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

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Epitaph Layout: Brian Glass

Contributors: Justin Achilli, Shane DeFreest

Oscar Garza, Priscilla Kim

Ethan Skemp

COVER ART



by David Krentz

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DEAD MAN'S PARTY

Welcome, fiends and friends, to the White Wolf Publishing's newest online newsletter *Epitaph*. Within its pages we've decided to show you our adoring fans some of the "magic" that's behind the curtain of our sunless lives. Within *Epitaph*'s pages you will find tidbits and trinkets of knowledge and lore. You will find both previously unpublished material, information on upcoming releases and interviews with some of our most talented fiends. Lastly, and for good measure we have included a few terrifying tales as written by you, our fans.

Enjoy!

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BLOODLINES OF THE BLACK STREETS OF BABYLON (625-539 BCE)

The fragmented memory of the Kindred recalls the Babylonian empire as it was at its height — a magnificent paradise of jeweled ziggurats and moonlit alleyways, ruled from the shadows by the Damned. Kindred arose from the masses as subtle gods among men, and the streets of Babylon were stalked by the progenitors of some of the most powerful bloodlines that exist tonight. In those nights, demons and desert whispered their secrets to Kindred, and they were host to many strange powers.

Every golden age must come to an end, however, and the Damned of ancient Babylonia were decimated by a new predator born through blasphemous rite, the Edimmu. The seven spirits tore the empire apart from within, and the streets of Babylon were black with the dust of slain Kindred. The few who survived bound together for the sake of survival or fled from the Near East altogether, scattering their kind throughout the world.

ILTANI

You don't remember me, do you? That doesn't matter, darling, because I certainly haven't forgotten you. Now why don't I help refresh your memory?

Dark sorcerers and subtle assassins, members of the Iltani bloodline are as clever, spiteful and venomous as snakes.

They operate in stealth and secrecy, and are masterful manipulators and deceivers. Vipers are unusually adept at controlling their own emotions, and they cling to their anger in death, fueling and transforming its corrosive energy to suit their own purposes. A vampire meeting an Iltani for the first time could never hope to see or understand the depth of the seething anger that is forever just beneath the surface of her stoic gaze — at least, not unless she chooses to unleash her fury.

The rare and highly specialized poisons the Iltani use to weaken their enemies are distilled from anger, spite and resentment. Kindred scholars speculate that it is by channeling this dark, emotional energy and transforming it through the Beast that members of the bloodline are able to harness their unique abilities. Whether or not this theory has any veracity may never be ascertained, as members of the bloodline are uncommonly elusive and secretive.



Parent Clan: Mekhet

Bloodline Disciplines: Animalism, Auspex, Celerity, Obfuscate

Nickname: Vipers

Weakness: The Iltani have the same weakness to sunlight that curses all Mekhet (p. 109 of *Vampire: The Requiem*).

Additionally, an Iltani's Beast makes her blood seethe with anger and resentment, and never misses a chance to seize control. Whenever the player fails a Discipline roll, the Storyteller rolls one die. One a 1, the Iltani's Beast leaps to the fore, forcing the player to roll to avoid frenzy (two successes required; see p. 179 of *Vampire: The Requiem*).

History and Culture: The Iltani bloodline can be traced back to ancient Mesopotamia. The bloodline's founder, Nanshe Iltani, was a powerful priestess of the Coven of Nanaja, and a consult to the Kindred royalty of the shadow empire of Babylonia.

According to Kindred of the bloodline, Nanshe Iltani had a lover, Arahunaa, to whom she was deeply devoted.

One night, the En (a title for the Kindred emperor in ancient Babylonia) came to consult with Nanshe Iltani. When the En saw the beautiful Arahunaa, he immediately wished to possess her. Despite Nanshe Iltani's desperate pleading, En Isiratuu took Arahunaa back to the royal temple to live at his side. Adding to the tale of treachery, Arahunaa went with the En willingly — preferring an unlife of royal luxury over the companionship of Nanshe Iltani. The cruel actions of Arahunaa and the En enraged Nanshe Iltani, and she vowed from that night forward that she would be the one to bring about their Final Deaths.

She knew that she would never succeed in killing her betrayers outright and survive. Instead, she would be patient, using a subtler approach of stealth and sorcery, striking when the moment was right. It was Nanshe Iltani's desire for vengeance that led her to uncover the secrets associated with her bloodline tonight.

In the years that followed, Nanshe Iltani devoted herself to finding new ways in which her powers could be used to destroy Arahunaa and the En, taking many solitary walks through the moonlit steppes and deserts of Babylonia to reflect upon her goal. It was during these travels that Nanshe Iltani was believed to have developed her affinity for the venomous, lowly creatures of the earth: snakes, spiders, insects and scorpions. That she was drawn to such creatures is not surprising, as she herself was poisonous from her own festering resentment. She found that she could call the stinging, biting creatures of the desert to her side, and even influence their movements. After a time, she uncovered methods of condensing and transforming her anger, through the Beast within, into potent venoms. Eventually, she made use of the creatures she called upon to act as vessels of her spite, using their stings to deliver her poison to the victim. While Nanshe Iltani did not succeed in discovering a poison strong enough to lead to instantaneous Final Death, her newfound abilities were useful to her cause nonetheless.

One night, Arahunaa appeared to Nanshe Iltani in a dream. According to her former lover, the En had developed a terrible, dark gift, the likes of which the Damned of Babylon had never seen. Soon, the En would be unstoppable, and the empire would suffer for it.

Seeing that the news could be used to her advantage, Nanshe Iltani seized her chance. Feigning sympathy for her plight, Nanshe Iltani gave Arahunaa a scorpion with a poisonous sting to set upon the En. The venom of Iltani's scorpion did not directly cause the deaths of Arahunaa and the En, but it was potent enough to indirectly guide them to their ultimate end. It was through Nanshe Iltani's

cursed venom, members of the bloodline claim, that the Edimmu of legend were able to gain access to the En, tearing him apart from within and then subsequently killing Arahunaa in the massacre that followed.

In the chaos that occurred shortly after the death of the En of Babylonia, it is unclear what became of Nanshe Iltani. Since then, however, her progeny have spread throughout the world, refining her techniques and passing along her secrets in low whispers to each new generation.

Kindred of the bloodline almost always choose to sire a childe from an individual who was resentful or bitter during his mortal life. Iltani encourage their childe to cling to their anger, to fuel and strengthen it, but *never* to allow their fury to show. If anything, a Viper appears void of emotion. It is through an Iltani's ability to control her feelings that she gains her power — skillfully transforming and molding her vitriol into useful manipulative tools.

Initiates to the bloodline must prove that they can control their anger. New Kindred are treated harshly, chastised and provoked until the young vampire enters a state of anger frenzy. The initiate must successfully "ride the wave" (see pp. 178-181 of *Vampire: The Requiem*) to prove he has the self-control required to become an Iltani.

Reputation: Members of the Iltani bloodline are unusually guarded and secretive, even for the Damned. Many Kindred tonight believe that the Iltani bloodline does not exist at all, and that it is simply a legend from the long-forgotten past. Those who do know of their existence, however, fear them for their strange ways and deadly abilities.

Because many Kindred laugh at the notion of the Iltani bloodline's very existence (and the Iltani prefer to keep it that way), members of the bloodline are excellent assassins. While some Iltani may be willing to offer their services as an assassin, it usually comes with a steep price. Vipers are much more likely to use their abilities to manipulate rather than kill. They prefer to stand in the shadows, watching as their venom slowly tortures or drives their victim to madness.

Kindred who know of the Iltani also know never to cross one. An Iltani never forgets those who have betrayed her, and she uses memories of past transgressions to fuel her anger. A vampire who betrays an Iltani may not pay immediately, but he *always* pays dearly in the end.

Concepts: Kindred assassin, lord of the flies, manipulative sociopath, espionage agent, underhanded informant, stoic enforcer, herpetologist, power behind the throne, eccentric collector, mysterious apothecary

Mérges Sorcery

The Sumerian word “Mérges” can be translated to mean “poisonous” or “angry.” It is a fitting descriptor, therefore, for the brand of sorcery practiced by the Iltani bloodline. Iltani have the unique ability to distill their negative emotions (anger, spite, resentment, hatred, etc.) into rare and highly-specialized magical venoms. The secrets of Mérges Sorcery are jealously guarded and carefully passed down from one generation to the next. Iltani have been known to hunt down and kill undeserving Kindred who have learned of its mysteries.

All vampires who become skilled in Mérges Sorcery develop specialized, hollow fangs that can be used to administer venom. When not in use, the fangs fold back against the roof of the mouth and are enclosed in a membranous sheath.

Cost: The use of Mérges Sorcery always costs the character one Willpower point. It is the Iltani’s own will that instigates a reaction between his hatred and the Beast within, and it is through this reaction that the venomous curse is formed. Willpower spent in this manner does not add three dice to activation rolls. (However, subsequent extended Mérges Sorcery rolls, past the initial activation roll, may be augmented by spending a point of Willpower).

Mérges Sorcery does not have the same linear progression that other Disciplines do. It is a character’s mastery that dictates the highest level of the rituals he may learn. For example, a character with two dots in Mérges Sorcery can know an unlimited number of level one and level two rituals (provided the experience points are paid to learn each), but he may not learn any level-three Mérges Sorcery rituals until his Mérges Sorcery level is increased to 3. Each time a character acquires a dot of Mérges Sorcery (including at character creation), he gains a ritual of that level at no additional cost. New rituals can be bought at a cost of two experience points multiplied by the level of the ritual.

To master Mérges Sorcery, an Iltani must never let go of his hatred. Instead, he must fuel it, control it, and transform it through his Beast. In the time that passes after his Embrace, a Viper gradually forgets how to forgive others, and he cannot recall what the peace of absolution felt like as a mortal. To an Iltani, anger is fuel, but because he never ceases to carry corrosive emotions within himself, his own hatred slowly begins to eat away at his Humanity. A character’s dots in Mérges Sorcery, subtracted from 10, is the maximum to which his Humanity may rise. For

example, a character possesses Mérges Sorcery at level three. His maximum Humanity is therefore 7. If a character increases his Mérges score higher than his Humanity would normally allow, his Humanity immediately drops to the appropriate level and the player makes a Humanity roll to see if the character acquires a derangement in the process of heightening his occult knowledge. (See pp. 182-188 of *Vampire: The Requiem* for more on Humanity rolls and derangements.) If a character learns both Crúac and Mérges Sorcery, his Humanity is limited by the higher of the two traits.

Dice Pool: Resolve + Intimidation + Mérges Sorcery

Because negative emotions are the source and fuel of Mérges Sorcery, characters with the Vice Wrath add +1 to relevant rolls. Conversely, characters with the Virtue Temperance take a -1 penalty to relevant rolls.

Action: Extended. The number of successes required to activate a ritual is equal to the level of that ritual (so a level-three ritual requires three successes to enact). Each roll represents one turn of ritual casting. Note also that each point of damage incurred in a turn is a penalty to the next casting roll made for the character, in addition to any wound penalties suffered.

If a character fails to complete the ritual in time (such as by being sent into torpor before accumulating enough successes) or decides to cancel the ritual before garnering enough successes to activate it, the effect simply fails. Any Willpower expenditures made are not recovered.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The ritual fails spectacularly, and the character enters an immediate anger frenzy, which lasts for the rest of the scene.

Failure: The ritual fails entirely, but not dangerously. Willpower is consumed as normal, but the ritual has no effect.

Success: The ritual takes place as described.

Exceptional Success: In many cases, extra successes are their own reward, causing additional damage or conferring extra duration or capacity.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier Situation

+2 Power is turned against, or applies to, a vampire with whom the user has a blood tie (see p. 162 of *Vampire: The Requiem*).

- There are no threats or distractions to bother the character.

-1 to -3

The character is rushed or distracted, such as by invoking a ritual in combat or while trapped in a burning building. This penalty is cumulative with multiple distractions (such as by casting a ritual in combat during a hurricane). Successes gained on a meditation roll for the night (see p. 51 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**) offset interruption penalties on a one-for-one basis.

Venomous Bite

(Level-One Mérages Sorcery ritual)

An Iltani can distill her own emotions into specialized poisons that can be injected into her victims through the vampire's bite. As described on p. 157 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, a character attempting to bite as a combat action must first achieve a grapple hold on the target. Then, on the following turn, the attacker can use the venomous bite ability. An Iltani may not consume Vitae from victims in the same turn that she uses Venomous Bite.

The Iltani can activate this ritual at any time in a given night, whereupon she is capable of using Venomous Bite until the following sunrise. She does not have to reactivate the bite to use different kinds of poisons (see below).

Traces of the venom remain in the victim's body even after its effects have worn off, and are still present in the victim's remains after death – unless the Iltani covers her tracks by using Antidote (see below). Once delivered, the victim's player rolls *Stamina + Resolve - Toxicity Rating*. If the victim fails, the poison automatically takes effect and deals immediate damage equal to its Toxicity Rating, unless stated otherwise (see the poison rules in the Introduction to this book). The Toxicity Rating for Mérages Sorcery poisons is equal to: **Blood Potency + Mérages Sorcery**.

An Iltani can produce a number of venom doses per day equal to her Blood Potency.

Venomous Bite may be used multiple times on the same victim. If an Iltani chooses to do so, the victim may be affected by multiple poisons simultaneously. Similarly, an Iltani may administer multiple doses of a single type of poison to intensify its effects (see Compounding Poisons, below).

Compounding Poisons: Some Iltani poisons can be compounded, while others cannot. With subsequent





doses of the same poison, the effects may increase or intensify, depending on the nature of the venom.

When compounding a poison, the concentration of the toxin in the victim's blood increases with subsequent doses. The concentration of a poison within a character's blood is measured by his Toxin Level. As the Toxin Level increases, the effects of certain poisons become more pronounced or severe. There are five Toxin Levels: levels 1-2 are considered low amounts of a particular poison, level 3 is a moderate amount, and levels 4-5 indicate high or lethal amounts of a poison within the victim's blood. At levels 4-5, any vampire who drinks the blood of a poisoned victim might feel the effects as well. The player rolls *Stamina + Resolve* – the Toxicity Rating of the poison in the victim's blood. If the roll fails, the consuming vampire also suffers the effects of the poison. Members of the Brothers of Ypres bloodline (p. 22) are not subject to this, and can drink from victims of Mérges Sorcery poisoning with no ill effect.

When a poison with a specific duration is compounded, the duration resets and begins again from the last dose administered, without weakening or losing previous effects. For example, *Venom of Paralysis* (see below) is a poison that can be compounded. *Venom of Paralysis* completely paralyzes a victim for a number of hours equal to the Iltani's rating in Mérges Sorcery. If an Iltani with three dots of Mérges Sorcery administers *Venom of Paralysis*, the victim would normally be paralyzed for three hours. Instead, the Iltani waits two hours and administers a second dose. The duration resets, and the victim remains paralyzed for another three hours (five hours total).

If a poison cannot be compounded, its effects last for the stated duration. The duration cannot be lengthened by additional doses, although an Iltani *can* wait until the venom wears off and then administer a new dose.

The effects of poisons may be compounded as long as the toxin remains within the victim's system. In this way, an Iltani can repeatedly administer a poison to a victim night after night, slowly killing him or driving him mad.

Upon learning this ritual, the Iltani gains the ability to use a poison that causes muscle spasms, painful cramps and damage to the nervous system. In game terms, the poison simply inflicts physical damage based on the Iltani's master of Mérges Sorcery:

Mérges Sorcery Level	Type of Damage
1	Bashing
2	Lethal
3	Lethal
4	Lethal
5	Aggravated

A Viper can choose to inflict a less severe type of damage if she wishes to.

In addition, the character can learn to produce other types of poisons. Each of the poisons counts as a separate level one Mérges Sorcery ritual for purposes of experience points.

Sample Venoms

Venom of Paralysis: The victim is completely paralyzed for a number of hours equal to the Iltani's level in Mérges Sorcery. This poison causes no physical damage.

This poison can be compounded. With each dose successfully administered, the duration is extended in the typical fashion. No new effects are added.

Venom of Madness: A victim poisoned with Venom of Madness develops a derangement of the Iltani's choice for every Toxin Level (see pp. 96-100 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*). Each Toxin Level can either inflict a mild derangement or increase an existing derangement (whether one the victim already possessed or one caused by this poison) to severe. Therefore, a victim poisoned at Toxin Level 3 (with no preexisting derangements) could have three mild derangements or one that is severe and one that is mild. The effects of this venom last for a number of nights equal to the Iltani's level in Mérges Sorcery. Venom of Madness causes no physical damage.

This poison can be compounded. With each dose successfully administered, the duration is extended in the typical fashion.

Venom of Lethargy: Venom of Lethargy inflicts no damage, but saps the victim's drive to act, and slows his movements temporarily. The victim's Speed becomes equal to his Strength alone (rather than the usual Strength + Dexterity + 5). The victim's Initiative modifier becomes the lower of his Dexterity or Composure, and the Fast Reflexes Merit no longer applies. Venom of Lethargy lasts for a number of hours equal to the Iltani's level in Mérges Sorcery.

This poison cannot be compounded.

Control Anger

(Level-One Mérges Sorcery ritual)

An Iltani is able to work herself into anger frenzy with ease, and is adept at maintaining control over her mind and actions while in such a state. Thus, she is able to reap significant benefits from the heightened emotional state of frenzy. An Iltani who successfully performs Control Anger may activate its effects as an instant action at any time during the same night the ritual is performed. Once activated, the Iltani enters a state of frenzy that lasts for one scene (a character may choose to end the anger frenzy

prematurely if she wishes). This has the following effects on a character:

- The character ignores wound penalties until wounds become severe enough to render the character torpid.
- The character receives one extra die to all Physical Attribute rolls.
- The character receives a +1 bonus to all Mérges Sorcery rolls while in a controlled anger frenzy.
- The character has no mental deficits normally induced by a state of frenzy.

Plant Venomous Bite

(Level-Two Mérges Sorcery ritual)

An Iltani may plant her venom within a snake, spider, insect, scorpion or other stinging or biting creature. Many Vipers make use of Plant Venomous Bite to attack their victims from a safe distance, or to store their poisons for future use.

An Iltani can produce a number of venom doses per day equal to her Blood Potency. Rather than using Venomous Bite to immediately deliver her poison, she may choose to plant some, or all, of her daily doses within living creatures. Only insects and animals that naturally have a poisonous bite or sting may be used in this ritual. Once the venom has been planted, an Iltani may use the Animalism Discipline to further instruct the host. A single creature can hold one dose of venom, and the poison remains useable within it for a number of nights equal to the Iltani's Blood Potency + Mérges Sorcery, after which the creature dies.

The poison begins to take effect once the victim has been stung or bitten. Immediately after the creature has delivered its venom, it crumbles to ash. Once poisoned, the victim receives the usual chance to resist (Stamina + Resolve - Toxicity Rating). If the victim's resistance fails, the poison automatically takes effect. Poisons administered using Plant Venomous Bite may be compounded as described in Venomous Bite (above).

Invoke Vice

(Level-Two Mérges Sorcery ritual)

Anger can bring out the worst in people, causing an individual to say and do things she ordinarily wouldn't. An Iltani can invoke anger in his foe, temporarily causing her Vice to dominate her actions. While under the effects of Invoke Vice, the subject becomes obsessed with indulging her Vice, leaving all other obligations by the wayside. The victim will only pause in her pursuit if her own life is in danger, and only until the threat is resolved, after which the obsession returns. The Iltani must be able to see or

touch the victim in order to use this ritual. Invoke Anger lasts for a number of hours equal to the Iltani's level in Mérages Sorcery.

Antidote

(Level-Three Mérages Sorcery ritual)

The Iltani is able to remove all traces of venom or poison from any person or object. In living and undead creatures, Antidote stops the effects of poisoning (both natural and supernatural) in its tracks, and prevents any further damage or influence on the creature by the poison. Iltani often use Antidote on the remains of their victims to cover their tracks by removing trace amounts of residual poison from the body. Antidote may also be used to render naturally poisonous plants or animals harmless, or to purify poisoned food or water.

Venom Mastery

(Level-Four Mérages Sorcery ritual)

An Iltani with Venom Mastery can produce exceptionally deadly and powerful venoms. Venom Mastery poisons may be administered as described in Venomous Bite or Plant Venomous Bite (above). Each of these poisons counts as a separate level four ritual for purposes of experience points.

Venom of Weakness: The Venom of Weakness temporarily withers the victim's muscles, causing acute fatigue and weakness. For one night, all Physical Attributes are reduced by a number of dots equal to the Toxicity Rating of Venom of Weakness. This poison causes no physical damage (but reduces Health indirectly by reducing Stamina).

This poison can be compounded. With each dose successfully administered, the duration is extended in the typical fashion. No new effects are added.

Venom of the Slow Burn: The victim's skin becomes highly sensitive to light of any kind when poisoned with Venom of the Slow Burn. Even moonlight and artificial light slowly damages a vampire or mortal afflicted with this poison. At low to moderate Toxin Levels (levels 1-3), Slow Burn is more painful than deadly. However, the target still feels his flesh slowly and excruciatingly burning away, which usually causes the victim to avoid light altogether. Some Iltani are known to use the Venom of Slow Burn as a brutal means of extracting information from their foes. After paralyzing a victim, an Iltani administers the venom, then uses a flashlight as an instrument of torture.

Higher levels of the poison are much more deadly, as described below. The effects of this Venom of the Slow Burn last for a number of nights equal to the Iltani's level in Mérages Sorcery.

Damage: See Toxin Levels, below

This poison can be compounded, and the duration is extended in the typical fashion. The victim does not take damage from Venom of the Slow Burn until exposed to light (of any kind). With each dose administered, the length of time a victim can remain in the light before sustaining an additional point of damage shortens.

Toxin Level

1 (minimum)

2

3

4

Toxin effect

Exposure to any kind of light (natural or artificial) causes the victim noticeable discomfort. The character takes one point of bashing damage per hour he remains in the light. Additionally, when exposed to light, the victim takes a -1 penalty to all actions that require mental focus or concentration. The damage at this level is subtle enough that the target might not notice what is causing it.

Exposure to any kind of light (natural or artificial) causes the victim pain. The character takes one point of bashing damage per each 30 minute interval that he remains in the light. Additionally, when exposed to light, the character takes a -2 penalty to all actions that require mental focus or concentration.

Exposure to any kind of light (natural or artificial) causes the victim intense pain. The character takes one point of lethal damage per each 15 minute interval that he remains in the light. Additionally, the character takes a -3 penalty to all actions that are not devoted to seeking total darkness. At this point, the victim can feel his skin blister and burn under even fluorescent lights. Vampires must check for Rötschreck upon seeing any source of light (2 successes required).

Exposure to any kind of light (natural or artificial) causes the victim intolerable agony. The character takes one point of lethal damage per each five minute

interval that he remains in the light. Additionally, the character takes a -4 penalty to all actions that are not devoted to seeking total darkness. Vampires must check for Rötschreck upon seeing *any* source of light (3 successes required).

5 (maximum)

Exposure to any kind of light (natural or artificial) causes the victim's skin to bubble, blister and melt. The character, if mortal, takes one point of lethal damage per each 10 second interval that he remains in the light. For vampires, this damage is aggravated. Additionally, the character takes a -5 penalty to all actions that are not devoted to seeking total darkness. Vampires must check for Rötschreck upon seeing *any* source of light (5 successes required).

Venom of Deceit: A character under the influence of Venom of Deceit believes anything he is told to be the truth, no matter how absurd or irrational. The victim then acts under assumptions based upon the false fact for the poison's duration (regardless of being confronted with the truth). For example, a man who is told "your wife has been murdered" acts as he would if his wife had actually been murdered for as long as the poison remains in his system, even if he is confronted by his wife, alive and well. (He may attempt to rationalize her appearance by believing that she is some imposter trying to fool him, but he will not realize that she is truly alive until after the poison wears off.)

Upon successful administration of Venom of Deceit, the Iltani may state a single "fact" to the target. The statement should be no longer than a sentence or two, as the victim only remains impressionable for a matter of seconds (if a character rambles on for too long, how much the victim believes of what the Iltani tells him is at the Storyteller's discretion). The victim believes the statement for a number of hours equal the Iltani's level in Mérages Sorcery.

Venom of Deceit does not *directly* force the victim to behave in any particular way or feel any differently than he would ordinarily. For instance, a victim who is told "find the man who murdered your wife" may not actually do so. Having heard that statement, the victim now believes that a man has murdered his wife, but if he was waiting to cash in on the life insurance, he may not care much at all about finding her killer. He might book a trip to Tahiti with his mistress, instead. The statement "you are looking for the man who murdered your wife" might seem more

effective, but in this case, the same man would probably just sit around until the poison wears off — believing the statement to be true, but wondering what possessed him to set out looking for his wife's murderer when he would rather be in Tahiti with his mistress.

This poison can be compounded. With each dose successfully administered, the duration is extended in the typical fashion. No new effects are added. Venom of Deceit inflicts no physical damage.

Master Rage

(Level-Five Mérages Sorcery ritual)

Master Rage is a more powerful version of Control Anger (above). The Iltani has mastered her hatred, and may enter anger frenzy at will. As with Control Anger, An Iltani who successfully performs the Master Rage ritual may activate its effects as an instant action at any time during the same night the rite is performed (the character rolls Wits + Intimidation + Mérages Sorcery to activate the effects of the ritual). Once activated, the Iltani enters a state of frenzy that lasts for one scene (a character may choose to end the anger frenzy prematurely if she wishes). Frenzy initiated by the Master Rage ritual has the following effects on a character:

- An Iltani ignores wound penalties to dice pools. The character can also avoid torpor for a short time. Once the character's last Health box is marked with lethal damage, the character remains active for a number of turns equal to her Blood Potency + Mérages Sorcery before falling into torpor. The character cannot avoid torpor at this point (that is, the player can't spend Vitae for the character to heal some damage and dodge falling into torpor), but she has a few extra seconds to exact retribution.
- The character adds two dice to any Physical Attribute roll.
- The character receives a +2 bonus to all Mérages Sorcery rolls while in a controlled anger frenzy.
- The character has no mental deficits normally induced by a state of frenzy.
- While Master Rage is in effect, an Iltani's anger is so powerful that it becomes infectious. If a Viper chooses to do so, she may loose her anger upon her foes. For each turn the Iltani chooses to use this ability, enemies within a radius of 50 yards for every success rolled (so 100 yards for 2 successes, for example) must make a contested Resolve + Composure roll -3 to avoid falling into an anger frenzy themselves. This only affects creatures with the capacity to enter some kind of berserk frenzy (vampires, werewolves and other supernatural creatures at the Storyteller's discretion), but only vampires take the -3 penalty to avoid it.

RISE OF THE COVENANTS: ANCIENT EGYPT (CIRCA 1279 BCE)



Transcribed from a recording discovered by agents of the Lancea Sanctum:

My name is Renfro Delaney and, as I sit here staring at this, how shall I put it, extraordinary find, I can't help but wonder what it must have been like for one of us to exist in ancient Egypt. Certainly, there could be no more than half a dozen Kindred in any specific village, unlike Rome to the northwest or even Delhi to the east. Desert sand for miles in every direction, a single strand of water your only source of life and even then, the flooding of the Nile every year had to be particularly devastating. How did they find sustenance? Were the ancient Egyptians willing sources of food? Were they that open and engaged with the Kindred of the time?

This papyri (sound of papers being shuffled about), these hieroglyphs, this tome — was religion so important to these people that they willingly offered their necks to us? True, the dead were often revered. But what about the undead? How much control did they actually have over the kine?

The Sun, our anathema, was worshipped, apparently, not just by mortals, but by the Kindred of the age. How was this even possible? How could they survive?

Who is this Renfro Delaney guy? An alias of some sort? Ask your crazy British pal what he knows!

Could there be Kindred from that time period around tonight? If so, what do they recall? Certainly the fog of time would have consumed most of their memories. What secrets do they still possess? Are there more of these glorious artifacts outlining the rituals they performed over three millennia ago?

Whatever the cost, in time and resources, I...that is we, must find out!



Whoever took these photographs knows what he's doing. This appears to be the story of a resurrection of sorts and it can be interpreted in various ways — I know that. On the other hand, if you look at these hieroglyphics, we see the worshipping of a mummy, the removal of his organs after death, where they are placed into jars filled with honey and then stuffed into his sarcophagus. Then, look at this! The night after he was placed into his tomb, he arose with stories of a great battle with...is this Osiris? Yes! And like Ra each morning, he returns from the underworld having bested the god of death to bring life and renewal to his people. He rises again, only at night, without Ra to guide him. Osiris, the god of the underworld, is his master now! Amazing!

This, of course, begs the question: Was this mindset specific only to the vampires of ancient Egypt or did ancient Romans create rituals from their religious beliefs of, say Mars or Neptune? The Acolytes were quite likely babbling their gobbledegook across Western Europe by then. Certainly, the Dragons came to exist thanks to Vlad the Impaler. The Sanctified must be grateful to Christ for their beliefs, as without him, Longinus wouldn't matter a whit. The Carthian Movement, society's bitter rebels, couldn't possibly have existed without a society to rebel against. Which leads us to the Invictus and, if you ask them, they've been around since the Big Bang.

(sound of a heavy object sliding across a flat surface, followed by pages turning) This text, however, implies that several of the various cults that existed at the time of Ramses the Great centered on powerful female goddesses, figures not terribly unlike the Crone. So, did the Circle exist then? Probably in some form or another, but undoubtedly quite different from the Acolytes we know tonight. These cults might be a part of the Circle or they could be the first known gathering of Kindred into a formal covenant in our history!

It's possible, then, that there was a covenant or covenants before the Invictus ever coined the phrase and that Kindred were not simply relegated to associating with just their own clans.

My god! These vampires believed this mythological bullshit! They actually played into it. How fucking brilliant!

This Delaney guy seems to have a hard-on for the Invictus. See if you can find out what he has on them, or what they have on him.

Using inductive logic, it is difficult to believe that vampires, social creatures whether they want to believe so or not, would have to be looking for excuses to get together. It's not like they had cell phones to communicate with or intercontinental jets for travel to and fro. There had to be more basic methods. Get-togethers. The Roman Kindred did it with their Imperial Senate. How did their precursors do it?

Vampires need each other to survive, no? Even though we despise each other, attempt to murder one another and squabble endlessly over minutiae, co-existence is essential for the survival of our, would you say, race? Species?

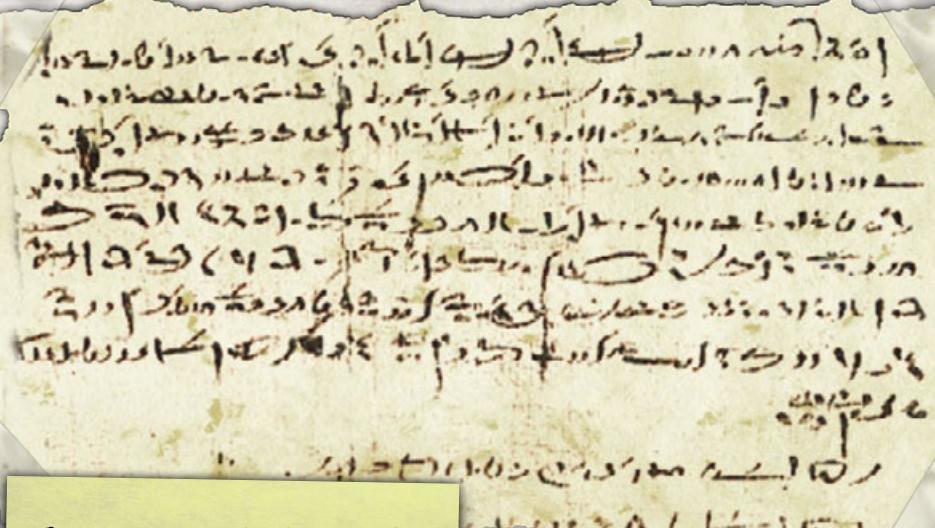
I am having difficulty focusing. I... one moment.

(footsteps, then a door creaking, muted scuffle, and then a gasp of pain) Better. Now, let's assume that, yes, there were other covenants, groups of like minded Kindred from different backgrounds and clans of the time. These groups would almost certainly be religious in nature. Religion dictated the lives of these people, after all. Thus, we must conclude that there was some form of peaceful coexistence amongst the Kindred of the time. A covenant of like minds and beliefs. Perhaps a Covenant of Ra, made up of Kindred desiring knowledge on how to break their curse, searching for control and power in the region, searching for ways to expand their influence further, seeking information on their brethren and the world in general and hoping for the freedom to travel vast distances across the desert through day and night. There is no evidence to say as much, but, knowing what we are, what we need, isn't it reasonable, even deductively logical?

Where did they meet then? This map implies deeply buried tombs beneath temples and pyramids all across Egypt, perhaps all interconnected by a tunnel system. I mean, this one here shows the Sphinx, for God's sake!

Pardon the randomness of my thoughts. This is beyond anything I've ever seen before. The implications are enormous. Nothing of what we know today is as we were told. The Great Covenants are not the end-all-be-all of Kindred society. They were not the beginning as some would lead us to believe! They are, in fact, mere stepping stones to what we are now. But, stepping stones from what? And to what? What are we becoming?

Where is the fucking map? If this exists, we need to find it before anyone else does.



This was supposedly discovered in Thebes and not by the Sanctified. How can we authenticate it? Could it actually be text of a previously unknown Theban ritual?

Use of the covenants: ancient egypt (circa 1279 bce)

(crack of the spine of a book) This book suggests the existence of a cult, perhaps even the equivalent of a modern covenant, dedicated to the Egyptian god of the Sun, Amun-Ra. The inscribed rituals are suspiciously akin to those of the Sanctified, as a former associate of mine has already verified. Granted, she wouldn't say they were Lancea Sanctum rituals, but I surmised that she was holding something back that terrified her. I knew, at that moment, I would not be able to let her leave with the knowledge of what I had found. Destroying her saddened me, but I just couldn't let these beautiful texts fall into her hands and the hands of those who would destroy them. They are mine now and no one, not even a former lover, will take them from me! Make that one more thing that those sanctimonious bastards owe me. I'm sorry, Melissa. Truly. (pages turning sharply)

Where was I? Oh, yes. Carbon dating has put this tome at well over 1000 years prior to the birth of Christ, which makes the Lancea Sanctum look foolish, don't you think? If they had found this book before me, I'm sure it, and I, would have been put to the flames by now. It's nice to have something in my hands that could conceivably ruin them.

Could these rituals be that powerful? Could they actually allow a vampire to walk in the light of day? Could they allow me? (papers being gathered) All I know is that I must try. I must find a way! (tape ends)

Can you see the implications? If the Dragons or the Sanctified hear about this, we could have ourselves a civil war. Not even taking into account a Masquerade breach, this could lead to Kindred extinction! We must destroy this material at all costs. You were right to bring this to me!

Did Delaney make copies?

Ironically, the Sanctified claim the angel Amoniel led them to the tombs of Thebes. Further, Amoniel is a derivation of the Egyptian god Amun-Ra. Coincidence?

Turning Point

— Egypt's 19th Dynasty

The most important aspects of life in the Middle East prior to Christ's birth were the distant settlements and the difficulty in traveling between them. Slaves, taxes, military troops and foodstuffs were regularly transported up and down the Nile from Upper Egypt and the Great Delta to Lower Egypt, Nubia and points still further south. This was the quickest and safest form of travel in Egypt, although caravans crossed the harsh desert terrain both west and east of the Nile as well. Most territories in the region were made up of city-states united under a common ruler who would report directly to the Pharaoh. Travel and taxes were regulated by these city-states.

The one common theme throughout northern Africa was religion, specifically, the gods of ancient Egypt. In the late 18th dynasty, a Pharaoh by the name of Akhenaten attempted to monotheize the people. There was only one god, whose name was Aten, he proclaimed, and Egypt would be united under him. Akhenaten faced fierce battles within the religious "community," primarily from the Cults of Set and Horus, although the Cults of Ra, Anubis and Osiris also grumbled. Cults of the female gods, particularly Isis and Bast, were curiously silent, preferring

to remain hidden and continuing their practices out of the new Pharaoh's line of sight. The plan worked, until the Cult of Set branded them all as traitors to Akhenaten's beliefs and began turning them in to Aten's forces.

A brief civil war between the Kindred of the various cults erupted, followed by numerous alliances and betrayals. In the end, the Cult of Set was said to have been utterly destroyed, the Cult of Horus vanished into the eastern desert and the Cult of Anubis was weakened to the point where it presumably absorbed into the other factions (probably that of Osiris). The cults disappeared from public view and from that of the spies of Aten, but their squabbling continued until just after the coronation of Ramses the Great as Pharaoh of Egypt.

Ramses, the progenitor of Egypt's 19th Dynasty, returned religious control to each city-state and its preferred deity. Akhenaten's previous monotheistic approach fractured and the people rejoiced at the return to power of the gods and their priests. The Kindred priests realized that there was greater strength in diversity and unified the various cults. These "covenants" worked together to keep Egypt safe from outsiders, to keep power within the

religious sects and, most importantly, to gather greater wealth and control for themselves.

They succeeded admirably.

The One: 1352 BCE – 1280 BCE

The Pharaoh Akhenaton took power away from the various gods and consolidated it into a single deity called Aten, “*The One*.” He enforced his edicts with the support of various smaller sects, notably those of Set and Horus, who agreed to worship under Aten’s name. With the military at his side, Akhenaten’s dream of a united religion flourished. The followers of Egypt’s “lesser” gods, however, continued to worship secretly, waiting for the moment they could emerge from Aten’s shadow. The Kindred urged their herds to fight and rebel against any who would silence them. Religion had become subsumed by the politics of Akhenaten and one could not be discussed without the other.

Akhenaten received very little public support from the people, but had the military to back his edicts. Unfortunately, the commoners of Egypt were suffering and began to revolt. Poor treatment, a shortage of food and forced monotheism created a bitter rift between the nobility and the commoners. When Akhenaten died, the dynasties that followed tried to continue his legacy, but nothing lasted. The reign of the monotheistic Pharaohs was coming to a brutal end. The Cults of Ra, Osiris, Anubis, Bast and Isis came together in an unprecedented covenant of religious unity, led by Kindred from each of the clans. Their herds rose with them and demanded change from the mortal leadership, including protection from persecution by the old followers of Aten and, to a lesser extent, the worshippers of Set and Horus, as these two cults had attempted numerous uprisings against Ra in the past.

Seeing the turmoil in play, a Kindred priest of Ra, the most powerful figure in the pantheon of Egyptian gods, devised a plan. He watched the signs of unrest and felt that an uprising was imminent. This priest not only wanted to take advantage of the ensuing chaos, he wanted to control its aftereffects. He believed that a Pharaoh was needed that could unite the country and return peace to a land riddled with strife, beset by enemies and devastated by natural disasters (sandstorms and the yearly flooding of the Nile Delta had particularly devastating effects during this time). He would control the Pharaoh and perhaps even allow him to drink from the blood of Ra.

The time was finally right for the priest’s plans to bear fruit, plans that would change the way Kindred survived, worshipped and thought.

The Many: 1279 BCE – 1212 BCE

That fruit came in the form of Egypt’s 19th Dynasty, led by Pharaoh Ramses II, also known as Ramses the Great. Ramses

proclaimed an end to Aten’s stranglehold over the other gods in favor of city-state worship, with a central god to bind the others and bring them together under a united covenant.

Ra was chosen to lead. Ramses gave the “lesser” gods domain over their own cities in exchange for their support of his programs. As a result, temples of worship began sprouting up all across the country. The Cult of Ra ruled over Karnak and cities that would later be named after the Greeks who would conquer Egypt, such as Luxor, Thebes and Abydos. Anubis’s main shrine was in the city of Khemennu. Cult leaders of Osiris ruled from Naqad, Bast’s actually built their own city, Bubastis, while the Cult of Isis claimed the city of Tanis. The High Priest of the Cult of Ra had final say over disputes and territory rights throughout the kingdom.

Wealth poured in from all corners of Egypt and the surrounding lands. Caravans brought back riches from the East and trade was never more prosperous. Ra and Osiris gained prominence amongst the Kindred faithful, as did Isis and Bast. Mekhet joined with Gangrel, who gathered with Nosferatu and Daeva to solidify the lines of communication and caravan safety for travel to the four winds. Only the Ventrue, in general, seemed left out, preferring to organize to the northwest rather than split power amongst the others. Pharaoh Ramses was in complete control of Egypt and his subjects were happy.

This was the exact moment that the priest of Ra had been waiting for. A month into Ramses’ reign, the priest struck, feeding droplets of his own Vitae to the Pharaoh. For four consecutive nights, the priest returned to the king’s bedchambers and fed more of his blood to the already powerful mortal. Ramses became both a ghoul to the Servants of Ra and one of the most powerful rulers in history.

Turning Ramses into a ghoul was genius. His very presence helped stabilize the region. He ruled for over six decades and lived an unheard-of 90 years, more than three times the average age of the typical male Egyptian. He was able to retain a great deal of influence over the affairs of both the Damned and his human subjects. Fortunately, it was a time of great prosperity for Kindred and kine alike.

Aside from being a uniting influence on his people and the surrounding region, he was also known as the great builder. During his inordinately long reign, Ramses ordered the construction of the Pyramids of Giza, the Sphinx and the Sanctuary of Abu Simbel to honor and placate the gods, as well as to create an eternal legacy for himself.

Ramses was also a warrior and led his armies to battle often and ruthlessly against the Hittites to the north. From a military standpoint, however, he is recognized more for crafting the first known peace treaty in human history than for the battles he waged. This treaty might have been suggested, in part, by the Kindred, who had come

to believe that their very survival was dependant upon mutual cooperation. They also feared the growing power of Greece to the northwest and Persia to the northeast. With the Hittites as their allies and not their enemies, Egypt was able to bring peaceful stability to the region.

But the peace could not last.

The Conquered: 1212 BCE – CE 1953

Although mortals believe Ramses finally succumbed to old age, no Kindred records exist detailing how the great Pharaoh really died. What is certain is that Egypt began to slowly disintegrate. The Nile flooded more frequently and with more spectacularly disastrous results. A great drought hit the region as well, lasting for 30 years, and the people once again began to suffer from famine, disease and extreme poverty.

Four hundred years of internal bickering and strife led to Egypt being invaded for the first of many times. Nubians from the south, Assyrians and Persians from the north, and then, in 332 BCE, Alexander the Great attacked with a massive invasion force from Greece.

The Greek invasion and subsequent takeover was so complete, in fact, that entire cities soon changed their names to compliment the new regime. The conquering leaders, retaining the title of Pharaoh, took Greek names and became some of the most well known figures in history. They also allowed many of the old Egyptian ways to continue and flourish. Greece held on for almost 300 years, until Rome decided to expand her Empire.

In 47 BCE, Cesar invaded and installed Cleopatra as queen. Religion, language and society in Egypt changed once again. The Romans persecuted anyone claiming reverence to the old pantheon of gods. Kindred and human cults alike disappeared altogether or adapted and conformed. Gone were the covenants of the Sun and the Dead. Gone were the cults of Isis and Bast. In their place, Camarilla vampires basked in the glory of a new world. The upstart Christian vampires of the Lancea et Sanctum overran Thebes and discovered secrets not meant for the eyes of any but the devoted of Ra and Osiris. Only followers from the cult of Anubis survived, refusing to succumb to invasion and disappear like their brethren. The Anubi would continue to do what they always did, prepare the dead for their journey to the afterlife.

Once the Romans conquered and altered Egyptian culture, the history of the cults vanished with their Kindred followers. It is believed that, in order to survive, several bloodlines were created, their numbers agreeing to voluntary torpor so that they may one night rise again. Whatever happened, enough evidence exists for Kindred scholars to conclude that the great covenant of Egypt became fractured and dissolved due to the many outside influences of multiple conquerors.

For 2700 years, from 750 BCE until CE 1953, Egypt was a conquered land. To this night, the bitter struggles of the Egyptian Kindred and various other supernatural influences from outside the region attempt to gain control over the country, her ancient secrets and those who have called Egypt home since the dawn of history.

The Legacy of Ancient Egypt

The prominence of a unified pantheon of gods brought Kindred from all five known clans and from every spiritual belief in Egypt together, but it was the combination of isolation, threats from invaders, natural disasters and religious persecution that finally forced the disparate factions to work together for the common good.

Mekhet, Gangrel, Nosferatu, Daeva and to a lesser extent Ventru Kindred joined forces to bring the beliefs of their various gods to their respective herds. The power of those gods was intoxicating, as creatures of shadow could, through study and devotion, attempt to actually walk beneath Ra's withering gaze. Monsters of terrible rage and mystery, through rituals of blood and sacrifice, could explore the underworld and return with horrifying stories of their travails.

The influx of Invictus Kindred into the region, however, meant that such cooperation was sadly doomed to fail. Polytheism became a relic of the past. Monotheism, in the form of Judaism, Christianity and finally Islam, began its relentless expansion across the globe. Kindred began adopting these religions as a matter of survival. Those who dared preach the old ways were hunted and destroyed, or hid from their persecutors for centuries on end.

Some Kindred proclaimed their heresies in such a way as to not threaten the new religions, preaching mythology rather than dogma. Others took their secrets with them into torpor or buried them in tombs designed never to be discovered.

Two Prominent Bloodlines Emerge — The Bak-Ra and The Usiri

The Anubi are the only previously known bloodline to come from the cults of ancient Egypt. Comprised mostly of Gangrel, the Sworn of Anubis have long pestered the followers of Longinus, but have too few numbers, resources and organizational skills to make any kind of impact against the Sanctified. However, word has recently surfaced of two previously unheard of bloodlines claiming to be descendants of the Egyptian gods:

The Bak-Ra, which translates to "Servant of Ra," was the first and most prominent bloodline to form from the fracturing of the covenant of gods. They were determined to keep the history and secrets of the sun god hidden from their conquerors. Many Bak-Ra agreed to voluntary torpor, hidden beneath the buried tombs of their ancestors,

unaware that most of their knowledge would be lost to the very sleep they hoped would keep them safe.

The Usiri, Warriors of the Dead, also chose voluntary torpor to hide the secrets of Osiris from the invaders. The secrets of the Usiri, however, were supposedly hidden somewhere in the Underworld, where only the followers of the god of the dead could retrieve them.

In modern nights, those Bak-Ra and Usiri who have been discovered and awakened from torpor bring with them more questions and fears than answers. What secrets rose with them from their graves? What memories, if any, can be culled from their rotting shells? Most importantly, how does the Lancea Sanctum reconcile their own history with that of these bloodlines?

The New Age

The Bak-Ra and the Usiri are the two newest bloodlines to emerge from ancient Egypt, joining the Gangrel-dominated Anubi. What of the traitorous Cults of Set and Horus? Did they create bloodlines before their destruction? What of Bast and Isis, whose followers are believed to have simply melded into the Circle of the Crone? Is it possible that they, too, sired specific bloodlines to protect the secrets of their gods? How many thousands of unexplored and still-hidden tombs are buried beneath the sands of Egypt? It might simply be a matter of time before something arrives to create havoc and chaos for the Kindred of the modern age.

The Roman Empire brought about great change, but it was the culture of Egypt during the reign of Ramses the Great that heralded the concept of peaceful coexistence among immortal enemies for a greater good – survival.

The covenants of the modern age owe a huge debt to the first covenant of Egyptian gods. Only the Circle of the Crone can say with any amount of validity that it existed in some form or another at that pivotal temporal flashpoint. It's a pity that the Circle has little interest in its own history, as the cumulative knowledge it could have attained from keeping records from that time might have increased its power in modern nights across the region. For what it's worth, the Circle's small part in the formation of the first covenant of vampires is known by a few ancient Kindred who did keep journals of their Requiem.

Modern Nights, Modern Covenants

— Flashpoint in Time

Most Kindred historians agree that the formation of the covenant of gods during Egypt's 19th Dynasty was the beginning of a new era. It provided a basis of trust amongst predators and their prey. Those same historians also agree that such trust simply cannot last among the suspicious, power-hungry Kindred.

But, history, as they say, is written by the victors. If that is so, then perhaps those who still sleep beneath the sands of the Nile will once again awaken to inflict their power and invoke their secrets upon an unsuspecting and unprepared world.

FLASHPOINT IN MODERN NIGHTS

What was once unheard of during the reign of Ramses the Great is commonplace now. Kindred bicker with one another over who should control what and why. Canals and levees keep the Nile at bay and travel is not only unrestricted, but relatively safe. Monotheism has reared its single head once more and followers of Ramses who might awaken will have their hands full just trying to understand what has happened to their world. Has Akhenaten returned to exact his vengeance or has madness consumed them?

Here are a few story hooks that will bring the unknown horrors of the past to your **Vampire: The Requiem** chronicle, whether it takes place now, or during some other time in distant memory:

- Tonight, the Invictus reigns supreme in most parts of Egypt, while the Circle of the Crone hides out and converts as many followers into its covens as it can. The Sanctified have fortified Thebes and allow few outsiders to venture into or out of the city. The Carthian Movement travels from city to city, attempting to excite the masses with anti-establishment propaganda. The Ordo Dracul, however, seems preoccupied with the city of Giza, an ancient home to the Cult of Ra. In fact, the Dragons outnumber any other covenant there by a three-to-one margin. Have they unearthed an ancient Kindred buried beneath one of the pyramids or have they discovered something even more terrifying?
- The Lancea Sanctum has learned that a new bloodline has crawled from the sand pits of Egypt to test their faith. Creatures called the Bak-Ra are claiming, *publicly*, that the rituals and secrets of Thebes rightfully belong to them and that they were stolen by the thieves of the false prophet Longinus. Can the Bak-Ra prove their claims and can the Sanctified even allow them to try?
- The Book of the Dead is considered by most scholars to be a simple funeral text, a collection of hymns, spells, rituals and instructions designed to give the dead a tool to overcome the number of obstacles they'll encounter on their journey through the afterlife. It is, however, so much more. In the hands of those who have been to the Underworld and fought with the spirits, communed with the gods and answered the riddles of fate so that they may return to our realm, it is a key to greater power and understanding. In Naqad, one such scholar who died and was reborn, has awakened from centuries of slumber with his sanity and his memories intact. He must be found and either destroyed, if possible, or recruited.

I AM THE VERY MODEL OF EXPERIMENTAL PUBLISHING

By Eddy Webb, Alternative Publishing Developer

About this time last year (almost to the day, in fact) I wrote an article for the eQuarterly called "Just What The Hell Are Alternative Products?" I had worked as AP Developer for nearly four months when I wrote it, so we were all learning what alternative products (now collectively called "alternative publishing" or just "AP") were really all about. The editor gave me a page to talk a little bit about AP, so I decided to take the opportunity to look back before looking ahead.

I'VE INFORMATION PDF, POD AND OTHER THINGS

The workhorse of AP has certainly been the Storytelling Adventure System line of downloadable adventures and adventure support materials. As of February 17th, we have nineteen SAS products that cover all of our current **World of Darkness** lines as well as **Exalted** and **Scion**. Our website team also whipped up a brand-new SAS site for us, which allows you to easily browse the variety of products we have.

We've also put out more PDF-exclusive products, like **Block by Bloody Block** for **Hunter: The Vigil** and **New Wave Requiem** for **Vampire: The Requiem**. These were products that I felt added a lot of value to their respective lines, but they wouldn't work as traditional releases. When we don't have to hit a certain page count, we can put out products with a much tighter focus and really get into the nuances of a smaller topic (such as building a city for hunters to play in, or examining the nature of vampires in the 1980s of the United States). We're just starting to explore the potential of these kinds of products, but already some fans have gotten really excited about the possibilities.

We also had a growing print-on-demand program, but due to some complications with that partnership, we temporarily suspended our PoD products earlier this year. We will be taking time to make sure that when print-on-demand books are offered again, that they will be of the quality that you as customers and we are publishers demand from our products, and a number of our PDF-exclusive products will have PoD alternatives as soon as we can offer them. But like the title of this piece says, a lot of this experimental, and like all experiments, some just don't work out the first time through.

THE FUTURE IS EXCITING AND REALLY NOT ETHEREAL

So with all that being said, we have a lot of new and exciting products coming down the line in 2009.

- **Collection of Horrors:** A new twist on the SAS line, this is an anthology of scenes, characters and props rather than a pre-constructed story. Each file has one scene, one character and one prop inspired by one of the stories in the **Hunter Horror Recognition Guide**. Even cooler, some of the props are audio files that you can play right at the gaming table – a recording from a reporter, a voicemail message, an autopsy report and even an interrogation scene make up some of the audio possibilities in this collection.

- **Ready-Made Player Character Groups:** The SAS adventures make it easy for a busy Storyteller to download a story and go, but very few of them offer pre-existing characters to use in those adventures. To fill this need, we're going to offer pre-constructed player character groups for each of our **World of Darkness** games, along with advice for Storytellers on how to build stories around that group. Once they're available, you'll be able to download absolutely everything you need for a game right to your desktop. Well, everything except pencils and dice, and there are even some companies that have cardboard dice you can download....

- **More AP Supplements:** We're not stopping with just **Hunter** and **Vampire** with our small, focused products. We have a PDF in the works for **Changeling: The Lost** covering goblin markets, as well as one for **Exalted** about the Incarna. We also have a product coming up covering the **Testament of Longinus** for **Vampire**. And there's even more ideas we're kicking around for the future.

SO HAVE SOME NEW SCION COMPANION BONUS MATERIAL

To celebrate a year of experiments and exciting new prospects to come, I pulled together some of the material that ended up getting cut for various reasons early in the development process of the **Scion Companion** (one of our biggest and most successful AP ideas last year) and compiled it here for you. Enjoy!

WHAT'S UP WITH THE TITLES IN THIS ARTICLE?

Look up the lyrics of "Major-General's Song" by Gilbert and Sullivan, used in their musical "The Pirates of Penzance," then read them again. You'll get it.

OMUKADE

Deep in the mountains of Japan are said to dwell the mukade, enormous centipedes with a taste for human flesh. These are the children of the Omukade, the Great Centipede, an avatar of Crom Cruach. The Omukade so hates the Amatsukami that it spends the whole of its existence burrowing upwards, eternally seeking sight of the heavens so that it might climb into the vault of the sky and eat the sun, the moon and all the stars. For the most part, though, it thrashes about within the rocky skin that is Crom Cruach, going forever in disoriented circles.

Occasionally, however, its thrashings crack open a passage between Crom Cruach and the World. These passages are never large enough to allow the Omukade — a creature of massive size and power — to enter the World. It throws itself, again and again, against the stone, until it tires itself. Then, as the sun rises in the sky above, the Omukade burns, and convulsively vomits forth into the World a strange, mudlike foam that is filled with eggs and then flees back into the Underworld.

The Omukade itself is literally miles long, covered with a fine black carapace that shines like obsidian in the moonlight. Its hundred legs are each tipped with a black spine capable of skewering several men at once, and its horrible mandibles drip with a viscous pus-like white poison (analogous to Jörmungandr's Venom; see *Scion: Hero*, p. 182). The places between its segments crawl with a thousand-thousand squirming poisonous centipedes, making even striking at Omukade's weak points incredibly hazardous.

MUKADE

Small amounts of the foam often pass through the cracks and tumble out of the openings in the World, coming to rest on the sides of mountains where they quickly gather fallen leaves and other camouflage that hides them from the sight of mortals. These eggs grow over time, coming to full size within a year. Most of the time, they are found by local kami, who destroy them out of principle, or by the mountain-dwelling tengu, who consider them a great delicacy.

Occasionally, however, even these efforts may miss one or two of them, and the mukade hatches a year after it was laid, scuttling down into the cracks of the mountain where it quickly grows to maturity, achieving an awe-inspiring size of some fifty to eighty feet in length. At that point, the flesh of creatures beneath the earth can no longer sustain it, and it surfaces, seeking fresh meat from large animals...and men.



Traits: Mukade have the stats of lindwurms, though their bite is quite poisonous, having the effects of Titans-pawn venom (see *Scion: Hero*, p. 182).

Trophy: The black chitin of a mukade can be stripped by a careful craftsman and turned into a very light but strong glistening black breastplate and limb-guards. This requires first a (Dexterity + Survival) roll, difficulty 5. Then, it takes one week and an (Intelligence + Craft [Armor]) roll, difficulty 5. For each success less than 5 rolled on each of these rolls, the armor's final bashing and lethal soak is reduced by one; gaining 10 or more successes on the Craft roll reduces its Mobility penalty to 0. Its normal traits are: +4B/+4L, Mobility -1, Fatigue 0.

THE CENTIPEDE CULT

The only other servitors of Omukade are an ancient Centipede Cult, a society of assassins and bureaucrat-saboteurs who have taken the downfall of the Son of Heaven — the Imperial Personage of Japan — as their personal goal. Throughout the centuries, their methods have changed and evolved with the times, beginning as simple clans of mountain-dwelling warrior-assassins. Over time, they have played many roles: the conspirator with Westerners, the instigator of civil unrest and even placing themselves in high bureaucratic positions intended to give them the power to determine the fate of war prisoners, always making decisions that will bring Japan under the most severe international scrutiny.

Foremost of the Centipede Cult are its masters, the mukade-bushi — the centipede warriors. Seemingly normal men and women, the mudake-bushi have eaten the

strange egg-foam of Omukade. To most men and women, this is poisonous. To a rare few (generally, to those with the potential to gain Titanic Virtues), it transforms them.

Traits: Mukade-bushi are effectively mortal men and women with the mathean template (see the *Scion Companion* section on the Tuatha Dé Dannan for more information). Additionally, they harbor squirming masses of centipedes in their bellies; inflicting more than three points of lethal damage on a mukade-bushi means these centipedes have been released explosively. Though the mukade-bushi takes an additional health level of aggravated damage when this happens, it sprays everyone in a ten-foot radius with biting, vicious centipedes. Those in the area are immediately bitten by centipedes, which inflict poison:

- *Mukade-Bushi Venom:* Tolerance —, Damage 5L/action, Toxicity 2, Penalty -2.

In order to escape being bitten, a character must be in one of two states: ready for it to happen or invulnerable. If a character is taking a Guard action and is aware of the effect (either because of fighting mukade-bushi before, or because of effects that warn against unexpected attacks), he may quickly move outside of the area, generally ending his Guard action to take a Dash or Jump action. Alternately, if the character is completely protected from head to foot by impenetrable armor, the centipedes cannot touch him.

Trophy: Mukade-bushi leave no trophies, simply corpses with a body cavity full of centipedes that rapidly try to escape with their host's death.

THE VIRTUES OF THE CELESTIAL BUREAUCRACY

The Virtues espoused by the Celestial Bureaucracy come from (or inspired) Taoism and Confucianism. The mystic doctrine of Taoism proclaims that all existence partakes of one undefinable essence—the Tao, or “Way,” which manifests as the contrasting but interdependent principles of Yin (darkness, stillness, feminine) and Yang (light, activity, masculine), the Five Elements (Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal and Water) and the Ten Thousand Things of actual existence. Nothing has existence entirely by itself: Everything changes, fast or slow, into something else. The doctrine of Confucius lays out the rules of proper social conduct, from family relationships to affairs of state. Obedience to these rules enables people to live in harmony with each other and with the essentially benign order of the Universe.

DUTY

According to Confucius, all people have their place in society. While they may change their station, they should do so only according to proper procedures, such as by marriage, becoming parents, passing examinations or appointment by a higher authority. Some duties are fixed: younger brothers should respect and obey older brothers, children should honor parents, wives should obey husbands, the living should revere their dead ancestors, everyone should obey the Emperor and his lawful deputies, and the Emperor should obey Heaven. These superiors, however, owe reciprocal duties—especially to set a good example. This Virtue also encompasses the rituals of society, such as births, marriages, funerals and sacrifices. Duty demands that all things be done in the correct, traditional and decorous manner.

HARMONY

Everything in the World naturally follows cycles of change and transformation—the Way, Tao. It is the Way of seeds to sprout and grow into plants that produce seeds of their own. It is the Way for aging empires to fall into corruption and crumble, and the Way for ages of chaos to produce new empires. All strife and evil comes from ignorance or refusal to follow the natural Way of things.

The greatest wisdom, and the greatest power, lies simply in comprehending the Way of the Universe and going along with it. The Virtue of Harmony may trump everyday notions of Duty, especially when rulers become unrighteous. When those in power lose the Mandate of Heaven, their failure reveals itself in crime waves, poor harvests, popular uprisings and dire omens from the Gods.

INTELLECT

Mere obedience does not suffice to guide mortals or Gods to their Confucian Duty or Taoist Harmony. Comprehension of Virtue requires study and contemplation. Gods and Mortals can both benefit from studying the classic works of great sages, though some Gods—such as the Handsome Monkey King, Great Sage Equal to Heaven—act from instinctive wisdom. That their instinctive wisdom often looks like blundering idiocy merely shows the subtlety of their attunement to cosmic Harmony.

The Gods show their Intellect most visibly through teaching and invention. Most of the old Gods revealed important arts and sciences to humanity, from writing to rice farming. The Celestial Bureaucracy honors Gods and Scions who continue this tradition by fostering new inventions and discoveries.

VALOR

Mere contemplation of Duty and Harmony are not enough. The superior person, whether mortal or divine, must put his Virtues into action. Any mortal can show Valor in small ways, as when a bureaucrat blows the whistle on a corrupt superior, and they deserve Heaven’s protection. Heroes go on quests, battle barbarians and warlords, and even overthrow regimes that lose the Mandate of Heaven.

A Scion who performs many deeds of Valor may come to be called a wu-xia or “questing knight.” Scions who become known for their encyclopedic and penetrating Intellect earn the honorific of shih or “scholar,” and those who go beyond mere scholarship to demonstrate a deep comprehension of cosmic Harmony gain the high title of tzu or “sage.” A devoted Confucian, however, would settle merely for a reputation as a gentleman through his devotion to propriety and Duty.

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BACK INTO THE HEDGE, A CHANGELING POST-MORTEM

By Ethan Skemp

PLANTING THE THORNS

So, first off, a little history.

I started out at White Wolf as an in-house editor — not the sort of “line editor” that implies more power over content control, mind, because that’s what we call a “developer.” I was embroiled in the business of proofreading, grammar edits, clarity, simple things of that nature. But I did think it was awfully impressive to be able to be in charge of a line, and I certainly thought I’d like to give that a go one day.

And at the time, if it were up to me, I figured my first choice would have been **Changeling: The Dreaming**.

In retrospect, I was probably hypnotized in part by the art — not just the gorgeous finished pieces like Diterlizzi’s fullpages, but also the vibrant character design sketches done by Josh Timbrook. There was also the simple fact that, well, we were talking about fantasy here. My mother started me on Tolkien, Lewis and Alexander at an early age, and also gave me my redbox D&D gateway drug to boot. Working on a game where redcaps and trolls were the player characters of choice was pretty damn attractive. Of course, that wasn’t quite my destiny, and instead I was drawn into the world of werewolves — a world that was rewarding enough that soon I wondered why that hadn’t been my first choice all along.

Flash forward. The World of Darkness had exploded in a rain of apocalyptic destruction around the turn of the millennium, and not to belabor the old phoenix metaphor, but a new World of Darkness had arisen from the ashes. I was still working on **Werewolf**, and loving the job, but we’d gotten to the point where with the Big Three released, we could go in any direction with the lines yet to come. We could try something brand new. A developer didn’t have to be faithful to one line only; we could work on two.

So I pitched a new **Changeling**.

Well, that wasn’t the year for it. We decided, and rightly so, that it would be best overall if we were to bring out a wholly new property, something that said “The World of Darkness might not go in all the old directions.” So **Promethean: The Created** was launched, and it was gorgeous. And in the aftermath of that, we started talking about what to do for “the fifth game.”

So everybody pitched a new **Changeling**.

WATERING THE HEDGE

I don’t know if it was a zeitgeist or what (no Geist jokes, please), but at that point we figured it would have to be. After some review, my pitch was selected as the winning case, with one alteration: my pitch involved changelings that were born what they were, but Bill Bridges had thrown out the idea that they were abductees who found their way back. (Bill, I should mention, is a frickin’ genius.) They asked me to revise my pitch with that idea at the core, but with the ideas I’d thrown out there like the Seasonal Courts and the customizable seemings and the otherworld of the Hedge still at the heart of the interface. I did so. And about that point I started to think, “You know, we may have a really good game here.”

As it turns out, we did. There were still a number of fine-tuning details to be made, of course. We had to figure out Contract magic. We had to make sure that if we were going 4x6 instead of 5x5 for character type selection that character creation could be made even more remarkable for the switch — enter the kith subsystem. Joe Carricker came up with the beautiful pledge system virtually unaided, bless him. But as we worked on it more and more, we said, “We might be on to something here.” Things were falling into place. The term “Lost” emerged, and immediately the thought of Lost Boys and Girls made perfect sense. Alec Bourbon knocked our socks off when the prologue came in. Aileen Miles’ thorn-motif logo and cover immediately grabbed the eye of everyone who saw it. It was look-

ing good. We had a plan for four books and a seasonal theme, and it was a limited line we could be proud of. All we had to do was wait and see what the customers thought of it.

To say we were pleasantly surprised would be an understatement.

BEARING (GOBLIN) FRUIT

To be perfectly honest, we knew that some people were not going to like *Changeling: The Lost*. For one, fairies are traditionally a fairly specialized sell. Some gamers are just Too Damn Macho to give half a look at playing some kind of pointy-eared pixie, unless he's got black skin and white hair and lugs around a couple of scimitars. Fairy tales are generally considered kid stuff, a pre-adolescent fantasy. But that was fine; we weren't going to begrudge anyone personal preference as to genre.

But we also knew that some people who loved *Changeling: The Dreaming* were not going to like the new take on "fae in the World of Darkness." Let's face it, the two games are almost diametric opposites in some ways. You were no longer born different and special — now you were an abductee, gaining power from a form of slavery. Entering changeling culture was a struggle through the Thorns, not an adoption. And the biggest talking point of all was that we weren't using "faerie" as a metaphor for creativity, imagination and wonder any more. Rather, it was played straight out of the old stories: an inhuman force that people were really afraid of, and for good reason.

As predicted, some people really didn't like that change.

But many more did.

Changeling: The Lost was a fantastic hit for us. We knew all along it would be a limited run: originally I'd planned for four supplements, but Rich Thomas (in his wisdom) said to gamble with five. He was right,

and then some — three more books would eventually be added to meet demand, two following the seasonal theme and one as a *Night Horrors* tie-in. The game kept selling out. People kept telling us how much they loved it.

It's rewarding when that happens, but it's all the more rewarding when it's a project you really care about. That's what hit me the hardest, right in the elation bone. Everyone who worked on *Changeling* invested a portion of what they really cared about into it. I can speak only for myself, but much of the game is emotionally keyed to one of my greatest fears: being separated from my wife, my family, my home. Those bonds mean the world to me, and I wanted to do a game about the tragedy of losing them, and about the potential hope of regaining what you've lost. Of course, I didn't want that to be the only emotional trigger the game had to offer: you also needed room for the person who gets a second chance out of the process, or the changeling who exults in what she's become even if she harbors a few quiet regrets. But the tragedy of being Lost is something that meant a lot to me. To see people say "Yes, that matters to us, too, and we love to explore that with your game" — that's been an absolute joy.

I've loved watching *Changeling*'s success so much. I feel simultaneously proud to have been a part of it and humbled by how much creativity its writers and artists and Storytellers and players have poured into it.

To everyone out there who gave this game a chance: thank you so much. I apologize to those of you that didn't care for it, but I think we made the game we were meant to make. And for those of you who supported it and ran with it and tore the doors off — thank you twice as much. I've never loved this job more than when I'm watching you all be brilliant and creative and have so much damn fun with something I helped to build.

It's been an honor.



Artist spotlight: Efrem Palacios

By Priscilla Kim

In Efrem Palacios' own words, "When I'm not being an international playboy super spy, I spend the rest of my time being a troglodyte artist living in (stay classy) San Diego, California." With an AA in graphic design, he worked for several years in the field before eventually turning toward illustration and picking up traditional training at the Watts Atelier in Encinitas, CA. Since then, he has done work for Wizards of the Coast, Blizzard, and for White Wolf, as seen in this as seen in this issue of Epitaph and many of the **Vampire: The Requiem** clan books.

How did you get started in art?

I've always loved art. As a kid, all an adult needed to do to keep me distracted was to give me a pencil and paper. As a professional I just kind of stumbled into it actually.

What brought you to illustration?

I always hoped that art would somehow find a place in my career. I've always loved illustration and all the things it's related to, like movies, animation, books and comic books, but I started off as Graphic Designer thinking it was the more practical "adult" art-related career choice. Only it never stuck; my designs were always more on the illustrative side than design side. Eventually I started meeting people who were seriously willing to pay me to draw stuff for them, so I said, "OK, I guess I'll be an illustrator."

I still learned a lot from graphic design, though.

What medium do you prefer to work in?

I guess Digital is my "go to" medium for my work but I also enjoy oil painting on my own time.

About how long does it take you to finish a typical piece?

When I'm not procrastinating—which is more often than not—I can finish something within 1 day to a week, depending on the complexity of the piece. Although I don't consider myself a perfectionist, I am still incredibly insecure about my art and never really ever feel I've finished anything, so I'll sometimes return to them and try to "fix" them. So I guess I never really finish anything really. It's kind of a bad habit.

How long have you been doing work for White Wolf?

I think I've been doing stuff for White Wolf for over a year, maybe.

What would you say is your favorite piece that you've done for White Wolf? Why?

*I'd like to consider all my art as if they were my children, so I think they are all special to me. (Aww) But I guess if I had to pick a favorite in the White Wolf pack, it would probably be the first color pieces I did in the **Venture: Lords of the Damned** book, purely for sentimental reasons, if anything. Just don't tell any of my other art I said that or they might get jealous.*

What's your favorite subject to portray? Favorite genre?

Favorite subject? Hmm... Is painting attractive ladies a subject? Preferably scantily clad or naked ones? As for genre I guess it goes with what mood I'm in. I like 'em all really. Fantasy, I guess, if you were threatening me with death. Right now I kind of feel like that Knight in Monty Python. "What is your favorite color?" "Blue! ...No! Oraahh!"

What artists inspire you?

Who doesn't inspire me? Rockwell, NC Wyeth, Sargent, Leyendecker, Frazetta, Phil Hale, Goya, Velazquez, Glen Barr, Bill Watterson, Chuck Jones, Eric Powell, Brad Neely—the list never really stops, nor is it restricted to just visual artists, and it only gets longer with time. Even my five year old nephew is on the list.

How do you deal with dry spells and artist's block?

Speed and crack cocaine tend to help me focus. No, but seriously—I look to the masters like Rockwell and even my peers and try to "inspire" myself to get back on track. If that doesn't work, I find hitting the booze and crying in a corner sometimes helps. And the cocaine, you can't forget about the sweet, sweet cocaine.

What other hobbies do you have?

I don't know if I have any hobbies. I don't collect anything to excess. I guess I am a very boring person.

Have any advice for aspiring artists?

Be willing to learn from anyone and never stop studying. Try to develop good art habits early on in your development, like making deadlines, and really try to listen when you're getting constructive criticism. Oh, and stay in school, don't do drugs and knowing is half the battle. G-I-JOE!



"THIS PLACE IS ALL YOURS?" STAN LOOKED AROUND AND MARVELED.
THERE WAS ENOUGH ROOM HERE FOR EVERYONE HE KNEW. "NO RENT OR ANYTHING?"

"NO RENT." SHE'D SAID HER NAME WAS TESS, AND SHE WAS SMOKING HOT. THE BLACK HAIR,
THE LIP PIERCING, AND THOSE GRAY BLUE EYES. STAN FELT DRUNK JUST BEING AROUND HER.
NO TATS, WHICH WAS WEIRD, BUT MAYBE SHE HAD A THING ABOUT NEEDLES. "JUST MY STUFF."

STAN LOOKED UP AT THE CEILING. HE COULD HANG LIGHTS, NO PROBLEM.
GETTING THE SOUND SYSTEM MIGHT BE HARDER; THE ELECTRIC IN HERE WAS OLD,
BUT HE WAS PRETTY SURE HE COULD MAKE IT WORK.
HE WASN'T SURE WHAT THE WINCHES IN THE CORNERS WERE DESIGNED TO DO,
BUT HE COULD PROBABLY MOUNT SPEAKERS ON THEM.
"IF WE COULD USE THIS PLACE, TESS."

HE TRAILED OFF AND GESTURED TO THE IMMENSE ROOM. "WOW."

TESS GAVE HIM THAT TIGHT-LIPPED SMILE,
IT ALMOST REMINDED HIM OF HOW HIS MOTHER USED
TO LOOK WHEN HE'D CUSS AT THE DINNER TABLE.
SHE DIDN'T LIKE IT, BUT SHE COULDN'T STOP IT.

"HOW MANY PEOPLE?" SHE ASKED.
"I DON'T KNOW. MAYBE A HUNDRED?
MAYBE MORE."

TESS RAN HER FINGERS
ACROSS THE BACK
OF HER HAND.
"PERFECT,"
SHE WHISPERED.

"UM," SAID STAN,
"WHAT ARE THOSE THINGS
IN THE CORNERS?"

HE DIDN'T LIKE THE LOOK ON HER FACE.
THE QUESTION SEEMED TO SNAP HER OUT OF IT.

"MACHINERY. FROM WHEN THIS PLACE WAS A FACTORY.
THEY'D MOVE HEAVY CABLES ACROSS THE ROOM, ABOUT THIS HEIGHT." SHE PUT HER HAND UP TO HIS NECK.

HE SWALLOWED ONCE. "BASEMENT?"

"CAN'T GO DOWN THERE." SHE SMILED THAT WEIRD SMILE AGAIN.
STAN WASN'T ABOUT TO BLOW A CHANCE AT HOOKING UP WITH THIS GIRL TO PUSH THE ISSUE.

"OK, SO, WHEN DO YOU WANT TO DO THIS?"

TESS DIDN'T MISS A BEAT. "HAS TO BE THE 19TH. PEOPLE NEED TO GET HERE AT SEVEN OR SO."

STAN SUCKED AIR THROUGH HIS TEETH. "I DON'T KNOW. THAT'S KIND OF EARLY. MOSTLY THESE DON'T START UNTIL AFTER MIDNIGHT."

"NO. MIDNIGHT'S TOO LATE." SHE TOOK A STEP TOWARD HIM, AND STAN FELT, NOT FOR THE FIRST TIME,
JUST LIKE HE HAD IN HIGH SCHOOL WHEN GETTING SENT TO SEE THE DEAN OF STUDENTS.
"SEVEN. THEY NEED TO BE HERE BY NINE, SO THEY SHOULD TRY AND GET HERE BY SEVEN."

"OK." STAN WANTED TO STEP AWAY FROM HER, BUT HE ALSO FIGURED SHE MIGHT BE ON THE VERGE OF KISSING HIM. "BY SEVEN,
I CAN PROBABLY DO THAT." MAYBE, ANYWAY. IF HE TOLD PEOPLE THAT THERE WAS A LIMITED SUPPLY OF DRUGS....

SHE SMILED, A REAL, BRIGHT SMILE THIS TIME. "GROOVY," SHE SAID.

STAN LAUGHED. "DID YOU REALLY JUST SAY 'GROOVY'?"

TESS ROLLED HER EYES. "RADICAL. WHATEVER.
JUST TELL ME WHAT ELSE NEEDS TO HAPPEN BEFORE WE CAN HOLD THIS PARTY."

MAYBE THIS CHICK WAS NUTS. STAN FIGURED SHE WAS FUCKABLE EITHER WAY, BUT HE'D JUST HAVE TO WATCH HIMSELF.
"WELL, WE MIGHT WANT TO PUT SOMETHING DOWN ON THE FLOOR. ALL THESE DRAINS... YOU KNOW, PEOPLE MIGHT TRIP."

"NO." THERE WAS THAT "GO SEE THE DEAN" VOICE AGAIN. "THE DRAINS NEED TO STAY OPEN."

"HOW COME?"

TESS SMILED THE THIN SMILE AND SHOOK HER HEAD. "IT'LL MAKE SENSE ON THE NIGHT, I PROMISE."

Chapter One: Blood Bathers

“The countess turned around and dealt the girl such a blow in the face that

“The countess turned around and dealt the girl such a blow in the face that blood spurted all over her arms and hands... Where the blood had fallen, her skin looked twenty years younger. It was beautiful and soft once again. Blood! Blood was the answer to everlasting beauty.”

— Olga Hoyt, *Lust for Blood: The Consuming Story of Vampires*

Olga Hoyt, Lust for Blood: The Consuming Story of Vampires

Time is terrifying. It grinds everything, living or otherwise, down into dust. It changes the strength, intelligence, wit and vigor of youth into frail, diseased decrepitude. People make up stories about happy afterlives in order to take some of the sting away, but the truth is this: we have gained the ability to outlive our bodies. We die incontinent, often demented, and bereft of dignity. In “civilized” countries, we are often unable to help our beloved elders choose to end their lives.

It’s a bleak future. But other options exist.

An old woman slides into a marble tub and feels the liquid embrace her. The smell in the room is rich, metallic and thick. In another day, it will be rancid, but by then, she won’t be an old woman anymore. She will be young and beautiful again, and in another decade, she will convince more young hunks to die under her knife.

A boy, barely a teenager, knocks on the door of a summer cottage. When a woman answers the door, he pounces on her, stabbing her over and over again with a hunting knife, until he is covered in her blood. As the light fades from her eyes, he gives a sigh of relief. If he hadn’t found her, he might have grown up.

A couple opens the refrigerated compartment attached to their house. In it are dozens — maybe hundreds — of bottles of blood. Each has been meticulously labeled. Each has been prepared with chemicals and infusions to keep the contents fresh and usable. And tonight, the couple will select one, let it warm to room temperature, and then pour it on their naked bodies as they make love. Tomorrow morning, they will have the strength and energy of young newlyweds again, even though they have been married more than a century.

Blood bathers gain their immortality from the mystical power present in the blood of human beings. Using a ritual handed down through thousands of years of occult tradition, a blood bather can remain young, strong, healthy and beautiful, perhaps indefinitely. Of course, in order to gain this benefit, the blood bather needs the blood, and that blood has to come from somewhere — or, more specifically, someone. At least the vampire has the option to leave her victim’s alive and many can use the blood of animals. For a blood bather to gain the benefit of immortality, the blood must be human and other lives must almost always be snuffed out.

Theory: Why Does It Work?

Why does the Bathing Ritual provide eternal life? Inherent in the blood of a living human being is a connection to that person’s life. It’s not quite the same thing as the soul, because the blood doesn’t contain quite so much of the victim’s personality, knowledge and unique perspective (if it did, vampires would take on their victim’s traits after feeding). The Bathing Ritual drains a person’s living essence, not just the combination of plasma, cells, sugar and nutrients that is blood. The bather then immerses herself in this essence, absorbing the life-giving properties. All that is left, then, is inert blood, useless for any medical or mystical purpose.

In order to take advantage of the Bathing Ritual, though, the bather must create or adopt the Ritual to suit her particular proclivities. Even if a Bathing Ritual were to be made widely available, only those truly desperate enough to gain immortality would benefit. Even if someone is knowledgeable enough to perform a ritual correctly and callous enough to murder other people for their blood, without the will to make the Ritual work, it won't.

This does mean, though, that theoretically any human being can take advantage of the Bathing Ritual.

The Bathing Ritual

The Bathing Ritual has its roots in every culture that espoused the mystical properties of blood — which is to say, almost of all of them. Almost every civilization in history had (or has) a legend about a blood-drinking creature or deity, and sacrifice and expiation invariably involves spilling blood. Some rituals involve spilling one's own blood, some involve taking it from another living being (human or animal), but the power of blood is undeniable.

So which culture was it, exactly, that discovered the Bathing Ritual? What civilization learned that by bathing in the blood of human beings, a skilled occultist could prolong his own life indefinitely? No one among modern blood bathers knows for certain. Any given blood bather usually believes that the culture that he has studied at length is the one responsible for ritual. A bather that rips out the heart of a victim to let the blood drain into a stone tub might state, if asked, that the Bathing Ritual is of Aztec descent. One that follows the example of the famed "Blood Countess," Elizabeth Báthory, might claim that the ritual is Hungarian or Ugric, or even Roman in origin. Since no worldwide community of blood bathers exists, they seldom realize that the ritual only appears in *all* of these cultures as a variant, a simplification (or perhaps an overcomplication?) of the original.

The original Bathing Ritual, referred to in the texts, pictographs and scrolls of ancient cultures, at least where it has been allowed to survive, apparently allowed true immortality. The bather would emerge from the bath a god, unable to be harmed by fire, metal or time. Any wound would close immediately, and hunger and thirst could not touch him. It is the hint of this kind of power that often entices a blood bather to attempt the ritual, leading to murder, power and ultimately addiction. But no blood bather has ever managed to truly achieve this success. The Bathing Rituals that blood bathers perform are all variants, because no complete version of the original ritual exists. Some key component is missing.





Blood bathers, and the few occultists who study the Bathing Ritual as a worldwide phenomenon (see Dr. Remy Darabont, p. 46), feel that the ritual works because of some intrinsic power of human blood, and that power can be expressed if prepared in the right way. Put another way, blood is easily available, and if it were as simple as taking a dip in a vat of blood, anyone could do it. But actually enacting the Bathing Ritual requires that the occultist prepare the blood in a certain way, sometimes treat the blood with specific herbs and ingredients, and invest a portion of his own will into the ritual.

It would be tempting to say that the specifics of the ritual don't matter — all that matters is the blood and the will. But that isn't precisely true, because when a blood bather formulates the ritual that he will use to attain immortality, he commits to that ritual. As such, every blood bather is effectively creating a new Bathing Ritual when he chooses this route to power. Every Bathing Ritual thus created *might* work for another blood bather (indeed, cults built around a given ritual exist, including the one led by Mother Liesel; see p. 44). However, it's just as likely that if a would-be bather researches an existing ritual, she will wind up creating another variant, and making it work with her own expenditure of will, time, and probably sanity. The Bathing Ritual requires the occult trappings that bathers give it in order to function, but it requires those trappings *because* the bathers create them. In the end, it would require a blood bather with a superhuman command of magic to reduce the ritual down to a simple need for blood.

Stop Beating Around the Bush

A person who simply takes blood and lives forever is called a *vampire*, and there are rules for those already. So is there a connection between the Bathing Ritual and the vampiric curse? Could an occultist actually "self-Embrace," turning himself undead, through some high-powered version of the Bathing Ritual?

Doing so would turn the undead world on its head, of course. People *can't do that*. A mortal only becomes a vampire when another vampire drains her dry, feeds her some blood, and expends the will necessary (a Willpower dot, in game terms) to raise her up.

But good stories come from the world being turned on its head, or at least, from the threat of that happening. Suppose a blood bather managed to turn herself into a true vampire, or something that resembles one (fangs, immortality, heightened strength and speed, inhuman allure) but could still eat, drink, tolerate the sun, and otherwise ignore the tradition banes of vampiric existence.

It's not the sort of thing we're prepared to put in the book, because it would turn the established World of Darkness upside down. And that's your job.

WHO'S-WHO AT CCP?

Something wicked this way comes. An interview with Natasha Bryant-Raible.

By Shane DeFreest

When did you start playing video games?

I was about five years old. I started with classic NES—Tetris and Super Mario Bros. The first videogame I ever purchased with my own money was Kirby's Dreamworld for NES. Cartridges were still \$20.

What type of work did you do before you got into the industry?

All kinds of ridiculous stuff. I always liked keeping three or four part time jobs instead of one big one, to keep life interesting. Before this I worked in a law office, in the Hollywood nightclub industry, hosted a live trivia game show, and did some talent/modeling. Simultaneously.

Without giving away too much of what you are working on, what does your job entail on an average day?

It's a lot of writing by myself at my desk, punctuated by exciting meetings where we all yell at one another.

Do you feel you are advantaged or disadvantaged as a female in an industry and job so typically dominated by men?

It's a double-edged sword. It's advantageous in that there's a pretty significant movement to include more women in the development of games, which gives them an edge in an increasingly competitive industry. However, it's a hard fight once you're there. There's still a lot of objectification of women in games, and not as much impetus to change that. It can be a little frustrating. Additionally, I feel like the industry as a whole is choosing to continue making designs that appeal to the "classic" demographic and to the predominantly male developers themselves, instead of mindfully expanding the market with more androgynous designs.

Name: Natasha Bryant-Raible

Title: Game Designer

Alias: "The Puncher"

Character Type: Vampire

Status: At Large (approach with extreme caution)



WANTED

Besides, it can be a little rough to work in an environment with, say, a 20:1 male-female ratio.

What's your favorite thing about CCP and your job?

Fantasizing about shipping our game. The deeper into development we get, the more overwhelmed I am by how awesome it could potentially be. We are so freaking cool.

If you had to pick one game as your favorite game ever. What is it and why?

Easy, I always know the answer to this one. It's Final Fantasy VII. I think it's still my favorite game because it was the first game I ever really fell in love with. The world and story were so beautiful and explorable to me. I was eleven when I first played it, and I spent years drawing fan-art and roleplaying Tifa Lockheart in IRC chatrooms. It was very silly.

As we all know CCP loves to consume alcoholic beverages. What's your drink of choice?

Vodka and water. When you put away as many as we do, you need a go-to that won't give you a hangover.

Would you define yourself as a hardcore gamer?

It comes and goes. I've been sticking to more casual, social games recently—such as on iminlikewithyou.com. I've tried picking up some of the recent big MMO releases, but I wasn't very engaged by any of them.

What advice would you have for people that want to get into the industry?

Show up! Network! There's many events meant facilitate the joining of would-be developers and the companies seeking them.

GDCs are the big ones. Go to them. Introduce yourself. Follow up with emails, always! Everyone's meeting a lot of people at those things, so understand that you'll have to go the extra mile to assert your potential.

What genre's do you find most appealing and enjoyable?

I was raised on serial Japanese RPGs, so they're dear to my heart. I also really enjoy party games—games that are easy to pick up and compete against your friends. I kick ass at WarioWare.

What's the weirdest/funniest you can share that's happened to you have since joining CCP?

My first Friday at CCP was pretty memorable. Several of the Icelandic designers were visiting from the homeland, and after a week of 12-hour meetings they decided to unwind at the shooting range. It was my first time firing a gun, and the force of the shot took out a little chunk of my hand. It was bloody. I still have a little scar. Subsequently, the crew was forcibly removed from Taco Mac (of all places) by the Georgia authorities. Charges include peeing in the bathroom sink and baiting the locals into aggressive conversations about religion and politics. Interestingly, a series of events like this would no longer surprise me in the least.

What movies, music and books do you draw inspiration from that help you do your job?

I listen almost exclusively to minimal electronica or similar genres while at work—very few words to convolute your thinking with, and always epic and emotional. I use it to manipulate my mood depending on what I'm writing. Aphex Twin, Telefon Tel Aviv, and Burial are on my playlist.

For movies and books, I've been consuming stories that I consider timeless. I'm very compelled by life before the internet. I try to glean what it is that's classic about the plots or emotions presented in these stories and apply them to my own ideas. One of my favorite books is Ayn Rand's *We the Living*, which was written in the 1930's but still feels so remarkably relevant. That's the mark of what I find inspiring. I've read it ten times.

I also check in on genre-relevant stuff, like the *Twilight* series. That was just short of infuriating. Reading *Twilight* is like buying a much-publicized car that's a lemon. Except for every single instance of that model is a lemon, morally requiring the manufacturer to do a massive recall. So really *Twilight* is like anything that sucks really bad. See, it even makes me write terrible analogies.

If you could tell the world any one thing about you that's not widely known what would it be?

I'm a complete optimist.

Vampire: the Eternal Struggle Storyline Event: Rise of the Imperator

They came from all over the world: lawyers and street thugs, gladiators and musicians. They entered through library basements, churches and subway tunnels and over the course of a few hours managed to congregate in an underground chamber in Dublin, Ireland.

"Oi! I am Prince O'Connor o' this fair town," a voice shouted over the sea of vampires.

Eager shouts rang off the stones.

"Now," the Prince continued, in his lilting Irish accent, "for the younger folk who may not have heard, there's a reason for the party. This may seem obvious to any of ye who've been on the front lines, but the Camarilla hasn't been very unified lately. Aye," the Prince went on "an' I dunno about you, but I think it's high time we got rid of the old fashioned Ventrue leadership and put someone in charge who actually knows how to win a fight."

In a time of crisis, the Camarilla searches for a leader.

Times are changing quickly. The Camarilla needs to respond to these changes with unity and strength. Advances in mortal society and technology can no longer be ignored. They have cameras in their phones, and video footage goes around the world in seconds. Mobs don't carry torches and pitchforks anymore. The kine have assault rifles, cruise missiles, tanks, and nuclear weapons. The Masquerade isn't a quaint tradition, something you can believe in or not. It is essential to the survival of the Kindred.

The Camarilla needs to strengthen its grip, but it's losing control. More and more Kindred are joining the anarchs. The Sabbat grows in strength. Secretive cults proliferate. Vampires are preaching about Gehenna, and the end of the world. They are thinking short term. Because they don't believe in their own immortality, they undermine the Traditions that have allowed the Kindred to exist for centuries. Lately, when the Camarilla has tried to show its strength, it has failed. The infernalists were able to secret the Kaymakli Fragment from Montreal. The anarch outlaws moved from city to city, unchallenged.

"The current command structure is not working. We need a united army - a cohesive military force with a clear and direct chain of command. Inter-clan politics must take a back seat. We can no longer afford to have individual groups working at cross purposes. Too much is at stake here. We need an Imperator to command all of the Camarilla. One voice calling the shots, and one mind making the decisions."

"Chairman, I object to the consideration of the question."
"Objection denied," said the voice from the head of the table.
"Continue."

Lucinde's lips did not smile, although Jan could tell she wanted to. "Out of all the clans, ours is best suited to this leadership role."

There was a time when the Camarilla could tolerate the existence of Kindred who were not willing to do what it

takes to uphold the Masquerade. That time is over. Kindred that fail to uphold the Traditions are now an existential threat to the species. They can no longer be allowed to exist. The fate of the Kindred depends on someone who can lead the Camarilla, restore order and stability, and bring all the Kindred under Camarilla rule.

To confront these challenges, the Inner Circle has agreed to appoint a military commander, a single individual who will be called upon to lead the soldiers of the Camarilla, to enforce the Traditions, and to restore order: the Imperator.

Who will rise and be chosen for this exalted position? Who has the will and the cunning to seize the reins of power? Who has strength to keep it? Each of the clans of the Camarilla lays plans to elevate one of their own to this position of power. No clan thinks one of the others can be trusted with this authority. Even within the clans, ancient rivals eye each other warily, and struggle for dominance. Among the corridors of power, the maneuvering begins. Who will have the honor, the responsibility, the power to lead the armies of the Camarilla? Who will be the Imperator?

Candles flickered in sconces throughout the circular stone room in the basement of the Vienna chantry. Seated around the table six members of the warlock clan. Wards flickered in the floor, walls and ceiling. Several screens were set up with thaumaturgical projections of Chantry leaders and princes. One chair was empty. On the table in front of it, a disembodied hand with an eye embedded in its palm was staring at Thrace.

Oliver Thrace frowned at the other Tremere. "The Council of Seven has already selected the Kindred who will lead us as Imperator. Let us now proceed with ensuring they succeed in attaining the position."

In this constructed VTES Storyline Event, players will join the power struggle, and choose the Camarilla's military commander. Players will design and play decks featuring one of the core Camarilla clans as they try to outwit, outmaneuver, and overcome their rivals to elevate one of their own. Boons will play a special role as ancient debts come due, and favors granted become obligations and tools for political leverage.

In addition to the players' decks, and the standard tools at a Methuselah's disposal, this event will feature a special Imperator deck that will be shared by all players. The Imperator deck represents the additional resources the Methuselah bring to their struggle for political power -- their political maneuvers, their cunning schemes, the weaknesses for their enemies to exploit.

The Rise of the Imperator Storyline Kit contains the all new Imperator promo card and the Kaymakli Fragment promo card that was first introduced for the Black Miracles and Lies Storyline. It also contains 12 booster packs as prizes, spoils to be showered upon the victor.

WW2881 \$29.99 VTES: IMPERATOR STORYLINE KIT

Coming soon, after the Imperator is chosen -- the next chapter in the VTES Storyline...

For centuries the Royal Order of Edenic Groundskeepers conducted their clandestine research. Slowly, carefully, they built their maps, documenting in detail, the secret resting places of the world's Antediluvian and the Methuselahs. The members of the order have gathered the secrets of their forbearers and the world's greatest trove of Kindred lore. Recently, several scholars of the order mysteriously disappeared while researching a site near Mombasa. Teams of strange Kindred have appeared in cities around the world to abduct the remaining members of the order and claim their research. It has become clear that the secret society had been penetrated or betrayed.

As the secret of the Edenic Groundskeepers is revealed, the world's Methuselahs realize their sudden peril, and the opportunities before them. The clandestine struggle for control of the information unearthed by the order begins. Some of the Methuselahs are motivated by desire for the secrets to remain hidden. Others are motivated by knowledge and the chance to learn secrets of the Edenic Groundskeepers. Some of the Methuselahs see the order's trove as the key to victory in the great Jyhad. Others see it as instrumental to Gehenna itself.

Only when the fate of the order has been determined, and the reasons behind their betrayal and abduction are revealed, will the Methuselahs come to understand **Eden's Legacy**.



TOP 10 CONSTRUCTED

Orrian Gissler	France
Olivier Perez	France
Matthew Morgan	USA
Hugh Angseesing	UK
Ruben Feldman	USA
Noel Gimenez Infante	Spain
Ginés Quiñonero	Spain
Erik Torstensson	Sweden
Hernn Rodrguez	Chile
Ben Peal	USA

TOP 10 LIMITED

Matthew Morgan	USA
Hugh Angseesing	UK
Jared Strait	USA
Robert Faengler	Germany
Joshua Duffin	USA
Joo Maselli Gouvea	Brazil
Dave Clooney	USA
Jeff Thompson	USA
Itamar G. Jr.	Brazil
Chris Berg	USA

VTES TOURNAMENT CORNER

DATE	TITLE	REGION	EVENT
5/9/09	Conklaavi 2009	Finland	Constructed
3/29/09	Caen by night	United States	Constructed
3/29/09	Power of All: Atlanta	United States	Constructed
3/27/09	Faction Wars #3	Canada	Constructed
3/24/09	N-story, Event_2 The conflict escalation.	Russian Federation	Constructed
3/22/09	Alacrity #3	United States	Constructed
3/21/09	Bergen/Oslo Part XII	Norway	Constructed
3/21/09	Alacrity #1	United States	Constructed
3/20/09	Faction Wars #2	Canada	Constructed
3/20/09	N-story, Event_1	Russian Federation	Constructed
3/15/09	1º Display Prize Tournament 2009	Brazil	Constructed
3/14/09	March to Oblivion	Canada	Constructed
3/14/09	White Nights Massacre III	United States	Constructed
3/13/09	Faction Wars #1	Canada	Constructed
3/8/09	Praxis Seizure:Turku XLVII	Finland	Constructed
3/7/09	Orun	South Africa	Constructed
3/6/09	Turf Wars: Amherst #3	Canada	Constructed
3/6/09	First Obninsk Tournament	Russian Federation	Constructed
3/1/09	Fresh Blood Vienna 2009	Austria	Constructed
3/1/09	Fleecing the Gaje	Australia	Constructed
5/30/09	Norwegian ECQ/Championship	Norway	Continental Qualifier
5/29/09	Texas Qualifier	United States	Continental Qualifier
5/16/09	English EC 2009	United Kingdom	Continental Qualifier
5/3/09	Sydney Qualifier	Australia	Continental Qualifier
4/25/09	Draqonia II	Sweden	Continental Qualifier
4/19/09	Great Lakes Regional Qualifier	United States	Continental Qualifier
3/21/09	Alacrity #2 (Qualifier)	United States	Continental Qualifier
3/7/09	Saturday at Seth's	United States	Demo
3/28/09	Steely Tenacity: Atlanta	United States	Limited
3/21/09	DraCon I (Draft Construction)	Russian Federation	Limited
3/9/09	KoT draft	Russian Federation	Limited
3/7/09	Camarilla's Rebirth	Portugal	Limited
3/1/09	Örebro Limited February	Sweden	Limited
4/18/09	Haven Uncovered: Westerville	United States	Mini Qualifier
4/17/09	Game Con 2009	United States	Mini Qualifier
3/1/09	Second Chance Qualifier	United States	Mini Qualifier

THE IDIGAM

“IT TURNS OUT WHAT WE DID IN APOLLO
WAS PROBABLY THE WORST WAY WE COULD
HAVE HANDLED IT OPERATIONALLY.”

— KRIST KENNEDY, PROJECT LEADER FOR ARCHITECTURE,
HABITABILITY AND INTEGRATION AT NASA’S JOHNSON SPACE
CENTER, AS QUOTED IN NEW SCIENTIST SPACE

This story is true.

They might have had a name in Pangaea, before their exile, before their time in cold nowhere made them even stranger and more powerful. But if they had a name, no one remembers it, not even the spirits. We know that Father Wolf saw them and saw the chaos they could wreak upon the world. And so he hunted them down, as was his sacred task.

He chased them down, and when they grew wings to escape, he leapt high in the air and caught them. They turned to water around his teeth, and he took them into his stomach to prevent their escape. They turned to

worms to burrow their way out, but he ate the grasses and the herbs, and vomited them back up. And then they changed to birds again and tried to fly away, and Father Wolf realized that nowhere in Pangaea could these things be contained.

And so when he caught them, he flung them upwards, and he called to Mother Luna to catch them. And she did, and she placed them in a dark prison, a soundless and barren wasteland that never saw nor felt sunlight. And there they sat, unable to change themselves, for nothing around them changed. And so it was for some time.

Human beings looked to the moon over the years, and they saw Mother Luna looking down. And they looked to wolves howling at the moon, and they wondered at their songs. They never knew that they were merely doing what Father Wolf had taught their ancestors. Their howls remind Mother Luna of what lay in the darkest recesses of her domain, and that she must keep the gates securely locked. They knew Mother Luna might forget, if she couldn't see. The creatures were locked in an oublie, forgotten by Helios, Luna, but never by the Uratha.

Human beings, of course, were the ones who freed them.

THE MOON-BANISHED

On July 20, 1969, two men set foot on the moon. This achievement had far-reaching effects for the inhabitants of Earth, not least of which was a newfound appreciation for how small and fragile the planet truly was. But Armstrong and Aldrin (and their compatriot, Collins, orbiting above) brought something else back with them: the idigam.

According to the lore of the People (Pure and Forsaken), these spirits originated on Earth. Father Wolf caught them and flung them into space, where Mother Luna caught and imprisoned them. She was able to do so because of the nature of these creatures.

The idigam are spirits without clear analogs in the physical world. While a cat-spirit is emblematic of a cat, and a hate-spirit cannot be other than hateful, these spirits did not have natures. This should mean death for a spirit, and yet the idigam have been able to thrive. Moreover, they were able to take other spirits (or living creatures) and assume their traits, which made them impossible to contain or kill. The only way to rid Pangaea of them was to imprison them on the moon, in a place devoid of raw material. The idigam therefore entered stasis, unable to mimic anything around them.

And they waited.

Their time in exile wasn't entirely uneventful. Objects from other worlds struck the moon's surface, and the idigam used these objects to change themselves. But they still could not cross the blackness of space, empty spiritually as well as physically, to get back to their homeland. Not until men arrived and brought them a chariot.

The manned moon landings of the late 1960s and early 1970s presented the idigam with a comparative smorgasbord of spiritual raw materials. The astronauts brought spirits of technology, food, fuel,

light and heat, in addition to conceptual spirits of joy, accomplishment, fear, faith (Buzz Aldrin, in fact, quietly took Communion on the moon's surface) and courage. The idigam fought among themselves for the privilege of riding the vehicle back to Earth. At least four of them did, letting go of the Columbia before or as it splashed down in the North Pacific.

LIES WRITTEN BY THE VICTORS

This story is true.

They've been here all along. We called them by their right name — idigam — but humanity called them Ladon, Chimera, Leviathan, Geryon, Samebito. They've taken forms as they've seen fit, and when heroes have risen up to kill them, they've dutifully died.

The moon landing, though, was when everything changed. That much is true. That was when the humans left their boundaries, and so boundaries ceased to mean anything. The idigam stopped respecting the bargains they made with Urfarah. They abandoned their forms, and they abandoned their agreement to die when human heroes rose to kill them.

We can still kill them, yes, but it's not the same. It was right and proper for humans to kill them, to make humanity think it could kill monsters. The truth is, the idigam were nothing more than distractions for humanity, so that we, the true predators, could hunt unnoticed.

But the humans fouled that up, and the Forsaken have bought into humanity's lies, just as they always do. And the idigam, now, are as great a threat to us as to the Forsaken.

As always, it falls to us to remain Pure. Let humanity handle their monsters. Let the Forsaken fight and die alongside them, if they wish. Only when the idigam threaten us directly should we take action.

One of them is believed to have been Gurdilag, the idigam that would go on to inhabit Denver, Colorado, and led to Max Roman's organization of the werewolves of that area (see p. 290 of **Werewolf: The Forsaken** for more information). Over the next three years, more manned missions to the lunar surface brought back more of the Moon-Banished.

Some idigam attacked the Forsaken out of anger for the spiritual children of their jailor. Many werewolves had no recollection of the ancient story of Father Wolf's battles with the idigam. They assumed these spirits were merely *Hithim*, and though they were more powerful than most, they

could
still be
bound
and
even de-
stroyed.

These weak-
er idigam

were still deadly foes, but nothing like the sheer spiritual power of Gurdilag and its ilk.

Not all of the Moon-Banished were so impatient. They spread themselves over the world, and began to remake the spirit wilds according to their own whims. The subsumed powerful loci, many of which were deep beneath the earth's surface, in the depths of the ocean, or otherwise unreachable to packs of Uratha. There, they became comfortable with the present

state of the world and its Shadow. They reached into the depths of the spirit wilds and found servants. They called out to the stars, to the voices they had heard during their long imprisonment, and sometimes the stars responded. A meteor shower might contain a thousand spirits from alien worlds, and only a handful would survive the fall to Earth. Of those, only one might live long enough for an idigam to find and nourish it. But that one could grow powerful enough to challenge a pack of Uratha.

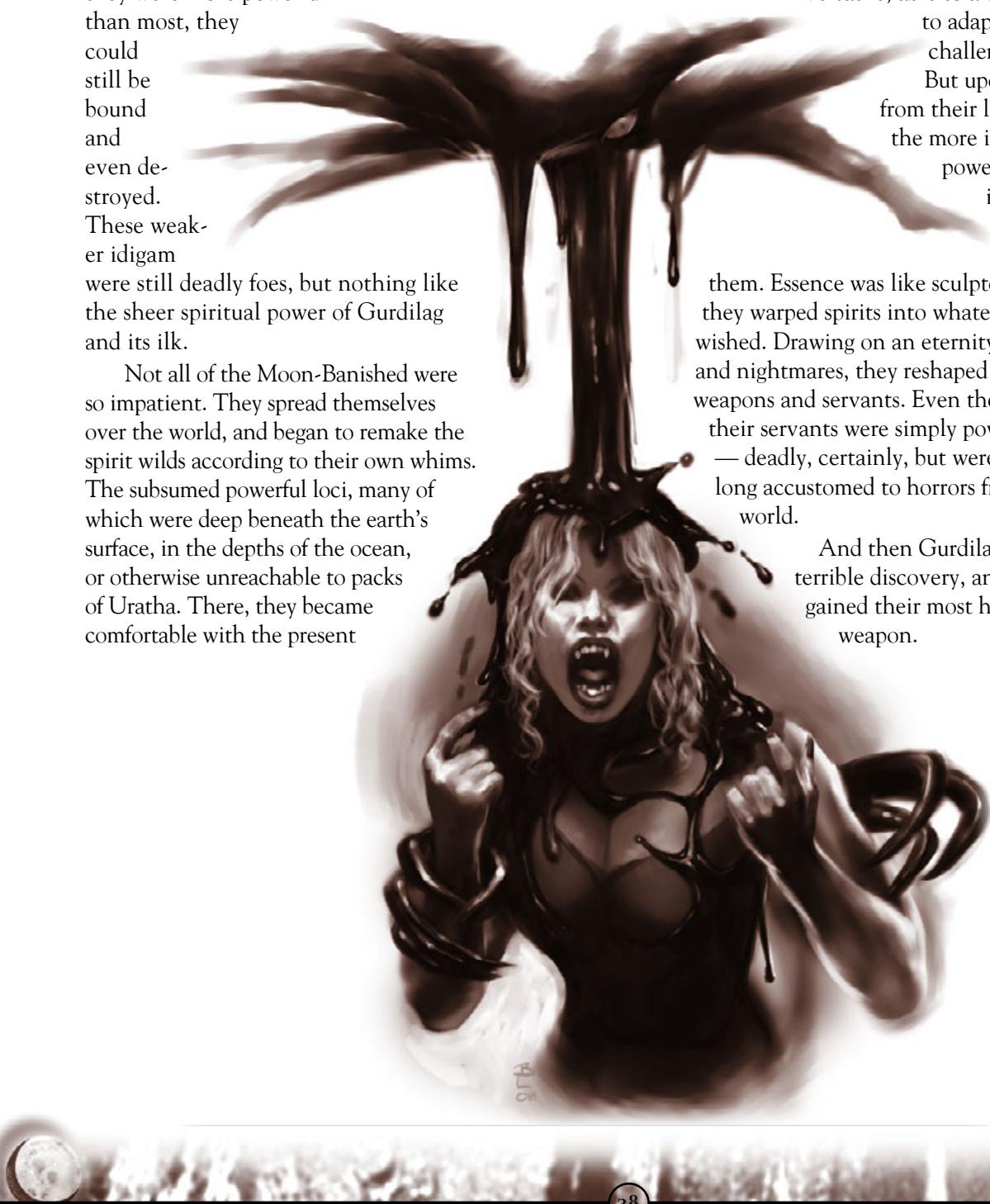
It is these patient, careful idigam that the Uratha fear. The Moon-Banished have always been

versatile, able to alter themselves to adapt to whatever challenge they face. But upon returning from their lunar prison, the more intelligent and powerful of the

idigam learned to alter the world around

them. Essence was like sculptor's clay, and they warped spirits into whatever form they wished. Drawing on an eternity of darkness and nightmares, they reshaped spirits into weapons and servants. Even then, though, their servants were simply powerful spirits — deadly, certainly, but werewolves were long accustomed to horrors from the spirit world.

And then Gurdilag made a terrible discovery, and the idigam gained their most horrifying weapon.



GEIST

THE SIN-EATERS™

You promised.

I lied. It sounds almost gleeful.

I peel back the caul on my face and sit up. My shirt is riddled with bullet holes and caked with dried blood. Mine. I pull it, and it rips the hair from my chest as it comes free. I don't know how long I've been here. My body is whole, but not unblemished. A hole in my shoulder, one in my legs, and violent bruises on my torso...but I can move. No bullets. Where did they go? Did they vanish, pulled into the Underworld to await some violent shade that dragged his gun down with him? Did my body absorb them? Did my other half take them away?

I did not, it replies.

I stumble to my feet. I'm in a cemetery. Makes sense; I was in a cemetery when she shot me. I don't remember much — I remember she was dark-skinned, maybe Latino or Arabic. She wore something around her neck that gleamed, not just in the moonlight, but with emotion. Love, I think. Regret. She was a Sin-Eater, I'm sure of that much, but she didn't seem familiar...

Yes, she did.

All right, then. Who was she?

I don't know her. I know the one that rides her. I know the Unrequited Lover.

I wonder how he knows her, but I don't wonder too long. If I ruminate on the question, I'll know the answer, and just at the moment, I don't care. I'm more interested in the poor bastard dying at the other end of the cemetery. My caul — my ticket back to this world — is melting away in my hand like gelatin under a faucet. I saw the last thing he saw: headlights. And then pain. And then nothing. No so very different from me, from what I saw years ago, except I lived. He did not. His name was Allen Michael Brexton, and he had a wife and three children. He thought of them as he died.

You said you wouldn't bring me back.

I lied, it says again. I needed you back. I need you to find her again.

Her?

Her, it insists. *The Unrequited Lover. Find her, and help her reach her end. And then you can die, if you wish.*

Her end? I'm not sure what it means. The geist inside me remains a mystery in many ways. I only know its name, one single word... "Regret."

Oh. You...knew her.

I did, it says. And now you must. If she is to have any peace.

Why should I care if she does? But I already know the answer.

Because until she does, you won't, it says.

I peel off my shirt and go looking for Mr. Brexton's body. If it's still there, I'll be taking his wallet. There might be money, yes, but more important, there might be Love.

And I'll need that.

The Path to Power

By Tyler Huffman

Caleb Baxter's limousine cruised through the surprisingly mild traffic on Broadway, the golden street lamps dancing off the windows as it passed like the liveried guests attending tonight's Elysium. Steering them toward St. Patrick's Cathedral, the ghoul in the driver's seat kept perfectly silent, listening intently as his master gave him his last minute instructions.

"Go to Arai's guild house and have the Meister select a white male between the ages of thirteen and sixteen," Caleb explained. "He must have hair the color of ripened corn and pale blue eyes, cherubic features, and an alto singing voice. Are you getting all this?"

"Yes m'lord," the ghoul nodded, never taking his eyes off the traffic ahead of him.

"Have him dressed as an altar boy and sent to the Cardinal's rectory as his last meal before torpor." Caleb knew his sire's tastes perfectly. The old Sanctified lecher would go to sleep absolutely content, never suspecting he was about to have the rug pulled completely out from under him. *This will be a night long remembered*, he thought with a smug grin as he stared out at the streets of Manhattan.

Brakes squealed as the car pulled to a halt alongside the old church and Caleb stepped out onto the curb. Taking a moment to compose himself, he straightened his tie and cufflinks as he glanced up at the ivory disk of the full moon above. *How do I look, O All Seeing Eye?* he thought. *Appearances are everything these nights.* Unlike many of his Invictus comrades, he had no qualms about adapting to the fashions of the modern '20's and wore a conservative pinstriped suit with a double-breasted jacket, long dark overcoat, and fedora hat, both of which he respectfully removed upon entering St. Patrick's, exposing his immaculately combed brown hair which he parted to one side in the modern style. His booming businesses and political connections demanded he keep up with the times, stodgy, inflexible elders or no.

As he stepped through the great, open door, the Herald announced in a clear tone that carried across the navel, "The Good Mister Caleb Baxter, Viscount of Broadway and Councilor."

Tonight a viscount, tomorrow the Prince, he corrected silently as he gazed across the gathered Kindred, the most respectable members of the First and Second Estates residing in New York. They were dressed in the most regal finery of their living days, a waltzing anachronism too stuck in their ways to even change their attire; frock coats and bustled gowns dominated the scene. As one they turned and acknowledged his entrance; some bowed respectfully, while most simply applauded the newly arrived ancilla. They needed him and his radical ideas, he knew, and once this changing of the guard ended they would be made to see that.

As the youngest member of the Inner Circle, Caleb knew full well that he owed his lofty position in no small part to his being the Cardinal's childe. By the elders' standards he was dangerously progressive despite a fiercely capitalist drive that they recognized as purely Invictus and had--in point of fact--been the reason the Cardinal had chosen to sire him, the heir to a line of wealthy English bankers living in the New World.

So when he came to them several decades ago with his brazen plan to found a cyclical dynasty with his sire, the head of the city's Sanctified, they had thought him mad. "You're deranged!" the old men claimed, sputtering impotently at his proposal. "To suggest someone from another covenant take part in one of our oldest and greatest traditions is outrageous!"

"Age and power has made old Benedict more like us than those bible thumpers he preaches to in the Lancea Sanctum," Caleb had pointed out calmly, drumming manicured fingernails on the great oak meeting table. "He's nearing torpor and it's no secret I am his favored childe; once he slips into the eclipse, I'll be in a position to usurp all of his holdings and claim them for

the Invictus... With the blessing of this most honorable council, of course."

"Until the Tribunal catches wind of your intentions!" the Alder Geoffrey shouted, stabbing a gnarled finger in Caleb's direction from the table's opposite end. "They'll know your betrayal and--covenant loyalty aside--they'll have no choice but to send you to Final Death. It's the law!"

"The Tribune's can be dealt with," the younger vampire insisted. "Once the compact is signed we can orchestrate their disgrace... or, if need be, their disposal." A collective intake of breath circled the room, his fellow councilors shocked at Caleb's blatant suggestion. "And when it happens, gentlemen, we will have the one thing that we have always wanted in New York City--an Invictus Prince."

They'd been stubborn at first but eventually Caleb had secured their consent to his plan. Jonathon merely wished a bribe, and the promise of dominion over all of Brooklyn had won Reginald's blessing. Wesley gave in to the Beast more often than he wanted the Harpy to know. Old Geoffrey had been the last to give in; it seemed the old Gangrel was quite fond of his mortal relatives and would do anything to ensure their continued safety.

Benedict had been intrigued by Caleb's proposition. To enter torpor secure in the knowledge that his hard won estate would be well cared for by his favorite childe and protégé while he slept, waiting to be returned to him upon awakening, leaving his endless dreams untroubled by worry was an attractive prospect indeed. The old Cardinal had taken little convincing at all, in fact, playing right into Caleb's hands.

I almost feel bad for the old man. A Kindred of Quality would never walk into the jaws of such a trap so willingly, he'd thought with a wry chuckle. Now, at tonight's Elysium, Cardinal Benedict would hand down his reigns of power and Caleb would take on the position of Prince, effectively ending a century of Sanctified rule in New York and ushering in a new era of the Invictus. A Reconquista without a shot fired.

As the congregation took their seats in St. Patrick's rows of pews, Caleb threw a knowing look toward his fellow councilors and headed for the front of the chamber. Looking to the altar as his sire took his place to shepherd the ceremony, he bowed his head as the opening Midnight Mass began, inhaling the cloying aroma of burning incense.

While Benedict, draped in his rich vestments, read the liturgy from *The Testament of Longinus*, Caleb's thoughts wandered to his brother Archibald. The Car-

dinal was his sire too and his loyalty was the only thing Caleb couldn't control. Would the up-and-coming priest side with his Invictus brother, or would he rebel, rallying the Sanctified beneath his own banner of conquest against Caleb?

Archibald had been kept in the dark for his own sake, as had the rest of the Inner Circle. Caleb would keep his brother close in the decades to come, providing him financial backing and helping him take over the Lancea Sanctum. He'd give him and the Sanctified access to the Guilds of the Invictus, indoctrinate them, and ensure their ultimate loyalty to their new Prince. If Archibald ever learned what happened to their sire and tried to stand against his brother, he would find his own covenant turned against him. Caleb smiled. *Plotting against my own brother now... I truly do deserve to be called Damned, a modern-day Caine and Abel.*

"Would the flock now rise and step forward to receive communion," Benedict declared, completing the Mass. Caleb abandoned his thoughts and stood as one with his fellow Kindred as they began to shuffle forward. He spotted his brother Archibald now standing beside the Cardinal, handing the elder a chalice brimming with Eucharistic Vitae. Each vampire in line stepped onto the dais and knelt before the Cardinal to drink from the vessel, receiving a solemn word, then stepped down and joined the others at the back of the church, awaiting the grand party of Elysium to follow.

Caleb knelt before his sire, sipping from the cup and accepting the damnation of the Dark Prophet Longinus. Then, rather than filing to the back, he took a place at the Cardinal's side until the remainder of the flock had taken their communion in turn. At last it was time. Stillness permeated the audience and all eyes focused intently on him for the anointing ceremony.

Once more he knelt before his sire, offering his hands for the ritual stigmata to be carved into his palms. As warm blood seeped from the open wounds, Benedict caught the cursed liquid in a bowl of scented olive oil, mixing the two together before tracing them across his childe's forehead with his thumb, forming the sign of the cross.

Taking in hand a thick, worn copy of the Sanguineous Catechism, Archibald opened to the Monachal Creed and began to read aloud, "I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of Heaven and Earth.

"I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, who was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary to redeem Man from Sin through his death and resurrection.

"I believe that Longinus, by piercing the Savior's side as he hung from the Cross, did reveal the divinity of Christ through the fulfillment of the prophecies and that, while Longinus was rightly Damned for his blasphemy, his damnation was itself part of God's Holy Plan.

"I believe that those so Damned are the agents of God's will, chosen to receive the Embrace that we may test the faithful and reveal the divinity within each of them.

"I believe that for my sins I am damned to Hell and yet through damnation I may find my purpose in God's Holy Plan."

Completing the Creed, Archibald closed the Catechism and stepped back while a deacon passed another large volume, *The Testament of Longinus*, to the Cardinal, who in turn held it before Caleb. The ancilla leaned forward and reverently kissed the tome before regaining his feet. Turning to the assembled Kindred, Benedict indicated his newly-anointed childe and announced, "I give you your next Prince." Applause rocked the church as they bowed and stepped down from the dais to join the ensuing revelry of Elysium and the blood feast to come.

Around three in the morning, they retired to the Cardinal's rectory where Benedict found Caleb's gift waiting for him. The elder took his time drinking from the youth, savoring the rich taste of his vitae until he fell unconscious. Summoning his ghoul retainer, Caleb whispered, "See that the boy is returned home safely."

"Yes m'lord," the ghoul nodded, throwing the lad's arm across his shoulders and carrying him out.

Turning to his sire, Caleb took a deep breath and slowly released it. "I suppose it's time you got ready, isn't it?" *Take your time you old wretch. I have.*

Caleb watched as Benedict solemnly removed his papal robes. The aged Cardinal appeared a hundred years older, already bearing the countenance of a van-

quished king. Setting the vestments aside, he went to the walk-in closet in which he kept a gleaming rosewood casket; even in the closet's darkened recesses, its polished surface caught the flickering candlelight. Pausing, Benedict leaned heavily upon the doorframe, his shuddering sagging slightly.

"Your Eminence?" Caleb asked, injecting as much concern as he could into his voice.

"It's not easy," the Cardinal answered. "The thought of entering torpor is a terrifying one."

Don't you dare get cold feet now, old man. Is your mind not at ease, knowing your assets will be cared for?

"It is," Benedict conceded. "Thank you for all you've done for me, Caleb."

"I serve at the pleasure of the Prince," the younger vampire answered.

Turning to his childe, Benedict placed a hand on Caleb's shoulder and smiled into his face. "You've made me very proud, my son. Guide the flock well in my absence." At last, the Cardinal dropped his hand and turned to his casket, raising the lid and settling himself down on the cushioned purple velvet lining the inside.

"I'll be right here waiting for you in a hundred years," Caleb assured his sire as the elder vampire's eyes drooped, then closed, and he drifted off into the deathly embrace of eclipse. For several minutes Caleb stood over his sire, watching him sleep. He looked peaceful, without a care in the world, serene even. Perfect.

Caleb crept across the room, wincing guiltily at every creak in the floorboards, to his coat hanging on a peg nailed to the wall. *This will be a night long remembered*, he repeated. *But by no one but I.* Reaching into a hidden pouch sewn within the coat's lining, he withdrew a carpenter's hammer and a wooden stake. With tools in hand, he turned back to the torpid Cardinal and wondered, *Will you remember?*



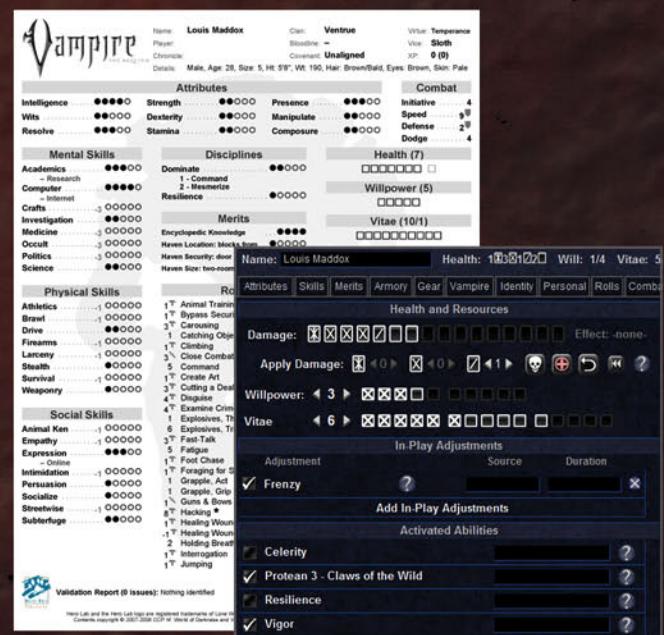
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VAMPIRE

THE ETERNAL STRUGGLE

The Ritual of the Shovel Head

By Dane Smith

Silence, dead silence, was all that Magnus heard around him, other than the ringing in his head from where the shovel hit him. Everything was dark, and it felt like the world was crushing him with its immense weight. His body felt like it could not move as something was pinning him to the earth, or more precisely in the earth. What he did not know was he had been buried alive. The dirt and worms have created a natural coffin for him to spend the rest of eternity. As he opens his eyes, his mind still intoxicated from the events of an hour ago, he feels pain as the dirt cascades into the unshielded eyelids. Instinctively he tries to claw at his face but it is a difficult task. As he moves any part of his body the earth fills the void. He breathes in hard and randomly, hyperventilating from the fear of his situation. Thoughts of a pending suffocation blaze through his mind at the speed of lighting. But then something strange occurs to him. If he is buried under the ground, then why is he not dead already? Surely he must have been unconscious for some time, so why is he not dead yet? He tries to control his breathing, and as he is settling down the rational part of his mind is telling him he does not need to breathe. The other part of his mind is telling him he is already dead and arrived in some sort of personal hell, to forever be left in isolation as some sort of eternal punishment for past sins. As he started to become calm he took notice that the ground was not entirely hard. He was able to move about, albeit with difficulty. If he was underground, then maybe he can dig himself up? What did he have to lose? Frantically he started to claw away at the ground above him. Soft dirt started to give way. His movements started to speed up as he saw the digging was having an effect. He kept clawing and clawing for what seemed like an eternity until he could see the moonlit sky.

One hour before Magnus was stuck in his underground prison he was having a carefree night. Dinner and a movie with the new girl at the office gave him a radiance of euphoria. He felt like a champion since she was shooting down offers left and right from other potential suitors. But to put icing on the cake he thought he would pick up a bouquet of roses. Sure it was a standard maneuver that every man used, but he knew girls liked that romantic stuff. It was not going to hurt his chances. Coming out of the flower shop the foot traffic on the street had started

to pick up. This concerned him because he did not want the flowers to get damaged. He made a heavy sigh and walked into the crowd. After a few minutes he could hear music echo behind him from a distance. Within a few seconds the music blurred down the street in the form of a SUV. A few more seconds passed and another car goes by blaring music. He pays little attention to it as he is trying to make sure his flowers do not get wrecked by oncoming walkers on the crowded street. Minutes later he comes to a turnoff where the foot traffic is lessened. A couple more minutes pass when he hears music behind him again. The same SUV drives by, and this peaks his interest. The van parks a couple hundred meters down the street, still blaring the music into the dead of night. Focused on the van in front of him as he continues walking, he does not hear the slamming of car doors close by. Suddenly his head is jerked back and something bites into the flesh of his neck. He tries to scream for help but the music is blocking out the frantic pleas. Fear can be heard in his voice. Escape is not a possibility as he cannot seem to move. A woman is draining the blood out of him, and enjoying every minute of it. A well-built man with a shovel stands next to her. After a minute of eternal hell his vision starts to cloud over. The darkness of death is taking its toll, and the chimes of the reaper begin to ring. In an instant the flicker of life in him fades and disappears. The woman drops the newly created carcass on the ground and it hits with a plop. She rolls up one of the sleeves of her jacket, exposing her skin to the cool night air. Her teeth bite into the skin as smoothly as the ripples in a pond. Blood starts pouring out of the wound, dripping onto the dirty cement ground. She aims the drops for Magnus's open mouth. Fear made his face contorted, and kept his mouth open. A couple minutes later the dark clouds covering his vision started to lift as the power of the blood took over his bodily functions. He looked up at the sky and saw the man and woman stand over him. But before he could say a word, the man struck him in the face with the shovel, putting him under the sweet embrace of unconsciousness again.

The stars in the sky signaled the success of his struggle. But he was not alone. He could hear laughing, music, and screaming, all around him. "Hey, it looks like the loser is finally coming around" a voice yelled out.

"Yeah, you owe me \$20 bucks Taylor" said another voice. The voice kept talking as he finally clawed his way out of the ground. What waited around him was not what he was expecting. Around ten men and women were drinking on a convoy of cars and motorcycles. All of them were dressed like street punks, with leather jackets, bandanas, and ripped t-shirts. The men wore jeans, while the women wore skirts that barely kept their panties hidden. One of the men threw a bottle at him, and if he were lucid he might have caught it, or at least dodged it. But instead it shattered across his face. The glass ripped open his cheeks, and the alcohol caused it to burn. Magnus screamed out in pain, clutching his face, while the gang started another round of laughing. "Looks like you embraced a smart one there, eh Brigit?" "Like you did any better? The last five pieces of gutter trash you embraced never even made it out of the grave" a female voice retorted. Magnus looked through the cracks of his hands as his lucidity came back to him, and the pain from the cuts started to reside, although leaving a dull stinging sensation.

"Who are you people?" Magnus asked the partying group. As if on cue more laughter and catcalls echoed into the night sky. "We're the devil" one of them yelled out in hysterics. A woman walked towards Magnus, with a mischievous smile on her face. She put her arms around him, and leaned in to kiss him. As they locked lips Magnus could feel something trickle down his throat. He pushed the woman away, and she still kept the mischievous smile on her face. Blood was streaking down the corner of her lips. He instinctively put his hand to his mouth and felt the warm substance at his touch. Looking at his fingers blood could be seen smearing its tips. "What kind of freak are you? Why did you spit blood down my throat?" he heard himself yell out. He was disgusted at what was happening. "I thought you would be thirsty after all that hard work digging yourself out of your grave" the woman said to him. "I mean, you are a vampire now. It is not like a beer does the trick anymore." Magnus looked at her stunned. "What do you mean Vampire? What kind of crack have you been smoking? Vampires do not exist. You've fried yourself on one too many horror films. What right did you have sticking me in some hellish underground prison? I should brake your neck, slut!" For some reason he could not help himself. The words kept pouring out. He was never angry like this in his life. But his vision was starting to blur over with some kind of red mist. It was like the dam had broken, and all this rage was starting to gush out. As the mist took complete control, he would not remember what happened next. In his rage he lunged

at the woman, and as he said he would do, he broke her neck. The audible crack could be heard as her neck hit the ground at an unnatural angle. The punks became quiet for the first time. This was not a part of the ritual that they had expected. Some of them were apart of Sabbat packs that performed dozens of shovel head rituals, but never have any of the neonates ever proved to be a challenge once emerging from their makeshift grave. Magnus ran at another of the punks, punching a hole right through his gut. Blood exploded out of the punk as he cried into the night sky. The rest of the remaining punks started to grab the shovels scattered next to them; the same shovels that they buried him with the first time. The next punk Magnus attacked was better prepared. He struck him across the face with the shovel, but it did not even faze him. The punk was grabbed at his waist; he could see the rage cloud over the eyes of Magnus as if he were a frenzied beast. The next thing the punk saw was his reflection in the windshield as he was thrown through one of the parked cars. Before Magnus was able to lock sites on another target to attack, the remaining punks launched a barrage of blows at him with their shovels. Blow after blow sapped the strength out of him. After a dozen blows his body fell to the earth, exhausted and beaten. The little blood that remained in his veins trickled into the parched ground. "What the hell made him so strong? Brigit is not an elder" one punk stated. "Who cares? What do we do with him now? How are we going to explain to the Archbishop that his childe was broken by a recently turned neonate?" The punks started to bicker amongst themselves as Magnus lay motionless on the ground.

From a distance a couple shadowy figures looked upon the graveyard with morbid fascination, through a pair of binoculars. A feminine voice spoke. "So, does he meet your expectations sire?" A sly smile came across the face of the other figure. "Yes, he will do perfectly. Your information network on possible targets to embrace for our experiments, as always, is the best in the city if not the country." The man turned to walk away. After a couple of steps his head turned back to the woman. "Make sure he is not killed by the rabble down there. The Archbishop is already annoyed at me for having to wipe out one of his packs for botching my last experimentation target. I do not want to have to wipe out another pack." With those words he walked away into the darkness, leaving the woman to perform his orders. She looked through the binoculars and smiled. "This will make the fight against the Camarilla interesting" she thought.

Love and Monsters

Parents in 'World of Darkness: Innocents'
By Andrew Peregrine

*"Mother is the name for God on
the lips and hearts of all children"*

Eric Draven – The Crow

Billie had a knife, so everything was going to be ok. Well, he had said he had a knife, and Zed hadn't believed him. So there they stood, in Billie's back yard, getting the proof. When Billie pulled out the knife, there was no doubt in any of the kid's minds that it was what they needed. Sure, they were small, but it was a big knife. If they got bothered by the skull dogs or the Raggedy man again, there was going to be trouble. Billie held the knife out in front of them for a while, letting their awestruck eyes run up and down the smooth steel lines and jagged hunter's curves. But then a large hand grabbed Billie by the wrist from behind, almost lifting him off his feet. The other children's eyes turned from awe to horror at what might be in store for Billie.

"What have I told you William James Thompson?" asked Billie's dad with quiet rage. He used Billie's full name so the other kids knew he was really in trouble. "The knives in my collection are not toys." Mr. Thompson effortlessly removed the knife from Billie's hand, Billie knew better than to offer any resistance. The other kids began to shuffle away as Billie was led into the house. It was certain he'd not be coming out for quite some time. Until then, what would they do if the Raggedy man came by again?

Why Parents Matter

There are few adults in a child's world, yet their parents are an integral part of it. For most children, their parents are the one thing they can rely on, for good or ill, and the foundation of their home life. Few children would prefer to be alone or orphaned, even if they cannot stand their parents. So when creating characters for World of Darkness: Innocents, it is vital that you spend some time thinking about who your character's parents are. There is as much variety to your character's parents as there is for your characters. Parents and how they relate to their children also forms a vital part of the child's identity, especially when they are younger. Until they go to school or mix regularly with other children, the opinions and way of life of their parents is all a child knows.

Parents also have a phenomenal degree of power over their children. They set curfews, administer punishments, feed and cloth their children. As time goes on, most children come to realize their parents are not all powerful and that they can break the rules, some realize this earlier than others. However, children are usually bound by the rules of their parents simply by virtue of having nowhere else to live. So while the children might be keeping the neighborhood safe from monsters, they still need to convince their parents to let them stay out late, or be prepared to suffer the consequences of sneaking out regardless. So it matters a great deal for any Innocents campaign how much attention each character's parents pay to their offspring. Will they keep you indoors if you are falling behind at school? Do they let you come and go as you please, or fear for your safety the minute you are out of their sight? While it might make things difficult, role-playing the relationship each character has with their parents will ground the campaign and add a layer of realism to the children's exploits.

If you are going to detail the character's parents, it is also important to make sure they are not all the same. Remember when you were a kid; there was always one kid who had a later bedtime, a nicer bike or always got to go on school trips. The opposite was true too, there were plenty who never got to go on trips, couldn't come out because they had to go to a special church or who never even considered checking their parents. One thing that often gets missed by children is that parents don't always agree. What one set of parents will not stand for means nothing to another set. So never assume that each character will be treated the same for their indiscretions. This can have a powerful effect on the game, after all, the kids with stricter parents are going to be far less keen to stay out late or break into old houses looking for clues. Their desire to follow the other kids balanced against their fear of punishment can be a rich source of role-playing opportunities for the entire group as they try to convince one of the gang to ignore their parents and join the ghost hunting.

Parent Traits

As far as their physical statistics go, the main rule-book already covers parents. This system of 'Parent traits' therefore governs how they relate to their children and what they are like as characters. Each character's parents are defined with 5 traits: Care, Discipline Foundation, Values, and Wealth. Like any trait in World of Darkness they are rated from 1 to 5. There are no hard rules to this system as it is designed to help you think about who your parents might be, rather than 'roll them up'. So, taking your Innocents character as a basis for any decisions, each player should pick the ratings that most suit their character to build traits for their parents. Use them to explain why your character is the way she is. Is she jumpy because her father is a drunk, is she too trusting because she only ever gets love and support at home?

While you should be able to assign the traits as you see fit, some groups may want a more defined rules system. In which case just assign points from a standard pool to the traits. For parents with a few extreme traits, assign one of each of the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 across the 5 traits. For more versatile trait creation you could assign points from a pool of 15, with every trait having at least 1. If you want to use something simpler, you will also find many of these traits will make the basis of several merits and flaws.

The traits themselves are described below. However they are only a starting point for you to flesh out the parents. Sure they might be strict, but why, and what are they most strict about? Were they treated badly by their parents or do they work too hard and are too tired to hear the whole story and punish just to make sure? Maybe they are scared about the things going on in the neighborhood and want their child to stay indoors just to be safe. Use the traits to understand more about your character. How have these parents made the child what she is? It is also important not to assume too much from one trait. Wealthy parents can still be abusive, often trying to buy off their guilt with expensive toys. Poor families can love their children as much as rich ones, even if they can't give them what they'd like to. Finally, remember to give your character's parents a name each. These people shouldn't be faceless adversaries but characters in their own right.

Care

The Care trait shows how much attention and love the parents show to their child. It is a vital indicator of how the parents and child relate to each other.

- **Abused** – This child has abusive and uncaring parents. Their home life is a nightmare of neglect and occasional violence. The parents

take no care of the child, leaving them to find their own food and clothing from what is in the house.

Ignored – The parents pay the child little attention, often not knowing if they are in or out. Anything the child needs like new clothes have to be pointed out to these parents. They'd just rather watch TV.

Non-demonstrative – These parents love and care for the child but just aren't big on hugs. Maybe they have trouble showing emotion or have a strict code of behavior themselves.

Loving – The child has been brought up in a loving and caring environment. However, their parents take an interest in all they do and want to know where they are most (if not all) of the time.

Overly Protective – These parents care a little too much. They have a paranoid fear that something will happen to their child and won't let them go anywhere or do anything they deem even slightly unsafe.

Discipline

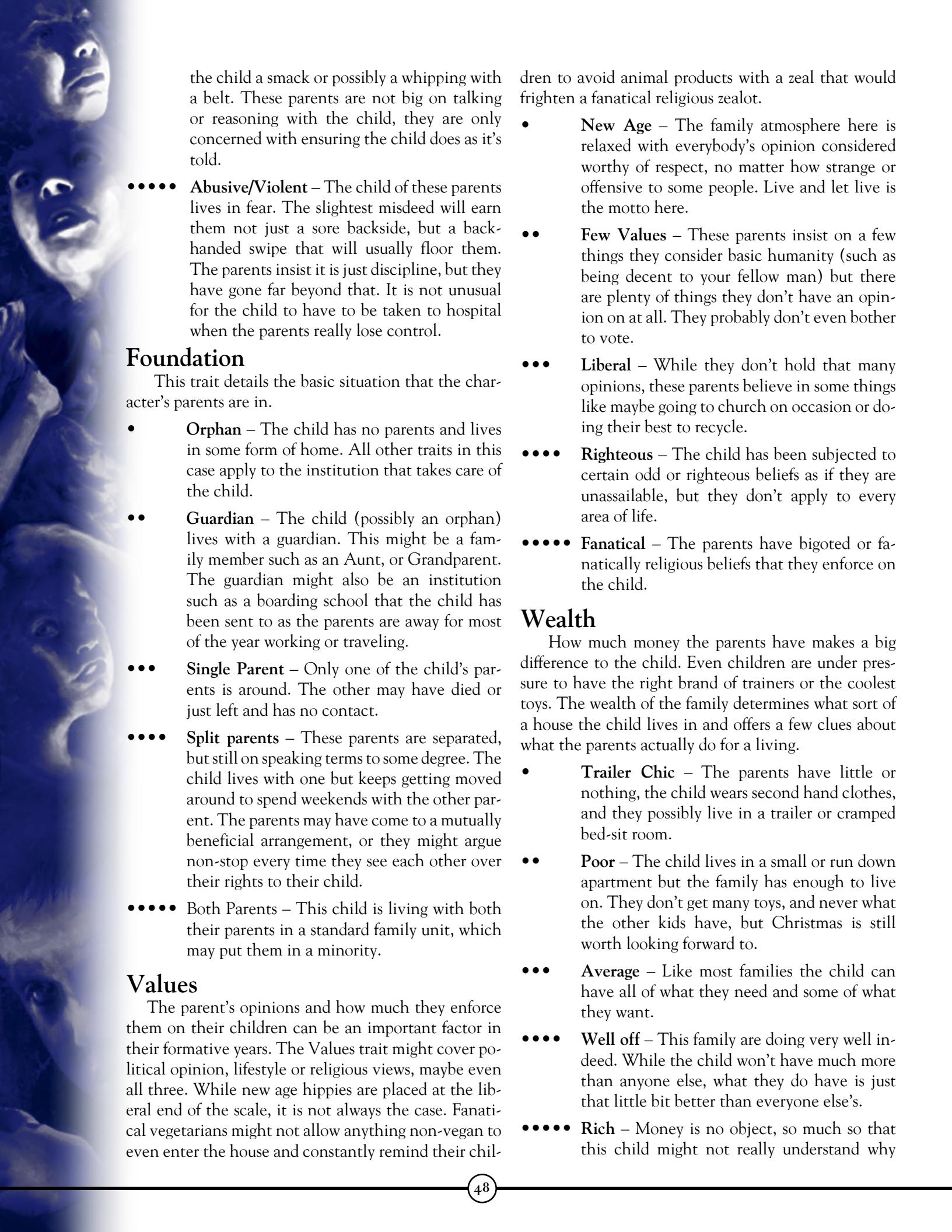
When the child gets into trouble, you need to know how bad that trouble is going to be. This trait defines how authoritarian the parents are, how many rules they may impose and how they respond to bad behavior. This can have a huge effect on the child's behavior with authority figures. Do they play up because they know they can get away with it, or do it to get attention from parents who become violent if crossed?

• **Non-existent** – The parents enforce no discipline whatsoever on the child. They might be too lazy to do so or believe that no form of punishment is appropriate. These parents have no rules and fail to enforce all of them.

Very liberal – While the child can expect a stiff talking to or possibly grounding, there is no danger of them getting a smack. The parents have one or two rules, but do little to enforce them.

Occasional Smack – There are consequences for misbehavior, but not beyond reason. The parents have rules, but nothing too unreasonable. Physical punishment is a last resort, but the threat is always there if need be.

Regular smacks – This child has a lot to worry about if they break the rules. Their parents have a few rules, but will brook no disobedience. Any form of misdeed will get



the child a smack or possibly a whipping with a belt. These parents are not big on talking or reasoning with the child, they are only concerned with ensuring the child does as it's told.

- **Abusive/Violent** – The child of these parents lives in fear. The slightest misdeed will earn them not just a sore backside, but a back-handed swipe that will usually floor them. The parents insist it is just discipline, but they have gone far beyond that. It is not unusual for the child to have to be taken to hospital when the parents really lose control.

Foundation

This trait details the basic situation that the character's parents are in.

- **Orphan** – The child has no parents and lives in some form of home. All other traits in this case apply to the institution that takes care of the child.
- **Guardian** – The child (possibly an orphan) lives with a guardian. This might be a family member such as an Aunt, or Grandparent. The guardian might also be an institution such as a boarding school that the child has been sent to as the parents are away for most of the year working or traveling.
- **Single Parent** – Only one of the child's parents is around. The other may have died or just left and has no contact.
- **Split parents** – These parents are separated, but still on speaking terms to some degree. The child lives with one but keeps getting moved around to spend weekends with the other parent. The parents may have come to a mutually beneficial arrangement, or they might argue non-stop every time they see each other over their rights to their child.
- **Both Parents** – This child is living with both their parents in a standard family unit, which may put them in a minority.

Values

The parent's opinions and how much they enforce them on their children can be an important factor in their formative years. The Values trait might cover political opinion, lifestyle or religious views, maybe even all three. While new age hippies are placed at the liberal end of the scale, it is not always the case. Fanatical vegetarians might not allow anything non-vegan to even enter the house and constantly remind their chil-

dren to avoid animal products with a zeal that would frighten a fanatical religious zealot.

- **New Age** – The family atmosphere here is relaxed with everybody's opinion considered worthy of respect, no matter how strange or offensive to some people. Live and let live is the motto here.
- **Few Values** – These parents insist on a few things they consider basic humanity (such as being decent to your fellow man) but there are plenty of things they don't have an opinion on at all. They probably don't even bother to vote.
- **Liberal** – While they don't hold that many opinions, these parents believe in some things like maybe going to church on occasion or doing their best to recycle.
- **Righteous** – The child has been subjected to certain odd or righteous beliefs as if they are unassailable, but they don't apply to every area of life.
- **Fanatical** – The parents have bigoted or fanatically religious beliefs that they enforce on the child.

Wealth

How much money the parents have makes a big difference to the child. Even children are under pressure to have the right brand of trainers or the coolest toys. The wealth of the family determines what sort of a house the child lives in and offers a few clues about what the parents actually do for a living.

- **Trailer Chic** – The parents have little or nothing, the child wears second hand clothes, and they possibly live in a trailer or cramped bed-sit room.
- **Poor** – The child lives in a small or run down apartment but the family has enough to live on. They don't get many toys, and never what the other kids have, but Christmas is still worth looking forward to.
- **Average** – Like most families the child can have all of what they need and some of what they want.
- **Well off** – This family are doing very well indeed. While the child won't have much more than anyone else, what they do have is just that little bit better than everyone else's.
- **Rich** – Money is no object, so much so that this child might not really understand why

other children don't get to go on school trips and wear nice clothes.

New Merits and Flaws

Finally, here are a couple of additional merits and flaws that apply to parents.

School Grades (-2 to +2)

Most children are categorized by adults by how well they are doing at school. Every child begins the game with this merit at +0, as they are doing as well as they are expected to do. Gaining points in this merit doesn't make a stupid kid suddenly get A grades though. However, they will be seen to be working hard and doing their best, even if that isn't very much. This trait is rated from -2 to +2 and this is used as a bonus or penalty when dealing with parents and teachers, as those who are working hard at school are often trusted more than those who aren't. As the campaign progresses and the characters miss lessons or slip behind through being too busy fighting monsters of the emotional trauma of doing the same, the Storyteller is free to drop their level in this trait.

-2 Badly falling behind – The child is doing very poorly, producing work that is often 2 full grades below their ability. They will probably be called to see the school councilor or be subject to extra homework and the special attention of their teachers.

-1 Dropped a grade – The child's work has become substandard. Notes will be sent home and the child will have to suffer several lectures about 'their attitude'.

0 As expected – The child is getting the grades everyone expects them to get.

+1 Working hard – This child is showing a commendable effort and has been noticed by the teachers

+2 Excelling – A right teacher's pet, this child is held up as an example of performance to other pupils. While it might net them favor and reputation with their parents and teachers, the rest of the students might not feel the same.

If you want a general guide for how well your character does in school, add their Intelligence Attribute to their Study skill for the mark they usually get in tests: 1-2=E, 3-4=D, 5-6=C, 7-8=B, 9-10+=A

Addicted Parents (3-5 pt flaw)

Your parents have a bad addiction. For 3 points only one of them has the addiction so the child can possibly get support from the other one. However for 5 points the addiction is bad and has consumed both parents. The parents will take any money the child gets to feed the addiction and will prioritize their needs above those of the child, possibly using the child to help feed and get supplies for the addiction. The addiction could be drugs, but could just as easily be alcohol or cigarettes.

ACHILLIES HEEL

By Justin Achilli

I don't know if you guys know this or not, but I'm the guy in charge of who gets to be vampires around here. Sure, my work on **Masquerade** and **Requiem** was in years past, but that's just my cloak of obfuscation at work. I'm the master vampire. You don't see me. I work from the shadows and I keep my fangs retracted.

A lot of these new guys, they think they can just come through the front door, pick up a vinyl cape, and dance the night eternal. What a bunch of rubes. It's my job to shed the scales from their eyes (often by kicking them in the head) and choose which among them receive the offer of infinite unlife and who's doomed to share the downstairs bathroom with the content developers (who are pretty much werewolves).

Vampire Applicant #OA56697-PL Chad Brown, Operations Associate

Chad has knives and knows where to hide the dead bodies. He will eat snakes if necessary, and can stomach month-old sushi, so he has a significant constitution. He also has a company credit card, so if resources ever became an issue, he would perform admirably as a minion. And by that I mean buy stuff.

Benefits: Already does my bidding. Easily cajoled.

Drawbacks: Short. Weird. Familiar with my modus operandi.

Petition for vampirism ACCEPTED.

Vampire Applicant #CS77252-PD Yas Bennett, Lead Accountant

A lead accountant sounds awesome, which would put the full might of corporations at my disposal. Do vampires write checks? No, seriously, think about it. Have you ever seen a vampire write a check? Oh, who cares. It's about the power, not the details.

Benefits: Controls who gets paid and when. Doesn't put up with people's crap. Once slammed Greg Fountain's sacroiliac in a car door.

Drawbacks: Knows where I live. Knows my wife. Knows my salary. *Knows too much.*

A tough call, but we'll roll the dice. *Petition for vampirism ACCEPTED.*

Vampire Applicant #IL26595-RK

Nathan Richardson, Executive Producer

If booze were blood, Nathan would probably be unimpeachable Prince of Hella Damnation for All Time. Also, if falling down and being unintelligible for about six hours were blood, he would still be a pretty accomplished vampire.

Benefits: Good shoes. Usually pretty clean. Mouth already filled with deadly fangs.

Drawbacks: Falls down so much. Exceeds my range of influence. Knows a language I don't, so he can communicate in ways I cannot know, which might undermine my status as Master Vampire.

Petition for vampirism DENIED.

Vampire Applicant #PA11743-UL

Richard Thomas, Creative Director

Rich has been here even longer than I have, and knows the secret treacheries that hide deep within the festering guts of the organization. He's also older than me, and I might be able to convince other people that *he's* the Master Vampire (*he's* not), and they'll come after him instead of me.

Benefits: Evil. Is my boss. Likes *Deadwood*.

Drawbacks: Might be smarter than me and manipulating me in reverse. Hey, what if *he's* already the Master Vampire (*he's* not) and has me tricked into thinking that I'm the Master Vampire? No, that couldn't happen.

Petition for vampirism ACCEPTED.

Vampire Applicant #MH65831-AD

Aileen Miles, Art Director

She's like a thunderhead of bile and wrath. That sounds like a pretty cool asset to have at one's command, doesn't it?

Benefits: Mean as a snake. Works from the remote office (would extend the range of my nefarious plans).

Already has minions of her own (Developer Ethan).

Drawbacks: Mad all the time. Can't drive a car. Doesn't drink.

Doesn't drink? *Petition for vampirism DENIED.*

As you can see, it's pretty difficult to weigh the souls of Men and see who makes the cut and who doesn't. That's fine with me, though, because building a hoary host of undead with which to threaten the night and execute World Domination isn't something that can be done lightly or by a part-time staff. Part-time, staff? Huh. Maybe I need an assistant.