprint into any receptive medium. VCR tapes carry the audio, while camera film develops images reminiscent of the clues. (It doesn't do digital, though. Analog only.) Then it stops. Everything goes back to normal.

Sometimes the God Talkers understands right away and asks the question the same night. (Asking the question is a matter of translating letters into a numerical code that, rather than being base 10 or binary or hexidecimal, has a changing base that follows the Fibonacci Sequence.) The querent then spends a point of Vitae bleeding into a sufficiently powerful radio transmitter (any ham radio works, or even a CB in certain latitudes) and sends the signal to a carefully calculated location in the constellation of Orion. This closes the time loop, asking the question for the answer he's received.

(No dice need be rolled for these messages. Obviously the sending worked, or the answer wouldn't have come. If an Engineer tries to send a message without a pending answer, it's equally obvious that something went wrong with that attempt because *no* answer preceded it.)

But sometimes the Engineer doesn't immediately figure out the question. Often he has to investigate the clues and more often than not the prophecy leads him into problems and secrets he had no idea existed. He gets three nights to figure out the question before the next stage of the Sickness descends.

Four nights after the prophecy, the Holy Sufferer awakens with mild hemorrhages. They cost him an extra point of blood upon awakening. The night after that, it's a point of killing damage from severe headaches and two points of blood spent to awaken. The third night of hemorrhages, they're usually too numerous and severe to keep hidden and he takes a point of aggravated damage. That's the night that mild electrical effects start again, intensifying just as they did before the prophecy. But now they build up to a pitch where any electrical appliance gives the sufferer a shock and fuses fail as soon as he enters a building. Even mortals and sensitive Kindred are affected as the electromagnetic distortion operates on sense-interpretation centers in the brain, thinking they hear whispers just on the edge of audibility, or that they see movement out of the corners of their eyes. Every night after that, the blood loss upon awakening rises by a point and he takes an additional point of aggravated damage. By the time he drops into torpor, it's too late. His body continues to decay until there's a brief spark, a sniff of ozone, and only ash remains.

It rarely comes to this, of course. The covenant has learned that asking "How do I stop the Sickness?" usually works as a question for *any* prophecy. (The theory being, any prophecy could be intended to push a vampire into certain actions on the behalf of the Angel of Death, with the question only occurring to him after the inscrutable mission is complete.)

Storytellers are strongly advised to accept any half-plausible explanation the player cares to offer for why the character's question fits the answer. You have the right to veto a question that's disruptive or silly or which violates the game's setting, but only exercise that right in extreme cases. Moreover, be generous with rewards when questions justify them. covenants recruit the worthy and presumably the characters qualify. If your player chose "time-warping clue magnet who could *die* from stubbornness" instead of "price break on Merits," respect the choice and give him some payout for putting his covenant powers largely in your hands.

Players, don't send your character into the Holy Engineers unless you are willing to let the Storyteller decide when you get a prophecy, *and* unless you're willing to make a good faith effort to find a question that pushes the plot forward. Usually the plot is the Storyteller's purview, but the prophecy setup gives you a role in determining what an important prophecy means. This can approach being a co-Storyteller. Don't abuse that for personal gain or it's

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going to be a long time before you get another prophecy. Use the opportunity to add cool stuff to the game and not only is the Storyteller encouraged to give you more prophecy, she's likely to tolerate questions that aggrandize your character or coterie a little bit. Just don't go overboard.

Philosophy

Except in the particulars, the Holy Engineer philosophy is like any other cult. They believe they have the one true answer and that anyone who isn't for them is against them or, at best, an ignorant and deluded obstacle. So far, they're a lot like the Nemites (see p. 111). The difference is in the details.

Unique and Holy Missions

Every instance of Radio Sickness is a message from Death, their patron, sent via the God Machine, leading them to a better future for humanity (and themselves). Even when prophecies are unclear, destructive or in conflict, there is a presumption of purpose behind them.

Obedience to the Master

Death, the master, the *Angel*, is the ultimate authority. Messages through the God Machine are to be obeyed. The covenant never really comes into conflict over whether to obey or not, it's all down to interpretation. If a prophecy unequivocally said to kill the local Mind Ancestor (see p. 109), the Mind Ancestor might fight it, but in a choice between a neonate with a prophecy and the oldest and most powerful elder in the covenant's domain, it's prophecy all the way. But of course, a 'clear prophecy' is so rare it's almost a contradiction in terms. Many Engineers would find it hard to trust an unambiguous answer unless they heard it themselves.

Individual Leadership, Collective Responsibility

When a God Talker gets a prophecy, it's her duty to seek out the essential question and ask it. While on this quest, her fellow Engineers are obliged to help her, but the degree of obligation depends on a lot of factors. Has the seeker been helpful to that particular Kindred, or with the covenant overall? Team players prosper. Is the request for aid reasonable, not risky and not insisting on extreme personal sacrifice? Dying for the cause is optional for those who aren't Holy Sufferers. Does her interpretation of the prophecy make sense? If dying for a cause is unpleasant, dying for a mistake is tragic.

Requests for help are part and parcel of membership. Requests for heroism, self-destruction, political suicide or personal impoverishment are too much. Moreover, nobody prospers when Kindred follow fools and madmen.

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Caveat Storyteller

There are two hazards to using the Holy Engineers, the mechanical and the thematic.

The default Requiem tone is high gothic carnage. Its tropes are powerful because they're universal: The seductive vampire, the terrifying monster, the frisson between mortal and undead. The God Talkers throw wild-eyed weirdness into that mix. The game's big and it can handle a lot of variation, but understand that this tone can be intrusive. If you've run a game that's all old European glamour and icy betrayal, suddenly propelling radio freaks into it can ruin the suspension of disbelief. Play up the weirder aspects of the Ordo Dracul, the conspiracy kooks on the Carthian fringe, and the alien mindsets of Crones that aren't just callous, they're incomprehensibly *odd*. You can do this from the beginning and have an Engineer as one more loony in the bin, or you can work in those elements with increasing frequency before springing the full beliefs of the Engineers on your players.

The mechanical issue is, it's hard to provide a precognitive answer to a question when even *you* don't know what the question is. If you keep Holy Engineers as Storyteller characters, it's just a prophecy where you get to reveal the question in order to clarify the answer. But if you're putting Radio Sickness in the hands of the primary characters, you need to be ready for them to think up unexpected and (most likely) self-serving ways to interpret your clues. To manage this, you need to (1) try to figure out what they're going to want, but that's unreliable so (2) have lots of events to put pressure on them, leading towards a manageable outcome. Moreover, (3) have the prophecies vague and confusing and ambiguous, to give you wiggle room so you can (4) be ready to roll with the truly confusing and unexpected. This is why the tone of confusion and mad muddle is important to establish. It gives your own half-baked ideas protective coloration.

I'm not saying you shouldn't let your players have characters join the Talkers. The fun of giving them a clue dispenser that operates on their rules but your timeline can provide a lot of interest and suspense. The unpredictability can be an exciting ride. Just make sure you keep your seat belt fastened.

Rituals and Observances

The Holy Engineers don't go in for a lot of ceremonial trappings or elaborate performance. The drama of electrical display is often enough to instill awe and reverence.

Presenting the Prophecy

When a Talker begins to suspect she has Radio Sickness, she puts the word out and waits for the Clarifier to contact her with a safe Elysium in which she can spend the next night. Often she's brought there at the first symptoms and weathers out the day there. In theory, any God Talkers who wish to observe the Prophecy can be admitted to witness a presentation. (No outsiders, of course, and no mortals.) In practice, not everyone can be found on short notice, and little effort is expended to find those who are in the covenant's bad books.

After the prophecy emerges, there's an open discussion of what it means, with various 'experts' expressing their opinions and giving advice. This can get raucous and shrill if the Clarifier doesn't keep order (and Clarifiers tend to be dreamy introverts, not hard-barking political steamrollers).

Announcing a prophecy isn't an obligation, and given the chaos that can arise from Presenting, many prefer to keep their answers to themselves. On the other hand, dramatic outpourings of Radio Sickness draw the attention of the covenant and respect for those who are open (or theatrical) about their answered prayers is hard to withhold.

The Radio Confirmation

If someone has not announced their prophecy, some skepticism is understandable on the part of a Holy Engineer being asked for assistance with a question. Fortunately, there's a process for determining whether someone has Radio Sickness and is within their dormant period. It involves a mix of radio equipment and occult paraphernalia—pendulums, alligator clips, candles, theodolites, pentagrams or rune stones, dials, aura-sensitive crystals, semiconducting crystals and antennae. Some swear that running the current through wire wrapped around a fulgurite makes the whole thing more sensitive, but every Engineer has his own method.

It can be as simple as having the Holy Sufferer hold two bare ends of wire or it can be considerably more involved, depending on the detector's skill. The challenge is an extended action, with each roll representing thirty minutes of testing. The detector can roll Wits + Occult or Intelligence + Science, but each time a skill is used, it takes gains a -1 penalty for the next roll during the extended action. (That is, the second time Occult gets rolled, it's at -1, no matter how many Science rolls have been made.)

With five successes, the detector finds that there is, indeed, a prophecy suspended within the individual. With 10-14, a few words of the prophecy text can be heard through a haze of static. With 15+ successes, the entire text of the prophecy is clearly heard, repeating over and over as long as the Holy Sufferer is within the detection apparatus.

Submitting to Radio Confirmation is sometimes a delicate matter. Someone disinclined to give help may deliberately sabotage their own detection efforts and then accuse the Holy Sufferer of making it all up. Or, with

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only good intentions, an unworldly detector might insist on puttering in his workshop until the entire prophecy has been heard, no matter how many hours it takes and how urgent the request.

The Praisecast

On the night of July 30, the Talkers broadcast their encoded prayers of praise, gratitude and hope for Death's freedom all night long. They boost the signal as strongly as they can and aim for the God Machine coordinates in Orion, and they keep the signal going from sundown to sunup. It's not uncommon for the broadcast apparatus to be sanctified and amplified with human sacrifice.

Anyone in the covenant can submit a string of prayercode, though the Clarifier checks all messages beforehand to ensure there are no selfish requests piggybacking on the signal.

Radio Sickness tends to spike in frequency during the last two weeks in July.

Titles and Duties

Holy Sufferer

Anyone in the grip of Radio Sickness (p. 105) is a Holy Sufferer, and her fellow God Talkers are honor bound to help her resolve her prophecy. There are a number of limits, however, to how much aid they are *required* to provide, as described under "Individual Leadership, Collective Responsibility." Nevertheless, being in the grip of Radio Sickness is a good way to get the attention of anyone in the covenant. There's no good excuse for turning away a Holy Sufferer without hearing the prophecy.

Mind Ancestor

The Holy Engineer with the earliest mortal birth-date in a domain is the Mind Ancestor, revered for her wisdom, experience and (likely as not) her ability to butcher or enslave her covenant mates. Mind Ancestors are called upon to mediate disputes between Holy Engineers on matters separate from the covenant's mystical duties. Any beefs over turf and herd go to the Mind Ancestor. So do problems with the Masquerade, or with Kindred outside the covenant.

Clarifier

The Clarifier is the individual in a domain who has most frequently suffered from Radio Sickness. The more messages someone has received, the closer they are to being Clarifier. Note that most groups of Holy Engineers only count bouts that have been observed *in that domain*. Someone who moves in from 'Frisco and says he's been on twenty missions is going to be credited with none of them until he has number twenty-one in the presence of locals. Then he's got a score of one prophecy.

Clarifiers rule on conflicts that concern non-linear time. If two prophecies are interpreted in conflict, the Clarifier decides which of the Holy Sufferers is correct. Along with this authority comes the right to command a Holy Sufferer to ask a particular question in response to her answer. No one other than the Holy Sufferer has that right, not even a Mind Ancestor serving as Prince.

In some cases, someone qualifies as both Clarifier *and* Mind Ancestor. It's rare for God Talkers to tolerate someone serving in both capacities. Most often, the elder is asked to choose one duty and bestow the other on the next-most-qualified Engineer.

Attitude Towards Others

Carthians: Facing the stupid future of political evolution instead of the true future of technological progress.

Circle of the Crone: They grasp the elephant's trunk and think the elephant a snake.

Invictus: Obsessed with the nugatory history of feudalism instead of the mystic history of all life on Earth.

Lancea Sanctum: They grasp the elephant's leg and think the elephant is a tree.

Ordo Dracul: They touch the elephant's tusk and think the elephant is a piano.

Unaligned: Fate's chaff.

The Radio Sick at Street Level

Riff-raff radio worshippers are ranting loonies whose deranged screeds don't limit themselves to Aztecs, Egyptians, Apollo missions and Michael Faraday's secret influence over Nikolai Tesla. They throw in Jews, Reptoids, 9/11 and Barack Obama, too. They'd be easy to dismiss as a moonbat batch of Ventrue if now and again they didn't barge up to Kindred they barely know with information or advice that only becomes relevant two nights later. They're freaks, but they're also freakishly prepared for random events, even as they have trouble with the more commonplace issues of herd and haven.

Engineers at City Level

Holy Engineer ancillae are secretive, distant and self-interested to outsiders. In normal circumstances, they come across little better than the Unaligned. They don't talk about their beliefs until the lights start going wiggy, at which point a strange transformation comes over everyone in the covenant. As soon as they have a Holy

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Sufferer to rally around, they suddenly move with atypical unity and purpose. Then, once the prophecy is resolved and the crisis dealt with (or caused and exploited), they return to their eccentric and individual orbits without explanations for anyone else.

God Talkers at the Top Tier

At the highest level, the covenant has a focus that's unique among the Kindred. The Invictus "rule everything" mandate or the Order's imperative to "transcend the curse" are guidelines more than concrete action points. The Engineers, on the other hand, know *exactly* what they want to do and *exactly* the order in which they want to do it. If details are missing from the intermediate steps, they can find them out with prophecy before they even know they're going to need them.

High tier God Talkers are an international plague of vampire sleeper agents, just waiting for the signal that pushes them into action, or for an opportunity to help someone sick with prophecy. They are single-minded in their pursuit of occult artifacts relating to the God Machine mythos, with their ultimate goal of recovering and restoring "packet Theta."

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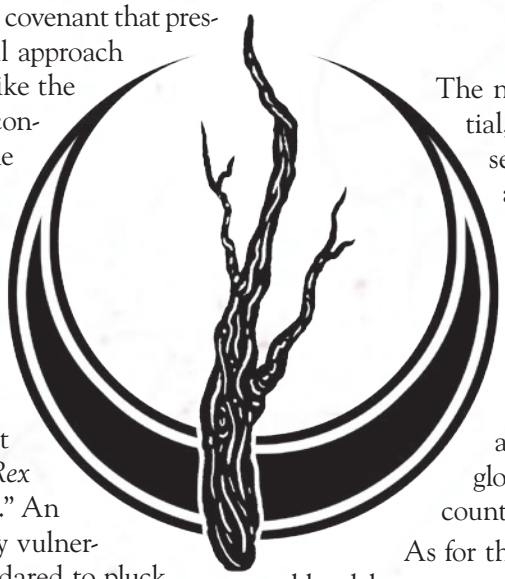
The Nemites



The Priesthood of Nemi is a religious covenant that presents a straightforward and practical approach to the dilemmas of the Requiem. Like the Ordo Dracul, they see the Kindred condition as one to escape, and like the Circle of the Crone they accept the powers of the blood as their rightful due. But unlike the Order, they seek a spiritual transcendence, and unlike the Circle they believe there is a unique truth and a single path that leads from the maze.

The ancient temple of Diana at Nemi was famously home to the *Rex Nemorensis*, the "King of the Grove." An absolute ruler, his position was only vulnerable if challenged by one who had dared to pluck a golden bough from the temple's sacred woods. But if the bearer of the bough could overcome the Grove King in combat, he became king in turn.

The myth of the king who dies for the fertility of the land and returns is, according to Joseph Frazier, the monomyth, the underlying story of humanity. The Priests of Nemi endorse this interpretation (espoused in Frazier's *The Golden Bough*) wholeheartedly. The vampire is the repository of the world's sins. Greed, suspicion and selfishness lead inextricably to death. (It's worth noting that in the *Aeneid*, the fleeing king of Troy plucks the golden bough, not to challenge the Rex Nemorensis, but as a gift to a seer that she might open for him the gates of the underworld.)

The evils of the world descend upon the Kindred, but while this doom is ghastly, it's not hopeless. By keeping to a strait path, by using wisely their supernatural tools, Kindred can escape their torment, silence the Requiem and ascend to a higher existence. In so doing, they carry the ills of the human race away with them. To cleanse oneself is to clean the world.

Membership Privileges

Members of the Priesthood of Nemi may purchase the Allies, Contacts, Mentor and Retainer Merits at half the normal experience-point costs (rounding up). This cost break does not apply to purchases of these Merits during character creation.

Overview

The negatives of vampirism are substantial, no matter how you look at it. Even setting aside the physical fears of fire and sunlight, the Predator's Taint and the icy withdrawal from human feelings are tortures of the spirit. The thirst, in the form of the ever-calling Beast, is the deepest depth for both body *and* soul.

In this darkness, there are only a pleasures whose sparks relieve the gloom. The bliss of the feed is hunger's counterpoint, the apex to its nadir.

As for the loneliness, the inhumanity? The blood has an answer to that too, in the vinculum, in the adoration of being Dominated, in the warming regard of Majesty.

These, then, are the covenant's foundations. Domination, Majesty and blood slavery are the Nemite sacraments. Join the covenant, drink of the King, and bring for the King to drink. Hollowed of human feeling, Nemites use blood artifice to maintain social stability and give meaning to what would otherwise be mere existence.

If the Sanctum promises righteousness and the Invictus bargains with power, the Grove of Diana's lure is, baldly, *love*.

Members

The Nemites recruit neonates, almost exclusively. While they eschew the Embrace almost entirely, they accept that other Kindred do it promiscuously. (Perhaps it's more accurate to say they *know* other Kindred do it and, in domains where they can't put a stop to it, they recruit as damage control.)

Neonates are usually confused and horrified. The Nemites not only promise an explanation, they claim a monopoly on the *correct* explanation. Neonates are just starting to see the friends and family of their mortal life drift away or age to death—if they don't make the mistake of staying close and feeding on their loved ones. As they come to realize the choke hold ancillae have on the avenues of authority, luxury or even simple *comfort*, neonates feel helpless.

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The Nemites have answers to all these problems.

"Why me? Why do I have to be this?" Because humanity has as much evil as good and cannot change that balance itself. It requires a supernatural agency to tilt things back, and while the Christians got that right, they are completely inverted about who can carry sins away. It's not a flawless immortal who comes back to life through sharing his blood. It's a damaged immortal who holds death at bay by stealing blood. Without us, mankind's evil would overwhelm it. We lance the sores of the world's soul.

"Why do I have to leave my family and friends?" You draw evil now. You are the drain through which misery is pulled. If you truly love those mortals, you must stay far from them. Perhaps you've already hurt someone you love. That's the evil within you striving to emerge. Better to come away from them, because you are not as they are. You can only find new friends and a new family among us. We understand you. As you are, we are. If you don't believe me, drink of *my* blood. Know an intimacy and joy you can never find in the blood of your beloved mortal lovers.

"All these laws and traditions… how am I supposed to get by when I'm trapped by a corrupt system?" The lure of position and secular authority is a lie. Let the demagogues strut and preen. Their only profits are comforts wasted on a corpse, bagatelles to decorate their numbness. The Vitae of a runaway satisfies as much as a CEO or pop star's blood. We can help you feed, we can hide you, and beyond that the claims of the others are vanity.

Philosophy

The Nemites operate like a human cult. They bring in the vulnerable, cut them off from their families and suffocate them in affection and affirmation… right up until the night they first disobey.

The conditional regard of the Nemite community is based on group's foundation values: Love, Community and Penance.

Love

The temptation to put "love" in scare quotes is strong and, frankly, justified. When a Nemite says the word, he doesn't mean what a human does. The human is talking about the genuine emotion that a child feels for a caring mother, or a groom for his bride, or a parent for a treasured infant. But all those things are changed or denied for Kindred, on one level or on several.

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Nemite love stems from Dominate, vinculum and Majesty, full stop. While Kindred form friendships and relationships after death, even with others of their kind, those bonds always have a coolness to them. Even when one Kindred faces Final Death for a coterie-mate, there's a dispassion to the kindness, the action's heat generated not by warm regard but by the defiant anarchy of a Beast that won't be caged.

But what of it? To the Nemites, any affection that makes sense is *inferior*.

Consider a friend of your own. You like him because you share values, or enjoy the same things, or have important experiences in common. You have a bond that can be explained, with good reasons for your companionship.

The Nemites disdain that sort of conditional regard. When Majesty takes over, there's no *quid pro quo*. There's nothing earned about the loyalty of Domination. These feelings are *more* real because they are pure. Mortal love arises from events and sensations. Nemite love just *is*, whether it's wanted or not, compelled into dead breasts with the force of a hammer blow, unstoppable or, as the Nemites prefer to say it, "incorruptible."

Human love is weak, evanescent as a soap bubble. You find your wife cheating on you, or your friend stealing from you, and it vanishes in an instant. Nemite love forgives all things.

Community

Once enthralled by Nemite love, why *wouldn't* someone want to spend all his time with his fellow believers? Having been bombarded with messages of Nemite loyalty (often backed up with Disciplines, but just as often using nothing more than a vampire's remembered human longing for community) helping other members of the covenant becomes the default.

As the Carthians and the Invictus well know, generosity is a hard sell to Kindred, which is why Nemites don't treat community feeling as an option. It's not only enforced with blood witchery and social opprobrium, the entire organization of the covenant defaults to it. Challenging the notion of communal belonging is to challenge the roots of Nemi's Grove. Without it, the covenant falls apart.

The options, then, are to hang together or burn separately. Most opt for togetherness and, that done, the Rex Nemorensis makes sure the togetherness is not halfhearted.

Does this mean the vaunted Kindred tendency to count coup and track favors has been organized out of existence? Quite the opposite. It's just done back-to-front. The typical power transaction for Kindred is "this for that." "I'll teach you this Devotion if you gank Devon's ghoul." The same exchange in Nemite culture would be a long and artful exchange about each other's welfare, punctuated with "What? You want to know that Devotion? Oh, I can teach you that!" and "Trouble with Devon's ghoul? Oh, I'm so sorry to hear that! No, that won't stand, I'll get that sorted right away." It's the same game, it's just reskinned with a pretense of caring and generosity.

Those who have much spread it around and bask in the gratitude of their recipients. Those who lack sop up the generosity, but for anyone other than the rankest neonate to take without giving is parasitism. To Nemites, that's worse than diablerie. Literally.

Penance

The flip side to the façade of concern (and the genuine devotion engendered with blood tricks) is the obligation of penance. Nemites see that they are monsters and realize they're predisposed to sin. But surrender to the Beast brings greater suffering to all, if the Kindred who succumbs even survives his moment of weakness.

So the Nemites fight. They struggle against the thirst that owns them. The greatest weapon in their battle is their use of penance to expiate their wickedness.

Any time a Nemite feeds, he is obligated to right the transgression by easing the suffering of another. One convenient way to do this is to feed another. Thus you have the Nemi paradox.

The Nemi Paradox

Let us concern ourselves with one of our type named Leucippus. Leucippus feeds on a mortal woman, and he is thereby burdened with sin. He is selfish and callous.

Similarly, if a woman of our ilk, let us presume to name her Xanthippe, feeds on a mortal man, then Xanthippe has polluted herself.

If Leucippus gives his woman to Xanthippe, Leucippus is innocent and, indeed, has shown moral kindness. He has relieved Xanthippe's suffering by assuaging her thirst. But Xanthippe, now, is bearing the burden. Not only has she harmed the mortal woman, and thereby done wrong, but she risks becoming a burden on Leucippus and causing suffering through sloth.

The resolution of this dilemma is for Xanthippe to feed her man to Leucippus, and for Leucippus to feed his woman to Xanthippe. Through this, the sins of each are mitigated and the generosity of each is placed in balance. Neither is obligated to the other and each has put selflessness before greed.

Nemites who feed one another are morally neutral, whereas Nemites who feed themselves are guilty and Nemites who permit themselves to be fed without reciprocating are doubly guilty.

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Relieving suffering is the standard by which expiation is measured, and whose suffering is best relieved? Why, the suffering of one's beloved fellows, of course. Thus Nemites are known to beg one another to permit some act of generosity and, if that act of generosity places the other Kindred in debt, that's the other Kindred's problem. (After all, refusing aid from one's beloved brethren is prideful and therefore merits penitence.)

The greatest act of penance, of course, is to sacrifice yourself, not though suicide, but by accepting destruction to save your fellows.

Rituals and Observances

Passing the Golden Bough

The central rite of the Priests selects its leader. The trappings of this three-night observance vary from domain to domain, but the core is consistent. In the US and Europe, it's most often practiced on the nights between October 31 and November 1.

On the first midnight of the 31st, the current Rex Nemorensis retires to a temple or sacred grove with a golden sculpture of a branch, usually about an inch in length. He cuts himself, hiding the branch somewhere within his body, then heals over it, being careful to leave no sign or scar. After this point, he feeds only from virgins.

At sundown of the 31st, the king awakens and feeds once more, this time from virgins drugged into an ecstatic stupor. Traditionally, this was done with belladonna or hellebore, but in modern times even traditionalists substitute less alarming natural hallucinogens like peyote. Those who are more concerned with philosophy than convention use drugs like hashish, MDMA or 2C-B.

Everyone in the covenant gathers for the Passing, bringing gifts to share (often prized vessels) as the King gives away his own possessions to those he favors. As he does so, he often discards garments as well, ending up naked on a table or altar at midnight. Then his followers tear him to pieces.

While this is bloody and violent it is, at the same time, joyous and loving and often erotic. The King sees this as his apotheosis, his reward for leadership, his escape from the vampiric trap. His followers drink his blood, loving him more and more as they do, and chew through his flesh, seeking the golden bough. Until it is found, the participants return blood to the King, so that he can heal himself and continue the rite. This reciprocal feeding continues until the bough is found.

The finder of the bough is the new Rex Nemorensis, chosen by the goddess, and he or she commits diablerie on the old King. This is seen, not as a crime or an act of contempt, but as the final tribute to a martyr. The old soul is too great a treasure to waste, so it is drunk by the new King, while the spirit and identity of the released King travels onward to unguessed-at rewards.

Some fight with frenzy to find the golden statuette, and some make only a perfunctory search, but all in the covenant are given an opportunity to find the bough.

Starting on November 1, the new Rex Nemorensis is crowned and begins his reign, which lasts until the next Passing. Some domains hold Passing every decade, some every five years, some every year. Few Kindred are willing to face diablerie for a year of absolute power (at least, absolute within the covenant) but a surprising number think they'll find a way out.

Often, the new King performs an embrace upon taking the throne, to restore the covenant's numbers. Others forego this privilege.

The King's Blessing

All who join the Nemites, especially those Embraced into the covenant, are given the King's Blessing. This consists of being presented to the monarch with great fanfare, being given a tangible memento from the Rex Nemorensis, and then (the most prized gift of all) the neonate is permitted to drink the King's sacred blood.

The King's Justice

Nemite despite resolution is basic. (They prefer to call it 'primal.') When Nemites have a dispute, they try to sort it out themselves, but if all parties agree that the situation is intractable, they call upon the King's mediation.

Those who appeal to the Rex Nemorensis begin by accepting a drink of his blood. He then hears the details of the case. If he finds dramatically in favor of one side or the other, he decrees that one party to the suit drink from the other, and thereby form a bond that ensures right behavior. Most commonly, he has all disputants drink from each other and then attempt to re-negotiate while under vinculum's influence. If, after that first drink, they *still* can't reach consensus, he repeats the process. First they drink from him, then they discuss their problems, then they drink from one another.

Titles and Duties

Rex Nemorensis

The King of the Grove rules the covenant. In theory, duty to him supplants all other duties, including a secular city Prince in a city with mixed covenants. Wise kings don't push that issue: They're in no hurry to die before the Passing.

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The King doesn't need to hunt for himself. His subjects are expected to supply him with all the Vitae he needs, either from their own veins or through herd procurement. Nemite vinculum promiscuity all but guarantees a King has a few vinculums when he ascends to rule, so the High Priests (described below) often restrict access to the King until his affection is more equitably distributed.

With no need to hunt, Rex Nemorensis is shielded from many normal Kindred risks. Should he undergo Final Death outside of Passage, the next King is selected by group acclaim, usually from among the High Priests. Thus, the High Priests take pains to protect the King. Even if they covet his crown, they probably want a full term and an opportunity for grand diablerie.

High Priest

One becomes a High Priest of the Temple at Nemi through popularity. They may dress it up with a formal investiture ceremony and big hats, but it's a popularity contest. Sometimes the current High Priests cordially invite someone to join them, usually someone they owe favors to, or someone to whom enough favors are owed that it's better to have them inside the Grove pissing out than outside pissing in.

Other times, someone simply goes to the Temple and declares herself a High Priestess. If she's got too much clout (that is, she's been so systematically generous that everyone owes her one) the other High Priests let her in, though possibly with some tut-tutting about impatience and brashness. If she misjudged her popularity and can't support the title, she's pitied and everyone is condescendingly *nice* to her. Often the legitimate High Priests offer her their Vitae as a consolation prize and, of course, to refuse it is the sin of pride. Even the King may step in, offering a second Blessing to a failed High Priest. That's the most humiliating of all.

Other than maintaining their snob-club status and controlling access to the King, High Priest's duties include ritual observance and meddling. Meddling (or "diplomacy,") means keeping up to date on what lower Nemites are doing, maybe suggesting to this one that he owes a particular penance or implying to that one that it would be awfully virtuous of him to offer aid to someone else.

The ceremonies vary greatly from domain to domain, but most can be simplified to (1) gather Nemites to celebrate something or another (2) use Majesty so that they associate Nemite ceremonies with profound feelings of respect and bliss (3) bombard them with Dominate messages that the philosophy is correct, that penance is the key to freedom, and that dying as Rex Nemorensis is the best thing that can ever, *ever* happen to them.

The Incomplete

Almost every Nemite has been relegated to Incomplete status at some point, but most overcome it pretty quickly. Incomplete Nemites are those who are running at a long-term deficit in the favor scheme. As with failed High Priests, they get condescending, back-handed kindness but they get it from *everyone* and it doesn't stop until they've been shamed into favor-bombing their covenant-mates. They even get the treatment from other Incomplete and (though it's never openly stated), Incomplete never become complete by helping *each other*. No, at this level it's all about currying favor with those who don't need it.

Some Kindred just don't give a fig about what others think and would happily sponge off respectable Nemites indefinitely, no matter how much indignity the aid comes with. For them, there's a temporary stage beneath Incomplete, and that's the stage of "Unworthy."

The High Priests decide when someone's Unworthy, and usually the first the new outcast hears about it is when they grab him, drag him to the King, and ask the King to drink the Unworthy into Final Death. It's not uncommon for Kings to commit diablerie during these ultimate penances. It's a hard taste to forget, after all.

Attitude Towards Others

Carthians: They think secular solutions can cure spiritual ills.

Circle of the Crone: They call their prison freedom and disdain the real thing.

Invictus: Bound by the tradition that reinforces sin, not the tradition that expiates it.

Lancea Sanctum: They preach of virtue while enjoying what they ought to escape.

Ordo Dracul: 'Scientific transcendence' is an oxymoron.

Unaligned: Alone, afraid and angry. Offer them a better way.

Nemites at Street Level

At street level, a Nemite 'sacred grove' is likely to be a city park, pissed in by day-time drinkers and mostly known for being a gay cruising zone in the '70s. Street-level Nemites are a dog pack with Rex as the alpha dog, symbolically mounting the others into submission. There's nothing classy or stylish or warm here. Theirs is the desperate passion of hopeless obsession, and 'love' is expressed through rough sex, possessiveness or groveling. The Requiem is an X-rated, jealousy-fueled soap opera, in which love and hate are mingled so tightly that they fuse. But though the internal battles are fierce and frequent, any outsider who troubles a Nemite is going to face the whole frenzied pack.

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Nemites at City Level

City Nemites make a pretense of gentility and compassion, to one another and, in a half-assed fashion, to outsiders. Unbelievers are visibly pitied and any interaction with a Nemite has a subtext (subtle or blatant) of phony regret that the Nemite can't help *as much* as they'd help someone who shared their beliefs.

Commerce and intercourse between Nemites is just as rank with hypocrisy and double meaning. City Nemites fancy themselves too sophisticated to be rude, and their conversations are often so polite, so encrusted with the signifiers of compassion that they seem positively sugary. But it's always a brittle kindness, and if pushed too far it devolves into the screaming hysteria more typical of the street level. But at least the city folk have the decency to keep their jealous rages and perverse co-dependencies private.

Nemites at the Top Tier

A worldly Nemite cabal not only crafts an illusion of camaraderie and affection for outsiders: They've got such a good fake, they believe it themselves. The scary thing about globe-trotting Priests of Nemi is that they are totally *sincere*.

From the outside, the temptation to join can be intense because they have every sign of *beating the curse*. At least, beating its emotional deadness and isolation. Even if you use compulsion, torture or mind-reading to see if it's a put-on, it tests positive for love. They believe they are the good guys and they want you to join them.

Of course, if you do you find out just how terrifying total, helpless, hopeless love can be. That Grove King believes that controlling you and breaking your will and remaking you as his perfect creature is an act of love. Unless you get away fast, you'll believe it too.

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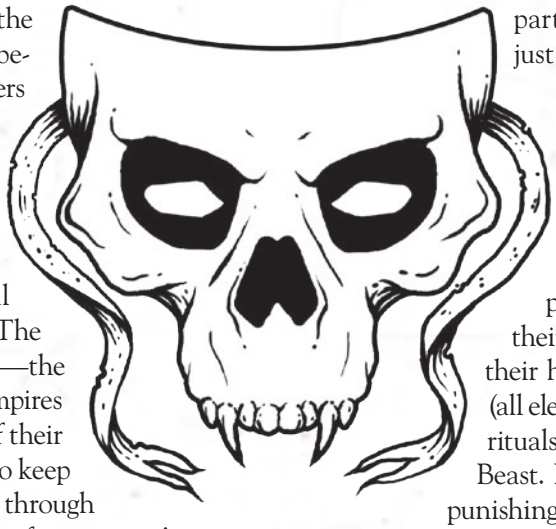
The Society of the Accord



The Kindred are a hidden society; the tradition of Masquerade extends beyond security against mortal hunters into an all-encompassing paranoia in which coteries guard their feeding grounds from one another, covenants practice their rituals in secrecy and a careful vampire can go years without meaningful contact with another of her kind. The urge to hide also stems from shame—the Lancea Sanctum preaches that vampires are damned, and from the night of their Embrace childer are taught to try to keep a rein on their Beast. Frenzy tears through careful intrigues in the red-flash of a moment's anger, Wassail drives the vampire on in a junkie's hunger and Rötshreck ruins Requiems with a single sign of weakness. That's the culture. A neonate striking out on his own can see the mainstream covenants—those that distract themselves from being vampires with politics, those that teach that vampires are unholy, or primordial, or something to be overcome—and wonder whether any aspect of Kindred "culture" could ever fit him. Where, he might ask, are the Kindred who exult in being vampires?

Every culture has a counterculture.

The Society of the Accord, better known individually as "Hellions," is a minor covenant tolerated as a pressure-release for the young and rebellious at best and a possible offshoot of Belial's Brood at worst. The covenant rejects the idea that a vampire should feel shame for her condition as Kindred and make a point of banding together in large groups called Voleries that act as a substitute for a coterie for most Hellions. Voleries have a deserved reputation as hell-raising gangs of carousers, devoted to indulging their vices with communal shows of excess and to proving their courage to one another in seemingly insane challenges of daring. Skirting close to breaking the Traditions with their bacchanals and dares, the Society presents an enticing image to the unaligned of a group of Kindred who, against all sense, seem to enjoy their Requiem. The Hellions mock the things a neonate has been taught to fear, from the sun to the wrath of elders, but what truly sets them apart is their view of the Beast. Frenzy—of any sort—is not shameful to the Hellions, rather a fact of the Requiem to be accepted with a shrug. That some dare end with the participants cowering in Rötshreck just adds to the fun.

Behind the orgies and the feats of courage, new Hellions find that there exists a purpose to the Accord. It is true that the covenant aims to say "you have no power over me," but the message is not pointed at the other covenants or their sires; they do not seek to slight their hungers, or the sun or even flame (all elements that members taunt in their rituals). Rather, the message is for the Beast. By variously rewarding the Beast, punishing it, understanding and taming it, the Hellion gains self-control. She accepts her nature as a monster while retaining a grip on her mind. She comes to an arrangement—an *accord*—with her Beast that grants some control over the experience of frenzy.

Although the Accord is seen by the other covenants as being at best a Masquerade breach waiting to happen, they are at heart a Golconda cult that hit on a surprisingly attractive means of negotiating the pull of the Beast. The covenant owes its popularity in modern nights to the means becoming confused with the end, and elders of the Accord decry the fact that the majority of neonates and ancillae are in it for the rites rather than the enlightenment.

But they do throw the very best parties.

Overview

While many covenants hold events for their members, few take the notion of a communal Requiem as far as the Society of the Accord with members traveling, feeding and celebrating together in their Voleries. It is not unusual for the entire covenant in a city to be members of the same Volery or for the Volery to replace the functions of a coterie for many members. Those Hellions that do belong to coteries outside the Volery can find their time monopolized by the covenant; the Society always has something going on, and the pace of the calendar leaves little time for shut-ins.

Events are scheduled whenever the Volery feels the need (often every night—at least once a week) and the theme arrived at by common consensus. To an outsider,

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the covenant's activities are a bewildering array of formal rituals, elaborate tests of courage, orgies and strange gatherings. One night, the Accord might build bonfires and see who can jump through the flames without fear. Another night, they might descend together onto a mortal gathering and drink them all dry. Another night they all might decide to bury themselves in a haven with a supply of "rations" caught from the street as though awaiting Armageddon, only to emerge the next night to play elaborate chase games where an unfortunate Kindred is declared "it" before being hounded all night by the gang until driven into Rötshreck.

Although the precise "rules" of the evening's entertainment are made up for the occasion, there remain two constants, one obvious and one subtle; the games are always a communal experience with every Volery member available taking part, and always involve frenzy or the threat of it. While the majority of the Volery are taking part for the approval of their peers and the powerful feeling of belonging that comes from carousing as part of the gang, those that take the teachings of the covenant a little more seriously find them empowering on a different level, one that betrays the origins of the group.

A relatively new covenant, the Society of the Accord grew out of the Enlightenment as the methods used by a small group of Golconda-seekers adapted to notions of self-control and psychology among the kine. Recognizing that the Beast presents a vampire with a few common reptilian urges—to feed, to be safe from the things that threaten the vampiric immortality, to warn off weaker predators—the covenant devised a scheme of affirmation and rejection which treats the Beast as an animal to be trained by reward and punishment. Eventually, after many years of practice, the Beast can be brought to heel by the promise of reward or the threat of denial, postponing frenzy for a time until the Man can arrange for the Beast to expend itself harmlessly.

The entertainments of the Accord are the means by which the Beast is tamed—every game is based around either giving into or resisting one of the three types of frenzy. By dancing through bonfires or daring one another into sunlight, the Volery learn to resist (or suffer) Rötshreck. When they chain the doors of a club closed and feed on every mortal inside, the Volery members ride the wave of Wassail, allowing their Beasts to feast until sated. The dominance games within the covenant, resembling nothing so much as a pack of hyenas, serve to satisfy the Predator's Taint and defy the instinct to hoard blood for oneself.

Those more "advanced" members of the covenant that have started to develop control of the Beast still take part in the covenant's rites. The games serve as payment in their internal bargains, buying off frenzy for a time. The most advanced—those on the road to Golconda, or the covenant's vision of it at any rate—keep the inner vision of the covenant alive and advise those younger Kindred who do want to take their understanding further. This disparity between the inner circle of devoted members and the greater mass of casual members accounts for the Accord's status as only a minor covenant, especially when combined with the covenant's view of the Requiem as something to be shared. A new Volery only buds off from the original in a city when the number of members becomes unmanageable.

Members

The Hellions attract Kindred who want to think of themselves as strong and accepting of their nature as vampires. Older recruits tend to be those that have served time in another covenant and found the constant struggle of politics to be too much like fighting the inevitable, the prayers of the Sanctified turned hollow or the drive to escape the curse of the Ordo Dracul too restrictive. Younger Hellions with no previous allegiances tend towards those that just want to enjoy themselves somehow but aren't sure how to go about it when their instinctive likes have been replaced by those of the Beast or those that were gang-members, natural followers, jocks or had another lifestyle based on finding a place in a tight-knit, aggressive social unit. They also find a surprising number of Embraced extreme sports fans. The covenant's attitude to the Beast can also make them a welcoming to a vampire who has suffered a particularly bad frenzy and wants to come to terms with it. Despite the propaganda painting them as opposed to the Masquerade, the Accord are well used to cleaning up after themselves for security purposes if not out of any sense of fear; on a practical level, a Hellion neonate has made "safe" more accidental deaths through feeding than many ancillae of other covenants, and it is to the Accord that the unaligned turn when they need help. After all, the Accord doesn't judge them for having frenzied.

New Hellions find that they have to sink or swim within a Volery; members operate on a complex pecking-order of dominance based on courage, Predator's Taint reactions, Willpower, the potency of the blood and what sort of challenge is being attempted, with different members having different specialties. A new member doesn't have a place in this shifting hierarchy, and must be assessed by a brutal period of hazing, in which they are forced to compete in the most outrageous challenges the Volery can think of. When all six Arguments (see below) have been covered, the Hellion is no longer a "newbie," but one of the gang.

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Philosophy

Hellions that take an interest in the theory behind the revels find that the philosophy of the covenant is based in its origins as a Golconda cult and the advances in psychoanalysis that occurred in the mortal sphere during the covenant's rise to power.

The Other

The Other is a piece of conceptual doublethink; it's a handy label for a self-deception that the Hellion must apply. The covenant acknowledges that in truth there is no separation between Man and Beast—the drives of the Curse replace those of life—but they recognize that acting on that understanding leads to a rapid slide into insanity as the mind of the Man rapidly dwindles. Most Hellions therefore use the idea of the "Other" to explore their Beasts from a position of disassociation, coming to think of their impulses as a separate person. By understanding the Other and where it intersects with the Man, a Hellion builds a picture of their Other self. The most advanced members of the covenant, those preparing to seek Golconda, then let go of this doctrine and internalize their Others, formally acknowledging that the creature they've been describing for years is in fact themselves.

The Dialogs and Arguments

The Society of the Accord describes the internal makeup of the Other as being divided into three "Dialogs" roughly corresponding to the Id, Ego and Superego of the Man. The Dialogs are named as Fear, Need and Anger and map to the three main forms of frenzy.

Each Dialog is said to communicate with the Man in two Arguments; one which the Man wins (the "Humane" Argument) and one in which the Other is victorious (the "Bestial" Argument). The covenant then describes the behavior of the Man and Beast in terms of these concepts—a vampire who successfully pulls away from feeding before killing the mortal is in the state of Humane Hunger, while succumbing to Wassail is an act of Bestial Hunger.

The covenant speaks of the Dialogs as ongoing, the Man and Beast making their Arguments in turn from the moment of the Embrace until Final Death. If one persona becomes dominant, the opposing Argument will become ever more forceful; the covenant believes that to constantly deny the Beast it's due leads to a vampire finally snapping in disastrous ways, and that it is better to keep the Dialog on as even a keel as possible, giving the Beast it's licks so that it will be more content to allow the Man to take charge when necessary.

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The Accord

Through understanding their own internal Dialogs between Self and Other, a Hellion attempts to establish the accord for which the covenant is named—a deal struck between a vampire and her own Beast, formalizing the Arguments into a treaty of self-control and payment. A Hellion who has achieved the accord seeks to "pay" the Other when the Man wins in the certainty that doing so will allow her to win the Argument in the future. She might Ride the Wave in the security of her own haven after successfully resisting Frenzy in public, or gorge herself on blood one night in preparation for going without (and resisting the hunger pangs that result) the next. As the end goal for the covenant's few elders, the Accord describes the state of Golconda as being the result of managing to put both sides of the vampiric mind in balance—changing the agreement from a peace treaty to a mutual defense pact.

Rituals and Observances

The celebrations and strange games of the covenant are not all designed around the three Dialogs, but those that aren't are regarded as being on the level of social engagements—slacking off to drive golf balls from the roof of a skyscraper doesn't advance the understanding of the Beast, but the Volery might decide to have a night off and do just that. Those activities that do fulfill the covenant's mission are called Rites, and are divided by the three Dialogs. Each takes multiple forms, from the regular games to the rarer rituals that require greater preparation and are looked forward to as festivals.

Rites of Fear

The Hellions are notorious for their Rites of Fear—daring one another to risk Rötshreck by confronting the banes of the Kindred and suppressing the urge to flee until the last possible moment. Participants jump through flames, hold limbs into sunlight or intense heat and when conditions allow expose themselves to the Predator's Taint of far stronger vampires, allowing the instinctive fear to take over.

A rare form of the Rites of Fear involves soothing the Other by taking elaborate (indeed, over-elaborate) security measures; these are the times when the Volery dig themselves into a location with a stockpile of prisoner-victims like bunker dwellers waiting for nuclear war, running with the urge to keep themselves from harm at all costs.

Rites of Anger

Rites of Anger involve provocation—usually the Volery takes turns humiliating one another in an attempt to cause their comrades to frenzy, but if the covenant think they can get away with it an outsider is declared "it" and hounded, the Volery piling on the frustration until the other vampire snaps. Weak-blooded newcomers to the Volery's city may find the covenant decide to get the Predator's Taint out of the way all at once, driving the interloper into Rötshreck while allowing themselves the rush of frenzy.

The killing Rite of Anger is reserved for Blood Hunts or other occasions when the covenant won't be punished for it (such as by volunteering en masse to assist the Sheriff in bringing in a lawbreaker). The Volery goes on the warpath, hunting down the target of their ire and Riding the Wave until the unfortunate victim is torn apart.

Rites of Hunger

The Rites of Hunger take a little more preparation than other exercises, as the covenant believe simply burning oneself into hunger by over-use of Disciplines to be somehow less authentic than the long, drawn out starvation of refusing to feed for a week. Once the participants have properly prepared themselves, they suffer temptation to break their fast.

Two major rites of Hunger exist—the *going-away party* and the *feast*. The first is held when a vampire of the covenant has grown too potent in the blood to easily rise and has decided to enter torpor; the elder literally starves himself to torpor, and the rest of the Volery "helps" if necessary by imprisoning him away from sources of Vitae. The second major rite, along with the fire-dance dares, is a signature of the covenant; the Volery finds a small population of mortals, lock the doors, make the inhabitants safe and gorge themselves, Riding the Wave of Wassail and drowning the Other in blood.

Negotiation

The last observance of the Society of the Accord is one of the few exceptions to the communal philosophy of the covenant, but even it is not performed alone. Two Kindred of the covenant perform negotiation; the supplicant and an ancillae trained in the position of "Advocate" (see below). The ritual is a formal conversation between the supplicant and their own Beast, voiced and represented by the Advocate, with the aim of understanding the reasons for frenzy and negotiating the terms of the accord. The Ritual of Negotiation serves the Hellions as confession does for the Lancea Sanctum and Ordo Dracul, and can help a participant stave off the degeneration of Humanity.

Titles and Duties

The Hellions don't have many internal roles, but three tasks are considered important enough to be given a spe-

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cial title. The Hellions bearing each title in a Volery may change from night to night depending on circumstance; they're descriptions of action, not formal jobs.

Navigator

The Navigator, usually shortened to Navvy, is the Hellion in charge of organizing a particular Rite, equivalent to a master of ceremonies or Mistress of Elysium. The Navvy is normally the member of the coterie best at the game in question, the reigning champion of the dare being attempted or simply the member who thought of the rite in the first place.

Advocate

A Hellion serving as the Beast's mouthpiece in the Ritual of Negotiation is called the Advocate. Opinion varies as to whether the Advocate actually does give a voice to the supplicant's Beast or simply uses rudimentary psychotherapy to say what the supplicant feels their Beast should say.

Cleaner

The Society's Rites are often messy affairs, and if the covenant is to be tolerated by other vampiric societies the Masquerade must be maintained. The Cleaner is the Hellion (usually the Hellion thought of by outsiders as the most responsible or least worst) with the task of disposing of evidence. The position also acts as the closest thing the covenant have to an ambassador to other covenants.

Legacy

The Hellions record their progress in forming an Accord with their Beast as "Treaties," which superficially (and worryingly, to the Ordo Dracul) resemble Coils of the Dragon focused on understanding the Other rather than forcing it to change. There are Four Treaties, one for each Dialog and one for Negotiation. Each is bought as a Discipline in the same manner as Coils, with the total number of Tiers a character owns providing the "current level."

Hellions acquire new Tiers in the Treaties through successful use of the Ritual of Negotiation (and by the spending of Experience) rather than the Chrysalis of the Ordo Dracul. The Treaties are incompatible with the Coils of the Dragon, and a character cannot learn both. A defector from one of the covenants can scour themselves of progress in their original Tiers, giving up the powers involved, before starting again at the bottom. At the Storyteller's discretion, they might regain some of the Experience spent on the now-vanished Trait.

Treaties of Hunger, Fear and Anger

These three Treaties are mechanically identical, but are limited in use to one of the three frenzy stimuli. A character may have different tier ratings in the three Treaties.

First Tier: Time of Choosing

The player spends a Willpower point for her character to delay a frenzy of the appropriate type for up to the character's Blood Potency in nights—the "banked" frenzy may be triggered by successfully Riding the Wave, but failure to do so by the time limit causes the character to automatically enter the frenzy without control. Experiencing a new frenzy during the delay's duration does not affect the delayed frenzy, and only one frenzy of each sort can be delayed at a time.

Second Tier: Act in Concert

Riding the Wave does not cost a Willpower point, and it requires a base of only three successes, not five. The attempt to Ride the Wave must be in keeping with the Treaty this Tier applies to—entering Wassail with the Treaty of Hunger for the purpose of catching fleeing prey or subduing a victim, Rötshreck with the Treaty of Fear for escape and anger frenzy with the Treaty of Anger for combat.

Third Tier: Beast's Tribute

After successfully Riding the Wave to enter the appropriate frenzy type, the character may ignore one future frenzy of that kind within his Blood Potency in nights.

Treaty of Negotiation

The Treaty of Negotiation is focused on the act of Negotiation itself—understanding the interplay between Man and Beast, with the latter expressed as the "Other."

First Tier: Separation of Soul and Beast

The character gains a +2 dice modifier to degeneration checks when the degeneration is caused by an event stemming from frenzy. The modifier does not apply if the character rode the wave.

Second Tier: Summon the Beast's Sight

By understanding the reactions and needs of the Beast, the character can spend a Willpower point to trigger a Predator's Taint check against another vampire despite it not being the first meeting between them.

Third Tier: Refined Separation

As per the first Tier, but the modifier applies to degeneration checks caused by Riding the Wave as well.

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The Sun-Walking Knights

For a group of Kindred to call themselves the "Sun-Walking Knights" is a gutsy move on the scale of being openly gay in Saudi Arabia. But this covenant's name doesn't refer to its Kindred members. It's named after the people in control—the ghouls.

The covenant began sometime in around the end of the 19th century with a group of apocalypse-minded members of the Ordo Dracul moving in on a Circle of the Crone domain in French Guiana. Conflict ensued (in retrospect, fulfilling the prophecy of doom that had prompted the Order to move there in the first place) and in the aftermath the conflict-weary survivors fused into a single organization called *L'Ombre Sans Nom*. No one outside the covenant has a clear idea of what happened next, because L'Ombre Sans Nom was isolated. The coastal highway between the Suriname border and the capital city of Cayenne is still sparsely populated *today*, both by humans and their Kindred parasites, and its Requiem culture is homogenously dominated by the Sun-Walking Knight covenant that grew out of L'Ombre.

Perhaps the isolation and paucity of competition allowed L'Ombre to discover a ritual that opened the door for a ghoul coup d'etat. Or maybe it was a strange hybridization of Crone magic and Order pseudo-science.

However it happened, L'Ombre Sans Nom found out a way to suppress clan flaws, at the price of robbing their Vitae of the ability to form the vinculum. Once ghouls were driven by blood addiction and kiss-bliss, but no longer constrained by artificial devotion, they began to request, and then *demand*, greater input into covenant decision-making. With their ability to walk by daylight, they were in a fine position to back their demands with threat. They thus became the first "*freighuls*," or free ghouls.

Membership Privileges

Full membership in the Sun-Walking Knights comes after undergoing a ritual called "Washing the Shadow." After the ritual, the weaknesses of the clans are changed as follows.

Daeva: Foregoing Vice costs only one Willpower, not two.

Gangrel: The Gangrel regain the 10-again rule on Wits and Intelligence-based rolls.

Mekhet: They still suffer an additional point of damage from sunlight or fire, but it's an extra point of lethal damage, not aggravated.

Nosferatu: They regain the 10-again rule on Presence and Manipulation rolls.

Ventrue: They only suffer a -1 penalty on their Humanity rolls to resist derangement.

Weaknesses gained through bloodlines are unaffected and remain in full effect.

Moreover, the Vitae of the changed Kindred no longer creates the Vinculum, no matter how much is consumed or how many times. It still addicts and creates ghouls, it just doesn't leash souls. Vinculums created before the ritual are unaffected, and the Knight's susceptibility to Vitae bondage remains if he tastes blood from Kindred outside his covenant.

Giving up the Vinculum's emotional choke-chain is, to many Kindred, a regrettable loss, but it's not without an upside. They can keep ghoul associates alive for decades without blunting their senses, and they can deal with one another without the threat of blood slavery. It's a price, but many find it a small one to pay to ease a clan flaw.

Overview

Twisting free of the Ordo's emphasis on hierarchy and the Circle's focus on individual fate, the Kindred of L'Ombre were rudderless until their own freed ghouls reshaped the covenant in the spirit of the French Revolution. Liberty, Fraternity and Equality were the watchwords, even if the guillotine had to make an occasional appearance.

L'Ombre schismed between two Kindred. One was aged, weary and cunning. The other was younger, forceful and cruel. As the elder dithered, the firebrand gathered more and more power and put rising numbers of ghouls under his bondage. But the ghouls rebelled and destroyed him, waking the old one by day and demanding their rights as full members of the covenant, lest they drag him into the daylight as well. From that revolution sprang the covenant's new model, and though the title "Sun-Walking Knights" initially meant only the ghoul branch, they became so dominant as the covenant spread that the name was soon applied to all who followed the process and the philosophy.

Members

Three types of neonates tend to join the Knights. The first are freaked over their flaws and haven't thought through the benefits of 'emotional enslavement powers.' The second are afraid of both their Vinculum potential *and* their clan issues. (Many in that category are Daeva or Ventrue, two groups with particular barriers to being anything less than monstrous.) They

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We who live by the grace of the blood need it to continue, for otherwise we are bound by the normal, brief span of a mortal's years. We have every reason, therefore to pursue its source.

What of that source, then? It is unrevealed until the final days and its value can only be seen under sunlight through the agency of those who have accepted the blood. Can the immortal source be said to need us? Surely not, when it can continue long after we are gone, spanning the ages and generations of men. But it desires us, it longs for our service, longs for us to turn to it in need and find the truth that only its sacrifice of blood can reveal.

With undying desire on one side of death's grey barrier, and stringent need upon the other, how can aught but harmony occur? But we are all of us fallen, greed and envy and mistrust are our birthright since the day that Eden burned. Can we truly enslave ourselves without holding back some scrap of defiance and self-will? Can we truly be worthy servants if we do not serve with a whole heart, knowing that we act in our own interest as well?

Here then is the conundrum. Each longs to master the other, to control the blood that mediates between life and death. But we the living can only be as mastered as we permit, while the fountainhead of the life-giving is stymied by our mortal freedoms.

No, this cannot be slavery, no matter how ardently such a yoke is desired. We the living cannot bind over the eternal, and were the deathless to compel our service, our service would lose its value. Only side by side, together, can we move forward. Any other choice degenerates into stasis, stagnation and death.

see the Knights as a way to get relief without having to violate the hope and freedom of others.

Then there are former *freighul* who get Embraced into the covenant. Unlike unaligned recruits, or Kindred poached from other covenants, the *freighul* know what they're getting and choose it. Though a surprising number of them run off before getting their shadow cleansed.

Former *freighul* tend to step right into readied seats of power, complete with alliances and arrangements between their old Vitae donors, Pillars they've mentored, and *freighul* comrades. Canny neonates who know how to spot jonesing ghouls and can build emotional dependence without the vinculum can gain influence and authority quickly. Scared neonates get tagged by control-freak ghouls who corral them with Pillars and treat them like cattle. Indeed, some Kindred are just fine being passive donors who let the ghouls boss them around.

Philosophy

The Sun-Walker philosophy is sketched out in a book called "The Poisoner's Dilemma," written by a Knight who couches the whole setup in double-meanings. Read by the ignorant, it comes across as a masochistic take on Christianity, but those in-the-know understand what "source of the life-giving blood" *really* means. It lays out the core of Sun-Walker belief.

Equality is Necessary, Not Desirable

Pillars (what other covenants call "blood dolls") want their rapturous vampire Kisses. Ghouls want Kindred Vitae to keep them alive and empowered. Kindred want blood from the Pillars to sustain their existence. So everyone has something they want and something to offer.

The problem is, the power isn't balanced. Kindred provide a service to both mortal types. Ghouls aren't strictly *necessary*. Pillars can survive just fine if they walk away and never get involved with Kindred again. But any given ghoul or vampire has the odds in his favor if she wants to kill a Pillar or just chain him up in a tool shed awaiting her pleasure.

So the society needs to enforce equality, because that yields the best outcome for a trio of factions, each of whom nurses some hidden rationale for being in charge.

One Must Trust Some

An offshoot of the previous principle involves trust. Trusting ghouls, Kindred, or people who enjoy having their life luxuriantly spooled out of their bodies is chancy. But to get the best outcome and optimize the meeting of needs and desires, trust is mandatory. Where nature makes trust unwise, the covenant must step in to make it not only possible, but palatable.

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Of course, one mustn't get into a foolish trust habit. Especially with those *outsiders* and their enslaving blood.

Contribution Trumps Condition

One's condition within the covenant is either Kindred (feeding ghouls, pleasing kine), Pillar (feeding Kindred) or ghoul (managing the defense of the others). But people rarely fall so neatly into categories. A Pillar may be rich or connected and opt not to become a ghoul. When that Pillar helps defend the covenant and enrich its members, should her merit be judged solely on her kine position? Ridiculous. She's far more than a mere blood source and deserves to be treated as such.

Rituals and Observances

Cleaning the Shadow

The process is deceptively simple. One makes an agreement with a Professor. One writes out a contract stating "I hereby pledge my loyalty to the Sun-Walking Knights, forsaking other covenants and thereby renouncing the practice of blood slavery and pursuing relief from the curse of my kind." True, this has to be written in one's Vitae, but what of that? The Professor countersigns with his own blood, the contract is burned and thereafter the signer can set no Vinculum and has the reduced clan flaws from p. 122.

Many professors insinuate that loyalty to the Knights is as supernaturally enforced as the contract's other effects. It's not. One can undergo the process, then immediately defect to another covenant with no greater risk than any other betrayal of a group of proud and self-willed ghouls and vampires.

Oaths

The Knights take their pledges very seriously, as long as they are properly witnessed and sealed. To do so requires at least four members of the covenant. One (the debtor) promises to fulfill some duty to another (the creditor). (Contracts establishing mutual duties are common, meaning both are creditor and both debtor.) A third acts as arbiter, judging whether the oath has been completed and meting out punishment should the debtor default. A fourth is witness. These contracts are usually written, always in blood, and are completely invalid unless at least one Pillar, one ghoul and one of the Kindred are involved. Two ghouls can make an oath with a Pillar arbiter and a Kindred witness, for example.

If the arbiter or witness declares the oath broken, the social opprobrium falling on the debtor is severe. Even if the arbiter levies no additional penalty, the oath-breaker finds that most covenant-mates require payment up front for anything the debtor wants and that, moreover, he may have trouble finding witnesses and arbiters for those deals he *can* make.

Proselytizing

The Knights believe they have a responsibility to all mortals (ghoul or no) entangled in the Requiem. They are duty-bound to show them a better way and enlighten them about the liberties possible under Sun-Walker rule. It's not *necessary* to hate the other covenants (though one needn't look far to find entirely *voluntary* hate) as a statement of their obsolescence. The new way works better than the old.

Knightly evangelism means traveling to a different city or region, finding the Kindred, and showing them the new way. This is most often done by ghouls. Without some form of occult defense, most Pillars find the job too hard. As for Kindred, the risks of travel and sunlight dissuade most. At its best and most organized, entire groups travel to spread the word. These groups include ghouls to mitigate the risks of the journey, Kindred to serve as examples, and perhaps a few Pillars to keep things running smoothly.

Titles and Duties

Pillar

Pillars, the fundament upon which the covenant is built, are stock mortals. No infusions of Kindred blood, no Embrace, just pale and sickly people who've had a taste of the Kiss and liked it plenty.

What distinguishes a Pillar from a simple blood doll is information. Pillars are trusted (rightly or wrongly) and have some knowledge of what the Requiem is and what the Masquerade requires. They are usually regarded as 'junior members' and many *freighuls* started as Pillars. They can vote for covenant officers, and are often the most numerous of the Sun-Walkers.

Officers

The titles vary from domain to domain, sometimes harkening back to the covenant's Circle roots, sometimes borrowing from the Carthians, but the duties are pretty consistent. There's someone who decides who needs a beating and someone who hands that beating out. There's an officer for the Masquerade and one who deals with other covenants. The one with the most influence is generally the one with the least actual authority, but who's in charge of organizing elections and tallying votes.

Everyone in the covenant, from the lowest Pillar to the oldest of the Kindred or *freighuls*, gets to vote for officers. Often it boils down to the use of Majesty or Dominate, but severe corruption can offset that. Sometimes elections are even decided on qualifications.

Professor

A Professor is someone, ghoul or Kindred, who can Cleanse the Shadow. Professors are honor bound to perform this service for anyone Embraced into the covenant. Other than that, they can refuse to do it at their discretion.

Cleanse the Shadow is a three-point Supernatural Merit. To purchase it, one must be taught it by another Professor and must have at least three dots in the Occult skill.

Professors are elected by a simple majority, and since there's no upward limit on how many there can be, it's rare for a

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candidate to fail. (If he does, he can run again in four years.) But once elected and taught, the Professor is sent from the domain and forbidden to return for five years unless it's a dire emergency. The Professor is expected to travel, spreading the word and building up the covenant. Most do or die trying, since most are ghouls desperate for a new Vitae supplier, and most of those ghouls are eager to avoid vinculum.

Freighul

The title for an enfranchised ghoul of the covenant was, in South America, "*esclave libre*" or "free slave," but as the covenant spread to Europe and the US, a harsher, shorter and less poetic portmanteau of German and Arabic came into use. Around Cayenne, you might hear "*esclave libre*" but anywhere else, it's "*freighul*."

Though they are the only element of the covenant that could be done away with, they are also its core and its primary *raison d'etre*. After all, without the services of *freighuls*, the covenant would just be a bunch of off-brand Carthians.

Attitude Towards Others

Carthians: Worthy beliefs undermined by their flawed blood.

Circle of the Crone: Trapped in a false religious hierarchy.

Invictus: Tyrannical bullying fucks.

Lancea Sanctum: Sanctimonious bullying fucks.

Ordo Dracul: They limit their own progress by their obsessive selfishness.

Unaligned: We prosper together while they perish alone.

Knights at Street Level

Down in the slums, the rhetoric about equality and justice is just that—rhetoric. The *freighul* and the Kindred struggle for dominance in an unwholesome tangle that neatly mirrors a dysfunctional love affair. The vampires are in the role of the abusive patriarch, a provider (of the priceless Vitae the *freighul* crave) who expects to be deferred to and won't tolerate mistakes because he has an unrealistic envy of the other Kindred's vinculum based "marriages." The *freighul* are like the codependent, enabling battered girlfriend, nursing a black eye and muttering "You have to sleep some time, bastard." Everyone on the outside wonders why she stays with him but, of course, when things are good, they're *so* good and those other bitches just don't know him.

In the traditional cycle of spousal abuse, the husband's reward is that the wife puts up with his hammering, and the wife's reward is his remorse afterwards. The same lopsided spin works between vampires who need ghouls for protection and driver's licenses and money, and ghouls who need vampires to remain ghoulish. (Also, you can get role reversals where a particularly cunning or connected ghoul strings along several vampire suppliers and plays them against one another, but generally the vampire holds the whip hand because he produces the addicting substance. *Freighul could* shop around and hope for a kindlier supplier, but so could crack whores.)

The non-ghoul Pillars? They're like the daughter that daddy hasn't abused *yet*, but who the mama is ready to throw in front of him as a distraction for those thirsty fists. Professors are likely to be distant figures, mysterious travelers who dole out their favors when the whim suits them and who leave in disgust with the slightest provocation.

Sun Walkers at City Level

If the Knights on the bottom are like the people you see on Jerry Springer, the Knights in a city-level setting are more like the stars of reality shows that showcase the brash, wealthy and breast-implanted. The Kindred are still playing control games with the *freighul*, but now the vampire is more likely to sneer at her new dress in public than kick her in the face.

The parallels don't stop at the emotional and fashion level, as the Knights are often a well-funded covenant. They don't have the deep fiscal history of the Invictus. They have the ability to operate during business hours, wielded by ghouls who only have one addiction to cope with and who know that they're going to benefit as much as the bloodsuckers. That's no small thing. So they make a good *nouveau riche* foil to First Estate old money.

They also make good foils to the Carthians, who talk a lot about upsetting old social orders but, often as not, leave boot-prints on plenty of ghoul necks. As for the mystic covenants, they tend to regard the Knights with a mixture of contempt and confusion. Defying the assigned order of vampires ruling ghouls seems foolishly optimistic in the best light, and downright perverse—like a man marrying his dog—at worst. Fear only enters the mix when those fully informed ghouls start trouble after sunrise, without having to snivel and double-check with some domitor beforehand.

Sun Knights at the Top Tier

This is the level where the covenant really comes into its own, because this is the level where its unique resource, the *freighul*, best leverage their advantages. Ghoul politicians, military officers and diplomats apply their occult advantages against mere humans to loot Baghdad museums, win elections and crack down on the turf of night-bound rivals.

Those nagging suspicions that the rich, the famous and the well-born have some kind of secret advantage that keeps them on top? It's all true, and it's all based on vampire blood. The difference is, the mortals with that benefit who work as Knights are still their own masters, while those other wealthy, renowned and clout-blessed people are secretly the whimpering slaves of immortal regnants.

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A SEASON OF SECRETS

Part Three - Greg Stolze

Bella Dravnzie gave a big smile to Persephone, who replied with a thin grin, lips closed.

"You aren't going to believe I'm glad to see you," Bella said, "But I am. I am, I am, I am."

"You're not going to believe I'm glad to see *you*," Persephone replied, "Because I'm not, you back-stabbing cunt."

Bella laughed. It was musical. She slung an arm around Persephone's shoulder and said, "I deserve that so much it doesn't even bother me. But take a step back."

"As you wish." Persephone's lip curled and she shrugged out from Bella's half-hug. It earned her a glance of mock severity from the woman who had once been her friend.

"Now Persephone, you've been dead long enough to know that what one of us says isn't necessarily how we should be understood. I *meant,* 'take a step back' *metaphorically*."

"What do you *want*, Bella? When you're trying to seduce someone you're really quite tedious."

"I could *make* you *fascinated*. You know this. So isn't it a sign of respect that I'm not playing you like that?" Before Persephone could reply, Bella pushed on. "When we met you were scared and uncertain and didn't even know how to kill or stop killing, and whenever anything happened you ran back to Maxwell. Now look at you! Routinely meeting with Garrett, a habitué of the Image, equally welcome at Carthian meetings and Sylvia Raines' hippie Satan-rockin' Sanctified church."

"You're going to take credit for that, I suppose? If you hadn't bitch-fucked me when I was weak and helpless, I'd never have learned strength?"

"That's about the size of it."

"Don't hold your breath waiting for a fruit basket and thank-you note."

"You know I have little need of either fruit or breath. Or thank-yous, for that matter. What I *do* need," she cooed, leaning in, "is information about the Prince."

"You have to be kidding me."

"You love him, Persephone. As much as creatures like us can love, you love him. You want what's best for him."

"And that's to narc him out to a treacherous Crone whore?"

Bella nodded, her hair bobbing with enthusiasm. "Crisis provokes growth! In the dead like us, it's about the *only* thing that does. With Rowan in torpor, the Circle has become…" Her eyes turned up, like the corners of her mouth, as she sought for the perfect word.

"Wait, Rowan's *torpid*?"

"Mm hm! Did it on purpose. The Circle," Bella said, "has become *motile*. Now I dropped a 411 about my elder on you. Pay me back."

"So you can steer Maxwell towards the disaster he needs to restore his reign?"

"Absolutely correct."

Persephone thought about it. "I think I get it. Here," she said, reaching into her handbag. Bella leaned in expectantly, and Persephone shot her through the purse at point blank range

"Persephone!" Bella squeaked as she stumbled back, mostly startled.

Persephone didn't say anything, just locked eyes on her and said, "Hold still, Bella. Don't move a muscle. Good." She drew the pistol out of the wrecked handbag. "You stay just like that," she said, her commanding eye fixed as she put the gun under Bella's nose and pulled the trigger.

The sounds Bella made were inhuman. Impossible to decipher outside the rage and pain.

"You're right, you're really right," Persephone said, idly kicking at Bella as she thrashed weakly on the floor, forcing the blood to put her broken face back in place. "I never could have done that when we first met. But if I love Maxwell as much as you say, isn't it *my* job to lead him towards his necessary disaster? Assuming, of course—as you did, because you always were a *dumb* little bitch, when all's said and done—that he hasn't already had it."

"Puh'seffy," Bella mumbled through broken teeth, "I d'n blabe you…"

"Wow, the powder burns look like a little hipster Van Dyke beard," Persephone said as Bella struggled to get her back to a wall. "You should have made me love you while you could."

"The Circle turns," Bella said, her face slowly reforming through threads of blood, and reaching swatches of skin. "In this chaos, it's turning to me."

"What*ever,*" Persephone replied. She shot Bella again, this time in the leg, and paused to stomp the bloodless bullet hole before turning to leave.

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Bloody Business

If the people have no bread, then let them eat cake.

—*Marie Antionette*

Make no mistake: the Damned are singular monsters. They have powers—and *problems*—that no other denizen of the World of Darkness has. An eternal struggle over a long-desired haven that plays out nightly for a century? A refinement of the living Blood burned within the crucible of dead flesh, a refinement that awakens new abilities, lost memories, and feared deformations of spirit and skin? A knife-fight in a back alley where the one thing doing more damage than the slashing blades is the endless invective (paired with cauterizing wit)?

Vampires dwell in a nocturnal world where a social slight can literally invoke madness, where a chess game over "resources" (meaning, soldiers and slaves) can play out over the course of a thousand nights, where the presence of one's beatific glory or nightmarish horror can change all the stakes in the *hair's breadth of a single moment*.

Right now, as it stands, a lot of this is driven only by the roleplaying of players and Storytellers. Nothing wrong with that, of course; the **World of Darkness** games make every effort to put the story first, ensuring that unnecessary systems don't bog the give-and-take of good dramaturgy. That's the default.

This chapter is about looking past the default. It's about providing systems that don't hinder the complex tale-making that can come part and parcel with playing **Vampire: The Requiem**, but instead highlight the critical undead struggles and grease the wheels for the great, blood-soaked, operatic conflicts you want to foster at the gaming table, whether those conflicts be physical, social, or mental.

Vampires are singular creatures, and therefore deserve a special touch: a bloody fingerprint on a pale thigh, a blood-drawing pinch of skin, a gentle sinking of fangs through layers of sweet muscle.

It's time for the Devil to get his due. Time to engage in some bloody business.

Twist of the Tongue: Social Combat

Certainly, any Kindred can represent a potent physical presence—with but the burning of the Blood, a vampire could tear a car door off its hinges, could snap a man's neck, could leap from building to building like a mad shadow. But physical conflicts aren't always where it's at when it comes to the way these monsters do business. Think about it: a vampire who takes his disputes to the streets is going to get flagged as a pesky Masquerade-breaker. You can't be chucking manhole covers and taking a chest full of bullets where people might see you—and in the city, *people might see you*. Masquerade, broken. Which means someone might take away your haven. Or kill your favored ghoul. Or exile your ass to the city limits. Or pound a wooden flagpole through your chest and pin you to a high school roof so that you can get a glimpse of one last sunrise.

Besides, a vampire who throws down with another of his kind is just playing a temporary game for the most part. He puts his immortal enemy down for a big dirtnap, well, that's just torpor. The adversary's down and out for… maybe a week? Maybe a month? Hell, even a year isn't much in terms of what eternal creatures can stomach; for many, that's just a bat of blood-caked eyelashes. Certainly the option would be for the vampire to then dispatch his adversary—stomp his head into an oily paste of ash and skin-flake, suck his soul out through his mouth (bite the tongue and keep sucking!), or toss him into a homeless guy's burn barrel. Done. Except… again, you're really not supposed to do that. In most cities, that's a no-no. Plus, that enemy, he has friends. He has slaves. He has a whole house of sharp-edged cards that could come raining down. And really, when it comes down to it, killing the guy… well, what fun is that?

Here's where the fun is for most vampires: the social sphere. You cut a vampire with a flashing razor, and it doesn't last. But you dig him at Elysium with a well-placed insult, a subtle measure of his (lack of) character, or an overindulgent and defeating boast, well… he's going to feel that tomorrow evening. And the evening after, and the evening after. Might go on for years. The Harpies whisper about it ("Did you hear what so-and-so said about blah-dee-blah's *boorish demeanor*?"). Maybe the Prince decides not to grant that long-desired and long-scheduled meeting ("Sorry to inform you, but the Prince has changed his mind. He's become

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suddenly very busy. Expect that his schedule won't clear. Best of luck."). Then one night, the poor fucker rounds a corner and hears a pair of new-blood neonate cuntholes dissing him like they're somehow better than him.

Of course, if that vampire is in any way worth his salt, he's going to try to get back his edge. He can't go on like this, not without reclaiming some measure of his power. He bends the will of those two neonate assholes and forces them to bite and claw one another until one drinks the soul of the other. He disses the Prince in return (dangerous, but some Kindred are attracted to the hard-to-get game), and plants a few of his own mean little hisses into the Harpies ear, letting the eternal "Whisper Down The Lane" tumble forward in its clumsy, careless way.

And that's the fun. It never ends. All the backbiting. All the exalting. The power grabs and demeaning snubs, the desperate ass-kissing and blubbering pleas. The gifts of blood. The heart-rending insults. The tangled logic, the cackling debate fallacies, the nooses with which to hang oneself. Night after night this plays out at Elysium, or in a back alley, or amongst the Primogen, or between sire and childe or Prince and Seneschal or a pair of handcuffed ghouls. It's gloriously, profoundly, awesomely *never-ending*. Just how the vampires want it.

So, it seems that it's necessary to have a system to reflect this, right? If the social realm is ostensibly more significant than what vampires can accomplish by kicking one another's asses physically, then the mechanics should back this up.

The idea, then, is the same as ass-kicking—it's still combat. But it's not a physical struggle. The only knives are tongues; the only stomping boots are clumsy threats and crushing insults. Where to begin?

The Bare Bones: Conceptual Difference

Here is the key conceptual difference between Physical combat and Social combat.

In Physical combat, my character attacks yours with a pipe: the pipe connects, a kneecap shatters. It is not a contested roll. I'm not seeking any purpose greater than breaking that knee or delivering your character some manner of harm.

In Social combat, I'm looking to be *dominant* in the conversation, gaining The Edge (p. 136), and ideally getting my way at the end of the whole affair.

This will be discussed more in detail, but in each turn of Social combat, only *one* winner occurs, and the entire scene of Social combat only has *one* winner, as well (which may or may not be the same character who won the turn; one can win a battle but still lose a war, after all).

Beyond the Fang

This chapter features a hell-ton of rules that are *generally* driven toward vampires: vampires, as noted, are unique creatures and so you might find that a certain specific set of optional rules will go a long way toward enhancing the predatory nature of your **Vampire: The Requiem** characters.

All that being said, hey, this stuff is portable. It's not universally specific to vampires, and if you want to move this over to a game of **Hunter: The Vigil** or **Changeling: The Lost** or whatever, feel free to do so. You may find it necessary to tweak the rules (and you'll find further rules tweaks in **World of Darkness: Mirrors**), but that doesn't mean this stuff can't be cannibalized for your other stories set in the World of Darkness.

Physical combat is about defeating another person's body—your character hits him, he loses Health. Simple.

Social combat is about defeating another person's position or Social ability, but isn't a one-way street. You might get a leg up on him, but he might turn the tables right back upon you. Hence, your character insults him, wins the turn, and he loses Nerve (see below, p. 129), and you *gain* his lost Nerve (provided your character has empty slots in that pool). However, in the next turn *he* might twist it back on you and win, which means at the end of the turn your character loses Nerve, and he gains it. Push-and-pull, give-and-take.

You'll find the nitty gritty of this below, specifically under "Social Combat Summary" on p. 129.

Getting Started: Social Advantages

Begin by calculating your character's Social Advantages. As it stands, a number of traits exist to support one's Physical abilities in combat (Defense, Initiative, Health), but now you'll need to calculate those traits that exist to support one's abilities in Social combat.

Dominance Modifier (Social Initiative)

Presence + Manipulation

Initiative in combat determines order of action: a character with higher Initiative gets to punch, kick, shoot, etc, first. It's necessary to establish a similar trait for Social conflict, and so you have your character's Dominance Modifier, which represents his "social footing" in any given social scenario. Every character involved in a Social conflict will have a Dominance rating for that scene; the character with the highest Dominance is the one who has the firmest social footing, and who more or less gets to control the pace and

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lob the first volley. The character with the lowest is scrambling to gain some kind of foothold into the conversation.

In the beginning of a Social combat scene, each player rolls one die and adds the results to her character's Dominance Modifier. The resultant number is that character's Dominance rating (just like Initiative) for the scene.

Guile (Social Defense)

Wits or Manipulation, Whichever Is Lower

Vampires can be tricky; get into a conversation with one, and before you know it you've given him your wedding ring, your bank account number, and your wife. And you can't help but feeling like it was *your* idea to give him all these things.

That's how the Kindred roll: every word is a leg trap, every question mark a slashing blade, every sentence a tightening noose. The best of them could sell fire in Hell. The best can wriggle free out of any promise, threat or opinion.

That, then, is a character's Guile. It's similar to a Physical Defense, but instead of assuming that the combat is filled with ducks, weaves, and parrying blows, it now assumes that the conversation is chock full of double entendres, loopholes, and other verbal trickery—all done in an effort to undermine the other's confidence in the Social combat, which mechanically means (ideally) undoing one's attacking dice pool.

A character's Guile works similarly to the way one's Defense does (i.e. subtracted from an "attack" roll), but the Guile is automatically decreased at the *beginning* of the turn, and does not decrease as the turn continues—the character loses one Guile for every participant in the conversation beyond the first (*participant* is defined as someone in the conflict actively making rolls; passive listeners do not count). A character engaging in one-on-one Social combat does not have his Guile reduced. But a Prince against five Primogen members would see his Guile reduced by four as he attempts to negotiate a number of personalities and their attacks.

A target's Guile score is subtracted from the attacking character's Social attack pool; if your character's target has a Guile of three, then you would subtract three dice from your Social attack roll of, say, Manipulation + Intimidation.

Three Dice, One Success

Remember that, on average, you're likely to earn one success for every three dice rolled. That's the basic probability, but is of course no guarantee; roll three dice, and you might get zero successes, or you might get six successes (rare, but with the 10-Again rule, not impossible).

Nerve (Social Health)

Composure + Highest Social Skill

Health in Physical conflict tells you, in essence, how much damage (punches, kicks, stab wounds, gunshots, whatever) your character can sustain before he blacks out, starts bleeding to death, or outright dies.

Social combat will never be so clear: while an insult might "bruise" your ego, it's qualitative, not quantitative. A knife to the eye has a plain, obvious result: no more eye, or at least, no more seeing through it for now. But dragging one's name through the mud is not so distinctly defined.

Still, in any social situation, it's easy to see the push-and-pull of power, the shifting of balance, the changing of a social dynamic. An argument, a seduction, a dressing-down; all of these things represent one character trying to get the edge over another. The question then is: *how much Nerve you got?* Nerve is the character's Social Health, or his social backbone.

You will find more about the ramifications related to the Nerve pool under "The Nature of Nerve," p. 137.

As a character makes successful attacks upon another in Social combat, the target's Nerve decreases, and the character's own Nerve increases. It's almost a type of Social vampirism: one character is stealing the energy from another, but it can be done in return, too. The push-and-pull continues, until one is said to have The Edge (p. 136).

The Basics: Social Combat Summary

Below you'll find the essential steps necessary to run a scene of Social combat in **Vampire: The Requiem**.

Note that, from this point forward, we're going to use two example characters throughout in an effort to frame Social combat in a meaningful and evocative way.

- The first character is India, a local slam poet with the ability to duck and weave verbally, to slither her way out of promises, and to constrict others with biting, alliterative and rhythmic wit. India is a Daeva.
- The second character is Harding, a tough thug whose sense of loyalty to the Sheriff is likely unparalleled. He doesn't have a lot of deft moves, but he can be mean and crazy like a distempered dog. Harding is Ventrue.

Stage One: Determine Intent

Physical combat ultimately has only a few key outcomes, with most of them easily summed up with, "I want to hurt my enemy physically."

The ends of Social combat are not so clearly defined. Each character enters into the social situation with some goal, what we're calling one's *intent*. A character might have a thousand and one different ambitions in a social

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scenario; it's best to sum this up in a single sentence (usually beginning with "I want," which is appropriate given that vampires are ultimately selfish beings). Want a handful of examples? Here you go:

- "I want to seduce her."
- "I want to subtly insult her social standing in front of everyone."
- "I want to convince him that he's worthless and leave him weeping blood."
- "I want to threaten him so he'll stop beating on his own thrall."
- "I want to get her drunk and stupid."
- "I want him to buy my fake Rolex watch for way too much money."

And so on. The intent can be as simple or as complex as the player wants it. It's important that the Storyteller knows the intent of the character so as to help measure success or failure and to help describe the reactions of any Storyteller characters.

Note that engaging in Social combat isn't really necessary if the target isn't the type to resist. If the character hopes to seduce a man who's been known to give it up for any pair of flashing eyes and licked lips, then no combat is necessary. Combat is only critical when some degree of resistance will occur; giving a compliment, for instance, and convincing someone of their self-worth will only necessitate turns of Social combat *if* the target is so mired in self-hatred that he will be hard to convince of his own value.

India approaches Harding who sits at the bar. She sidles up next to him. Her intent is to insult the job he's doing as Sheriff, and further get him to leave the bar (because frankly, the guy's presence is a real a buzzkill). Harding's intent is get this girl to leave him the fuck alone.

Stage Two: Determine Dominance

Just like with Initiative, here it's important to figure out who has the immediate power when stepping into the social situation. Someone is always more socially dominant than the others in a Social combat; this then helps to determine the "order of operations" during this Social combat scene. Roll one die, and add to character's Presence + Manipulation score.

India's got three dice in both Presence and Manipulation. Her player rolls a die; it comes up a 7. She has a Dominance of 13 for this scene. Harding's only got two dice in both Presence and Manipulation, and his player rolls a 5, giving him a Dominance of 9 for the scene. India will go first for the remainder of this Social combat scene.

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Stage Three: Attack

"Attack" may be a bit of a misnomer, in that every roll isn't necessarily a direct attack on another individual, but metaphorically, your character is at least trying to gain leverage over one or several targets in the conversation.

The default Social attack dice pool is:

Social Attribute + Social Skill—target's Guile +/—other modifiers

Physical combat is easily defined; you only have so many ways you can try to break another character's body, and so the rolls are clearly limited.

Social combat is not so limited. So, it's important for player and Storyteller to come up with appropriate rolls suitable for the attack desired.

The player should always describe his character's maneuver in a fairly straightforward way: "I make it clear I want the necklace that hangs around her neck," and should furthermore say how he conveys this: "I say, 'Listen, if you don't hand me that necklace real quiet-like, I'm going to snap your tender little neck.'" Alternately, the player might just say, "I stare daggers at her chest, a dreadful smirk on my face." (Remember, a Social attack doesn't necessitate spoken conversation. It can easily be conveyed in sly glances, lip-licking, cruel grins, or other gestures and expressions.)

That roll, then, might be Manipulation + Intimidation for the spoken threat, or Presence + Intimidation for the unspoken warning.

The target might sling back a glib dismissal of the attacker's threat (Manipulation + Socialize), toss an unspoken threat right back at him (Presence + Intimidation) or even make up a lie about how the necklace really belongs to the Mekhet Primogen, and do you *really* want to upset the Mekhet Primogen (Manipulation + Subterfuge)?

Both attack rolls subtract out the Guile of the opposing target. If the conversation occurs amongst several participants, then the *highest* Guile of the other participants is subtracted from the roll (provided that the player isn't subtracting his own Guile, of course).

India, seeing that she has the attention of the bartender, other patrons, and some saggy-breasted blood doll standing a few feet away, decides to have a little fun at Harding's expense. She makes mention of the number of Masquerade breaches that have happened recently, pretending to be ignorant as to whether Harding would know anything about it. He would and does; he's the Sheriff, and these breaches are his (failed) responsibility. India's player determines that the vampire is "just talking," couching the insult in just a "regular conversation," so the Storyteller determines that a Manipulation + Socialize roll is suitable for this attack. India's player gets three successes. Harding, wanting India to just leave him the hell alone, goes for a hamfisted threat about what'll happen to her if she doesn't back off. The Storyteller allows Harding's player to roll Presence + Intimidation, and that player gets only one success. Now, to resolution.

Stage Four: Resolution of Turn

At the end of the turn, when all Social attacks and maneuvers are in, compare the successes gained by each participant in the conversation.

The character with the highest number of successes during this turn of Social combat has "won" the round. All other participants lose a number of points from their Nerve equal to the successes gained by the winner of the scene. The winner *gains* that amount to her Nerve if she has room in her pool (her Nerve points may not exceed her maximum Nerve pool).

On a tie, the win goes to the character with the highest Dominance Modifier (*not* the highest Dominance

Scenes or Nights Instead of Turns

The goal with Social combat is to simulate a conversation where stakes are on the line and intent can be either damaging or rewarding. It's why there's a push-and-pull instead of just a winnowing Nerve score—a conversation is meant to go more than 10 or 15 seconds; each cruel sentence and seductive whisper builds to a mad crescendo of the course of many minutes.

One way to push past this limitation of turns, however, is to make the combat go scene-by-scene as opposed to turn-by-turn. One roll per attacker per scene; resolve that scene; move to next scene; repeat until concluded.

When might this be appropriate? If the Social combat is meant to simulate a protracted event, then it doesn't make sense to limit it only to a handful of turns. Think of a long night where the Prince and Primogen argue, or where a hissing Nosferatu attempts to sway the gathered throngs of blind ghouls and tunnel freaks in the darkness below the city. The Prince doesn't convince his Primogen in two minutes; the Nosferatu doesn't sway the frothing crowd in a handful of turns. It might take the full night to do it, whether successfully or no.

Further, consider the possibility of expanding this out even further—night-by-night instead of scene-by-scene. A sire and childe who work at one another with cross-purposes may only come together once a night before going out to hunt—each gets a jab in, represented by one roll. The next night is the same, and the night after that. The ebb-and-flow will *eventually* see a result: the sire gives into the childe's wishes or the childe is finally dissuaded. But the cool thing is, it might take weeks for this small Social conflict to resolve.

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for the scene). If that still results in a tie, then nobody is considered to have won the round, and all Nerve points remain the same.

India, having received more successes than Harding (three to his one) is the winner of this round. The crowd seems to have responded to her veiled insult against him, and Harding's own threatening retort seems to have been lost in the murmur. The dismissal of his abilities as Sheriff stings just as she desired: Harding loses three Nerve points, and India gains three (for her pool was down from earlier failed Social encounters).

Stage Five: Resolution of Social Combat Scene

Social combat may continue for as long as any and all participants choose to be involved, though it ends for any participant who has lost all Nerve. Losing Nerve means losing the Social combat. Losing the Social combat means not only dealing with the ramifications of having no Nerve (see "The Nature of Nerve," p. 137), but also succumbing to the intent of the attacker.

Succumbing to the intent means that, whatever the attacker was hoping to have happened will happen. This *has* to be within reason, as determined by the Storyteller. Without the addition of Discipline use (more info on that can be found on p. 137), a character cannot be made to:

- Physically harm himself
- Physically harm another
- Do something entirely counter to his character ("I want him to burn his favorite book")
- Do something entirely counter to his well-being ("I want to convince him to go up to the Prince and thumb that fucker right in the eye")
- Perform an impossible action ("I want her to disappear")

That being said, a wide range of intent can still take hold. Examples might include: "I want him to feel ashamed at his actions;" or "I want to turn his anger toward his sire and away from me;" or "I want to turn her on, sexually."

The Storyteller has the last word on whether or not the attacker's intent can be carried out.

Can a character resist succumbing to the intent? Yes; a character cannot be *forced* to do anything without the application of Disciplines. But choosing not to give in to the attacker's intent is costly: the target must pay one point of Willpower and, in addition, loses his Guile against other Social attacks for the remainder of the night. Why? Because the target is off-balance. He feels unsettled, with a nagging feeling working at the fore of his mind ("Should I have slept with her?" or "I don't trust my own instincts anymore"). Put another way, the character is now "off his game" for the rest of the night.

Also note that a character can attempt to prematurely exit the Social combat before losing all Nerve, but doing so is only contingent upon the attacker relinquishing her attack. (This isn't dissimilar from the way one might deal with a Physical attack—surrendering or trying to escape before too much Health is lost. But if the attacker continues to rain blows on the target or chases after, the combat isn't really over.)

Finally, the *winner* of the Social combat has the Edge (p. 136). The winner of the combat is the one who won the most turns by the end of combat and still has Nerve points in her pool. If a target prematurely exits a Social combat, he automatically gives the Edge to his attacker provided that attacker gives up the fight. If the combat features multiple participants, the "last character standing" is the one with the Edge.

India is only emboldened by the crowd's response. She begins making none-too-subtle jabs at Harding again and again, putting him against the ropes every time. He tries to excuse himself and head to the pool tables, but she just follows after, digging and digging. When all is said and done, Harding is cowed. He's insulted. He feels all eyes on him, and he leaves the bar. India's got the Edge. Harding knows he could've stayed behind and felt the sling and arrows of all those mocking stares, but doing so would've just thrown him off his game and given India the Edge, regardless. He retreats to his haven for the rest of the night (which gives the vampires of the city something of a free pass for the next six or so hours).

Social Combat Modifiers

Below are a number of potential modifiers that you might invoke to affect Social combat. These are in addition to any modifiers you choose to use from the **World of Darkness Rulebook** ("Social Skills," pp. 78-87).

+3	Character has the Edge
+2	Target is character's ghoul or thrall
+1 to +5	Appropriate Social equipment (brandishing a weapon for Intimidation, offering a bribe for Persuasion, giving a gift to seduce, showing fake evidence to confirm a Subterfuge attempt, etc.)
+1	Target is "family" (within two Embrace "steps" of character)
+1	Character wears convincing clothing (a nice suit for a salesman, a sexy *haute couture* outfit for a seducer, a rough biker's outfit for threats of ass-kicking).
+1	Character possesses higher Blood Potency than the target

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-1	Target possesses higher Blood Potency than the character
-1	Either vampire is hungry
-1	For every mild derangement possessed by opponent (derangements aren't helpful to those who possess them, but they can hinder attempts to convince or unnerve such individuals)
-1	Character wears inappropriate clothing (golf outfit for threatening, a frumpy frock for seducing)
-2	Either vampire is starving
-2	For every severe derangement possessed by opponent
-4	Language barrier (character doesn't speak the same language, must rely on body language)

Effects of Social Merits

The **World of Darkness Rulebook** has a number of existing Social Merits (pp. 114 -117). How can these affect Social combat?

Allies

Generally speaking, a character won't need to engage in Social combat with their allies. That's why you purchased them for your character with Merit dots, so you don't have to constantly fight to get what you want out of them. Plus, a system already exists (p. 114, **World of Darkness Rulebook**) by which a character can ask Allies for help.

However, your character may find a time when she can be backed up by her allies. Having allies present that are represented by the Allies Merit can be useful. They don't need to contribute to the conflict turn-by-turn, and instead can provide a passive bonus to your character simply by dint of their presence provided the Storyteller rules their proximity to be significant. The bonus is equal to +1 per individual ally present, to a maximum bonus equal to your character's Allies score in that particular group. So, say your character has Allies 2 (Journalists), and he's trying to convince the Sheriff that something big went down last night (even though it didn't, and your character's totally lying). You've got a trio of journalists backing your character up, fabricating evidence, and nodding when appropriate. Even though three journalists are present, your character only gains a +2 to his Manipulation + Subterfuge "attack" roll because that's all he has reflected in Merit dots. Still, every little bit helps, right? It would go the other way, too—if he had Allies (Journalists) 3, but only two actual journalists were *present*, then the bonus would remain +2 because of the limited number of allies in attendance.

Something to consider, however: if allies are present and Social combat turns particularly nasty (say, a provoked Gangrel pulls out a hatchet and starts chopping), the Storyteller might justify a loss of one dot in that particular instance of the Allies Merit.

Barfly

Useful only when speaking to other characters with the Barfly Merit. If your character has the higher Dominance during the Social combat scene, she gains +1 in dealing with another barfly.

Contacts

Possessing the Contacts Merit likely indicates that Social combat isn't necessary—like with Allies, you bought the dots, and a system is in place (pp. 114-115, **World of Darkness Rulebook**) by which to take advantage of those dots.

Fame

The Fame Merit functions as normal during Social combat. On appropriate Socialize or Persuasion rolls, your character gains a bonus equal to dots possessed in the Fame Merit. This only works on those who would actually be impressed by the famousness of your Damned character, mind; a special effects nerd doesn't care if you were once a famous Olympian, while the space-case tweaker girl at the bar *does* care if you're the lead guitarist of the band that's about to go on in 15 minutes.

Inspiring

Doesn't work on Social combat directly, but those who support the character *during* Social combat ("Back the Play," p. 134) might earn that precious Willpower point.

Mentor

Mentor cuts the other way: if your character gets involved in Social combat *with* his mentor, then the character suffers a penalty to all Social attacks equal to the dots possessed in that Merit. Once in a while, it's expected that a mentor and his charge (or sire and childe) will engage in Social conflict. That being said, if it happens too often, the Storyteller may rule that a loss of a dot is necessary, or the loss of the entire trait.

Resources

Resources has an indirect effect on Social combat, in that it can provide bribery material or allow the character to purchase proper equipment bonuses (trying to impress someone while pulling up in a Lotus, for instance). Otherwise, it has no direct effect.

Retainer

Your character gains a bonus to all Social attacks against a represented retainer equal to dots possessed in this

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Merit. Though, like with other Merits, renewed Social combat time and time again might warrant a loss of one or all dots in this Merit. It doesn't help to continually antagonize the help.

Status (Clan, Covenant, City or otherwise)

Status means something, especially amongst vampires. (One might even theorize that it's at least a little bit supernatural—in much the same way that the Edge represents a heightened state of Social ability, Status might literally radiate off the character.)

When engaged in Social combat with a member of the agency in question, your character gets a bonus equal to dots possessed in Status (That Agency). If your Daeva has Covenant Status (Invictus) 4 and is trying to convince a coterie of neonates within the covenant to do her bidding, she gains a hearty +4 bonus to her Social attacks. They know who she is, and they're likely to be affected by her very presence—so imagine what her stinging rebukes and glorious promises do to engage their interest. However, this cuts the other way, too; if your Daeva only has Covenant Status (Invictus) 1, and she's dealing with a lofty elder who possesses four dots in the same, she only gets a +1 against his +4 dice, which gives him a not-unreasonable advantage.

Striking Looks

As per the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 117, the Merit grants a +1 or +2 bonus to Presence or Manipulation rolls, and this applies to rolls made during Social combat. However, the Storyteller should make certain considerations: first, Intimidation rolls are harder to pull off with beauty as a factor (being beautiful doesn't help you whack a lead pipe against an open palm), though it *can* in certain social circles. Second, if the target in question isn't the type to be affected by one's physical splendor (a Nosferatu with a sexual fetish for car crash victims, for instance), then the bonus likely won't apply.

Special Social Maneuvers

A character engaged in Social combat has a number of unique Social maneuvers available to him. Each provides unique effects that are noted below:

Ambush

Cost: 1 Nerve

The character ambushes a target in Social combat with an unexpected assault—the character must possess some means of actually surprising the target, of course, and the Storyteller will be the ultimately arbiter of whether or not this is possible.

Examples could include: the character lets slip a dangerous secret, the character informs the target of something drastic (his childe suffered Final Death, the target is in the sights of the Prince's goons, the target's haven has been secretly infiltrated and searched), the character offers a powerful nugget of knowledge, etc.

A good benchmark is, "Would the attack make the target blanch and go paler than usual?" If the victim would be left reeling, searching for words, then the attack could count as an ambush.

(That being said, it might be possible to ambush the victim conjuring a potent lie using Subterfuge. Again, the Storyteller is the best arbiter, here.)

If successful, then the target loses his Guile against the next Social attack.

Ambush may only be used once during a Social combat.

Outside the bar, Harding finds himself face-to-face with a young street punk, Gorky. Gorky's got a puffed-up-chest and is full of cocky swagger and thinks he's going to mock Harding while the Sheriff is down. It's a bad move. Harding lets the truth fly, alerting the punk that Harding damn well knows who it was that burned down those three nightclubs two years back (Gorky), and even though that was before Harding's time as Sheriff, he'd be happy *to let that information casually slide into the hands of meaner monsters. Gorky is left backpedaling, stammering to gain purchase—Harding needn't subtract Gorky's Guile of two from his attack roll of Manipulation + Intimidation, and he gets a reasonable three successes against Gorky's two. It earns him a little Nerve back, and he decides he's done with this conversation; he shoves past the punk, leaving Gorky behind.*

Back the Play

Cost: None

The character chooses to not make a play of her own, and instead decides to back up or bolster another character's Social attacks. This works like a Teamwork effort (p. 134, **World of Darkness Rulebook**). The character must make the same roll as the subject she's attempting to bolster (if she's backing up the efforts of another character making threats using Presence + Intimidation, she must submit to the same roll). Successes gained on the roll are added as dice to the subject's subsequent roll (in this turn or the next, following order of Dominance).

Jayce is India's coterie mate and plans on backing whatever play she makes. India, in trying to convince a pawn shop broker to let her in the back to see the "special inventory," is making a bribe with Manipulation + Persuasion. Jayce backs her play by highlighting the usefulness of the bribe, and perhaps making it sound better than it really is. He rolls the same, gets three successes; but India has a higher Dominance than he does for this scene of Social combat, so on the next turn, India's roll gains three dice, born as a result of Jayce's successes.

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Measurements

Cost: None

The character "holds" his attack for this turn, making no Social rolls (meaning, in effect, he's contributing nothing to the conversation and conflict). He instead lets the conversation play out, ideally measuring what would be the best approach (i.e. thinking before speaking). By taking no action and measuring the situation, he gains +2 to his roll on the next turn of Social combat. This is cumulative; for each turn he holds his attack and weighs his options, he gains +2 (to a maximum of +5) dice.

The pawn shop broker wants to try to up the ante with India, and so he refuses to commit either way during the turn, hoping to lead her out with a better offer. On the next turn, he does gain the +2 when he tries to subtly convince her to up the bribe (Presence + Persuasion), but since she has her coterie mate's help, it won't matter—her successes are still going to outweigh his, and his Nerve only goes down further.

Salt the Earth

Cost: 1 Nerve

One might call this "razing the castle," or even "dropping the bomb." The idea here is that the character so completely befouls the conversation, it allows her to win this scene of Social combat *but* largely destroys the relationship held between the two characters.

The attack should be in some way scathing or otherwise inflammatory—boldly tearing down the Prince's policies and ruining his good night, revealing the target's deepest and darkest secret for all to hear, or speaking an insult that cuts straight through the bone and might as well be a willow branch aimed right for the target's unbeating heart.

The character gains +5 to his attempt on this turn. In addition, if the character *wins* this turn, then the victim loses *all* Nerve and the character wins the entire Social combat scene.

However, this has a drawback: the relationship is effectively poisoned (the "earth is salted so that nothing new may grow"). The character from now on suffers -5 to all subsequent Social rolls made against that target. This penalty needn't be permanent, but the character will need to work overtime to mend fences. Losing those penalty dice could be the function of an entire story (reducing the penalty by one per game session where the character makes appropriate amends).

India's childe, Rabbit, has long been an impudent little bitch, and India's had enough. Her Blood's running hot, scouring her veins and guts and forcing her thumbs to pierce the inside of her palms. She doesn't frenzy; instead, she lays into her childe like she's never done before. She calls her weak, verbally abusing her at Elysium with the force of flaying lashes and hooks—she even regales those around with tales from

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Rabbit's earliest nights when she was just an embarrassing, id-driven freak. Rabbit's jaw drops. India's attack is an insulting Manipulation + Intimidation; Rabbit attempts to shake it all off with lies (Wits + Subterfuge). But India's player gets +5 to that roll, and she gets a tremendous six successes versus Rabbit's one. India has salted the earth, ruining her relationship with her rebellious scion.

Throw Up Walls

Cost: None

The vampire attempts to throw up Social walls and become effectively unflappable for the turn. The character may do nothing else during this turn of Social combat; she can't say anything beyond a cursory few words ("Go away," "Fuck off," "Don't have time"). She may double her Guile score for the remainder of the turn. She can declare that she's going to use this Social maneuver at the beginning of the turn regardless of her Dominance, provided she hasn't yet acted. Like with Guile, throwing up walls reduces by one per participant beyond the first (see "Guile," p. 129).

Harding just doesn't want to deal with any more shit tonight. On the way back to his haven, he runs into one of the screeching Harpies who thinks to accost him and scrape away at his already diminished self-worth as Sheriff, but he's just not having any of it. He keeps his head down and his feet moving, and dismisses her with a growl. His Guile, normally a 2, is now a 4 for purposes of the Harpy's attempts. It's enough to give her pause; she can't find any footholds, and swiftly grows bored with the effort.

The Edge

A character who wins a Social combat—or has all participants bow out of the conversation early, leaving that character the default victor—gains the Edge. But what *is* the Edge? What does it mean, and what good does it do the character?

In the Blood

The Edge is in the Blood. It hums, singing a song of domination and success. Dead arteries tingle. An unbeating heart almost stirs to life. A vampire who gains the Edge finds himself infused with a kind of preternatural self-confidence; a rush of adrenalin for a creature whose undead body *has* no such adrenalin. Vampires are predators, remember, but that predatory nature goes well-beyond the "hunt-and-kill" physicality of stalking prey and taking blood. They're social predators, too—picking the wings off flies, sliding through the dancing throngs looking for someone to humiliate, or convincing a victim to give into their greatest and strangest urges. The Edge means that the vampire can now exult in his predatory success. He's done well. He found his prey and exerted his dominance. The Edge is as sweet as the rush of Vitae gushing into the mouth.

And yes, this means that *only vampires* are capable of possessing the Edge (unless the Storyteller rules otherwise).

Glories of the Edge

A vampire possessing the Edge can take advantage of the following benefits:

- +1 to any rolls related to the three primary Social Disciplines (Dominate, Majesty, Nightmare)
- +3 to Social rolls made during Social combat
- +1 to Social rolls made outside Social combat
- +1 to rolls made to resist Social Disciplines (Dominate, Majesty, Nightmare; as with "Mesmerize," Dominate 2), *or* -1 to the subject's Social Discipline roll as resistance (as with "The Forgetful Mind," Dominate 3).
- While not really a benefit, one's Edge can be seen in one's aura as a crimson edge, almost as if faintly wet with blood. It seems to pulse, like a faint heartbeat.

Spending the Edge

A vampire may "spend" the Edge in a few different ways, too. Choosing to give up the Edge, the vampire may:

- Gain +3 to any one roll during combat (she effectively turns her predatory advantage outward, from Social to Physical).
- Automatically resist or exit frenzy (the Edge is sacrificed for her to keep her cool)
- Gift the Edge to another vampire. This is an instant action, but demands no roll on the part of either party's player. It *does* necessitate that the gifting vampire partake in some kind of "boosting" act—words of encouragement or inspiration, a paean sung to fear and bloodletting, a steely gaze made in an effort to bolster the backbone of the target.

Losing the Edge

A vampire loses the Edge in a few different ways:

- She enters daysleep (the Edge only lasts for the remainder of the night in which it is claimed; after that, the "high" is lost)
- She is knocked into torpor
- She is defeated in Social combat
- She "spends" the Edge, as noted above
- Another vampire consumes even a single point of her Vitae

Once the vampire has lost the Edge for the night, it cannot be reclaimed. She can only once more possess the Edge after a restful daysleep.

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The Nature of Nerve

Nerve is a number of things rolled into one—it's a character's self-confidence, his conversational certainty, his moral high ground, his backbone. It's not supernatural; all characters possess it, and all characters can gain or lose it. It's just as vital to a character as his Health. In fact, for vampires, it can be *more* vital, because the undead body is powerfully resilient and easy-to-mind. Nerve, on the other hand, can represent a vampire's true strength in the Social domain. It cannot be reclaimed by spending Vitae. It isn't supernaturally bolstered against attacks; even a human's insulting words can damage it, proving its fragility.

Systems

A character with a *full* Nerve pool has an advantage: he can take a +1 to any Resolve + Composure roll meant to either resist frenzy or resist the effects of a derangement.

However, lost Nerve can be damning. Just like with Health, as a vampire reaches low reserves of Nerve in his pool, he begins to take penalties. These penalties are *only* to Social rolls, and do not affect Mental or Physical rolls.

Nerve Boxes	Marked Penalty
Third-to-last	-1
Second-to-last	-2
Last	-3

When a character reaches *zero* Nerve, he feels as if he's lost all self-confidence, as if any Social savvy once possessed is now lost, never to be reclaimed. A character will feel weak, unstable, and more like prey than predator. As a result, he suffers from the following:

- A full -5 penalty on all Social rolls
- A -3 penalty against any Resolve + Composure rolls made to resist frenzy or the effects of derangements.

Losing Nerve

Generally, a character only loses Nerve when in Social combat, either via another character diminishing it through Social attacks, or by spending Nerve to access certain Social maneuvers (found on p. 134). Also, a few of the unique Merits necessitate the expenditure of Nerve (found below).

Gaining Nerve

A character gains Nerve in a few ways:

- The vampire gains one point of Nerve upon first awakening for the evening (gained at the same time as Willpower; if any effect stops the gain of Willpower in such a way, then the vampire also fails to gain a point of lost Nerve).
- The vampire takes it in Social combat (as noted throughout, being dominant in a Social conflict causes the weaker participants to lose Nerve, and the strongest participant to gain it).

Social Combat Merits

The below Merits are largely only useful for characters in **Vampire: The Requiem** games where the above Social combat rules are used. If the Storyteller isn't using these Merits, then their default advantages will be largely useless. That said, each Merit has an additional bit of text that endeavors to make that Merit functional in games where the Social combat rules will not come into play.

Intractable (•••)

Effect: When using the "Throw Up Walls" maneuver (p. 136), the character doesn't double his Guile score, but instead may add in his Resolve or Composure score, whichever is higher.

Alternate (No Social Combat): Once per game session, the character can add in either her Resolve or Composure score (whichever is higher) to any one Social roll, thus reflecting the character's obstinate demeanor.

Savvy (•••)

Effect: When determining the character's Guile score, he uses the *higher* of his Wits or Manipulation instead of the lower of the two.

Alternate (No Social Combat): This in effect creates for the character a Guile score, even in a game that will not use the Social Combat rules. Any Social rolls made against the character suffer an automatic penalty equal to the character's Wits or Manipulation score, whichever is lower. However, the cost of this Merit increases to ••••.

The Shark (• to •••••)

Prerequisite: Blood Potency ••• or higher

Effect: The character is a Social powerhouse; a true climber with a resonant aura. It goes beyond his looks—it's the whole package. The way he speaks. The way he dresses. The way he *moves*. The character gains +1 to his Dominance modifier per dot in this Merit.

Alternate (No Social Combat): The character's Social ability is so intense and so certain, it really does affect the way he moves. This becomes a •••-dot Merit instead of a •-to-••••• scale; now, once per game session, the character can add his Presence score to either his Speed or his Initiative modifier. It lasts for the remainder of the scene.

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Disciplines in Social Combat

A vampire's Disciplines can have a profound effect on Social combat. The Damned can use their bloody powers to twist the conflict around her fingers; the strings of a marionette, dancing this way, and that. Words can be made to cut, literally. Auras pulse, foreshadowing the conversation to come. Shadows of veins move across pale skin like the shadows of clouds on the ground, and the faster they move, the more the fiend knows that his razor tongue is cutting to the quick. Disciplines can read the conflict; they can adjust the conflict; they can destroy the conflict.

Below you'll find suggestions on how a character could use Disciplines in new and unusual ways. These ways, unless the Storyteller deems otherwise, are already available to those characters who possess the Disciplines at the requisite levels—the player needn't buy additional dots, or choose one power over the next. What you'll find here are abilities *in addition* to what a vampire can achieve already. The dot ratings are the level one must possess in that Discipline to use this ability in Social combat.

Storytellers that don't want these powers to be automatic can instead allow players to purchase them as single-Discipline Devotions, with a cost of:

Dot Level	Experience Points Cost
•	3
••	6
•••	9
••••	12
•••••	15

Not every Discipline will have its effect on Social combat, of course. Some Disciplines do not have appropriate contributions to a Social-based conflict.

Animalism: Invader Dominance (•)

Cost: None

Dice Pool: None

Action: Reflexive

The vampire is animal; the vampire is invader. The vampire is tapeworm. The vampire is a snake in your bed, a spider in your boot, a wolf at the back door. The vampire can add his dots in Animalism to his Dominance modifier. This ability is considered to be "always on."

This ability will not work on vampires with a higher Blood Potency than the character.

Animalism: Bestial Presence (•••••)

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: None

Action: Reflexive

The mere presence of the vampire can stir the heart to madness, or lay an easy serenity on the mind. Animals have this ability—a loyal hound is a calming presence, while a rabid wolf is anything but. The vampire may choose to be what he wants: an agitating fiend, quickening the pulse; or a soothing creature, softening the edges.

The vampire spends a point of Vitae. He may take no other action during this turn of Social combat. He chooses a target participant in the conversation; that target either gains +3 to his Social rolls for the remainder of the combat scene, or loses -3 dice.

Auspex: Unique Measure (••)

Cost: None

Dice Pool: Wits + Empathy + Auspex—target's Blood Potency

Action: Reflexive

The vampire gains the ability to truly measure an opponent in Social combat—the vampire doesn't gain hard-and-fast answers. She cannot wholly predict what words will come next or what thoughts are cast across the opponent's mind, but it *does* allow her to gain an immediate and instinctual snapshot of her foe.

If the character succeeds on the roll, she can choose to know one of the following things about her foe:

- How much Nerve the foe has remaining
- The foe's strongest Social dice pool (Attribute + Skill combination)
- The foe's weakest Social dice pool (Attribute + Skill combination)
- The foe's Dominance modifier
- The foe's intent during this scene of Social combat
- The foe's Virtue
- The foe's Vice

The character may only use this ability once during the scene.

The Storyteller is encouraged to tell the player the hard numbers when appropriate ("He has only three Nerve points remaining") but to also describe it in an evocative way so that the player can frame it for his own character's understanding ("He's growing edgy, like he's against the ropes; you suspect he's on his last nerve").

A dramatic failure provides conflicting information to the vampire. Her incorrect instincts force her to act at

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-3 dice on all Social rolls for the remainder of the scene.

An exceptional success allows the vampire to choose two of the above items to know rather than only one.

Auspex: Twist of the Knife (●●●●●)

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Presence + Persuasion + Auspex versus target's Composure + Blood Potency

Action: Contested; all rolls are reflexive

The vampire knows how the conversation is going to go, because this is how she wants it to go. With this ability, the vampire can quite literally steer the conversation however she so chooses. If successful, the vampire can choose one Social Skill for a single opponent (with the exclusion of Animal Ken). The opponent will, for the remainder of the Social combat, use *only* that Skill to wage her Social war. How the foe manifests that Skill is up to that character's player (which may be the Storyteller)—if the vampire chooses Subterfuge, that means that the foe will certainly try to lie, but *how* she lies and *what* she lies about are up to that character's player. (Also, that player can still choose what Attribute will pair with the Skill—Wits? Presence? Manipulation?)

Dominate, Majesty and Social Combat

On first glance, you'd think: "Dominate and Majesty should each have more effect on Social combat, right? More so than what's listed here?"

Not exactly. The unique abilities listed on this page are beyond what is available with Dominate and Majesty usually, but the abilities already found within the Dominate and Majesty Disciplines (pp. 124-133, **Vampire: The Requiem**) generally undo the very *need* for Social combat. Social combat is a way for characters to diminish the arguments of others or direct them to perform a certain way; each of these two Disciplines in its full form already does that, blessedly skipping all the pomp and circumstance that Social combat demands. It's one roll and done, for the most part. No need to go through turn after turn of trying to convince a target of something when you can just match their gaze, declare a phrase, and have thine will be done, right? Majesty is perhaps more helpful—Awe, for instance, can add Social bonuses to the vampire's Social combat rolls for the appropriate members in a crowd (and this can be quite potent when paired with Dominate's "Master of the Tongue," below). Still, for the most part, these Disciplines in their current form are meant to bypass Social combat. What you'll find in this book are those abilities meant to ameliorate Social combat for the vampire.

Dominate: Master of the Tongue (●●)

Cost: None

Dice Pool: None

Action: Reflexive

The vampire with Dominate is, like it or not, a verbal master. His words carry weight. Each sentence is a serpent around the neck and a worm in the ear. Even when the vampire isn't expressing Dominate to the fullest extent, it's always presence, always providing a sharp edge to even the most mundane phrase.

The vampire with Dominate can add his Dominate dots to any Social attack roll made during Social combat in an effort to have his intent carried forth successfully. This ability is considered "always on."

This ability will not work on vampires with a higher Blood Potency than the character.

Dominate: Cast the Die (●●●●●)

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Wits + Intimidation + Dominate versus target's Resolve + Blood Potency

Action: Contested (all rolls reflexive)

The vampire is a violator. He can slip into the room of the mind, can raise the blinds, rearrange the furniture, and lock the doors. In this case, the vampire can twist one's intent to becoming anything he wants. By targeting a foe, the vampire can literally change the intent of that foe to anything he so desires. If the target's intent was once to insult someone, the vampire can change it to "compliment," instead. The target doesn't even realize that it's happened until the conversation is over and he not only failed to get what he wanted, but he achieved an entirely different (and likely damning) goal, instead.

A dramatic failure only serves to bolster the target's intent; the target now gains a +3 bonus to all Social combat rolls during the remainder of this scene.

An exceptional success further erodes the subject's will: in addition to the above change of intent, the target also loses a Willpower point.

Majesty: Sublime Enervation (●●●)

Cost: None

Dice Pool: None

Action: Reflexive

The vampire is a pulsing signal, a potent beacon, a sacred obelisk. His Majesty radiates from him, forever undeniable. The vampire's Majesty automatically diminishes the Guile of those in Social conflict with him—each participant's Guile is diminished by a number equal to

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the vampire's dots in Majesty. It doesn't matter if one participant is favoring the Majesty-bearer's point; the radiant awe still reduces their ability to string together cogent comebacks or to maintain a mental defense against the intent of others. All present find their Social defenses stripped raw. The vampire may turn this power "off" for a scene by spending a Willpower point.

This ability will not work on vampires with a higher Blood Potency than the character.

Majesty: Army of Intent (●●●●●)

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Presence + Expression + Majesty

Action: Reflexive

The vampire's sublime and seductive aura might be thought of as having invisible tentacles—with this ability, those tentacles ensnare those nearby, bringing them into the Social combat to support the vampire's argument.

Each success on the roll above summons one human individual (this power does not work on other vampires) to the defense of the vampire. That human will involve himself in the Social combat, using whatever means necessary to support the vampire's intent—haranguing the target, lying, complimenting, seducing, threatening violence, whatever. This works as per the "Back the Play" maneuver found on p. 134: successes gained by the summoned participants are added as dice bonuses (no maximum) to the vampire's next Social roll during this scene of Social combat.

A dramatic failure indicates that the crowd turns on the vampire, and instead joins the conversation to work against him.

An exceptional success is notable only in that it provides added successes (and thus, added participants).

Nightmare: Consumption (●●●)

Cost: None

Dice Pool: None

Action: Reflexive

The vampire is a monster. He is a sucking maw, a wide and endless pit. Those who find themselves locked in conversation in this way feel themselves weak and small—a mouse in the talons of a powerful bird, a child trying to climb free from the ogre's mouth.

Those locked in Social combat with this vampire lose a number of Nerve points per turn equal to the vampire's dots in the Nightmare Discipline. The vampire does not *gain* these Nerve points, however. This ability is considered "always on." The vampire may turn this power "off" for one scene by spending a Willpower point.

This ability will not work on vampires with a higher Blood Potency than the character.

Nightmare: The Beast Within (●●●●●)

Cost: 1 Vitae or 1 Vitae and 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Presence + Intimidation + Nightmare versus target's Stamina + Blood Potency

Action: Contested (resistance is reflexive)

The vampire is able to poison a target's self-confidence—the monster within the foe eats his way out, burning through the subject's last vestiges of resistance. If successful, the subject takes a number of points of bashing damage equal to the number of Nerve points remaining in that target's Nerve pool. In addition, the character's Nerve points *all* go away (one could argue that it is this swift depreciation of one's Nerve that actually causes the damage). If the vampire instead chooses to activate this ability with both Vitae *and* Willpower (see Cost, above), then the damage is no longer bashing but lethal, instead.

If the vampire rolls a dramatic failure, then the vampire's *own* Nerve is destroyed (all of it), and the vampire takes a number of points of bashing damage equal to the Nerve points diminished (the Beast within rebels, bursting free of his cage and doing untold spiritual damage to the creature).

An exceptional success not only causes the physical damage, but also invokes a mild derangement in the subject. This derangement lasts for one week.

FAQ: Social Combat

You might have lingering questions. Hopefully this will go toward answering those concerns.

Q: Can I spend Willpower on Social combat rolls?
Absolutely. Spending Willpower works as normal, providing a +3 to any one roll.

Q: Can I spend Willpower to increase my character's Guile?
Yes, just like you can do with Defense, you may spend a point of Willpower to increase your character's Guile by two until the end of the turn. Guile is, for all intents and purposes, a "Resistance" trait.

Q: Can I spend Vitae during Social combat?
Yes. A number of Vitae expenditures are reflexive (such as the Vitae spent to heal wounds), which means you can spend that Vitae and still have your character take an action (like making a Social attack) that turn.

Of course, spending Vitae doesn't confer anything outside the norm unless it's being spent on the Discipline additions noted above.

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Q: Can more than one vampire have the Edge at the same time?

Absolutely. The Edge is not unique. Plenty of vampires will feel the heady rush of dominating their peers and enemies from night-to-night.

Q: What happens when two vampires with the Edge go against one another in Social combat?

Both possess the Edge, so both gain the requisite bonuses to their rolls (+3). Eventually, one will win or bow out of the conflict; the one that loses or bows out forfeits the Edge. The victor (or "last one standing") keeps the Edge.

Q: What happens if my target isn't resisting (such as speaking to a passive audience)?

Then Social combat isn't necessary. For that, the Storyteller will likely rule it's one roll and done. Social conflict is only necessary when… well, a conflict occurs. Sometimes, vampires get what they want very easily: seducing the willing, frightening a coward, abusing a victim. Social combat doesn't come into play in such instances. But when one resists? When the target plays mouse to the vampire's cat? When a bully refuses to be cowed, or when a monster refuses to play the victim? That's conflict, and that's what determines if Social combat is necessary. If the audience is passive, then one roll will cover it. If the audience is active—heckling, debating, denying—then it might be a good time to engage in a scene of Social combat to play out the ebb-and-flow of that conflict.

Storytelling Social Combat

The goals of Social combat are many. First, the Social dots on the page can sometimes go forgotten—a particularly charismatic player might handily play out a scene with conversational aplomb, and in the give-and-take of a conversation with a Storyteller character or the character of another player, potentially necessarily rolls are lost. A savvy player handling a socially inept character might overplay his hand, while a player not-so-comfortable with the conversational give-and-take might not always be able to accurately "act out" his character's high Social stats. Social combat helps give context and mechanics to back all this up: the dots on the page matter, helping the player reflect the reality of the character's capabilities.

Second, it's key to give weight to conversations—in fiction, conversations are rarely throwaway. Dialogue isn't there merely to provide entertainment or waste time. It exists to convey information, to give clarity to (or, in some cases, muddy the waters around) characters, to push forward a plot, and to provide subtext. More specifically, conversations have *stakes*. They are driven by intent. Lives might be on the line. Or money. Or power. With the right twist of phrasing or the proper threat delivered, an entire story can change course—in life, we might try to avoid conflict, but in fiction, we strive for it, and Social combat helps to frame a conversation as conflict.

Third, these are *vampires* we're talking about. They are monsters. They are predators. Their unlives are spent working against one another and, in many ways, against themselves. Social combat for the Damned highlights this conflict: a compliment could be a secret insult, a condemnation is a renewed promise, a simple discussion over music or literature could frame an unspoken verbal war over territory with each threat scratched in between the lines about tempo or meter. Think of it this way: two vampires are dancing on the ballroom floor. Automatically, we know it's not about dancing. Maybe it's about lust. Maybe it's about a polite and smiling way to quietly insult one another. Could be that it's a show of power, or a deliberate show of weakness. The point being, a dance between vampires is *always* about more than the dance, and the same goes for a conversation—it's never just about the conversation. It's always about so much more, and Social combat helps to bring that to the fore.

Challenge: Too Powerful?

It might seem that Social combat can be very powerful. That's intentional. It *is* powerful for all parties involved. Vampires can contain a potent measure of their own personal power in a single word or sentence; the Blood expresses itself in biting barbs and lustful promises. The world can change on a conversation. With but a word, the political winds might change, unlives might be traded, alliances might be built up or shattered to pieces.

During playtesting, it came up: wouldn't it be possible for a cadre of neonates to slowly wear down a Prince's Nerve so that he's exposed and weak, able to be preyed upon by other political forces (or even the neonates themselves)?

Yes, to a degree, that is possible. It's only possible, however, in that it doesn't take into account that the Prince is likely a far larger and meaner predator, and he's made the hunting grounds work *for* him, not against him. He likely has a Seneschal or Primogen who back his play. He probably has a higher Blood Potency. The Prince also isn't likely to make himself available for abuse by a handful of nobodies—and if they did have the change to dig at him, would they make it to the following night without getting booted into torpor by a shadowy thug squad? And yet, *and yet*—herein still lies a measure of promise. If that coterie of neonates is smart enough to get in and wear down the Prince, they really might have a chance to earn him as an ally, or weaken him so that his enemies might

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tear him piece to piece at the upcoming Elysium. Perhaps he underestimates them and lets them get their words in without even realizing that they're feeding off of him and his potential. With the right moves, that coterie of "nobodies" *could* force a sea change on the city's nocturnal politics and policies, once more indicating the true power that Social combat can offer to those who master it.

What It Feels Like

Having the Edge feels like being *sharp*, sharp as a razor cutting the wings off of flies in flight—and being engaged in Social combat feels like you're trying to out-talk a shark. Being low on Nerve feels like you're a drain, not a fountain, like you've got a sucking hole inside of you that muddles the mind and fumbles the tongue.

It's important to consider what Social combat *feels* like—and Storytellers and players alike are encouraged to describe (remember: show, don't tell) how Social combat is affecting their characters turn-by-turn.

The Games We Play: Mental Combat

A vampire sits across from his foe, and moves his Bishop toward the King. He doesn't have to say it, but the word is clear nevertheless: "Checkmate."

Mental combat. It perhaps portrays a visual that isn't necessarily apt—this isn't some kind of psychic melee, some "fracas in the mind" where two monsters battle it out on some invisible plane of thought.

No, what this is about is a game of Intelligence and Wits—a battle for mental supremacy staged across a particular scenario, a scenario driven by Mental traits above all others.

So, the aforementioned example of a "chess game" is one where Mental combat would come into play. Now, certainly the chess game scenario is one that could easily be done in a single contested roll—two Mental dice-pools pitted against one another, and the winner is the winner at the end of the scene. Nothing wrong with that, and frankly, we assume that's the default approach because the last thing you want to do is bog down a game with extraneous dice rolls.

However, you might find times where a protracted series of rolls is useful—is each step of the game significant? Are you attempting to determine how long the chess game lasts? Do you want to see the ebb-and-flow of the game, move-by-move, examining each moment in time so that the characters can perhaps exchange witty banter or veiled threats? Then it might be a benefit to the story to see how this Mental combat unfolds rather than distilling it down to a barebones contested roll.

Other Examples

The chess game is only one example where Mental combat might be appropriate. Here, then, are a few others:

- A Gangrel stalks what he hopes will be a future thrall (or a future meal, he hasn't yet decided) through the dark forest. It's a game of cat-and-mouse, and it's more than just *who can run faster* or *who can hide*—because running and staying still are tantamount to losing the game. It's about smartly stalking prey, or wisely avoiding it—about second-guessing where one's enemy is coming from, and where he's going.
- Two Damned of the Ordo Dracul have divergent opinions on why it is that mythology's view of vampires and the weaknesses of such creatures differ so greatly from the reality—and so they take to an online forum to parade around their respective theories to try to earn Status within the covenant.
- A pair of vampires move through a crowd: one tries to move unseen, while the other tries to spot him. It's spy-versus-spy time, a battle of perceptions. The hider uses the crowd, and tries to out-think his adversary. The seeker tries to guess on the hider's habits, where he might go, how he might hide.
- A murderer leaves a terrible crime scene—blood everywhere, but clues, too. Those clues are left on purpose, meant to compose a secret message for the one who can decipher them. Later, the Mekhet Sheriff takes a stab at the crime scene—the dried blood on the walls gives him hunger pangs, but he's able to push past them and examine the clues, trying to decipher the puzzle left behind. (Note: this is an example where the Mental combat doesn't necessarily play out in real-time; below, you'll find a way to make this work as an abstraction, with the criminal rolling for "creating his puzzle" in the past, and the Sheriff rolling for "deciphering the puzzle" in the present—the rolls are made at the same time even though one character has technically already acted.)

Getting Started: Mental Advantages

Time to calculate your character's Mental Advantages. These are the traits that guide his deftness (or lack thereof) in Mental combat scenarios.

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Aptitude (Mental Initiative)

Intelligence + Wits + Resolve

This isn't a modifier; you never roll a die to add to this. Add up all the character's Mental Attributes, and this is the character's Aptitude. It determines the order of Mental combat events, just as Initiative does during a Physical confrontation—that being said, not every Mental combat scene will require one to know who goes first. Consider that, in a chess game, the turns are preordained; one cannot "get the jump" on the other.

Acumen (Mental Defense)

Intelligence or Wits (whichever is lower)

This serves as the character's Defense against incoming Mental attacks. This isn't exactly like a Physical Defense, obviously, where the character is literally blocking attacks and avoiding harm—rather, it's more an effort to reflexively represent the abstract actions of outwitting an opponent. It's not literal, not exactly. Let's go back to the chess game idea. Each character gets a move on the table, and this is that character's "attack"—but, each roll isn't necessarily equivalent to one move. And chess is more than just the character's single move. It's about anticipating not only the possibilities on the board, but also anticipating the *psychology* of one's opponent. In that anticipation, your character is trying to outwit her opponent's future moves and, in fact, outthink her opponent's entire psychology. That's the Acumen score. That's what it represents during each turn.

Gray Matter (Mental Health)

Intelligence + Resolve

This serves as the Health track that helps to determine how much progress one's opponent makes against your character. This is, in part, an abstraction, but it can lead to literal problems where the character finds it more and more difficult to think—as the opponent begins to clearly show his dominance, your character might begin to feel cornered, confused, frustrated (and this is can create penalties). Just like with Health, one begins to accumulate penalties at the last three Gray Matter boxes (-1, then -2, then -3). These penalties *only* apply to other Mental rolls, however. Your character's ability to think clearly becomes muddled, but it doesn't affect her chance to, say, jump over a fence or make a threatening gesture.

The Basics: Mental Combat Summary

Below you'll find the essential steps necessary to run a scene of Mental combat in **Vampire: The Requiem**.

Note that, from this point forward, we're going to use two example characters throughout in an effort to frame Mental combat in a meaningful and evocative way.

- The first character is K-Bar, a local Gangrel hood who's building up a small army of malcontents and shitheads—a real anarchic crew. But K-Bar's not like them; he's smart, and he sees these thugs as his pawns on the chess table that is the city.
- The second character is Casimir, the Prince's Seneschal. Casimir's a Mekhet, and serves as the perfect right-hand-man to a bloated, lazy Prince who couldn't give a fuck about what's going on outside his penthouse. That puts a lot of power in Casimir's hands, and he's got puppet strings connected to a whole host of neonates and ancillae.

Stage One: Determine Time Frame

Physical combat goes literally turn-by-turn. Three seconds pass, and punches fly, bullets punch holes in mortar, knives slide through the spaces between ribs. Mental combat doesn't need to work that way. A move in a chess game *can* take place in three seconds, but it can take minutes. Moreover, a chess game can have dozens of moves—do you really want to roll dozens of times?

What becomes necessary than is to redefine the nature of a "turn" in the context of Mental combat. It can be anything, though it should be a time frame that all parties (Storyteller and players) can agree upon.

The chess game might see each turn take a minute, or even five minutes. Thus, the roll made for each combatant during that turn isn't necessarily equivalent to "one move," but it instead equals a whole host of moves progressing the game. Alternately, the two Ordo Dracul vampires fighting out academic theories over a protected web forum might only post once per night, meaning that each turn is now equal to a full night—and this doesn't mean that each character is incapable of doing other things during that night. If the Storyteller decides that the character can perform other actions during the "turn," then it's all good. (Even the vampires in the chess game might be able to supplement their Mental combat "attacks" with Social barbs—this is another way in which Mental combat is different from both Physical and Social combat.)

The attempts to outthink and outwit one another will play out with Casimir and K-Bar moving both human and vampiric resources against one another. This isn't something that happens over the course of a three-second period. In fact, the Storyteller decides that the best way to play this out is over the course of weeks—so, each "turn" is equal to one week in the terms of this Mental combat.

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Stage Two: Determine Intent

It's entirely possible that the intent of each character in Mental combat is "to win." The two vampires playing chess, for instance, may simply want to win the game they're playing, and that's it.

However, Mental combat is often about trying to achieve some kind of *result* that goes beyond the mere mark of success—the Gangrel hunting his prey through the forest hopes to, well, catch his prey. The prey hopes to escape. That's the intent of each.

It might be helpful to put stakes—literal or abstract—on the table, too. The two vampires playing chess might play over a set of literal, spoken stakes. The winner might get to expand his domain into Chinatown, for instance. The loser might have to give up a favored thrall.

Abstract stakes might not be known to the characters (though it should always be known to the players). The two Ordo Dracul academics fighting over the Internet might unknowingly be putting up a dot in Covenant Status—the winner gains one, the loser forfeits one.

Whoever wins the combat wins their intent, provided it's reasonable. The Storyteller and players should address intent and stakes at the beginning of Mental combat.

K-Bar and Casimir don't realize it, but their players do—the one who outplays the other on the "battlefield" that is the city streets gets to gain a dot in City Status. The real bear, though, is that the one who gets outplayed loses *a dot in City Status. Uh-oh.*

Stage Three: Determine Aptitude

Compare the Aptitudes of each character involved in the scene. Highest goes first, then the next-highest, all the way to the lowest.

In many cases, it won't be necessary to determine order of action, however—in the chess game, of course, moves are made one after the next depending on who is allowed to go first. In such a case, skip this step.

Casimir's actually got his Mental Attributes as primary, and he's a bit older and more experienced than K-Bar. Casimir's total Mental Attributes tally to nine, while K-Bar's only tally to seven. Casimir makes his moves first during every turn of combat—he gets the jump on K-Bar every time. It might provide him the edge necessary to win.

Stage Four: Attack

The attack isn't necessarily on one's opponent—but it *is* an attack against the opponent's "game." A character

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outguesses and outwits his opponent's efforts—hoping to untangle his knot, so to speak.

An attack roll during Mental combat should look like this:

Mental Attribute + Appropriate Skill—target's Acumen +/—other modifiers

Let the player describe how she wants to make her attack—in a chess game, she might say, "I play defensively, reserving my big guns for the later-stage game." In the battle of *academia* online, she might say, "I suspect my opponent's going to take a stuffy, academic route, so I'll instead go for something that plays up the mystical angle, and I'll approach it with a defter touch—less facts, but more flourish." From there, the player and Storyteller should work together to come up with an appropriate roll.

Note that it isn't necessary to use a Mental Skill in the attack—the two Ordo Dracul agents arguing over the web forum might make either Wits + Occult rolls, *or* Intelligence + Expression rolls depending on the approach. The Gangrel hunting his prey might make an Intelligence + Survival roll, while the prey might attempt a Wits + Stealth roll. Both Physical and Social Skills can apply during Mental combat, though only Mental *Attributes* should be used.

A character's successes on the roll subtract from the Gray Matter of the opponent.

Casimir and K-Bar do not come from the same worlds, and so they do not share a common approach. Casimir is the consummate politician—he knows he needs a certain groundswell of support, and he knows how to make political threats and play the pawns against one another. His roll is an Intelligence + Politics roll, for six dice. K-Bar, on the other hand, is the king of the streets. He knows a baser level of "politics"—the push-and-pull of gang thugs, drug dealers, and other lawbreaking deviants. He thinks on his feet, moving players around, starting fights and inciting those on the lowly streets to rise up against their "slavers." His roll is a Wits + Streetwise roll, at five dice.

Here, though, the Storyteller decides that it's not entirely inappropriate to add each character's City Status to the rolls as a bonus. Casimir has four dots, while K-Bar only has two. That ups their dice pools: Casimir with ten total dice, and K-Bar with seven, but then it comes time to subtract out one another's Acumen. Casimir has an Acumen of three, and K-Bar has the same. So, it's now seven dice (Casimir) versus four (K-Bar).

Much to the players' surprise, Casimir's roll is a bust. He gets nothing, and his player notes the irony that sometimes having a large dice pool seems to mysteriously punish the player (probabilities, be damned). K-Bar, on the other hand, scores a reasonable three successes—and Casimir's Gray Matter is knocked down by three points.

Playing With Time

As noted above in the example regarding the crime scene, you don't necessarily need to have two characters engaged in Mental combat at the same time. You should probably keep the *rolls* happening at the same time, but it is possible that Mental combat plays out at different points in a timeline.

In the on-going example between Casimir and K-Bar, imagine if the character K-Bar actually put things in motion long before Casimir ever knew it—he seeded the streets with spies, he set a timeline of events that would unfold at a given moment (maybe even with *explosions*), he maybe even used Dominate to condition a few of Casimir's thralls.

To preserve a sense of driving narrative and suspense, however, you can still play this out like Mental combat. It unfolds just as it does here, step-by-step, but K-Bar's "actions" are actually actions that have already taken place—his player is rolling dice *now*, however.

K-Bar's player doesn't need to describe the actions he took at the time he took them. If K-Bar puts his pieces in place two weeks before, his player can just say, "K-Bar gets his ducks all in a row, and I'll describe what that means when it comes time to play out Social combat."

Stage Five: Repeat, Resolve

Continue the turns, just like with Physical combat, until one character's Gray Matter (Mental Health) track is entirely filled up. When that happens, that character has lost the Mental combat. The victor's intent is fulfilled, and if any stakes were on the table, they come to pass. Each turn equals whatever time frame you set forth in the first step—so, if each "turn" equals one night, and the Mental combat takes seven total "turns," that means it takes seven total nights. (Again, provided the Storyteller agrees, other actions can be taken outside of Mental combat, even if that means dropping out of Mental combat's flow for a time to roleplay a different scene.)

Casimir regains the advantage, but it's not enough—surprisingly, K-Bar manages to one-up Casimir in the end, after five turns of Social combat, Casmir's taken enough damage to fill up his Gray Matter pool. The two describe the Mental combat as it plays out—K-Bar knows how to position his territories and the people within his territories in ways that Casimir didn't expect. It puts a lot of pressure on Casimir, pressure that the poor Seneschal can't seem to redirect. In the end, K-Bar nets a win. Casimir's still Seneschal, and K-Bar's still who he is, too—but now, K-Bar has one added dot of City Status, and Casimir's lost a dot, and the Harpies let him know it.

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What Happens to Gray Matter?

Once one's Gray Matter is reduced to zero, does it stay reduced? Technically, yes—a reduced pool means that if the character engages in another Mental combat, he only has so much "mental energy" to go around. He'll suffer a kind of brain fatigue if he pushes himself too hard, too far. The character regains *one* point of Gray Matter per night but *not* when involved in a Mental combat.

However, unlike with Health or with Nerve (p. 129), it's very easy to "reset" one's Gray Matter—choosing not to regain one's Willpower point upon awakening (in other terms, spending that Willpower to achieve an effect) allows the character to erase all damage from the Gray Matter pool. It allows him to awake mentally refreshed.

Existing Mental Merits

How do the current Mental Merits affect Mental combat? Really, only two of them have significant bearing:

Eidetic Memory: The Storyteller may rule that, if the Mental combat is based on memorized information (perhaps like what the combatants were attempting to do in the Ordo Dracul occult-academic fight), then the +2 bonus is warranted. However, if memorization of information isn't particularly helpful, then this bonus should not apply.

Encyclopedic Knowledge: This Merit may come into play *during* Social combat, with the character rolling for the Merit's effects as a reflexive roll. This is only where appropriate, of course—if it's useful for the character to remember a fact about witchcraft or a tip about surviving in the woods, great. Success on the roll means the character can take a +2 bonus to the *next* roll made in Mental combat. A character can only utilize this Merit's benefits once during the span of this Mental combat instance.

New Mental Merits

Below are two Merits that apply to Mental combat, but can also apply to characters in games where Mental combat rules have not been adopted.

Shrewd (••)

Effect: The character knows a thing or two about a thing or two—he's got a cunning brain that works out tangled problems with critical thinking even when he doesn't really have the required information. The unSkilled penalty for the character's Mental Skill rolls is now -1 dice instead of -3 dice.

Mental Alchemist (••••)

Effect: To most people, an obstacle is an obstacle—a lead weight in the hand is a lead weight in the hand. Your character can turn lead into gold; something that blocks her thought processes isn't necessarily a stumbling block, but instead serves as a refinement of thought and thought process. Once per game session, your character can take a Mental roll (meaning a roll driven by either a Mental Attribute or a Mental Skill) and turn all penalties into bonuses for that one roll. This costs nothing to do.

Elegance in Simplicity

You'll find that the rules presented for Mental combat aren't quite as robust as what you'll find here for Social combat. We've a couple reasons for that.

First is one related to sheer practicality—we only have so much room. This book does not have infinite pages, as much as we'd like it to (though maybe the book is a vampire—maybe as it ages, it'll gain Book Potency points and magically grow new pages!). That necessitates a choice, which leads to…

Second, Social combat better presents the "predator-prey" dichotomy. Vampires are a combination of social creature and blood-hungry predator, and so Social combat can come charged with a subtext that goes far deeper than what's afforded by simple conversation. It should feel like you're getting in the tank with a lean, hungry shark. A vampire's bark may not be worse than his bite, but it's probably just as goddamn dangerous.

Thing is, Mental combat isn't quite as based in the predator-and-prey dynamic. Vampires can be mental (in more ways than one), but that's not their driving force. They are creatures of a nocturnal society, and so the lion's share of word count goes toward Mental combat, instead.

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Combat Compression: Simplicity in Violence

Two monsters circle each other on a roof, surrounded on all sides by cackling onlookers. The one has a fire ax, the other a set of exposed claws. Under the fingernail moon, they fight. The ax crunches down on a collarbone; claws swipe up and take a nose clean off the face. The air smells of fresh blood. Bones knit. Flesh mends. The ax whiffs through air, and claws find purchase in only the already-tattered coat of the opponent. Fangs bare. Monsters hiss. They move swiftly—*too* swiftly, in ways unnatural to the eye.

It's a cool scene, but here's the trick: even with the appropriately-simplified combat found in the Storytelling System, this might take a while to resolve. Oh, it won't be long in the *game* time, but at the table, it might take up far too much of the session.

Of course, adhering to combat as written allows for the troupe to detail and bear witness to all the little complexities found in combat: the burning of Vitae to heal wounds, the nicks and scratches, the violent give-and-take of what *should* be life-ending blows, and so forth.

Then again, maybe at this moment those complexities aren't that critical. Maybe this particular combat isn't that important in the grand scheme of things, *or*, maybe this combat is about something more than just the damage caused to the enemy's body.

Instead, distill the entire combat scene down to *one roll* for each combatant present. Yes, you're going to miss a lot of those nitty-gritty blow-by-blow details, but again, those may not be important in this particular scene.

The Basics

Combat is now a contested action. One roll on each side, and that's it.

First: Determine Intent

The intent of combat often goes unspoken, and because of this, it's too often, "I want to prevail," or, "I want to hurt him more than he hurts me." That intent is fine, but it's also not looking into the great potential of what combat can do. As noted under Social Combat earlier in the chapter (p. 127), the reality is, physical combat isn't nearly as dangerous to vampires as it is to everybody else. They can beat the bloody stool out of one another for hours without suffering enough damage to end their seemingly immortal existences.

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The reality is, vampires don't necessarily attack one another for damage. They may have other goals in mind, and it's very important to establish the *intent* of each combatant before this one-roll combat scene.

Why? *Because the winner of the combat is likely to achieve his intent.* (If the combatant's intent is purely to cause damage, fine, but then you might want to consider moving this back to the expected model of combat—the one-roll model written up here isn't going to be nearly as satisfying as tracking the blow-by-blow.)

Provided the intent is reasonable, then the winner of the scene (meaning, the winner of the contested roll) achieves the intent. The Storyteller is the final judge on what constitutes a reasonable intent. Your character might be trying to convey a message or a feeling. He might hope to achieve some physical effect or see a consequence play out as the result of the fight. He might hope to have a *social* result born of the physical combat. Some examples of reasonable intent might be:

- "I want to humiliate my opponent in front of everybody."
- "I want to engage in a duel and win his most beloved thrall as my prize."
- "I want merely to survive and to show her that I will always be indomitable."
- "I want to steal the keys off his belt."
- "I want to throw her out the window and away from this scene."
- "I want to escape, which involves me getting past my opponent."

It's important that players and Storytellers identify intent—even if the characters themselves don't know it, everybody must recognize the stakes so that when they're achieved it isn't a surprise. (And in some cases, the characters must be aware of them, too: in the case of the "duel" example noted above, that intent can't really be made manifest if the characters don't know they're actually *in* a duel where actual stakes are on the line.)

Unreasonable intent often centers around either impossible effects or specific points of damage. If "I want my enemy to meet his final death" is the intent, fine, but then that should be played out turn-by-turn, blow-by-blow. If "I want my enemy to yield and make me Prince" is the intent, that's likely too extreme a result for a single scene of combat. (Then again, if the combat scene is one where the player is controlling a politically-potent vampire and he's engaging in a duel with the Prince amidst a field of onlookers, maybe that intent *isn't* so far-fetched.)

Is it absolutely necessary to label the intent? No, but it's something that will give the combat context, framing it in a way that goes beyond the mere desire to do damage to one's opponent. Getting into a fight is so often so much more than the need to cause damage: the damage done is merely representing one's true desire. You want to beat down that guy at the bar who made an ugly pass at your girl? The damage is peripheral; the punishment is the true intent.

Building the Base Attack Pool

First, put together the character's basic attack pool for the scene. This is the normal attack roll (like the ones found on p. 154 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**): Strength + Brawl, Strength + Weaponry, Dexterity + Firearms, or Dexterity + Athletics.

Now, double it. A six-dice pool becomes a 12-dice pool, for instance.

That's your *base* attack pool.

Determine Vitae Spent

Note that this happens *before* resolution—meaning, before anybody actually rolls anything.

Each player should note how much Vitae he's going to spend for the combat.

He cannot spend more Vitae than is allowed; since you just figured out how long the combat is going to be, you know how much Vitae can go into the fight per participant. If the combat scene is only six turns, and the vampire's Blood Potency is fairly low (three dots or under), he can't spend more than one a turn—which means he can't spend more than six Vitae during this combat scene.

What's the purpose of spending Vitae?

- To augment Physical dice pools (as below).
- To activate Disciplines (as below).
- To heal wounds preemptively. A player may say, "I spend four Vitae to heal wounds," even though those wounds haven't happened yet. Once they occur, the player can determine how to heal them ("I spend one to heal two bashing, I spend the other three to heal three points of lethal"). What happens if the vampire overspends? That's the gamble; the Vitae remains lost. Why? Again, because this is an abstraction of combat; the assumption is that during the many turns of combat, lots of things are happening. Blows are exchanged. Damage is done, damage is avoided, damage is healed. The one-roll washes out the minutiae of combat, and this is meant to apply consequence as if such minutiae still *happened*, regardless of how well it was detailed.

Add Positive Modifiers

The vampire gains a number of bonus modifiers (*not* limited to +5) that should be added to the roll. These include:

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- Specialty bonuses. If the vampire has a Weaponry Specialty in axes, and he's using an axe to go at his opponent, then the +1 bonus is appropriate. This bonus is not doubled.
- Any weapon bonuses. This works as with normal combat -1(L) is +1, 5(B) is +5, and so forth. (It's possible that the equipment modifier is a penalty, which means you need to apply negative dice instead of a positive modifier, obviously.)
- Dots in any Fighting Style, provided it's appropriate. If the vampire has three dots in Fighting Style: Boxing, and is going at his opponent hand-to-hand, it's reasonable to add the +3 to the roll. If the vampire is wielding a rusted machete, then that's not really boxing, is it? Note that the individual maneuvers gained through the fighting style aren't applied—if you're looking for the turn-by-turn results and want to apply a body blow, then it's better not to compress the fight into a one-roll affair.
- Willpower spent on this roll confers its usual +3 dice.
- Vitae spent can confer its usual benefits—each Vitae spent adds +2 to a Physical pool, though it only adds it to the one roll. Vitae can also be spent to activate Resilience or Vigor with normal effect, as both of those Disciplines require one Vitae for the entire scene. The vampire may also spend a Vitae to activate Celerity, and that means Celerity is subtracted from the opponent's one roll. (Sure, it's true that augmenting Physical dice pools and activating Celerity are really meant to be "turn-by-turn" solutions, but remember that here we're attempting to abstractly mimic a combat scene with one roll per party involved. If you're uncomfortable with this benefit, feel free to up the Vitae cost—three Vitae spent, say, allows the +2 to the Physical for that "scene roll," and three Vitae spent allows Celerity to be subtracted from the attacker's pool for the "scene roll.")
- All-out attack is still possible, but note that this assumes the attacker is *always* using that during combat, and won't get to apply his Defense against the incoming attack roll.

Subtract Negative Modifiers

- Subtract the opponent's Defense from each attack roll. If the opponent has declared a dodge, that means the opponent does not roll, *but*, may double the Defense as normal for purposes of subtracting from the attack roll.
- Most of the modifiers found on p. 154 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** still apply.

Determine Length of Combat

How long does the combat last? The combat lasts for a number of turns equal to the highest *base* dice pool used by a participant in the fracas. That may seem like a lot—if one of the participants has the highest dice pool at 20 dice, then the combat will last 20 turns (despite there being only one roll per combatant). Then again, remember that one turn is only *three seconds* worth of time. A 20-turn combat scene is only a minute's worth of actual fighting.

Resolution: Intent and Consequence

Simply put, roll the dice. Compare results the way you would for any contested roll. In this case, successes done are considered to be damage, and *in addition*, the winner of the contest is the one whose intent plays out (provided the Storyteller deems it appropriate).

Here's the trick: for vampires, the roll gains the 8-Again quality. No, this doesn't apply to normal combat rolls, *just* to those rolls performed in service to this one-roll combat compression system. It's meant to represent that vampires can be particularly dangerous, and may have an added edge (one they don't have to pay for—though one could argue they paid for it long ago by dint of the Embrace).

Note that Initiative is never rolled; the only time Initiative matters is at this moment of resolution.

Initiative matters if:

- Two or more participants do enough damage to one another to end each other's lives (or in the case of vampires, push one another into torpor or final death). In that case, the one with the higher Initiative modifier is the "winner" and knocks the other into torpor or final death but is himself saved from that fate by *one* damage box in the Health track (meaning, the winner takes enough damage to *almost* kill him, but never fills in that final Health box).
- If the results of the combat are a tie, determine the winner by who has the highest Initiative modifier.

Describe It

And now, the fun part—you've calculated the one rolls, you've rolled them, and now what? Well, it's time to describe the combat. Remember, you're not stretching this out turn by turn—just a couple sentences of description to resolve the event. Does your character duck and weave, thrusting a blade into the soft meat of your opponent's side? Or does your character keep putting his face in the way of hammering blows, laughing and spitting blood as he suffers an unmerciful beat down? Obviously, you're describing the *result* of the dice rolls—if your character lost, then describe your part of the combat as it leads to your character's failure (which can be just as fun, if not more, than describing victory).

Example

Harding's done putting up with India's shit. He wants to make an example out of her and punish that wicked tongue

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of hers. His intent is to whip her ass and parade her around in front of a handful of onlookers to show them who's boss. Her intent is to make him look stupid, and only further damage his reputation.

The Storyteller allows this to be distilled down to a one-roll combat compression because really, the scene isn't about the damage done, it's about the delivery of intent through fighting.

India doesn't have a huge combat pool: she has a Strength of two, but a pretty nice Brawl score of three. That's five dice, and doubled, it means her base pool is 10 total.

Harding's a much meaner competitor in the ass-kicking contest—he's looking at a four Strength and a four Brawl, giving him a very solid eight dice. Doubled, that gives him a dice pool of 16 dice—a real whopper.

India decides to expend Vitae—one to activate her Celerity, in which she has three dots, and three to heal wounds. Harding is ballsy, and expends nothing, as he is loathe to give into any of his vampiric hungers if necessary.

When considering modifiers, neither is adding a weapon, so no modifier there. Harding does have two dots in Fighting Style: Boxing, which is apropos, so he gets +2. India gains no bonuses.

But, India has a Defense of three, which gains another three from the Celerity. Harding similarly has a three Defense. Harding's roll suffers—6 dice. India's suffers -3.

Harding's got the highest base dice pool -16—and so the combat lasts 16 rounds, or approximately 48 seconds.

Now, time to roll.

Harding's player has a final dice pool of 12 (16 + 2—6 = 12), and India's player has a final dice pool of seven (10 -3 = 7).

Harding's player rolls, and earns a below average result of three successes.

Fortune favors India, once again. She rolls her smaller pool, but the 8-Again quality grants her an unusual measure of success—six total successes, which is double what Harding got.

India's the winner. Harding takes six points of bashing damage, and India takes three… but, since she spent Vitae (overspent Vitae, as it turns out), she takes no damage at all.

India's player describes her attack as almost cruelly playful, the way a cat might antagonize a pit bull. It's dirty-fighting with lots of wicked maneuvers—feint left, kick to the nuts, a rake of painted nails across the face while her laughter echoes. Harding's player describes his effort as overconfident: Harding steps boldly into the fray thinking he's got this locked down, but every time one of his meaty fists takes a swing, she's already behind him, putting her sharp-heeled boot to his tailbone. In the end, Harding says he eats a handful of gravel for his effort, and the onlookers cheer on his defeat.

One-Roll Combat: Multiple Participants?

Two ways to handle having multiple participants in this one-roll combat scenario.

First? Don't. I know, that's not particularly fair, but this system is really meant to simulate something more like a "duel" rather than mass combat. Mass combat is often chaotic enough where it warrants the granularity of turn-by-turn action.

The second approach (er, the only approach) works like this: everybody rolls as discussed. Subtract the highest Defense from your opponents from your dice pool. Any successes gained can be divvied up amongst combatants as you see fit. The combatant with the highest total number of successes is the winner and still has his intent carried out however is best appropriate.

Down-and-Even-Dirtier Combat

Okay, maybe all that is too much work. Some situations in a game aren't critical to resolve, and are ideally something you want resolves fast and furious so it doesn't bog down a session or the story. The vampire is shaking down a mook, or knocking some dude's head through a scummy urinal, or booting a security guard down a flight of steps.

If the combat really isn't significant, and is little more than an obstacle on par with, say, climbing a fence or breaking down a door, you can distill it to a barebones roll. This is useful particularly when the vampire wants to achieve a specific effect, and again, is less useful when seeking to do straight-up damage. "Throw guy out window" is a viable goal, as is, "Shake him down for money" or even "Put the fear of God in him."

The player can call for such a roll if he feels it's appropriate; if the Storyteller is fine with the vampire overcoming this obstacle in a single roll, he should allow it to happen. A lot of it comes down to narrative weight—a vampire moving silently through the halls of a corporate office in an effort to stake and decapitate the bloated elder in the back office might have to run through a few security guards. It's appropriate to have the vampire dispatch those security guards swiftly, but it *wouldn't* be appropriate to have the vampire dispatch the bloated elder with a single roll. That's a game-changer (or a game-ender, depending on how it goes), and shouldn't be hand-waved. The goal of this action is to have a quick dramatic moment while pushing forward to get to the "good stuff."

Action: Instant and contested

Dice Pool: Combat roll (Dexterity + Firearms, Strength + Brawl, Strength + Weaponry, or Strength + Athletics) versus a combat roll from the opponent

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(same spread as above) *or* an attempted escape roll (likely Dexterity + Athletics or Strength + Athletics). Do not account for Defense on either roll; again, this is down-and-dirty, more about effect than damage.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: If the vampire dramatically fails, then the opponent really gets one up on her: likely, whatever she was hoping to do to him happens to her. If she was aiming to throw the target out the window, *she* gets tossed out, instead.

Failure: The opponent wins the contest. The opponent gets to do damage to the vampire equal to total successes rolled above the vampire's, or instead gets to flee (depending on the roll).

Success: The vampire wins the contest. The vampire does damage to the opponent equal to total successes rolled above the opponent, and achieves the desired effect (provided the Storyteller deems it possible and appropriate). Additional damage may apply from environmental effects—for instance, tossing a security guard out a third floor window will certainly do additional damage to the guard's body when it smacks against asphalt.

Exceptional Success: As above, and the vampire gains a point of Willpower from the heady rush of potency.

Tilts: Conditions in Combat

Combat is brutal. Even when it's *elegant*, it's brutal—a rapier point punching through the apple-skin of an esophagus, a delicate claw cleaving flesh in twain, a hard tongue thrusting into a socket and popping the eye like a grape.

Sometimes, though, running a combat can be tricky—tracking the effects of such brutality can get lost at the table, especially when no hard and firm rules exist for every such consequence incurred during the fray.

This system—called "Tilts"—helps to define a number of consequences that might occur before, during, and after combat. These conditions are applied to one or more of the combatants in the scene and have specific effects upon those combatants.

Below, you'll find two types of Tilt: *environmental* and *personal*. Environmental Tilts affect everybody in that scene. A personal Tilt affects only the individual to which the Tilt is applied.

Each Tilt below is described in detail. Each details whether or not it's environmental or personal, and with each you'll also see a general description, a description of the mechanical effect on the character or the scene, and a way to preemptively "end" the condition. Further, each also has attached one or several ways that the Tilt might be caused during combat.

Note that these Tilts *generally* apply to all types of characters in a combat—humans, vampires, Storyteller characters, player characters. A few (Full-Blooded) apply only to vampires, however. These are noted, when appropriate.

Some of these Tilts expand upon or replace existing rules found in both the **World of Darkness Rulebook** and **Vampire: The Requiem**. You needn't necessarily replace these, but the goal of Tilts is to apply a unified system of "cause-and-effect" during combat. Combat is often unpredictable, and should remain as such, but some measure of predictability in result is desirable (if two players stab out the eyes of two respective enemies, one enemy should not have penalties or bonuses different than the other; both are blind, and thus, both suffer from the Blinded Tilt, below).

The Tilts below are *generally* for combat, meant to simulate easy rules for use during combat (which can sometimes become complex). That being said, they aren't restricted to use during combat, and the Storyteller may rule that they have effect well beyond a fight scene.

Why "Tilt?"

We chose the name "Tilt" because it has a number of cool implications.

First, these conditions can tilt the combat in a character's favor, or out of a character's favor.

Second, in a game of pinball, one can literally move the "table" to adjust the ball, but moving too far one way or another engages the tilt mechanism, and the player generally loses a turn.

Third, and final, combat itself is often kind of tilted. It's chaotic and mad, driven at odd angles, and the world may literally seem to have tilted on its axis.

Blinded

Personal

Description: One or both of the character's eyes is damaged or removed.

Effect: The character suffers a -3 to all attack rolls if one eye is damaged, and -5 if both eyes are damaged. The character also loses half of his Defense (round up) if one eye is damaged, and all of his Defense if both eyes have suffered damage. This supplants the "Fighting Blind" rules found on p. 166 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.

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Causing the Tilt

The primary way that one causes this Tilt is by doing damage directly to the eye as through a targeted ("called") shot, which is performed at a -5 penalty. However, one can achieve a temporary version of this effect by performing some manner of "dirty trick" in combat, such as throwing sand or kicking dirt into the victim's face, and this is an attack move made with a Dexterity + Athletics roll, with a -3 penalty instead of -5 (though the opponent's Defense still applies). The Blinded Tilt, when caused in this way, lasts *only* for the victim's next attack.

Ending the Tilt: An eye is only considered ruined if actual damage is done to the eye, whether from bashing, lethal or aggravated damage (above). When one suffers damage that results in ocular damage, the player should mark the resultant damage from that attack in some way (usually by drawing a small 'x' or dot *below* the Health box). The condition can only be ended when all the damage that caused this Tilt has healed (with vampires, healing this is easier).

Blizzard

Environmental

Description: Heavy snow carpets the ground and keeps on falling, a barrage of white whirling from the sky above.

Effect: "Whiteout" conditions make it very difficult to see—and the further something is, the harder it is to perceive. Even items on the character's person are hard to see (-1 penalty). For every ten yards beyond the character, visual-based Perception rolls suffer an additional -1 penalty (cumulative). In addition, moving through snow is difficult. For every four inches of snow on the ground, appropriate Physical rolls (combat, Athletics, etc.) suffer -1 penalty (so, 12 inches of snow on the ground means a penalty of -3 dice). The "Blizzard" Tilt might go hand-in-hand with the Extreme Cold or Ice Tilts, as well (both found below).

Causing the Tilt

For the most part, weather happens (meaning, the Storyteller causes it). Certainly some supernatural powers might be able to cause a blizzard, however.

Ending the Tilt: Characters don't really have a way to "end" the Tilt, though they can end its effects by escaping the weather or by simply waiting for it to stop. A character can ameliorate both Perception and Physical rolls through proper equipment (goggles, snow boots) that might add anywhere from a +1 to a +3 to the roll, depending on quality. If the Tilt is somehow caused by an enemy with supernatural abilities, then it's possible that disrupting the enemy's attempt (or outright destroying him) could end the effect.

Deafened

Personal

Description: The character's ears are shot—maybe they're suffused with a terrible sound (the pealing of infernal bells, an intense *tinnitus* ringing, the white noise susurrus of blood rushing), or it's possible that one is quite literally deaf and no sound reaches the ear drum.

Effect: The character is deaf in one or both ears. One ear causes a -3 penalty to all hearing-based Perception rolls. Both ears is more complicated—the character's player only gets a chance die on hearing-based Perception rolls, and in addition, suffers a -2 penalty to combat-related rolls (one doesn't realize how critical *hearing* is to combat until they have it taken away from them—it's disorienting, and one loses a whole host of aural cues).

Causing the Tilt

Particularly loud noises during combat, such as a gun fired within 10 feet of the character, may cause temporary hearing loss or tinnitus. Also, a targeted attack on the ear (made at -4) could cause this Tilt. Note that any vampire or creature with "heightened senses" active are all the more susceptible to ear-wrenching sounds, as noted below.

Ending the Tilt: If the character suffers this Tilt due to a loud noise, then the condition persists as if it effects both ears for a number of turns equal to ten minus the character's Stamina + Resolve dice pool (with a minimum one turn's worth of effect).

Drugged

Personal

Description: The character suffers a narcotic effect—the term "Tilt" is doubly appropriate, given the character's addled Perceptions. The world shifts, dips, collapses and retracts.

Effect: You can use the list of drugs found on p. 177 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** to determine effect—however, if you want to go with a generic "drugged" effect, then the effect can be the same across the board for whatever drug is causing this Tilt. In that case, the character suffers a -2 to both Defense and Speed, a -3 to all attack rolls, and a -3 to all Perception rolls. While the way the Tilt *feels* might be different, a meth-user (tweaked out) and a Quaalude-junkie (zoned out) will have similar penalties—the meth-user can't concentrate long enough to make his attacks count like he should, and the sedated character finds that he's moving out-of-sync with the rest of the world.

Causing the Tilt

Generally, one must have imbibed, inhaled, injected or ingested drugs to suffer this Tilt—but that doesn't mean

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the character has to have *chosen* to do so. One can successfully dose another character with a Dexterity + Weaponry attack (suffering -1 for improvised penalty, and further penalties if the drug must be administered via a targeted attack such as through the mouth or in a needle that goes specifically in the arm). Note that a vampire must generally ingest already-drugged blood to suffer from this Tilt. The player should note how many points of drugged Vitae are taken into the vampire's body.

Ending the Tilt: A vampire can only end this effect by purging the drugged blood (in game terms, each point of affected Vitae must be spent in some fashion, and thus disgorged from the undead body). A mortal will suffer the effects until the body breaks down the chemical in the body. If you're using the drugs from the **World of Darkness Rulebook** (p. 177), they come part and parcel with info explaining how long each "high" lasts. If you're instead using a more generic "drugged" sensation, then assume that the effect lasts for a number of hours equal to ten minus the character's Stamina + Resolve dice pool (minimum of one hour). Medical help (flushing the system, pumping one's stomach) will halve this time.

Earthquake

Environmental

Description: A tremor shakes the ground. Everything shudders and shifts. Stability is lost as the very earth below one's feet becomes disloyal.

Effect: Earthquakes don't last very long, but while the quake is actually occurring, all Dexterity-based dice pools suffer between -1 and -5 penalty dice depending on the severity of the quake. Damage is also likely, unless a character gets to a safe location. Assume a character takes between one and three points of bashing damage per turn of the quake's duration. Players can make a reflexive Stamina + Athletics roll to avoid that damage (ducking falling objects, for instance, or shouldering the brunt of collapsing drywall).

Causing the Tilt

Earthquakes aren't usually caused by characters, unless they have some tremendous supernatural power (and one can easily envision an elder with inhuman Strength causing a minor earthquake as he awakens from a millennium-long torpor).

Ending the Tilt: Earthquakes rarely last for more than a minute (20 turns), so outlasting them is the best course of action.

Enraptured / Terrified

Personal

Description: The character is lost in waves of rapture, pleasure, fear or imagined misery. The victim may stand, swaying gently back and forth, lost to the waves of pleasure; or she might sit huddled in the corner, weeping softly, plagued by an undertow of anxieties.

Effect: The victim may not take any actions during combat until this Tilt is resolved. The victim still gets to apply Defense against incoming attacks, and once an attack is performed successfully upon the victim (meaning, the hit connects), she is jostled free from her state of rapture or terror.

Causing the Tilt

The Storyteller can allow one of two ways to handle this Tilt. In the first way, Entrancement (Majesty •••) is necessary to invoke the "Enraptured" Tilt, and Dread (Nightmare •••) is necessary to invoke the "Terrified" Tilt. In the second way, a vampire simply possessing either Majesty or Nightmare can cause Enraptured or Terrified, respectively—doing so is an action taken outside of the standard Discipline powers. The character rolls Presence + Empathy + [Majesty or Nightmare] versus the target's Composure + Blood Potency, and it costs a point of Vitae. Success indicates that the victim suffers from the Tilt as described above appropriate to the Discipline used (Enraptured for Majesty, Terrified for Nightmare).

Ending the Tilt: The Tilt will naturally end after one scene. However, the victim may spend a Willpower point to temporarily end it for a turn and take an action, or can spend a Willpower *dot* to end it for the scene (and doing this means that the character cannot suffer from this Tilt for the next 24 hours). Also, attacking the character will end the Tilt, as well.

Extreme Cold

Environmental or Personal

Description: The character suffering under this Tilt feels frozen and frost-bitten as he trudges through snow, or is blasted by bone-cutting cold winds, or is perhaps just stuck in a freezer. Any time the temperature gets below zero degrees Celsius (32 degrees Fahrenheit) can represent extreme cold. However, this Tilt can also be personal, affecting only one character: hypothermia, for instance, is a medical condition that could create this Tilt in a single individual. A vampire's Vitae turns frigid and sluggish in her veins when exposed for too long to extreme cold.

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Effect: The character does not heal bashing damage in this state because the extreme temperature replaces any healed bashing damage with its own bashing damage (a small cut might turn to frostbite, for instance). In addition, for every hour that the character suffers under this Tilt continuously, he accumulates a -1 penalty to all rolls and traits. Once he reaches a maximum of -5 dice, every hour *after* that he begins to suffer one point of lethal damage.

Causing the Tilt

Simply being in a frozen environment (tundra, a walk-in freezer, etc.) will incur this Tilt, but suffering hypothermia can cause this, as well. It is possible to create conditions that will put a victim into suffering under this Tilt—locking the victim in a walk-in freezer, for instance, or shoving him under the frigid waters of a frozen pond until he develops hypothermia.

Ending the Tilt: The best way to escape this Tilt is to find a source of warmth—characters warmly bundled will end this Tilt, for instance.

Extreme Heat

Environmental or Personal

Description: The character is stumbling through a desert, the sun beating down on him (though, uhh, he can't be a vampire), or maybe he's working his way through the tunnels surrounding an old—and very active—boiler room, where the walls hiss steam and the heat is enervating. Alternately, this Tilt can be personal, where a character is suffering under the yoke of a debilitating fever. Note that extreme heat is generally considered anything above 104 degrees Fahrenheit (40 degrees Celsius); this includes the temperature of the fever. A vampire suffering under the duress of extreme heat may feel that the living Vitae in her dead veins moves more slowly, like molasses; her limbs do not animate properly.

Effect: The character does not heal bashing damage in this state because the extreme temperature replaces any healed bashing damage with its own bashing damage (bruises might turn to sunburn, for instance). In addition, for every hour that the character suffers under this Tilt continuously, he accumulates a -1 penalty to all rolls and traits. Once he reaches a maximum of -5 dice, every hour *after* that he begins to suffer one point of lethal damage. Note that, if actual fire or sunlight is present, that's going to create a whole host of other complications for a vampire.

Causing the Tilt

For the most part, the Tilt is caused by purely environmental factors—a desert is hot, a sauna is hot, a forge is hot. Even a fever is usually the result of suffering under an infection (though it's possible that some supernatural creatures can create a fever in a victim). One can certainly create this condition, to a degree: a vampire that binds a victim to a chair next to a belching boiler has forced this Tilt upon that individual.

Ending the Tilt: Escaping the extreme heat is key—finding shade will do it, as will escaping the source of the heat (such as leaving the boiler room or foundry floor).

Flooded

Environmental

Description: Some substance—water, sewage, mud, gore—is high enough to impede the character's progress in this scene.

Effect: Assume a character suffers a -2 Physical penalty per foot of water (or mud, or other substance) through which he must slog. If the water goes up over his head, he must swim (Dexterity + Athletics), suffering a -5 penalty if the floodwaters are rapid (flash floods), or he must attempt to hold his breath ("Holding Breath," p. 49, **World of Darkness Rulebook**) if he cannot stay above the rising waters.

Causing the Tilt

Generally, this Tilt is the result of extenuating circumstances—heavy rain, swift snowmelt, a broken water heater. But that last one is significant because it's something a character could *cause*. A character could break a water heater, or, with enough explosives, even detonate a small dam.

Ending the Tilt: Getting to high ground and leaving the floodwaters is the best way to mitigate or countermand this Tilt. Certainly a long-term solution involves draining the floodwaters, but the nature of performing that task will be unique to each situation.

Frenzied

Personal

Description: The character is driven to the edge of madness, hunger, and anguish. The Beast within has taken over.

Effect: The vampire suffers from an anger, fear, or hunger frenzy. In any case, the systems for frenzy (pp. 178-179, "Systems for Frenzy, **Vampire: The Requiem**) are still applicable, but the Storyteller may also incur the following effect: the vampire may not apply Defense to incoming attacks, *but* may instead channel the effort she'd usually put into Defense toward attacks. Whatever her Defense is, it can apply as a dice bonus to attack rolls made by the frenzying vampire.

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Causing the Tilt

The causes and ways to resist frenzy can be found on pp. 178-179 of **Vampire: The Requiem**. Here, though, we'll offer a variation on this, should the Storyteller choose, one that might work specifically well during combat or even during the course of an entire evening. Any time the character suffers some kind of frenzy trigger (insults, damage, the smell of fresh blood), the character collects a "frenzy token" (feel free to use a d10 to mark this, or even just pennies). Once the character accumulates a number of frenzy tokens equal to that character's Resolve + Composure score, she *immediately* enters frenzy—no roll to resist. (Think of this as a thermometer with the mercury rising.) Before frenzy, the player may spend a Willpower point to remove one frenzy token *at the moment it is gained* (but not after). Upon sleeping and waking the next evening, the character resets all frenzy tokens to zero.

Note that this generally only applies to vampires, but it's not impossible that a human could suffer under a type of frenzy (perhaps thought of as "berserker rage"). If a human witnesses his beloved daughter murdered in front of him, it might be reasonable to suggest that the individual enters a state of blind, raging bloodlust. Also, with Storyteller approval, it might be possible for a vampire to use Leashing the Beast (Animalism •••••) to inspire a frenzy in a human target.

Ending the Tilt: The Frenzied Tilt is likely to last until the end of the scene. However, a vampire's player may spend a Willpower point to "quiet" the frenzy for one turn, or spend a full Willpower dot to end the frenzy entirely.

Full-Blooded

Environmental

Description: The vampire is fat with blood, satisfied, given over to a heady rush.

Effect: A vampire with a full pool of Vitae is considered to be under the sway of this Tilt. In combat, this translates to a +1 to all combat rolls, +1 to Defense, and a +1 to any Resolve + Composure rolls made to resist frenzy or supernatural compulsion.

Causing the Tilt

This one is easy enough: the vampire must drink his fill, literally. If his entire Vitae pool is filled with blood, then he gains this Tilt.

Ending the Tilt: Also, sadly, easy enough—the way to end the Tilt is to spend even a single point of Vitae. Once this is done, the vampire loses that heady rush, that "full-as-a-tick" sensation.

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Heavy Rain

Environmental

Description: The rain comes down in sheets, knives, driving hammers. It falls not so much in a hissing whisper, but a clattering clamor, like ball bearings on a tin roof. The only thing a character can *see* is the rain coming down in gray curtains.

Effect: Heavy rains (approaching tropical storm levels or worse) cause a Perception penalty of -3 dice, both to visual and aural (the rain is hard to see through, but it's also loud as hell). Note, too, that if such rains carry on for an hour or more, the Flooded Tilt is likely to occur as a result.

Causing the Tilt

Unless the character has some manner of supernatural weather control or access to cloud-seeding planes, it's likely that the rain is caused by the standard weather cycles.

Ending the Tilt: Getting out of the rain is the only way to really mitigate this Tilt—rain ends on its own, unless it's somehow the result of a sodden apocalypse.

Heavy Winds

Environmental

Description: Winds buffet the character. It howls. It feels *physical*, like getting jostled around by a linebacker.

Effect: First, heavy winds (of a tropical storm level or worse) are loud—so, characters caught in heavy winds suffer -3 to all aural Perception rolls. Second, rate the severity of the winds from one to five—one being around a tropical storm levels (about 40 MPH), three being hurricane levels (around 80 MPH), and five being tornado levels (150+ MPH). This number is equal to the Physical penalty suffered while moving in those winds (and this includes any Drive rolls made in the buffeting winds). Note that characters may suffer damage from being in such wind—objects whip around, anything from bits of stone and straw to cows and car doors. The character may suffer bashing damage in a turn equal to the numerical severity of the winds, but a Dexterity + Athletics roll may be allowed to "dodge" flying debris.

Causing the Tilt

Without supernatural weather-manipulation abilities, heavy winds are just sometimes a hard fact of life—sirocs in the desert, typhoons in the South Pacific, tornadoes in the Midwest, wind shears everywhere.

Ending the Tilt: Escaping the wind is critical to ending this—even getting into an automobile will end the Tilt temporarily.

Hungry

Personal

Description: The vampire knows he needs blood—he's starting to feel empty, and the Beast within is beginning to whine for its meal.

Effect: Once a vampire finds himself hungry, he's already losing control. Not much, not yet, but the hunger gnaws at him, and knocks him off his focus. In combat, the vampire gains +1 to all combat rolls (because his body is so desperate for a *taste*) while his Defense is down -1 (because he's got blinders on and is focusing more on the *kill and feed* than anything else). In addition, the vampire gains +1 to Social rolls (to the vampire, Social rolls are part of being predatory) and -1 to Mental rolls (as it becomes harder to push through the haze of hunger pervading all thought).

Causing the Tilt

Generally, being hungry is a side effect of… well, not drinking enough blood. "Hungry" is defined for the vampire as having between two and four points of Vitae in her system (though an alternate rule might suggest that one calculate between 20 and 40% of the vampire's total fill—so, an elder with 30 possible Vitae in her system will begin to feel hungry at around 12 points of Vitae).

One might be able to cause this condition in another vampire by consuming that vampire's blood or by cutting him and bleeding him out.

Humans generally don't feel the measure of hunger that a vampire feels, and so these rules don't apply to mortal beings. Mortals are not possessed of an inner Beast that pushes them to greater levels of desperation and deviation.

Ending the Tilt: The vampire must consume Vitae to end this, though spending a Willpower point will actually temper the hungers and undo this Tilt for the remainder of the scene.

Ice

Environmental

Description: The ground is frozen—traction is for shit, and a foot won't find solid purchase unless the tread's got the kind of cleats that would crush a man's skull.

Effect: First, this effect can technically apply to any surface that's been made slick. That means icy, yes, but it could also be the result of an industrial accident where some kind of oil or machine lubricant coats the floor, or it could even be the result of linoleum freshly-cleaned with soap, water, or floor wax. On ice or another slippery surface, Speed is halved, and Physical rolls suffer a -2 penalty.

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A character can still attempt to move at his full Speed, but doing so ups the penalty to -4, instead. Driving on ice is all the more difficult—Acceleration is halved, and the character's Drive roll is penalized by -5 dice.

Causing the Tilt

Ice is the natural result of water freezing on the ground—oh, we probably don't need to tell you that, do we? It would be possible for one to create icy or slippery conditions, however. A Dexterity + Crafts roll could be used to pour water on a road to make it freeze, to spill an industrial lubricant (perhaps by busting open a machine), or to mix a batch of cleaning chemicals to make a slippery solvent.

Ending the Tilt: One needs to go somewhere that it's not icy or slippery, or try to thaw the ice or clean up whatever it is that's making the ground slippery.

Immobilized

Personal

Description: The character is held fast by a grappling opponent, by a pair of zip-ties binding wrists and ankles, or even by a hard pine box (meaning, "coffin") locked with a padlock.

Effect: The character has no Defense and can take no other combat-related action beyond trying to escape (Storytellers will need to use common sense here; if the player believes his character is in position to deliver a nose-busting head-butt even though his arms and legs are shackled, let him make the attempt but at a significant penalty).

Causing the Tilt

One causes this Tilt by immobilizing the victim. A grappling maneuver is likely first necessary, at which point the character may immobilize simply by holding the target firm, or instead by applying handcuffs, duct tape, zip ties, or by throwing the victim in a tight space (such as a coffin or car trunk).

Ending the Tilt: Other books have their own systems for escaping a grapple, handcuffs, duct tape, or zip ties, but you can instead choose to use this universal system—the character must make a Strength + Athletics roll penalized by either the grappler's own Strength or by the item's Durability. (The Storyteller may also rule that additional penalties are necessary—zip ties, for instance, are particularly restrictive, especially when binding both hands *and* feet. This might warrant an additional penalty of -3 dice.) If grappled, a single success breaks the hold. If bound by an object, it becomes an extended roll where the target number of successes equals the item's Structure; reaching that target number means the character either breaks the item binding her, or slips out of it. However, each roll a character makes in attempting to end this Tilt confers one point of bashing damage to her.

Insane

Personal

Description: The character is suffering an imbalance, a psychotic break, a panic attack. Her mind races. Her pulse beats. Nothing feels stable. Everything feels off-kilter.

Effect: Nobody said the insane are totally ineffective in combat—madness does not preclude the ability to bash someone's head in with a fencepost (and, in fact, can actually make the act all the easier… at least, ethically). The character gains a +1 to all combat rolls, *but* suffers from two debilitating effects due to her tangled mind. First, she always goes dead last in Initiative unless she's up against another character suffering the Insane Tilt, at which point it's necessary to roll to compare Initiative scores to see who goes last and who goes *next* to last. Second, the character may not expend Willpower during combat—her own internal sense of conviction is damaged and thus, unreachable. Finally, Social rolls are made at -3 dice.

Causing the Tilt

Not every character who possesses a derangement suffers the Insane Tilt during combat—rather, this Tilt must be aggravated, inspired to "flare up." Any character with a derangement may enter the Insane Tilt if pushed to it—instead of manifesting the specific symptoms associated with one's derangement, the Storyteller may instead call for a Resolve + Composure roll to resist a general anxiety, a potent mental malady that simply destabilizes the character. Or, if the character witnesses something truly atrocious and mind-breakingly bad (a woman witnesses her husband eating the brains of a co-worker, a vampire enters the Prince's chambers and sees him wading knee-deep across puddles of gore, a father watches his daughter shoot herself in the head at the whispered command of a monster in the corner), the Storyteller may rule that the Insane Tilt is simply unavoidable and manifests.

However, a character could attempt to *cause* this Tilt in a victim, too. A vampire might orchestrate events that lead to a character's psychotic break, for instance. Or she might knowingly present stimuli that could awaken a character's pre-existing mental conditions (if the vampire knows that her victim is on meds to quiet his bipolar disorder or to "shut out the voices," who's to say that she couldn't stir that condition to the fore?).

Alternately, Disciplines might work to temporarily inspire this condition in a victim, too—using Dominate, Majesty or Nightmare on an already destabilized character (such as one already suffering under the yoke of one or more

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derangements) might "tilt" that character over the edge. In particular, use of Shatter the Mind (Nightmare ••••) might have the additional result of causing this Tilt in a victim during the scene in which it was invoked against her.

Ending the Tilt: Generally, this Tilt doesn't last more than one scene. A character can attempt to end this by making an extended Resolve + Composure roll that requires she do nothing else but sit, meditate, and try to shut out the craziness. The target number for this roll is ten minus the character's own permanent Willpower score. Each roll is equivalent to one turn's worth of time.

Knocked Down

Personal

Description: Something hits the character's chest like a cannonball, or cracks into the backs of her legs—she tumbles to the ground.

Effect: The character is knocked off her feet—she loses her action this turn if she has not acted (but if she *has*, she loses no action). A character on the ground is considered prone (see "Going Prone," pp. 164-165, **World of Darkness Rulebook**). The character can still apply Defense against incoming attacks, and may attempt to make an attack from the ground (kicking, biting, tripping, firing a weapon, whatever), but at a -2 penalty.

Causing the Tilt

Some weapons have a "knockdown" effect listed for them—and, even if they don't, a melee weapon with 3(B), 3(L) or higher, or a firearm with 4(L) or higher can have the chance to cause knockdown. A character making an attack with such a weapon can declare that the goal of the attack is a knockdown (which leads to the Knocked Down Tilt). In doing so, the attacker *halves* damage done (round up), but achieves this effect on a successful attack. Note that this is different from what's found in the core Storytelling System combat mechanics.

Ending the Tilt: A character can actually attempt to *not* suffer the knockdown effect by rolling a reflexive Dexterity + Athletics roll, penalized by the damage modifier of the weapon used (so, for example, the roll would suffer a -4 penalty if a shotgun was causing the knockdown). If the Knocked Down Tilt still occurs, however, the character must spend one action getting up. Getting up ends the effects of this Tilt.

Poisoned

Personal

Description: A toxin runs through the victim's veins—he can feel it within, tearing him apart with tiny claws, running like acid through his gut and heart and head.

Effect: The goal here is to simplify a "poisoned" condition without worrying about Toxicity levels during combat (as a Storyteller and player often have enough numbers and effects popping up turn-by-turn). Here, the poison is either considered "moderate" or "grave"—a moderate poison causes one point of bashing damage per turn of combat, and grave causes one point of lethal damage per turn of combat. If the Storyteller knows the type of poison and its Toxicity level, he can resume the standard rule for handling poisons and toxins (found on pp. 180-181 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, though be aware that errata exists for this system at White Wolf's website) when combat is complete.

Causing the Tilt

While some characters suffer this Tilt accidentally (imbibes a toxin without realizing it, walks into a house where the air is toxic from a gas leak), most end up poisoned at the hand of an enemy. A vampire could poison a human being by secretly poisoning his food (Stealth versus the target's Perception), or could attempt to do so in combat (stabbing one with a syringe filled with, say, drain cleaner or snake venom would be the result of a successful "touch" attack, with only one success necessary to inject the toxin). Rumors exist, as well, of vampires whose fangs secrete poison as the result of puckered sacs that lurk unseen near the soft palate.

However, for a vampire to suffer from a poison, the blood that the vampire consumes must first be tainted by the toxin. A vampire hoping to do harm to another of the Damned in this way might "poison his drink," which is another way of saying, "poison a human victim from which the target will probably feed." It's even possible that a vampire might dose himself with a toxin and then allow an enemy to feed from her.

Ending the Tilt: If a vampire feeds from tainted blood, mark those points of toxic Vitae somehow (a tiny dot or an 'x' below the slashed box should do it—written in pencil, of course). When the vampire purges that Vitae, the poison has run its course. Humans don't have that same course of action available, obviously, but a mortal victim can succeed on a Stamina + Resolve roll each turn to counteract the damage for that turn only. This roll is reflexive, *but*—if the character chooses to act that turn (meaning, rolls an instant or extended action), the Stamina + Resolve roll is penalized by -3 dice because the character is pushing his body to do too much.

Sick

Personal

Description: One's stomach churns. The world spins. Sweat beads the brow, and chills run up the arms—a fever is tearing through the body.

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Effect: The character is sickened in some way. First, determine the severity of the sickness, with the severity being either "moderate" or "grave." A moderate sickness, which might be anything from a cold to asthma to the flu, causes a -1 penalty to all actions during combat, and that penalty goes up by one every two turns (the first two turns, the character suffers a -1 penalty, the next two turns she has a -2 penalty, and so on, until a maximum of -5 dice). A "grave" illness is far more serious: pneumonia, a deadly infection, some kind of aggressive cancer. Suffering under a grave sickness causes the same penalties as a moderate one, but the character also suffers one point of bashing damage per turn of combat. Note that this system is meant to simulate that it's difficult for an ill person to act during combat—the body isn't meant to handle that kind of doubled-up stress, hence penalties and/or damage.

Causing the Tilt

Making someone sick isn't easy—certainly if one has a vial of smallpox or some other infectious disease, it might be possible. Also, if a character is herself infected with, say, a sexually-transmitted disease, she might be able to infect another through the… ahem, proper course of action. Vampires in particular can cause widespread sickness; over time, the Damned run the risk of accumulating all manner of infectious diseases on their lips, fangs, in the Vitae they drink, and so forth. Feeding from a club girl with a blood parasite and then feeding from some emo-kid an hour later will potentially transfer the parasite to the new victim (Storytellers looking for a quick down-and-dirty system for this might consider rolling a chance die. Rolling a '1' means the infection takes, while rolling anything else means the victim stays healthy. That's a 10% chance of infection—if the Storyteller thinks it's higher than that, instead roll the die as a normal action—an '8,' '9,' or '10,' means that the disease takes.)

Note that it's particularly difficult for a vampire to actually get sick. For the most part, disease doesn't transfer to the vampire the way that, say, drugs or poisons might. Certainly some diseases (particularly those that are diseases of the blood) could affect the vampire, but generally, consuming diseased blood just means that the vampire has the chance of spreading that disease like a plague flea.

A Discipline could cause this Tilt—the Cachexy Discipline (p. 249, **Vampire: The Requiem**) is a Discipline that causes sickness within a victim, and might result in this Tilt. Further, use of the Dominate Discipline could convince a victim that she's not feeling well, thus invoking the serious version of this Tilt (though not likely the grave version).

Ending the Tilt: Generally, this Tilt is only used during combat; if the character is suffering under a disease, then outside of combat you're free to apply the "Disease" systems found on p. 176 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. If the character suffers under a sickness and enters combat, she might find herself saddled with this Tilt (though, note that after a combat scene has completed, the accumulated penalties should fade at a rate of one penalty die per turn). A character can spend a Willpower point to gain +3 dice, as usual, during combat, but that's not unique to this Tilt.

Starving

Personal

Description: The world is blood. The vampire can see every pulse-beat in every neck, can smell old blood on dry asphalt, can *taste* the warm rush of fluid down the back of his throat. These sensations provide a mad prelude that drive the creature forward.

Effect: The vampire is driven by the need to consume blood. Provided that he hasn't dipped into a frenzied state (which may cause the Frenzied Tilt, found on p. 154), then the vampire's actions are restrained enough, but still framed by the desperate hunger for blood. The vampire gains +3 to all combat rolls, but -3 to her Defense (like with the Hungry Tilt, the vampire is focused only on the *kill*, not the *defend*). In addition, the vampire gains +3 to Social rolls, and -3 to Mental rolls.

Causing the Tilt

For a vampire to be considered starving, the vampire has to have zero or one point of Vitae in her system—though, the Storyteller might rule that starvation happens when the vampire is at or below 10% of her potential pool of Vitae. So, if an elder has a blood pool of 30 potential Vitae, she would be considered starving at three points of Vitae, not one or less.

See the "Hungry" Tilt, p. 156, for more information.

Ending the Tilt: See the "Hungry" Tilt, p. 156, for more information.

Stunned

Personal

Description: The character is dazed. Maybe her vision blurs. Maybe her hearing is lost beneath a sharp, high-pitched tone.

Effect: A character suffering under the Stunned Tilt loses her next action.

Causing the Tilt

Generally, a character can be stunned by any attack that does damage equal to or in excess of the character's Size.

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However, some weapons may have a "stun" special ability wherein damage done equal to or in excess of the victim's *Stamina* causes this Tilt (this is slightly different from the rules found on p. 167 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**).

The Storyteller may rule that other effects cause this Tilt, however—a successful called shot to the head while using a blunt instrument, or a character caught in the Blast Area of an explosion (p. 178, **World of Darkness Rulebook**), might be cause to issue the Stunned Tilt.

Finally, a vampire who procures an exceptional success on a Majesty or Nightmare roll may find that those affected by the Discipline suffer the Stunned Tilt.

Ending the Tilt: The Tilt only lasts for a single turn, unless the Storyteller declares differently. That said, a character can end the Tilt reflexively during her turn by spending a Willpower point, which allows her to push through the pain and act. However, doing so is still not easy, and she suffers -3 dice to whatever action she takes that turn.

Running a Montage

Time passes. For vampires, this is true in a way that can be both rewarding and troubling—for some amongst the Damned, time may crawl, sluggish as a worm, or it may fly by with the swiftness of an arrow. An elder may blink and find himself dead for another year, the world having passed him by yet again, his mouth wet with blood he barely remembers drinking.

In game, this can feel hard to simulate—every session can feel distilled down to minutiae. Sometimes, that minutiae is important, yes, but other times it feels like it's just a matter of filling the spaces simply because those spaces are empty. The minutiae should never drag down a session. The solution?

The montage. It's a film staple, a compression of the narrative that allows the characters and plot to unfold swiftly over a short period of time (for the audience, at least). Calendar pages flip off the wall. The protagonist practices boxing against a slab of meat. The leaves on the trees turn blood-red. The moon ascends swiftly in the sky, forming its lunar arc. The protagonist fights with his lover, but we cannot hear the words. A vampire feeds. The sun rises. The sun sets. Events pass in whatever time dilation the narrative demands; information is conveyed swiftly and cleanly, because in a story we don't witness every minute as it happens (which is how a two-hour movie can comprise a week's worth of time, or even a whole century).

The question is, how does one run a montage in **Vampire: The Requiem**?

Step One: Determine Time Frame

This is almost two small steps in one. First, determine if the game is subject to an ultimate time limit for the montage overall—so, in other words, if it's May 1st, and the coterie has a major meeting with the Prince on May 22nd, then the montage cannot possibly last beyond that, because that meeting is a "tentpole moment" that must be played out at the table.

Second, figure out how long each "turn" of the montage will be. This is a set time—each turn will push the montage forward by that increment. *Any* increment of time is fine, provided it's what suits the narrative. Ten minutes? Sure. An hour? A day? A year? A decade? We're talking about vampires, after all, and while the world may change, the vampire might possibly stay exactly the same over the course of a century. If you begin a game in 1900 and want to push it forward to 2009, a series of montages may help bridge a series of gaps between tentpole moments.

Tentpole Moments?

Very simply, a tentpole moment is any event that you *know* you'll need to roleplay. Time dilation won't work to convey the potency of that scene—whether it's a roof-top gunfight with a nemesis, a trial in front of Elysium, a delicate negotiation with a trio of Harpies, a tentpole moment is something that cannot be bypassed or hand-waved. It's possible that the players are aware of an impending tentpole moment—if they set up the meeting with Harpies or know the date of the trial, they and the characters are aware of what's coming. Alternately, it's possible that only the Storyteller knows that a tentpole moment is coming, and may have to make a few mysterious insistences ("You only have three weeks until... well, you'll see") to enforce any appropriate montage limitations.

Oh, and they're called "tentpole" because they're necessary to keep the tent—meaning, the story, the narrative, the game—standing.

Step Two: Turn by Turn

Each turn, go around the table and ask the player what her character is doing during this time. Encourage them to use one or two sentences, and no more. "I'm weeping tears of blood and tearing up old photos from my life as a human" is acceptable, as is, "I'm at the Hyboria Club, laughing around mouthfuls of blood sucked from some drunk girl's pale thigh."

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The sentence doesn't describe *everything* that happens in that given time frame. It's not meant to. In part, it's a summation. It can serve as a general "theme" for your character's actions during that time. A single sentence can't sum up what your Damned character does all night, all year, or all decade, but given the often staid and static nature of vampire existence, it's appropriate to hang that entire time frame on the single image of the weeping girl or the lustful feeder (or whatever you choose).

(Note, too, that a "turn" equals whatever increment you all decided upon.)

Roll Required

It's possible that an event in the montage is an obstacle that the Storyteller feels should only be resolved with a roll on the part of the player. That's fine—the player can make a single roll during the time.

For the most part, such rolls should all be instant rolls; though, if the increment of time is short enough (say, 10 minutes), and the extended roll is long enough (the roll represents 10 or more minutes of time), the extended roll can be made a part of the montage. (A vampire examining a crime scene might include as his part of each montage turn a sentence describing his search of the scene—"I'm sitting on the edge of the tub, staring into the cooling puddle of blood" one turn, and the next, "I'm rifling through old papers, when I spot a bloody fingerprint atop one of them."

However, if the time increment is long enough, an extended roll will need to be compressed down to an instant. A vampire clambering up a cliff face won't need to roll for every ten feet, for instance—one Strength + Athletics climbing roll (with bonuses and penalties thrown in where appropriate) should handle the entire obstacle.

It's okay, too, if the roll is contested—the down-and-even-dirtier-combat section above (p. 147) describes a quick and easy way to distill combat down to a single roll. Feeding might be a commonly-expressed contested roll during a montage, and is actually a good place to "play out" feeding—this way, it's not limited only to a dice roll, and demands a sentence or two's worth of interaction between the player and Storyteller. And yet, by limiting it to the montage model, it doesn't bog down the narrative with needless complication.

Provided it's not a significant narrative experience, a contested roll between two of the players' characters is fine, too—a chess game, for instance, or a simple argument.

Discipline Use

Discipline use is absolutely doable within the span of a montage; many Disciplines work as instant rolls, and can be used without much of a change. Those that don't will have to be modified to suit a single roll (and, if use of the Discipline requires more than a few sentences of explanation or resolution, then it might be necessary to drop out of the montage mode). The new rules for manifesting Disciplines ("Dead Echoes," p. 162) may add some new options to this, if used.

Telling a Story

It's not critical, but montages usually do more than convey a simple sequence of events—this isn't just a game, after all, it's a Storytelling game. The goal is therefore to try to tell a story, to ascribe some manner of narrative to a sequence of events. It's not merely about the passing of time—perhaps it's about a vampire accumulating assets and allies before beginning a covert war against a social nemesis, or about a slow spiral into blood addiction.

Storyteller Involvement

The Storyteller is involved in a montage only as much as is necessary, which ideally isn't much at all. Turns in which a character confronts an obstacle certainly demands some input from the Storyteller, and it's also possible that the Storyteller will contribute one of his own montage ideas per turn. Perhaps he describes a scene glimpsed in the city, or a moment in the unlife of a prominent vampire (or the mayor, or one of the character's thralls). Montages are an interesting place for the Storyteller to chip away at the fourth wall *just a little bit*.

Step Three: End It

Montages end. While you could conceivably run an entire game session or story in "montage mode" (and that is perhaps an interesting challenge—go!), for the most part it's about compressing time and narrative the way one might reduce a sauce down to from a watery slurry to a thick, syrupy potency.

That means it's important to know when to *end* the montage. It's possible that the montage will go the distance and end at the natural point decided upon in step one—you have a set time frame, and the montage goes to the culmination of that time frame.

However, it's possible, even likely, that the montage must end before that. The Storyteller may decide that something the characters are doing has changed the plot in an interesting way, and demands a shift in the story. That shift might necessitate dropping out of montage mode and back to the regular "minutiae" of playing.

A player can also be the deciding factor. A montage doesn't exist to steamroll over player intent for his character, and if the player requires a more protracted scene to handle the drama and conflict, then the player can

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call for an end to the montage. Players shouldn't abuse this, of course; if one player doesn't like montage mode, but the rest all find it engaging, then some semblance of balance must be struck. The dissenting player can't just end the montage turn after turn because he wants to micromanage his character's own story. Find a balance at the table that suits everybody. Vampires might not be particularly good at compromise, but the *players* of those vampires better be.

Downtime

Every game has its downtime. With **Vampire: The Requiem**, this can be all the more true, because the Damned are singular creatures with a capacity for immortality. Time crawls, and time flies, telescoping and collapsing with equal cruel measure. Vampires aren't universally actors; they needn't be dynamic 100% of the time, because they can put plans in motion, and then wait. Hence, downtime. It happens in every game, but in **Vampire**, it seems to happen all the more frequently.

Usually, downtime is handled without any particular pomp and circumstance—a discussion around the table of what different characters are doing over the course of a few days, a few weeks, even a year. If rolls are necessary, they're handled, but not with a great deal of description. A few sentences of "show, don't tell" covers it nicely.

No system really protects this; it's a bit slapdash. It doesn't have to be, though. In fact, take a look at that, and then take a look back over the description for how to run a montage. It's not dissimilar, but the montage method is simply a bit more strictly laid out, isn't it?

So, one option you have is to always run downtime in your **Vampire: The Requiem** game as a montage. Sometimes, you focus in on one or several scenes where the minutiae is necessary, where the drama and conflict must be seen up close and in a protracted way, and then you pull back out and once more enter the montage mode. Time passes. Plans unfold. Desires bloom. Hatreds sour. The montage allows for narrative flexibility with a cinematic edge while still having something of a process to follow.

Dead Echoes: Manifesting Disciplines

A vampire's Disciplines seem like a straightforward hierarchy of monstrous powers: *I can control bats; I can become a bat; I can hide from plain sight; I can become your lover; I can become your greatest fear*; and so forth. That's how they are, because that's how they're written: each ability leads to another ability.

And yet, metaphorically, Disciplines can serve as something deeper. They're not just abilities a vampire learns, but are instead predilections bound to the Blood, supernatural expressions ineluctably married to the creature's own hoary lineage. The Damned don't learn Animalism the way a human learns typing, or gardening; he doesn't attend classes and practice, practice, practice. He literally awakens a part of his monstrous heritage that lies slumbering in his Blood. He stirs a part of himself that was once hidden, a part that finds sympathy forged between the Beast within and all those little Beasts without.

The way that Disciplines are presented suggests that they're something the vampire can access when necessary in the same way that one might use a cell phone or a laptop—just another weapon in an arsenal. But, if we approach Disciplines as something that exists within the Blood, then it might be something that has *resonant effects:* lingering echoes that are outside the vampire's control.

Note that, for the most part, this makes Disciplines far more powerful than they already are (much in the way that Disciplines can amp up Social combat, found on p. 127). As with any of the new systems found in this chapter, if you're hoping to use this in your game (whether you're player or Storyteller), it should be something you discuss with the troupe at large so that everybody is on the same page.

Discipline Skills

Disciplines highlight those mythic and horrific vampire powers found in legend and literature: turning into a wolf, becoming mist, swaying minds with hypnotism, etc. But, Disciplines are also tightly categorized: Obfuscate is about hiding. Dominate is about social control. Protean is about change. Auspex is about perception.

If we assume that Disciplines have a resonant effect beyond a vampire's control, it stands to follow that a vampire possessing a certain Discipline might find that it infects and improves on anything he does within that Discipline's purview. Having Obfuscate, then—even without directly accessing its powers—might help one hide more easily, for instance.

Okay, then: let's marry Disciplines with Skills. A little bit of overlap is likely. Moreover, the blood sorceries and rituals of the covenants do not count toward this.

Animalism: Animal Ken and Survival

Auspex: Investigate and Empathy

Celerity: Athletics and Larceny

Dominate: Persuasion and Subterfuge

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Majesty: Expression and Socialize
Nightmare: Intimidation and Empathy
Obfuscate: Occult and Stealth
Protean: Subterfuge and Survival
Resilience: Athletics and Intimidation
Vigor: Brawl and Weaponry

Now, the question becomes: what effect does this assignation of Skill-to-Discipline actually have? You have a number of options—the troupe should choose one that best suits the tenor of the game.

Option One: Big Bloody Bonuses

The vampire gains a bonus to both Skills related to each Discipline he possesses. If the vampire has three dots in Obfuscate, then he has a persistent +3 bonus to all Occult and Stealth rolls, both of which are Skills that have to do with hiding (or things that are "hidden"). This doesn't count toward Discipline rolls, because that's largely redundant. A vampire that wants to shadow a blood doll, though, would find this bonus helpful.

These bonuses don't obviate the unSkilled penalty—the character may have a supernatural understanding on how to blend with the shadows thanks to Obfuscate, but without actual training in Stealth (meaning, he possesses no dots in it), the unSkilled penalty will apply no matter how many dots in Obfuscate he has.

Option Two: Pick A Skill

Instead of assuming that the vampire gains a bonus on *both* Skills associated with each, the vampire's player must choose one of the associated Skills at the time of purchasing that first Discipline dot. So, when buying the first dot in Auspex, the player must choose *either* Investigation or Empathy as the "enhanced" Skill. This can't be changed once chosen. So, the player chooses Empathy, and from then on out, that vampire gains a perpetual bonus to Empathy equal to that vampire's dots in Auspex.

Option Three: Bonus is Minimal

Each Discipline provides only a +1 bonus to the Skill(s) in question, no matter how many dots are actually possessed in each. This reduces the bonuses significantly down to what is effectively the same bonus that a Specialty would provide (except these bonuses are more common and functional).

Option Four: Make It Cost

Whether you go with option one or option two, giving the bonuses a Vitae cost helps to lessen the power ratio a little bit—so, to *gain* the bonus for a scene, the player must spend a point of the vampire's Vitae.

The Vigor Problem

Vigor already provides a bonus when active, so isn't this redundant?

Yes and no. Vigor provides an Attribute bonus only to Strength. So, lifting a gate *or* punching a Harpy in the mouth gain the Vigor bonus. The Vigor Skills (Brawl, Weaponry) are only useful toward those Skill rolls.

So, what happens when a vampire gains the Skill bonuses and then activates Vigor for the scene, and then has to succeed on, say, Strength + Brawl? The default option is that both Attribute and Skill gain Vigor dots as bonus, so if the vampire possesses two dots in Vigor, then the total bonus for that roll is +4 dice.

Violent Aura: Combat Disciplines

Disciplines can also have a radiant effect on combat. Makes sense, considering that vampires are ultimately predators; each Discipline is really just a manifestation of that vampire's predatory nature. Given that each of a vampire's powers is in some way geared toward making that creature a more effective hunter or a more potent monster, then it stands to figure that each Discipline might affect how the vampire fights.

Again, these are "always on." Don't use them if you don't want to amp up the powers of the vampires in your game—they confer significant advantages to the monsters that wield them. Note that, if you're using these with the "Discipline Skills" option above, you'll find some redundancy.

Alternate Option: Combat Disciplines As Merits

If you like the idea that certain Disciplines offer certain "bonuses" for vampires in combat *but* don't want to just allow them to be free, here's an idea: make them Merits, instead.

Each ends up being a three-dot (•••) Merit with a prerequisite of possessing at least one dot in the Discipline to get the effect. That way, it costs the player 12 experience points to get this resonant combat effect from his Discipline. The Merit must be bought once for each Discipline effect (so, if the character gains the combat benefit from Auspex, Celerity and Nightmare, that requires the player to buy the Merit three times).

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Auspex

Harding doesn't hear the branch snap—it's nothing so simple. It's the way his ear notices how the sounds coming from behind him are suddenly dampened. It's the way his arm hairs stand at attention from a faint misdirection of air. It's in the way his very skin feels the footsteps resonating on asphalt. He's about to be jumped, and he knows it.

Auspex provides the vampire with an ability to detect surprises more easily. Any Wits + Composure roll made to detect an ambush features a bonus equal to the vampire's dots in Auspex.

Animalism

The Beast within is in every part of him—crawling through his veins, chewing on his last nerves, tugging on every tendon to make them taut. Cal can't stop it, so instead, he just goes with it. Every part of him is aware, the way a cat is aware, the way an owl is aware. It gives him an edge. Just enough to know what's coming for him.

Those with any dots in Animalism can automatically choose the *higher* of Wits or Dexterity for purposes of determining Defense. That's a benefit that animals possess, and it's now a benefit that the vampire possesses.

Celerity

India's body is a bow—pulled tight, ready to release. The claws come in, but she's not there; they cut only air, air filled with India's echoing laughter.

Those with dots in Celerity may choose to use their Celerity score as normal Defense instead of Wits or Dexterity. This is *in addition* to Celerity's normal effects; when spending Vitae to activate Celerity, it allows the vampire to further subtract dice from attacks *and* potentially dodge incoming bullets, to boot.

Dominate

Lochlan thinks of himself as a politician, not a fighter. His weapons are words. His threat is what he'll do to your haven, your domain, your childer. With but a glance, you'll give him everything. You'll cut yourself. You'll laugh as you do it. But even this is an advantage in combat. His power is undeniable, and some part of you always wants wait and see what he'll do…

Add your character's dots in Dominate to your Initiative score. She is a dominant force, and the Discipline's radiant effect helps to confirm that, even in combat.

Majesty

"Let's not do this," Jack says, holding up his hands. "We can, I am sure, discuss this like men. Fair men. Yes? Sit with me. Consider my words. Calm your teeth."

A vampire with this Discipline may choose to stop combat for a number of turns equal to dots possessed in Majesty. It requires no expenditure of Vitae and no roll. It can only be used once per scene.

Nightmare

This is what Mydra thinks: "I am gnashing teeth. I am worms under skin. I am long claws in your eyes, and crawling snake in your heart. You are food, and I am hungry." It echoes from her eyes, her mouth, her pores. She is monster. All understand this.

Any caught in combat with a vampire possessing this Discipline find their Initiative scores hampered by a number equal to the dots the vampire possesses in Nightmare. If both vampires possess the Discipline, both suffer the loss to Initiative equal to the other's score. If more than one vampire possesses it (and some do not), the highest Nightmare score is subtracted; the effect isn't cumulative.

Obfuscate

She stands directly behind her prey, her nose almost touching the nape of his neck. He doesn't notice. He's looking at his bus pass, scrutinizing it; she doesn't know why, and frankly, she doesn't care. She reaches around the front of him, her hands ready to rip his chin back so her teeth can take a bite of that sweet apple. He doesn't notice. They never do.

The vampire may add her dots in Obfuscate to any dice pools used when making a surprise attack (see "Surprise," pp. 151-152, **World of Darkness Rulebook**).

Protean

Reyes knows the first order of business is always the thirst: he is thirsty, and so he must drink. And the first order of business demands the first tool in the toolbox: his fangs, which help to quench his thirst. They rend and tear. His tongue licks at a canine. He laughs.

The vampire may make a bite attack without first grappling; in addition, the bite's damage is lethal. A successful bite indicates that the vampire may begin to consume blood where appropriate.

Resilience

The knife comes down hard against her side, and she doesn't feel a thing. Her flesh turns the blade aside. She invites another, and another, and another, until finally the cat is done playing with the mouse. Veronica reaches out and pushes her thumbs into the man's eyes until they pop like grapes. The knife clatters to the asphalt.

The vampire with Resilience forever has flesh that serves him as armor: halve the vampire's dots in Resilience (round up), and this is a persistent armor against bash-

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ing and lethal attacks (1/1, 2/2, 3/3, etc.). It doesn't stop aggravated damage, and any attack with armor piercing ignores this armor.

Vigor

His fists piston left and right, missing his target—the bitch keeps jumping around like a fucking monkey, and it's pissing him off. He's not the best fighter, but when he hits, he hits. And, suddenly, he hits. *His fist connects with her chin, and he* feels *her jawbone crack in half. Ding. Winner winner, chicken dinner.*

Halve the vampire's dots in Vigor (round up). These dots now equal *automatic* damage done to any victim *successfully* hit by the character's close combat attack (using Strength + Brawl or Strength + Weaponry). This doesn't help the vampire hit the target—he doesn't gain any bonuses to attack. But if he successfully hits, then the number becomes automatic damage. If Vince's has three dots in Vigor, then any time he successfully hits with a close combat attack, he does an automatic two points of damage (type of damage determined by the type of attack).

Atrocity in Requiem

Wash and wash, but the blood won't come off.

You stink of it, and you know others can smell it too. You stand too close to the mortals, and they edge away without realizing why. Other monsters know you on sight, and their lips peel back with a tiger smile. The Beast smells it too, and shakes her cage, and screams in the darkness so you can hardly think anymore. You ache to unburden yourself, to find some absolution, but what you've done would horrify any confessor.

Atrocity is an alternative core mechanic for handling the Humanity of vampires (and it pairs with the Hell Is Other People system on p. 169 if you so choose). Where the core rules create a sense of the Gothic melodrama, with a tragic and inevitable decline into depravity and madness, Atrocity is less concerned with tracking this decline, and more with creating immediate consequences for a vampire's actions. Atrocity uses sin, depravity and horror to jump-start new scenes, and to color a vampire's Requiem with the red of the blood he's shed.

Humans can become spiritually calloused, inured to horror if exposed to enough of it, or guilty of enough of it. So too with vampires, though the process is different. When a vampire stops being revolted by the horrors of her existence, the Beast consumes her. That disgust, terror, and anguish is the cage the Beast is locked inside, and if it weakens the Beast can never really be locked away again.

To this end, the horrors a vampire perpetuates add to a steadily increasing pool of dice called Atrocity Dice which represent a dissonant internal conflict, and her inability to reconcile what she's done with who she desperately wants to believe herself to be.

Atrocity Dice

A frenzied murder, vicious beating, ruining a marriage out of spite, or a blowtorch in your hand and an enemy's ghoul tied to a chair with wire, covered in weeping burns. Atrocity offends the humanity you cling to, mocks your presumptions and your pretenses. Having it makes you feel on edge, foul tempered, just wrong. The more you have, the worse this feeling of gets, and the more you'll inadvertently act upon it. Worse, the more you have, the stronger the Beast becomes.

You can gain as many as three Atrocity dice in a single scene, depending on how horribly you act. The Storyteller and your fellow players judge your actions, and based on these questions, determine whether you get Atrocity for it. Questions of judgment might include:

Did your actions hurt someone else?

If yes, then proceed to the next questions. This is the real key—causing pain and misery in others. Being miserable and even hurting yourself rarely gives you Atrocity unless its especially heinous or imaginative (and usually then, there's something else at work). Likewise, hurting others to defend yourself or others in the heat of the moment usually doesn't rise to the level of Atrocity, unless you take it further than self defense. For example, after wounding an attacker and causing him to fall down, you walk up and shoot him in the face. That's Atrocity. Feeding is also a possible source of Atrocity, but one vampires quickly grow somewhat accustomed to if they wish to survive. So long as their victims are left alive, and suffer no permanent injury most vampires find a way to justify this to themselves. Feeding on willing victims is the easiest way to do this, and keeping a victim ignorant of what's really happening also helps.

If I walk up to a man, and without any obvious provocation, shoot him, then the answer to this question is "Yes."

Is the harm grievous?

Stealing a car would rarely qualify as Atrocity. Stealing the car from a man who wanted to drive his ailing father to the emergency room would likely qualify. It is easier to assess harm when it's physical and delivered immediately in the scene. Beating back an attacker isn't horrific, but growing claws and ripping him to shreds as he tries to flee is. Taking an unwilling and aware victim for their

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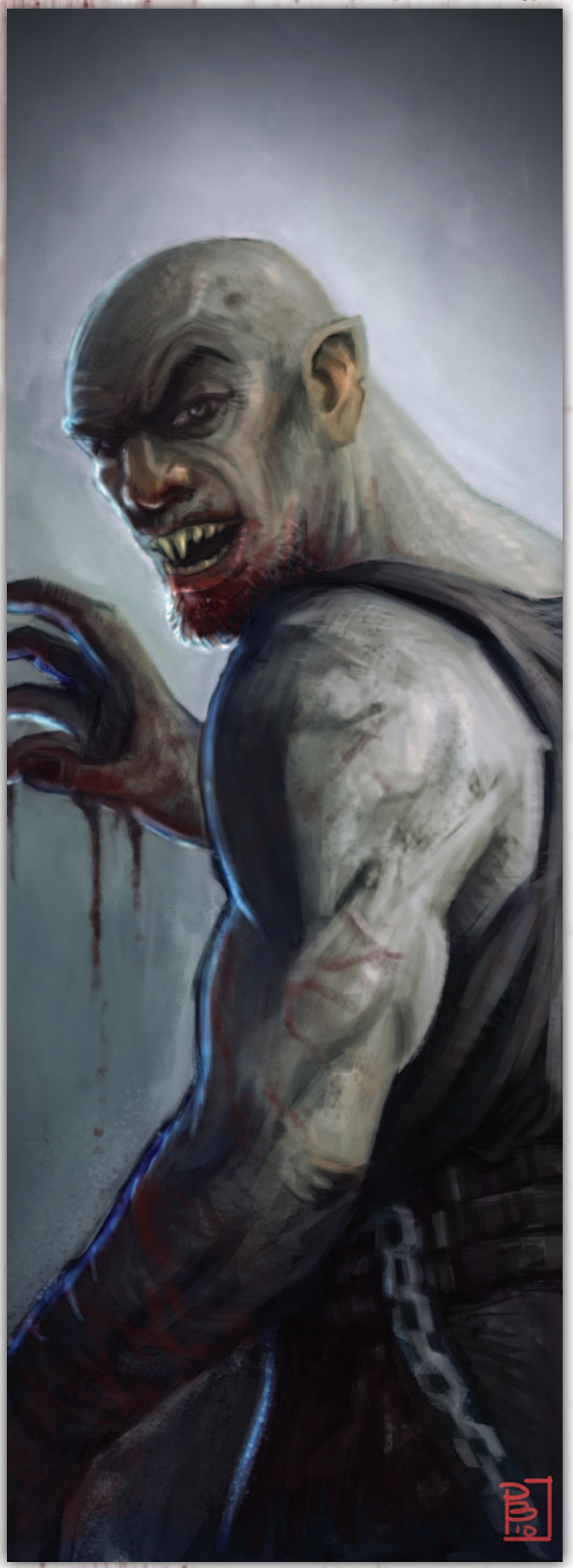

blood certainly qualifies, because few things could be more violating and horrific, especially when the struggling victim succumbs to the kiss, and begins to enjoy it. Leaving someone permanently reduced by the harm you do is also often an Atrocity—maiming a victim, destroying a treasured relationship out of spite, ruining them financially, spoiling a promising career and blackening a reputation. These might all qualify.

If the bullet leaves him quickly bleeding to death from a severed aorta, then the answer to this question is "Yes."

Do you hurt more than one person?

Beyond a certain point, inflicting misery becomes a pure statistic, divorced from the realities of human suffering, but on a personal level there's certainly a difference in hurting one person, and hurting many. Causing the breakup of a family, or worse, murdering one. Destroying a company, and leaving all the employees suddenly jobless. Running another car off the road, and then watching as driver and passengers all burn to death. There must be some kind of immediacy to this. In the company example, you would not gain Atrocity dice for shutting down the company unless you encountered the employees whose livelihood you ruined, and got to see what you'd done. How would this happen, you ask? That's what the Storyteller is there for.

If he falls backwards into the arms of his wife, and his blood sprays across the face of his horrified children, then the answer is "Yes."

Did you like it?

This one is fairly simple. Did you feel powerful and terrible? Did it give you a savage satisfaction? This one is mostly for you to answer (er, in the guide of the character). Will you own how you felt about it the bad things you did, or were you driven by necessity to do something you hated?

If killing him felt good, if seeing the faces of his family twist around screams brought a thrill of power, then the answer is "Yes."

The Butcher's Bill

Each "Yes" answer on the last three of these questions means you gain an Atrocity die at the close of the scene. Added cool points if you work this into a quick closing narration—the drip of blood from your fingers, your laughter at a destroyed enemy, the quiet weeping of the man with no more fingers who told you exactly what you wanted to hear.

Three Atrocity dice for this cruel murder. You could have found another way to settle your dispute or seek recompense from this man, but you didn't. You could have done it quietly, at his office, or one dark night in the

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street and spared his family this horror, but you didn't. You could have had the decency to feel conflicted about it, disgusted with yourself even as you pulled the trigger, but you didn't.

You put a hot slug through his gut, and watched him die. You smiled as his children froze in terror, as his wife tried to stop the blood which just would not stop. You did it, and you liked doing it, and you left a man dead and a family broken, his wife and children scared for life.

But this isn't necessarily the end of it. Here is one more question you can ask yourself:

Can I Justify it?

Did they have it coming? Was it for national security? Can you dehumanize them in your mind, making the killings less hideous in your memory? Say how you justify your character's actions out loud to the other players and Storyteller, and spend one Willpower point for each Atrocity die you're justifying, and you don't have to take it (provided nobody disagrees). You only get this one shot at denial—if you take the Atrocity die, you're stuck with it until you find another way to get rid of it.

And why did you do it? And why did you do it this way? Well, you killed him just like he killed you. But hell, you were more merciful than he was, because at least you let his kids live. Before coming here to do this thing, you visited their grave, and even though you knew your wife would be as horrified by this violence as your victim's, and your kids just as terrified as his, you remind yourself that they don't have the chance to feel those things, because they're dead.

Fuck that guy.

Fuck his family.

Spending two Willpower means you only take one Atrocity die for this heinous crime.

Permanent Atrocity Dice

If you get 10 Atrocity Dice, then in a massive frenzied catharsis scene these collapse and become a single *permanent* Atrocity die you can *never* be rid of. Ever! No, really.

A part of you has been calloused and scared to the point where it's completely dead, and a gap forms from the rot in your soul. Through this rent, the Beast peeks, gnawing at the ragged edges forever. Even if you play safe, do charity work, only feed on the willing, and do no lasting harm to anyone, this awful thing colors everything you do, think, and say and you'll never be free of it.

"Wait," you say. "My character was a killer before being Embraced. He's got a two-figure body count in Brazil before he even came to the US. He's a cold hard motherfucker, who won't blink about pulling the trigger!"

Alright, fine—occasionally a sociopath makes an interesting character, and so if everyone at the table is cool with it, this optional Merit can be purchased at character generation or with experience to represent becoming inured to certain kinds of Atrocity:

New Merit: Calloused Soul (• to •••••)

Effect : Each dot of Calloused Soul you possess reduces the Atrocity dice you would acquire for a given scene by one for certain kinds of actions. For example, torture, murder, rape, feeding, character assassination, betrayal, or inflicting economic ruin. Choose one type.

Drawback: Take your Calloused Soul levels as penalty dice for all social rolls which don't involve deliberate manipulation, intimidation or threat.

Horrifying Yourself

Carrying around Atrocity means you're edgier all the time, shorter tempered, and just a little *off*. If you have Derangements, they're worse when you have Atrocity dice. Likewise, the common weaknesses of the vampiric condition are also exacerbated. When you roll dice in a stressful situation (especially when added complexity will make the scene more interesting) the Storyteller can ask that some of those dice be Atrocity dice instead of normal dice. You can separate the Atrocity dice from your pool, and roll them separately, roll them with different hands, or use different colored dice to represent them in a mixed pool. Atrocity dice replace normal dice in your pool one per one, so if you have three Atrocity and rolled a pool of seven dice, you'd roll *four* normal dice and *three* Atrocity dice.

Atrocity dice behave normally in a pool and generate successes just like ordinary dice. It is only when a 10 is rolled on an Atrocity die that it affects the scene in a meaningful way. A 10 means the horror you're trying to deal with (and the Beast that feeds upon it) finds its way into your action. It gives your action a nasty cast, a hint of unhealthiness, or it reveals in a small way your unnatural nature. While intimidating an office manager into leaving you alone in the server room, you let out a low, almost inaudible growl that leaves him shaking. When seducing a potential bedmate, there's a predatory aggression to the flirtation that leaves them both entranced and frightened. In a fight, you hit harder, and find yourself smiling when the blood comes.

The more tens you roll on your Atrocity dice, the worse this unnatural revelation or cruelty becomes, and these dice work just like normal dice for the purposes of 10-again, meaning, 10s are still rerolls.

Permanent Atrocity dice work a little different. Instead of replacing normal dice in your pools, you add it to all

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your rolls. This means you get an extra die, which is good. But it means that no matter how clean you keep your soul, there's always a chance (one in ten, in fact) that it'll come out, and you'll leave some damage or some pain behind you even if you never intended any harm.

Note that any time Atrocity dice return successes, you should check "Cognitive Dissonance" below.

Cognitive Dissonance

Guilt, self disgust, and horror—eventually, it can get to be too much to carry around anymore. Ask the Storyteller for a scene which can trigger a crisis of conscience for you. Perhaps the current situation reminds you strongly of the things you did in the past, the bad and the wrong things. Perhaps it brings home the cost in human suffering of your actions. Presented with a dilemma—act to perpetuate the Atrocity (in what will likely be the most advantageous course of action), or demure from continuing it, and Embrace the revelation, and the maddening sense of self-annihilation facing your own sins can bring.

Now, the Storyteller picks your Atrocity Dice, and rolls them. Success on this roll isn't good for the character (but good for the Atrocity!).

You can spend Willpower to reduce this pool on a one per one basis for this single roll, but never lowering it below 1 die.

Exceptional Success: Reduce your Atrocity Dice to 0, and gain a Permanent Atrocity Die instead. You completely lose it for a time as appropriate to the scene, descending into frenzy. When you return to rationality, the Beast is with you like never before.

Success: Act out in accordance to your earlier Atrocity to a severity determined by the successes you roll. You gain these successes in additional Atrocity dice, and reading the questions above in reverse, determine how many people you hurt and how badly you do so in the process. Alternately, you still act out, but instead of additional Atrocity dice, you gain a derangement appropriate to the situation which will persist for at least the remainder of the current story.

Failure: You come through your crisis of conscious shaken and unstable, but somewhat purged. Reduce your Atrocity dice by half, or reduce your Atrocity dice to zero, and gain an appropriate Derangement which will persist for the remainder of the current story.

Dramatic Failure:In an almost violent emotional catharsis, you come through the trial purified. Reduce your Atrocity dice to zero.

Getting a dramatic failure is almost impossible, unless you first buy down the pool with Willpower.

Born Bad

When you create a new character, and roll a die to determine starting Vitae, take half this number (rounded up) as Atrocity dice. When converting characters from published Vampire the Requiem material, you can replace a derangement with a die or permanent Atrocity, and if their listed Humanity is below 5 then give them one, and if it is below 3, give them two.

Don't Feed the Animals

Here is a collection of optional rules and ways to use Atrocity to create a different experience of play in your chronicle. Some of these alter core mechanics found in Vampire the Requiem, and produce a significantly different set of realities for the characters in the setting, and the player's characters. None of these will break your game, or fundamentally alter the themes, but they'll produce some differences in play, and leverage the Atrocity mechanics to affect other situations.

The Beast Wakes

As described on p. 179 of **Requiem**, triggers for a frenzy are inconsistent . Sometimes, a minor annoyance can cause a vampire to lose control, while other times she endures enormous stress without feeling the Beast rise. You can use Atrocity to determine when a stressful situation, circumstances, and recent history conspire to push a vampire over the edge. The Storyteller may ask for a roll of Atrocity (normal plus permanent) to see whether the Beast rises, and on a successful roll a frenzy must be resisted. Resisting the frenzy is handled normally as described on pages 178 to 181 of **Requiem**, but requires additional successes to resist equal to the extra successes on the Atrocity roll. For example, if the Storyteller called for an Atrocity roll to see if an abusive cop causes frenzy, and this produces 3 successes, then the first means that yes, a frenzy begins, and the second two mean the Resolve + Composure roll to resist the frenzy must produce an additional two successes.

If there could be said to be any upside to losing control of yourself and lashing out violently while in the clutches of the Beast, your actions seem distant and unreal, like they're happening to someone else. This disassociation insulates you from Atrocity, and the most Atrocity you can gain from the Beast's actions is one die. Further, instead of a single bonus die to physical actions, you add your total Atrocity dice to your physical actions when frenzied.

Whether they'll admit it or not, some vampires are wise to this, and let the Beast run wild sometimes, doing the damage they want done, but leaving them insulated from it.

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Whether they'll admit it or not, the Beast is wise to this too, and is perfectly happy to sew chaos, maim, murder, and glut itself when the man relinquishes control.

Stinking of Sin

Other vampires smell the Atrocity on you, and it excites and infuriates them. Their Beast snarls and lunges on the end of its chain as it demands dominance from you. It is the very stuff of the Predator's Taint, and you yourself feel the presence of other vampires more intensely when you've been wallowing in depravity. Add permanent and normal Atrocity dice to Blood Potency before comparing when checking to see if a vampire reacts to the Predator's Taint.

The Skull Beneath the Skin

Your vampiric nature becomes more and more apparent as your Atrocity increases, shifting your appearance subtly. The illusion of life gets thinner and more ephemeral, and your ugliness more disturbing, or your beauty more grotesque. Observers can add your total Atrocity dice to their rolls to spot something or uncanny about you. Knowledgeable observers can identify you immediately as a vampire with such a successful observation.

The Kiss of Heaven

Your total Atrocity dice is the *maximum* damage you will suffer per round from exposure to sunlight. This means a vampire with no Atrocity would suffer no damage from exposure to sunlight. This is a major departure from the assumptions of the core rules as presented in **Vampire: The Requiem**, and means that vampires who do everything they can to avoid hurting others, can walk about during the day. This would not be *comfortable* for them, and die penalties commiserate with the amount of damage they *should* be suffering (as described on p. 172 of Requiem) are not out of line, but the sunlight won't kill. Vampires with permanent Atrocity (as most elders would surely have accumulated) are always subject to at least some damage.

The situation this creates is one where sin and horror are *immediately* punished in a mystical way, and suggests a relationship between the Beast, and the burning vulnerability to sunlight. It also means that a vampire on walkabout during the day who commits an Atrocity might well burn to death on the spot.

Atonement

Getting rid of Atrocity dice means doing something to atone for the sins that earned them. There's no god or priest to forgive you. You have to mean it, and take action to somehow make it better. You can't lie to yourself here, and what penance you do must be hard, and it must hurt, and you have to be sincere about it. Ask the Storyteller for the opportunity to atone, and suggest how you might do so. The more dramatic and cool this is, the better it'll play. Then, during the scene you spend one Willpower point per Atrocity die you remove to demonstrate the atonement is genuine, and then suffer whatever consequences arise in the story.

The weeks after the killing are torture. You felt so righteous, and so sure of yourself, but you spun out of control, you enjoyed the killing too much and you killed some more. Cased more pain. And now, its threatening to eat you alive. Despairing, you go to the wife of the man who's murder started you down this path, and you douse yourself with gasoline, and put a lighter in her hand. You kneel before her. You look her in the eye. You apologize. You mean it. She puts her thumb on the lighter, her knuckle whitens...

Hell Is Other People

Isolation makes people crazy. It's one of the classic brainwashing fundamentals. It's the torturer's easiest trick. Bang your victim up in a cage, and don't let him see a human face for a month, and then send in your smiling interrogator. Babies will actually die if they don't have real personal contact with other humans. Humans are wired for it. Humans are social monkeys, and even when they become vampires, what makes them human, and what keeps them human is contact with humans. Even the hungry-eyed Gangrel nomad always seems to end up roving with a gang or a posse no matter how aggressively lonely he tries to be. And what about that weird old fucker in the castle in the mountains? Left alone too long, the curse does some strange things to the once-human psyche of the vampire. Without anything else to eat, The Beast eats the man.

Hanging out with other vampires all the time is pretty bad, too. It's like trying to quit smack when all your friends are junkies. Other vampires exacerbate your problems, and if you don't have some contact with regular people, you're going to go squirrely. Even worse than the vampires are the ghouls and thralls you make for yourself, because *they're* not going to comment on the crazy when you have a total meltdown over something. They're like a rich celeb's entourage, and they're never going to call you on your bullshit when you need it most.

The people who become vampires are slain, and dragged screaming back through death and into their hideously and unnaturally animated corpses. Every moment of conscious existence it is impossible to forget this. The body feels alien, even after a hundred years. Sensations

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are dulled or weirdly exaggerated Hunger is a barking dog, whining for more even when sated. It gets easier and easier to categorize people into three types: people to eat, people to fight, or people to run away from. (You might want to add a fourth category—"People to fuck"—but let's be honest, for vampires that just falls into *eating*.) It gets harder to remember that people are even people at all, and not animate dolls with heads full of ashes. It's easy to fall into the belief that they're the only really conscious beings in the whole world, and everyone else is a zombie or a shadow puppet. The world becomes the torturer's cage, but nobody ever comes in to ask any questions.

What ends up being most important isn't an abstract measure of your ability to relate to humanity in general, but your ability to forge and maintain real human contact with a few real humans.

The Purpose

Hell Is Other People is a different way to approach the humanity of vampires which removes the abstract definition and mechanics for this concept, and replaces it with a system for identifying the people—real ordinary humans, primarily—the vampire cares about and relates to, and then examining the ways the vampiric condition perverts and subverts these relationships.

The principles are fairly simple—it doesn't matter what humanity in general might feel about you, or how you feel about humanity as an aggregate, rather what matters is how your elderly father feels about you, and how you feel about him. He's a tie to your human life, a reminder of normalcy and mortality. Even if he doesn't know you still exist, you know *he* does, and you watch out for him, see that he's taken care of. He's an anchor, keeping you from drifting away.

Two main goals are at work, here: first, to provide players and Storytellers with a specific and immediately useful alternative to the core mechanics, and second to produce a system which directly feeds play, outputting conflict and circumstances which demand in-game action. It then becomes possible to run a chronicle based entirely around these anchoring relationships, maintaining them, protecting them, grieving them when they're lost, or escaping the pain and hiding inside fury and vengeance Anchors are almost always mortals, and they age, and then die. Elders who manage to stay vaguely connected have buried dozens or even hundreds of lovers, friends, parents, children, and vassals. And in their minds, they somehow have to balance out the beloved dead against those used, abused, and drained to perpetuate their existence And sometimes (all too often) somebody appears on both sides of that balance. Vampires are not good at simple and uncomplicated relationships. They always hurt the ones they love.

How Does It Work?

At its most basic, Hell Is Other People serves as a short list of people to which a vampire is connected. These anchors provide an immediacy to the vampire's struggle to remain human. They also become characters in the chronicle, and in a sense 'community property' which can be played by anyone sitting at the table for a scene, allowing players whose characters are absent to participate in that scene if they wish, and giving the Storyteller a stable of characters to with which to populate her world. Anchors are described initially in minimal detail, with the bulk of the mechanics being about defining the relationship the vampire has with her anchors. It further aims to describe that relationship's particular quirks, benefits, and challenges, but more detail is added as the game goes.

Anchors can be used and abused to gain other benefits—the most obvious being a ready supply of blood donors—but also contacts, assistance, resources, access, or a safe haven for the night. The harder you push your anchors, the more you risk damaging the relationship, or possibly worse, exposing it to the attentions of other vampires.

And of course, there's the acidic erosion of your humanity caused by the atrocities of your very existence. Your actions lead to dissonance within yourself, a sense of growing horror at your own existence. The urge for confession and especially for absolution grows with each murder. Your anchors sense it, even if you never say it, but *oh* how you want to say it. To unburden yourself. To have Mommy tell you that you're not really a bad person, and not really a monster.

You hope she's not forgotten how to lie to you.

As a Humanity Variant

This system approaches the core themes of connection, isolation, and sin from a different angle than that of the humanity mechanics in the core rules. They're not intended to supersede the core mechanics, but provide an alternative. The play experiences drawn from the two systems will differ by design. Hell is Other People is a more intensive way of tracking the declining humanity of the vampire, but rewards tracking the added fiddly bits with social role-playing opportunities. It also shifts the focus of a chronicle gently away from the exclusive halls of Kindred politics, and puts the vampire's connections with ordinary humans into a prominent position, and even makes them valuable assets and terrible liabilities

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in those games of power. The core Humanity mechanics more closely model the flow of Gothic melodrama, with its epic descents into depravity and madness, while Hell is Other People is more concerned with the impact a vampire has on the people around her, and the damage she can do—like a drowning man dragging the lifeguard down with him.

That Old Ball and Chain

A character's first anchors are described during character creation, and though these can shift and change during play (old ones being lost, and new ones being found) most of the work setting up this system takes place when the player creates the character. This takes place in step seven of the character creation process as outlined in the **Vampire: the Requiem** (p. 93—94), and replaces Morality and Humanity.

Characters begin with seven anchors, and if a player wishes, as many as two can be traded for additional experience points. Each sacrificed anchor grants the player five experience points (for a maximum of 10), and the loss represents a tragedy or trauma, something which tore the vampire's human connections from her, but left her somewhat wiser for it.

A vampire's anchors define the person she's linked to, and the way they're connected. Each anchor is defined by the following things, meaning, a player should describe these in as much detail as she finds comfortable.

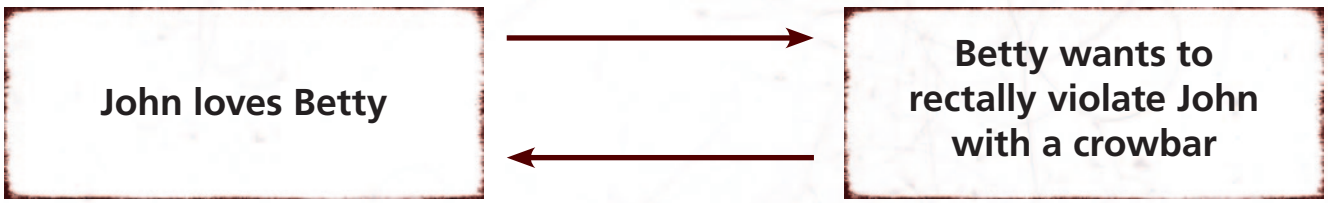
Name—The anchor's name (duh).

Age—How old is the anchor? This is especially relevant for Kindred who've lived a few decades or more, as their first anchors will be significantly older, while they remain in the stasis of undeath. It has little mechanical impact, and really serves to drive home the vampire's agelessness, and the fate of all the mortals she cares about (and the temptation to put them in thrall, or Embrace them fully). Consider the age of a vampire character when creating starting anchors, and spread them out across the vampire's span, or consider why an elder vampire has only young 20-something anchors.

Thumbnail—A simple three- or four-word phrase to describe who the anchor is and what they do. Examples include "aggressively honest beat-cop," "struggling student stripper," "nebbish and obsessive antiquarian," "successful novelist," "homeless dude with his ears to the ground." This should give you or a player running this character for a scene an immediate grasp of the character.

Relationship—The nature of the relationship the vampire has with the anchor. This defines the way the vampire relates to the anchor, and the ways she feels most comfortable interacting with him. Regardless of the nature of the relationship, the feelings involved are intense—even if the relationship is one which normally might not bring with it a close emotional bond. Not all relationships are equitable or represent the same thing for both people involved. If the vampire feels differently about the anchor to how the anchor feels about the vampire then write two Relationships down separated by a slash. The first is how the vampires feels about the anchor, and the second how the anchor feels about the vampire. It is possible, but shouldn't be common, for the vampire to have a relationship with an anchor who feels nothing for the vampire, and might not even be aware of her. These should be suitably creepy, because they represent a major emotional attachment (often leading to obsessive observation at a distance) of which the anchor is wholly unaware.

You can also design relationships in the "coterie chart" style—with names/images separated by arrows that go both ways. On one side of the arrow is the relationship described from that one direction, and on the other is the vice versa relationship. Relationships in this way might even be linked to each other, and not just to the vampire in question. Anchors are free to be a group as opposed to separate individuals.



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It is suggested that there be as few duplications among the Relationships described for starting characters, as too many of a type could be redundant and won't add anything extra to the chronicle. The types of relationships available are as follows (though feel free to add your own):

- **Enemy**: not all anchors have to tie down the vampire with positive bonds. An enemy is just as compelling as a lover, and the relationship is sometimes easier to maintain. For many vampires, simply exterminating a mortal enemy is often well within their powers, so think about why this hasn't happened with this relationship.
- **Friends**: as easy to understand as lovers, and easier to maintain. Friends look out for one another, take each other to the airport, help each other move, and provide emotional support, advice, and beer.
- **Lovers**: easy to understand, easy to imagine, but surprisingly difficult to maintain even for ordinary mortals. If one lover is a vampire, then the added threat of death during sex adds a whole new dimension to this relationship.
- **Mentor**: similar to Parent, but without the familial emotional ties. A Mentor relationship is based on respect, instruction, and guidance A mentor teaches, and provides an example. Whether the vampire is the mentor or the mentee will determine the timbre of this relationship.
- **Parent**: whether literal or emotional, the relationship is a parental one, and whether the vampire or the anchor is in the parental role will determine the nature of the relationship.
- **Professional**: emotional ties are restricted to loyalty and respect, and the professional relationship often has a financial component.
- **Rival**: a little like an enemy, but with less effort to destroy the other party. Rivalries can sometimes drive people to excel, and other times it can drive people to hire thugs to beat a rival in the legs with a length of pipe.
- **Sibling**: like Parent, the sibling relationship is about real or virtually real bonds like those with a brother or sister. Consider whether this is an equitable relationship, or one of an older sibling to a younger one.

Kinks—Kinks are the ways the relationship grows complicated and dysfunctional. Human relationships are complicated, and when one half isn't human anymore, it's far worse. Kinks are the ways the relationship doesn't work, backfires, is unhealthy, or causes trouble. They're points of conflict, and in a way pressure release valves: they're familiar forms of dysfunction the anchor and the vampire have dealt with before. Ironically, generating a huge kink-inspired blowup makes the relationship more resilient when a vampire dumps her personal horror into it, using it as an emotional heat-sink. The catharsis can makes the Atrocity (Atrocity found on p. 165 and You Always Hurt The Ones You Love on p. 182) somewhat less damaging, provided you choose to use the Atrocity system found earlier in this chapter.

Choose one Kink from the list on p. 172.

Comforts—These serve as the ways an anchor can benefit the vampire, beyond just keeping her connected to her human nature, or giving benefits when ruthlessly exploited. While all anchors can be used (by risking them, p. 181), some anchors provide the equivalent without the need to abuse them—this usually in the form of a one-dot Merit. A lover used to the cold kiss of the vampire would not recoil in horror when the hungry monster comes knocking, while one well-placed in the police department could be used by a vampire asking for off-the-record info on current cases. Boons like this can be had from any anchor, but doing so risks hurting or exposing them. With the right Comfort, however, there exists minimal risk. Choose one Comfort from the list on p. 174.

Hot for Teacher

Relationships change and evolve, and while a vampire may exist in a state of relative physical and emotional stasis, his anchors age and their perspectives and desires alter. It's perfectly acceptable to change the nature of the Relationship a vampire and her anchors share. A professional relationship can evolve into friendship, or friends could drift apart to develop a solid working relationship. What's important is that the vampire remain attached to her anchors, and that they continue to provide a grounding in ordinary human life. The strong connections of family and love are powerful links to this, but the respect of a favorite professor, or the hate of a rival can do the same.

These shifts can happen naturally as an emergent factor of normal play, or they can be a deliberate goal when a player chooses to interact with an anchor character a certain way. There's no system for this, beyond roleplaying through it to the satisfaction of the other players and Storyteller, and working it into the chronicle in an interesting way.

Kinks

- **Abuse**: The relationship is marred with physical and verbal abuse typically in one direction, but sometimes in both. The obvious assumption is that the vampire

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will abuse the anchor, but this need not be the case. The emotional stasis of the vampire means some of them will forever be trapped in a cycle of unhealthy abuse, attracted to people who'll mistreat them because while in no rational way is this good or desirable, it just feels right. These relationships can be especially volatile, considering the fury of the Beast. A vampire dumping his Atrocity into a relationship kinked with Abuse might go home and beat or berate his anchor, or possibly more disturbing, go home and provoke the anchor into beating him.

- **Betrayal**: The relationship endures despite regular betrayals. Unfaithful lovers, thieving friends, lying family, and mentors who won't stand up for their charges. Betrayals often result in fights or reprisals: seeking to betray the betrayer in revenge. A vampire dumping Atrocity into a relationship kinked with Betrayal might sleep around, steal, lie, or otherwise betray the trust of the anchor. Likewise, the vampire might take umbrage with a recent betrayal perpetrated by the anchor, and blow it up into a huge fight.
- **Codependency**: The relationship involves an unhealthy degree of emotional interdependence. Either the vampire or the anchor (or even both) need to feel like the other party depends on them, and can't function without them. They'll make excuses for their failings, and enable their vices and weaknesses, keeping them unhealthy dependent If both vampire and anchor do this, the relationship eats its own tail, and both encourage the other's worst failings. A vampire dumping Atrocity into a relationship kinked with Codependency might take extreme action to try and break the cycle of dependency, or might indulge in vice and sin to the extreme and try and push the anchor into rejecting them.
- **Control**: The relationship is dominated by a strong personality who insists on imposing his will upon the other party. This need not be violent or coercive (though, this kink occurs with frequently with the Abusive kink), but consistently pushes the controlled party into line with the controlling party's desires for them. It is a continuous process of tearing-down, and attacks identity and self esteem. Like Abusive, the obvious assumption is that the vampire will be the controlling member of the relationship, but again this need not be the case. A vampire who dumps Atrocity into a relationship kinked with Controlling might demand absolute adherence to his desires, pushing and pushing until a blowup occurs, or it might involve the vampire defying the controlling anchor until a fight breaks out.
- **Dissimilarity**: The relationship lacks a foundation of common experiences, and the parties involved share too little similarity of personality or interest. Sometimes, despite years in the relationship, the parties can seem like strangers to each other, and it becomes difficult to find ground on which to meet. A vampire dumping Atrocity into a relationship kinked with dissimilarity might try and force his interests on a disinterested anchor, or could more subtly neglect the anchor for someone who shares an interest
- **Distance**: The relationship is difficult to maintain, due to physical or emotional distance, and each meeting involves a period of re-acquaintance and uncertainty A vampire dumping Atrocity into a relationship dulled by Distance might arrive suddenly without warning, and immediately demand intimacy and companionship without any period of adjustment, crossing the anchor's thresholds of comfort and forcing them to react and push back against the unexpected emotional closeness.
- **Forbidden**: The relationship is taboo, illegal, embarrassing, or reputation-destroying for one or both of the parties. Forbidden relationships must be pursued secretly, with due care taken to prevent anyone finding out. Meetings must be furtive, and hidden. Example: a police officer's childhood friend in the mob, or a vampire's romance with the Prince's mortal great-granddaughter. A vampire who dumps Atrocity into a relationship kinked with the Forbidden flaunts the relationship briefly, daring the world to notice despite the pleas of the anchor to keep it secret.
- **Horror**: The relationship is rocked by the anchor's horror at the vampire's true nature. This usually means the anchor knows the vampire is an undead blood-drinking thing, but it could also mean the anchor knows some dark and hideous secret about the vampire. That's she's a serial killer, that she conned old ladies out of their life savings, or that she's got sexual piccadilloes that would make a Nosferatu vomit up a pint of blood. It's not impossible that the Horror could run the other way: a vampire still has the capacity to feel horrified at a mortal's dark secrets, and made uneasy by such revelations. A vampire who dumps Atrocity into a horror-filed relationship need only flaunt and demonstrate his unnaturalness or whatever it is that horrifies the anchor.
- **Hypersensitivity**: The relationship is made volatile by the overreactions of one or both parties to issues they've become hypersensitive to. When these issues come up, rational discussion leaves the building. A vampire dumping Atrocity into a relationship mined with Hypersensitivity could deliberately stomp on

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such a mine, provoking an explosion. Alternately, the vampire could explode irrationally when their issue came up innocently enough.

- **Insanity**: The relationship is troubled by the unsound metal state of one or both parties. Insanity leaves one party irrational and erratic, unable to control their own mind, or regulate their emotions and actions to a greater or lesser degree. It can be disconcerting, terrifying, and confounding, even if the emotional bonds are real and powerful, mental illness can still sever them. A vampire dumping Atrocity into a relationship tipped over by Insanity might provoke his mentally unstable anchor to experience a psychotic episode, or could fly into one himself and force his anchor to deal with the consequences.
- **Obsession**: The relationship eclipses other interests, and pursuing it, cataloging its progress, and tracking the activities and life of the other party becomes an ends to themselves A vampire dumping Atrocity into an obsessive relationship might destroy the detailed observations or journals of the obsessed anchor, or might reveal to the anchor the depths of her Obsession, shocking and frightening him.
- **Jealousy**: The relationship is fraught with jealousy, which can run in both directions freely, or be more directed at one party by the other. Unlike its common companions Abuse and Control, Jealousy could just as easily spring from either vampire or anchor. A vampire dumping Atrocity into a relationship soured with jealousy could flaunt a flirtation or deliberately blow off the anchor to spend time with someone else, precipitating a blowup. Alternately, if the vampire is the one afflicted with the Jealousy, he could take umbrage with the anchor's innocent interaction with others, and flip out about it.
- **Rejection**: The relationship is distorted, and the vampire and the anchor have radically different experiences of it. The rejected relationship is one which has been refused by one party, forcing the other to pursue it regardless. For relatively sane and rational people, this could rise to the level of the annoying or harassing, but for unstable or obsessive individuals, it could turn to stalking or worse. A vampire dumping Atrocity into a Rejected relationship could suddenly turn 180, and welcome the anchor's overtures, only to reject them again at a cruel moment. Or, the vampire could stalk and torment the object of his fascination regardless of her wishes.

Comforts

Acceptance: The anchor is cool with the vampire being a vampire, and has seen feeding, frenzy, and other horrible things, and is somewhat inured to it. Reduce the dice rolled for Horrors by 3.

Access: The anchor provides access to an otherwise restricted place, level of society, or organization. An anchor in the intelligence community could provide access to associates in that world.

Assistance: The anchor will physically come to the vampire's aid, serving as a one-dot Retainer.

Bleeder: The anchor will willingly let the vampire drink from him, granting two Vitae (instead of one) for every die of Stress.

Clued-In: The anchor knows the score in one of the major supernatural communities, though isn't a supernatural being herself.

Info: The anchor has access to useful information, and can provide the equivalent of one dot of Contacts.

Support: The anchor has funds or access to funds which she can supply to the vampire, granting what amounts to one dot of Resources.

Hurt

Hurt is a way of tracking the health of the relationship with an anchor, not unlike damage a character might suffer. Hurt is tracked like this:

No (0) Points: *Fine*—The relationship is healthy (for a given values of "healthy"), and fairly stable.

1 Point: *Troubled*—There's something between the anchor and the vampire, something brewing. This will find its way into the role playing between the characters, and this serves as a cue for the player or Storyteller running the anchor.

2 Points: *In Crisis*—the trouble has broken the surface, and become and ugly conflict which threatens the relationship. If it can't be resolved somehow, it could mean the end of the relationship, possibly resulting in the total irreplaceable loss of the anchor.

3 Points: *Broken*—the relationship is broken, and the anchor cut free. It's still possible to recover the anchor, and somehow mend the connection, but this demands an intensive effort.

4 Points: *Gone*—the anchor is gone, and utterly beyond recovery.

Reducing Hurt requires at least one scene addressing it, and defusing the growing dissonance in the relationship will require some kind of successful roll (and preferably the roleplaying to go along with it). Successes on this roll reduce the Hurt by one point per success, but the total Hurt acts as a penalty to that roll. Only one roll is allowed per scene, culminating the confrontation or the reconciliation. The Attribute and Skill used in the roll will vary,

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depending on the nature of the relationship, how much the anchor knows about the vampire's true nature, and how the player describes her character's efforts to mend the relationship. It is possible to use Disciplines or other vampiric advantages to force the anchor into harmony with the vampire, but doing so only exacerbates the problem in the long term. More on this later.

Exposure

Exposure is a way of tracking how aware of the anchor Kindred society is, thus exposing them those dangers, and the risk of being used as pawns in Kindred politics. Exposure is tracked very much like Hurt, with the following levels:

None: *Unknown*—The anchor is wholly unknown to other vampires, and remains a secret. It can't be used against you, and so long as you prevent others from finding out, will remain safe from the covetous eyes of the undead.

1 Point: *Coterie*—The anchor is known only to your closest allies, friends, and associates: the vampires you come closest to trusting. This usually means the other players' characters, but might include a Storyteller character or two depending on your chronicle. The anchor is as safe as you trust your coterie to keep them.

2 Points: *Court*—Word of your anchor has leaked out to the powers who rule the local vampire domain, and while it isn't public knowledge, it is known to some to the most influential and politically connected Kindred in your city.

3 Points: *Domain*—Every vampire in your domain knows about your anchor, and your relationship with him. They know his value to you, and without too much effort, they know where to find him.

4+ Points: *Taken*—All your efforts to protect your anchor prove fruitless, and he is taken from you. The anchor is wooed away, killed, or simply vanishes. You may or may not know who is responsible, and whether your grieve or seek vengeance is your decision to make, but in the end it is your own carelessness which doomed him.

Reducing Exposure is far trickier than reducing Hurt, and can involve such skullduggery as faking breakups, feigning disinterest, faking deaths, spontaneous moves, and name changes. Unless the anchor can be impressed with the necessity for such dramatic action, many will be resistant to dropping their whole lives, and moving to a new place, *and* living under a new name. Exposure can slowly decline with the passage of time too, if you can avoid having any contact with an anchor for months, then their Exposure declines as Kindred observers reassess their analysis of the relationship, assuming if you can avoid them so casually for so long that they must not be that important to you.

Stats

Stats are a shorthand version of Attributes and Skills allowing the Anchor to be played like a minor character (these rules are based on the those found in **Hunter: Block by Bloody Block**). Anchors can be defined quickly if needed using the following method:

Divide *eight* points among the Attributes of Physical, Mental, and Social.

Make up two or three areas of experience or expertise for the anchor, and divide *five* points among them (using the Thumbnail as a guide).

Select a Virtue and a Vice

Give them a Willpower equal to Mental + Social.

Give them Health equal to Physical doubled.

For example, my character has an anchor named Joe Parker. He's my character's brother, and he's a aggressively honest beat-cop. The Kink between us is Resentment, and the Comfort is Access. Another player wants to run Joe for a scene, and since it involves conflict, stats are needed for Joe. I quickly assign his Attributes—Physical 4, Mental 2, Social 2. I give him the following areas of experience "Beat-Cop 3," "Knows the System 1," "Knows the Streets 1." I give him the Virtue of Justice, and the Vice of Wrath. His Willpower is 4, and his Health is 8. Joe is ready to play.

Connecting The Dots

You have two ways to approach the process of describing anchors. Either the player (with the usual cross-chatter and input from his fellows and from the Storyteller) can define all his character's anchors, the relationship, kinks, and comforts, defining them completely as he develops his character concept, or he can leave some or even, pending Storyteller approval, *all* his anchors blank until he needs to define them during play.

Some players balk at being called upon to produce a list of names and personalities and relationships when they want to focus on who their character is, while others will find being put on the spot during session and asked to define their undefined anchors spontaneously difficult and distracting. Hell Is Other People can easily accommodate both, or those players who fall somewhere in between. Starting a chronicle with all the anchors defined gives the Storyteller a long list of hooks and personalities to work into the story, but having these introduced spontaneously in play can present him with a rewarding challenge

It is suggested that at minimum, a Storyteller ask his players to define at least three of their starting anchors, as this strikes a balance between ease, utility and later flexibility.

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It turns out to be a good thing Joe came along when violence breaks out. Joe is packing his backup pistol, and when shooting at the ghouls who're trying to carve us up with machetes, he rolls his Physical +"Beat Cop" totaling 7 dice, plus the equipment bonus from the gun. Later, as we're trying to get a lead on the gang colors the ghouls were wearing, he rolls his Mental+"Knows the Streets" totaling only 3 dice. Joe still has a bit to learn about the more cerebral side of policing.

Old Hurts

The anchors a character starts with in part represent their past, and their history dealing with humans. These relationships are not going to all be pristine and new, free from pain and risk. Vampires are terribly fallible, and their will is often not their own. To represent this (and to inject a little motivating chaos in to the system early) two final steps are required to complete the anchoring process.

After you have described as many anchors as you wish from your starting seven, you must assign *three* points of Exposure among them, indicating which of your anchors have started to come to the attention of other vampires. All three points can be placed in a single anchor, pushing it into the awareness of your entire local domain, and exposing your anchor to the full dangers and complexities of Kindred politics. Or, you can distribute these three points among several different anchors.

Finally, assign three points of Hurt where desired, indicating which of your anchor relationships you're most recently damaged by your abuse or by exposing them to the horrors of your existence As with Exposure, this Hurt can be assigned to a single anchor, putting the relationship in imminent danger of collapsing completely, or you can divide the hurt up among your anchors.

Points in Exposure and Hurt offer different axes of conflict and danger. Exposure generally creeps up slowly, and rarely declines, while Hurt can rise and fall dramatically in the course of a single session. Exposure gives you a rising sense of external menace and vulnerability—the sense that a person you care about might be taken from you, or used against you. Hurt creates a more immediate threat—the sense that a person you care about may leave you, or turn away in disgust.

Green-Eyed Monsters: A Quick Trick

Here's a simple technique for creating coteries with powerful internal connections (and rivalries). Require at least one anchor be left undefined until the whole group has completed character creation. Then, the final anchor is chosen from one of the other players' list, taking the same name, age, and thumbnail description, but a different relationship, kink, and comfort.

I'm Taking My Katana And My Trenchcoat And Going Home

He's a deadly swordsman with no past—no family, no friends, no history, and no connections to other people that a Storyteller can ruthlessly exploit. He's emotionally bulletproof! He can stare into the Devil's eyes, and kick him in the sack because nobody can touch him, because he doesn't give a fuck about anybody or anything. No allies, no contacts, nothing connecting him to other people.

You know this guy. You've had him in your party at one point. You might have played him—I know I did.

Trenchcoat McNinjasword never knows love or empathy, but he has the cold hard touch of his twin Desert Eagle point-five-oh's to see him through.

There's lots of reasons a player might chose to create the isolated and unconnected badass, and unfortunately many of them relate to bad play experiences in which a Storyteller or other players abused his sense of fun by using those connections to make him feel inadequate about his character, vulnerable, or infective

If one of your players is hesitant to try Hell Is Other People because of the explicit degree of connection it demands, reassure them that you won't use their anchors to screw them or ruin their fun, rather when anchors become figural to play, it means the spotlight swings and focuses on their character, and they get dedicated play out of it.

Anchors are more than a line in a paragraph of back-story too—they provide several mechanical advantages, and aggressively manipulating and gaming one's anchors to squeeze more power out of them... well, it's a game about callous vampires isn't it? Being a complete bastard is often a part of the genre, and the system is designed so that regardless of the player's motivations when abusing his anchors, the result is the same—relationship-focused situations spiral into chaos and horror.

In fact, the system is designed in such a way as to tempt players to abuse their anchors. In the short-term, it's a way to grab big chunks of play and effectiveness. Doing horrible things to the people who love you makes you powerful.

That's a funhouse mirror reflecting the temptations the imaginary vampires might feel, when interacting with the people she cares about.

Alternately, if one player opts out and wants to use only the straight-up Humanity system, that's cool. And, hey, if they really want Katana Johnson, Ronin of Clan Trenchcoat to be their character, feel free to keep an eye out for **Dudes of Legend: How To Be Fucking Awesome**.

Bam—instant conflict.

The characters will have to negotiate the normal human issues with sharing people in common, and then contend with the Beast as well, the jealous monster. The Beast doesn't like to share its toys, and especially not its food, and

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sometimes seeing an anchor cavorting about with another monster is enough to make it freak its shit out.

When describing an anchor taken from another character's list, think about how you came to share the same anchor in common, and what that means. The starting Exposure of that anchor will determine whether anyone else knows you share it, and indeed your characters might not be aware of it either, creating an interesting role playing challenge, and suggesting a delicious and possibly dramatic revelation scene when one character realizes the elderly gentlemen his mother has been so enamored with of late is, in fact, the vampire sitting across from him at the table.

The Measure Of One's Anchors

Since this system replaces the core Humanity mechanics, it has a similar core dynamic—maintaining anchors allows you to continue playing your character. Without any anchors, a vampire descends into a wholly solipsistic state, and he feels like the only real person in a whole world of automatons. Without any grounding in social *human* reality, the Beast quickly overburdens the Damned. It isn't troubled by such existential questions as "Am I real?" It has all the evidence it needs of that in its torturous hunger and savagery. The vampire without anchors is a feral deadly thing, carrying the helpless Man about inside to bear mute witness to the horrors it perpetrates.

As a vampire's number of anchors declines, she'll become increasingly possessive and aggressive in defending them, paranoid about their welfare. The vampire with only one remaining anchor is a nearly monomaniacal obsessive, and ironically, sometimes this instinct to control and protect is the very thing which breaks the final anchor. Anchors are also a calming influence in a vampire's life, a source of security, and even hope.

10 Anchors—A sense of wellbeing follows the vampire—optimism, even joy. So many people care about him, and he cares about so many people in a real concrete and demonstrable way. The Beast rages against its cage, but the door is chained shut. The vampire needs only a single success to resist any frenzy, except those directly related to threats to his anchors, against which he rolls normally. The vampire also finds it much easier to remain active during the day, and can wake and act without the need for a roll.

8 or 9 Anchors—Still confident and optimistic, but tinged a little bit with a sense of vulnerability. The Beast smells blood, and howls. Resisting frenzy requires two fewer successes than normal (to a minimum of one, of course) except when related to threats to his anchors, against which he rolls normally. The vampire still finds it fairly easy to wake and acts. Roll a number of dice

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equal to his Anchors, and a basic success allows him to act for a whole scene, and an exceptional success for the whole night.

6 or 7 Anchors—Edgy and uncertain, the joy of being connected to people is colored with the real and likely recent memory of losing somebody. The apprehension of impending loss sours the security of so many close personal ties, and the vampire has no special resistance to frenzy, but threats to his anchors don't yet send him running mad. Waking is increasingly difficult though, and when he rolls to wake, he can only remain so for rounds equal to the successes rolled, though on an exceptional success, he can remain active for the whole scene.

3 to 5 Anchors—Increasingly agitated, paranoid, and isolated—the vampire watches his dwindling anchors, and rather than inspire comfort and security, they stir in the character a grasping possessiveness and lingering terror. He has no special resistance to normal frenzies, and any threat to his anchors requires an additional success to resist beyond those inherent in the circumstances. He finds it extremely difficult to drag himself from sleep, and must spend a point of Willpower before attempting the roll to wake and act, and this only ever grants Rounds equal to the successes in time to act.

1 to 2 Anchors—The vampire feels it all slipping away, and now there's a sense of inevitability to it. The Beast's screams are a constant companion, and it feels the cage door weakening. Sometimes, the vampire feels like giving in and letting the monster out to do what it will do to his remaining anchors, and just be done with it. Yet, he's compelled to obsess and protect them, guard them, stalk them. He clings to his last remaining anchors like a drowning man to a hunk of waterlogged wood, and that's not necessarily a good thing, but his tightening grasp is misery. All frenzies require an additional success to resist now, because the Beast is always awake, and any threat to his remaining anchors demands an additional three successes to resist beyond those inherent in the circumstances. Waking during the day is nearly impossible now, and while he can roll his one die or two dice to wake for rounds equal to any success rolled, he must spend a point of Willpower to even attempt this, and failure means he can't attempt it again for the entire day. Remaining anchors gain the Obsessive kink, and if they already have this one, the Abusive or Controlling kinks instead.

No Anchors—The Beast is unleashed. Feeding, killing, and sleeping are all it can manage with any regularity. Inside, within the Beast's old cage, the Man watches it all, caught between doubting his own existence, and wishing desperately that he didn't.

The Blood Will Out: Clans and Anchors

While the curse paints vampire's experiences in similar broad strokes, the unique taints and perversions of an individual's blood heritage adds finer details to the picture. A vampire's clan informs her instinctual reactions, especially in the intimate vulnerability of an anchoring relationship.

Daeva

One would assume the Daeva would have the easiest time forming anchors and keeping them happy, but their penchant for emotional manipulation and using people like playthings (or furniture!) leaves them with a bone-deep cynicism about human relationships and emotions. For the Daeva, relationships are feeding strategy, and they have a great deal of difficulty separating their preferred hunting methods from their vital sanity-preserving human contact. They're hip, shallow, charming, and superficial. They make and break relationships so easily that they have trouble valuing the ones that really matter. Daeva anchoring relationships tend to not be those with lovers, and they also favor familial forms of anchoring, though many also find meaning and connection in a carefully maintained rivalry. They are often kinked with Betrayal, Codependency, Dontrol, or Jealousy.

Gangrel

Like the Daeva, the first assumptions made about a Gangrel's ability to form anchoring relationships are likely wrong. Gangrel are not as solitary as stories suggest. They do keep and maintain real relationships, but do so across spans of time and distance. If they wander from domain to domain, they might be scattered across a huge chunk of the country, and they may only meet them in person rarely. Gangrel are good at the long distance relationship, but this makes it difficult to conceal their true nature from their anchors. If years pass between meetings, then the agelessness of the Gangrel will be apparent. A Gangrel's anchoring relationships tend to be friendships, and are often complicated by Dissimilarity, Distance, Forbiddance, or Rejection.

Mekhet

Too often the Mekhet have trust issues. They're so secretive by nature, that true intimacy is difficult to achieve, and even then, honesty in an anchoring relationship more difficult still. With mystery and conspiracy in the blood—and the instinct for probing the same when they encounter it—the Mekhet are sometimes terribly odd in their relationships. They favor those one step removed from deep intimacy, professional and mentor relationships for example, and they are often marred by kinks like Control, the Forbidden, Hypersensitivity, and Obsession.

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Nosferatu

To look at them, one wonders how they have any genuine human contact at all, yet somehow they manage, and indeed sometimes have an easier time keeping their anchors than those of other blood. They're used to rejection and disgust, used to getting by regardless, of moving past the superficial, and somehow finding a true place. Many Nosferatu will strive and fight to maintain their anchoring relationships, because they feel the dehumanizing power of the curse more acutely than others, and see it reflected in the faces of all those who look upon them. They have no particular favored relationship, though it is rare to find a lover willing to endure their touch. Their relationships are often kinked with Horror, Dissimilarity, Distance, and Rejection.

Ventrue

Like the Daeva, those of this clan are often extremely outgoing and superficially social, but they're such consummate users that they have trouble putting themselves in a vulnerable position, or finding any equanimity in a relationship. The Ventrue blood also cries out for control, for dominance, for obedience, for respect. Instinct drives them to impose their will upon the world, and to resist such imposition. They favor the professional and the familial anchoring relationships, and many truly cherish their enemies. They frequently experience kinks in these relationships of Abuse, Control, Hypersensitivity, and Insanity.

The Official Position On Undead Companionship: Covenants and Anchors

The Covenants each approach the issue of anchors differently. All recognize that some contact with the human world, and maintaining contact with mortals helps stave off the advances of the Beast, but each has a different set of opinion and doctrine on how these relationships should be managed.

Carthian Movement

The most common opinion in the stewpot of Carthian debate is that anchors are a personal matter, and best left to the individual to manage. Those mortals a vampire feels close to are private, and no court should monitor or restrict a Kindred's right to keep what relationships she will, so long as they don't threaten anyone else. Some radicals in the movement who wish to destroy the Masquerade, and declare themselves openly say the best way to begin this process is with the revelation to those closest, and anchoring relationships should be open ones.

Circle of the Crone

Secretive and insular, the Circle seems a foreboding entity to the outsider yet within there's an almost familial quality. The Circle interests itself in the private lives of its adherents, and the local circle might seem like a group of nosy relatives with regards to an individual's relationships. Creation is power, after all, and it seems natural to mark the anchors of members as potential neonates and acolytes. Many vampires of the Circle find their own anchors in similar relationships with others of their cabal, creating a weirdly incestuous emotional landscape.

Invictus

The Invicti are both sensitive to the precarious sanity of the vampire, and aware of his need for control and dominance. They recommend caution and circumspection when forming ties with mortals—never lose sight of who and what yours are, and never delude yourself that the relationship is anything other than what it is. They also recognize what a weakness a vampire's anchors are, and demonstrate through ruthless exploitation to its membership just what happens to the incautious Kindred who allows his relationships to become too well known.

Lancea Sanctum

The Spear grudgingly acknowledges the need for contact with the mortal world, but demands it never interfere with a vampire's sacred duties to his nature and his sect. When mortal affection supplants faith and service, an official sanction may be in order up to and including the death of the distracting anchor. Members of the Lancea must struggle between these demands, and the seeming incompatibility in maintaining genuine relationships with mortals, and still keeping the faith.

Ordo Dracul

The Ordo is the most foreward-thinking of the covenants where relations with mortals are concerned, and actively encourages its members to seek such connection. What is the purpose of the Coils, if not to ease a vampire's passage in the mortal world? Keeping these anchors is seen as a test of the vampire's resolve to dominate the Beast, and overcome the Requiem. Members of the Ordo may find themselves inundated in helpful relationship advice when their anchoring relationships begins to suffer.

Anchors In Play

Anchors and the Man

The Man relates to the character's anchors like any human relates to others of its kind—with all the complexity and nuance that implies. Anchoring relationships run the gamut from the intimacy of lovers to the distant hatred of enemies, as petty as a friendship over the backyard fence with a neighbor, to as serious as marriage.

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Sacrifice: Who Would You Kill for Power?

God demanded Abraham sacrifice his precious son, and the story resonates powerfully because it hits the core of what occult sacrifice is all about. The sacrifice of things without value is no sacrifice at all. Human sacrifice only matters if the human life being fed to the darkness matters to the magus. Likewise, with the occult workings of the vampires who attend the rites of the Lancea Sanctum, and the Circle of the Crone. Both recognize the power of sacrifice, and both have ritual workings to capture this power and channel it.

With either Cruac or Theban Sorcery, a vampire may empower a ritual with the sacrifice of one of her anchors. The methods vary, even within the two sects, but it isn't unknown for practitioners of Theban Sorcery to sacrifice their loved ones through crucifixion, and for the adherents to Cruac to sometimes employ the old Druidic methods of ritual disembowelment. The purpose of these grisly deaths is two-fold. They give the victim time to realize how they are betrayed, and they give the vampire time to realize the depth of their betrayal, for this is as much the true sacrifice as the death itself. The vampire gives up a piece of his humanity for power, and ritually scourges it from himself through the murder of someone he cares for.

The game mechanics for this sacrifice are simple—taking this extreme action requires the expenditure of a point of Willpower, and it adds five dice to the roll to invoke the associated ritual, and further (when appropriate) also ensures that an exceptional success is had on three successes instead of five. It also inflicts Atrocity dice upon the vampire equal to the total successes generated for the ritual, provided you use the Atrocity system. A sin of this magnitude will not be without its repercussions.

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Each anchor represents a Storyteller character or an alternate character a player could assume during a session (*or*, as noted, that another unoccupied player at the table might handle), and they're automatically granted a certain primacy in a chronicle. The Storyteller is free to use them to build stories, and in doing so, making the conflicts that involve them personal and vital to the vampire to whom they belong.

Anchors and the Beast

The Beast relates to the anchors in a more elemental fashion. The three main drives of the vampire's Beast which find outlets in the three kinds of frenzy also influence how the Beast reacts to anchors, and how it tempts the Man it use and abuse them. The Beast wants to do three things to all the man's anchors:

Dominate Them—The same instincts which drive the Beast to rage and destroy also drive it to dominate and control those close to it, to impose its will, and force submission and obedience. The Beast wants to knock them down, and put its foot on their necks. It demands deference, and has no patience for foibles or hesitation. It wants to lash out at any sign of disobedience. If allowed to dominate them, the Beast can force an anchor to obey, to submit, or to grant the vampire favors or influence.

Hide Them—The Beast recognizes how vulnerable the anchors make it, and it is terrified that they will be taken and used, that the Man will risk himself and the Beast too if the anchors are threatened. The instincts drive it to take them, hide them, and destroy all evidence that they existed. If the Beast had its way, they would all be rounded up and locked in a shipping container somewhere secret, and anyone who knew about them would die. If allowed to protect them, the Beast's instincts are remarkably true, and it can reduce their exposure even while risking the destruction of the relationship itself.

Eat Them—The Beast hungers and wants (perhaps more than anything) to consume all those ready and trusting victims the Man cares about so much. It's a simple urge, and underlies almost every interaction the Man has with his anchors. The Beast hungers, and whispers about how easy it would be to just take a little bit, to just take a sip. Especially when the anchor might be willing.

Perilous Exposure

Anchors represent a source of support, information, and aid but calling upon this help—especially in Kindred matters—risks Exposure. How much you call upon them determines the risks, this determines how many dice the player (or Storyteller) rolls to determine potential Exposure. Each success on this roll adds +1 to the Exposure of the anchor in question.

The kind of aid an anchor can provide can be anything that could reasonably fall under their Thumbnail description or their stats if they have them.

Kind of Aid	Dice To Roll
Contact (as the Merit)	+1 die
Ally (as the Merit)	+2 dice
Assistance (+3 dice to a roll)	1 die
Each additional time this story	+1 die
In a supernatural matter	+1 die
In a Kindred Matter	+2 die

So if Jack Stringer calls on his friend from childhood (an accountant) to help him puzzle out the Prince's finances (Assistance with a Kindred matter), it would be a roll of three dice to see if this exposed his friend to the vampire community. If he calls his friend again to help him set up one of the Prince's thralls for an IRS audit (thus, as an Ally in the Kindred Matter, and for the second time this story), then he'd be rolling five dice to see how it exposed his anchor.

Hurting Them

In addition to all the perfectly normal ways of being horribly to people, vampires have some special ways of their very own. Abusing an anchor results in a die roll to see whether it hurts the relationship. The dice rolled vary depending on what the vampire does, but each success results in a point of Hurt inflicted on the anchor. In a scene, all the abuse is cumulative.

Abuse	Dice Rolled
They realize you're a vampire	+1 die
You have no time to prepare them for it	+1 die
Feed on them	+1 die per Vitae taken
They Witness you in a Frenzy	+1 die
They're harmed by the frenzy	+1 die
They see someone else harmed	+1 die
They witness you feeding	1 die
The victim is badly harmed	+1 die

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The victim is dead or dying	+2 dice
Use of a Discipline against them	+1 die
Fail to protect them from other Kindred	+1 die
You allow other Kindred to harm them	+1 die
They witness other supernatural horror	+1 to +3 dice

So continuing the example, Stringer's accountant friend comes to the Prince's attention, and Stringer receives a summons to attend the Prince in his court. He arrives to find his friend and anchor bound and gagged, and lying before the Prince's chair. He says, "Jack, my friend. I have the unfortunate task to inform you of a worm in your apple. We found this mortal has betrayed the trust you placed in him, oh indeed, he's betrayed you quite cruelly and struck out against your Prince, whom we all here know you love. So due to the great respect we have for you, we held this traitor until you arrived to dispense the what justice you see fit. Please, do as you will to him, or if it is beneath you, I shall have the Sheriff dispatch him with the expedience of a bullet in the brain."

Choices, choices... Jack feeds savagely on his friend, making a show of it for the court, and then asks to take the mortal back to his haven to prolong his death. His efforts to convince the prince are successful, and he's permitted to carry away the unconscious moral away. But when he awakes, will he have a friendship anymore?

Jack's friend was harmed by other vampires and he didn't protect him, and then Jack fed on him, both revealing his vampire nature without first preparing him for it, and taking four Vitae. All total, that's eight dice to roll for harm to the anchoring relationship.

You Always Hurt The Ones You Love

The horrors a vampire perpetrates follow him home. A player can chose to dump his Atrocity dice into one of his anchoring relationships in an ugly scene. Between Storyteller and player, decide how the scene will be staged, and how the stress and anger the Atrocity represents explodes into the relationship. The Atrocity dice are all rolled, and each success is a point of Hurt or Exposure inflicted on the anchor.

If the Atrocity is grounded into one of the relationship's Kinks instead of some random thing, then the conflict that results will be a familiar one, and in a way, the relationship survives despite it. Staging one of these familiar fights counters the first success rolled on the Atrocity dice.

Anchor At Player-Level

Is an 'anchor' a concept within the setting of the game, or does it exist on the player-level? Some character stats and advantages have analogs in the game world itself—Disciplines, for example. But Anchors are mostly a game-level concept, and don't intrude into the shared fiction. Some vampires who study the psychology of the undead might postulate that the undead seek connection to mortals to help maintain their sanity and equilibrium, perhaps even calling these relationships "anchors," but it isn't a term in common usage.

What other vampires recognize about an anchor which has been exposed is that it really matters to the character, and so represents a weakness or something they can exploit. If they take action against the anchor, then it's going to have some mechanical implications too, but they wouldn't send a threatening note saying "Surrender, or your anchor gets it!"

Not all of a vampire's relationships constitute anchors, and not all anchors are obvious to an outsider as a close and valuable relationship—what makes an anchor an anchor is that it in some way keeps the vampire connected with the mortal world, and gives them a different perspective on reality beyond that of other Kindred, or the too-close company of their own Beast.

Regardless of what the Atrocity dice roll, they're gone after it, and the psychic dissonance they represent is purged.

Another way to abuse your friends and loved-ones for fun and profit is to treat them badly in line with a Vice, and do it in a dramatic conflict-causing way**.** This has to be hurtful and fairly dramatic. In this case, Atrocity is rolled but not dropped after the roll (meaning, all Atrocity dice are kept), and they inflict Hurt on the anchor normally, but each success also restores an additional point of Willpower beyond the one granted normally by acting in line with a Vice.

After a night of blood and fire, Jack is spent—he's a stumbling mess, wounded and mentally drained. He hammers on his ex-girlfriend's door at 3 A.M. until she lets him in, and finding her new boyfriend there, after all the crap he's had dumped on him, after all the horrible things he's done, it's more than he can take. He's got 5 Atrocity right now, and so his player says, "Jack loses it—I'm going to hit my Wrath vice and just go fucking nuts on her, and him, and everything. Really screaming abuse and breaking shit. If I can, I'm going to throw his ass out of the apartment too." What a shameful display of temper. Certainly worth a point of Willpower from his vice, but the Storyteller picks up five dice, and rolls them getting two successes. So this nets Jack three Willpower, but inflicts 2 points of Hurt on his anchoring relationship with his Ex.

The Atrocity system can be found on p. 165 of this chapter.

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Going Too Far: Breaking An Anchor

If your mistreatment of an anchor becomes too extreme, your connection to them breaks, and the feelings that kept you linked to them shrivel. They become just another mortal to you, and whatever spark or true emotion that made the relationship powerful for you is gone beyond recovery. If an anchor takes four or more points of Hurt, it breaks. The anchor may still be a Storyteller character in the chronicle, but no longer serves you as an anchor.

If an anchor becomes too exposed to Kindred society, eventually something will happen to them—something that offers you no opportunity to prevent. Most commonly, they simply vanish. Some vampire somewhere decides they know too much, and poof, they're gone. You might be able to eventually figure out why with some investigation, but in your heart you know why it happened, and who's to blame. You exposed them to your world, and eventually it ate them. The anchoring relationship was already stretched by their Exposure and your constant demands for aid, so when it happens it leaves you feeling empty and isolated, without even anyone to rage at, and without even the fury to rage.

Broken anchors know secrets about you. They're potentially dangerous, but you also have some real history together. They're going to be trouble.

If an anchor dies without Hurt or Exposure reaching four points first, it is a different matter...

Death, Grief, and Payback

Mortals die. Pretty much by definition. Every anchor a vampire possesses now will be dead in a century. Many, much sooner. If an elder were to survey his long history, he'd find a disturbing long list of his closest friends and lovers who never got the chance to die natural deaths. Dealing with this certainty, and the way it highlights the vampire's own unnatural state is unavoidable, unless the vampire is willing to take extreme measures. How does a vampire cope with the death of someone whom she cares about, and depends upon for maintaining her connection to humanity?

She can grieve them, suffer their loss, and eventually one day find someone new to fill the void. This is painful, this hurts, and this makes everything else in the vampire's existence a little harder, and a little worse, but coming out the other side of grief means healing.

Or, fuck all that weeping and sorrow. The Beast is put off by it, the Beast offers something else—rage, hatred, and vengeance. Bury the grief under a torrent of hot fury, and go out and kill the motherfuckers who took the anchor away. Revenge is a powerful thing, a thing which can consume a vampire, but also make her mighty and terrible. The vengeance of a vampire who's anchors die is one of the reasons most Kindred are somewhat circumspect about murdering a rival's anchors out of hand.

Mechanically speaking, grief is all stick while vengeance is all carrot. When the player chooses to play his vampire's grief, it imposes a die penalty to all his actions which are functionally like wound penalties. These penalties decline slowly, until eventually the vampire is recovered enough to function well enough. The advantage of this suffering is that during the process of burying and saying goodbye to the anchor, the vampire doesn't lose it (though it can't be used for anything), and when the penalties cease, the vampire can replace the dead anchor with a new one. This is a process mediated with roleplaying, and can be worked into the progressing storyline as the Storyteller and player arrange it. Meeting someone new, forming a bond with them, and cementing it into something lasting are pretty significant events, and worth some attention in the chronicle. The eventual reward here is the opportunity for some dedicated attention, some role playing, and the recovery of a valuable mechanical resource (the anchor).

How long does grieving last?

This is a judgment call for the Storyteller to make, based on the passage of time in the chronicle (whether play encompasses a small block or game time, or whether large spans of time are covered quickly), and whether the grieving vampire is played as such. Grief affects people differently. In general, the most severe penalties should last for at least a session, the moderate ones for a couple of sessions, and the mildest for a few more. The Storyteller and the player should discuss what penalties are appropriate.

What grief offers is pain and sorrow that goes on and on, until eventually, one day, you're functional again. What vengeance offers is the opposite—strength and power right now.

Up front, the cost: you burn the dead anchor forever. It's gone, and you don't get the chance to replace it without building a new one up from scratch as outlined on p. 171. The Beast eats it up, and there's no taking it back later on, and no painful but healing grief waiting if you renounce your vengeance later on. That might work for the bad guy in 80's action TV shows, who learns to love again when the heroes help him understand the madness of vengeance, but it doesn't work for the undead. The Beast takes what it's given, and gives back strength and power.

When seeking vengeance for the death of an anchor, the vengeance-driven vampire takes bonus dice equal to his current Atrocity dice. Yeah, you see how that works don't you? You get Atrocity by being horrible and inhu-

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man and monstrous and going horrible and inhuman and monstrous things to people, and when you're doing those things to the people you've targeted for vengeance, you do it way worse and way easier. It becomes a double feedback loop—commit horrific acts against your targets, get more Atrocity, then you have more dice to do more horrific acts. Why not stomp that guy a little bit until he starts to weep instead of just knocking him out? Especially if there's somebody innocent to witness it. When you kick in his boss' door, you'll be carrying even more power because of the unnecessary cruelty. You've opened yourself to the Beast, and you're no longer fighting it, and so long as you steer where it wants you to drive, it screams your name, and hoots, and loves it. You're on the hotrod to hell.

Avenging a murdered anchor is easy. You've got a target, you've got a simple objective—find the motherfuckers, and tear them apart. What about anchors that just die? How do you revenge yourself on cancer? Old age? Revenge isn't a rational process, especially a vampire's revenge. Figure out and angle, and make it work. It's the oncologist who failed to save your anchor—hurt him, destroy his practice, ruin him. Or, perhaps the incompetence of the whole hospital is to blame. Use your influence, and get its budget cut, close it down, or if you're more inclined towards direct physical action, burn it to the ground. Old age? Go gunning for the people who kept you away from her in her final moments. You should have been there with her, after all these years, and instead you had to deal with some ridiculous crap from the Prince. It's his fault. He needs to suffer for it.

Like Grief, how long Vengeance lasts is an uncertain thing, but generally if the vampire pursues other things instead of monomaniacally following his path to the destruction of his enemies, it'll start to sputter and die. A session without taking some meaningful action to further the vengeance is usually enough for it to slip through the vampire's fingers, leaving him cold and empty.

When the vengeance burns out, what's left is ashes. The reality of what is lost, and what has been sacrificed hits home, and the vampire is left with all the memories of the dead anchor, but none of the emotional context or connection, no sense that any of it mattered at all. It all feels about as meaningful as walking down the street to buy a newspaper from the corner store.

The Sweet Surcease of Suffering

Every vampire's veins are filled with eternity—the promise of life beyond death, an ageless forever. Watching anchors decay and wither, year after year, decade upon decade... the blood tempts, the blood whispers. If fed Vitae, an anchor could be turned into a thrall, a ghoul, and sustained against time and disease. If fully Embraced, an anchor could join the vampire's Requiem.

But no, it's never that easy.

Ghoul or Thrall Anchors—Turning an anchor into a thrall doesn't break the anchor outright, but does severely weaken the vampire's connection to them. An anchor is supposed to be a link to the mortal word, and turning one into a ghoul means that link is eroded. Ghoul anchors stop aging, and gain the other benefit of being ghouls, but gain a permanent point of Hurt and Exposure which never goes away. These connections are fragile, and it's easy to stop thinking of a ghoul as a friend, valued for their companionship, and to start thinking of them as a servant, valued for their obedience Time will see the anchoring relationship weaken and break, leaving you with a thrall instead of an anchor, their face a constant reminder of what you lost.

Embracing an Anchor—This almost never turns works out. The Embrace gives an anchor the unvarnished truth of the vampiric condition from the inside, and they gain a perspective on the way you treated and used them through the course of the relationship. Most are not happy about this. The frisson between sire and childer in these situations is severe, and not only is the connection of the anchoring relationship totally destroyed, but the new relationship between vampires is usually marked with animosity and spite and jealousy towards the sire's remaining mortal anchors. There seems like no good rational reason to do this, does there? Yet, the urge to save a dying anchor with the power of the curse is powerful. Presented with a situation where turning the anchor into a thrall or embracing him would save his life, the vampire must spend Willpower to prevent himself from doing it, and damn the consequences.

Making It All Better: Let The Healing Begin

So now you know how to hurt, use, abuse, and expose your anchors. You know what their deaths mean. So how about healing a hurt relationship, or reducing their exposure?

Here, there's not much mechanical complexity. Fixing a bruised relationship means performing acts in the story to ease that hurt, make amends, apologize, and re-connect with an anchor. The easiest way to handle this is to roleplay or describe the interactions, and if it satisfies the Storyteller and other players, you recover some or all of the Hurt done to the anchoring relationship. The more hurt the relationship, the more intensive and the more emotional this contrition and relationship mending must be, but because all chronicles are paced differently, some leeway is needed to allow the Storyteller to work these scenes into the flow of the game.

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If a crunchier method of healing hurt anchors is needed, players can role-play their interactions, and then roll an appropriate Skill check based on what they're doing with the anchor, recovering Hurt equal to the successes rolled.

This isn't a process of lying or tricking someone with bruised feelings into coming back to you—for the relationship to work as an anchor it's a two-way thing, and if the vampire feels disingenuous about it, then it's not really healed. Park of this healing process is the vampire herself feeling all right in the relationship and re-connected with the anchor.

Healing the Exposure of an anchored relationship is easier than reducing that Exposure. Once exposed, there's little that will make other Kindred forget you've shown them your throat. But because there's nothing mystical or definitive about what constitutes an anchor, and what's just a normal association, there's always some doubt. If you want to avoid any contact with an anchor for a time, Exposure will fade. Taking action to conceal or hide an anchor can also help, as can the always-popular faked death. The problem with avoiding your anchors to protect them is that this itself hurts the anchors. What this essentially means is that after a chunk of time spent avoiding an anchor, points of Exposure can be traded out for points of Hurt. Then, dealing with the Hurt (before it gets so bad it kills the anchoring relationship) is handled normally.

Running out of Anchors

Vampires get weirder and more feral as their human contacts dwindle and fade. As anchors die or are driven off, the vampire's ability to find and connect with new people becomes harder—it's a vicious circle. What happens to the vampire who loses all his Anchors through inattention, abuse, violence, or the grind of time?

The Castle on the Hill—The classic image of the solitary vampire noble, dwelling in isolation with only a few quavering mortals to pay fealty to him is a powerful on, and fairly accurate when you remove the theatrics. The Daeva, standing alone in a crowd of admirers. The Gangrel on her bike, riding fast to another empty sanctuary. The Nosferatu, in his sewer. The Mekhet, cloistered with his secrets and his studies. And the Ventrue, playing to type, he surveys the city from his penthouse castle, alone. The affliction of the true elders is isolation and paranoia—even those few remaining anchors they allow themselves are almost unbearable vulnerabilities in their layered armor of lies and machinations, yet ironically, their unwillingness to extend their trust to more mortals leaves the ones they do connect with all the more vulnerable. Yet the flipside—the wrath of an elder denied his loved ones would be so much worse than that of a neonate.

Wake Alone—Emerging from torpor is never a pleasant process, but waking to find a world remade, and all those you cared about (and all those who kept you sane) gone... a waking vampire with decades behind him will find his anchors grown old, some having died, some having forgotten him. This isn't unlike having multiple anchors killed, and the grieving process gets folded into the waking and orientation. The vampire will be driven to re-connect, filing the places occupied by dead anchors, and getting reacquainted with living ones. New anchors will often be chosen for their resemblance to dead ones—choices which rarely turn out to be simple and consequence-free.

Welcoming The New Age—One reason awakening vampires, or those who've allowed their anchors to die off, might wish to reform them is to find a vital connection to a new age. The stasis of the vampire can leave some elders unable to effectively grasp the complexities of the modern world (some adapt remarkable well though—it is a mystery why some thrive, and some suffer). A young mortal who's very much of the time can be a valuable guide on integrating and thriving.

Anchors As Community Property

Anchors become something like community property. They needn't exclusively be Storyteller characters, nor must they be entirely player-run characters. In an scene where a vampire interacts with an anchor, anyone else at the table can, with Storyteller approval, take on the role (and rolls) of the anchoring character.

As described under Stats on p. 175, anchors can be given a set of rudimentary Attributes and Skills, allowing rolls to be made for them if need be. A player temporarily taking on the role of an anchor can describe these if needed and they've not yet been defined.

The reward for doing this and doing it well is that the Storyteller can award experience points for a player's efforts adding to the chronicle in this way. It also provides a way for players who's characters are absent to participate in a scene.

Making New Friends

It is possible, though difficult, to gain entirely new anchors during play. This is different from grieving and eventually getting over a dead anchor. In that case, the anchor "slot" remains open, to be filled when you're ready for it. Adding a completely new anchor can replace one lost to hurt or exposure, or give you a new one beyond your starting allotment.

As with other forms of advancement, the Storyteller must be circumspect in moderating this because forming

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a new anchor demands at least some in-game roleplaing dedicated to forming the new anchoring relationship. The effort to genuinely connect must add to the chronicle, and a player seeking such connection need make no secret of her desire to gain a new anchor. In fact, it allows the Storyteller and the other players to put the sudden intense sociability into context.

This is a judgment call of course—when it feels right, then you can spend experience points and add the anchor to your sheet. Sometimes, the group will find a single intense scene justifies the addition, while in a less frenzied chronicle, a peppering of scenes scattered across many sessions might be more natural. Regardless, adding an anchor is not a casual event, and represents the character taking a real social risk, and exposing herself to the dangers of human contact. She's daring to care about a human being, with all the pain that promises inevitably for the hungry immortals.

When the group is satisfied with the story elements, the you can spend experience points equal to three times your current number of anchors to gain a new one. If you have only three anchors remaining, this means a fourth would cost nine experience points.

For the Storyteller: Anchors in your Chronicle

Shamelessly Exploiting Them

Anchors provide the Storyteller with a huge list of complications, plot hooks, antagonists, allies, leverage, and sources of drama and tragedy, so knowing how to take advantage of it is essential to getting the most out of this system (and justifying the additional mechanics and record keeping).

Creating Intense Situations—The players already have at least a minimal buy-in for caring about their anchors. They've invested a little time in them, written some things down, perhaps worked them into their character's backstory already. Your job is to take this seed of caring, and water it until it grows tall and thorny. Begin early and often using characters off the anchor list in your plotting and stories, and tempt players into running them with the promise of bonus experience points, so they take on the nuances of how they're portrayed. Your goal here is to get *everyone* at the table—not just the player to whom they belong—to start caring about them. Once you start to have that, start dialing up the heat. Putting an anchor who the players have met and seen played into a dangerous situation will ratchet it up in terms of significance pretty dramatically.

And on the flipside, anchors themselves are a source for intense situations. When the anchoring relationship suffers Hurt or Exposure, there's the potential for a great scene there, one of melodrama or of menace. When a vampire tries to heal a wounded relationship with some careful attention, there's a scene there full of pathos and personal conflict if you want to make it so. When a vampire's accumulated stress and horror explodes in an emotional confrontation with an anchor, there's a potentially devastating scene there—especially if an anchoring relationship is completely broken in the process. The death of an anchor—used rarely—provides an object lesson in how all-encompassing the Curse is, and then gives the player a devastating choice to make... suffer, or destroy.

All the mechanics which mediate the change of an anchor's states trigger emotionally charged scenes which you can use as you like.

Up the Stakes to Make It Personal

We mentioned buy-in earlier. Getting players to care and feel invested in what happens to their characters, and the Storyteller's characters can be tricky sometimes. Anchors provide a shortcut to this, if as just described, their quickly brought to life. Using them to make the larger events of a chronicle feel personal keeps them relevant to play even when they're not the focus of it, and puts a human face on things.

For example, in the machinations of Kindred politics, the downtown Invicti are pushing a program of urban renewal and gentrification, seeking to turn the characters' comfortably run-down neighborhood into the new trendy place for young urban professionals to live—loft apartments in the old warehouses, and a corporate coffee shop on each corner. Losing all their favorite scummy night spots and street hunting will be bad, but when one character gets a call from an anchor who's just been served with an eviction notice after his building was bought out by Invicti interests... that puts an exclamation point at the end of the sentence. It's no longer just Kindred politics and territory—now it's hurting one of their own.

Drive Home the Themes

Anchors can be used to get to know Requiem's larger themes, to invite them in, and give them a bed for the night.

Predation—Vampires are predators. Vampires eat human beings. They can stalk the night, creep in alleys, seduce strangers, mesmerize the unwilling... or they can go home, and have a mortal filled with the hot red stuff open the door for them, and welcome them with a smile. Feeding on anchors is easy and safe... at least until you take it too far, and destroy the finer feelings that keep you

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connected with them. Every time a vampire feeds on an anchor—every time a vampire is tempted to feed on an anchor—the reality of their curse is hammered home.

Isolation—Rational vampires know in their hearts that they're the unclean, poisonous toxic things which will sicken and kill any mortal who gets too close. They know they hide their true nature because it would horrify their prey, ad leave them with nothing to eat. There's a layer of lies and self deception wrapped around this ugly truth because without it, a vampire couldn't even pretend to be human. Even the cynical still lie to themselves about it, savoring only a dark chuckle at their frailty. If a vampire really cared about all these people, wouldn't she flee from them? Leave them safe? Yeah, right. The terror of isolation, of being left alone with nothing but the Beast for company overrides almost everything, including basic honesty with oneself. Vampires cling to their anchors, because they'll drown without them (ironic, though that sounds). Yet, anchors die, the relationships wither, and as they leave, a vampire's true isolation from humanity becomes harder and harder to ignore. Anchors are a bandage over an infected wound, and when they come off they take the scab too.

Personal Horror—They do indeed make the horror personal. They put a human face on the victims, and since they're played and personified more deeply than normal Storyteller characters, it should bite deeper when they suffer, witness a vampire's sins, bleed for the monster, or flee him in shock and horror and disgust. The revulsion of a stranger is bad. The revulsion of a loved one is so much worse. The vampires may experience the horror, but seeing it reflected in a witnesses eyes adds another perspective on it.

Abusive Relationships—This is an ugly and uncomfortable topic for many people, so best to get it out of the way. Ordinary humans end up in some truly fucked up abusive relationships, and almost perversely it seems, some end up preconditioned by accidents of upbringing and neurochemistry to unconsciously seek out such relationships, to find again and again they've fallen for another abusive person. And what is a vampire, if not an abuser? The Beast puts the worst drunken temper to shame, and dress it up how you like, taking blood from the unwilling is uncomfortably close to rape. This theme is a loaded one, and not for everyone to explore, but in the context of vampires and their anchors can provide some powerful opportunities for role playing, and add an intensity to a chronicle some may enjoy.

Vulnerability Versus the Necessity of Caring—In the neo-feudal hell of vampire society, weakness are ruthlessly exploited by enemies, used to control, intimidate, and suppress Anchors represent a profound weakness which is almost shamefully easy to exploit. It offends the Beast's instincts to be placed in such a vulnerable position, yet the Man will not relinquish these tenuous human contacts because doing so would be the death of self. Anchors are a source of strength as well as weakness though, and they provide a vampire with a reason to go on existing, year after year. Even though losing them hurts, even though they make a liar and a self-deceiver out of him, even though the evil-eyed old men of the world would use them to control him, the Man still dares to care.

Anchoring Your Chronicle

A chronicle run with Hell is Other People will play and feel differently than one run with the core Humanity system, and even if used lightly will emphasize the necessity of interacting with mortals. It also removes most of the negative social consequences of a declining Humanity score—so vampires can remain socially engaged and dangerous up till the point when their connections fail them completely.

There are two primary ways this system can inform a Storyteller's chronicling.

First is the *anchor-complicated* chronicle. In this mode, the anchor system provides dies a way of complicating and confounding—adding a layer of relationship drama to the vagaries of Kindred politics, and placing a vampire's mortal anchors into peril. In this mode, the anchors become Storyteller characters when the larger scope of the chronicle is planned out, and get interwoven in the story.

Second is the *anchor-based* chronicle. Here it becomes possible to run a chronicle which is nothing but anchors and anchor-prompted play. In this mode, the Storyteller merely pushes a vampire's anchors into an unstable configuration, forcing some to near-breaking, others into exposure. Anchors are played aggressively by other players, and fleshed out as full characters as quickly as possible. The goal here is to make the players care about them beyond their mechanical functions as quickly as possible, and then to throw the anchoring relationships into crisis which demands action to mend. Interleaving the vampires' anchors into a tangle of affectations and attractions can add another layer of conflict in the "Get your boy away from my daughter!" mode.

Soap Doesn't Make You Clean

Relationship melodrama where half the social tangle is undead rarely ends well for all concerned. Consider the tapestry of human experience, all the different ways people relate to one another, and all the ways they manage to screw that relating up. Lovers lie and cheat, friends drift apart even if there's no betrayal, teachers lie to students,

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parents neglect children, rivals surpass their opposition, or simply lose interest in them. Now, throw a blood-hungry nightstalker into the mix. Vampires bring a whole new set of stresses for a relationship (not the least, the Atrocity of their very existence). They're secretive, strange, often unsettling, inevitably unstable, with unwholesome needs, perverse desires, and horrific habits. They keep odd hours, odder company, and sometimes other monsters come looking for them with rope and hooks and fire.

Soap (as in 'soap opera') can wash up even a standard action movie style plot, and even if the chronicle usually plays like summer blockbuster, adding in the relationship-driven B-plot can give it some more depth... or at least, put the anchors front-and-center when the cackling mad Mekhet terrorist needs somebody to duct tape to a huge bomb.

Mudbath

Players can suggest anchor-based subplots. In fact, they should be encouraged to if you are planning on running a soapy chronicle. Get them to write two or three possible anchor-based complications or plots down on a card, and then keep these at your right elbow for ready use in play. When one comes up, throw the player who came up with the idea an extra experience.

Let the players know about the experience points reward for getting their plots picked up, so they'll make them as lurid and attention-getting as possible.

An alternative for Storytellers who like to be surprised and to improvise plotting on the fly would be to let players introduce soapy subplots on the fly, and spontaneously injecting one of their Anchors into the current crisis. If the group likes it—and it doesn't strain credibility beyond what the group's willing to accept—then it goes live and into the chronicle immediately, and the introducing player gets his bonus experience points.

For example: Winter is a special time for Vampires, because it's sometimes dark enough early on for them to stop by the bank themselves before it closes. Jack (after losing his accountant friend) needs to file his own taxes, and so has to hit the bank for some paperwork. While waiting in line, somebody at the counter ahead of him starts yelling—it's a robbery! Jack's player thinks quick, and glances over his anchors and sees J.B. Massey, an anchor who's seen no action in play so far, and whose thumbnail reads "troubled street kid." Jack's got a parental relationship with this kid. His player raises a finger and says, "I recognize the robber's voice." Now, Jack the vampire is caught in the middle of an armed bank robbery with one of his anchors doing the robbing. The Storyteller smiles and nods, "Yeah, that's worth an experience point!"

Knowing When to Back Off

We keep talking about how complicated human relationships are, so it's time to consider what that means for the actual group of actual people who sit around the table to play Vampire. If some people at the table have issues with relationships, particularly unhealthy or abusive ones, then some care need be taken when making these a major component of a chronicle. There's no magic yardstick for measuring this, and the only way to make sure everyone is cool with the direction things are going is with regular conversations about the chronicle as a whole, its themes, directions, and whatnot.

This meta-discussion is valuable for more than assessing everyone's comfort zones, and can provide a Storyteller with good information on tuning the chronicle to suit the preferences and play-styles around the table, but is essential for avoiding alienating players when potentially sensitive subject-matter finds its way into the game. Giving players the ability to say they're not comfortable with an issue, or with the handling of an issue without fear of disrupting the group will help keep things harmonious. Most players don't want to insult their Storyteller by suggesting they're doing it wrong, so some will not mention on their own initiative that the issues being injected into the chronicle are uncomfortable for them. The free discussion forum pre-game or outside the game gives them the opportunity to speak up.

Even if players are not made uncomfortable by the relationship play, they might not be comfortable with how their anchors are treated in the chronicle, especially if they've gotten attached to them, and have begun to think of them as fully realized characters in their own right. With players cross-playing the anchors of other players, this can happen with surprising swiftness. Likewise, a player who habitually takes on the role of another player's anchor might begin to feel possessive about her. This really serve the good, because fully-realized anchors dial up the intensity, but in doing so there's the risk someone's feelings will get hurt when the anchors suffer (as inevitably they must!). Again, keeping everyone willing to be open about their opinions and needs in the game, and keeping the dialog going will help minimize the chance you'll hurt or insult a player when you use some heavy-handed season finale plotting, and crush an anchor with an out of control car, and put them into a coma (see "Soap" in the previous section).

Keeping It All Straight

Five players, seven anchors per player... even a liberal arts major knows that's a whole lot of characters to keep

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track of. Things will only get more complicated, because anchoring relationships are so unstable, mortals so frail, and the Beast so perverse. As plots get soapier, the amount of crossover between each character's stable of anchors will get increasingly complicated. Is it Diego or Daniel who's in love with Desmond? Is it Sharon or Susan who sold out Sarah to the Sicilians?

Two tools will help dramatically when trying to keep this all straight.

The Big List—the Storyteller should have a big list of all the anchors in play, including the same information each player has on her sheet, the vampire they're anchoring, and a section for notes and developments related to that anchor. This is the dead-basic bare minimum needed to keep anchors straight, and use them to their fullest.

The Map—on another blank sheet, write down each vampire's name, and then each anchor's name when they come into play. Circle them. If you have a supply of colored pencils or crayons, you can color-code each name with a hue representing each vampire so at a glance you know which of the names on the map belong to whom. Draw a line between the anchors added to the map and the vampire to whom they belong, and on the line write the kind of relationship they share.

Whenever anchors become entangled with one another, forming new connections or relationships, draw lines between them and on the line a word or two describing the relationship. You may want to add in important non-anchor Storyteller characters to this as well (giving them their own color) when they start to impinge on the growing complexity of interconnections. Seven degrees of separation, indeed.

In the business, this is called a relationship map, and provides a graphic presentation of how all the characters in play relate to one another. Conflicts will literally become apparent on the map, when the loyalties come into conflict, anchors are torn between multiple vampires, or subject to their ire. See the example relationship map on p. 171 of this chapter.

A Final Hypocrisy

Vampires may spin a fiction around their relationships, lying to themselves that what they do is good and filled with genuine feelings, but the ugly truth of a vampire's anchors are this—they drain them dry. Even if the vampire never breaks his anchor's skin, never drinks literally from them, he's still a parasite leeching from them emotional vitality, passion, feeling. Even if he never murders them, beats them, eats, betrays, or abandons them he'll still doom them unless he gives them up first. The relationship an vampire has with his anchors is unstable and it degenerates Were the vampire to be honest with himself, he'd realize how much danger he exposes his anchors to just by associating with them.

Yet, he still does. The lies help. Love, friendship, respect... but it's all a con he runs on himself. Love is for the living, and he has no place claiming the love of a mortal. Yet, he does. He clings to them, fights for them, weeps and mourns when his influence dooms them. But he doesn't stop, he seeks new anchors, draws more innocents into the web. As he tips over lives others tumble askew too when impacted, a domino fall of human misery rippling outwards from him, darkening the world a little more with each new fall.

Vampires are not cursed—they *are* the curse.

Banes: The Cost of Inhumanity

Vampires play at being human. It's the central notion behind their storied Masquerade — they wear human personas like an actor in a *commedia dell'arte* troupe wears his mask. Vampires even adopt stock personas. The naïve club girl looking for her first taste of love. The suave, seductive man out for a fling. The "victim" trolling for muggers, or the helpful Samaritan searching for (or arranging) flat tires in the middle of the night. These are the masks that the vampire wears.

At first, the mask is nothing more than a memory of what the vampire once was, or perhaps an idealized version of what he wanted to be. But as time goes on, the mask grows heavier. The Man recedes, the Beast takes up more room in the Kindred's heart and soul. And as this happens, the vampire's blood grows thicker, his Disciplines grow more powerful. In as little as a decade, a vampire might look out at humanity and wonder whether he ever truly understood it.

The banes system presented here takes this notion — that as Humanity falls, the vampire's supernatural side comes to the fore — and presents an accompanying system. As a character's Humanity trait drops, the character may develop a bane instead of a derangement.

Systems

Banes are divided into mild and severe categories, just as derangements are, but unlike derangements a mild bane doesn't necessarily devolve into a severe one.

In general, a mild bane can do one of the following:

- Inflict bashing damage.
- Cause up to a -5 penalty to an action (but not prohibit it).

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- Compel a choice between losing an expendable trait (Health, Vitae or Willpower) and taking an action.
- Cause an inconvenient situation that might risk the Masquerade, if mortals are paying attention.
- Interfere with a vampire's supernatural prowess (Disciplines, physical augmentation, healing, Vinculum) in some way.

A severe bane can:

- Inflict lethal or even aggravated damage.
- Prohibit taking a particular kind of action altogether.
- Compel a given action with no possibility of resistance.
- Expose the vampire as a supernatural creature to anyone nearby.
- Interfere with something basic to the vampire's nature — the ability to expend Vitae at all, for instance.

Acquiring a Bane

A vampire might develop a bane instead of a derangement following an unsuccessful degeneration roll at the Storyteller's discretion. In this instance, the bane can be "cured" just as a derangement might. If the character's Humanity increases back to the level it was when he experience the degeneration that preceded the bane, that bane fades. Unlike derangements, though, which may or may not return if the character's Humanity drops again (see p. 93 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**), banes never truly leave the character. The character still feels the effects of the bane if his Humanity increases, just not strongly enough to affect him on a mechanical level. If the character loses Humanity again, the old bane resurfaces, *and* the character must check once again for a new detriment (either bane or derangement; see below for more on how to choose which is applicable).

For example, Caleb, as a neonate, has Humanity 7… until he loses control after a week of being unable to work up the courage to feed and attacks a young nurse walking to her car as her shift ends. He kills the unfortunate woman, draining her dry and leaving her body sprawled across the hood of a car. Caleb's player rolls for degeneration and fails, and then rolls Caleb's new Humanity rating (six) and fails again. Caleb develops a bane. In this case, the Storyteller decides that he incurs the Hunger's Visage bane (see p. 193).

In the coming months, Caleb, falling in with a coterie pledged to maintaining Humanity and helping each other to do so, shuns his vampiric side and embraces the Man within. His player spends the experience points necessary to buy his Humanity back up to 7, whereupon the Hunger's Visage bane fades. Caleb no longer looks like a monster when his Vitae pool falls, but he still *feels* his face contort when he gets hunger. If his Humanity drops again, his player will have to make the Humanity roll to see if another bane (or a derangement, depending on the circumstances) appears, *and* the Hunger's Visage resurfaces.

Vampires might acquire banes in other ways, too. Below are several options:

- **Atrocity:** If you are using the Atrocity dice rules (see p. 165) in your chronicle, you might allow characters to shed Atrocity dice in exchange for a bane. Five Atrocity dice can be removed from the character in exchange for a mild bane, while the player can trade in up to nine Atrocity dice in exchange for a severe bane. Once a character accrues his 10th Atrocity point, though, he still gains a permanent Atrocity die.

  Banes gained in this manner are permanent (as much so as other banes, at least; see below for information on losing banes).
- **Blood Potency:** When a character's Blood Potency increases via experience point expenditure, the player rolls the character's Humanity. On a failed roll, the character acquires a mild bane. The player can choose to automatically fail this roll and accept a severe bane; this reduces the experience cost of Blood Potency to new dots x 7.
- **Diablerie:** If the character raises her Blood Potency through diablerie, the player rolls Humanity (*after* taking into account the automatic loss; see p. 159 of **Vampire: The Requiem**). If this roll *succeeds*, the character gains a mild bane. If the roll fails, she gains a severe bane. The player still needs to roll Humanity to avoid gaining a derangement as usual (or another bane, if the Storyteller prefers).
- **Spontaneously:** What if all of the vampires in the city just woke up one night and found that they couldn't enter homes uninvited? What if the entirety of Clan Gangrel slowly succumbed to a condition that forced them to count grains of spilled rice? What if a handful of salt could eat away at the flesh of any vampire who had ever killed a person (which is most of them)? Banes can arise without antecedent from a particular character's actions, but this kind of occurrence is thematically different from a bane afflicting a character following degeneration. That said, the vampiric condition (and mortal perception thereof) is mutable, and sometimes it's good to shake things up.

Losing a Bane

The only sure way to lose a bane is by raising Humanity to the point that the bane fades (see above). That isn't easy, though. Raising Humanity requires that a vampire act in a humane fashion, that she spends the time and energy to

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relate to human beings and, more importantly, that she deny her bestial impulses. Once the Beast claws the Man down, the damage is difficult to reverse. As such, vampires who accumulate banes might search for a way to excise them that doesn't require the steep climb toward Humanity. Likewise, if the Storyteller uses the optional system of allowing players to trade Atrocity dice for banes, or chooses to assign banes for other reasons (see above), he might wish to allow characters to remove them through taking actions in the story.

A bane might be absolved by reconnecting with one's Humanity on an immediate basis, rather than raising the trait. A character saves a mortal's life with no thought of reward, and later finds that the sight of fresh cut flowers doesn't bother him anymore. A vampire breaks up a gang fight using Majesty, and later realizes that he can finally walk across the bridge to his old neighborhood without feeling ill. This method only works, of course, if the player is willing to put some thought and consideration into what taking a humanitarian action *means* to the character. In any event, if the character doesn't treat the fact that whatever he did lifted a supernatural curse with some reverence, that curse can reoccur the next time that vampire enters frenzy.

Another option, if the Storyteller is using the Atrocity system, is to reverse the rules given above. The character loses a bane, but gains five or nine Atrocity dice, depending on the bane's severity. In story terms, the character is sacrificing his ability to deal with humanity for the ability to *pretend* to humanity more effectively. Consider: Banes set vampires apart from mortals, and make discovery more likely. Atrocity dice bring the Beast closer to the surface, but they don't necessarily make the Masquerade harder. A vampire that loses a bane in favor of Atrocity dice is making a conscious choice — be a more savage, but better camouflaged, predator.

Finally, the character might discover supernatural remedies for banes. Certainly, in a chronicle in which banes are commonplace, rumors of how to get rid of them probably abound. Below are ten such rumors. It remains up to the Storyteller to determine whether any of them actually work.

- "Drink the blood of a sorcerer. No idea how you find one or what you do if he tries to use his magic on you, but if you drink his blood, you lose *all* your weaknesses. Sunlight, the hunger, and anything else you might have picked up. The big stuff comes back — sorry — but those annoying curses that just seem to happen? Those stay gone."
- "Burn off your own hand in the sunlight. I know it's extreme, but God accepts that sacrifice. If your right hand offends you, cut it off and cast it away, right? I don't know if it works with eyes or not."
- "Abstain from feeding on humans for a full year. Going into torpor doesn't count. You have to live the way you normally do, out and about among the kine, but not feed on them. You do that, the curse is lifted."
- "High Priestesses of the Circle of the Crone are all taught rituals that can absolve you of these kinds of things. It's the last thing they're taught when they ascend to the Circle's leadership, or so I'm told."
- "Wait for the cat. You'll know it when you see it. Follow it, it'll lead you to a person. When you see that person, help him. How? You'll have to figure that out. But if you can help that person, you'll be cured. But you've gotta watch for that cat, and you only get one chance."
- "You have to enter the Underworld. The place where dead humans go. And they'll probably want to kill you if they figure out what you are. But if you can get in — and finding a gate isn't easy, let me tell you — you can make your way to the River of Blood. One sip cures these curses. Then, of course, you have to get back *out*."
- "Confess to a mortal priest. I mean, confess *everything*. You'll have to tell him what you are, and yes, that's a Masquerade breach. But he can give you absolution. Real, God-approved absolution. If you do the penance."
- "The Ordo Dracul knows how to cure these things. Thing is, it's part of their freaky meditation practices — you change your body to accommodate the curses. And as far as I know, the only way to learn their methods is to drink the Kool-Aid and join up. I know Kindred who have done it."
- "You get these things when you drift too far away from humanity, become too far removed from the human understanding, right? So the way to cure them is to become famous. Ever notice that every year, there's

The Ordo Dracul and Banes

To expand a bit on the rumor above, the speaker is referring to the Coils of the Dragon. Since learning the Coils requires making a physical change to the supernatural anatomy of the vampire, it stands to reason that the same metaphysical meditative practices might be used to rid oneself of a bane.

System-wise, the player needs to expend three experience points for a minor bane and six for a severe one, and the character needs to spend one full night in meditation. This option is only open to character who have learned at least one Coil of the Dragon. It doesn't matter which one; the point is that the character has learned to seize control of her undead state enough to expunge the curse.

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always a celebrity who doesn't have any real talent? Usually attached to another celeb? I'm not naming names, but I'm just saying — some of them were Kindred with some heavy burdens to shed."

- "Curses can be expatiated with blood — Kindred blood. It takes ten Kindred. And I'm sorry, neonate, but you're number nine. If you can direct me to two Kindred that no one would miss, however, I might be convinced to let you off."

Mild Banes

- **Aura of Madness:** Insane people find the vampire fascinating. Anyone with a derangement of any kind feels compelled to follow, watch or interact with the Kindred. The derangement in question usually plays into the reaction, so a character with the fixation derangement becomes, as the name implies, fixated on the vampire, while a character with the narcissism derangement might see the vampire as a threat to his interests or as someone who can finally understand his greatness. This aura isn't strong enough to compel player-controlled characters with derangements to take any particular action, but they still notice the vampire. In any case, the vampire winds up with a small entourage of unbalanced people following him in short order.
- **Bells:** The sound of bells causes one point of bashing damage per turn. Recordings of bells or artificial bells (such as the sounds produce by a synthesizer) do not cause this effect — only a bell with a clapper causes damage.

  Variations: Bell sounds cause Repulsion (see below) instead.
- **Blood for Service:** The vampire requires a taste of the target's blood before she is able to command a victim's mind. All uses of the Dominate Discipline suffer a -5 penalty unless the vampire has previously tasted the victim's blood.

  Variations: This bane might affect Majesty, Nightmare or any similar Discipline. As a severe version, it might affect *all* such Disciplines.
- **Blood of the Unwilling:** The vampire receives only one Vitae for every two Health points of damage inflicted if she feeds from an unwilling victim. "Unwilling" here can mean a vessel who does not wish to fed upon (meaning an unknowing victim is by definition unwilling), a vessel that the vampire attacks rather than seducing, or a victim incapable of giving consent (asleep or drugged).

  Variations: The vampire receives less Vitae from *willing* victims instead. This bane can be applied to any particular kind of victim — virgins, clergy, children, criminals — that the Storyteller wishes to make inefficient victims for the vampire.
- **Blood Tithe to Midnight:** Every midnight, the vampire must reanimate his body. Over the course of the night, the vampire's undead metabolism slows as the daysleep threatens to overtake her. In game terms, the player must spend a point of Vitae at midnight (the halfway point between sunset and sunrise, which may or may not actually happen to be 12:00 AM), or else the character suffers the daysleep for one full scene. The character can attempt to remain awake during this scene, but suffers the same difficulty she would during the day (see p. 184 of **Vampire: The Requiem**).

  Variations: The player must spend a point of Vitae during any scene that the character sees the full moon (reflected sunlight threatens the daysleep), or the character suffers the effects.
- **Caught in Webs:** Cobwebs are impossibly sticky for the vampire. If the vampire touches a spider's web, the player must expend a point a Vitae and roll Strength + Stamina to pull free, as though breaking an object of Durability 3 (see p. 135 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**).
- **Counting Compulsion:** The vampire is compelled to count grains of rice, mustard seeds, salt, beads or other such tiny objects if they are spilled or scattered in front of her. The player can spend a point of Willpower to avoid this compulsion, but unless the character cleans up the mess or leaves the area, the compulsion lingers. The player must spend a point of Willpower each minute that the material remains visible to the vampire, and during this time the player applies a -1 modifier to all rolls for the character due to the distraction.
- **Crossroads:** If a vampire passes through a crossroads, whether on foot or in a vehicle, he becomes confused and disoriented. He suffers a -3 on all Mental actions for the remainder of the scene (rolls to resist frenzy do not suffer this penalty, though Discipline rolls that use Mental Attributes do). Passing through multiple crossroads in the same scene does not deepen the confusion, though if Storyteller makes this a severe bane, the effect might last the rest of the night or the penalty might worsen.

  Variation: The character must spend a Willpower point to find his way to any destination that he cannot walk to in a straight line.
- **Day of Rest:** Christian tradition holds Sunday as a day of rest, while Jewish custom keeps the Sabbath holy. In either case, a vampire with this bane discovers that she labors under certain restrictions on this "day of

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rest." She is able to feed, function and use Disciplines normally, but cannot counterfeit life during the day of rest. The player cannot spend Vitae for the vampire to gain the blush of life, nor can she spend Willpower to clarify the vampire's reflection.

Variation: The vampire might find himself unable to use Disciplines to command mortals to violate the prohibition on keeping the Sabbath day holy (or whatever religious variation the Storyteller wishes). For a severe version of this bane, the vampire might find herself unable to feed on the day of rest.

- **Faded Reflection:** The vampire's reflection becomes permanently blurred and murky, and no amount of effort on the vampire's part can improve it. The player cannot spend Willpower to appear in mirrors or photographs (see pp. 169-170 of **Vampire: The Requiem**).
- **Fascinated by Dust:** The vampire cannot help but stare at a cloud of dust. This might arise when the character disturbs the dust of a room, or if a knowledgeable foe blows a handful of dust in her face. In either case, the player must spend a Willpower point and roll Resolve + Composure in order to look away. If the roll fails, the vampire stands transfixed for a number of turns equal to (10—Humanity). If the vampire is attacked, this effect ends.
- **Hatred of Beasts:** Animals hate the vampire. Wild animals flee on site, while domesticated animals either flee or interpose themselves between the Kindred and their owners. All uses of the Animalism Discipline that deal with animals suffer a -1 penalty, and mundane applications of the Animal Ken Skill suffer a -3 penalty. This bane can serve as a minor threat to the Masquerade, but can also prevent vampires with low Blood Potency from finding food easily. This bane does not affect vampires, werewolves, or other intelligent beings that can take animal form.
- **Hunger's Visage:** The vampire becomes noticeably inhuman as his Vitae pool drops. When a vampire is *hungry* (see p. 179 of **Vampire: The Requiem**), his skin becomes even paler than usual, his fangs distend, his eyes take on an animal-like quality and color (yellow, pale green, frost blue) and his fingernails elongate. If he is *starving*, these changes become even more pronounced. The vampire's eyes turn blood red, bone white or luminous green. His flesh becomes white as chalk, or a rotted yellow — either way, not a natural color. His breath smells like rotting blood and his fingernails are yellowed, brittle and a horrible brown color. In either of these states, the vampire probably suffers penalties to non-Intimidation Social rolls, but the real danger of this bane is that it breaks the Masquerade.

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- **Inhuman Maw:** The vampire's teeth change. They might become slender and snakelike, or his jaw might unhinge to reveal a lamprey-like mouth. In any event, unless the vampire is actively biting someone, the change isn't obvious. Anyone having a conversation with a vampire notices with a successful Wits + Composure roll (the vampire's player can contest this with a Manipulation + Stealth roll).
- **Insect Attractor:** The vampire acts as a magnet for bugs. Flies, mosquitoes, bees and all manner of other six-legged creatures flock to him, crawling on his skin and trying to enter his mouth. This can, in turn, attract other creatures seeking to eat the bugs, but the more noticeable effect is that the vampire *always* has some kind of insect crawling on him. This imposes penalties on Social rolls (the extent of the penalty depends on the situation and the audience), and can also mark the vampire as having some kind of supernatural pedigree, if a witness knows what to look for.

  Variations: Vampire attracts rats or other vermin instead.
- **Lingering Wounds:** The vampire finds certain kinds of wounds harder to heal. The player or the Storyteller chooses a source of damage when the character acquires this bane. Any damage from that source can only be healed during the day, while the vampire is asleep. The character needs complete rest to will his undead body to heal the damage. The type of damage is otherwise unchanged; if the character suffers Lingering Wounds from silver and is stabbed with a silver knife, the damage is lethal, but if he is shot with silver bullets, the damage is bashing. He simply can't heal the damage until he goes to sleep. Some possibilities for damage sources include:

  —Silver

  —Ash, yew, or mistletoe wood

  —Damage inflicted by virgins, clergy or "the pure of heart" (Morality 8+)

  —Blessed weapons

  —Attacks preceded by calling the vampire by name
- **Lost in Fog:** The vampire cannot find her way in fog, steam or mist. All attempts to orient herself when surrounded by such a condition suffer a -3 penalty, and the Direction Sense Merit is useless. If the vampire finds a guide and accepts his help, she *must* follow him until they escape the fog.
- **Lunar Illumination:** The vampire glows slightly in moonlight. This isn't too noticeable in a city environment, where the vampire is probably surrounded by artificial light, but in a rural locale, or even a suburban area with few streetlights, the vampire has an obvious nimbus of soft, pale light around her. This can, of course, provide hunters with a way to identify the vampire.

  Variations: The vampire glows under artificial light instead of moonlight, or glows in pitch darkness (which probably also imposes a slight penalty to Stealth rolls).
- **Madness in the Blood:** The "sanguinary animism" derangement (p. 191 of **Vampire: The Requiem**) demonstrates what happens when a vampire believes that he takes on the traits of his victims. With this bane, the character inherits any derangements that his victim has. These derangements remain for one scene per point of Vitae taken from the victim. If the vampire kills the victim by draining him to death, the player must roll Humanity. If the roll fails, any derangements from that victim become permanent.
- **Must Wear White:** White is a mourning color in some cultures, and vampires occasionally develop a compulsion to wear white. If the vampire does not visibly wear at least one white article of clothing, he feels out of sorts and exposed. In game terms, the player applies a -1 penalty to all rolls until the character can dress appropriate. If the white article of clothing becomes soiled, this penalty applies until it can be cleaned or replaced.

  Variations: Black, of course, is the color of mourning many cultures, but strangely, this doesn't seem to become compulsory as often.
- **Occluded Voice:** Electronic transmissions refuse to carry or record vampire's voice. That means that talking on a telephone with the vampire is impossible; the phone transmits only static. It also means that the character cannot be recorded. The character can overcome this limitation for one minute if the player expends one Willpower point (for telephone or other communication devices), or leave a recording in place for a number of days equal to 11 minus one's Blood Potency. If the player expends a Willpower *dot*, a recording can be made permanent.
- **Repulsion:** A certain substance makes the vampire recoil. The character cannot come within 15 feet of the source of the Repulsion unless the player spends a point of Willpower. This in no way prevents the character from using other methods to affect the source of the Repulsion; a mortal might keep a vampire away using a bulb of garlic, but the vampire can still shoot the mortal if she has a gun handy.

  If another character is holding the source of the Repulsion, he can move it toward the vampire, thus forcing the vampire to back up or flee. The Repulsion inflicts no damage to the vampire even if comes within 15 feet, but the player must spend a Willpower

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point per turn until the character can get away. If the character runs out of Willpower, the player must roll Resolve + Composure to resist frenzy.

Appropriate choices for Repulsion include:

—Garlic

—Silver

—Religious artifacts (from a specific religion; if *all* religious symbols cause Repulsion, this should be a considered a severe bane)

—Salt

—Orange peels or other citrus fruits

—Roses or other fresh flowers

—Blood from a specific animal

Variations: Source of Repulsion strips Health points (bashing damage) or Vitae instead after all Willpower is depleted.

- **Slowed by Bloodlust:** The sight of blood makes a vampire dizzied and distracted, to the point that he has difficulty fighting foes who are obviously bleeding. The vampire receives no Defense against any opponent who is visibly bleeding. If the opponent is simply bloodstained, the vampire receives his Defense normally — the opponent actually has to be losing blood. If the vampire's Vitae pool is completely full, this bane does not apply.
- **Tangling Briars:** The vampire becomes weak as a child when faced with thickets, briars or brambles. The character's Strength is considered 0 if more than one of her limbs are touching such plants, though the player can expend Vitae to increase Strength and allow the character to pull free. If the character pushes on, however, the player must expend this Vitae each turn to maintain the necessary Strength.

  Variations: As a severe bane, this might extend to restraints made from brambles or briars.
- **Touch of Frost:** If the vampire remains stationary for five minutes or more, frost accumulates on windows, plants and any other surface that holds it. The Kindred leaves icy fingerprints on glass, even after a brief touch.
- **Uninvited:** A vampire who enters a dwelling uninvited suffers three points of bashing damage. Once inside the dwelling, the vampire suffers no further damage from this bane, but cannot heal the damage until she leaves.

  Variations: The vampire suffers a -2 modifier to all actions while in the house; the player must spend Willpower to enter.
- **Vulnerability:** The character suffers bashing damage from contact with normally harmless sources. Anything listed as a source for Repulsion (see above) might be a Vulnerability instead (or as well, if the character picks up another bane). Whenever the character touches the offending material, he suffers two points of bashing damage. The character can heal the damage normally, given time and blood, but prolonged contact with the substance can drive the vampire into torpor. It cannot kill the vampire, though; if the Kindred suffers enough damage from this source to fill his Health track with lethal damage, further exposure to the substance does *not* push the character's Health track into aggravated damage. Touching a vampire with the substance requires a touch attack (see p. 157 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**).
- **Weakened by Symbols:** The vampire feels weak in the presence of holy symbols, and actually attacking someone carrying such a symbol imposes a -5 modifier on all rolls (including Disciplines). The vampire might be vulnerable to all holy symbols, the symbols from a particular religion or subset of religions (all Christian symbols, all Abrahamic religious symbols, etc.), all holy symbols that the character recognizes as such, or only the religion that the vampire practiced in life. In no case does the religious devotion of the bearer make a difference — the bearer might be a serial murderer, but if he carries a cross, the vampire still suffers the penalty.
- **Weight of the Grave:** A handful of grave soil sprinkled on a sleeping vampire forces the player to spend three points of Vitae to awaken in the evening, rather than just one (but does raise the question of why someone who encounters a sleeping vampire sprinkles dirt on her rather than taking more drastic measures). Grave soil slipped into a vampire's pocket or purse can accomplish this as well, as long as the soil is on the character's person when she goes to sleep.

  Variations: Grave soil flung at the vampire slows her down, reducing Initiative by three during that scene.
- **Withering Presence:** The vampire exudes an aura of death. This isn't strong enough to harm or even bother human beings, but plants wither and insects fall dead when the vampire is within 10 feet or so. The effect isn't strong enough to kill large and sturdy plants, but household plants, and flowers die noticeably quickly. A perceptive hunter, therefore, can follow the trail of dead foliage to a vampire's door.

Severe Banes

- **Beast's Cowardice:** If a victim puts up any fight at all — even to the point of saying, "Stop," the vampire loses his fangs. He cannot feed from the victim at all under these circumstances, and can only take blood from incapacitated vessels or blood that is freely given.

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Variations: The Beast wants its prey alive and wriggling. The vampire can *only* take blood from a victim that physically resists.

- **Burning Purity:** The touch of the pure of heart sears the vampire's flesh. Casual contact with a human being of Morality 8+ causes one point of lethal damage per turn. This damage manifests as searing, scorching burns, as if hot metal had been applied to the vampire's skin. The vampire's player must roll to avoid Rötschreck when the character suffers this damage.

  Variations: The vampire only suffers damage when touched by a member of a particular religion, or a *devout* member of that religion. Some other definition of "purity" (virgin, never raised a hand in violence, etc.) might also apply.
- **Blinding Salt:** A handful of salt flung at the vampire burns away his eyes, blinding him for the rest of the night. Aiming the salt properly requires a roll of Dexterity + Athletics, penalized by the vampire's Defense (but not armor) and a -3 modifier to hit the face and eyes. If the roll succeeds, the vampire's eyes boil away to a harsh-smelling goo, and he loses his sight until the next sunset.
- **Cannot Set Foot on Holy Ground:** The vampire is barred from entering consecrated ground. If he is taken onto such ground involuntarily, he can take no other action but fleeing (but doesn't not suffer damage while he is there). What constitutes "consecrated" ground is a question for individual troupes to consider, much as with the mild bane Weakened by Symbols (p. 195).
- **Can't Cross Running Water:** The vampire is physically unable to cross running water under his own power. Even rainwater running through a gutter stops him in his tracks, and a river makes him shake with unnamable dread. He can ride in cars or other conveyances across running water, but if he falls into a body of water, he falls into torpor immediately.
- **Deadly Birthrights:** The mortal descendants or relatives of vampires are reputed to make effective vampire killers (more information on these beings, called dhampirs, can be found in the **Wicked Dead** supplement). Since Kindred are normally incapable of reproduction, this is thought to be merely a story. But children or blood relations other vampires from their breathing days can spell doom for vampires with this bane. Such relatives inflict aggravated hand damage to the vampire. Their fists strike the Kindred like Divine judgment, shattering bone and flesh. Note that the relative in question doesn't have to be related to the vampire with this bane. Someone in his immediate family just needs to have been Embraced.
- **Death of Day's Sleep:** The vampire cannot wake during the day. From the moment the sun crests the horizon to the moment it sinks again, the vampire is a corpse (albeit one that burns in sunlight). He vaguely recalls dreams of drifting in a sea of blackness, but has no other recollection from his time in the daysleep. A character who knows the Surmounting the Daysleep tier of the Coil of Banes (p. 149 of **Vampire: The Requiem**) can spend a Willpower point to retain the same level of activity that most vampires can manage during the day, but it might be better to stipulate that a character who knows that power does not acquire this bane.
- **Debt of Lost Humanity:** The vampire finds awakening in the evening more difficult as his Humanity falls. For every point of Humanity below seven, the vampire must pay an addition point of Vitae to wake himself. Further, for every derangement gained from degeneration (not from other sources), the blood tithe increases again. For example, a vampire with Humanity 5 and two derangements gained from losing Humanity must pay five Vitae to awaken every morning. Of course, this means that the vampire must feed more frequently, which, in turn, increases the risk of further Humanity loss.
- **Forced Slumber:** A cross, rose, wooden nail or some other special object placed on the body of a Kindred prevents him from rising the next night. The vampire remains aware and sensate, but cannot so much as blink. During this time, the vampire continues to lose a point of Vitae every evening, but cannot move until the item is removed.
- **Harbinger of Death:** The vampire's presence is anathema to life. While healthy individuals can survive the Kindred's touch, sick or weak people aren't so lucky. A vampire with this bane who strolls through an infirmary or nursing home might claim dozens of lives (and the player would roll for degeneration, of course). Pregnant women may miscarry from the vampire's proximity, as well, at the Storyteller's discretion.

  This bane is meant as a curse, not a weapon, but if you require a system, assume that everyone who touches the vampire must succeed on a Stamina + Resolve roll or suffer three levels of lethal damage. This damage immediately heals as soon as the vampire leaves the area, but for someone whose Health track is already full, this damage can be fatal.
- **Haunting:** The vampire stands out to ghosts. No matter how cognizant a ghost is, he recognizes the vampire as an undead creature. Ghosts respond differently to vampires based on their lingering passions. A vengeful

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ghost might follow the vampire hoping to do her harm, while a protective ghost might want to make sure the vampire doesn't kill anyone. In any case, the ghost can spend a point of Essence per night to anchor himself to the Kindred (ghosts and their anchors are described on pp. 208-209 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**).

- **Honesty for Kindness:** The Kindred might be degraded and evil, but she can't ignore a true act of kindness. If someone does her a good turn with no expectation of reward, the vampire is unable to keep a secret from or lie to that character for the remainder of the night. All questions must be answered completely honestly, and to the vampire's highest truth — that is, she cannot conceal fact behind semantics. The good deed that the vampire enjoys doesn't have to be unsolicited (that is, the vampire can ask for help), but if even a penny is given in recompense, the vampire can lie or cheat the character as she sees fit. Doing a good deed with the express purpose of taking advantage of this bane negates the effect.
- **Infectious:** Normally, of course, for a vampire to Embrace a mortal takes will. With this bane, though, a vampire can create another Kindred simply by drinking her blood. In order for this to happen, a mortal must die during a scene in which the Kindred feeds on her. The vampire's player rolls Humanity. If this roll fails, the victim rises the following night as a vampire. The new vampire is of the same clan as the parent Kindred, but knows no Disciplines and exists in a state of half frenzy. The new Kindred is animalistic and seeks only fresh blood. Its human intelligence is gone. If the parent Kindred can find the vampire within three nights of the Infection, he can spend a Willpower dot to make the Embrace "true." Otherwise, the new Kindred is doomed to this state forever.
- **Interference:** Most banes involve folk remedies, herbs and practices from older cultures, but new banes do emerge. One of them is the odd effect that some vampires have on radio waves and other such transmissions. When the vampire gets near a device that uses radio waves (older televisions, radios, cell phones), the device loses reception. Televisions lose picture and viewers see only "snow," while cell phones drop calls and radios crackle and warble. This bane gives a hunter an excellent way to track the vampire — just watch for the stream of people cursing into their cell phones or wondering why they've lost a wireless Internet connection.
- **Lethal Bindings:** The vampire can be bound or even dismembered by red string, prayer strips, or other seemingly harmless materials. The character cannot cross such bindings if they bar his path (and, fortunately for him, he knows instinctively to avoid them). If he attempts it, the binding — even flimsy thread — remains taut and firm, but slices into the vampire's flesh like a scalpel. Pushing against the material causes one point of aggravated damage per turn for every limb or body part exposed. A doorway strung with the offending substance, then, can dismember a vampire in seconds.
- **Madness Sees Evil:** Anyone with altered perception can see the vampire for what he is. That includes anyone under the influence of mind-altering chemicals, legal or otherwise, and might include anyone with the Unseen Sense Merit. The Storyteller is the final arbiter of whether a person's perceptions are altered enough to see the vampire. Such witnesses don't always understand what they are seeing, but know for certain that the vampire isn't human and is dangerous. That means that clubs and parties, which are normally good places to hunt, become ready sources of mob violence against the Kindred.
- **Maddening Vitae:** Other Kindred can drink the vampire's blood with only the usual unpleasant side effects (blood addiction, Vinculum and the like). Mortals, however, grow steadily unstable when they drink the blood of the vampire afflicted with this bane. Every time a mortal imbibes from the vampire, even just a taste, the Storyteller rolls the mortal's Morality rating. Failure means that the mortal develops a mild derangement or upgrades an existing such derangement to severe. These derangements normally involve obsessing over the vampire somehow.

  While many ghouls wind up unhealthily fixated on their regnants, this vampire's servants lose functionality in short order. The mortals become unable to cope with the world, following the vampire at all times, extolling his virtues to anyone in the area, and consuming insects and small animals in an attempt to become like their master. While the mortals never deliberately betray the vampire, they haughtily brag on the vampire's behalf to anyone who asks (including hunters).

  Variations: The degradation isn't mental, but physical. The vampire's slaves become mutated, hideous husks of their former selves.
- **Mindless Hunger:** As the vampire's Vitae pool falls, the Man dies away. The character's ability to solve problems, recall facts and apply logic is directly linked to his blood pool. The vampire's Intelligence Attribute is limited by his Vitae pool. That is, if the vampire's Intelligence rating is usually four dots, and he only has two Vitae in his pool. then he is functionally at

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Intelligence 2. If the vampire falls to zero Vitae, he enters a mindless frenzy, becoming no better than a draugr until he feeds. Even then, feeding only allows the vampire to attempt to regain control. As soon as the mindless vampire sups on at least one point Vitae, the player rolls the vampire's current Intelligence + Resolve. If the roll fails, the frenzy continues until the vampire feeds again (which might be as soon as the following turn). If the roll succeeds, the Kindred regains control of himself.

Variations: This bane can be applied to any Attribute, though the effect is different. If the bane is applied to a Social Attribute, the vampire gains the effects of the Hunger's Visage bane (p. 193) in addition to the frenzy. If the affected Attribute is Physical, the vampire becomes sluggish and weak when the Attribute falls to zero. Any derived traits suffer, of course, but the Kindred also enters torpor at sunrise if he fails to feed before then.

- **Mortal Before God:** On consecrated ground, the vampire loses all of his undead powers. He cannot use Disciplines, augment Physical Attributes with blood, or heal using Vitae as long as he stands on holy ground. "Holy ground," for purposes of this bane, might include any church or worship site, the sites sacred to a particular religion, or a site prepared with special herbs, symbols or rituals.
- **No Breath:** The vampire's respiratory system does not function, not even to the extent require to draw in a breath. This means that the vampire cannot speak above a strangled whisper, and even then only a few words at a time. The player can spend a point of Vitae to allow the vampire to speak normally for a scene, forcing blood into the lungs and throat to reactivate them.
- **Oathbound:** Once the character gives his word, he cannot break it. Maybe the Beast latches onto some odd notion of loyalty or honor, or maybe the vampire just fixates on the oath as sacrosanct. In any case, the Kindred cannot deliberately violate a sworn vow, though he can do so by accident. For instance, a vampire swears never to harm a member of a given family, and some years later, stalks and kills a long-lost descendant of the woman he made the promise to. He has no way to know the identity of his victim, and this bane does not grant any special senses to the vampire, so he violates his oath.

  If a vampire tries to break an oath knowingly, his muscles seize up and he cannot move. If he breaks an oath accidentally, he must immediately roll for degeneration (roll two dice). The vampire can be forced into swearing oaths, but can also leave loopholes in the language of the oaths — as long as he doesn't violate the *letter* of the law, he can do as he pleases. Oaths can be sworn out loud or silently, but if the words "I swear," "I promise" or similar language passes the vampire's lips, the oath is binding.
- **Offered Blood:** The vampire cannot refuse an offer of blood. Even if she is in the middle of a group of mortals, if one of them asks (for whatever reason) if she wants blood, she must answer "yes," and immediately imbibe. If the offer is made but no blood is actually put forth, the player must roll to avoid wassail.
- **Paralyzed by Metal:** In addition to a wooden stake, a metal shaft such as a sword or a spike can paralyze the Kindred. The system for impaling the vampire remains the same as described on p. 176 of **Vampire: The Requiem**, except that the attack need only inflict one point of damage, not three.
- **Rain's Refusal:** Rain, the bringer of life, refuses to touch the vampire. The rain simply falls around him. Even if he walks out in a monsoon, he comes back completely dry. Water from other sources (showers, rivers, etc.) does not avoid the character, but it becomes brown and stagnant within seconds of the vampire immersing himself. If the vampire drinks water, willingly or otherwise, he immediately suffers three points of aggravated damage.
- **Revenge from the Ashes:** The cremated remains of a human being burn and sear the flesh of the Kindred. Such ashes inflict one level of aggravated damage per turn of contact. Coating a vampire with this bane in such ashes probably dooms him to the worst minute of his unlife as his flesh drops away and his bones sizzle and crack. If he can manage to get to water and wash the ashes away, he might survive.
- **Rotting:** The vampire's flesh starts rotting every night at sundown, and heals over the course of the day as she sleeps. This rot does not inflict any damage on the vampire, but it looks and smells repulsive, and seems to afflict the extremities first. The nose and lips rot off, the flesh around the fingertips blackens, and the feet develop blisters that ooze foul-smelling, clotted blood. Only by expending one point of Vitae every scene (as though activating the blush of life; see p. 157 of **Vampire: The Requiem**) can the vampire avoid this fate, and even then the scent is faintly present, causing a -3 to all Social rolls.
- **Shadow's Shame:** Shadows, reflections and even televised images turn away from the vampire. The vampire might make the effort to remain visible on a security camera or in a photo, but people around

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the vampire seem to turn their faces away. Likewise, if the vampire stands with several people in front of a mirror, the reflections of the people avert their eyes from the Kindred. If the vampire feeds on someone "in view" of the reflection, the reflection screams, alerting anyone in the area.

- **Sun's Terrifying Visage:** The vampire fears the image of the sun as much as the sun itself. Whenever the vampire sees a picture of the sun, the player must roll to avoid Rötschreck. The Storyteller should apply modifiers based on how realistic the image is. A child's crayon drawing of the sun might apply a +3 to the roll, while a video of the sun at high noon might impose a -5 modifier.
- **Uncontrolled Hunger:** The vampire must taste any blood he sees. Whether the blood is seeping from a diner's steak in a restaurant or an open sore on a homeless man's cheek, the vampire cannot leave the area under his own power without just a taste. The vampire doesn't have to reach out and dip his finger in, but he must taste the blood before the scene is over. If he is removed from the area by force, he immediately loses five points of Vitae as his Beast spitefully burns through his blood reserve.
- **Vulnerability, Severe:** As Vulnerability, above, except that the damage inflicted is lethal.

Storytelling Banes

From a game design standpoint, replacing derangements with banes removes the notion that immoral actions can lead to mental illness (which isn't an *entirely* accurate representation of the Morality system, but it's close). Players who find that notion offensive, or who just don't like the idea of a failed dice roll dictating how they play their characters, might appreciate the banes system as a way to keep a consequence for succumbing to the Beast.

From a story perspective, though, the notion of banes deserves a bit more discussion.

Every culture has a legend about a creature that at least bears some resemblance to a vampire. These creatures usually have at least two points in common: They used to be human beings but died, and they consume blood to survive. Everything else is variable. Some "vampires" can't pass for human beings at all. Consider the earliest Greek vampires, the *vrykolakes*, which resembled bloated, ugly corpses. More monstrous still is the Malaysian *penanggalan*, a flying female head with the entrails dangling from it. Some vampires don't drink blood by anything as subtle as a bite on the neck. The *jiang shi* of China drank living essence, feasting on the soul or breath. The African *adze*, was known to take the form of a firefly and pass through closed doors to drink blood from its victims. Again, virtually every culture in the world has a legend about a night-stalking creature, and trying to filter all of them through the lens of **Vampire: The Requiem** is impossible, given that we've chosen a specific (and modern) take on vampirism for this game.

But consider the World of Darkness, and what we know about vampires even looking only at the **Requiem** core book (that is, ignoring sourcebooks such as **Mythologies** or **Wicked Dead** that present alternates takes on the vampiric condition). The Kindred *are* mutable. Their weaknesses *can* change — it's what allows bloodlines to form from the clans. It's what allows powers like Theban Sorcery, Crúac and, especially, the Coils of the Dragon to work. The undead form, the very condition of being a vampire, is not a constant state. Banes are a way to express that, to bring the particulars of any vampiric legend from any source the Storyteller finds interesting, into the game. These cultures don't have to be limited to centuries-old legend, either. A bane might make vampires sparkle under strong light, marking them as inhuman, if that's what the Storyteller finds compelling.

Banes and the Tiers

Banes mean different things to a **Vampire** chronicle depending on what "tier" that chronicle takes place. See Chapter One for a detailed discussion of these three tiers.

Neonates & Coteries
"What is happening to me?"

Banes are strange, scary and new, but so is everything about the vampiric existence. Characters can ask mentors about banes, if they *have* that kind of support, but everyone has a different theory on them and no one really knows the truth. The characters can learn through experimentation and observation how banes come about, but they discover that it isn't consistent — banes don't afflict the Kindred equally (in game terms, because the dice don't fall the same way for everyone).

In this kind of chronicle, banes are exactly what's described at the beginning of this section — a result of the vampire degenerating from Man to Beast. They are the infection of the supernatural, the observable and terrifying part of the Requiem that shows the neonate that *this is not a dream*. The Storyteller should considered running a full scene devoted to a neonate discovering a bane, and grant experience points for the player portraying the character as appropriately horrified. Human beings, after all, do not recoil from crosses.

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Ancillae & Cities
"I know your weakness."

Ancillae have been part of Kindred society long enough to learn some things. They know how to feed without drawing attention, how to use their Disciplines to best effect, and usually they know who the other Kindred in the city are, at least the ones they need to be concerned with. Banes, in this sort of chronicle, serve as blackmail material and currency. Everyone knows that vampires fear fire and sunlight, but *all* vampires fear fire and sunlight, so using a flamethrower against one's enemies is risky. But what if a vampire were to learn that his hated enemy fears cats, and flees before them? Suddenly a little expertise in Animalism becomes much more potent.

Of course, the knife cuts both ways. A character's own banes become secrets that he keeps from everyone, even his own coterie, lest his enemies confront him with his own personal weaknesses. Consider, too, that when a vampire faces his banes, he faces his crimes. Banes come about as a result of one's transgressions, and sooner or later, they come home to roost. Learning about a given vampire's past, in fact, might allow an occult scholar or an Auspex expert to suss out a given vampire's banes, and rumor has it that a Devotion dedicated to doing just that exists.

In a city-level chronicle, a bane outbreak might be a localized occurrence, affecting or spread by one particular coterie. Something intrinsic to that area causes a flux in the vampiric condition, probably a temporary one. Figuring out what caused it and why can propel an ancilla (or a group of them) to prestige, or it can give them a weapon against their rivals.

Elders & Conspiracies
"We cannot escape ourselves."

Elder vampires are almost beyond banes. Rather, they are beyond the point where banes matter. Yes, for a vampire to reach the status of elder, he probably accrues many banes, but he has also learned to hide them, cope with them or otherwise compensate for them. An elder might shy back from a chunk of silver…right before his minions tackle the uppity ancilla trying to unseat him and take her head off.

In an elder chronicle, banes serve to remind the characters that they *are* vampires. They are not gods. They are not immortal, not really. They are undead, and they are bound by supernatural rules even if the laws of the land cannot touch or do not apply to them. The elder vampire who watches that ancilla crumble to dust cannot forget the feeling he had when she thrust that silver at him. He cannot forget that once upon a time, that wouldn't have mattered. He cannot forget that, just for a moment, he had no power but to recoil.

In a conspiracy-level chronicle, banes might also shake the foundations of Kindred society. An entire clan's weakness might change, or a bane might become a fundamental weakness for all Kindred, simply by a machination (or a mistake) from a group of powerful elders.

New Devotion — Learn Bane
(Auspex ••, Animalism •, Nightmare •)

A perceptive vampire can examine another and learn, through a delicate combination of glimpsing the target's aura and inducing just a bit of fear, whether she suffers from any banes. This has the side effect of allowing the character to learn the target's clan by learning her clan weakness.

The vampire using this Devotion must make eye contact with the target. Even if the Kindred uses the Devotion successfully, though, the target notices nothing but a slight shiver down her spine.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Wits + Intimidation + Auspex—Composure

Action: Instant

If the vampire succeeds in using the Devotions, he immediately learns the target's banes, including clan weakness. He doesn't learn the order in which the character acquired them, though, nor does he learn the target's present Humanity level (meaning that this Devotion can be used to guess, but not exactly measure, how strong the Beast is for a given vampire).

This Devotion costs 12 experience points to learn.

Bane or Derangement?

The bane system *can* replace the derangement system entirely, but it doesn't have to. The Storyteller can choose to give a character a bane or a derangement, depending on circumstances. Some suggestions for making that decision follow. Whatever the criteria that a Storyteller uses, though, he should make sure to inform the players whether a failed Humanity roll will result in a bane or a derangement and the reasons for his choice. Remember, too, that the bane system was developed in part to avoid the eventuality of a failed dice roll dictating character behavior. If player would prefer to have a bane rather than a derangement, it might be best to honor that request.

- **Banes result from the Beast usurping the Man.** As such, a degeneration roll that occurred due to a character's frenzy should probably risk a bane, rather than a derangement.
- **Banes are supernatural.** If the degeneration roll took place amidst a decidedly supernatural backdrop — a fight with werewolves, for instance, or after interrupting a witch's ritual — a bane is more appropriate than

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a derangement. Likewise, if the character was using Disciplines or calling upon other powers of the Blood, a bane makes more sense than a derangement.

- **Banes involve the environment, while derangements are internal.** A character who loses a dot of Humanity by killing a vampire hunter laden with garlic should stand a better chance of gaining a bane than a derangement. That doesn't necessarily mean that the bane will involve garlic, only that the character was responding to an outside threat when she lost Humanity.
- **The Masquerade protects Kindred.** Violating the Masquerade has a strange effect on Kindred, bringing the predator closer to the surface. Playing at being human doesn't make the vampire human, obviously, but it makes the mask easier to maintain. In any event, if the character has been exposed as a vampire to mortals during the present story, whether by accident or deliberate action, a bane is more appropriate than a derangement.

Banes and Clan Weaknesses

The weaknesses that the vampire clans and bloodlines suffer from could easily be used as banes. Some of them are mild, some severe, but any of them might make for interesting banes even in an otherwise standard **Requiem** chronicle. Consider: a Gangrel vampire develops a bane and winds up taking extra damage from fire and sunlight, which is the Mekhet clan curse. Does that mean that the Savage is becoming somehow Mekhet-like? Did she diablerize a Shadow? Is she developing Auspex or another Mekhet Discipline? Or are all of the clan and bloodline weaknesses simply banes that became somehow affixed to a given line? Does that mean a great enough show of Humanity could remove this "uber-bane?"

Another option is to excise the clan weaknesses entirely and simply have each player choose a bane for her character at the start of the chronicle. Vampires, therefore, aren't identifiable by weakness (and identifying a vampire by the Disciplines she wields is always chancy), meaning that lineage becomes a more easily guarded secret. Maybe a vampire's clan ceases to matter, with immediate lineage taking its place in the setting — the descendants of a given elder are the dominant family in a specific area, but outside of their power base, this "clan" doesn't have much influence.

Designing New Banes

The lists above are by no means the only possibilities for banes. The Storyteller and the players should feel free to mine folklore, cinema, literature and their own fevered imaginations for anything that might make a suitable bane, regardless of whether the source involves vampires.

Why the breadth? Because the vampire myth is constantly changing. We've already pointed out that ancient Greek vampires were hideous and monstrous, while European vampires in later centuries were seductive and humanlike in appearance (if not temperament). As cinema and modern literature seized on the vampire as an eternal symbol of fear, a metaphor for rape, an iconic monster (take your pick), we can choose from a myriad of different vampires. Novels like *Bloodsucking Fiends: A Love Story* give us vampires that resemble the Kindred in appearance and supernatural power, but don't play up the horror of the condition. Films such as *From Dusk Till Dawn* show vampires as near-mindless monsters, but, interestingly, depict a physical transformation when the vampire lets its true self show (*The Lost Boys* and "Buffy: The Vampire Slayer" do this as well, to a much lesser degree). These sources depict vampires as having a large variety of weaknesses, some of which can be traced back to various legends, some of which were invented by Hollywood, and some of which just don't seem to make sense (why, for instance, did David in *The Lost Boys* die from being impaled on antlers?).

If we assume that all of these sources exist within the World of Darkness, then we have to acknowledge the fact that the Kindred *do* suffer from some of the classic European vampire weaknesses: sunlight, a wooden stake, and so on. If that's the case, then why not all of them? Why shouldn't any given substance have the power to repel a vampire? Why shouldn't a vampire be unable to cross running water? Some of these weaknesses are too limiting to apply to all Kindred (especially if we're to continue believing that the Masquerade has remained intact), but if any given vampire can show any of them, it actually lends some believability to the vampire legends. Why are they so diverse? Because vampires really *are* that diverse.

All of this means that anything that the Storyteller and the players think appropriate can become a bane. Obviously, it's incumbent upon the players to remain true to the themes of the game. Radioactive isotopes as a bane probably evoke images of superhero comics more than vampire literature, but then, if you're interested in playing **Vampire** as a "superheroes with fangs" kind of game, who are we to argue? Just refer to the system considerations at the beginning of this section, decide what mechanical effect a bane should have, and have at it.

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Dearly Devoted: A New Look At Devotions

We are gathered here tonight...

The Sisters swung things old-school, a classic Hammer number with the gauzy robes and chalices of blood, and it only needed a Christopher Lee leer to complete it. The old traditions have it hard, because they've inadvertently become cliché as Hollywood glommed into the classic tropes even if there's good sensible occult reasons for the gauzy robes and the blood... splashing... making them... slickly transparent... against... supple... pale... flesh...

Where was I?

The Sister next to me took the passed chalice, and stepped to the font, filling it with the blood of all the sacrificed—the blood of the lamb, the serpent, the goat, and the man, all blended like cranberry juice cocktail with the Sisterhood's seven special herbs and spices. The sister shivered deliciously. I could sympathize—watching her made my teeth ache. She stepped back into the circle, and raised the chalice to the moon glowing through the open skylight shone off the nightblack blood within it.

"Coyolxauhqui! Hecate ! Chang'e! Our Old Mother, Our Own Flesh! We consecrate the blah blach blem murgh mleh! Blah meh bah Me! Me!"

I lost her litany about halfway through, She was the twelfth sister to intone it tonight, and I was to be the thirteenth, the new initiate, the new Sister.

Oh, you can stop laughing now, I think. It isn't as if the organ serves a particularly useful purpose, and I could always regrow it with the nighttime magic we all enjoy. So yes, I'll admit it before we reach the climax of the narrative—I cut off my cock to steal the occult secrets of the Blessed Sisters of Severen, and fuck you too.

She finished the incantation, and upended the chalice upon herself, soaking her robes through.

The chalice came to me next, I took it in one carefully manicured hand, and I flatter myself that my art and artifice made me a credibly convincing counterfeit chicky. I stepped forward, forcing my hipbones to sway just so, dipped the chalice into the font, and back to my place in the circle. My turn to intone. I wasn't sure when the magic would happen—when the force of the ritual initiation would come to me, when I'd feel the power I was here to steal. I said the words in a convincing contralto—have I mentioned my singing voice before? It is a delight. None of the sisters turned on me, none drew the slaughtering knives, none cut me. The blood was still body-hot from the spirit lamp warming the font, and made me shiver when it hit my chilled body, molding the robe around my painfully-implanted silicon tits, then gushed down my stomach, and down my legs in a truly obscene parody of mortal menstruation. Shades of Carrie. It was indeed a 'not so fresh feeling.' The moment rang in my consciousness, a temple bell signaling completion. I felt suddenly opened, spread and vulnerable.

Then... nothing happened.

For a moment I stood there, covered in reheated blood, feeling very silly. Particularly about my cock. I do have a certain reputation to...

Bliss. And misery.

I am filled with the Moon, the light is in me, the blood on my body goes cold, but I grow warm. I fall to my knees with a choking sound, and then I scream. My heart wakes in a panic, and scrambles around in my chest thrashing madly, trying to find a way out through my throat. Hot, then cold... oh, very cold. I shiver uncontrollably, and then the pain, it is hideous, like fire between my legs, and my chest like fists are being twisted under my skin. I hear the closest Sister say,

"Look. She bleeds! We are blessed tonight."

Convulsively then, I died again and the moonlight went black, the shadows suddenly bright—when the Sister leaned over me, I could see the skull beneath her skin, I could count the victims who'd died to perpetuate her life in the whorls of black light around the crown of her head, her chakras opening and closing like sea anemones, hungry with hooked tendrils. And around us, the hall was full of ghosts—some just memories, but others true specters. The weak and confused ghost of the man who's blood went into the Font was there, and vague shadows of his sanguine companions, the goat, serpent, and lamb.

I smiled at him, and my regard made him more solid, fleshed his form with thickening moon-dark. I sat up, and beckoned him closer, and he came as if entranced.

"As if" indeed.

He came, and knelt as I stood. The other sisters opened their eyes in this special way too, and smiled approvingly. I may complain and connive to escape my tedious lessons, as many a tutor of mine would bitterly accuse, but I am a good student when I exert myself.

I leaned down close to the ghost's ear, and saw he was shaking. Shaking with dread and terror! What a delicious irony. I couldn't resist. I opened my mouth. I bit. I fed.

Unholy Matrimony

Devotions are strange marriages of different Disciplines which often explain the weird and unique capacities of noteworthy characters, or give some tooth and truth to a cult's occult practice. The guidelines provided in the Requiem core assume they'll typically be created by individual Storytellers or presented in published material with

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their cost in experience points laid out, and any particular vagaries of acquisition handled improvisationally.

Here, we'll do something a bit different with Devotions. You'll get some further guidelines on creating them, and then a whole new method of acquiring them as objects of play rather than artifacts purchased with experience point currency—they become endeavors rather than something bought cleanly, and without consequence.

Or course, you can still spend experience points on Devotions, but by doing so you make the Devotion yours—you buy exclusive rights to this strange new power, and you get to say how others may access it, and at what price. The Devotion becomes more than a special trick you know. Sharing it (or not), teaching it (or not) gives you influence, power, leverage.

Witness the Joining

Creating a Devotion still requires a little artistic license, but this section should give some guidance on that.

This assumes a player-driven creation process. Storytellers have their full license to create Devotions as-needed for their chronicles, and aren't required to pay this much attention to the details. If it works and makes for a better chronicle and happy players, then that's all the justification that's required.

As a player-driven process there's two ways to approach it:

Shoot the Moon—here, the player says exactly what he wants the Devotion to do without paying too much attention to the requisite Discipline ranks. Unless this is a serious long-term goal, it ought to cleave fairly close to some Disciplines the character has on the sheet (via the thematic guidelines below).

The player outlines exactly what the Devotion should be able to do, and the Storyteller examines it for theme and for power with the guidelines found below and on pages 260 to 265 of the **Requiem** book. Then, the Storyteller tells the player what kind of Disciplines he'd need as prerequisites for the power, and why they're needed.

This starts off the back and forth of negotiation as the player can accept the Storyteller's offer, or make her a counter-offer in the form of a less (or possibly, more) powerful Devotion to try and narrow it down closer to the character's current capacity.

Once the Devotion is agreed upon, the player has to decide to buy it with Experience or try and Seek it (p. 205). The cost in experience points is determined normally, but if the player chooses to Seek, then see below for the trials and troubles he might face in the process.

Lowball It—The other way to do this is for the player to look at the Disciplines his character already has and try and figure out the best effect he can squeeze out of them. Once he's lowballed the effect, the presents it to the Storyteller and explains why he should be able to get the Devotion he wants with the Disciplines he already has.

The Storyteller then either accepts the Devotion, or makes a counter-offer by scaling back the power to fit within the character's current capacities, or shaves off the Discipline requirements if the player has over-estimated how much it should require.

The player can then accept the offer, or try a counter-offer of his own, and this goes back and forth until an agreement is reached.

Then, as in Shooting the Moon, the player can chose to buy it free and clear, or Seek.

Something Old, Something New —Thematic Penumbras

The core Disciplines all have associated and outlining thematic elements which tie into the overall themes and folklore of **Vampire: The Requiem**, and to more generalized occult symbolism and myth imagery. Basically, when using one Discipline themes to modify the effects of another's powers, consider these penumbras for guidelines on which might be the most appropriate.

Animalism—most literally contends with animals and influencing animals, but within its penumbra is Beastliness, instinct, rage, and the inner Beast of men and vampire which drives them to horrific action. At the edges of the penumbra, is the mystical significance and meaning of specific animals—the virtue found in certain Beasts.

Auspex—involves expanding perception and awareness, but also includes spirit travel, and psychic activity. With expanded awareness comes insight, and the revelation of secrets. Auspex gathers up prophecy as well within its penumbra. Perception-based superstitions and folklore also fall loosely under Auspex. The Evil Eye, seeing a murderer's image in the eyes of a dead man, and eyes as windows to the soul.

Celerity—most obviously the speed of the body, but also the speed of mind—and possibly, of transcending mere speed, and simply being there already. Celerity can also be a bridge, linking two effects together, allowing combination effects from different Disciplines by applying the concepts of simultaneity to them.

Coils of the Dragon—this tightly-focused power set is about overcoming the weakness of the Kindred condition, but more broadly about overcoming any weakness with the application of will.

Crúac—its broad array of possible effects (bound only by the lore available) belies a simple core theme—this

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ritual set encompasses all that is primitive, pagan, primal, and occult in an ancient pre-Christian sense. Ritualistic trappings to produce powerful if not immediate results are very much in-theme for Crúac, and more broadly those things which hark to the ancient world, and its dark and bloody dead religions.

Dominate—is control, and the sublimation of another's will and desire. It is about power, and enforcing it. About social hierarchy and dominance. It is about authority, and about the symbols and displays which mark one as invested with authority. It is about badges and uniforms, but also about bone-deep animalistic instincts to conquer and rule, and establish dominance. The politics of wolves.

Majesty—so like yet unlike Dominate. Majesty's penumbra contains emotion, urge, and desire—it is an attractive force, a lure. Where Dominate works on brains, Majesty works on balls. Majesty also encompass fame, attraction, covetousness, and obsession. It motivates behavior which circumvents the conscious mind. Majesty is beauty, though perhaps in the same way a coral snake is beautiful.

Nightmare—almost the perfect opposite of Majesty. It is repulsion, rejection, solitude, loss. Obviously fear and its cousins dread and terror, but more subtly it is also doubt and anxiety and something as prosaic as stress. There is a transformative quality to Nightmare, which remakes something over, horrifically—possibly even embodying a physical transformation.

Obfuscate—this Discipline is about becoming secret, hidden, and it's about predation—the unseen tiger or the unseen stalker, lurking outside a victim's bedroom window or in the forest beyond. Obfuscate is also perversely invasive—it puts one into the private space of others, without their knowledge. There's a core of violation here, in addition to the imagery of darkness and shadows, there's one of trespass and secret crime. While spectral and unseen, the Discipline's penumbra stretches to include the spectral and the ghostly.

Protean—the transformation of the flesh, to make it serve the vampire's needs better. Protean is about change, but also about the loss of self, and can include changing identity as well as changing skin. In some ways, it is more about the revelation of true nature than about concealing it—it strips away the veneer of humanity from the Kindred and makes them obvious monsters.

Resilience—at its simplest, it is about shrugging of harm, but more broadly about survival, about remaining unchanged. The physical resilience implies a mental or psychic resilience too. It comes closest to including the stasis of vampire immortality within its penumbra.

Theban Sorcery—where Crúac is bloody and primal, Theban Sorcery is studied and sacred, and very in keeping with the organized religious nature of the covenant which keeps the lore. It demands devotion, not simply will and blood. It is power which comes through commitment and resolution, and surrender to something larger than one's self. It covers those ritualistic occult practices more in keeping with religious service. A ordered form of magical practice.

Vigor—the corpse moves, and with Vigor it moves powerfully. Vigor is the animating force which moves the undead, magnified and enhanced. It includes motion and exertion, but can also include the outward counterfeit face that a vampire uses to appear human. Vigor is raw physical power, but can be stretched to include the way this changes a person's attitude and demeanor, and to the giving of life, such as imbuing something unliving with the animating power. The general theme of strength can also be used to strengthen another effect, for example expanding the range or scope of another Discipline effect.

To Have and to Hold—Buying It

Once the player and Storyteller agree on the required Disciplines and effects of a Devotion, the player can choose to buy it outright for experience points. As describes in the core rules, this is the total required Disciplines multiplied by three. So, a Devotion requiring rhree Disciplines rated at two each would cost roughly 18 experience points.

Who Wants Candy?

So, what's to stop a player buying a Devotion this way, and then essentially giving it away to the other player's characters? Or, handing it out to Storyteller characters as a bribe or perk?

Well, two things really.

The player who buys a Devotion creates the Ordeal needed to acquire it, and anybody he gives it away to still has to endure this test and win through it. If they're not willing to endure the Ordeal, but the character is willing to teach the Devotion, then they can spend experience points and buy it.

What if the player creates a cakewalk of an Ordeal so he can pass the Devotion around the group without anybody suffering for it, or adding anything to the Chronicle?

Then it's entirely appropriate for some canny Storyteller character to figure out the Ordeal and cakewalk her way to the Devotion too. The player controls who has access to his new Devotion, but if he chooses not to control that access, then anybody could just wander by and help themselves.

Simple advice—don't try and scam the system, or the Storyteller is given permission to scam back.

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That's a pretty significant outlay for a power which is more likely to be effective and interesting but not provide some kind of dominant advantage.

What else does the player get for creating and then buying this interesting power?

The player owns it.

His character is the only character in the game who's allowed to have that Devotion unless the player says it's okay. He's free to allow others to learn it by way of Ordeal (see below), or to buy it themselves with experience points like a published Devotion.

The Storyteller should decide if this potent addition is appropriate to the game. A game of secret power and occult strength should find this as a nice addition.

Seeking and Ordeal: Sealed in the Temple

If the player doesn't want to spend the experience, then he can *Seek* the Devotion and endure the *Ordeal* needed to learn it. These require play-time, and so must fit into the context of the chronicle. They've got to make it better, or it becomes about one player having solo adventure time while everyone else looks one. There's no reason other characters can't assist—at least up until the seeking character has suffered the Ordeal, but this kind of play could also be reserved for side-sessions outside the regular game meeting, allowing one-on-one play with only the Storyteller and player, and any others who want to help out.

Once the Devotion has been created and agreed on, the Storyteller creates a map for the Seeking, and the trial or trials which make up the Ordeal.

The map is a series of scenes noted in the following shorthand which describe the process for seeking and possibly accessing the Devotion's mysteries. Exceptional success on any check rolled during the Seeking reveals one of the trials which must be endured in the Ordeal, and it's entirely possible that a player might balk at what the Devotion might require of him.

Map scenes can be described thusly:

Map Scene	
Name: Name of the scene	
Thumbnail: An extremely brief description of the scene and its location	
Challenge: Dice pool needed to address the scene's challenge.	**Consequences:** What happens with success or failure.
Links: How this map scene links to others in the map.	

A Seeking's map consists of one "initiation" scene which starts the Seeking, and then one additional scene for each Discipline required by the Devotion. Each added scene in the map is thematically linked in some way to one of the required Devotions, and will require an appropriate roll to overcome.

When the Seeking is successful, the character has the chance to learn the Devotion, but must endure the Ordeal.

An Ordeal is some form of mystical trial by which the character is judged worthy of the mysteries, an initiation which prepares them to receive the mystery. Ordeals can have lasting consequences in a chronicle, binding the character with obligations or marking them mentally or physically.

Pick one trial to open the Ordeal, and add another for each Discipline required to learn it. As with the map, the trials should reflect the Disciplines they're keyed from. These trials also impose a penalty on the required roll based on the required rank of the discipline. For example, a Devotion requiring a three-dot Discipline will impose a -3 penalty.

Exceptional success on a trial means the following trial may be taken without the usual penalty or the consequences of a previously failed one removed.

Success means the character met the trial, and may proceed to the next.

Failure means the character may choose to abandon the Ordeal without suffering any consequence, or may continue the Ordeal but suffer a consequence dictated by the type of trial.

Dramatic failure means the character fails the Ordeal and suffers the consequence for the trial.

Trials are sequential, the one flowing into the next though they need not be immediately follow. Some Ordeals are stretched out over hours, days, even weeks. The Storyteller can use this pacing to work a character's Ordeal into the flow of the Chronicle's other stories.

Here's a useful format for outlining a Trial:

Trial Scene
Name: Name of the scene
Trial Type: Which of the following types of trial this one is.
Thumbnail: An extremely brief description of the scene and its location
Challenge: Dice pool needed to address the scene's challenge.

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Example Trials

Endure

The trial requires the character to endure some form of suffering, which usually demands a Stamina + appropriate Skill roll to withstand. The consequences of failure are Vitae equal to twice the value of the Discipline which inspires this Trial.

Initiation

The trial is a ritual initiation into an exclusive and likely secret clique who control access to the Devotion being sought. This requires a Composure + appropriate Skill roll. The consequences of failure are an obligation to the initiating organization. You must perform some service for them at a later time, and failure will bring dire (if somewhat ambiguous) consequences.

Sacrifice

You must give up something you treasure to overcome this Trial. This requires a Resolve + appropriate Skill roll. The consequence of failure is you're unable to give up the scarified thing, and are marked by the trial. The Mark is obvious to those who know what to look for and is permanent unless removed mystically.

Sin

You must commit some act which horrifies even you. This trial immediately provokes a degeneration roll, with the consequences of failure being the normal loss of Humanity. If the roll fails, the character may still back out of the Ordeal, and not suffer the consequences, pulling back from the sin before doing anything irrevocable.

Suffer

The trial inflicts pain and misery on the character, and requires a straight-up Stamina roll to endure. The consequences of failure are lethal damage equal to the twice the level of the Discipline which inspired this trial.

Temptation

The trial demands the character resist some terrible temptation with a Composure roll. The consequences of failure are a Fixation derangement related to the source of the temptation.

Example Devotions

Cobra's Kiss

(Protean •••, Vigor ••)

This deadly power transforms the vampire's fangs into hollow venom-injecting instruments like a viper's. A measure of Vitae is then transformed into a lethal supernatural poison. The vampire's bite inflicts aggravated damage, and mortals suffer the effect of an injected poison with a Toxicity equal to 4 + the vampire's Blood Potency. Other Kindred suffer the aggravated damage normally, but the supernatural venom also destroys Vitae equal to the damage inflicted.

Cost: 1 Vitae per successful bite.

Dice Pool: Strength + Brawl—Defense to grapple, and Strength + Brawl to bite.

Action: Instant to invoke, and a normal action to grapple and bite

Seeking Map

1. Remembrances of Septimus the Elder (Find a translated fragment of a Roman's account of military action in North Africa Intelligence + Academics.)
2. Retranslation (Convince a dying ex-professor of classics to re-translate the fragment. Manipulation + Persuasion unless the character can heal the dying man).
3. Find the Mambo Dancers (Find a where the secretive Gangrel bloodline meets and make contact. Wits + Investigation).

Ordeal Trials

1. Suffer (Sit unresisting while cobras bite).
2. Endure (Twist your body into painfully contorted positions and crawl through a complex body maze).
3. Initiation (Join the Mambo Dancers).

Whispers in the Dark

(Dominate •••, Obfuscate •••)

This subtle power allows a vampire rendered invisible with Obfuscate to use Dominate on a victim without revealing their presence. The vampire stands close to the formless target, and whispers her desires to him. Dominate at one or two dots may be used this way.

Cost: 1 Willpower plus the cost of Dominate

Dice Pool: None.

Action: Instant

Seeking Map

1. The Black Mirror (A Mayan obsidian mirror on display in a local museum perfectly reflects the Kindred, but the image seems to be speaking some other language. Intelligence + Occult to recognize the words it whispers).
2. Follow the whispers (from the mirror, the Kindred will begin to hear whispers from the shadows, which can be followed with Wits + Empathy)
3. Demand the shades show themselves (The unseen shades will manifest as shadowy figures if cowed with a Presence + Intimidate roll).

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Ordeal Trials

1. Sacrifice (the shades demand blood and anguish)
2. Temptation (They seek to distract with illusions of the vampire's desires).
3. Sin (To seal the vampire's commitment, they demand he follow their whispered orders to commit some grievous wrong)

Body Hive

(Animalism •••, Fortitude •••, Nightmare ••)

This horrific power turns the vampire's body into a living hive for vermin which hollow out her torso of all the useless organs that fill it, and gnaw wound-like exits in her chest and back. The creatures inhabiting her partakes of her Vitae, becoming essentially a swarm of tiny ghouls. This horror can be summoned out and controlled in a terrifying display of unnatural potency.

The body hive has several effects. It can be used to make a lethal ranged attack on a target you can see who is within a pistol shot's distance, inflicting successes as lethal damage.

The hive can also scout the surrounding area, revealing hidden opponents, dangers, or other things of interest. When the hive creatures burrow back into your body, you learn what they know.

Finally, you can set the hive's creatures swirling around you, confusing attackers, flying into their mouths, and biting them. This allows you to add the successes on the Devotion roll to your Defense until you direct the hive to some other purpose.

Action: Instant

Cost: 1 Vitae per night to maintain the hive, and keep the body from reverting to its normal state (thus killing the vermin) plus 1 per use.

Dice Pool: Stamina + Animalism + Size

Seeking Map

1. Find the Bugman (The Nosferatu elder knows a guy who knows a gal if you're willing to flirt with him. Presence + Socialize).
2. Follow the rats (Bugman points them out, says they know the way. Presence + Animal Ken to let them lead you)
3. Slog through the landfill (It's as gross as you imaged. Getting through this demands a Resolve + Survival roll)
4. Meet Queen Bee (The dump-dwelling vampire hive is hard to find, requiring Wits + Survival to track her – oh, and don't mind the yellowjackets)

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Ordeal Trials

1. Suffer (with the Queen's friendly Embrace, her hive-creatures try to burrow into your body)
2. Endure (the Queen introduces you to all the creatures who wish to join you. Sit, and be engulfed in their masses, and endure it)
3. Sacrifice (You must prove your commitment to the parasites by giving them sometimes you cherish to destroy)
4. Initiation (the Queen is lonely... despite all her little friends. Marry her and be her King).

Charm the Dead

(Majesty •••••, Auspex ••••, Vigor ••)

This clever power allows one to faintly perceive ghosts, and then imbue them with enough substance and attention to affect them with Majesty, then finally consume them. The devoured dead provide some sustenance for the hungry vampire, but more significantly, they give up images and insights into their lives and last moments.

Action: Extended

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Presence + Majesty + Blood Potency resisted by the ghost's Willpower

Each success drains one Essence from the ghost, and each two points of Essence become one Vitae (round down). In addition, each success is an image or fact about the person the ghost was or about the circumstances of their death that the vampire learns. If the vampire has a specific question to pose to the ghost, then all the facts and images pertain to the answer

Seeking Map

1. Find an entrance to the Underworld (Wits + Occult)
2. Bargain with a ghost there for his name and story (appropriate Social roll)
3. Convince the ghost to follow you out of the Underworld (appropriate Social roll)
4. Conceal the entrance to the Underworld so that others may not find it (Dexterity + Survival)

Ordeal Trials

1. Endure (ghosts rage in anger at the concealment of the gate and attack)
2. Initiation (once defeated, the ghost accept you as one of their own – albeit mistakenly)
3. Sacrifice (pour half of your Vitae upon the ground as the ghosts lap it up)
4. Sin (allow the ghosts to watch the most egregious act of engaging in your Vice)

Gargoyles: Children of the Stones

"Mierda!" Rico cursed and spun around in the swamp, startled. He'd sworn something had darted right between his feet, even though the water was just inches deep. The sudden movement had obviously spooked Toli, too.

"Pussy," Toli muttered through forced laughter.

"Dick," Rico rebounded, cracking his first honest smile in days, and the mood lightened. He explained: "I thought I saw something. My eyes are fucking with me—"

Abruptly, a pale, spear-like object sprung from the shallow water, piercing Rico's heel. It shot upward into the back of his thigh, skewering his hip. Shrieking in agony, Rico tried, fruitlessly, to wrench his impaled body free of the long, curved, ivory spike that had emerged out of nowhere. Then, seconds later, the dark water reclaimed the ivory object even more rapidly than it had appeared.

Toli panicked and sprinted forward as Rico fell. His brother was doubled over in the muck, clutching his bleeding leg — his face pallid, his breath rapid. The swamp fell eerily silent, as the brothers stared at one another in confused horror.

Another crude, jagged spike shot up, barely missing their faces.

"What the hell?" Rico stammered. It was clear now that whatever attacked them was nothing natural in origin. "It looks like bone, but…"

Toli yanked Rico painfully to his feet. "Corre! Vamos!" he barked, "GO!"

Rico nodded through a stiff grimace, swinging his arm over his brother's shoulder. But before they could take a step, the marsh before them began to boil. A hulking mass broke the surface of the brown water, uprooting the surrounding sawgrass as it arose. Clods of dirt, crawfish, and roots fell from the monstrous behemoth in wet clumps, revealing mud-streaked bone, as the creature heaved itself up from beneath the earth. The thing, now half in and half out of the ground, was an intricate and grotesque skeleton composed from the mismatched bones and teeth of alligators, birds and fish.

Rico slumped heavily against Toli's shoulder, fading fast. Gritting his teeth in fanatical determination, Toli found new strength in his terror. His heart pulsed in his temples as he hauled his brother away from the horrific beast, slipping and splashing in desperation through the swamp.

Born from the Blood

Kindred traditionally refer to gargoyles as "Children of the Stones" due to the chiseled, rock-made counterparts they sometimes mimic. In **Vampire: The Requiem**, they are described as hulking, man-shaped creatures that look

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somewhat like their namesake architectural features (see **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 226).

Gargoyles are homunculi birthed from vampire blood and told of in ancient esoterica. They're not strictly composed of Vitae-animated stone, but can be created from nearly any conceivable material in addition to a certain blood price. They may be artfully constructed from glass, bone, metal, discarded rubbish, wood, or even flesh. As a result, Children of the Stones come in a vast array of shapes and sizes. Depending on the type of gargoyle and the Kindred that creates it, it might vaguely resemble a human, demon, angel, inanimate object, animal, or some form that is entirely alien and unrecognizable. Some speak, and some do not. Some are extremely powerful allies or adversaries that act as prized instruments of their creator's will. Some are expendable, weakly assembled ragdolls intended to fall to shambles after completing a single task. With the exception of rare, rogue gargoyles, Children of the Stones loyally and unquestioningly obey their master's commands.

Guardians of the Haven

Gargoyles make excellent guardians for vampiric havens, and this is by far the most common purpose behind the creation of Children of the Stones. Gargoyles tirelessly keep watch over the resting place of their masters during daylight hours when the Damned are at their most vulnerable. The automaton may sound a shrieking (or silent) alarm, imprison an intruder in a dank holding call, or brutally crush the bones of those who would dare threaten their master's haven or trespass into his domain.

Gargoyles are, in general, creatures of low intelligence and they possess no real will of their own. Whatever they lack mentally, however, they make up for with their unswerving loyalty and the innate ability to perform basic tasks. Most gargoyles only understand simple commands, but they obey their master without question or complaint. While a gargoyle's primary duty is to protect a vampire haven in some way, this is by no means the only reason Kindred create children of the Stones gargoyles. A small gargoyle could potentially carry a message to an ally without attracting much attention, whereas a larger and stronger gargoyle may be valuable in combat. The varied purposes for which gargoyles are created may be seen in the examples to follow.

The Birthing Ritual

While only members of a specific clan may birth certain sub-types of gargoyle (see the clans and gargoyles, p. 212), a vampire from any lineage may perform a blood ritual to create a Child of the Stones. Basic knowledge of blood rituals performed to construct gargoyles are widely known among the Damned, and as such, the information is not restricted to any particular covenant. Certain covenants possess secret knowledge of more hazardous rituals that can produce a rare and extraordinarily powerful Children of the Stones, but the few who possess the guard it carefully.

Birthing a gargoyle is an extended action that is performed by the single vampire who is to become the automaton's sole master. The rank of the gargoyle that is

The Five Covenants and the Children of the Stones

- **The Carthian Movement:** The free-thinkers of the Carthian Movement don't use gargoyles all that often, but when they do, they use gargoyles as a means of spying upon important political meetings and serve as an extra set of eyes and ears in the city. There exists some rumor of gargoyles capable of destroying themselves (along with the secret political messages they carry) when intercepted by an unknown vampire, but the Carthian Movement claims that such reports are ludicrous.
- **The Circle of the Crone:** It is most widely known that the Circle of the Crone make use of the Children of the Stones as trustworthy assistants for secretive blood rituals, particularly rituals extremely powerful or dangerous in nature. Some covens occasionally use gargoyles as easily disposable sacrificial lambs to the pagan gods of ancient nights, though many such gods are unwilling to accept a sacrifice that isn't alive (and doesn't squirt blood).
- **The Invictus:** The Invictus use gargoyles as bodyguards for their most influential members, and as silent assassins for those who oppose their ideology.
- **The Lancea Sanctum:** Influential members of the Lancea Sanctum are particularly fond of using gargoyles as solemn attendants during religious ceremonies. Gargoyles not only protect their havens, but also guard powerful religious artifacts and relics.
- **The Ordo Dracul:** The Ordo Dracul create homunculi-like gargoyles to serve as test subjects for experiments regarding the vampiric condition. Hushed whispers have also spread throughout the city that the Ordo Dracul once succeeded creating a gargoyle with free will and the ability to survive without a regular blood tithe. But skeptics say that even if the Dragons succeeded in this endeavor, surely no such abomination would be allowed to remain alive by the covenant. Such a monstrosity would present a danger to the Masquerade and to all Kindred if it was ever set loose.

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created must be less than or equal to half the vampire's Blood Potency score (round down). While other vampires may donate blood to its initial Vitae cost, they are not considered a part of the Birthing Ritual. Typically, the steep initial blood cost is collected in a ritualistic bowl or amphora from willing Kindred donors (usually members of a coterie or trusted allies of the would-be master). The vampire then performs the ritual in utter solitude. In doing so, the master ensures a successful, lasting connection between Damned and gargoyle. The connection between the two is so strong, in fact, that if the vampire master falls to Final Death, the gargoyle will crumble to dust after a number of days equal to its master's Blood Potency. Due to the fact that a gargoyle may survive its master for brief period of time, it is wise for a coterie of vampires to make sure that at least one other member is designated as an Ally of the Master (see below). A Child of the Stones with no Kindred or haven left to protect will go rogue until it crumbles to dust at the next full moon, randomly attacking anything that stands in its way (or in some cases, accidentally stumbles into it).

Cost: Depending on the type of gargoyle being created, the ritualistic components required may vary, and some materials are far more difficult to obtain than others. The Vitae costs may be paid by more than just the vampire master, and any who contribute Vitae to this are automatically considered Allies of the Master.

Dice Pool: Resolve + Occult + Blood Potency

Action: Extended. The number of successes required to successfully perform the Birthing Ritual is equal to three times the rank of the gargoyle (so a third-rank gargoyle requires nine successes to create). Each roll represents 3 hours spent performing the ritual.

The ritual must be performed in solitude. If the ritual is interrupted in any way, the attempt fails and the partially-constructed automaton dissolves into dust. Any Vitae or material expenditures made are not recovered.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The gargoyle is completed in an unstable state before a connection is successfully made with the ritualist. The gargoyle turns upon the vampire performing the ritual, attacking him as though he were an enemy for a number of rounds equal to the gargoyle's level, after which the partially-constructed automaton dissolves into dust. Any Vitae or material expenditures made are not recovered.

Failure: No successes added to the total. If the character is forced to stop before the Birthing Ritual is complete, the ritual fails and the partially-constructed automaton dissolves into dust. Any Vitae or material expenditures made are not recovered.

Success: The Birthing Ritual is a success, and fledgling gargoyle is successfully created and under the command of its new master, the ritualist.

Exceptional Success: The Birthing Ritual is a success, and a fledgling gargoyle is successfully created and under the command of the ritualist. Further, the vampire may reclaim one point of lost Vitae (though to reclaim, she must lick it as it spills from the gargoyle's joints or orifices).

Upkeep Cost: If a gargoyle is created successfully, the master is required to sacrifice monthly a number of points of his own Vitae equal to the rank of the gargoyle. If the monthly blood price is not paid by the master, the gargoyle will crumble to dust in a number of days equal to the master's Blood Potency.

Allies of the Master

After the Ritual of Creation is performed and the fledgling gargoyle recognizes its creator as its sole master, a vampire who wishes to be considered an ally of the master must ask the gargoyle's master for the right to become an ally of the gargoyle. If the vampire master concedes this wish, then the ally may become "official" by tithing a point of Vitae to

Storytelling the Birthing Ritual and Character-Unique Gargoyles

To be upfront, the birth of a gargoyle should be sublime. Storytellers are free to describe this (though players are encouraged to lend a narrative hand) in whatever way seems most appropriate—but it's always dramatic. Blood and material items come together to form something approximating life. Does a bar of silver in the hand turn to vapor as it drifts toward the slowly-forming gargoyle? Does it begin to rain only on this area? Do the bones of the gargoyle—meaning, twists of rebar and knuckles of wood—come pressing up out of the earth in a hiss of steam and gurgles?

Children of the Stones are created by their master to serve a purpose, and the intent of the master is reflected in his creation, but he has little control over the more superficial aspects of a gargoyle. To add interest to a chronicle, a Storyteller may choose the form that a gargoyle takes (or secretly adjust its abilities, if it adds to the story in some way) based on any number of factors — creation cost, vices or virtues of the character creating the gargoyle, or even a vampire's past actions. For example, vampire who attempts to create a large, strong gargoyle, but does not pay the complete cost at creation may end up with a feeble gargoyle whose bark is far worse than its bite. Kindred who possesses the Vice of Lust may end up with a Child of the Stones that is almost comically voluptuous. A vampire who has committed diablerie in the past may create a gargoyle with telltale black veins or flecks of stone, mimicking its master's marred aura.

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the gargoyle once per month (always on the first full moon). While allies of the master may not command the gargoyle to act, it will never harm Kindred who have paid a monthly blood tithe, even when ordered by its own creator to do so, and it will protect allies of the master from harm to the best of its ability. If both the master and an ally of the master are in imminent danger at the same time, the gargoyle will attempt to protect its master first, unless it is instructed by the master to protect the ally instead. While Kindred who reside within the haven are not required to pay the monthly Vitae cost, those who do not are considered trespassers by the gargoyle and will be treated as such unless the master commands his Child to allow the "trespasser" unrestricted access to the haven each month when the blood price is due.

Children of the Stones

As stated, the ritual performed to create a basic gargoyle is not restricted to any particular covenant (although, as stated previously, certain sub-classes of gargoyle may only be produced by a member of a specific clan). The following gargoyles have no clan restrictions and may be birthed by any vampire, provided she has the proper Blood Potency score (halve it and round down to determine if the rank of the gargoyle is doable), and is able to obtain the materials and Vitae necessary for the automaton's construction.

Child of the Stones: The Guardian Angel

Description: Wryly referred to as a Guardian Angel, this gargoyle takes the shape of a winged demon roughly the size of a full-grown man. It is created from virtually any kind of stone or metal. Some Guardian Angels look very much like the hideous, stone creatures perched atop buildings that come to mind when one envisions a typical "gargoyle." True, some Guardian Angels may look very similar to their architectural counterparts, but they are not necessarily grotesque. Some Guardian Angels may, in fact, be quite beautiful, taking the form of a muscular winged warrior with cruelly-handsome, chiseled features, or a sensual, voluptuous succubus with majestic wings.

Guardian Angels often stand sentinel over a vampires' haven, frozen in place until an unfamiliar vampire or mortal approaches, causing it to spring to life. A Guardian Angel may attack and restrain or destroy the trespasser, depending upon its creator's previously declared orders.

Rank: 3

Materials Needed: 100 lbs of metal or stone, a small vial of holy water

Vitae Cost: 12

Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 3, Resolve 2, Strength 5, Dexterity 2, Stamina 5, Presence 3, Manipulation 1, Composure 2

Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Intimidation 3, Investigation 1, Occult 1, Stealth 1, Weaponry 1

Merits: Sense Danger

Willpower: 4

Initiative: 4

Defense: 3

Speed: 10 (species factor 3)

Size: 5

Health: 10

Weapons / Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Slam	2 (B)*	10

***Special:** Knockdown (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 168)

Supernatural Aspects:

Material Immunity: Being made from solid metal or stone makes the Guardian Angel immune to being knocked out, bleeding to death, disease and wound penalties caused by damage.

Child of the Stones: The Rat Nest

Description: The Rat Nest takes the form of a horde of rats, each of which appears to be composed of dark gray iron and cast from an identical mold. They creep unseen and ever-vigilant through the walls and pipes of a vampire haven, and will faithfully alert their creator of any trespassers into his domain. They will not attack an intruder unless their master is in apparent physical danger, at which point they will swarm from the walls of the haven, screeching in a cacophony of grating metal on metal, hundreds of beady eyes ablaze with the fiery orange of molten steel. The Rat Nest overwhelms the transgressor with sheer number, scratching and biting him to bloody shreds and burrowing through his soft, tortured flesh with serrated tooth and nail. Once the victim is either subdued or destroyed, the Rat Nest will silently retreat to the walls of their master's haven, leaving behind a trail of rust and gore.

Rank: 2

Materials Needed: scrap iron, the mummified paw of a rodent, a handful of hot coals

Vitae Cost: 8

Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 1, Resolve 2, Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Presence 1, Manipulation 1, Composure 1

Skills: Athletics 1, Brawl 3, Intimidation 1, Investigation 2, Stealth 2, Subterfuge 1, Survival 1

Willpower: 6

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Initiative: 6
Defense: 2
Speed: 14 (species factor 7)
Size: 5
Health: 8
Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Bite	1(L)	2
Scratch	1(L)	2

Supernatural Aspects:

Material Immunity: Being made from solid metal makes the vermin of the Rat Nest immune to being knocked out, bleeding to death, disease and wound penalties caused by damage.

Child of the Stones: The Messenger

Description: The Messenger is a tiny, impish gargoyle created from vampire's blood and liquid mercury. Rather than protecting the haven of its master, this gargoyle is specifically birthed to quickly and secretly deliver messages. No larger than a few inches in height, the Messenger moves quickly and stealthily through the night, looking like nothing more than a stray moth. The Messenger can be trusted to show no other person the message it carries other than the vampire for whom it is intended.

Rank: 1
Materials Needed: a bead of mercury, an inkwell
Vitae Cost: 4
Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 3, Strength 1, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2, Presence 2, Manipulation 1, Composure 2
Skills: Academics 1, Athletics 1, Brawl 1, Craft 1, Investigation 2, Occult 1, Stealth 4, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 1, Survival 1
Willpower: 5
Initiative: 6
Defense: 3
Speed: 25 (species factor 20)
Size: 1
Health: 3
Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Bite	1(L)	1

Supernatural Aspects:

Mercurial Speed: The Messenger delivers its master's notice with the unnatural speed of mercury. When utilizing the supernatural ability, Mercurial Speed, the Messenger's speed is doubled until it fulfills its mission. A Messenger may use this ability once per night.

Communiqué: A Messenger may memorize a short message composed of 10 words or less, and then deliver it quickly and loyally to another Kindred. The Messenger may deliver its message by discreetly whispering it into the ear of the recipient, or it may use a small portion of blood to write the communication upon a loose sheet of paper or some other surface (such as a wall, or even the recipient's own skin). If its creator commands it, the gargoyle can also memorize a reply composed of 10 words or less to be returned to its master. A Messenger will never deliver a message to anyone other than the vampire for whom it is intended. If intercepted, the messenger will remain stoically silent and motionless until it turns to dust (due to not receiving its monthly blood price).

The Clans and Gargoyles

Each clan possesses certain supernatural abilities that are typical to that clan. These specialized Disciplines are passed down through the Vitae of the original vampiric source from sire to childe from one generation to the next. It makes sense then that because gargoyles are animated by the Vitae of their master, that they too may possess certain unique abilities or traits related to the clan of their creator. Blood, after all, carries everything, and in the World of Darkness, a vampire's heritage matters in myriad ways.

Daeva: Children of the Beloved

Only the Daeva clan can birth Children of the Beloved. They often exhibit the grace and beauty of form that Succubi enjoy. Children of the Beloved tend to attack and defend their masters using abilities that incite passion, entrance, or otherwise play upon a victim's emotions in some way. The following are examples of gargoyles a Succubus might construct.

Child of the Beloved: The Sirens

Description: In the labyrinthine rose garden encompassing an extravagant vampire's haven, the Sirens take the form of a triad of beautiful women sculpted from the purest white, semi-translucent, Penteli marble. The three maidens lounge elegantly about the brim of a large, Baroque fountain, as though preparing to bathe in its

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glittering, moon-lit basin. They remain near the font, suspended in their basking, an intruder disturbs them. If an unexpected guest sets foot within the garden walls, the Sirens stir gracefully to a semblance of life and begin to sing with clear, soaring voices.

The melody echoes with such bittersweet longing that none but the most callous and soulless of monsters would find themselves unmoved. If, however, the victim retains some trace of humanity, the song of the Sirens may lure him to a swift, watery grave.

Rank: 5

Materials Needed: The finest Penteli marble, a handful of white rose petals, melted snow or rain water

Vitae Cost: 20

Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 2, Resolve 3, Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Presence 3, Manipulation 5, Composure 3

Skills: Athletics 1, Brawl 3, Empathy 3. Expression 5, Persuasion 3, Investigation 1, Occult 1, Socialize 2, Stealth 1, Subterfuge 2

Willpower: 6

Initiative: 6

Defense: 2

Speed: 12 (species factor 5)

Size: 5

Weapons / Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Slam	2 (B)*	5

***Special:** Knockdown (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 168)

Health: 8

Supernatural Aspects:

Material Immunity: Being made from solid marble makes the Sirens immune to being knocked out, bleeding to death, disease and wound penalties caused by damage.

Song of the Sirens: The moment a trespasser enters the garden of their master, the Sirens begin to sing. They beckon to the trespasser, enticing him ever closer with their tantalizing beauty and heart wrenching song. Song of the Sirens is an extended action (Manipulation + Expression).

Undertow: If the intruder is successfully lured to the fountain, the three maidens fall upon him, forcibly dragging him under the water, and holding him securely beneath the surface with cold hands of hard, unyielding stone. If the victim is mortal, he is likely to drown. If, however, the prisoner is Kindred, the Sirens will continue to hold him beneath the clear waters of the fountain until their creator commands them to release the captive, or until the rays of the morning sun destroy the ensnared vampire.

Child of the Beloved: The Clockwork Mockingbird

Description: When not concealing itself, The Clockwork Mockingbird appears as a small, silver automaton in the form of a delicate songbird. The Clockwork Mockingbird perches in wait near a vampire haven, usually within the leaves of a nearby tree or beneath the eaves of a neighboring building, until an uninvited vampire enters its master's territory. When an uninvited guest approaches the protected area's vicinity, the gargoyle whirrs to life and takes to the sky in swift flight, calling out in a clear, urgent voice. With the supernatural ability of Mimicry (see below), the Clockwork Mockingbird deceives and attracts the attention of the intruder in order to attempt to lure him away from its master's haven.

Rank: 2

Materials Needed: pure silver, a handful of songbird feathers, a pocket watch

Vitae Cost: 8

Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 1, Resolve 2, Strength 1, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2, Presence 4, Manipulation 3, Composure 2

Skills: Athletics 1, Brawl 1, Empathy 3, Expression 5, Investigation 1, Persuasion 2, Socialize 3, Streetwise 2, Stealth 4, Subterfuge 3, Survival 1

Willpower: 4

Initiative: 6

Defense: 1

Speed: 17 (species factor 12, flight only)

Size: 1

Weapons / Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Beak	1 (L)	2
Talon	1 (L)	1

Health: 3

Supernatural Aspects:

Mimicry: Using Mimicry, the automaton attempts to attract the attention, concern, or curiosity of an intruder. It may play upon the intruder's compassionate nature by imitating the sobbing or pleading of a lost child, coax him with the soft, sensual invitation of a lover, tempt a blood-starved vampire with the glib chattering of easy, mortal prey, or goad into furious pursuit by endlessly hurling

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humiliating taunts and insults at him from just around the corner. Once the Clockwork Mockingbird incites the trespasser to investigate further, it flits swiftly from shadow to shadow, attempting to hide itself from detection while luring him further and further away from the protected haven. If the Clockwork Mockingbird fails to lure away its target, it immediately attempts to fly swiftly to its creator to alert her that an enemy approaches.

Mimicry is an instant, resisted action, pitting the victim's Composure + Empathy vs. the bird's Manipulation + Expression. If the victim loses, he becomes distracted and obsessed with uncovering the noise for the remainder of the scene (but only that one scene).

Material Immunity: Being made from pure silver makes the Clockwork Mockingbird immune to being knocked out, bleeding to death, disease and wound penalties caused by damage.

Gangrel: Children of the Wild

Only the Gangrel clan can birth Children of the Wild. Children of the Wild are hard and weathered creatures. They tend to possess abilities that are intended to assure the continued survival of their master in a harsh and unforgiving world. The following are examples of gargoyles a Savage might construct.

Child of the Wild: The Grave Marker

Description: The Grave Marker serves as a portable guardian for Gangrel who traverse the barrens beyond the cities using the Discipline of Protean to make a haven of the earth itself. A Grave Marker plants itself in the ground above the Savage's resting place. It takes on an appearance that blends in with the surrounding countryside. For instance, a Grave Marker in a remote forest may look like an ancient, solitary, moss-covered tombstone, the name and epitaph slowly eroded away by the wind and rain of the passing years. In locations more heavily populated by mortals, the Grave Marker may elect to camouflage itself in a suburban cemetery as a glossy, modern headstone, or beside a busy intersection as a white memorial cross — lovingly adorned with small gifts and plastic flowers. When it needs to move, it turns into something like a scuttling bug: largely incapable of attacks, but capable of moving when it needs to.

Rank: 1
Materials Needed: limestone or wood, a handful of graveyard dirt
Vitae Cost: 4
Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 1, Resolve 1, Strength 1, Dexterity 1, Stamina 1, Presence 1, Manipulation 1, Composure 1
Skills: Stealth 5, Survival 1, Subterfuge 2
Willpower: 1
Initiative: 2
Defense: 1
Speed: 2
Size: 3
Health: 4

Supernatural Aspects:

Material Immunity: Being made of wood or stone makes the Grave Marker immune to being knocked out, bleeding to death, disease, and wound penalties caused by damage.

Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust: Once the Gangrel who created the Grave Marker arises from its slumber, the Grave Marker simply collapses into a heap of dust. Provided that its master remembers to retain a handful of the gargoyle's dust before leaving the resting place behind (keeping the dust stored within a small pouch crafted for the purpose, for example), the Grave Marker may be easily revived the next time its creator chooses a new resting place and requires its assistance. Before using Protean to sink into the earth, the Savage may revive a Grave Marker by sprinkling the handful of dust on the earth in the location of the new resting place. If its master does not take the dust of the Grave Marker with it, the gargoyle will remain in the same location until its master returns to retrieve it. If its creator does not return to pay the monthly blood price, it simply remains as dust.

Tabula Rasa: In most cases, Grave Markers do not bear a name or epitaph upon them. For an extra point of Vitae, however, the creator of the gargoyle may choose to display a short inscription (or for an additional point of Vitae, an existing message can be removed).

Chill of the Grave: When someone sets foot upon the resting place of the sleeping vampire, the Grave Marker awakens its master with a sudden shiver down the spine, alerting her that a potential threat is near. This action is reflexive, but it is entirely up to the Gangrel to decide what to do with the information.

Child of the Wild: The Bone Ward

Description: The Bone Ward is loosely composed of the tooth, claw and bone of long-dead animals. The vast majority of the time, it dwells in the earth surrounding its master's haven. If an unexpected guest trespasses, a Bone Ward will first attack from beneath the earth, sending up razor sharp stakes of bone to deter, confine, and even kill the intruder.

The Bone Ward prefers subterranean movement, burrowing swiftly and smoothly through the soil so naturally that it appears to be more swimming than digging. A Bone

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Ward is rarely seen above ground. If a threat approaches, the Bone Ward will make every effort to remain underground as long as possible to utilize its unusual advantage. If it is forced to surface, it collects and assembles itself into a single immense, hulking monstrosity formed from the roughly-conjoined, mismatched remains of dozens of animals in any imaginable combination of tooth and claw, rib cages, snaking vertebrae, and bizarrely-joined boney appendages.

Depending on the location of the chronicle and the indigenous fauna thereabouts, the type of animal remains that the Bone Ward is comprised of may vary greatly.

Rank: 4

Materials Needed: bone, the tooth or claw of a wild animal, a handful of graveyard dirt

Vitae Cost: 16

Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 3, Resolve 3, Strength 5, Dexterity 5, Stamina 3, Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 4, Crafts 2, Intimidation 1, Investigation 1, Occult1, Stealth 4, Subterfuge 1, Survival 1, Weaponry 1

Willpower: 6

Initiative: 8

Defense: 3

Speed: 13 (species factor 3)

Size: 8

Weapons / Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Stab	2 (L)	5
Slam	3 (B)*	5

***Special:** Knockdown (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 168)

Health: 11

Supernatural Aspects:

Sense Vibration: When beneath the ground, the Bone Ward can instantly detect any movement on the ground above it up to a radius of 50 yards surrounding its location. Using this ability, the Bone Ward can flawlessly detect the location of trespassers above ground.

Subterranean Celerity: When the Bone Ward is underground, it can burrow through the earth at an incredible speed. When beneath the earth, the Bone Ward's Speed gains a +10 bonus.

Bone Cage: A Bone Ward can thrust a ring of thick, curved, tusk-like bones up from beneath the earth, forming a perimeter of bone around an enemy. This grants a +3

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to all grapple rolls, but the Bone Ward must remain immobile when using this ability. The diameter of the ring may be no larger than ten feet.

Bone Spike: The Bone Ward may shoot a sharpened bone spike through the earth, attacking victims from underground. The spike can extend no further than two yards from the ground. This is a Strength + Brawl roll, inflicting lethal damage. On an exceptional success, the bone spike impales the intruder, and although the enemy vampire is not technically staked, he is still physically restrained by the spike, and must find some creative way to free himself from the spike.

Ossify: The Bone Ward can thicken its compact osseous tissue, in order to compensate for impact. When making use of the ability Ossify, the gargoyle may gain an Armor rating of 2. This armor is cumulative with armor from other sources. This shift is performed as an instant action, and the gargoyle suffers a -1 to Strength and Dexterity while using this ability.

Bone Chimera: As an extended action, the Bone Ward may emerge from the earth and assemble itself into a hulking, monstrous, skeletal chimera made from the bone, tooth, and nail of various wild animals local to the area it was created in. This transformation allows it to pursue or attack an enemy above ground, but it also makes it more vulnerable to attack. While in the process of assembling itself, the Bone ward's Armor rating suffers a -2 penalty. The Bone Ward can maintain its form as a Chimera for one scene or until it chooses to revert to its typical form as scattered animal bones beneath the earth. Note that this is the only way the Bone Ward manifests above ground.

Material Immunity: Being made from the skeletal remains of animals makes the Bone Ward immune to being knocked out, bleeding to death, disease and wound penalties caused by damage.

Mekhet: Children of the Shadows

Only the Mehket clan can birth Children of the Shadows. Children of the Shadows toy tend to toy with the minds of their victims in some way or make use of illusion or deception to trap or mislead intruders. The following are examples of gargoyles a Shadow might construct.

Child of the Shadows: The Raven

Description: The Raven looks like a hard, glossy version of the black, melancholy bird, from which it takes its name. Carved from solid obsidian, it can often be found perched above the door of a vampire haven or within a stuffy parlor atop a dusty, antique bookshelf. If some unknown Kindred (or kine) enters the parlor, the Raven says nothing, and does little more than gaze down upon the intruder morosely with shining black eyes. Physically unimposing and seemingly innocuous at a glance, the Raven is often ignored as its power over an intruder rises to an elegant crescendo. Its gaze is nothing more than unsettling at first. The trespasser's breath may quicken, his heart may race, or he may begin to feel claustrophobic within a tiny waiting room. The longer the intruder spends under the unwavering, sinister gaze of the Raven, however, the more agitated and uncomfortable he becomes. If he is not permitted access to the haven by its occupants, he will eventually feel the overwhelming urge to leave the parlor immediately. If he continues to refuse to leave the room, or becomes trapped within it, the trespasser will eventually sink completely into madness.

Rank: 2
Materials Needed: obsidian, a handful of raven feathers
Vitae Cost: 8
Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 3, Resolve 4, Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Presence 3, Manipulation 1, Composure 3
Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 1, Empathy 1, Expression 4, Intimidation 2, Investigation 1, Occult 1, Persuasion 1, Stealth 2, Survival 3
Willpower: 7
Initiative: 6
Defense: 3
Speed: 14 (flight only, species factor 10)
Size: 2
Weapons / Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Beak	1 (L)	4
Talon	1 (L)	2

Health: 4

Supernatural Aspects:

Glower: An uninvited vampire who enters a haven protected by the Raven may become prey to its supernatural power, Glower. As an instant, contested action that may be used once every fifteen minutes, the Raven's relentless stare drives an intruder slowly to the brink of insanity. Glower pits the gargoyle's Presence + Expression versus the character's Wits + Composure. If the attack is successful, the trespasser develops a mild derangement of the Storyteller's choice (see derangements on p. 97 of **The World of Darkness Rulebook**). If a subsequent attack using the same ability succeeds, the Storyteller may increase the character's newly acquired derangement from mild to severe, or may choose to bestow a second,

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mild derangement upon the intruding vampire. There is no limit on the number of derangements the trespasser may acquire under the ever vigilant eye of the Raven, and the effects last for 24 hours or until the gargoyle's master instructs the Raven to remove the derangements. It should be noted that the Raven may not remove pre-existing derangements. The gargoyle may only remove derangements caused by Glower.

Material Immunity: Being made from solid obsidian makes the Raven immune to being knocked out, bleeding to death, disease and wound penalties caused by damage.

Child of the Shadows: Marley's Door

Description: Marley's Door takes its name from the spectral apparition of Ebenezer *Scrooge's* deceased business partner mentioned in Charles Dickens' 1843 novel, A Christmas Carol. The gargoyle appears to be a heavy wooden door with a knocker of glinting steel. The knocker often bears the face of a fierce Beast or a demon with a cold, unwelcoming expression fixed resolutely upon its grotesque face relaying an ominous warning to would-be intruders. While the demonic knocker of Marley's Door does fill unwanted visitors with a sense of foreboding, the gargoyle's real power lies in its ability to misdirect and mislead intruders. The only animation the door can muster is swinging back and forth, open and closed.

Rank: 3

Materials Needed: brass, oak, a lantern

Vitae Cost: 12

Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 3, Resolve 3, Strength 1, Dexterity 1, Stamina 2, Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 1

Skills: Empathy 1, Expression 2, Intimidation 3, Investigation 1, Occult 1, Persuasion 3m Subterfuge 5

Willpower: 4

Initiative: 2

Defense: 1

Speed: n/a (Marley's Door remains utterly stationary, apart from being able to open and close itself, and relies entirely upon its supernatural abilities to impede trespassers in its master's haven.)

Size: 7

Health: 9

Supernatural Aspects:

Trick Door: When an unwelcomed guest stands before Marley's Door, it appears to be an ordinary door (it may be locked or bolted shut, as with any door). If instructed to do so, it may creak slightly ajar allowing him a glimpse of the foyer within. Once a trespasser crosses the threshold, though, he suddenly finds himself someplace else entirely. Marley's Door can deceive the intruder into believing that he has entered any imaginably location: a janitor's closet, a dense forest thick with briars in the dead of night, or even to the intruder's own haven. The one place it does not lead, however, is its creator's haven. The ability Trick Door is an instant and contested when an unfamiliar vampire or mortal walks through Marley's Door, pitting the gargoyle's Wits + Subterfuge against the target's. When successful, the trespasser enters a trance-like state inside the Shadow's haven, believing that he is elsewhere until the gargoyle's master can decide what to do with the unwelcome guest. Trick Door lasts for 24 hours or until the master of Marley's Door commands the gargoyle to lift the illusion.

Shift Threshold: Once per night, Marley's Door has the ability to bind itself to another doorway located within its master's haven, linking the two doors together. Marley's Door may, for example, link itself to the door to a prison cell within its master's haven. When the intruder passes through the door, he ends up in the prison cell. There the he remains, until he is set free or finds some other way to free himself.

Material Immunity: Being made from wood and brass makes Marley's Door immune to being knocked out, bleeding to death, disease and wound penalties caused by damage.

Nosferatu: Children of the Despised

Only the Nosferatu clan can create Children of the Despised. Haunts birth gargoyles that may appear hideous and outright repellant to an intruder, or they may simply be innately unsettling to behold. The following are examples of gargoyles a Haunt might construct.

Child of the Despised: The Discarded One

Description: The Discarded One is composed from the foulest, most disgusting refuse of the masses of humanity. Various available refuse items such as rotting food, shreds of greasy newspaper, and moldering, discarded rags are assembled from garbage into a vaguely humanoid shape. A pair of rolling, yellow, lid-less human eyes then supernaturally surface from within a malformed lump of foul waste meant to be the thing's head. Finally, broken shards of multi-colored glass or tile are formed into jagged rows of teeth within a crudely improvised mouth. The smell of the Discarded One is nothing less than repugnant, and most creatures find it instantaneously and violently nauseating.

The Discarded One can collapse into an innocuous heap of garbage or assemble itself into a lurching and abhorrent semblance of a body at will. If the stench of the Discarded One alone does not ward off an intruder, it attacks, hurling vile chunks of itself at the trespasser.

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Rank: 3
Materials Needed: urban refuse, sewage
Vitae Cost: 12
Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 3, Resolve 3, Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Presence 2, Manipulation 1, Composure 2
Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Crafts 1, Empathy 1, Expression 5, Firearms 1, Intimidation 3, Investigation 1, Occult 1, Persuasion 1, Socialize 1, Stealth 3, Streetwise 2, Survival 2, Weaponry 2
Willpower: 5
Initiative: 4
Defense: 2
Speed: 9 (species factor 3)
Size: 7
Weapons / Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Hurl	2(B)	5
Slam	2 (B)*	10

***Special:** Knockdown (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 168)
Health: 10

Supernatural Aspects:

Arouse Disgust: As an instant action that may be used once per scene, the Discarded One may provoke an intruder to become suddenly and acutely aware of the extreme filth in which he wades, pitting the gargoyle's Presence + Expression versus the character's Wits + Composure. If the attack is successful, the trespasser develops a mild phobia of contamination — specifically, by the Discarded One (see Phobia on p. 189 of **Vampire: the Requiem**) for the following 24 hours. If the gargoyle rolls an exceptional success, the vampire develops Hysteria, also regarding contamination by the refuse of the Discarded One, (see Hysteria on p. 189 of **Vampire: the Requiem**) for the following 24 hours.

Nauseate: As an instant action that may be used once per scene, the Discarded One can produce a stench so foul that it causes the victim to become violently ill. If the vampire has imbibed any blood within the past three hours, he immediately vomits and loses the recently gained Vitae. On an exceptional success, the intruder continues to retch (despite an empty stomach) and cannot feed to gain additional Vitae for the next 24 hours.

Alter Composition: The Discarded One can reflexively alter its form as an instant action, twisting, stretching or warping the garbage it is composed of to gain unusual advantages. For example, the gargoyle may gather itself into a form that is vaguely humanoid to engage in combat, create appendages from its refuse to reach a handhold that would normally be too high, or collapse into a formless, innocuous heap of trash. These changes last for a scene or until the Discarded One chooses to revert to its typical form.

Material Immunity: Being utterly composed of refuse makes the Discarded One immune to being knocked out, bleeding to death, disease and wound penalties caused by damage.

Child of the Despised: The Paper Doll

Description: When undisguised, the Paper Doll is a horrific, faceless mannequin with long, thin, quill-tipped fingernails sewn together from yellowed parchment and stuffed with sawdust. When creating a Paper Doll, the Nosferatu meticulously flays off its own skin and painstakingly creates the vellum. The resulting gargoyle is then propped in the foyer of a Haunt's haven, perhaps haphazardly leaning against a wall or positioned in an overstuffed armchair like a grotesque figure in a wax museum. When an unknown vampire enters the haven of the Paper Doll's master, the automaton assumes the appearance of the Kindred that created it, down to the smallest detail. The disguised gargoyle may relay a simple message to the intruder if its master has preemptively commanded it to do so, such as "You are not welcome here. Leave this place immediately," or "Leave the package on the table and go." If the newcomer refuses to comply and/or leave, the Paper Doll attacks, showing its true form and clawing at the intruder with unexpected agility.

Rank: 4
Materials Needed: the skin of the master (see description above), quills, sawdust
Vitae Cost: 16
Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 3, Resolve 3, Strength 3, Dexterity 5, Stamina 2, Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 3
Skills: Athletics 1, Brawl 3, Crafts 2. Occult 1, Investigation 1, Stealth 1, Weaponry 1, Expression 1, Intimidation 1, Persuasion 1, Socialize 1, Subterfuge 4
Willpower: 6
Initiative: 8
Defense: 3
Speed: 13 (species factor 5)
Size: 5
Weapons / Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Slice	2(L)	8

Health: 7

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Supernatural Aspects:

Hide True Form: The Paper Doll has the supernatural ability to hide its true form and take on the appearance of the Nosferatu from whose skin it is made. The gargoyle may even feign a Predator's Taint by amplifying the effects of the Vitae that animates it. When hiding its true form, the gargoyle takes a -2 penalty to its Composure rolls. Although the Paper Doll may look and sound exactly like its master, it can only mimic up to three simple phrases, each composed of 10 words or less as instructed beforehand.

Blood Inscription: A paper doll has the ability to inscribe the thoughts of its victim upon its parchment skin. During an attack, if a Paper Doll successfully slices open a vampire's flesh with its quill-tipped fingernails, it instantly senses the intruder's current thoughts through his Vitae (or blood, if mortal). The Paper doll may then choose to retreat in order to hastily scrawl crude sentence fragments and childish drawings upon its skin, the resulting images and/or writing representing the thoughts it gleans from the victim's blood during the attack. Using this morbid ability, a Paper Doll may later display the stolen fragments of thought to its master.

Material Immunity: Being constructed from parchment and sawdust makes the Paper Doll immune to being knocked out, bleeding to death, disease and wound penalties caused by damage.

Ventrue: Children of the Estate

Only the Ventrue clan can birth Children of the Estate. Children of the Estate are often quite beautiful in an imposing way, and typically subdue enemies by physically overpowering them with merciless force. The following are examples of gargoyles a Lord might construct.

Child of the Estate: The Golden Idol

Description: A Golden Idol takes the form of a gleaming statuette of a calf cast from solid gold. As in Christian theology, the golden calf may be interpreted as a metaphor criticizing the pursuit of wealth and indulgence. It is somewhat ironic, therefore, that notoriously ambitious Ventrue create this gargoyle to guard their lavish and excessive havens. The Golden Idol is placed in the center of a narrow foyer. If a trespasser encroaches upon its master's haven, the gargoyle appears to be nothing more than a piece of fine art on display. It need not move, for the Golden Idol may manipulate the Vitae within a vampire's body, forcing him to kneel until its master returns or violently compelling the intruder's legs to carry him back out the door. (It should be noted that these gargoyles needn't actually be of a calf; any animal will do. Some Ventrue have even created ones that are golden doppelgangers of themselves.)

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Rank: 4
Materials Needed: gold, calf blood
Vitae Cost: 16
Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 3, Resolve 3, Strength 0, Dexterity 0, Stamina 2, Presence 5, Manipulation 5, Composure 4
Skills: Empathy 2, Intimidation 2, Manipulation 5, Occult 1, Persuasion 2, Subterfuge 1
Willpower: 7
Initiative: 4
Defense: 0
Speed: n/a (The Golden Idol remains utterly stationary and relies entirely upon its supernatural abilities to impede trespassers in its master's haven.)
Size: 2
Health: 4

Supernatural Aspects:

Solid Form: Being made from solid gold makes the Golden Idol immune to being knocked out, bleeding to death, disease and wound penalties caused by damage.

Playing God: Within a radius of five feet, the Golden Idol may seize nearly total control of a trespasser's body as an instant, contested action, pitting the gargoyle's Presence + Manipulation versus the character's Wits + Composure. If the attack is successful, the Golden Idol may manipulate the Vitae within a vampire's body, forcing him move or stand stock still (depending upon the provisional order of its master) for as long as the trespasser remains within a five foot radius of the gargoyle or until the Golden Idol's creator instructs it to release the intruder. The victim may break the control by spending a number of Willpower points equal to the Idol's rank (in this case, four).

Child of the Estate: The Stone Sentinel

Description: The Stone Sentinel takes the form of a towering, regal lion carved from cool, smooth, jet-black onyx. They stand guard in plain view as imposing and grandiose works of environmental art, outside of sprawling corporate buildings or in the gleaming, spacious lobbies of urban mansions in which rich and powerful Ventrue lords reside. Stone Sentinels are sheer powerhouses of solid stone, and its only purpose is to physically tear the enemies of its master, quite literally, limb from limb.

Rank: 5
Materials Needed: Onyx, a lion's pelt
Vitae Cost: 20
Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 3, Resolve 3, Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5, Presence 4, Manipulation 3, Composure 3
Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 5, Intimidation 5, Investigation 1, Occult 1, Stealth 2, Survival 2, Subterfuge 1
Willpower: 6
Initiative: 7
Defense: 3
Speed: 22 (species factor 13)
Size: 10
Weapons / Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Claw	1 (L)	20
Bite	1 (A)	10
Slam	3 (B)*	20

*Special: Knockdown (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 168)

Health: 15

Supernatural Aspects:

Solid Form: Being made from solid onyx makes the Stone Sentinel immune to being knocked out, bleeding to death, disease and wound penalties caused by damage.

Roar: The Stone Sentinel may open its gaping maw and let out an ear-splitting roar that strikes terror into the enemies of its master and sends them running away with a deeply-rooted, instinctive fear of the gargoyle that shakes the very Beast within. Roar is an instant, contested action, pitting the Stone Sentinel's Presence + Intimidation versus the intruding vampire's Wits + Composure.

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Story Hooks:

- In China, Emperor Qinshihuangdi lies entombed with 8,000 stone warriors to protect him in the afterlife. Wildly fragmented legends exist of a vampire known as Tiao Tai Nu, who is rumored to have possessed immense power circulate among the most ancient of kindred. Certain fanatical Kindred scholars insist that Nu made a ghoul of Emperor Qinshihuangdi, and that the 8,000 stone warriors are really gargoyles, somehow suspended in a state of eternal slumber.

  If the legends are uncorrupted by the maddening effects of torpor, how was Nu able to create children of the stone and rule them on that scale? Was there a horde of stone warriors scouring the Chinese countryside, collecting the blood Nu would require to expand and fuel this vast, fabled army? If the 8,000 warriors really are Children of the Stones, why have they not crumbled to dust as gargoyles always do when not paid a monthly blood tithe from their master? Does Nu still exist tonight, entombed in torpid slumber within a carefully hidden tomb? Historians find many of these tales difficult to swallow. Others argue that it was customary during that time to create children of the stone to protect the tombs of powerful kindred during torpor. The sleeping vampire's childe typically created such gargoyles, however, and never on such a vast scale.
- An influx of neonate Kindred in trendy South Florida has brought with it both the positive and negative trappings of youth. Whispered campaigns circulate among the newly Damned of a mysterious party circuit circulate, attracting these young vampires, along with handsome profits. Clearly, this behavior tempts fate and endangers the masquerade — how has it been permitted to escalate to such a point?

  In tandem, eccentric Cuban Kindred cite tales of a potent elder, Delphia. According to some, Delphia left Cuba in the early 1950's, seeking solitude in the Everglades, and protecting her remote haven with an immensely powerful Bone Ward. She is rumored to have gone mad in her self-imposed isolation from the usual eternal torment that plagues the Damned. Such a tale is not uncommon, but the story of Delphia is bizarrely connected to those of the dangerous, new party circuit.

  Too powerful to exist on human blood alone, Delphia is rumored to make the occasional appearance at these wild neonate gatherings. Is she the ringleader of this new party circuit that endangers the Masquerade, and therefore the very existence of the Damned? If so, can she be stopped?
- Several witnesses have come forward describing a hulking beast, with flesh like granite, skulking though the shadows of the city. In tandem, several prominent kindred were brutally torn from their havens and forced to burn beneath the sun's lethal light. Is a Child of the Stones being used by its master to commit these heinous acts? If so, who is the vampire (or vampires) behind the attacks? Or is the beast of stone one of the rare gargoyles self-conscious and intelligent enough to act upon its own free will. Who will be next to die, and why?

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A Season of Secrets

Part Four - Greg Stolze

Bruce tugged at his cravat. He'd hated ties when he was alive. Since dying he'd rested out his days in storage lockers, garden sheds, the winter basements of abandoned buildings. He didn't even need to breathe if he wasn't going to talk. But *still* the rag around his throat made him uncomfortable.

"Don't fidget," the Prince said, then straightened the folds of cloth with a delicate fussiness that Bruce couldn't help but find a little fruity. He squelched the thought as soon as it crossed his mind, because he didn't know if Maxwell could read his mind or what.

The Prince of the city smiled at Bruce and ruffled his hair. "It's going to be just fine," he said affectionately. He'd been really nice to Bruce ever since he'd started feeding off him.

Feeding had become a big thing for the Prince, and Bruce certainly understood the anxiety of vampire hunger. That shit could make you do *crazy* stuff, really evil. But if Bruce had it right (something he always had to second-guess) the Prince could now only feed off other vampires. Which was, he'd admit, a pain in the ass. But at least Maxwell could be sure that anyone he snacked on 'cause he *had* to wouldn't go whining to the cops or beef about it on WGN. As the boss honcho, he could just *order* people to feed him, so Bruce didn't quite see the problem. On the other hand, the Prince could think circles around Bruce in three different languages, probably while watching TV and chewing gum.

They were behind the "authorized personnel only" door in the Shedd Aquarium's Oceanarium section. The free access areas were closed to the daily public, but open to Chicago's nocturnal predators. From the lowliest unbound (like Bruce) to the mightiest elder (like Maxwell) all could come, coexist in peace, discuss matters of profound importance (like who was feuding with whom) and socialize.

It was Elysium and it was packed because after a couple months' hiding out, Maxwell was hosting. The announcement had gone out, in channels so thorough and subtle that the Kindred didn't really question how they knew, it was just suddenly in the air, like the first few flakes of a coming snow. Tonight's Elysium: a historical theme based on the year of the Prince's Embrace, 1800.

Outside, the crowd was dividing itself, as it always did. Typically, this was by age, subdivided by politics, with some preferring to break up into cliques based on heritage (either their histories when alive, or by particular details of their cursed unlives). But tonight, in addition to sides and factions forming in response to Norris' bitter legacy, people were also splitting up based on dress.

The people who'd done their homework and were in proper Georgian attire—high-waisted pastel dresses for women, with elaborate rounded coifs under massive hats, knee britches and riding coats for men—were forming a loose crowd, raising supercilious eyebrows at the younger or more ignorant who heard "1800" but thought "Victorian" and immediately went corset shopping. Some, especially the young and poor, were dressed as they always were, jeans, leather jackets. Kindred who had a particular style that they forced upon every Elysium—tats and latex, burqua or nakedness—kept on as they always did, mingling with a few who had the depth of knowledge to dress as English counter-culture or as a revolutionary French peasant.

Solomon Birch was in a period priest's collar. Persephone Moore looked like the cover of a Jane Austen reprint, with a fake beauty mark as an ironic nod to the period. Maxwell had overseen Bruce's costuming in buckled shoes, brimmed hat and shad-belly coat, and when he judged the time was right, he had the orchestra strike up an imposing Beethoven melody. The Prince stepped forth and enjoyed the gasps.

The young had known Maxwell only as a fashionably modern authority figure, by turns stern and jovial but always cool enough. Older Kindred remembered him as a peer, less polished than his Princely persona but always striving for sophistication, always studying, always pursuing elegance and achieving it more and more as the years wore on.

"Good evening," the Prince said, spreading his arms. "This is what I looked like upon my Embrace."

His hair was wild, woolly, great in size like a '70s revolutionary's afro, but so unkempt and matted that it looked more like a thorn bush. The beard matched, reaching down to his collarbones and sticking wildly out past the

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radius of his ears. He wore stained buckskins, ragged and ill-repaired, and his feet were shoeless.

Maxwell knew how ridiculous he looked, of course he did. He played into it with the crowning touch—a period-authentic clay pipe. It was clumsily made and clearly, just from the way he held it, an object of sentimental value to him.

"I hear you gasping," he said. "I know. I've changed a lot, hm? All those years of nightly haircuts and careful shaves to conceal my rude nigra origins."

"Represent!" someone shouted from the crowd, a comment the Prince met with an eye-roll.

"I hid what I was as we all hide what we now are," he said, his voice seemingly contemplative and private but projecting to the farthest corner of the room. Usually his speeches were proclamations, loud and public and with plenty of eye contact for the crowd. But tonight his eyes were lowered, toying with the pipe, seeming for all the world as if he were musing in private to himself.

"I am Maxwell Clarke and I am a diablerist."

When he said *that*, he looked up.

The sound was remarkable. Because vampires need to breathe only when they're going to talk or smoke or use their lungs for some *specific* purpose, many in the audience had left theirs empty and flat. At the Prince's admission, the simultaneous inflation of a hundred chest cavities set the whole room moaning, a brief but dire groan of dread and disbelief. Some instinctively drew back and Maxwell laughed. He pointed at them and laughed.

"What?" he asked. "What, do you think I'm going to do it again? Right now? Do you think I'm going to lunge across the room and start chowing down on neonates one after the other? Please."

He went to his chair, the Princely chair Solomon had built for him that was as close to being a throne as one could get without being absurd. He sat down and crossed his legs.

"My lord," Solomon said, and stopped. He came forward, slowly, and the look on his face was almost unbearably poignant. Even the still and shriveled hearts of dead predators who hated him couldn't help but be stirred a little at the pity and horror the Bishop evinced. It was sincere, it was shockingly selfless and the cynics would later natter on about the vinculum, about Maxwell's skill with mind control, but it was indisputable. No matter how it got there, the concern on Solomon's face was undeniably real, and he spoke as if he and Maxwell were the only ones in the room.

"My lord, you are sick. You… you need help. It can be well, and I can help you. Please, I beg you to move beyond this sin, to… to…"

"I don't need *your help*, Solomon," Maxwell said, and the Bishop froze. "I know what I did and I have no current plans to repeat it. But you know what?" He looked out over the Kindred assembly. "I reserve the right to do it again."

"This is intolerable!" The man who stood and cried out was Invictus, a member of Maxwell's own nominal covenant.

"Intolerable? Is it?" The Prince stood and stared him down. "I have done everything for you, you mob of ingrates! Enforced the Masquerade to keep your selfish indiscretions concealed! Mediated the petty conflicts that fall like a cold drizzle, *constantly*, every group whining about the others, each one consumed with its own blind greed. I have tried to create peace and security, and I have been mocked for *softness*. I have striven to contain us, the better to hide us all, and been whined at for being *small minded*! I forbade the Embrace, I kept us from open murder of each other, and my reward for that was that *Norris* and his devious ilk took the breathing room I'd provided and used it to plot against me. I know your thoughts," he said, spinning to pin Bella with a glance, voice rising. "Right now, Christ, you're so transparently predictable, you're even now thinking how you can use this to remove me from office and replace me with a Circle Prince, presumably *you*, when your Covenant would permit and even encourage a thousand cruelties and blasphemies only a few degrees less reviled than the *one* of which I am guilty.

"I have committed Amaranth!" His voice was a shriek. "I shout the word you hesitate to whisper! I refuse to be a mealy-mouthed hypocrite about it, *Scratch*, and I refuse to accept that it makes me less of a leader than I was before, *Justine*."

At the pointed use of their names, the two elders reacted. Scratch, instinctively, vanished. Justine became statue still, the only thing moving her lengthening fangs.

"I killed Norris and who misses him, eh? He provoked me one time too many and I got sick of it. His crimes were enormous, so he reaped an enormous punishment. You don't want your soul devoured? Then don't *piss me off*. Don't stab me in the back and try to laugh it off. *Don't try to take away what is mine*."

"My lord, you must relinquish Praxis immediately or it will be removed by force." The voice speaking was flat, calm and inexorable. Many present didn't know the woman speaking. She looked dowdy in her Georgian frock, just as she usually looked dowdy in subdued Chanel suits and tasteful gold jewelry. Lillian Vanderpool never really got comfortable in her body as a corpse, and she still stood awkwardly, like a posed mannequin, as she decried the Prince.

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"By *force*? Whose force, your Carthians? Look me in the eye and tell the truth, do you really believe there'd be more peaceful nights with a Carthian Prince, or would it be long knives and pogroms? Sylvia, Solomon, someone put that Longinus spell on her, the one that makes her puke bugs when she lies. Let's see if Ms. Vanderpool really thinks I've done a poor job of keeping peace."

"It's not a matter of your job performance," she said. "I fear you have fallen prey to your most indelicate urges."

"Oh, now I'm *crazy*?" Maxwell began to laugh. "Yes, you're probably right! I'd have to be a lunatic to try transparency and honesty in this snake pit! But sane or crazy, evil or good, *I'm your Prince* and I hold this society together. You may hate me, but you need me. No matter who you are, you *know* that I'm a better Prince than you're likely to get otherwise. Even if I'm a cannibal! Even if I'm a madman! I'm nobody's first choice, but I bet all of my enemies can think of three or four candidates for Prince who'd be a whole lot worse. Solomon? Justine? Bella? Walter Barowski or Max Maurey? There are a lot of low cards in that hand—no offense," he added, glancing at Justine and Solomon with a wry twist on his lips.

And then the room went silent.

It wasn't just that people stopped speaking. It was like a speaker was unplugged. The lapping of water in the tanks, the shuffle of feet and the resonances of random sounds in the acoustics of the musicians' instruments, it all went instantly still, every sound wave died, a moment of deafness attended Elysium, and then a voice broke it.

"I will be heard."

Nobody saw where the man came from, but every Kindred present was aware that this was a living human, heart pumping blood and standing next to… Earth Baines? A curiously subdued and nervous Earth Baines, by every appearance.

"Um, okay," Maxwell said, tilting his head with a little snicker. "I suppose I should have expected this. Go ahead, you have the floor."

The strange mortal—tall and imposing and dressed all in white—looked over the crowd of monsters with no fear on his face, only a calm calculation as he said, "Your master, Maxwell Clarke, is a soul-eater."

The silence that followed was the more mundane quiet, people not talking, and it was brief before the Prince started to giggle.

"Oh," he snorted. "Your timing just *could not be worse*."

Now the man in white seemed flustered. Just a little, but whatever he'd been expecting from the crowd—disbelief, rage, anarchy and terror—he wasn't getting it. Maxwell continued.

"How about you cut to the chase here? Setting aside the very relevant question of whether we *have* souls, you don't give a damn about one vampire committing unspeakable acts on another."

"No," the visitor said. "No, I'm here about Nartaka."

"I assume that's the dead guy Earth here was tasked with hiding? Incidentally, Baines—I'm pretty sure McLean picked you because you were disposable if you fucked the mission up, and you managed to even fuck up your own disposability. Bravo, big guy."

Earth looked like he was wishing the ground would open and swallow him.

"We had an understanding, Clarke," the man in white began.

"Okay, look, let's not pretend any of you gave two shakes of a rat's cock about that guy. If he'd had *friends* among his community, he wouldn't have come to me. He made it crisply clear that you guys wouldn't have pissed on him if his head was on fire, and wouldn't have stopped any other time, so don't act like he was the little orphan from the *Les Miz* poster. You're concerned that I drained a magician dry and that's legitimate, so let me explain. I killed him for, eh, three reasons. One, he was a dick. You probably know this, he was an arrogant snot who didn't pay me the proper respect. Two, I didn't want to pay him what I owed him, and killing him was easier. Yes, that's kind of a scumbag maneuver, I'll fess up, but you get in the ring with a bloodsucker, you have to expect the occasional low blow. Three, I was curious if there was anything special about this so-called 'mystical blood.' You can rest easy on that account. No cool colors, no exhilaration, no satori or mystic crystal revelations. I think he may have been dosing on synthroid, but other than that, he tasted like a suburban insurance salesman. I'm not about to start dropping your people like birds because your magical blood is *soooo* special and wonderful, all right? My curiosity's satisfied and no one wants a big blowup over one unpopular shitbird, so are we done here?"

Before the white-clad visitor could reply, Maxwell had turned back to the Kindred.

"This just underscores my point," he said. "I'm tired of being lobbied, taken for granted and schemed against. I am now, officially, a *tyrant*. You all knew I'd ignore my own laws, Persephone here proved that, and I'm sick of the pretense. I get to do whatever I want. You don't. You don't Embrace, you don't kill one another, you sure as hell don't commit diablerie, but if I feel like it, *I can do any of that*. I think you'll put up with it, I really do. Because the alternatives are worse. Because in my tenure, I've run this city better than any Prince anyone can remember. Because with me, Chicago *works*. If you don't agree? Think you can do better? All

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right, try to upset the apple cart. Just remember Norris. He had half of us blackmailed, he was old and smart and had a legion of spies behind him. Look where *he* ended up."

•••

"I'm surprised you decided to meet with me," Solomon said two weeks later.

"Maybe I came to gloat." Persephone replied. They were in a foreclosed house, Persephone had a key. She'd chosen the place, she knew the exits, she had gotten there first and had people watching it all day. She wasn't sure how much that would help if Solomon decided to hurt her again.

"That's going around," he said. "A little arrogance is always common when one takes power. Just as a little self-pity and guilt are common when one loses power."

"I have to think you've fallen pretty far if you're coming to me for help. What happened to your legion of fundie followers?"

"Oh, they're around. I haven't been stripped of my status as a priest, just… relieved of the political duties of a Bishop. It will be interesting to see how Sylvia handles them. But it is, in fact, in my capacity as spiritual leader that I'm here today."

"If you want to save me into more perfect damnation, no sale."

"Salvation can never be purchased, but I believe that you will come to the truth in time. Already you have a better grasp of what you are. I see your ruthlessness grow nightly. You should never have been, no more than I, but it's a fallen world and we must seek the Lord's will even in our damnation. But the sinner I'm most concerned with is Maxwell so, as they say, it's not all about you."

"You'd be better off talking with Bruce," she said, before she could consider the bitterness in her tone. "The Prince has moved Bruce into his brownstone."

"It's only a gesture," Birch replied. "Would you really prefer to be his daughter-concubine, living under his roof? The Prince has the Temple rolling out Vitae Reliquaries for him, many of them, but I worry that it's only a temporary solution."

"As opposed to what?"

"Removing him from power! His sin against Norris has maddened and corrupted him…"

."..and now that you're no longer Bishop you've set your sights higher?"

Solomon closed his eyes and looked pained. Then he produced an insect shell from the pocket of his sport coat and showed it to her. "A magic trick," he said sardonically, then muttered in Latin.

"I'm a kindly man and universally loved," Solomon continued, and bugs poured from between his lips. He grimaced and sputtered them out. "Bah, vile. You know this spell, yes? No unclean words can pass my lips unmarked now. I shall endure the occasional lie during our conversation so that you know the truth of my other words. I want what is best for Maxwell."

He paused, so that she could see no insects were forthcoming. "I believe his holding of Praxis is dangerous to himself and to the city he loves. I don't know whether I am motivated by genuine friendship or the bonds of Vinculum. Honestly, I suspect some of both, but that's less important than isolating him from the power that can only push him closer to the edge." He paused. "Sylvia Raines is my good friend," he said, then spat more creepy-crawlies.

"Wow," Persephone said. "This is… surreal, really, I…" Then Solomon grabbed her by the hair.

She shrieked as he flung her to the ground, diving on top of her moments before the report of gunshots ripped through the air. He sprang off her and the crash of gunfire underscored the thuds of bodies crashing into walls and rebounding off floors. By the time she got to her feet and followed, Solomon was kneeling on top of a struggling Aurora Hatch, her pistol a yard away, still gently smoking.

"You bitch!" Aurora screamed. "*I'll end you! She was my daughter*!"

"Hold her head steady," Solomon said. "Do you have a pocketknife? I'm unarmed."

Mutely, Persephone pulled a knife out of Aurora's boot. "She always kept it there," she muttered.

"I knew nothing about this," Solomon said, grunting as Aurora thrashed beneath him. "I think she came for both of us. Hold her *head*, Persephone! Stop being useless!"

Uneasily, Persephone complied. "What are you doing?"

"Cutting off her eyelids so she has to meet my gaze, and it's a delicate business so hold tight. I'm going to apprehend her and show her the error of her ways."

"Is your spell still working?" Persephone demanded.

"I'm your enemy in this matter," Solomon said, and the beetles poured out, prompting Aurora to scream as they skittered on her face. "Now help me brainwash this neonate before she takes another shot at us both." Only then did Persephone notice the two bullet holes in Solomon's jacket.

Hesitating, she knelt.

"First this one," Solomon said. "Then the Prince. We can save him, us two."

Persephone's voice was low with dread and dejection.

"Because only we love him."

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Dead, Dread Chronicles

It's a piece of cake until you get to the top. You find you can't stop playing the game the way you've always played it.

—*Richard Nixon*

The ways one can play a game of **Vampire: The Requiem** are as varied as the deviations in the blood of all the vampires in all the world's mythology. That's a good thing, by the way. Bloodsucker noir? Backwoods swamp-leech crime fiction? The Kindred on a space station? Maybe you'd like to see **Vampire: The Requiem** modeled off of **The Wire**, or **The Shield**, or with something that looks like a giddy combination of **Buffy The Vampire Slayer** and **Lost**.

Thing is, your options are limitless.

Which of course means we cannot possibly *attend* to all your options because that would take us an infinite number of monkeys and typewriters—not to mention about a billion more pages.

But what we can do is give you a couple-few options, let you have a taste, maybe show you the way toward designing your own spins on the **Vampire: The Requiem** chronicle. That's what this chapter is about: we're breaking the mirror and handing you a shard, letting you gaze upon the distorted, jagged reflection to see just how awesome your **Requiem** game can be.

The Dark Metropolis

"They say this city never sleeps. If you're smart, you won't either."

The Underbelly

"You ain't got nothin' on me, Bryce," growled Roscoe with a voice like grinding gravel. "Why should I do you a solid, when all you've got is a whole lot of nothin' to offer me in return? I told you not to come back here if you ain't got nothin' to trade."

In the dim light, Bryce saw the informant's hand shift nervously under the counter. The red neon "closed" sign in the grimy pawn shop window flickered subtly off, then on again, three distinct times. If Bryce didn't know any better he might have thought it was a coincidence. A gang of brutish, broad-shouldered vamps emerged from the shadows of the dank alleyway across the street at the signal.

"Call off your buddies, Roscoe," Bryce stated coolly with a wry smile. "I know you don't want at least one of them hearing what you were up to last night with Ruby."

Noir and the Damned

The Dark Metropolis is **Vampire: The Requiem** in a noir setting. The Metropolis is a visceral, urban maze cloaked in perpetual night—a nightmarish, surreal paradise for the Damned. In their eternal struggle with unlife, Kindred are morally ambiguous to begin with, lending themselves naturally to the genre. But in the gritty underbelly of the Metropolis, the general rule is to trust no one. Everyone harbors a secret, and she who survives and thrives the dog-eat-dog streets of the Metropolis looks out for nobody but herself. Time itself may be fluid and dream-like. Events may take place out-of-order, or the storyline may include occasional flashbacks or flash-forwards that veer from the typical chronological sequence.

What Is Noir, Exactly?

Sex. Fatalism. Deviations. Long shadows cast across long nights.

Noir, whether we're talking in fiction or as *film noir*, often features a world that is explicitly broken and drenched in silver nitrate and shadow. Imagine a protagonist who discovers that heaped atop his shoulders is an inverted pyramid—every time he thinks he knows the identity of the person who's fucking him over he finds a whole new layer of hell and hate. Every time he turns around it's another betrayal, another dead friend, another seduction. And in the end, it's overwhelmingly impersonal: it's Man Versus The World, and a very Bad World, indeed.

Tier: Ancillae / City

This chronicle explores corruption and power-play between ancillae of the Metropolis, and is intended for characters that have an established role in Kindred society. There is a general atmosphere of mistrust, even

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Cinematic Influences

Although film noir's classic period is generally regarded as stretching from the early 1940s to the late 1950s, its influence stretches across decades, as well as other genres, and can still be seen in films today. Look to the following movies as influences for your own film noir **Vampire** Chronicle.

- **Classic Film Noir:** Film Noir during the 1940s and 50s was heavily influenced by the hardboiled school of American detective and crime fiction. Most took place in an urban setting, featuring archetypal characters of the genre: private eyes, femme fatales, corrupt lawmen, or jealous husbands. Some classic Noir films include: The Maltese Falcon (1941), Double Indemnity (1944), Murder, My Sweet (1944), The Killers (1946), The Postman Always Rings Twice (1946), The Lady from Shanghai (1947), Strangers on a Train (1951), and Kiss Me Deadly (1955).
- **Neo-Noir:** The genre continued past its classic era, and there are a number of films today that maintain the Noir tradition. While *similar* plots, themes and character archetypes persist, these attributes of the Noir became more flexible or exaggerated as the genre evolved throughout the decades. Some Neo-Noir films include: Blue Velvet (1986), Naked Lunch (1991), Reservoir Dogs (1992), Se7en (1995), Fargo (1996), Crash (1996), L.A. Confidential (1997), Fight Club (1999), Memento (2000), Mulholland Drive (2001), Insomnia (2002), The Machinist (2004), and Brick (2005).
- **Cross-genre Film Noir:** Noir may also be blended with other genres. A primarily Noir chronicle may also include elements of science fiction, comedy, pulp, or dark comic adventure. Some Cross-genre films include: Soylent Green (1973), Blade Runner (1982), Alien³ (1992), Pulp Fiction (1994), Ghost in the Shell (1995), Twelve Monkeys (1995), The Big Lebowski (1998), Gattaca (1997), Dark City (1998), The Thirteenth Floor (1999), Minority Report (2002), Sin City (2005), and The Dark Knight (2008).

among perceived allies. As in any city there exist coteries of neonates and a few feared and respected elder vampires, but the vast majority of action happens among the ancillae—too old to be affected by the foolish highs experienced by the young and too young to submit role of feared and respected administrators that elder vampires tend to fall into.

Mood and Theme

Noir is notorious for its nihilistic presentation of the world. The tone of the genre tends to be cynical and pessimistic, with doom-laden storylines involving subjects of death, suffering, tragedy, unhappiness, and existential despair. At the same time, the city has its own sense of constant, vibrant urgency. The Metropolis is almost alive with the constant movement of its living and undead residents. It is the great, unforgiving, terrible, beautiful beast in which the Damned circle tirelessly, tracing the careful steps of the eternal Danse Macabre through its glittering streets and darkest recesses.

A Glossary of Hardboiled Slang

To add some authenticity to a chronicle set in the Dark Metropolis, consider having your characters use popular slang of the 1940s:

All Wet—Describes an erroneous idea or individual, as in, "he's all wet."
Broad—Woman, dame
Bump Off—To murder, to kill.
Cat's Meow—Something splendid or stylish; the best or greatest, wonderful
Darb—An excellent person or thing (as in "the Darb"—a person with money who can be relied on to pay the check)
Fall Guy—Victim of a frame
Frame—To give false evidence, to set up someone
Hard Boiled—A tough, strong guy
Heebie-Jeebies—The jitters
Jalopy—An old car
Joint—A club, usually selling alcohol
Keen—Attractive or appealing
Moll—A gangster's girl
Pinch—To arrest.
Sheba—A woman with sex appeal
Sheik—A man with sex appeal

Description

The Metropolis

The setting of the chronicle is an endless, sprawling urban maze referred to by its inhabitants simply as the Metropolis. The Metropolis is the essence of all that defines a city. It is a sleepless, ceaseless, ever-changing entity and the pride and home of kine and Kindred from all walks of life and unlife. There is resplendence in its ugliness and peace in the consistent and ever-present ebb and flow of the cacophonous multitudes. Despite the intense extremes of its danger and crime, the Metropolis is a thing of monstrous beauty—a dark haven for the Damned.

The Big Five of the Metropolis

In the Metropolis, the covenants are like mob families, using their power to jockey for influence over the city and each other. The camarilla and areas of Elysium only exist

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to keep coteries from escalating small disputes into serious covenant wars—but those wars have been known to happen. Still, when something threatens their collective self-interest, the Big Five cooperate efficiently.

The higher up in the hierarchy you get, the more corruption you'll see, with the exception of a few idealists that separate themselves from the political process but are just too powerful or connected to be taken down. There's plenty of room to wiggle at the bottom, however, and the players' coterie might be able to work under the radar of more powerful Kindred mobsters, at least until they do something that draws attention from above.

The **Invictus** is part Murder Inc, part Special Forces. If you want to run a scene where someone opens a closet with a huge rack of neatly arrayed weapons it will probably happen at an Invictus haven. In the Metropolis, this covenant has specialized body armor, silenced machine guns and all of the deadly firepower you see in the movies.

The Carthian Movement has deep contacts with mortal subcultures. If you want to hook up with thugs, smugglers and thieves, these are the Kindred to find. This contrasts with an interest in bleeding edge technology and culture, so they're also the people to blame when the wires get crossed or the power fails at just the wrong moment.

The Circle of the Crone are spies and assassins. They shape Kindred society by murdering or banishing anybody they don't think deserves the gift of the Embrace. Acolytes learn mystical secrets from the rogues and solitaries they eliminate. They perform experimental rituals with these secrets, opening gates that should never be opened, or creating monsters in the name of some long forgotten goddess of their lore. Coteries of Acolyte operatives exist solely to cover up their mistakes.

The Ordo Dracul is the power brokerage of Kindred currency. Dragons argue for consistent standards in trading secrets of the various Disciplines. They also act as a kind of "Q Division" in emergencies. They've got a lot of dangerous mystical experiments in the works, just waiting for the right occasion for a trial run.

The Lancea Sanctum is dug in with high society and the semi-religious Old Boys' Clubs of Hermetics, Freemasons, wannabe Templars and other mortal groups with more ambition than real knowledge. They rule the realm of faceless bureaucrats with city-altering authority and old people you've never heard of, with more money than you can imagine. In a crisis, this largesse trickles down to operatives who need it. Use the Lancea Sanctum to justify an expensive, jet-setting chronicle.

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Sample Player Characters

Bryce Rosen, Mekhet, the Private Eye

"I'm not falling for his story. I've got a bad feeling in my gut that something else is going on here. Something big."

Bryce Rosen is a Private Eye with rugged good looks and a slick trenchcoat. His eyes are brooding, keenly intelligent, and sharp, and he moved with a silent, deliberate gait. To many, he often comes across as being amoral, ruthless, and self-serving. Bryce trusts no one and suspects everyone. Rosen is tough, smooth, knows all the right things to say (especially when it come to the broads), and while he may not have an innate sense of goodness or compassion, he has a personal code of loyalty, professional responsibility, and integrity that he seeks to uphold.

Ruby Harrison, Daeva, the Femme Fatale

"You've got to help me, Bryce. Please. For old time's sake. You know I wouldn't be asking if I had anyone else to turn to."

Ruby Harrison is a seductive, stunning beauty with the calculated ability to use her sexuality and enchanting charm as weapons. Her pale skin is flawless, and she wears her glossy, auburn hair in long, loose waves. She is a semi-famous stage actress in the Metropolis, and is notoriously manipulative and secretive about her personal life (which still tends to find its way into local gossip). Although she appears delicate, Ruby is capable of taking care of herself unless she finds herself in over her head. She is just as likely to be the villain as she is the anti-heroine—it may just take an entire chronicle to determine where her true loyalties lie (quite possibly, simply to herself).

Dale Wickliffe, Daeva, the Confidant

"You know I don't mind if you lay low here for a while, but make sure you keep a handle on that broad. Mark my words, she's nothin' but trouble."

Dale Wycliffe is the owner of a local joint, the Sticking Point, frequented by Kindred and an undeclared but unspoken and accepted location of Elysium in the Metropolis. Wycliffe's face is open and friendly—most feel comfortable around him almost immediately. He is quick to smile at a joke and willing to lend an ear to anybody with a good story or juicy gossip to share. He can typically be found at the bar, serving alcohol-laced blood to his patrons (who may be anyone from the most lowly neonate to the infamous Ventrue mob boss, Logan Stone, himself). Wycliffe is an ally of Bryce Rosen, who helped him out of a tight spot in the past.

Allies and Antagonists

Dennis Ashford, Gangrel, the Jealous Lover

"It's been too long, Ruby. You look good. You always look good. I don't know if you heard, but I've got a new gig doing security for Mr. Stone. You should let me treat you to dinner. I've really turned over a new leaf since last time, doll."

In the public eye, Dennis Ashford maintains his role as a respected and feared member of Logan Stone's inner circle. His agenda, however, is self-serving and may be connected to a much larger, more ominous plot. His true loyalties remain to himself, making Ashford the first to jump ship when the going gets tough, or his ruse is discovered. He and Ruby have were lovers a few years back, and their relationship since that point has been on-again off-again. Dennis is constantly suspicious that his lover has betrayed him in some way (with or without good reason), and he is openly expressive (often violently so) about his jealousy.

Logan Stone, Ventrue, the Mob Boss

"I know you're not sticking your nose into my private business, Rosen. You're a smart guy, and that would be a very unwise move on your part."

Logan Stone is a broad, stocky man who appears to be in his early fifties. His jet black hair shows no trace of gray, and is slicked back in a short, clean cut. His jaw is strong and broad as his shoulders and he is dressed to the nines in a tailored pinstriped suit and shiny black patent leather loafers. Stone has a gruff voice and barks his commands like a bulldog, expecting unquestioned loyalty from his inner circle of highly esteemed Kindred. He has an arsenal of heavy weaponry at his disposal and the manpower to use it. Stone is not a vampire you want to accidentally look at the wrong way. Logan Stone is currently the most powerful mob boss in the Metropolis (as such, he could be regarded as the city's Prince in usual game terms), and has been for the past several decades. The balance of power can always shift, however, and the four other mobs of the Big Five are always looking for an opportunity to tilt the scale.

Roscoe McAlister, Nosferatu, the Double-Dealing Snitch

"Yeah, I know the guy you're looking for. I know just about everybody. You want the dirt on him? No problem. Since I don't like the guy anyway, let's just say you owe me one."

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Roscoe McAlister is the city's resident double-dealing snitch. He owns a local pawn shop, where he does business with kine and Kindred alike, selling and trading gossip and the secrets of the powerful and influential people who inhabit the Metropolis. Roscoe is utterly self-serving and would kill his own mother (if she were still alive) if somebody offered him the right item or amount of cash in exchange. Roscoe can not only be paid to tell secrets, he can also be convince to keep them (for the right price). And he will faithfully keep absolutely any secret until somebody makes a better offer. He's double-crossed so many Kindred (and has made so much cash doing so) that he has employed his own private gang of Kindred assassins to bump off anybody he suspects might be thinking of doing the same to him.

Story Hooks

The noir setting of *The Dark Metropolis* lends itself to any number of hard-boiled detective stories. Consider using the following examples in your **Vampire** chronicle.

- **A New Mob in the Metropolis:** Rumors that a new mob of Kindred have taken up residence in the Metropolis are being whispered under the city's breath. One of the characters owes a current city mob boss, Logan Stone, a favor, and He calls upon the players' coterie investigate the matter. Stone knows next to nothing about the new mob, apart from the fact that poses a potential risk to his personal endeavors. Why has the new mob taken up residence in the Metropolis, and who is in charge? How do they plan on "threatening" Logan Stone? Will the new mob become allies or enemies?
- **Under the Underworld:** The city's streets always have a certain, distinctive foul odor, but it's gotten worse lately, a lot worse. Something big is rotting beneath the Metropolis, and the overpowering reek of decay is rising from the runoff grates and sewers. There have always been rumors of a mysterious cult of the Damned that conduct bizarre blood rituals within secret passageways beneath the Metropolis. Are the rumors true? What is causing the foul smell? Why is it happening now, and what is the cult's purpose? How high up does this problem go? What happens when the actions of a small cult are exposed to be a machination put in play by the Prince himself? (**Requiem** is a perfect model for this noirish sense of conspiracy. Consider how easily the Disciplines help to confirm the awfulness of the trust-damaged Metropolis.)
- **The Long Lost Lover:** An ex-lover, of one of the member of the player's coterie, Beverly, arrives suddenly one night begging for help after having disappeared without a trace several years ago. She claims to have narrowly escaped being assaulted by an influential member of one of the city's mobs. As the player's character knows from past experience, Beverly is not always honest when it suits her own agenda. Is she telling the truth this time, or is there more to her story? Why was she attacked by the mobster? What has Beverly been up to in the years since she left the Metropolis and why has she suddenly returned now?

Why Time Flows Like Bad Dreams

Noir is well known for its oneiric disregard for chronological order. Flashback and flash-forwards occur often, and events may occur out-of-order, or even backwards. In **Vampire**, it is possible to apply careful displacement of key events throughout your chronicle. A storyline may be relatively consecutive, with plot detours into the past or future. At any point during a chronicle, a scene may take place at a future point in the storyline (a flash-forward), or a past point in the storyline (a flashback).

Flashbacks and flash-forwards happen *within* the story itself. The narrative progresses to a point, and at that point a flashback/forward is used. But to what purpose? You might choose to use a flashback in game for one or several of the following reasons:

- *For thematic-, motif- or mood-based resonance.* In a game about treacheries and betrayals, you might choose to flashback to a time the characters were betrayed or did some betraying all their own. Alternately, you might go an opposite direction and choose an event where someone stayed loyal—using an opposite "foil" in such a manner can provide contrast and highlight the point you're hoping to drive home.
- *To provide some further detail.* The coterie is battling an old nemesis, and in the midst of the combat, you choose to move to flashback. Why? So they can recall an earlier meeting or battle with the nemesis. When the narrative returns to the present, the characters can call-back moments from that flashback, or even help to conceive of the nemesis' strengths and weaknesses. In this manner, you're providing context from past to present.
- *To answer questions.* The characters confront something in-game that, up until now, they haven't seen before.

Two Flavors of Flashback

For purposes of this introduction essay, we're going to frame out two types of flashback you might use during your **Vampire: The Requiem** story. These are certainly not the only ways to handle flashbacks, but this dichotomy should give

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you an idea as to how to use them and, more importantly, *what they mean* in the context of the narrative.

Note that it's important Storytellers and players be on the same page as to what style of flashback is being used in your game. (This section is largely reprinted from **Ancient Mysteries**, but should help frame how and why to use flashbacks and flash-forwards in your noir-centered game.)

Reflective

The "reflective" flashback assumes that what happens while playing the flashback does not greatly impact the present. The flashback is meant to be largely informational, used to provide context to events in the present.

For example: in the present, the vampires meet their nemesis on a rooftop, and they're about to do battle—pistols and knives drawn, the rain is pouring down. The session ends, and the Storyteller and players decide that the next session will begin in flashback. In particular, the narrative remembers when the characters were still *human* and were meeting their nemesis when he was human, too. The flashback takes place on a sunny day—a contrast to the rainy rooftop scenario from last chapter (and a contrast to the shadowy silver nitrate of the visual noir)—and has the characters as loose allies (another contrast).

Because this is a reflective flashback (meaning it reflects the present events and is a "reflective" look back), the characters know they can't change stuff dramatically. They cannot, as humans, suddenly act on secret information and kill their nemesis before he really becomes their adversary. We know the guy survives and becomes Kindred, like they do—the flashback isn't going to change any of that.

Certainly the flashback can have some repercussions in the present: when the game switches back to the rain-slick rooftop, the nemesis might call to attention words spoken or actions taken during the flashback ("You still think I'm all wet? Just some dumb fuck?") But the characters can't have killed him, or given him a scar that wasn't there before, or anything like that. They can change things that haven't been pre-established, but not dramatically so.

One way to ensure this is to eschew dice-rolling during the flashback encounter, but dice still help to provide flavor to encounters, so it's perhaps best to use a mixture.

Adaptive

An adaptive flashback assumes that players help to set the course of the present through their actions in the flashback. They're free to act as they wish during the flashback (though players should always take care to separate out what facts the characters know between past and present), and can have dramatic impact on the present tale.

It's important that the Storyteller know how to frame events so as not to get caught up in a situation where he has to drastically rewrite the tale—the flashback isn't time travel, the characters aren't going back in time to kill Hitler and change the course of the world, but the players should feel free to act accordingly *within* context.

So, using the above example of the nemesis, it'd be important to probably have the human flashback first. The characters establish whatever happens during that scene—they betray the nemesis, he betrays them, they kill him, they scar him, whatever—and *then* the Storyteller pushes the story to the present where the consequences of that flashback are seen in full-effect. If the nemesis is dead, perhaps they're atop the rain-slick rooftop with his brother. If they cut a mean scar across his face, it's still there—and maybe he's carved up his face good and nasty, a roadmap of pain that's meant to frighten them.

In an adaptive flashback, the events of the past are meant to really be as important as the events of the present. They're not purely reflective. They don't provide small detail. They set major events into play, and the players are helping to orchestrate a tale at both ends of the narrative.

This mode has its pitfalls, and everybody needs to be comfortable with them. If the players do something that contradicts present precedent, the Storyteller has to be prepared to rewrite history a bit. It's important not to "railroad" them (something that happens more in a reflective flashback by necessity). *But*, the players also have to be prepared to accept the consequences of that. If killing the nemesis creates negative conditions, so be it. They also have to be willing to commit to a little suspension of disbelief when it comes to rewriting the narrative a bit. (This strange narrative flow is actually pretty appropriate to the oneiric nature of noir. Ever watch *The Big Sleep*? It almost feels like this, like things don't always add up the way they should.)

Nothing wrong with rewriting the narrative, of course—it simply assumes a more organic, consequential flow. It may feel jarring, but given the context of **Vampire: The Requiem**, you have a great excuse to make it work: by explaining that the story is actually one told in the *memories* of the coterie characters, you have an easy justification in having the story switch around because… a vampire's memory is terribly fallible! Memories adapt and rewrite themselves within the Kindred brain, and so when the narrative does that very thing, it makes sense in the framework of the game!

Challenges

Using any kind of flashback presents some unique challenges. Below, we help identify these possible potholes and

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some solutions on avoiding them (or, at least, lessening the impact of driving over them).

Avoiding Railroading

We covered it already, but it bears repeating: with a reflective flashback, the players should already understand that railroading must occur to some small degree. They may try to kill that nemesis, but shouldn't be at all surprised when he escapes death.

Alternately, railroading should be wholly avoided during an adaptive flashback, and everybody should be comfortable with the fact that the answer to "Can my character do [X action]?" is always, always *yes* (or, at least, "yes, but..."). The narrative may shift and change, but that's okay as long as everyone's happy with the freedom it allows.

Triggering Flashbacks Or Flash-Forwards

Deciding how and when to trigger flashbacks is something the Storyteller must best decide. Intuition must serve as a guideline. Sometimes, it's a terrible idea to interrupt a really strong flow of events to jimmy in a flashback—and yet, other times you can keep the players breathless with suspense if you pause the action just as something dramatic is about to occur.

One option is to include the players on whether or not to dive into flashback. If the majority of players thinks it's a good time to glance backward or ahead, so be it. They should even be encouraged to suggest when a narrative flip might be good—"I've finally reclaimed my sire's diary, so it seems a good time to flip through and revisit one or two old memories."

Another question is *how* to transition. Generally, it's as easy as saying that it's time for flashback and doing it. But, you look at a TV show like *Lost*, which uses dramatic moments and narrative trickery to present its flashbacks. Does some telltale sign of flashback reveal itself before they occur (the Storyteller points out the color red, for instance), or can the Storyteller succeed in tricking the players (making the players think that it's the present when, really, it's a flashback)?

Variance in Skill

If you're involving some measure of dice-rolling in the flashbacks (which you should, especially in adaptive flashbacks), you have to address the deviation between the character's stats in the present and the past. But how?

If you have enough time to know that you're going to spend a significant portion of the story in flashback around a certain time, have the players create "lesser" versions of their characters from that time. Or, if you know this from the very beginning of the story, have them create the "flashback" characters *first*, then have them spend experience points to get those characters up to speed in the present.

Alternately, if you're doing a down and dirty (meaning unexpected) flashback, you've got to find a good measure of how to reduce the character's stats appropriately. A few options include:

- Take a representative portion (an approximate percentage) of their dots away. If the characters are 200 years old and you're going 100 years back, then take half of their dots away (either half in each trait, or remove half from the total sheet—the former is easier on the fly).
- Discuss with the players when a situation comes up—if a character must roll Manipulation + Subterfuge, discuss with the player a suitable penalty to the roll. It might be -1 if little's changed, or -5 if the character has significantly shifted his Social "approach" over the decades.
- Revert to pre-game stats. Basically, just don't count any dots the player might've bought with experience points. Everything else can be assumed "status quo" before the story began.
- Do nothing at all. It may not make total sense, but particularly with reflective flashbacks, it may not need to. As long as good story comes out of it, why waste the time on the work if what you're predominantly doing is establishing detail and context, not new plot points and events?

Separation of Knowledge

It becomes pretty tough bouncing back and forth from flashback to present while keeping in mind exactly what the character knew *then* versus what the character knows *now*.

For the most part, it's easy to combat. Everybody in the troupe should be encouraged to watch everybody else's back—not to be "narrative police," but simply to be willing to call out, "Hey, don't forget—we didn't know about [X piece of information] back in 1932, dude." The Storyteller becomes the final arbiter of what slides and what doesn't.

If something does slip through, it can be easily explained. Again, in the context of the game, it's simple enough to suggest that the narrative itself is really just the memories of the vampire characters—and, hey, sometimes memories are mistaken, especially considering the fog of eternity.

Alternately, consider that the Blood is a supernatural medium. One might say that it holds the memories of all

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the vampires that came before it, and some have further suggested that history is cyclical, a crass repetition of events. If such an error occurs, you can explain it that way, maybe even having the player spend a point of the character's Vitae to "confirm" that such time-transcendent knowledge comes out expressed through the Blood itself. It's a bit esoteric, but then again, so are vampires.

Including Everybody

In a perfect world, every flashback would involve every character—that way, everybody gets to have a little fun. It's just not realistic, of course, the same way that every scene in general doesn't necessarily include every player. So what do you do about it?

- Nothing. If the scene is entertaining, everybody wins. The other players watch and enjoy, or they maybe flip through the **Requiem** book, looking for some cool ideas on how to spend experience points.
- Don't use a flashback unless it contains each of the player's characters.
- Schedule flashbacks as whole game sessions—that way, those that aren't involved don't need to show up to the game table that day unless they want to. Or, by saying, "The first two hours of the chapter will be devoted to the 1849 flashback," those who aren't involved know to show up two hours later.
- Have players whose characters aren't in the flashback assume control of other "Storyteller characters." One's a bartender, one's the Prince's Seneschal, the third plays a mad ghoul, whatever. If a player is going to assume a significant role, especially one that is tied to another player's character (say, playing that character's sire), it's best to discuss it with everybody first.

Experience Points

It may seem strange to award experience points for something that's already happened, but it's only happened in the story, not at the gaming table. A game session is a game session. Stuff learned is stuff learned. We recommend that you give out experience points the same way as usual, with little to no variance.

Different Masks

Who says that the flashbacks absolutely, unequivocally must include the player's current characters? We sure didn't say it!

Just because those characters weren't present doesn't mean a flashback can't exist. The flashback may involve other characters who are connected to the story, and it can even be brought organically into the present (because, ultimately, that's the goal).

Consider: the coterie's knocked a potent elder into torpor with a mean slam from a sharpened chair-leg. They've got him buckled down in a boiler room somewhere when they remove the stake from his chest.

Now, they can interrogate him—and the elder tells them a story about when *he* was "a little fish in a big pond," just like them. The story's about him and his coterie, and it'll help answer some of their questions.

Except, it'll be kind of boring to just have the Storyteller stand around and recite the story. Even if it's really evocative and interesting, you might have a better avenue: *flashback*.

Let the players take control of pre-made characters, or even characters they conceive of themselves. Put them into a flashback featuring these other characters, and it "becomes" the story that the elder tells to their present vampires. It all fits together, like a crazy, blood-soaked puzzle.

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When the World Ends

"There is nothing outside the last mortal sanctuaries but the cold and dark. We must learn to adapt, for when the kine perish, so too do the Kindred."

Hope in the Unknown

Mahala licked her bloodied lips, taking special care not to spill a drop. Pressing two fingers firmly against the frigid, blue skin of the vessel's body she searched for a pulse. After several tense seconds she felt a slow, weak heartbeat. The blood still pumped sluggishly through the mortal's arteries. Her food supply was running low, and it might be days before she encountered signs of an undiscovered city in the barren expanse of gray permafrost. Closing the lid on the insulated cart to protect the bodies from the lethal cold, Mahala continued her slow trek southward—following a trail whispered rumors of a city where humankind flourished as it had in the nights before the end of everything.

After the War

Nearly a century ago, a massive nuclear war took place among the Canaille, decimating the population of Kindred and kine alike. Tonight, thick clouds of black ash block out the sun and the world beneath the ash belt is cloaked in darkness and endless winter. Your characters are neonates in the sanctuary of St. Genevieve, one of the last remaining mortal sanctuaries of the post-apocalyptic world, ruled by the deceitful "Pastor" Locke and his powerful counsel of faithful followers. According to Locke, the Kindred of St. Genevieve were chosen by God to begin a new era within the sanctuary under the rule of pure and pious believers, and that those who set foot outside the sanctuary walls will perish in the eternal cold and dark of the hellish Wastelands. The sanctuary of St. Genevieve has begun to run low on supplies crucial for the survival of it moral inhabitants, however, and each day the number of mortals is declining at a frightening rate. Soon, food will become scarce within the sanctuary, and many of the fledgling vampires are beginning to doubt the words of Pastor Locke.

Tier: Neonate / Coterie

The player characters in *When the World Ends* are neonates struggling to come to terms with their own unlife in a world where the food source is scarce and their own numbers are quickly dwindling under the unchallenged regime of a corrupt leader. This chronicle is firmly rooted in the first tier, and as the story progresses, the fledgling characters discover not only the truth about their own existence and fledgling community, but also the nature of post-apocalyptic earth outside the sheltered walls of St. Genevieve.

Mood and Theme

When the World Ends explores themes of adaptation and survival in the midst of a post-apocalyptic nuclear winter, as well as the liberating virtue of hope in one of the darkest eras in both Kindred and kine history. The general mood is of bleak desolation beneath the scorched, ashen sky, and marred with claustrophobic isolation within the remaining mortal sanctuaries. The human population has never been in such short supply. Food is scarce, and tempers are short. The attitudes of the surviving Damned may very well be to the same extremes as the hottest and most frozen regions of barren rock from which they struggle to squeeze the final drops of life-sustaining blood. The need to assist the mortals' efforts to rebuild is abundantly clear. The continued survival of the Damned is dependent upon having an abundant food source on which to feed, and humanity has many hurdles to face before survival is ensured, such as famine, extreme heat and cold, low birth rate, and disease.

May We Recommend Some Reading Material?

Too bad. We're doing it anyway. You want a good example of this? Check out Robert McCammon's **Swan Song**. It's 900+ epic pages of the journey a small group of characters make through the nuke-blasted wasteland of America. It features a Satanic character (The Man With The Scarlet Eye) who is positively vampiric. It'll give you so much visceral material for this chronicle mode, you'll thank us. Hell, you'll build idols in our honor. (McCammon also does vampires well in **They Thirst**, but that's appropriate more toward "bloodsuckers" than "nuclear winter horror story.")

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Description

Post-Apocalyptic Earth

The world teeming with life and bustling mortal cities that the Damned once stalked as predators is nothing more than a dim memory in the minds of Kindred who have managed to survive since the end of days. The earth's surface is now frigid and bleak, pock-marked by radioactive craters and the burnt, skeletal remains of lifeless cities that still stand as grim monuments to the end of the world. The exploding nuclear warheads created huge fires, and the resulting smoke and soot from burning cities and forests was emitted into the troposphere in vast amounts. Clouds of ash injected into the atmosphere settled in the Northern Hemisphere mid-latitudes as a colossal black particle cloud belt that encircles the earth, blocking out the sun. Within this belt, the world is cloaked endless night and eternal winter. Average temperatures are as low as -40ºC (-40ºF) in the interiors of Northern Hemisphere continents. The combination of cold and dark beneath the belt make it impossible for most animal life and vegetation to survive on the earth's surface in these areas, although there are rumors that some wildlife may have mutated in the during the years subsequent to the war into fearsome beasts that bear little resemblance to the animals they once were.

Most major cities were destroyed, and the few that still remain within the ash belt are sequestered by vast expanses of forbidding, barren wasteland. Communication between these small, secluded reservations of humanity is largely unheard of among survivors of the end of days.

Outside of the cloud belt, the large-scale destruction of the earth's ozone layer lead to the opposite extreme, scorching and penetrating the surface of the planet, and creating an atmosphere of such intense heat and ultraviolet radiation that even those who survived the initial nuclear explosions beneath the earth were smothered and baked to death within their shelters.

The Wastelands

The Wastelands are what Kindred call vast expanses of ash-covered ice and frozen earth between surviving human sanctuaries. The Wastelands cover most of the earth's surface, and the extreme temperature and inability to communicate with other surviving cities make most attempts to explore the Wastelands nearly impossible for humans (although, amazingly, some still find a way). Travel is also difficult for vampires, due to the great distances between inhabited areas and the uncertainty of the new world's geography, some have found ways to transport and reserve blood for the journey. The sun no longer poses a threat beneath the belt, as thick, swirling black clouds now block out most of the sun's rays.

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Scavengers of the Wastelands

There are a number of coteries that band together with the intent to scavenge and explore in the Wastelands. Some do so to chart new maps for future use, some seek lost family members, and some endeavor to find resources to rebuild or repair their sanctuaries. Other coteries might have more malicious reasons for trekking in bands across the desolate countryside. There are rumors of groups that set out to capture mortals from other sanctuaries in order to replenish their own depleted supply of prey. Other groups don't bother with attempting to steal mortals from other sanctuaries, and would rather take over a weaker, existing sanctuary by force, killing Kindred who refuse to submit to their rule, staying until the food runs out, then moves on to attack a new sanctuary.

St. Genevieve

Before the war, St. Genevieve was a mid-sized city in with a metropolitan population of around 1,700,000 (could've been Philadelphia; pick whatever city suits your players and chronicle best). The city was more prepared than most for a full-scale nuclear war, but only around 5,000 humans and a handful of Kindred survived in a system of nuclear bunkers built beneath what remains of downtown, fueled by a geothermal power generator at its core. When the end of days passed and nuclear winter fell upon the earth, the inhabitants adapted surviving structures to the new world, insulating them heavily against the cold. Tonight, the sanctuary of St. Genevieve is the home of our neonate protagonists, and is the only world they have ever known. Even so, the conspiratorial atmosphere of a corrupt dystopian society can be felt by many who dwell in the sanctuary. St. Genevieve is under the cruel regime of **Pastor Locke** and his powerful council of faithful followers. The small, new generation of neonates is more-or-less segregated from the elders who sired them and control the sanctuary. The fledgling Kindred of St. Genevieve are left to their own devices to unravel the mysteries of vampirism—a painful and confusing process that leaves many confused and desperate for answers. Gideon Locke is more than happy to provide these answers during his Sabbath day sermons in the gathering hall, spewing lies and twisting the words of Longinus to suit his own agenda.

As the months pass, many neonates have mysteriously vanished. Supplies within the sanctuary are slowly dwindling, and the entire facility is falling apart after decades of use. Not only that, but the human population is also rapidly declining, and many neonates have begun to fear that food will soon become scarce if nothing is done to increase the mortal population of the sanctuary. Nobody in St. Genevieve speaks of what lies beyond the walls of the sanctuary, but many have begun to silently wonder if they are being led to final destruction by Gideon Locke. Many feel hopeless and powerless until a traveling Gangrel, Mahala Hill, arrives in St. Genevieve to restock supplies, bring with her news of the outside world and stirring the neonates of the sanctuary into action.

The Fabled City of Last Masses

When Mahala Hill strides into St. Genevieve, she brings with her all the information she's overheard about the City of Last Masses. The City of Last Masses is said to the largest point of resemblance for all those (mortal and undead alike) who survived the end of days. It is located under the shadow of the belt where it is protected from the heat and radiation of the sun, but it is just close enough to the edge of the belt that the temperatures are occasionally warm enough for kine to venture outside, allowing men the freedom to expand the city and explore the surrounding land for additional resources and raw materials.

The drawback of living in this narrow, temperate region of the planet is that the region is prone to storms and downpours of acid rain. While Kindred are still beneath the dusky shadow of the belt, (and as such, remain unthreatened by the fatal rays of the sun), the Damned are just as susceptible to damage from the corrosive rainfall as mortal men. If a traveling vampire or mortal is caught outside during an acid storm, the character must take one point of lethal damage for each turn he is unable to find shelter from the elements.

The City of Last Masses is growing exponentially as more and more Kindred find their way from the ash belt to the fringe sanctuary. If the number of surviving vampires continues to increase in the same fashion for much longer, the human population, (already susceptible to famine, low birth rate, and disease), will soon be in danger. With a decreased population of mortals, food will soon become scarce for Kindred of the Last Masses. This topic is a source of heavy debate among the newly reformed camarilla. Many support the views of the city Primogen, Alexander Woodrow, who asserts that humanity should be preserved, nurtured and protected by rationing blood until the population is restored, that the city should remain open to all who find their way from the ash belt to the sanctuary, and that doing so is absolutely essential for the continued survival of all Kindred. Others support the viewpoint of Thaddeus Craven, the outspoken Ventrue Priscus, who believes that the open doors of the City of Last Masses should be closed to any new vampire survivors who appear from the wasteland, and that the current vampires within the city should continue to feed from existing mortal population without any need to ration the food supply.

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Sample Player Characters

Patina Belle, Daeva, Neonate of St. Genevieve

"You'll never guess what I heard on my way to the core. There are rumors flying all around the sanctuary that one of our kind has arrived from outside St. Genevieve."

Patina Belle was recently Embraced in her late teens. She has a pretty, youthful face with freckled cheeks and wide, almost unnaturally blue eyes. She wears her ink-black hair in a short, chin-length bob. One of the only remaining Daeva in St. Genevieve, Patina spends the majority of her time spreading and collecting gossip and rumors from around the city, digging up dirt that she can potentially use for leverage if the need ever arises. She was Embraced around the same time as Amelia Moore (see below), and although the two rarely spoke to each other before their Embrace, each has come to lean upon the other for support when their sires abandoned them shortly after cursing the two women with unlife. Patina especially, due to her relative youth, looks up to Amelia for guidance, despite the fact that Amelia is nearly as desperate for answers about her own monstrous existence as her younger friend.

Amelia Moore, Mekhet, Neonate of St. Genevieve

"I just can't believe he's gone. I spoke with Roger during the last shift. Is it just me, or is it starting to feel like this has been happening more and more often. Something isn't right here."

Amelia Moore is a slight, wispy-looking vampire with mousy hair. A general air of exhaustion can be seen in her permanently slumped shoulders, the deep, dark circles beneath her eyes, and her slow, drawling pattern of speech. She was Embraced around the same time as Patina Belle, although Amelia was in her late twenties at the time. Although her view of the world is generally pessimistic, she often downplays her negative views for Patina's sake—taking on the role of a mentor for the younger girl to the best of her limited ability. Amelia Moore has picked up on the fact that many of her fellow neonates have been disappearing one by one as of late, and that more and more humans are dying off each day.

Warren Dremel, Nosferatu, Neonate of St. Genevieve

"Yeah, I think I might have a few spare parts left in the storeroom that nobody'll miss. Bring the cart by next shift, and I'll see what I can do."

Warren Dremel is tall, wiry neonate in his mid-thirties. He wears thin, wire framed glasses and is most comfortable in a worn pair of old jeans and a T-shirt. Before his Embrace, he worked as an engineer in the generator core of St. Genevieve. Due to his unique skill set and mechanical talent, Warren is one of the few neonate Kindred in the sanctuary who has worked close to Gideon Locke's private chamber. He has overheard enough to know that things may not be as bleak outside the city as the Prince makes them sound in his community sermons. He knows what happens to those who oppose Locke, however, and is smart enough to keep his mouth shut about it and his gaze fixed firmly upon his work. He has been around longer than most other fledgling vampires of St. Genevieve, probably due to his quiet, deceptively non-threatening disposition and natural ability to blend into the background unnoticed.

Gaven Miller, Mekhet, Neonate of St. Genevieve

"Oh yes, I've been keeping an eye on the mortals. According to my recent figures, if things continue along the same trend we'll run of food in less than five years' time. Something needs to be done, and sooner rather than later, but I'm not going to be the one to bring the news to Pastor Locke."

Gaven was Embraced in his early fifties. He is a rotund man, balding, with small, deep-set blue eyes and a heavy wheezing voice. He maintains the archives and records of the sanctuary in a small, disorganized library, filled with spineless and torn books with ancient, yellowed pages. Gaven has taken over the job of St. Genevieve's record keeper ever since the neonate who did the task before him vanished mysteriously, leaving behind a thick journal of loose-leaf pages describing the history of the sanctuary. Each night, Miller painstakingly records the events that occur within St. Genevieve. It was he who first noticed the rapidly declining population of mortals within the sanctuary.

Allies and Antagonists

Gideon Locke, "Pastor Locke," Ventrue, Self-proclaimed Prince of St. Genevieve

"My children, we are all that left of our kind. You will serve me and I will lead us into a new era, do not concern yourself with what is outside our sanctuary's walls. There is nothing there for you but cold, endless sleep."

Self-proclaimed Prince of St. Genevieve, Gideon Locke is a tall, imposing man, Embraced in his mid-fifties, with intense black eyes and a long mane of sleek, salt-and-pepper hair. Before the end of days, he was a devout member of the Lancea Sanctum, and he often calls young Kindred of the sanctuary to the gathering hall for sermons loosely based upon the teachings of Longinus twisted to serve his own ends. He is quick to anger, and those who incite his wrath

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do not survive for long. Locke is one of the last remaining of a small group of Kindred who survived the end of days along by taking shelter with the mortals of the sanctuary during the final days of the war, and he believes that he alone was chosen by God to survive the end of days in order to lead a new, "pure" generation of the devout. Rather than band together and cooperate to ensure the lasting survival of the rag-tag coterie of surviving vampires within St. Genevieve, Gideon endeavored to gain dominion over the sanctuary. Over the decades, he gained support through empty promises, deceit and treachery, all in the name of Longinus—killing off all those who failed to meet his twisted standards of purity, and accepting nothing less than unquestioned obedience from his followers. Now an elder, Locke is too powerful to drink the blood of humans, and he keeps a herd of neonates from which to feed, keeping them contained and ignorant of the world outside St. Genevieve. But Gideon Locke is a big fish in a little pond. Although he is safe within the sanctuary's walls, he fears retribution from Kindred who also survived the end of days in the other remaining human sanctuaries outside of St. Genevieve for his unchecked crimes since the end of the world.

Alexander Woodrow, Daeva, Primogen, the City of Last Masses

"So Locke survived the end of days? What of the others? What of my dear sister?"

Alexander Woodrow is a respected Primogen of the City of Last Masses. He is a tall, muscular vampire with chiseled good looks and dazzlingly white fangs. He has gained a great deal of support from many of the Kindred of the Last Masses for his views on preserving and nurturing the remaining human survivors of the end of days to increase the food supply for future generations of Kindred and for the continued survival of the Damned. Woodrow is openly opposed by a small, but vocal faction of Kindred who oppose his conservative viewpoint. His sister, Brianna Woodrow, was one of the Kindred who survived the end of days in St. Genevieve. Alexander Woodrow remains hopeful that he will hear word of his lost sister. Unbeknownst to him, however, the order to have Brianna killed was given by Gideon Locke on his path to power in St. Genevieve.

Thaddeus Craven, Ventrue, Priscus, the City of Last Masses

"The Kindred who dwell within the City of Last Masses right now are the only ones we ought to be concerned about. I say close the doors to outsiders before any more mouths appear at our doorstep begging for scraps of food we don't have to spare."

Thaddeus Craven is a tall, powerfully built vampire. Embraced in his mid-forties, he shows only the slightest creases of age around the corners of his dark, close-set eyes. He stands and speaks with an easy confidence that some perceive as arrogance, and feels a personal sense of responsibility to his clan within the walls of the city of Last Masses. As the Ventrue Priscus of the City of Last Masses, he hold a good deal of sway in the city. Craven is diametrically opposed to the views of Alexander Woodrow concerning the problem of a declining human population and an increasing vampire population in the city. He and his supporters believe that the City of Last Masses ought to close its doors to any newcomers who arrive from the barrens. Those outside the city can fend for themselves or come back for wherever they came. The City of Last Masses has too many mouths to feed as it currently stands.

Mahala Hill, Gangrel, Survivor and Traveler

"I've heard tell in my travels that that's another city just south of here. It would be hard going, but if you stick together you might be able to make it before the next storm blows through."

Mahala Hill is a hardy and muscular, wild-haired female Gangrel. Her deeply wrinkled skin is as tanned and weathered as sun-baked sandstone. Her face is hard and angular, and is often set with an expression of fierce determination. Mahala walks everywhere with a swift, purposeful gait. She roams the barren Wastelands of post-apocalyptic earth in search of the rumored City of Last Masses, where food is plentiful, and humanity is said to flourish as it did in days before the end of days. On her travels, she encounters St. Genevieve and stops to restock her stores of blood, bringing news of the outside world to the small sanctuary and inciting rebellion among its restless new generation of Kindred.

Story Hooks:

The Post-apocalyptic setting of *When the World Ends* lends itself to any number of futuristic dystopian stories. Consider using the following examples in your **Vampire** chronicle.

- **The Trappers:** A small faction of Kindred calling themselves "Trappers" have been periodically returning to the City of Last Masses with several dozen of human survivors collected from the ash belt each trip. According to the Trappers, their goal is to help boost the human population and improve the food source for the rapidly growing population of Kindred finding their way to the city. Things may not be how they appear, however. Right around the same time the Trappers began arriving with their salvaged human stock, a strange, deadly blood-borne pathogen has begun to spread slowly among the Damned of Last Masses. Is

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the timing nothing more than a coincidence, or can the disease be traced to the new faction? Can the pathogen be cured? Can its spread among Kindred of the Last Masses be halted?

- **A Helping Hand:** Since the end of days, low birth rate, famine, cancer and disease have lessened the already frighteningly low human population (and therefore the Kindred food supply). There exist rumors, however, of a faction of Morbus who have adapted their bloodline Discipline, Cachexy, to heal any mortal of disease, effectively ensuring the survival of their herd. In game terms, the player rolls as she would for the power Inflame (see pg. 147 of **Vampire: The Requiem**), and if the action is successful, the result is as describe in the book as a dramatic failure (conversely, if the character rolls a dramatic failure when attempting to send a mortal's disease into remission, the result is that of the described exceptional success). The Prince calls upon the character's coterie to find this faction of Morbus who are rumored to dwell in a secluded human sanctuary within the ash belt, and to convince them to return to the city using whatever means are necessary to do so.
- **Beasts in the Dark:** Since the end of days, no plant or animal life has been discovered outside of the protective walls of the last mortal sanctuaries. Recently, however, there has been news of strange noises in the cold darkness outside the insulated walls of St. Genevieve. Some say it's howling and scratching, others describe the noises as shrieks of growls. Are there really creatures that are able to survive in the harsh wasteland without protection from the extreme cold? What are they, and where have they come from? Why have they gathered around the secluded sanctuary of St. Genevieve?

Special Rules: Mutant Beasts of the Wastelands

Some creatures that managed to survive the end of days are rumored to have mutated in fearsome monstrosities that bear little resemblance to the animals they were before the war. In general if anything was able to survive, it needed to become tougher, bigger, and stronger, and more vicious in order to survive the harsh environment of post-apocalyptic earth.

The following are examples of several mutated animals that may stalk the Wastelands of the ash belt.

Mutant Wolf

Description: The mutated wolves of the ash belt are large, black, heavily furred pack animals with long, razor-sharp fangs that jut from its elongated maw in slavering, concentric rows and wide, flickering yellow eyes. Mutant wolves are particularly vicious, and will begin tracking anything it can devour at first scent, and attack in packs with brutal, primal force. It hunts in packs and primarily by scent, and its long, mournful howl can be heard by its packmates from miles away. Its muscular body is built for speed, and an adult, mutated wolf has been known to weigh up to 200 lbs.

Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 4, Resolve 4, Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Presence 3, Manipulation 1, Composure 3

Skills: Athletics (Running) 4, Brawl 4, Intimidation 3, Stealth 3, Survival 4 (tracking)

Willpower: 7

Initiative: 7

Defense: 4

Speed: 19 (species factor 10)

Size: 5

Weapons / Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Bite	3 (L)	9
Claw	2 (L)	6

Health: 9

Tracking The Tractless Wastes (Special Power): The wolf can expend a Willpower point per hour to ignore any penalties to tracking rolls (and in the Wastelands, penalties are populous). Further, if the wolf has tasted the blood of the victim (or if a vampire, its Vitae), the wolf can also add +4 to its Speed. This power ends when the wolf runs out of Willpower—or, of course, when he finds his prey.

Mutant Carrion Crow

Description: The mutated carrion crow is a large, black, scaly, bird-like creature with wide, membranous wings and a lengthy, cruel, curved beak. Its eyes burn an eerie red from within set-set sockets. Carrion crow may be encountered as a solitary creature, or they may circle in flocks above something that is dead and rotting in the Wastelands. The carrion crow does not attack living creatures unless it is desperate for food, in which case anything moving below it becomes fair game, and it will attack with it piercing beak and long, sharp talons.

Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 3, Resolve 5, Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Presence 1, Manipulation 1, Composure 3

Skills: Athletics (flight) 4, Brawl 2, Intimidation 1, Survival 4

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Willpower: 8
Initiative: 7
Defense: 4
Speed: 16 (flight only, species factor 10)
Size: 2
Weapons / Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Beak	2 (L)	3
Talon	1 (L)	3

Health: 5

Carrion Cry (Special Power): The crow can, by spending a Willpower point, emit a deafening squall from its foul beak. This is an instant action, and any who hear the cry (within 100 yards) must make a Resolve + Composure roll. Failure on this roll causes the victim to feel a deep sense of fear and foreboding: the victim takes his own Empathy score as a penalty to all other rolls for the next turn.

Mutant Rat

Description: Mutant rats that make their nests in deserted human cities, where they may infest sheltered areas (such as the twisted remains of warehouses and factories) in naked, squirming droves. The mutated rodents are about the size of a house cat, and are hairless, with loose, wrinkled gray skin, long, sharp incisors and a pair of whipping, worm-like tails that they utilize to maintain their balance when climbing. Their shining black eyes are bright and inquisitive. Mutant rats are typically scavengers, but if their nest is invaded, they will swarm upon the intruder in teeming, merciless waves to protect their home.

Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 2, Resolve 3, Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Presence 1, Manipulation 1, Composure 3
Skills: Athletics (climbing) 3, Brawl 2, Intimidation 1, Stealth 3, Survival 4
Willpower: 6
Initiative: 6
Defense: 3
Speed: 12 (species factor 7)
Size: 2
Weapons / Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Bite	2 (L)	3
Claw	1 (L)	3

Health: 5

Plague Bite (Special Power): If the rat successfully bites a victim, then the victim's player must roll a number of dice equivalent to the victim's Health dots. Failure on this means that the victim contracts a random disease (chosen by the Storyteller by whatever means the Storyteller decides).

Mutant Giant Insect

Description: Mutated giant insects can be found in burrows in the icy ash of the wasteland. They lie in wait just beneath the surface to attack anything that walks close by with swift, razor-sharp scythes. Giant insects can grow to be up to a foot in length and their soft bodies are covered in a pale gray, chitinous, protective shell. They have six long, segmented legs—the front pair terminating in praying mantis-like scythes – and glossy, black compound eyes.

Attributes: Intelligence 0, Wits 1, Resolve 1, Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 1, Presence 1, Manipulation 1, Composure 1
Skills: Athletics 1, Brawl 1, Intimidation 1, Stealth 3 (hiding), Survival 3
Willpower: 2
Initiative: 2
Defense: 3
Speed: 11 (species factor 7)
Size: 1
Weapons / Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Scythe	2 (L)	3

Health: 2

Hidey Hole (Special Power): By expending a Willpower point, the insect can go above and beyond normal abilities in hiding itself in the foul earth of the Wasteland. It camouflages itself so completely that any rolls made to notice it or detect surprise (when it attacks) suffer a penalty equal to the insect's Stealth score (in this case, -3).

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Nights of Long Knives

When you go out to seek revenge, dig two graves.

The Bloodiest Damn Game Of Musical Chairs

"Why?"

Jacob considered the dry, cracked voice of his fellow priest, and met accusing eyes with a level stare.

"You are her childe, Jacob. You spoke for her at conclave. You were the favored instrument of our Prince…" The priest's tone wasn't pleading, despite the grave situation, but confused and hurt.

Jacob looked away, tested the hammer's weight in his hand, and considered how best to explain.

"Ever since I died, all I did was what she told me. I've been… thinking. Talking to others," he said.

"Dragons," his guest spat

"Yes. They told me what I already knew, deep down. I was seeking a change."

"She wouldn't allow it."

"She's not here anymore, is she? It's just us! Mouthing prayers I've never believed in but was too under the thumb to reject. And by the way…"

He hammered the stake home.

"…I fucking hate *you, brother."*

The Pitch

"Nights of Long Knives" is about a sudden power vacuum and how the Kindred of a city rearrange themselves to fill that vacuum. Your characters are ancillae faced with a mass disappearance of elders—after decades of stagnation, the top of almost every food chain in the fiefdom has been cut off, and we start the chronicle just as the shock has begun to wear off and the killing is about to begin. Long-resented laws no longer have anyone backing them up, oppressed covenants see their chance to grasp power and no one has the authority to keep the neonates in line. You are the mistress of Elysium, the sheriff, the parish priest of the Spear, the Carthian Chairwoman and any number of other middle roles, now faced with empty seats above you and knives at your back. You're the Prince's eldest childe, raised in the city's politics through your mistress' patronage and now bereft of her protection or control. You're the progeny of a disgraced Dragon, now free to make your own mark without stigma, or the secret student of a banned covenant that can use the chaos to further your agenda.

Above you are the now-vanished elders, still defining the actions of the neo-feudal hell even if they're no longer there to act as present nobles. Everyone knew them, was the servant of one of them, had their own goals and ambitions crushed by one, loved one, was the pet student of one or anything else you can think of. Below you are the neonates, the great rabble that outnumber you and suddenly see you as dreadfully temporary. If the elders can vanish, then so can the ancillae, and asserting your authority will be a challenge.

It's a small city; somewhere in Europe maybe, one of the old cities with long, bloody histories and a too-small downtown to support more than a few dozen Kindred. Map out the bloodline-trees of the entire Kindred population active, in torpor and missing, and you'll start seeing who everyone is—especially the people you have to introduce to the sun. That isn't a nameless Carthian you're staking, it's the blood-nephew of one of the other characters, childe of his sire's childe. We start our chronicle long after everyone's been introduced, and just a fraction too long after everyone decided they had a couple of other Kindred on their shit-list.

There's only room for one Prince. Who's it going to be?

Tier: Ancilla/City

This chronicle is about the politics of a single, isolated city turning deadly, with alliances and betrayals made nightly among the coteries and covenants. Player characters are experienced ancillae of a few decades standing. It's firmly in the higher end of Tier Two.

Mood and Theme

Mood: Catharsis. The mood is the explosive release of long-pent up resentments and rivalries, as Kindred held in their positions within the Danse Macabre are free to move as they will at one another's expense. A beating isn't just a beating but revenge for hundreds of slights over dozens of years, decades of suppressed hatred focused into making the other bastard *pay*.

Theme: Slipping Masks. The thin veneer of civilization the Kindred wear is being torn off. Elysium is failing and secret allegiances, feuds and loves are revealed as one by one the city's Kindred show their hands. To negotiate the Danse Macabre, characters will need to keep their own

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secrets close to the chest while making their best effort to understand the motives of others before those motives drive them to violence.

Description

The Nights of Long Knives requires a fair investment of setup for the Storyteller, but it should pay off when the stakes begin to fly. A few dozen Kindred Storyteller characters, packed into a small city, need to be created to have agendas of their own. The Players' characters need to be inserted into this web and be given allies and antagonists of their own so that they feel part of the setting as it burns down around their ears. It's **Vampire** as disaster simulation, a city's worth of Kindred carefully created to interact with the neofeudal pyramid of obligation keeping everyone in place before it's fatally damaged in the opening chapter.

Because the chronicle relies on the Storyteller mapping the relationships of all the setting's Kindred, and because betrayal and treachery are more fun if the character being betrayed has a full backstory *and* if the act itself will cause ripples through all the other characters, less is more in terms of population. The setting should be chosen to support only as many vampires as the Storyteller feels confident of naming, fleshing out and remembering the interconnections between. Too many vampires (over 40 for most groups) leads to facelessness and players confused by who is screwing over whom in a given chapter. Too few and the setting becomes predetermined; without enough schemes going on for the actions of players to disrupt. (Plus, too few means the characters might start in on each other. Fine for most games, but better to let a game take its time going down that route. Games that begin with characters at each other's throats make for too-tense, too-terse games, in our opinions.)

The chronicle relies on a feeling of pressure that has been suddenly released. Characters should have been held back in some way by the now-vanished regime; in play, emphasize the fact that the Kindred of the city are committing offences against the old order—their plans break the Prince's edicts, or cross territorial bounds that were considered iron-clad until the elders went away. Some of the Kindred may want to hold to the old laws out of loyalty or because those laws favored their own interests. Others will want the limits on their Requiem torn down as soon as possible. Most will hold both opinions about different laws, stamping down on those that hurt their privilege and demanding that others stop stamping on them. Because of this, it's best to make the old regime as totalitarian as possible in a few cases—perhaps a covenant was banned outright, or the Embrace

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declared illegal without the approval of the Sanctified bishop. Maybe restrictions were limited to Kindred of particular lines of Embrace, thanks to an insult laid at the Prince by their great great grandsire.

The reason for the active elders vanishing can be as complicated or as simple as you want; it sets the stage for the chronicle rather than being the plot itself. Maybe they all went into torpor at the same time for some reason. Maybe they were murdered. Maybe they just vanished. Note that unless something really unusual happened, there will be other elders who went into torpor before the event, who may even be due to wake up during the course of the chronicle. How will the ancillae and neonates react to a solitary elder appearing and threatening their control of their new fiefs?

The player characters are the remains of the old authority—those ancillae important enough or experienced enough to have had roles in the Prince's court or the leadership of covenants, but not important or powerful enough to have vanished with their superiors. They have the opportunity to grasp real power for themselves, but they've played their part in restricting the neonates and will have to watch their backs while expanding their empires. They should be created as "movers and shakers," with around 100 experience, and each should have at least one Status Merit of two or three dots reflecting their position in the Danse Macabre. They should have peers among the Storyteller characters to fill similar roles, but no active superiors. Even as agents of the old ways, they will have suffered the same restrictions as other Kindred, maybe even more so.

Every vampire in the setting knows every other vampire in the setting, barring nomadic outsiders that may show up in play. The Predator's Taint has long since dulled into feelings of jumpy paranoia rather than outright frenzy. The Storyteller should make a few brief notes for each Storyteller character, detailing his or her agenda and secrets, and then move on to listing (very briefly) what each vampire knows about what every other vampire is up to; this stage should include the player characters, so that the chronicle begins with preexisting allies and antagonists for every player. It should also include the vanished elders—just because they're gone doesn't mean they don't cast long shadows over the chronicle.

Once the chronicle has been set up, it's time to give it a push. The first chapter of the first story should open with the first shot being fired—the first Kindred given Final Death by a rival, the first Elysium disrupted or the first transgression against the Prince's edicts. Pick something that will affect as many player characters in different ways as possible. If that proves impossible, choose two trigger events.

Then watch it all come tumbling down.

With so few vampires compared to a larger city in the US, each clan will likely be made up of only one or two "family trees," adding a further dimension to the chaos in the form of Blood Sympathy as bitter rivals instinctively know when one another suffer disasters or experience great victories. Players should decide if their characters have given the Embrace in the past and pick neonates from the Storyteller characters to be their spawn.

With the way that the chronicle is set up, player characters may find themselves eventually at odds. Nights of Long Knives can get competitive, especially as the chronicle reaches its end and coteries turn on one another, and this is one of the few times a Storytelling chronicle can have a clear "winner." The entire troupe should decide what to do about the possibility of the characters clashing with one another; the players could create their characters to not have conflicting goals or delay it such that the coterie agree to deal with everyone else before turning on one another. If the troupe is willing, it's entirely within the spirit of the chronicle for the final story to be a bloodbath, and if a player's character backed the losing side they might find the chronicle ends with Final Death for them. Be sure that no feelings are being hurt around the gaming table and enjoy setting one another up for a fall. This is not a game for strangers or sensitive friendships.

Resist Direction

When figuring out the conflicting agendas of the Storyteller characters and how they relate to the player characters' own schemes, it can become tempting to work out how some of the plans might go off ahead of time. Resist this temptation and concentrate on making as many mutually exclusive, opposed and confused agendas as you can. You're building a house of cards in the setup, but leave the decision of how to make it fall down it to the players beyond the initial push.

This means that once the chronicle is running, and after your nudge to get everything moving, most of your work as Storyteller is in assessing how the player's actions affect the Storyteller characters—have they impressed anyone? Ruined a scheme? Does anyone need to come up with a plan B? Concentrate on showing those changes in play and seeing what happens next. Try not to force your own direction on the chronicle, and let the players' actions have meaning. When the dust settles at the end of it all, they should have made their own fates.

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Sample Background

The sample characters and stories are based on the following setting, designed in line with the advice given so far.

The chronicle is set in a small European city that suffered during the bloody conflicts of the early 20th century, sending most of the Kindred that existed then into Final Death as the city was pounded by enemy bombs and their havens cracked to the light of day. The survivors of those wars are the handful of elders who have kept a tight grip on their city ever since, sires of new generations of Kindred that have always known their masters' presence. A central coterie of elders controlled the neofeudal pyramid, with the Prince and all her Primogen drawn from it, and laws were made to advance their covenants while protecting their own interests. The Sanctified Prince and Archbishop ruled a parallel hierarchy of priests while the majority of the city's Kindred were members of the Carthian "laity." Membership of the Circle of the Crone or the Invictus was banned outright with those covenants labeled as heretics and descendents of the political ideals that saw the continent plunged into war. The elder coterie couldn't ban the Ordo Dracul, thanks to a powerful single elder of that covenant having survived the conflagration, but the covenant was restricted to that single bloodline. The old Dragon went into torpor himself in the 1960s; his progeny haven't dared break the restriction on recruiting for fear of giving the Prince an excuse to remove what little freedoms they have. More recently, the ruling coterie declared the city full to capacity and outlawed new Embraces without permission—permission that has never been granted.

One year ago, the city was the target of a terrorist attack directed at the country's mortal leaders. A bombing left dozens of mortals dead with many more injured, and signaled a shift in governmental policy as the people became paranoid. For the Kindred, the bombing signaled greater changes; the bombs, whether by strange luck or subtle manipulation, destroyed the elders' havens, killed the Carthian leadership outright and left the Prince and the remaining Primogen in torpor, their bodies rescued by their priests and stolen away to a safe location. A new Carthian Prefect and Myrmidon were quickly elected, but the Sanctified couldn't nominate a new higher Priesthood until the Archbishop and Bishops woke. Worried that Kindred from other cities would hear about the sudden weakness and invade, the new ruling council of Priests and Carthians banned travel away from the city.

One month ago, one of the Dragons Embraced a favorite Ghoul. One of the Carthian neonates vanished for several weeks—denying she'd been to a neighboring city, but unwilling to say where she had been instead.

As the chronicle starts, a Priest who took over a neonate coterie's territory for himself is attacked, ripped apart and left for the sun.

Sample Characters

Anne-Marie

We do not behave this way in Elysium. Standards must be maintained, despite our present difficulties.

You're the Mistress of Elysium, the chain holding the society of the Kindred together despite everyone else's best efforts, and you're finding it an increasing struggle to get your guests to respect the sanctity of Elysium. You achieved your post when you a Harpy, informing on the previous Master as being a secret Acolyte and stepping in graciously when the Prince had him destroyed. You claim to be above politics, focused on your job, but pay lip-service to the Carthian ideals so as to avoid being seen as suspicious. In fact, you are apolitical and would be unbound if not for the stigma attached to that state. You're the black sheep of the Ordo Dracul bloodline, Embraced by the Old Dragon but uninterested in joining that covenant. Your brothers, sisters, nephews and nieces in the Dragons see you as an intermediary on their behalf, the respectable face of the bloodline.

As a Daeva, you've long since felt yourself die inside. Your Requiem was meant to be easy—smile your fake smile, amuse and divert the other Kindred with the entertainment you lay on every month and the surprising places you host Elysium, keep tabs on everyone as part of your job as social organizer, hunt and feed on your off-nights and above all keep busy. You're industrious in your efforts as a distraction from your void of meaning and lack of a greater purpose.

The cracks, though, are beginning to show—Elysium is getting progressively more difficult to arrange while the Kindred grow more hostile to one another. Your relatives in the Ordo Dracul want to expand their powerbase and are pressurizing you to Embrace in the belief that you're too important to the city to be punished. You fear the emergence of the Circle of the Crone, remembering what you did to your predecessor, and above else fear the return from torpor of your sire. If you could find a way to make sure that never happened, it might be worth it, but it would have to be done subtly; the other Dragons want him back as soon as possible, and your Blood Sympathy to them means any slip of emotion on your part at his Final Death might be noticed.

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Jacob

We were all given roles to play. Some are happier than others.

You're the golden boy of the Lancea Sanctum, an altar boy Embraced to serve as the servant and agent of your sire: the Prince and Archbishop. Thoroughly lost to Vinculum, you were her mouthpiece to the other Kindred, representing her to the other covenants and recounting her messages to the Sanctified priesthood. You were her mouthpiece in another way, too—a decade after your Embrace, her blood grew too thick to feed from the living, so you served as her proxy, feeding enough for both of you and being fed off by your sire in turn. Your Nosferatu lineage manifests as an unnaturalness that puts people off—you seem at times more like a statue in a church than an animate being, firmly in the uncanny valley, which when combined with fear of your sire means you've spent the best part of your Requiem in a terrible state of loneliness, standing apart even from your coterie.

You were the one who rescued the ruling coterie from their haven, and placed their torpid bodies in a long-forgotten bomb shelter from the last war. You were driven by the Vinculum to do so, and their location is a secret you haven't shared. Your mind is increasingly your own, though, with time and lack of reinforcement. If she were to reawaken, you'd be under her heel in an instant, but for now you can nurse thoughts long held private such as your atheism. Your sire would have destroyed you long ago if she knew you didn't believe in the church of Longinus, but now you're making quiet attempts to find something else to believe in, a covenant where you can at last be yourself and be accepted. It won't be easy—anyone taking you in would be breaking your sire's commandments, and assuring him or her you weren't a spy would be extremely difficult.

Unfortunately, another Priest noticed your quiet efforts. Brother Garret realized your faith was wavering and pressed you about it too hard—hard enough for you to frenzy and kill him. Fortunately, he'd had a loud disagreement with some nameless neonate only a few nights before, and the sheriff is a believer in open-and-shut cases. As long as the neonate falls quickly, you should be fine.

Monica

I didn't expect to last this long.

You're the Carthian Prefect, elected to the position from your previous role of Myrmidon to replace the existing Prefect when a bomb fell on him. So far, you've managed to avoid being assassinated despite being the nearest thing the city has to a Prince these nights. It's the "so far" that takes up most of your effort. You can believe—and you do—in a fairer society for the Kindred, free of the Lancea Sanctum's priesthood and their medieval beliefs, but you can't get to that society if you've already gone to Final Death. If you tried to lead the way in having some of the Prince's edicts struck off the books you'd quickly find your haven invaded by Sanctified angry at the loss of their special rights. Instead, you and your Myrmidon rely on the disenfranchised proposing changes to you which you can use your position to give a fair hearing to, carefully maintaining your neutrality and never letting your poker face slip. You trust the Myrmidon, your co-conspirator—she's your blood-sister, consanguineous childe of your own sire—more than you trust anyone else, but your need to maintain deniability means you don't know for certain who the Acolytes and Invictus in the city are and you worry about what else you're missing in relying on her. The night is fast approaching when you will have to take a more active hand in sponsoring freedom.

Walter

I'm just doing the job the way my mentor taught me to. She was a monster.

The old Sheriff-slash-Inquisitress was the terror of the night: a Sanctified Nosferatu named Pike enforced the Archbishop's laws with an iron talon. You shared neither her clan nor her covenant, being a Daeva and a member of the Ordo Dracul, but you were an able student, the favorite of her Hounds and as cold-hearted as she ever was. When she fell to the attack, you were quickly named as sheriff and disabused any notion that the regime change meant you would go soft. Your answer to the gradual slipping of the city into chaos so far has been to commit greater and greater atrocities. "Draconian values" you call them: impaling as a punishment for poaching, the loss of limbs (to be painfully regrown over months) for disobedience. But you're just one man, without any Hounds, and your strategies are failing. Worst of all are your childer and your siblings' childer in the Ordo Dracul, pushing the restriction on recruiting and the Embrace to the breaking point and counting on the idea that you won't enforce the law against them. You don't know what you'll do if you find that one of those laws has been broken—your loyalty to your covenant weighed against your loyalty to your mentor. You will be tested soon, and you're not sure of the outcome.

Allies and Antagonists

Dog

Let them come.

The leader of a coterie of unbound neonates, the unwanted fledglings of Carthians, Sanctified and Dragons

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ganged together for protection, you feel ignored by your betters and resentful at what you see as them mocking you. Your territory has been growing since the old order ended, but that didn't stop the ancillae's patronizing tone. Run along, Dog, the grown-ups are talking. Well, you've had enough. When the priest demanded you stop feeding in the best part of your territory (so what if it was by his church?) you gave him a piece of your mind. Then someone killed him, and you're looking guilty in the eyes of the law. You don't care.

If there had been any position—any feudal title, any tiny mark of respect—from the leaders, you might have turned out differently. If they'd recognized your claims over your feeding grounds, you might have been content; in another city, you'd have even made a good sheriff or at the very least a Hound. Your sire was even the Master of Elysium, before he was destroyed—his destruction is a black mark against you, preventing you from becoming anything of notice. But now you know it's only a matter of time before the real sheriff comes around, and you're going to have a fight on your hands.

Elizabeth

I can't tell you who presented that motion Father, you understand? It'd be like breaking the seal of confession.

You're the Carthian Myrmidon, tasked with providing the impartial voice for anonymous petitions and for keeping order at meetings, a role you inherited from your blood-sister Monica when your mutual sire suffered Final Death and she moved up to his position. You're twelve years her elder, but are her junior in the covenant thanks to being taken less seriously because of your appearance—you were Embraced as a 15-year old—and because of an infraction you committed early in your Requiem, when you Embraced without permission. It wasn't a crime worthy of destruction back then, but your childe's rejection of the Carthians to become a Harpy and eventually the Master of Elysium made you a laughing stock for a few years. He eventually fell afoul of the previous sheriff and was destroyed, but not before embracing Dog; the Blood Sympathy between you and the young rebel tugs at you along with your guilt for bearing ultimate responsibility, and you find yourself trying to figure out a way to save your grandchilde when you couldn't save his sire.

Your blood relation to Dog isn't a secret, but your contacts among the banned covenants are—you know who trained your childe as an Acolyte before he was destroyed, and you're determined that they become a legal covenant in his memory. That's the secret: no one brings the petitions to loosen covenant restrictions to you. You fabricate them and use your position to present them.

And when she's least expecting it, you're going to kill Anne-Marie.

Rose

You don't know him the way I do.

You're the darling daughter of the Ordo Dracul Daeva. Beautiful, romantically minded Rose, only just old enough to be considered an ancilla. The closest thing "aunt" Anne-Marie has to a Harpy and assistant despite your clinging more closely to the family business of the Coils. In life, you were a young woman of a certain class, left under no illusions that your job was to be married off advantageously, and soon developed a chameleon-like ability to hide your real self behind a façade that changed on whom you were with. Dismissed by most of the covenant—and indeed most of the Kindred—as a socialite who over-romanticizes the Requiem, you're driven by two goals. You've been in love or an approximation you mistake for love with Jacob for decades, though he wouldn't be able to partake in your fantasy "marriage" of a mutual Vinculum as long as his sire holds the reins of his mind. To free him, you need to destroy the Prince.

Those other Kindred that have noticed you disappearing for nights at a time, reappearing dressed strangely (that is, normally rather than as though you were attending the ball) assume that you have taken a lover, and they're right. It's the Tunneldweller, who you've convinced that you alone understand him. Once he's in Vinculum to you, you'll get the secret of the Prince's location and free your real love in a single act of calculated regicide.

Tunneldweller

Leave me alone!

You're a Nosferatu, childe of the former sheriff, and you're abandoned by the entire world except for your angel. Your sire broke your mind with Nightmares when you didn't say your prayers, and you fled underground, paranoid and scared that Walter would be sent to bring you back. The other Kindred call you "Tunneldweller" when they think of you at all, then they kick and spit at you and laugh at your ruined face.

You saw your cousin Jacob put her there, when the tunnels shook and rained dust and bricks. Your sire lies in a cellar, locked up tight to sleep after the roof fell in on her. You try to stay away, but every so often lurk closer and closer, poking at the fear, love and revulsion like tonguing at an abscess.

Only your angel offers you solace. She visits you by the subway station, talks softly to you and is not disgusted. You told her about your sire, and now gnaw at it—was that the right thing to do?

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Sample Stories

Blood at the Ball

The Final Death of Brother Garret, staked and left for the sun, is being firmly pointed at Dog and his crew despite Elizabeth's protestations of there being no proof. Walter is convinced that Dog did the deed, but Monica won't let him off the leash until he has solid evidence—which won't be easy to come by given that it was actually Jacob. Dog, for his part, isn't backing down from the confrontation. Elizabeth suggests that an Elysium be held to defuse the situation and try to find out who actually killed the Priest, privately hoping that if her grandchilde goes down (she, like everyone else, is actually certain that he did it) he'll go down fighting and take Anne-Marie with him. If Jacob betrays any signs of panic Rose, who has her own reasons for paying particular attention to him, will notice them.

The scene is set for a tense Elysium of veiled and not-so-veiled threats, with almost everyone present trying to get Dog off the hook for their own conflicting reasons. Except for Dog and Walter, who just want to tear strips off one another.

Samson and Delilah

Mid-way through the chronicle, feelings regarding the Circle of the Crone have relaxed slightly as the Lancea Sanctum's influence declines following Garret's death and Jacob's disinterest. While the vote to legalize the recruitment to and membership of the other covenants—including the Ordo Dracul—is looming. Rose has been engaging Jacob in conversation, trying to convince him to join the Dragons when the vote passes, as it must despite Sanctified opposition. Walter and Monica have their hands full trying to calm down Sanctified who want the whole thing scrapped and are angrily accusing everyone Elizabeth meets with of being an Acolyte, Jacob is treading carefully while surrounded by angry priests and Anne-Marie comes home one night to find a starving Rose begging sanctuary after she used all her Vitae to heal herself following a beating. If Anne-Marie digs into who attacked her friend, she might discover that it was Tunneldweller, who has noticed Rose's feelings for Jacob and frenzied.

The Dragon Wakes

Late in the chronicle, as the end-game approaches, Jacob has renounced his Sanctified faith and gone with Rose to the Ordo Dracul, which leaves Walter faced with protecting him from incensed Sanctified and in need of finding a Hound to alleviate his workload. Unfortunately, the only volunteer is Dog. Monica has uncovered the fact that nomadic Kindred are aware of the city's fragile state and are beginning to move into the outer suburbs, the Carthians are barely holding onto power following a large exodus to the now-legalized Circle of the Crone and she's having to consider eliminating, rather than persuading, threats to her rule. And Tunneldweller has stolen the elders.

At which point, just as things can't get any tenser, Anne-Marie's sire wakes from torpor. He turns out to have been forced into sleep by Monica's predecessor and is nursing a grudge. He declares that he will lead the effort to repel the invaders in service of the Prefect, but everyone can tell he's going to try to declare himself Prince. Loyalties are tested—Walter faces the final test of his covenant or his duty as sheriff, Monica the decision of whether to fall to the Old Dragon, the invaders, the Sanctified or to somehow find a way out, Anne-Marie faces her sire's return and Jacob is torn between his loyalty to Rose and the other Dragons and his Vinculum to the Prince.

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Unmasked

Love will tear us apart.

Order Versus Chaos

In the early hours of the morning as the city slept, a dead man met a dead woman beneath a streetlight, opposite a building they knew well.

"You shouldn't be here. It's not right," said the male and taller of the two, wary of restarting the argument but stating the fact for the record.

"Can you stop me?" asked the female.

The tall vampire considered, shivering against the chill he didn't feel.

"They can. If they hear about it, we'll all be done for."

"That would be true even if I stopped. We're all tainted. What about Simon?"

A flash of guilt crossed both faces as their eyes met. The other vampire looked away first, raising her gaze back to the window high above.

"Simon's different. I'm going to make him an agent—like that spooky guy on West's…" he searched for the term.

"…Ghouls. And no, you won't. I know you."

"And I know you. I think pretty well. You're never going to cross that threshold and talk to him. You wouldn't break their Masquerade even if I've bent it…" He trailed off at his companion's expression. "…oh, God. Tell me you didn't."

"Not yet, but I will. I don't see how it applies. He's not a hunter. He's not someone able to tell the world about us. He's just…"

"…Your husband."

The Pitch

Unmasked is a chronicle about the pressure to confirm to the Traditions when the World of Darkness provides reason after reason to break them, and about the effort to keep the genie in the bottle when you've torn the lid off yourself. A street-level coterie of neonates start with good intentions and quickly get into a position where they're under threat of destruction should anyone find out what they've done. Maybe it started when one of them was tracked down by his jilted fiancée, refusing to believe that he was dead. Maybe one of the coterie made the first move, approaching his former best friend and explaining what had happened to him. Maybe there's a doomed couple, hoping that if they convince the world that they're still in love despite one being food for the other they'll start believing it too. The end result is that the Masquerade is in tatters—the coterie are supported by mortals who know what they are, and an ever-increasing number of mortals and Kindred are let in on the secret.

Too many loose lips endanger everyone, from both sides. Mortal groups dedicated to hunting vampires may catch wind of the goings-on in the coterie's territory and persecute Kindred and "sympathizer" alike. If one of the Kindred that knows bears a grudge and goes to the covenants with proof that the Masquerade has been broken, the response to the coterie's crimes will be swift and bloody. But despite the danger, neither mortal nor Kindred at the centre of the mess are willing to give it up. They can't quit one another. They're already doomed. It's only a matter of time.

Tier: Neonate/Coterie

Unmasked stars a single coterie of very young neonates and their human friends; other vampires are a largely unseen threat, one that the coterie are going to have to avoid if they're going to keep their indiscretions secret. The covenants are something as far away from the characters' experience as the government is to the mortals. The chronicle is therefore Tier One.

Mood and Theme

Mood: Transgression. The coterie knows that it has broken the Tradition of Masquerade. They're not stupid, and realize that their Requiems are forfeit unless something is done. But they're unwilling to kill, Embrace or ghoul the mortals that know about them and they're as unable to flee for a new city as any group of new neonates. The feeling that the coterie has done something wrong for which it will eventually be found out and the desperation with which it delays that revelation night by night should always be there in the chronicle, as should the thrill that results in breaking the rules even if the characters know they'll have to pay for it one night.

Theme: Refusal to Change. In many ways, the characters are refusing to admit that their old lives are no longer theirs to be held onto. The lovers refuse to bow to the pressure to give one another up, one vampire refuses to treat his friend as a source of Vitae or a slave and another wants her marriage back, ignoring the whole part about "until death." Even when the ultimate result of the indiscretions is known, the coterie refuses to bow to the inevitable. The characters refuse to admit to the fear that deep down they're no longer human.

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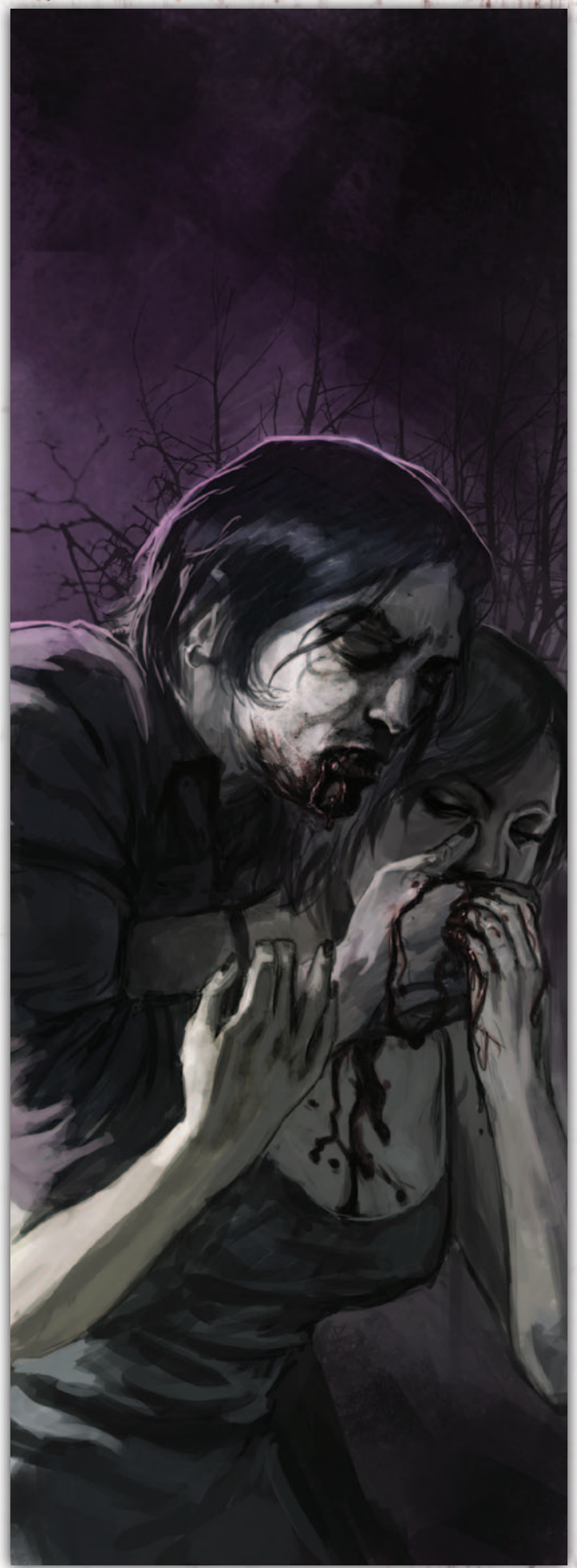
Description

This differs from most **Vampire: The Requiem** chronicles in that the interactions it's focused on aren't those between vampires, but those between vampires and mortals. It plays on both the necessity of maintaining the precarious breach of the Masquerade and the ever-present fear of discovery. Both should be emphasized in play.

Without a compelling reason or reasons for the coterie to continue in the Masquerade breach, the chronicle will suffer. The sample characters presented below all have emotional reasons for reaching out to mortals, but that's a motive to commit a crime not to continue committing them. Reinforce the need for the mortal characters by presenting situations that can only be solved with the aid of a free-willed human; by allying itself with mortals, a coterie receives a means of acting during the day without the problems that a Ghoul can cause with their addictions and magically binding love. A mortal that protects a vampire's haven because she likes the vampire is a superior guard to a Ghoul doing so because he's addicted to the vampire's blood, or at the very least has different strengths and weaknesses to the Ghoul option. The most important thing a human ally does for a vampire is providing a sense of humanity capable of disagreeing with the vampire's wishes—the benefits when trying to maintain Humanity of having human contact that isn't a Vinculum-addled slave are great, and you should consider giving bonuses to degeneration rolls of characters who really work at those relationships.

The fear of discovery is easier to manage; as contact with the covenants and the Prince's court is limited in a Tier One chronicle, the cast of vampire Storyteller characters will be limited to the claimants of neighboring territory and any court officials that do check up on neonate coteries. A sheriff or bishop is too high up for the chronicle, but a Hound or priest is appropriate in small doses. Whenever one of these characters acts within the coterie's territory there is the chance that they will discover the breach, which should keep the paranoia alive in the coterie.

Intrusion into the coterie's affairs can come from the mortal side as well as the Kindred. In many ways, by associating with mortals the characters have made themselves targets for Hunters or mortal Storyteller characters that have their own reasons for searching for them. In our example characters, one of the coterie is being searched for by a former lover who doesn't know about the Kindred; if she finds him it would be a further Masquerade breach that the coterie aren't in control of and one that would be made infinitely worse if she learns about vampires from one of the mortals that the characters *have* told.



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The sense of guilt for the coterie's actions is important to maintain in order to feed the mood of the chronicle. The troupe can achieve it by providing a human cost to the arrangement and by illustrating what will happen if the Kindred authorities discover the breach. The human cost can be both low-key, in the natural consequences of staying out all night with one's undead friends on work and other friendships, and sparingly fatal; a character falling to Wassail and feeding from one of his mortal associates will cause much heartbreak, accentuated because the vampire had convinced himself that he didn't see his friend as a source of blood.

Illustrating the consequences of breaking the Masquerade is easy—have another coterie destroyed for the crime and ensure the characters learn about it. For extra paranoia, have the other coterie's breach taken to the Prince by one of the player coterie's few Kindred allies. If there are mortal groups working against vampires, another ally of the coterie might fall prey to them as an object lesson in the Masquerade's purpose.

Guilt can come from betraying other Kindred as well as letting the delusion that mortals are friends slip; a character in this chronicle should frequently be forced to lie to allies to cover up her own crimes and the crimes of others. If there is an authority figure (such as the above example of a Hound) play them for maximum ambiguity, emphasizing their desire to do right by the characters. If a character feels terribly guilty about covering up the breach to the local Hound, even though she's well aware that he will send her to Final Death if he finds out, your troupe are doing it right. It might not even be as overt as betrayal—mortals aren't used to the way that the Kindred divide a city into fiefs, and it's entirely likely that a mortal one of the coterie is interested in lives within the hunting grounds of another vampire, who must be dealt with in a way that doesn't expose the coterie.

Unmasked lends itself well to crossovers, thanks to the Tier and the focus on how vampires relate to the wider World of Darkness. It's possible to introduce minor supernatural beings or even characters created with other World of Darkness games (especially **Hunter: the Vigil**) to the story in order to showcase the differences in how they interact with mortals compared to the Kindred.

There is no strong reason why every player in the chronicle has to play one of the Kindred; in fact, the chronicle may be stronger if a player or two are willing to meet the challenge of portraying mortal humans in a Vampire game (and once more, using the **Hunter: The Vigil** rules may not be altogether inappropriate what with the focus on tiers and Professions). The characters chosen should be from the core of the coterie's allies, rather than any acquaintances on the edge of the Masquerade breach, and can fulfill the niche a Ghoul would in a normal game; the "member of the coterie" that can act during the day and advance the group agenda while all Kindred are asleep at the cost of being fragile. The troupe might consider the resistance of Blood Potency, the healing abilities of Kindred and Disciplines to be sufficiently unbalancing to require a handicap of sorts beyond immunity to sunlight, no need to consume blood, no frenzy and the ability to buy Morality with Experience. If so, create the mortal character with 30 more experience than the vampires. Remember that the mortal will have higher skills than the vampires once the chronicle advances beyond the first few stories, as he won't have to spend experience on Blood Potency or Disciplines.

True Romance

In a chronicle about Kindred who have an emotional attachment to mortal humans, the subject will inevitably come up—just how much emotion are the Kindred even capable of? A vampire is certainly capable of seeing a mortal as a friend and colleague (although the vampire will have to control the fact that his friend makes him hungry, thanks to the Beast), but can the Kindred fall in love beyond the artificial need of the Vinculum?

By default, **Vampire: The Requiem** assumes that the Embrace renders the Kindred incapable of experiencing new emotions. A vampire who never experienced love as a mortal will never fall in love. Emotions that one of the Kindred has experienced are present but hollow as though they were echoes or copies of the real thing, and this deadening increases over time. At the stage in their Requiem the coterie are depicted in this chronicle, the characters are still capable of friendship, though if they stopped to think about it they would realize that they no longer care as much about their friends as they used to; almost as though they are going through the motions while their minds catch up with what's changed in their bodies. Any vampire that believes himself to be in love is practicing a certain amount of self-delusion, aware that he don't feel quite as strongly as he once did but clinging to it out of habit, loyalty or fear of what abandoning the relationship might mean for his Humanity.

The other issue is one of pleasure: feeding gives the Kindred a rush beyond anything they experienced as mortals, and other sensations feel dull compared to it. The Beast drives a vampire to feed, filling a neonate with alien urges to consume her mortal allies. Eventually, the vampire in a sexual pairing with a mortal will realize (or admit) that sex is more on the level of wearing comfortable clothes than that of ecstasy, and that the thrill of lying with her lover is disturbingly like that of smelling delicious cooking. The sad part is that the mortal in the pair may get off on his partner's reaction or—worse—think that he can change her. Star-crossed lovers, indeed.

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Sample Characters

Liam

My heart doesn't need to beat for me to still love her.

You weren't anyone special—an EMT, working out of a hospital in the centre of the city. Trying to save a few lives in the World of Darkness. You worked long shifts, endangered your life a few times and tried to make a difference. You lived alone, with few friends and no relatives nearby. That's why they targeted you. A group of vampires wanting access to the hospital did their research and picked you as the best EMT to Embrace, the least likely to be missed. They ambushed you when you were called out one night and made you a Daeva.

They didn't know about your girlfriend. They saw you living alone and didn't realize you had a lover at work, your affair carried out in snatched moments between calls. Cassandra is a doctor in the ER and you were both keeping it quiet.

You died, but your love didn't (or at least not entirely). You suffered "basic training" at the hands of your sire and his coterie before being allowed to leave and make your own Haven in exchange for a tithe of access to the hospital, which you arranged by making sure your own clearances weren't revoked when you "quit" your job. You didn't consciously plan to break the Masquerade, but somehow, within a week, you found yourself explaining to Cass what had happened to you.

Now you try your best to make your Requiem quietly, beneath the notice of other coteries. You use your medical skills to feed cleanly and without risking the lives of the people you rationalize as "donors." You and Cass briefly considered getting access to the Blood Bank, but security is too tight and when you did try it, stealing a bag from an ambulance, it didn't taste right.

You cling to Cass as your point of reference in an increasingly crazed world. You regard the coterie with relief and shame; relief that you have someone to go through your Requiem with, and shame at the way your example appears to have inspired Charles and is now inspiring Andrea. You dread visits from your sire; he always wants something from the hospital, or using your medical knowledge, and you fear that one night his demands will put Cass at risk.

Charles

Don't make my mistakes, Andrea.

You came to the city seeking sanctuary, and only now realize how deep a pit of trouble you're in. The only comfort is that you're not going through it alone.

Embraced as a Nosferatu a week before you were due to get married, you fled your sire and your life as a journalist. You couldn't face your fiancée with the ruined face the Nosferatu curse left you, and had no one to turn to except—in desperation—your older brother Simon. After a harrowing journey, hiding from the sun in storm drains and stealing cars to cover more ground, you made it to his home just before dawn. You're not sure how you persuaded him that it was his brother under your deformity, but he opened the door and let you sleep in the cellar.

You met Liam a few weeks later; your brother's house was close by to the tiny haven Liam had made for himself. Having another vampire to explain what had happened to you (as best as he could) helped, and Simon has declared his intention to stick by you despite what you've all learned about the Masquerade. You decided, in a moment of nobility, that it would be best if your fiancée never learned what happened to you. Simon could volunteer to risk his life if other vampires found out about the arrangement, but she couldn't make an informed choice to do so and you refused to endanger her. Recently, though, the determination of a new member of your coterie to get her marriage back has you questioning your decision.

Andrea

All it would take is for them to look away for a night. Just one night.

You're both the most recently Embraced vampire and the longest away from your mortal life in the coterie, the difference made up as time as a Ghoul. Five years ago you were happy—a librarian married to a police officer, mother to two children and taking night classes in the hope of one day becoming a translator. On your way home from class one night, you were abducted by a Mekhet named Conrad and forced to drink his blood. Imprisoned as a Ghoul in his haven, you assisted him in his translation and copying of old texts. Eventually, he received permission from the Prince to Embrace you. No longer able to keep you prisoner, he hoped that the work had interested you enough to make you stay. It hadn't.

You were declared dead in your absence, thanks to one of Conrad's allies pulling strings, and the Kindred authorities know where your mortal family live. Even so, you're circling around them, straying closer every night to your old home. You ran across Liam and Charles—and Simon—and have joined their coterie, your skewed and second-hand knowledge about the covenants and the Kindred hierarchy being better than their near-complete ignorance. Charles thinks it's too risky for you to contact your husband, especially with Conrad not that far away, while Liam can't advise you against it without being a hypocrite.

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Simon

Good evening. Welcome back among the living.

You're Charles' brother, one of two mortal "honorary members" of the coterie and the fixer of the group. A reasonably wealthy owner of a construction firm, you've seen a lot of strange things in your time. You never know what you'll turn up digging foundations in the World of Darkness, and you have developed a detached sense of calm that the vampires value you for. Already, you've converted your basement into sleeping quarters for the three Kindred, who you think of as particularly odd houseguests.

You can tell, however, how fragile the vampires are psychologically. You know how thin the thread Charles holds on by is, which is why you're keeping something from him. His jilted fiancée is trying to track him down—she visits the city more and more, asking you if you've seen him. You've been careful to only meet her during the day so far, but you worry about some of the things she's asking.

It's like she already knows he's here.

Allies and Antagonists

Cassandra

We need to know how it's passed on.

You're the coterie's closest mortal ally bar Simon, a major source of resources and information for the vampires in your role as an ER doctor. You let the coterie know about shelters and blood drives, keep an eye on unusual killings and attacks that might indicate other vampires and study the changes in their bodies, trying to understand what happened to them. You're still in love with Liam, despite his…condition… and you're certain that there must be a cure somewhere. Vampirism to you is a scientific puzzle, an unexplained medical mystery that you're determined to crack. There's so much to understand and help them understand.

Sometimes, during the day, you see Liam's sleeping body and realize, for a moment, that he's no longer human. You're not sure what you'd do if he realized that too—the existence of the Kindred is intoxicating to you, a secret society of bloodsuckers hidden in plain sight, moving among the cities of the world like gamekeepers. You sometimes think about asking Liam to make you a vampire, but he doesn't know how it's done.

Kristen

Why did he leave? Was he running from something? Why didn't he trust me?

You're Charles' ex-fiancée, and since the day he vanished a week before your wedding (at least he had the decency to not leave you literally at the altar) you've been searching for answers. There existed no sign of forced entry at your home, but items went missing—some of his clothes, a photo of the pair of you and what would have been his wedding ring. The police think he took them when he ran.

You know he's out there somewhere, and you know Simon's lying to you about not knowing where he is. Charles was a journalist, and in the months since his disappearance you've decided that he must have stumbled into something connected to organized crime. That's why, in your opinion, he ran. Simon must be protecting him, but you don't understand why he hasn't sent word. One of his former colleagues at the newspaper says he has experience with missing persons and unusual cases—you've met him a few times, and he says he'll look into it for you.

Michael

My wife was murdered five years ago. I don't think I'll ever know who killed her.

You're Andrea's husband (or, as far as you are aware, her widower), a detective in the police force and a man who feels like he's aged a lot more than the five years since his wife vanished. You couldn't identify the body, after what was done to it, but the DNA test confirmed it was Andrea. No suspect was ever found.

You try to get though your days as best you can, raising your children—now teenagers—and nurse your heartbreak at every milestone Andrea's not there for. Your career has stalled as you've stopped taking what you see as unnecessary risks that might leave your children without a father entirely. You've grown careful, and you're thinking of leaving the force entirely.

Until then, though, you have your current case to work through. Another tragic murder—some poor kid dumped at the hospital missing a chunk of thigh and nearly all of his blood. The doctor who attended was Cassandra, who nearly jumped out of her skin when you gave her your name. It's been a week, now, but you can't quite put her expression out of your mind; like she knew who you were.

Barrabas

Have you heard the word of Longinus?

You're a priest of the Lancea Sanctum, your parish lying next to the territory of the coterie, and you're the member of the Kindred who has the most contact with the young trio. You tolerate their presence and allow them to move through your territory as long as they don't poach as part of a design to gently draw them into the Sanctified flock.

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You think it's working on Charles, especially—the young Nosferatu clearly has issues he's working through, and may be grateful of some spiritual guidance.

Rachel

Keeping out of trouble?

You're the Hound attached to the area of the city the coterie live in, and you have your misgivings about them. Three neonates with no one to keep them in line is a recipe for disaster, and you're sure that they'll get up to no good eventually. Barrabas assures you Liam and his friends are keeping their noses clean, though, so you'll leave them alone for now. Liam, though, worries you—his Embrace was part of a power play between the Carthians and Invictus, and the Primogen settled the matter *against* his sire. If Liam starts to upset the ancillae by meddling in his former place of employment, you'll have to stop him.

Conrad

Where does she go at night? What does she do?

You're Andrea's sire, and you consider her to be most ungrateful for that blessing. You rescued her from a life of mediocrity, gave her a purpose, the gift of your blood and then made her your childe, but she still left to go squat in a basement with—who? A pawn of Carthians and a self-loathing Haunt. You follow her sometimes, your far greater grasp of Obfuscate well up to the task, and you're saddened by her moping over her husband. You might have to deal with him in order to make her see the light and take her place in the Ordo Dracul. You'll have to keep Barrabas out of it, though—the old Priest owns the territory her family live in.

Anthony

Yeah, I have experience of this sort of thing.

You're a journalist, one of Charles' old workmates from back east, and you've been hired by Kristen to look into his disappearance.

You're also a vampire hunter (once more, we recommend **Hunter: The Vigil**).

Ever since you survived an attack ten years ago, you've watched for signs of the bloodsuckers. You were contacted by people calling themselves the Network, a clearing-house for evidence of the supernatural. The things you've seen on the mailing lists put you in no doubt that America is rife with supernatural beings, preying on humanity. You thought you owed Charles' memory the courtesy of meeting with Kristen, even if his other friends told you she was nuts, but something in her story made you pay attention. You've done some digging into this brother of his, this Simon character, and some of his dealings in the construction trade. You've noticed that he's done a lot of work on his home recently, reinforcing the basement—or sun-proofing it.

Did Simon sell his brother to the leeches in exchange for contracts? Is he a ghoul? You're not certain, but you'll find out. You're now wrestling with the question of when you should express your concerns to Kristen. Hard experience has taught you it's difficult to sell people on the existence of the undead.

Stories

Guardian Angel

Michael manages to identify the John Doe in his homicide as an inhabitant of a poverty-ridden tenement near to Barrabas' church, and retraces the man's footsteps to the place. The coterie gets wind of the development through Cassandra, and has to face the task of diverting Michael away from the church without either Michael or Barrabas finding out. While they're at it, though, Rachel pays them one of her infrequent visits; if she finds out that Barrabas has been feeding incautiously, he'll be punished. Does the coterie drop Barrabas in trouble in order to protect Michael?

Digging deeper reveals that Barrabas has an alibi—he was deep in the city centre that night at Elysium. The real culprit, hidden behind his Obfuscation, is Conrad; the Dragon wanted to tie Barrabas up with the Hounds temporarily so that he could deal with Michael, but wasn't counting on Michael receiving the case himself. If the coterie realizes that Michael was the target, they don't have long—Conrad is already lying in wait inside the house…

Exposure

Anthony has been snooping around, trying to decide if Simon is a Ghoul. He's finally decided not—just a collaborator, working with the vampire that killed Charles. Problem is that the vampire he's identified is Liam, and Anthony's now started tracking him, too. It's easy to detect a vampire when you have a digital camera and understand how the image blurs, so Anthony's in no doubt as to his evidence—Liam, a vampire, began living with Simon shortly after Charles died.

He confronts Simon, demanding to know what the leeches are paying him and giving him a chance to confirm that Liam was the culprit. The coterie have two nights before their haven is plastered on the internet, giving Charles an unhappy choice—confess who he is or silence the reporter in some way.

But the coterie don't know that Kristen hired Anthony. They don't know what he's told her, or left for her in case of his death.

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Blood Mark

They're coming for all of you!

Where In The World Is Carmen Sanguinato?

Luc waited for the last of his flock to leave before closing the chapel doors. Making a brief genuflection to the statue of Saint Daniel, he began to clear up while reflecting on the growth of his congregation. These nights, the Damned of Miami sought spiritual guidance with greater frequency. The stories of what had happened in New Orleans to the Kindred there had shaken the faith of many but brought may more to his door seeking God.

As he worked, Luc felt the Beast rise deep inside. By the time he had cleaned up the last of the sacrament and knew for certain that it wasn't just exposure to blood causing the weakening of his grip over his mind, the Beast was throwing itself at the bars of the cage. His heart beat twice of its own accord, reanimated to the blush of life for an instant. He set the sacrament bowl down and sank to the floor, resting the back of his head against the altar. He realized then that the feelings weren't his—they were external, as though something were happening to one of his childer.

He focused on the emotions of terror and opened his mind, trying to ascertain which of his line was responsible.

By the time the priest found him, Bishop Luc was in the full force of Rötschreck. They restrained him as best they could while he thrashed and screamed about talons ripping into his flesh and the letters V and I.

At the last, he identified who suffered the traumas he was experiencing. After all this time. Salome. Being torn apart as she desperately summoned help that would never arrive from thousands of miles away.

As he felt her go to Final Death, she managed to send words through the ties of the Blood. Croaked with what remained of her windpipe. Not a cry for help; a warning.

'They're coming for all of you.'

The Pitch

This chronicle is a tour of the World of Darkness at night, a globe-hopping mystery where a former coterie is forced to reunite and go in search of their last member, who they haven't seen in over a century. They once split up because of personality conflict, but self-interest rules the night; each of them felt, through the Blood Sympathy, the Final Death of their lost colleague at the hands of... something. And she warned them, across an ocean and years of separation, that they were next. Thus, it's time to get the band back together.

The Kindred migrate slowly, but they do migrate; they follow their herds all over the world, moving at night. Our coterie is no exception—originally from Europe, they've spent a hundred years in the New World. Most don't inhabit the same city in America any more, the coterie having disbanded in the early 1900s. They know where they saw the final member of their circle last, but that was a very long time ago and she moved on since. The chronicle is therefore a race against time, coping with the difficulties involved in becoming suddenly nomadic and retracing her route from their shared origins to her violent end, before who or whatever destroyed her tracks *them* down.

Along the way, they'll find hints of a conspiracy and clues as to the creatures stalking them—vampires with strange allegiances and the symbol "VII." Something has been stirred up and is out for blood; their blood. Before they split up, the coterie took part in a ritual to create sympathy between their Vitae. That sameness is how the coterie were warned, but it's how the monsters are tracking them, following the lines of blood. Everywhere they go those Kindred lines sired by the lost one are murdered, torn apart as if by talons. Then everyone who drank her blood goes the same way, Ghouls and Kindred in Vinculum alike.

They're next. Unless they can find where she went to Final Death, find what released the things after them and somehow stop it. It won't be easy—the same path that made her a target to the conspiracy is the one the coterie are following her trail down.

Tier: Elder/Conspiracy

Blood Mark features an ex-coterie of ancillae forced to reunite after they become elders, traveling the world from domain to domain searching for clues as to what happened to a missing member of their group. Along the way, they become aware of a Europe-wide conspiracy of vampires hiding within the individual power structures of the cities, and it is this group that becomes the chronicle's antagonists. This is **Requiem** at Tier Three.

Mood and Theme

Mood: Creeping Doom, Sudden Shock. The threat level of the chronicle is a steady, slow build punctuated

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by moments of shocking violence. Whole sessions, even stories, should go past with the coterie looking over their shoulders, expecting an attack that doesn't come. When the tension begins to fade is when the enemy attacks from surprise, leaving scenes of gore and horror behind.

Theme: Unseen Patterns. The characters in Blood Mark travel the world, visiting fiefs in America, Europe and North Africa. They have an opportunity to see things that the majority of vampires don't—the similarities and differences between different courts. A new city should be at once familiar and different, the subtle changes to covenants in each location tripping up nomads lulled into a false sense of security. Sometimes the similarities grow too overt to be ignorable—the sheriff of London uses the same cipher in his correspondence as the Sanctified Bishop of Milan, but the two have never met and have nothing in common. By paying attention to these signs and clues, a pattern that sedentary Kindred would never see emerges. Chasing this pattern killed Salome, and those vampires revealed as parts of it do not appreciate the coterie repeating her work.

Description

In order to give enough time for Salome to have moved across several cities in the course of her research since the coterie split up, the characters in Blood Mark are elders created with around 250 experience. The high personal power of the characters is offset by the isolation from a vampire's normal support networks. Merits such as Herd that can't be used in the chronicle should not be paid for with experience but be assumed as part of a character's background, while those like Resources that will be usable in play should still be bought.

The chronicle relies on a feeling of history between the characters and the absent figure of Salome, as well as a kinship that pulls the coterie together despite its internal disagreements and more than a century of being apart. If making the coterie seem like it has known one another for decades when the players haven't portrayed it before seems intimidating, there are techniques your troupe can use. Don't be daunted by the idea of setting up decades of backstory; it really isn't necessary to detail and remember every year of the characters' Requiems from childer to ancillae. Chances are that thanks to the Fog of Eternity the characters won't remember all of their shared past anyway. Instead, concentrate on the interactions between the characters in modern nights. Trust and distrust, the grating of personalities and the way the coterie works together remain even when the events that led to them slip from reliable memory. If it becomes important to the chronicle to know exactly what happened to the coterie 137 years ago in London, it can be inserted as a flashback scene into the current chapter.

To build the closeness and tension in the coterie, each player should decide on at least two things about every other player's character: a reason the character could work with that other vampire enough to form a coterie early in their Requiem, and a reason why they eventually decided to part and go their own way. Once that very basic skeleton of interaction is worked out, the chronicle can begin. Pay attention to how the characters interact in early sessions and then create events in the back-story that explain or illuminate the characters behavior. By focusing the process this way round, writing the background to fit the chronicle in play rather than the reverse, the players won't need to worry about the way the first few sessions go and will be able to concentrate on enjoying their roles.

One scene in the backstory is important, however, and should be established in flashback as soon as possible or used as a prelude; before the coterie split up and the characters travelled to America, Salome led a Crúac ritual which tied the coterie's blood together; the characters all share Blood Sympathy to one another as though they were in the same Embrace-line. The chronicle's antagonists can sense blood relationships, and it's this artificial family tie that makes the coterie a target while giving the characters the advantage of being able to sense one another's emotions and know when one member of the group is in distress.

The chronicle features a lot of travel, which is unusual for a **Vampire: The Requiem** story. The characters' age, experience and wealth relative to most Kindred offers a few solutions to the problems of finding blood and shelter from the sun that travel exacerbates; it is not outside plausibility for an Invictus character to use her wealth to charter transport with light-proof containers for sleeping. The high Blood Potency of characters reduces the threat of the Predator's Taint as far as they are concerned, but increases the likelihood of native Kindred they come across reacting in fear. The coterie will be seen as unwelcome outsiders in most domains, interlopers come to steal the kine from vampires that have spent decades carefully setting out their own claims. The distrust of any vampire outside of the coterie can be reduced with effort and tribute to local powers, but serves to bind the characters closer together as a unit.

The challenge to the Storyteller in Blood Mark is in creating the half-dozen or so cities the characters will journey across during the chronicle, a much larger task than the detailing of a more usual **Requiem** setting. Fortunately, the theme of the chronicle allows the Storyteller to "cheat" slightly, reusing just enough of a setting to make life easier and give a creepy edge to proceedings as the characters notice. Names might

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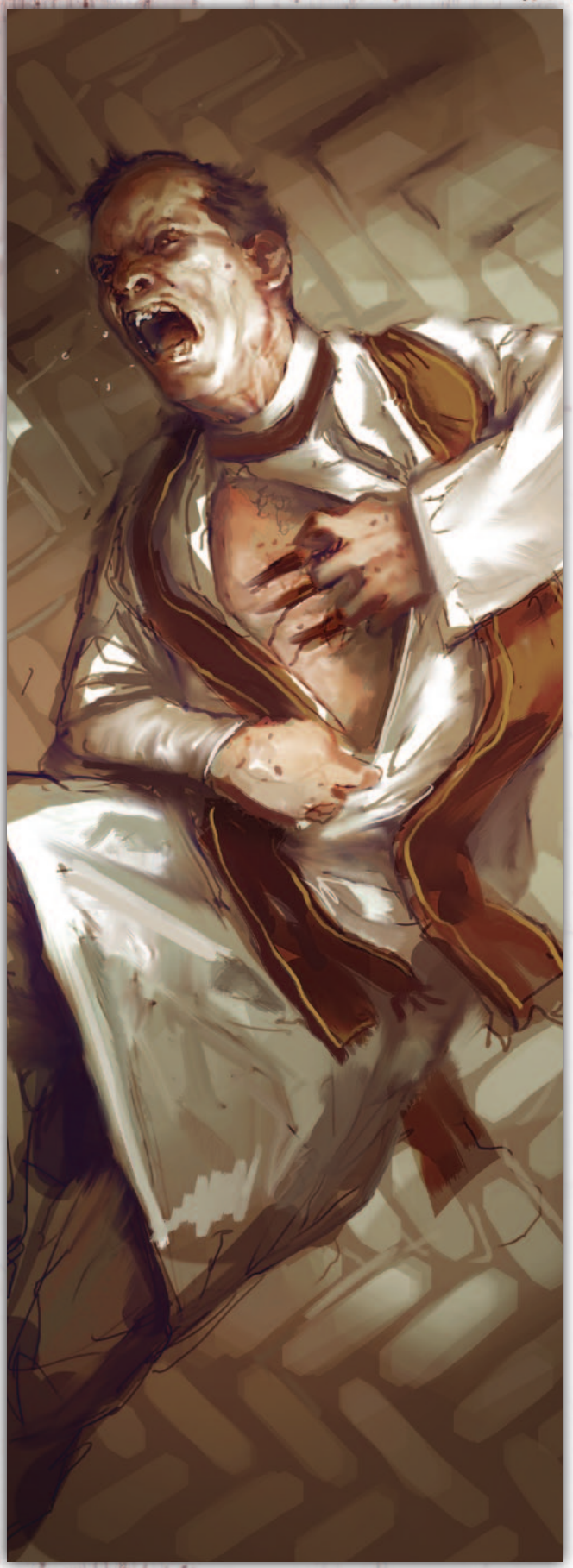

Flashbacks

Rather than dump a lot of exposition on the players at the start of the chronicle, consider using flashback scenes to introduce information the characters should know when it becomes relevant. Rather than just narrating what happened in the past, seriously consider allowing players to control their characters during the flashbacks—it can be difficult to play a scene out when the player doesn't have a clear idea of where it sits in continuity, so start flashbacks off with a few framing notes and allow the players to improvise from there.

If your troupe finds that you especially enjoy the use of flashbacks, consider rewarding players who improvise well with extra experience and the incorporation of the coterie's historical actions into the modern-night setting. If a character has the Contacts or Allies Merit without specifying whom those Merit dots represent, it may even be possible for players to introduce such Storyteller characters when needed within flashback scenes, and for those characters to then be written into the chronicle.

Last, flashback scenes allow your players' characters to interact with Salome, despite that character having died before the chronicle begins. It's difficult to care about a murder mystery when the victim has never been seen, and her appearance in these scenes plugs that gap. You can find more about using flashbacks earlier in this chapter (p. 230).

be reused, translated appropriately for the dominant language. If one city contains a covenant at odds with the others, consider reusing the reason for the disagreement and the rough breakdown of clans involved in the next city, but change the names and which covenant is the outsider. There may be an official of the court in each domain (a different position and name each time) who is always a Mekhet and always of the same personality. It's a narrative device to emphasize the nature of the Kindred, a labor-saving exercise for the Storyteller and a plot point all in one—if the characters dig into these strange coincidences, they may uncover VII's agents.

Above all, Blood Mark is a chronicle about travel. It's not necessary to have each story set in a different city (it's unlikely Salome made her haven in more than three or four, though she might have travelled to more), but if the chronicle spends too long in one place it may get bogged down and begin to feel like a static setting. When this happens, it's time to move the coterie on to their next destination.

The journey the coterie go on over the course of the chronicle is laid out ahead of it by the footsteps of the lost member, and forced by attacks from the conspiracy it has inadvertently become a target of. Both of these stimuli

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are necessary—the path ahead and the impetus to follow it. Avoid having VII attack the coterie unless it's time to move on or the characters instigate the confrontation.

The Conspiracy

As the coterie will discover if it follows her trail, Salome was seeking the origins of the Kindred. By the time the coterie split up she was already highly knowledgeable about bloodlines and Embrace-trees of the clans, with a focus on her own clan as a Ventrue. She moved across Europe, interviewing elders or their progeny and using samples of Vitae (often illicitly gained) in Crúac rituals to determine lineage, with the goal of mapping the Kindred migrations as far back as she could.

Along the way, she noticed odd discrepancies—vampires who appeared to be related but claimed to have no contact with one another's domains. Tales of the dead Julii. The Ventrue belief—widespread in Europe—that their clan originated in Troy. Eventually, she came to the notice of VII, a secret society of Ventrue (or perhaps a clan that greatly resembles them) that has infiltrated the cities of Europe and North Africa. VII believes itself to be the pure stock from which other vampire lines are descended, controlling the courts of the Kindred from behind the scenes, and they did not appreciate Salome uncovering evidence of their existence. When threatened, VII strike with creatures they call *Manes*; these footsoldiers resemble ghouls but are created from corpses rather than living humans and which can home in on the blood of a target.

Salome was not deterred. She traced the Ventrue line from Troy back into mainland Europe and ancient Etruscan ruins. While investigating a cave in Italy, she was attacked by VII and destroyed.

VII

This chronicle's version of VII is entirely unrelated to any of the possible versions of that secretive covenant published so far and is based on the Ventrue creation myth first explored in **Ventrue: Lords over the Damned** while heavily implying that the Julii from **Requiem for Rome** were in fact VII. It's used here because the chronicle needs a secretive group of Kindred that strike without warning, destroy other vampires with great ferocity and then vanish, leaving only a symbol to identify themselves behind. VII already does all of that, so there's no point in reinventing the wheel.

The twist in this chronicle is that members of VII are also members of other covenants; they're undercover agents, indistinguishable from the rest of the Kindred unless you can spot their patterns of behavior. And that's where the coterie comes in.

Sample Characters

Luc

We are tested by Longinus, of that much I am certain. It remains to be seen if we are strong enough to pass.

You're the Sanctified Bishop of Miami, Primogen councilor to the court of Prince Amans. Your congregation is healthy, conversions are up and you have your eye on becoming Archbishop when the Prince finally enters torpor. French by birth, you were Embraced as a Nosferatu in Madrid, 1815. In all the years of your Requiem you have never returned to France, instead joining the Madrid Sanctified as a Priest. You enjoyed success as a member of the Night Inquisition, an effort by the then-Prince to root out a demon-worshipping group of coteries that in modern nights would be recognized as Belial's Brood. The effort increased your faith and fervor for Longinus' teachings, which began to grate on your coterie. When the opportunity came to cross to the New World in 1908, you took it; making the long journey by ship, crouched in the cargo hold with a letter of introduction to the Sanctified of your destination.

You consider the others in the coterie to be individuals you long since grew past the need for. Godless heretics the lot of them, but heretics you feel a kinship to thanks to the ritual Salome performed when you broke the group. Even when reunited by Salome's death, the attitude toward your religion taken by the others sticks in your craw and causes disagreement; you are of the belief that Salome summoned some kind of demon by accident and that you should not tread too closely in her footprints for fear of producing the same result. You are undoubtedly useful to the coterie when tracking VII; your experience as an Inquisitor serves you well in isolating the nonbelievers from a Sanctified church.

Dominic

It's not the travel I mind, it's the company.

Even when the coterie was based in Spain, you were the outsider of the group, the furthest-traveled and the least willing to settle into the Danse Macabre of a single city. Born in the Basque region and Embraced by a Gangrel in the 1850s, yours was a semi-Nomadic Requiem, traveling around the cities of Spain but always returning to Madrid and your coterie. You rejected what you saw as the weakness of most Kindred, trapped in their cities by fear of the unknown. Blood was not that difficult to find and your Disciplines allowed you to move under your own power through the wilderness. Clearly something of you wanderlust wore off on your fellows, but even when the coterie disbanded you went further than most, all the

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way to Mexico City where you learned the Crúac rituals of the strange native Kindred.

Despite being an Acolyte, you disagreed with Salome's quest—the Kindred have no one origin, as far as you are concerned, and you never understood her need to trace her line back.

In the chronicle, you provide the practiced knowledge of being a nomadic vampire along with the occult understanding needed to use Crúac and understand any notes Salome may have left behind.

Despite being an Acolyte, you have secretly learned the first Coil of Blood from Francine in exchange for teaching her the basics of Crúac. This allows you to subsist on the blood of beasts, allowing you to wander further from cities without fear of starvation.

Isabella

Salome ruined us. Why did she have to stir up these hornets?

This could not have come at a worse time for you. Luc may have ambitions of unifying Miami's church and state under his rule, but it's a pipe dream to the Nosferatu Prince. You, on the other hand, were *this close* to becoming Prince of Colorado Springs. After emerging from a 40-year torpor in 1962, you found that childer you sired after moving to America had made particularly wise investments and that you were rich enough to buy the power necessary to secure a Primogen seat. The migration across the sea, feeding from the passengers of a luxury liner, had finally provided the reward you wanted when you were just another lowly Daeva Invictus neonate back in Madrid. You knew that you had no chance of rising to the top barring great changes, so decided to seek out a smaller domain you could make your own.

Wealth and influence are the great door openers in the old world as they are in the new, and during the chronicle you'll find yourself supplying the rest of the coterie with both. You feel slightly used in this regard, but have no interest in blood magic or Egyptian ritual. Besides, someone has to be the worldly one. Returning to the land of your early Requiem is a strange experience for you—the World Wars and Civil War decimated Madrid's Kindred hierarchy, and you're faced with the fact that you would have been better off staying.

Francine

You think we want any part of your provincial troubles? Just tell us what we need to know and we'll be gone.

Embraced by a line of Carthian Mekhet into the class war with the (then) ruling Invictus of Madrid, you disappointed your sire and blood-sisters by rejecting the struggle in favor of the Ordo Dracul. Your argument was that the escape from societal roles was petty in comparison to the escape from the Curse itself, which didn't endear you to your "family" much. Eventually, you became held up by the Invictus as an example of a commoner who knew better than to rebel; your providing ammunition to the ideological enemy caused mounting tension between the Carthians and your coterie, which in turn led to the coterie moving on from Madrid and going their separate ways. You have no regrets, however, having spent the last century in Washington DC studying Wyrm's Nests and developing your understanding of the Coils.

You have a tendency to act in the immediate interests of yourself and then your coterie, regardless of the potential fallout. You weren't a victim of bad luck in Madrid; the Invictus used you as a poster-childe because you didn't care enough to stop them. In order to gain a basic understanding of Crúac (and a Devotion of it and Auspex that allows you to see Wyrm's Nests), you taught Dominic how to achieve the Coil of Blood, something for which you would be targeted for retribution for by your own covenant if they found out.

Allies and Antagonists

Salome

See here: this is the Aenead, the tale of the Ventrue migration from Troy into Europe. I've been to Troy, of course. Nothing left there now after Schlieman had his way. But this passage here is interesting…

You're dead, torn apart by VII when you stumbled upon the centre of their power. A Spanish noblewoman in life, you were Embraced as a Ventrue and rejected the Christianity of your mortal family to follow the teachings of the Circle of the Crone. You had been raised to pay attention to family background and breeding, and your talent for genealogy created a use for you among the other Ventrue, whose sire-lines you were able to recite at a moment's notice.

When the coterie decided to travel to America in order to pursue their own interests, you found that your own plans involved staying behind. You had mapped as much of the Ventrue clan's internal relationships as you could from Madrid, and had a grand goal in mind—all Kindred, your covenant taught you, sprang from the Crone. By following the family trees back to a common ancestor, you might be able to find the Crone herself, the theoretical first vampire. Chasing this dream around Europe and North Africa saw you attacked by VII, who you took to be agents of the Lancea Sanctum trying to stop you from proving that the Crone was every bit as real as Longinus. Eventually, you discovered accounts of

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a temple to an ancient Goddess in Italy, and assuming it to be dedicated to the Crone went to investigate.

VII were waiting for you.

What you never discovered was how close you were to the end goal—the cave at Lake Avernus was indeed sacred to a goddess; Manea, the Etruscan Goddess of insanity and death, mother of the Manes and Lares that were absorbed into the religions of the Romans who came to ascendance in Italy after the Etruscans. The Kindred of Rome believed themselves descended from Manea's immaterial offspring, some of whom took the form of spectral owls.

Onorato

Where do you get these ideas? I am but a humble servant of my Prince.

You're the sheriff of Venice, a city on the trail of Salome, and you have served the Invictus loyally in that capacity for 83 years. The Kindred of Venice know you as a stern creature of regular habits.

You are also a cultist of VII, scion of the Lares and regional leader for the conspiracy. As a Ventrue, Salome interviewed you when her pilgrimage brought her through Venice. Your curiosity raised, you became alarmed when you realized that she was seeking Manea by a different name. Raising lesser Manes by feeding your Vitae to corpses and summoning your counterparts from other cities, you confronted and destroyed the outsider minutes before she could disturb the rest of the mother-goddess.

Unfortunately, the coterie will not be so easy to isolate and purge. It is traveling and asking questions after the former member. You will attempt to divert the characters from the path as best you can, but if they cannot be fooled the time for killing will come again.

Manes

VII members in this chronicle can create a temporary ghoul from a human corpse in a parody of the Embrace. By spending two Vitae (literally emptying the blood into the mouth of the body), the corpse animates as a mindless servant, obeying the will of the VII agent who created it. If the corpse-ghoul runs out of Vitae it collapses back into death instantly. VII believe that these beings—"Manes"—are somehow primitive versions of the Kindred.

Nuria, Prince of Madrid

Why did you have to come back? Couldn't you leave well enough alone?

You're the Prince of Madrid, a Carthian elected to that position following the fall of Franco and the exchange of fortunes between the Carthians and Invictus that followed. A Mekhet of the same sire as Francine, you are not pleased to see the coterie return to Spain; though your covenant now celebrate their victory over the first estate, you feel that your position is still precarious and see Francine as a threat despite the two of you being blood-sisters. You want the coterie out of Madrid as quickly as possible, by force if necessary.

Complex Character Creation

It can be difficult to create the sheet for a 200-year old vampire by simply throwing more Experience at the standard character creation rules. The Fog of Eternity provides an explanation for any gaps in skills, such that a player won't need to spend dots on skills or Merits their characters would have known in life but are now redundant. A good rule of thumb is to only buy traits that will actually see use in the chronicle.

More advanced character creation rules for elders can be found in both the **Vampire Chronicler's Guide** and **Ancient Mysteries**, the latter being the more complex of the two. If you don't have either book available, don't worry—this chronicle works just fine with characters created as standard as long as you remember to buy up Blood Potency to 4 or 5 and keep skills and Disciplines in proportion rather than min/maxing. Not that there's anything inherently wrong with min/maxing, but with so much Experience a one-sided character can rapidly become overbearing.

Stories

The Great Divide

The coterie has reassembled in Miami, following the experience of Salome's Final Death, and has decided to seek out whatever killed her before her warning comes true. In this story, Luc must contend with handing over his parish to lesser Sanctified while the coterie as a whole plans the best means of crossing the Atlantic. Planes are too easily exposed to sunlight (especially to Europe from the US, flying in a parabola over the far North) and that leaves shipping. Passage must be booked. Arrangements must be made. Attempts to make sure Luc doesn't come back must be fended off.

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Once the ship is underway, weeks of claustrophobia and hunger set in. The coterie can't risk exposure to the sun but need to feed, which involves sneaking into the upper decks at night (assuming a cargo ship). What will the sailors do if they suspect something is using them? What if a character, unused to "ship-rations, falls prey to Wassail and kills a crewmember?

Balance of Power

The coterie arrives in Madrid to a less than warm welcome from Nuria. Predator's Taint sees several members of Nuria's Carthian court succumb to Rötschreck, and Nuria—already worried about the characters' reasons for being back in Spain—takes it as an insult. The reunion is especially tense for Francine and for Isabella, who is told in no uncertain terms how low her covenant was brought in the Spanish Civil War. The coterie must establish where Salome went next (Paris, which raises long-forgotten feelings in Luc) before the balance of power in Madrid topples over entirely. The problem is that only one Ventrue elder knows the information on Salome's route; he introduced her to an old correspondent of his in France. That elder has now been forced from his haven under the new Carthian regime and wants the coterie's assistance in returning his covenant to power. Some of the Carthians take exception to the coterie even speaking to the old Ventrue, and accuse the characters—Isabella especially—of being spies for the Invictus.

To Avernus

The coterie have reached the end of the road; they've tracked Salome on a tour of the ancient world and eventually back to Italy—not to Rome, as might be expected, but to the city of Pozzuoli in the Campania region. Just inside the city limits is a volcanic lake which the Romans thought was the entrance to the Underworld. Before Rome, however, Lake Avernus was the home of the Etruscan Goddess Manea, mother of the household Gods and ancestor spirits that the earliest Ventrue were associated with.

Salome didn't believe that Manea was a Goddess, or even that she still existed, but instead thought that the myths were half-remembered glimpses of a female vampire that spawned a whole race of monsters; she believed that Manea was the Crone, and the mother of the Ventrue if not of all the clans.

In a tunnel between the lake and the ruined Greek colony of Cumae, closed off since World War II, she found the entrance to a temple to Manea. That temple is the centre of VII, cultists guarding the torpid body of what they believe to be Manea herself.

If the coterie can evade VII, they can make it inside the temple. Is the vampire in torpor Manea? They can try to wake her to find out, or settle for destroying the place. If VII are broken by the loss of their Goddess, will the coterie finally be free of looking over their shoulders? Even if the sleeping vampire isn't the Crone, she's still a Methuselah of great age—but the Fog of Eternity might make anything she has to say meaningless, even if the characters do somehow speak ancient Etruscan.

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Sun's up.

Remember that middle finger? Burned off about 30 seconds ago. Looked like a Slim Jim under the piercing gaze of an acetylene torch. Hissing. Splitting like a too-hot hot dog. Turning black.

I'm surrounded by bodies. I don't really remember it.

I'm pretty sure I went fucking apeshit.

I dunno what it was. Aw, that's a lie, isn't it? I know what happened. I waited too long to eat. We don't talk about it much, but it's like, what do they call it? Autoerotic asphyxiation. The pleasure of denial. You feed when you're fat, well, it's nice, but who gives a shit? You feed when you're hungry, though, and the taste becomes something bigger, badder, something transcendent.

I waited too long.

And the sun was coming up. I could feel that. Like I said, I could smell it.

They were dancing around me. The boy-toys. The bouncy bitches. Suddenly I was in the middle of it, and I was high on my own hunger and ready to fuck my own fear right in the ear. The way they were moving, I had this idea, I had this notion that I was like the beating heart in a living body and all these empty-headed dumbfucks were the blood cells, the red blood cells, swirling and orbiting and coming to me and through me and I was taking them in through my mouth and I was shitting them out through my mouthy aorta and the beat was pulsing and I was pulsing and—

I woke up here. Surrounded by bodies.

Sun coming through the one window. A bright beam of it. A spear.

Right here. Inches away.

I gave it the finger and it burned the finger off.

I let it take the hand, too.

Then the arm, up to the elbow. Sizzle, sizzle. Flesh smoke. Bone to ash. It hurt.

Jesus.

I don't know how I'm going to get home. I can't sleep here. Not among these bodies.

Gods and little fishes, I'm fucking tired.

Maybe I can find a tunnel. Or maybe I'll just walk out that door. I could do it. Open the door, prance out into the bright sun and get one last beautiful look before whoof, the smell of burning polyester, of crisping blood, of vampire skin in bubbling confit.

Depends on how much I hate what I just did. Or, how much I loved it.

Or how much I hate that I loved it.

Fuck.

Am I pleased with myself? Or disgusted? Questions I ask nightly. Hourly. Secondly. Is secondly a word? Christ, I just want to lay here. But I can't. I have to answer these questions. You don't, but I do. That's my life. My unlife. My non-zero-nights-nada-life.

Do I burn today?

Or do I thrive?

Can I keep on keeping on? And on? And on and on? How long does the music play?

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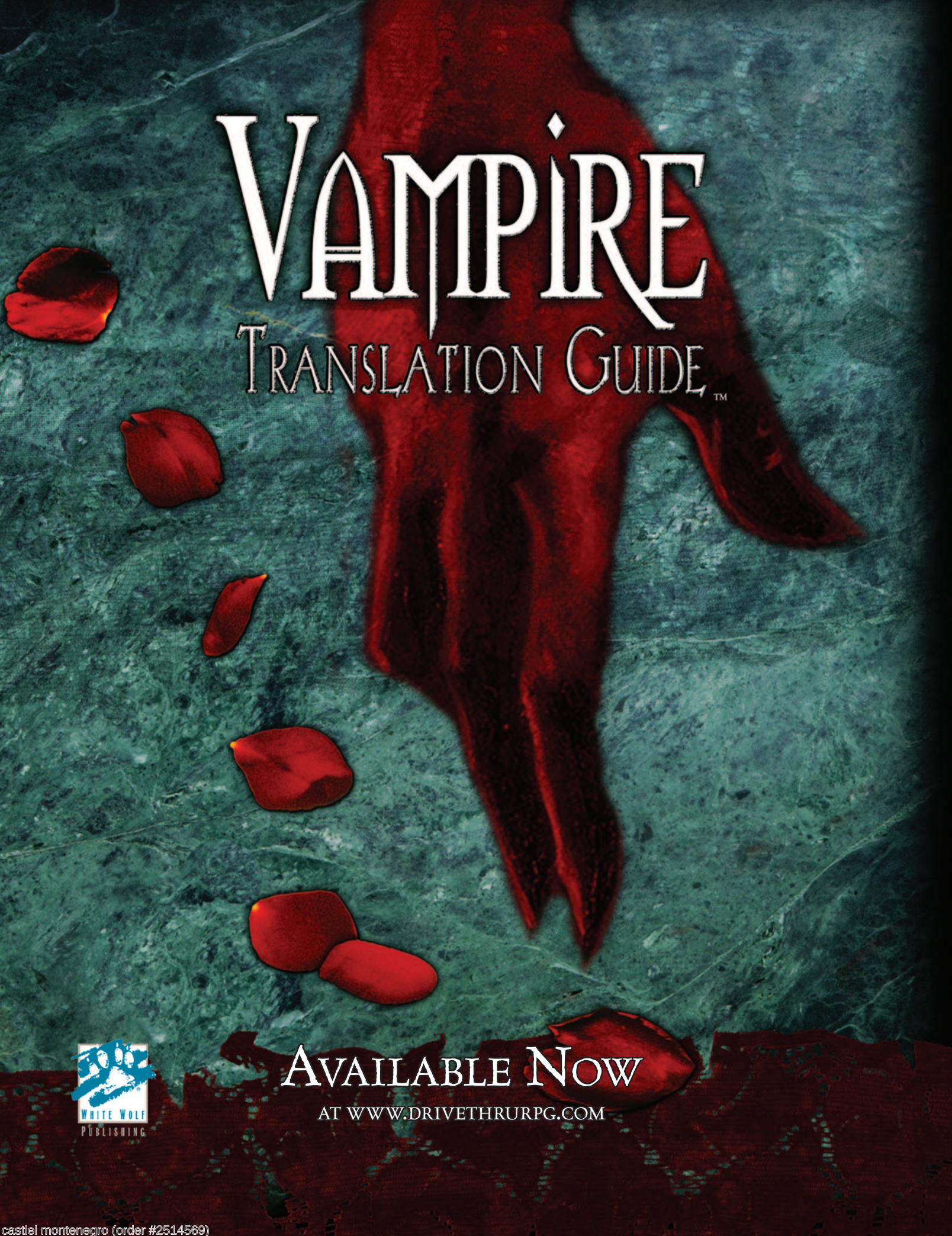

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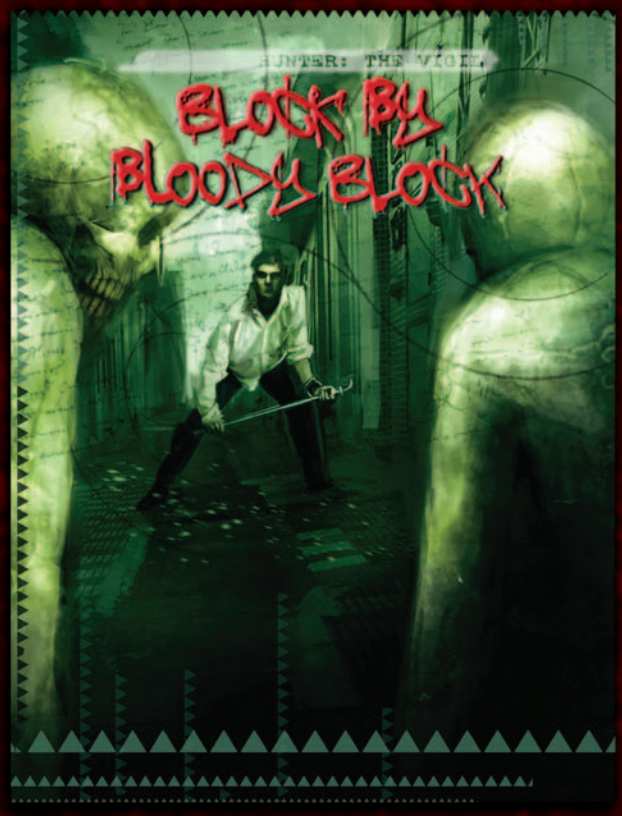

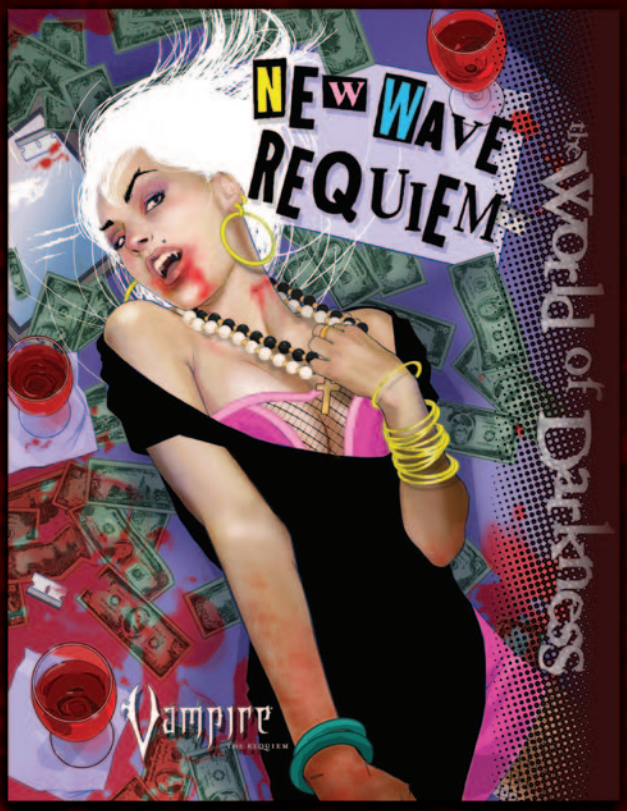

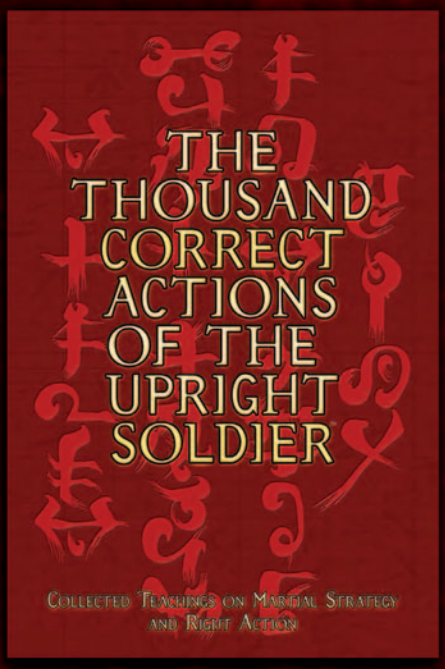

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