

Strange, dead Love



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I could tell by the way his sheets whispered against his skin as he sat up that they were Egyptian cotton. My hunch was confirmed as the fabric pooled around his otherwise naked hips. Cool, crisp, and with none of the slipperiness that silk would have offered, they had to be at least 500 thread count.

What can I say? I notice details when it comes down to the nitty-gritty. And, happily, the nitty-gritty was exactly what it was coming down to.

I couldn't bring to mind his name, but he had a body no woman could forget. He was perfection. Honey-blonde hair. Bright blue eyes. Broad shoulders and six-pack abs. He was a long stretch of sculpted steel and sex appeal. And he was calling my name.

“Lis...”

There was altogether too much space between where I was standing and the bed he was lounging in. Of course, at that moment, a hair's breadth would have been too much space. I wanted nothing more than to trace my fingertips over his golden skin... along the lines of that chiseled chin... across the golden sheen of barely-there chest hair and down the treasure trail it made beneath those pristine white sheets.

“Lis!”

He wanted me too. I could tell by the hunger in his voice. The urgency grew, pulling at me, but the distance between us stayed the same. I felt like I was standing in cement. No matter how badly I wanted to, I couldn't step forward, couldn't move, couldn't reach out for him.

He scowled, but it wasn't me he was frustrated with. Somewhere, in the distance, a trill of beeps repeated themselves over and over. He frowned as if trying to place the sound.

I blinked, flailing for my bedside table even as I croaked out a curse at the ringing phone pulling me out of what promised to be an extremely hot dream.

I glanced at my alarm clock as my fingers wrapped around the phone. 9:04 AM. Not an unreasonable hour for a call. Unless you'd been working until after the sun came up the night before, that is.

“This had better be important.” I sounded like I'd been gargling gravel as I growled into the phone and flopped back onto the coarse sheets of my real and altogether-too-solitary bed.

“I need you.” The voice on the other end of the line was half honey, half whiskey, and all male.

“You and half the city, Gabriel...” I sounded almost as tired as I felt, but despite my exhaustion I found myself reaching for my robe rather than crawling back under the covers. Something was wrong.

“Alicia.” He drew my name out into extra syllables – Ah LEE see ah – where most folks settled for a short version – Lis – that rhymed with “freeze.”

Not even my father called me by my full name. No one but Gabriel Boucher.

“What’s going on, Gabriel?” Even as I was grilling the owner of Ciao Bella, the nightclub I’d been “working” outside last night, I was also leaving my bed (and the dream-blonde) behind. I tripped over a duffle bag I’d dropped before falling into bed just after dawn. The well-worn zipper split, spilling a pair of neon-green go-go boots and a jumble of clothing. The boots had platform heels easily 8 inches tall, making them longer than the miniskirt they were tangled in. I sighed into the phone, kicking the mess out of the way as I waited for Gabriel to explain why he was waking me up when I’d only left his club a few hours before.

“It’s... complicated.” Gabriel’s voice, a subtle blending of the myriad European countries he’d spent time in, was normally unshakably confident. The hesitation in it, as much as the fact that he’d dared to rouse me from my bed, would have been enough to call me to him. But his next words assured I was on my way.

“I’m calling in my favor.”

The cell phone silence hung between us, and I found myself holding my breath, hoping for more details that I was certain wouldn’t be given, at least not over the phone.

“I’ll be there in ten minutes,” I said. He hung up before I’d finished the sentence.

It wasn’t until I was in the shower—quick wash and rinse done, hot water cascading over me as I tried to collect my thoughts—that I realized how serious the situation was.

Gabriel had called me at 9 in the morning. He’d risked my wrath, knowing he’d be waking me after only a few hours of sleep and before my first cup of coffee. But that wasn’t the worst of it.

It was morning. Daylight. Gabriel Boucher had just called me at 9AM.

I turned off the water and leapt out of the shower, barely bothering to dry before I was pulling on clothes. Not the stuff I’d worn last night, or my normal uniform. Showing up wearing my blues and a vice-cop’s badge was no way to avoid attracting attention in the Gabriel’s neighborhood, even at 9 in the morning. I settled on jeans and a t-shirt, plus a jacket to hide my sidearm, and boots sturdy enough to kick the ass of whatever I was going to be facing.

A minute later, hair pulled back in a still-dripping bun, I was locking the door to my apartment and sprinting for my car.

I threw on my sunglasses against the glare of the morning sun through my windshield as I slammed the car into gear and merged with the post-rush hour traffic. As much as I hated early mornings, there were folks out there who liked them even less. Gabriel Boucher was one of them.

Gabriel wasn’t just a night owl. He wasn’t just “not a morning person”.

He was a vampire.

And if he was calling me at 9 in the morning, the already-weird world as I knew it had just taken a hard left turn for the über-bizarre.

Introduction

"Love never dies a natural death. It dies because we don't know how to replenish its source. It dies of blindness and errors and betrayals. It dies of illness and wounds; it dies of weariness, of withering, of tarnishing."

- Anaïs Nin

Introduction

The rustle of silk. Spicy perfume. Bare skin, cool to the touch. A long neck. A throbbing pulse. Hot breath. An anticipatory quiver.

Then, sharp fangs.

All to feel a kiss. *The Kiss*. One letter distinguishes a vampire's ecstasy from mortals'. A single kiss may lead to a human orgasm. Another, a Kindred Kiss. Similar? Or nothing alike?

Underneath it all, turbulent emotions shatter dreams and fulfill mortal fantasies of love and desire – emotions a Kindred can no longer feel. Or can they? Is love the sole province of the living? Or is it something more, something so powerful it can transcend the vampiric condition?

Strange, Dead Love not only explores the difference between the physical and emotional aspects of love, but also explores romance as a genre – in all its seductive and passionate glory – within the context of **Vampire: the Requiem**.

Playing for Love

Romance isn't just about sex, and it's not just about falling for someone so hard it hurts. It's not about denying a predator's true nature or seducing mortals in the name of love. Romance is all about emotion and how two (or more) characters build on their feelings to experience a moment of intimacy – one that we can all relate to.

To vampires, there is nothing more intimate than the Kiss: that moment when a Kindred feels something more powerful than orgasm. That instant when a vampire buries her fangs in another's neck not only to sustain her life but because it feels *that* good.

Like horror, romance is both a genre and a mood. It has certain conventions and tropes, but it also has a

story structure. In a chronicle, a Storyteller maps out the beats of a plot; in a romance, an author or a screenwriter designs the steps to intimacy between two or more characters. We'll show you how to implement a relationship-driven plot, and also how to add in elements that your coterie can respond to.

There's more to romance in **Vampire** than a single Kiss: it's also a vital way to help characters better understand each other and themselves. Building relationships, whether they be Kindred vs. Kindred, Kindred vs. mortal, or Kindred vs. society, not only draws from the character's cultural and social expectations, but their Virtue and Vice as well.

Many contemporary readers look to Anne Rice as the first author who blended sexy vampires with beautiful mortals, but she's only a recent example in a proud tradition. Long before Anne Rice, vampires often took the guise of the mortal's dead lover. Some works explored not only social taboos, but sexual. Throughout the literary history of the vampire, the emphasis on romance has allowed readers and viewers to either sympathize with the undead or fear the monster. In more recent examples such as *Twilight* or *Buffy: the Vampire Slayer*, protagonists can even fall head over heels in love with the undead.

Those of the Daeva clan are seductive and tantalizing, perfect for a romance. They are the epitome of a Kindred lover and their entire existence is shaped by desire. But the Daeva are not the only Kindred in the **World of Darkness** who can imitate love and sex. Any Kindred – monstrous or beautiful – may fall into the illusion of a deep, emotional connection or have an erotic one-night stand. Sometimes, that dream is shared with other Kindred. Other times, that fantasy happens with a mortal, whether he's aware of it or not. Either way, romance is a very human trait and something Kindred can never fully understand... until it happens to them.

How to Use This Book

It is not uncommon for a vampire's desire for romance to end in tragedy. In **Vampire**, romance is seldom about the happy couple with a glowing future. It's about the consequences of a Kindred's desire and the lengths they'll go to indulge it. How many rules would a Ventru break to pursue a lover? What would a member of the Lancea Sanctum think about a Nosferatu who's a regular at the local strip club? What's to stop a Wrathful Kindred from killing his jealous lover?

Strange, Dead Love is a toolkit for answering these questions. While romance, more than almost anything else, is something that needs to be customized for individual characters and players, there are classic story elements and structures that you can use to bring it to life

for your chronicle. We'll give you the tools to immerse yourself as much (or as little) in the more romantic side of **Vampire**.

To that end, **Strange, Dead Love** is a little bit different from most **Vampire** books. While other books focus on how a particular subject changes in the World of Darkness, this book focuses on how to leverage World of Darkness elements to tell stories in the paranormal romance genre. Chapter One explores stages of intimacy, romantic themes, and genre props. Chapter Two provides "shards" – chronicle frameworks and variations for telling your own romantic stories. Chapter Three discusses storytelling romance, with advice for both beginning and experienced Storytellers. This last chapter also suggests ways to play romantic games for two, sharing the duty of storytelling between both players.

“I won’t do it, Gabriel. And you’re an ass for even asking me to.” The bodyguard at the door tensed, but Gabriel shook his head and the guard slouched back into the “at ease” position that he and the two dozen others I’d passed on my way in seemed to use as a default.

Increased club security didn’t relax Gabriel. He fidgeted with a stiletto-sharp letter opener that was probably worth more than my entire apartment building. I didn’t like watching the gleam of silver flashing in his deft hands, but it was safer than making eye contact.

“I don’t have any choice, Alicia.” He drew out my name, like he always did, but this time there was a pleading to his tone that I’d never encountered in him before. “And because I don’t have a choice, neither do you. You will help me.”

There was a time when I might not have noticed the subtle, supernatural push that accompanied Gabriel Boucher’s words. A time when I might have been naïve enough to have met his eyes in defiance of his order, and thus fallen prey to the force of his vampiric will.

That time was long past.

Four years ago, I’d had my first encounter with the bloodsuckers that ran the city’s sex and crime rackets. I’d learned the hard way that meeting their gaze was an invitation to mindless servitude.

Luckily, not all vampires saw humans as pawns. Some — like Gabriel — clung to their waning humanity and kept their brainwashing to a minimum. He’d rescued me when I’d gotten in over my head and we’d formed a tenuous alliance. Sometimes I had the upper hand, sometimes he did, but our relationship was never based supernatural domination.

That he’d try it on me now showed me how desperate he truly was.

“Knock it off,” I growled, keeping my gaze firmly glued to his chest, a silk-shirt-covered expanse that made my dream blonde look puny by comparison. “We have an agreement. You don’t use that stuff on me, and I don’t have your basement dug up at noon.”

“Alicia. I need you. Dieter’s watching all of my people, especially those who can go out during the day. I can’t go myself — even just being awake for this meeting so he can’t overhear us is taking every ounce of strength I have. I need someone who can get in while he’s weak, snag the Key, and get back out. And it has to be someone who he won’t suspect is working for me. I need you. Besides...”

Even without meeting his eyes, I could tell when he’d lowered his gaze to the desk. “You owe me. Do this for me, and we’re clear.”

Four years is a long time spent waiting for the other shoe to drop. The knowledge that I owed him my life had swung between us like a hangman’s noose. Now I had the chance to clear that debt. And all it required was breaking into the home of the biggest, baddest vampire in the city, stealing back a mysterious artifact, and somehow getting out with my body and soul in one piece.

How hard could it be?

Chapter One: Props and Themes

Love cannot accept what it is. Everywhere on earth it cries out against kindness, compassion, intelligence, everything that leads to compromise. Love demands the impossible, the absolute, the sky on fire, inexhaustible springtime, life after death, and death itself transfigured into eternal life.

- Albert Camus

Lacy lingerie. Silky lotion. Moonlight and soft violins. One player's idea of a perfect romance will drive another to roll his eyes. Romance isn't just about sexual preferences and getting in the mood. Romantic chronicles are shaped through emotional confessions that reveal deep fears and dark dreams. These feelings force the characters to ask if they should (or shouldn't) be committed to each other. Can the Damned love? What kind of mortal begs for a Kiss? Is sex with a vampire really that good?

The path to intimacy is filled with physical cues that culminate in sex and a Kiss. Characters who touch — or refuse to go near each other — exist in every chronicle. Themes build the relationship, props tease the characters, and intimacy takes off all their clothes, regardless of whether it feels so right or so wrong.

While intimacy can be its own theme, it's so powerful that it's found in every flavor of paranormal romance. Keep this in mind when you're reading what it takes for vampires and mortals to bare their bodies and their souls.

Getting Intimate

Sex doesn't just "happen." Clothes fall to the floor, secrets are revealed, vulnerabilities are exposed. If you skip several steps between strangers, physical expressions of love become distinctly creepy — appropriate material for **Vampire**, but not at all romantic. By jumping from a first impression to full-on nudity in a romance, the players don't have enough time to care about the connection between characters. An emotionally-charged scene is more than physical bodies going through the motions; it's about wanting to consume another character and never let go.

A Dance within the Danse

When vampires are involved, intimacy can either be terrifying or magnificent. Sexy, flirting Kindred are one thing. Hot vampires who go straight for a blood bond are another. The possibility for romance can easily turn into a horrific night when the Damned are involved. The steps to intimacy may start off slow or speed up quickly. That's part of the fun.

In **Vampire**, vulnerabilities are shared and passions are explored through an intimate dance that demands a vampire's full attention.

Choosing a Partner: A coy glance. Eyes locked. Intense stares. Eye contact shows what's on a vampire's mind and opens the door to a new conversation. Maybe a Nosferatu is shy and a police officer dares to lock eyes with him. Maybe a Mekhet makes her secret intentions known to a songstress by staring at her from across the room. Or maybe a Ventre tracks down a disdainful model because she refused to even look at him.

The Invitation: Fingertips brush. Bodies bump. Hands shake. Characters meet, they talk, and maybe they touch. The more comfortable they are, the closer their bodies will move. The more anxious they are, the faster they'll want to pull away. A Mekhet trails a few steps behind a librarian for days until the mortal realizes he's there. A Daeva expects her lovers to hang on her like accessories and flounces off when she doesn't get her way. Vampires and mortals pick their partners and either cue the music or find someone else. When the invitation is accepted, personal boundaries are blurred.

Promenade: An arm snakes around a waist. Foreheads touch. Hands clasp. Intentional and prolonged physical gestures are expressions of complex emotions: infatua-



tion, possession, respect, desire, lust. A Venttrue rests her hand on her date's forearm. A Gangrel walks around with his hand on the back of his lover's neck. No clothes have come off, but that doesn't mean both of these vampires don't have something else on their minds. Which date would you rather be? The first refrain can be tough for characters to learn, but once they do, their music sounds that much sweeter and the blood tastes that much better. Once the lovers are swept up in the music, they'll drown themselves in each other through their passions.

Sex and the Kiss: A trail of lingerie leads up the stairs. Bodies huddle naked under the stars. The music beckons and a vampire makes his final move. It's either sex, a Kiss or both. But which one does he choose? Kindred can have sex and use the Blush of Life to appear mortal, but it's nothing like feeling that coppery, sweet blood pouring into their cold veins and satiating their Beast for another night. That doesn't mean a vampire wouldn't try to please their mortal lovers. The Kiss feels good to them, too. Sex, to the Kindred, is a physical sensation that isn't always tied to their emotions. Unfortunately, it's everything to a mortal — especially if she's doesn't suspect vampires exist.

As the final step in an intimate and uniquely personal dance, that first assignation changes everything. It's a catalyst that drives the characters into each other's arms for another night or sends them on their separate ways. It's a goal that tests the temperature of the relationship or only gives *one* of the partners what he wants. The sex may get better (or worse) over time, but nothing is as memorable as that first night.

Insights characters learn in the after-glow of an orgasm are the coda of the song. For some vampires, it's the pillow talk (or lack thereof) where they learn something about themselves or their partner. Maybe old insecurities creep into a Venttrue's mind after his lover says she doesn't like his holier-than-thou attitude. Maybe a young man freaks out after he realizes he had sex with a vampire and his lover must try to reassure him.

Typically, characters don't feel the same way about each other after they've had sex. It changes how they interact, what secrets they'd reveal and what they'd risk to be together. Maybe a mortal willingly sacrifices his precious blood to save a Nosferatu's life. Maybe a Gangrel swears off feeding on mortals completely because he gave into his Vice of Lust and felt guilty afterward. Or maybe a

vampire can't stop sliding in between a warm set of sheets because she just can't get enough of her lover's blood.

Erotic romances, ranging from one-night stands to relationships which transcend death, go through the same steps at a much more rapid pace. Unfortunately, skipping steps can lead to twisted and dangerous warps in the relationship. In a fit of jealous anger, one lover stomps into a room and wraps herself around a Kindred she's never met. Feeling dirty and unloved, another slides his hand down another guy's pants without introducing himself first.

Remember, the dance within a Danse is about one particular couple. It's up to you to peel back dead layers of flesh and find out how a Kindred, in spite of his Beast, explores intimacy.

Blood Bonds and Disciplines

A powerful attorney doesn't bother responding to a Kindred's repeated, but polite, invitations. Instead of abandoning his intended, the Venttrue decides to force his will by using Dominate on him. When that fails, the vampire realizes the only way to claim the lawyer for his own is use the Vinculum. What will the Venttrue decide? Will he wait for the mortal to fall in love with him over time? Or will the vampire force him to be by his side no matter what?

The use of Disciplines may be sporadic or calculated and, like sex or a Kiss, will affect one or more of the characters – even if the victim doesn't remember what happened. Remember, a Kindred who uses a Discipline like Dominate, Majesty, Celerity, and so on is taking away her lover's free will. The effects of this on the relationship may be subtle, but they're still there.

A blood bond, on the other hand, is much more likely to permanently change the thrall. Think of a blood bond as the stages of fidelity for a Kindred pursuing his thrall... for the dead do not easily part with their blood. Make no mistake: blood bonds and Disciplines force intimacy rather than allow it to flourish naturally... grounds for something much less pleasant than romance.

Both Vinculums and Discipline use dramatically alter a character's choices, create an illusion of intimacy, and force the target to feel loyalty or even love. The way a ghoul reacts to their regnant will be different from the way a mortal who hasn't sipped the regnant's Vitae does. In a *Vampire: the Requiem* game, it is not uncommon for Kindred to manipulate other people to tailor situations to their advantage. When we're talking about love, however, that's not always a good thing.

When the relationship doesn't develop naturally, then the connection becomes fragile and has a better chance

of breaking when the effects of the Discipline or Vinculum wear off. Maybe a Nosferatu isn't as impressed with a Daeva as they thought they were. Maybe a ghoul plans on killing her regnant's new lover because she's afraid she'll be replaced.

Regardless, both elements can (and should) have consequences when used in a romantically-themed game, because the Damned's forcing their will on another removes the cornerstone of any relationship: trust.

Blood bonds and Disciplines are an important part of how vampires interact with mortals, but you may want to minimize their use in a romance game. The goal here is intimate, not creepy. Of course, you can tweak the setting a bit to help. For example, making the blood bond two-sided removes some of the consent problems without making the relationship any less entertainingly dysfunctional.

For more information about Vinculum, refer to pp. 80 and 160 in *Vampire: the Requiem*.

Themes

If we resist our passions, it is more due to their weakness than to our strength.

- François de La Rochefoucauld

Paranormal romance is rife with themes found in traditional romance. The steps to intimacy are thrown against the framework of taboos, social expectations, and faith. Each theme suggests a unique romantic feel in *Vampire: The Requiem*.

The story of love, in all its physical and emotional glory, is what a relationship is all about. When that connection is up front and center, the romance is powerful and permeates through every single character. When it tip-toes in the background, the lovers handcuff other plots because those stories wouldn't exist without them. That's what makes playing a paranormal romance so attractive. You're not just shining the spotlight on pretty couples as they waltz off into the night. You get to figure out whose sexy shoes you want to fill and how long you'll keep your dress on.

Some themes offered here will force you to retool the World of Darkness so you can invite a mortal lover onto the floor. When that happens, let the coterie know what the limits of your chronicle are as soon as you can. How strict is the Masquerade? What concerns does your coterie have about their domain? How important is it to maintain status within a clan or covenant? After all, your characters probably wouldn't want the local Sheriff busting down

their door when they're getting it on for the first time... at least not if they didn't expect it.

Whether they're on-or-off stage, all members of your coterie need to know if there's a place for them in your personal romance or not. This isn't just your dance. It's an integral part of the Danse. Can you hear the music playing?

Redemption

In popular depictions of vampires, love is so powerful it can redeem the Damned and kill their Beasts. At its heart, Kindred redemption is about transformation through love.

Not all change brought on by redemption has to be physical. Maybe an herbalist who wanted to commit suicide learns to value life because a Crone taught them to find life in the tendrils of a Mandragora plant. Maybe a Gangrel who fed off raccoons came to grips with his vampiric nature because a member of the Lancea Sanctum helped him through. Even when a vampire no longer feels Damned, love can still change them. It's just not as earth-shattering as waking up and no longer needing to feed.

In a paranormal romance, the couple's love can be so pure and so real that God makes an exception and forgives that particular vampire. The strength, emotions and commitment of the couple is crucial to a redemption. If the lovers never meet, the transformation never happens, and the vampire remains one of the Damned.

For a vampire who loves being one of the Kindred, the thought of being saved can be pretty damn scary. This isn't about some ritual or Discipline the Kindred can prepare for. This is about an invisible force that has the power to quell a Kindred's Beast, rip them right out of torpor, or allow them to walk in broad daylight. If that doesn't shake a vampire down to her bones, then nothing else will. What happens when a vampire doesn't *want* to be saved? What if she becomes human entirely by accident?

And what happens to the rest of Kindred society when they learn one of the Damned is mortal? How about the mortal who feels responsible for their now-human lover?

The One

Soul mate. Perfect lover. True love. The idea of "The One" is about that soulmate who is destined to truly and unconditionally love you. No one else even comes close to the happiness you'll feel when you're together. Wars have been fought, laws have been broken, and vows have been trashed all because a pair of lovers believed they were supposed to be together. In their hearts, the fact that they found each other wasn't dumb luck or a happy coincidence — it was destiny. The undercurrent of this theme is the idea that love can transcend all physical and

spiritual bonds. By its nature, the idea that there's only one other person you can (and should) be with takes romance to a spiritual level: These aren't just partners, but two halves of a divine soul. Once they get together, the couple becomes more powerful as a team than they would individually.

When you add vampires into the mix, and this theme takes on a different tone. Maybe the vampire and mortal were destined to fall in love so they'd have something precious, something fragile, or something worth fighting for. Perhaps the scent of a mortal's blood attracts a specific vampire. Two mortal lovers, separated in life, may even find each other again in the Danse.

Kindred may claim not to have souls, but that doesn't mean this theme doesn't apply. The belief in a soulmate is so strong that it compels mortals to believe anything, even that a vampire isn't truly Damned. It's the desire for a soul mate and the faith in their love that moves this theme.

When someone believes they've got a soul mate, all their happiness is twisted up in their other half. Sad thing is, the alleged soulmate may not want to have anything to do with her enamored. If a mortal is convinced that a vampire is their one true love, will he pursue her back to her haven? If you flip the situation around, you have a Kindred who'll thwart every Tradition to prove herself to a mere mortal. Depending on the clan, covenant and status of the vampire, that betrayal could have an effect on Kindred society for years to come.

This is the most flexible of the themes included in this book, because there are such a diverse number of emotions, sub-plots, and potential for conflict: Murder. Obsession. Faith. Devotion. The heavy emphasis on one character affords players the ability to easily tap into their Virtues and Vices to help shape their story. Think of how a vampire suffering from the Vice of Sloth is affected by a mortal hunting him down, or what happens when a mortal with a Virtue of Hope crosses paths with a Kindred who bears an uncanny resemblance to the woman who haunts his dreams.

The level of intimacy required for a theme like The One to work will depend upon several factors: Do the characters know each other? How did they meet? Do they believe in reincarnation? Are they already convinced they're soul mates? Is the relationship one-sided? Keep in mind that The One doesn't necessarily have to be about two strangers; it can refer to an existing relationship, too. The characters may not wind up together in the end, but their interactions with each other may reveal more of their fears, hopes, and dreams than they would ever be able to explore on their own.

That's what makes the idea of a soul mate so powerful. People who believe in soul mates are willing to risk everything. It doesn't matter whether or not that person is really right for them. What counts is what each character believes about love. Sadly, those beliefs will often blind characters to the truth. For lovers who must also deal with the Masquerade and the urges of the Beast, that can lead to tragedy.

Against all Odds

Laws don't apply to these couples. As long as they're together, they don't care if anyone else suffers. Some romantic plots focus on the strength of the characters as a couple. The "us against the world" mentality forces everyone else to take a stand when the lovers tell them to fuck off.

Vampires and mortals who fall in love don't give a shit who lives or dies. Circumstance may bring them together, but in their minds, the only thing that will separate them is death. Even then that may not be the end of it. Think of the mortal who will risk her life and sacrifice her soul to be with her Kindred beloved for eternity. This isn't just about forbidden romance and social taboos — it's about how this couple's love for each other creates chaos. How they'll rip off all their clothes while the world burns because they deserve to be happy.

There has to be a damn good reason the couple wants to be together. That cause can be passive or active, emotional or physical, social or personal. Maybe a woman is blind and needs her wife to see. Maybe a mortal has a calming effect on a Gangrel's Beast. Maybe a Nosferatu doesn't give into his Vice of Gluttony because the soothing presence of his lover satiates him. Maybe two vampires stop feeding on humans when they're together. Whatever the reason, the lovers are so blind to everything but each other that they'll leave a path of destruction in their wake.

Against All Odds is a perfect theme to explore the lengths the Prince will go to protect the Masquerade. Everybody says it needs to be protected. What happens when the Prince's childer is seen around town with a local reporter? Who can the lovers turn to for help?

Against All Odds can also be used when the lovers started out as enemies and have legitimate, life-threatening reasons to avoid each other. A police officer marries a serial killer. A CEO at war with a vampire rival surrenders herself to a night of passion. A nun abandons her vows and begs her Kindred lover to Embrace her. These characters didn't lack common sense. They struggled with it and lost. Once they're together? Nothing in heaven or hell will break them apart.

Ask questions when you're using this theme to uncover great pacing and a gripping plot. Think about how familiar the characters are with each other, what forces threaten their happiness, and how long they'll survive.

Sacrifice

Would you risk life and limb just to be with a vampire? Imagine a ghoul who throws himself over a Kindred's body or a thrall who takes a bullet. Think about how powerful it is when one of the Damned admits: "I will die for you." The theme of sacrifice bubbles under the surface of many romantic plots. In order for the characters to wind up together, one (or both) of the lovers has to give something up they don't want to lose. Maybe it's a teenager's virginity. Maybe it's a healthy amount of Vitae or the location of a vampire's haven. Maybe it's a life of crime. Or maybe it's a mortal's very humanity.

Loss in the context of love will often come at a crucial moment in a larger story arc. This is the gut punch: that moment when a couple is floating along in a state of bliss and someone has to make a choice that affects their future. The more a character has to lose, the more intense this theme will be for your game. Either a vampire feeds without the Kiss or they cannot be with their mortal lover. Either a single mother gives up her kids or she can't run away with her beloved Kindred. Other types of sacrifices between mortals and vampires include: lifestyle (e.g. sleeping habits), wealth, status, faith, community, and even morality.

In paranormal romance, sacrifice also deals with the consequences the lovers face before and after they make their decision. Sometimes, other characters around them are forced to lose something to ensure their happiness. A Prince agrees to call off a blood hunt if a couple leaves his city. A preacher allows his only daughter to escape with her Kindred lover to ensure her safety. A small town must come to grips with the fact that vampires are real. The ending can be happy, tragic, or bittersweet. It can be a test of the couple's faith in each other. Often, this theme is great for mysteries because you never know what's going to happen until the very end. Do these lovers really care about each other? Tell them to start tossing everything they hold dear and find out.

For chronicles with sacrifice as a theme, the pacing can be thrown off if those decisions aren't devastating to the characters. Allow the lovers the chance to fall in love, to be happy, to explore their bodies. Then test the waters. Find out what the vampire is so afraid of losing. Grab the mortal by the throat and ask her what she's willing to permanently give up for love. How will that crucial decision change the couple's future? For better, or for worse?

With Sacrifice as your romantic theme, there's no guarantee what the relationship's outcome will be, only that somebody has to lose.

Triangles, Squares, and Other Shapes

Two ghouls fight over a vampire. A jealous boyfriend sleeps with a pair of Kindred because he knows it'll piss off his girlfriend. Triangles, Squares and Other Shapes allows Kindred and mortal couples to experiment with multiple partners as a way to increase dramatic tension in a romantic plot. Maybe two couples swap partners for a weekend. Maybe a college kid dares to steal a Kindred away from her dance partner. Or maybe a wife is bored and has a one-night stand.

In paranormal romance, conflict keeps the fires of passion burning and makes love pretty damn exciting — which is why this theme is important to **Vampire**. With this theme, any member of a coterie has an opportunity for romance at any time. This takes the pressure off the players if they feel like they're excluded from a tightly-focused plot on a specific couple.

Motivations are crucial to uncovering how to make a vampire or a mortal happy in this kind of story. It doesn't matter if they have a passing interest in romance or not, they need to figure out what they want. Blood? Sex? Companionship? You can then throw in an obstacle or two that each character must overcome to achieve their romantic goal. A vampire has trust issues and suffers from the Vice of Envy? Push those buttons. Knowing what Vices or Virtues to leverage helps keep the situation grounded. If it turns out to be a night of raw, blood-sucking pleasure, then the tension is still there. These raw emotions will take out the boredom and ensure every character — whether they're stripping off their clothes or not — is having fun.

For example, say there are two Kindred hopping into bed. Their Vices are Gluttony and Sloth. The first Kindred can't get enough and the second wants her partner to do all the work. They have a fight and the first vampire leaves. What happens when she meets another sexy vampire when she's walking back to her haven? Perhaps that new vampire suffers from the Vice of Wrath and she starts dating them both. Will the Kindred sit there and take it, or will he dare to stand up to the new girl?

This theme is not about having an orgy for the sake of an orgy or exploring the technical details of managing multiple partners. It's about the dramatic tension that happens when passions flare and tempers are tested after new love interests are introduced into budding or long-term relationships.

Since vampires feed indiscriminately on both male and female vessels, most Kindred don't have a problem with relationships or sexual encounters with the same gender.

Clan reactions are uniquely personal and depend upon the surrounding circumstances of these entanglements rather than the act itself. For example, the Ventru might take issue with two Kindred lowering themselves to fight over a mortal.

Cursed by Fate

No matter what the lovers do, they are not meant to be. Heaven turned its back on the couple and neither mortal nor Kindred has a friend in the world. Their love is a downward spiral that ends in tragedy. Maybe they know it. Maybe they don't. Maybe others go down with them. This theme isn't just about star-crossed lovers like Romeo and Juliet — it's about Fate dealing a shitty hand. It's about whether or not love is even possible in the World of Darkness. Whether it hits hard or it creeps into a chronicle inch-by-inch, make no mistake: these lovers are powerless to stop their doom.

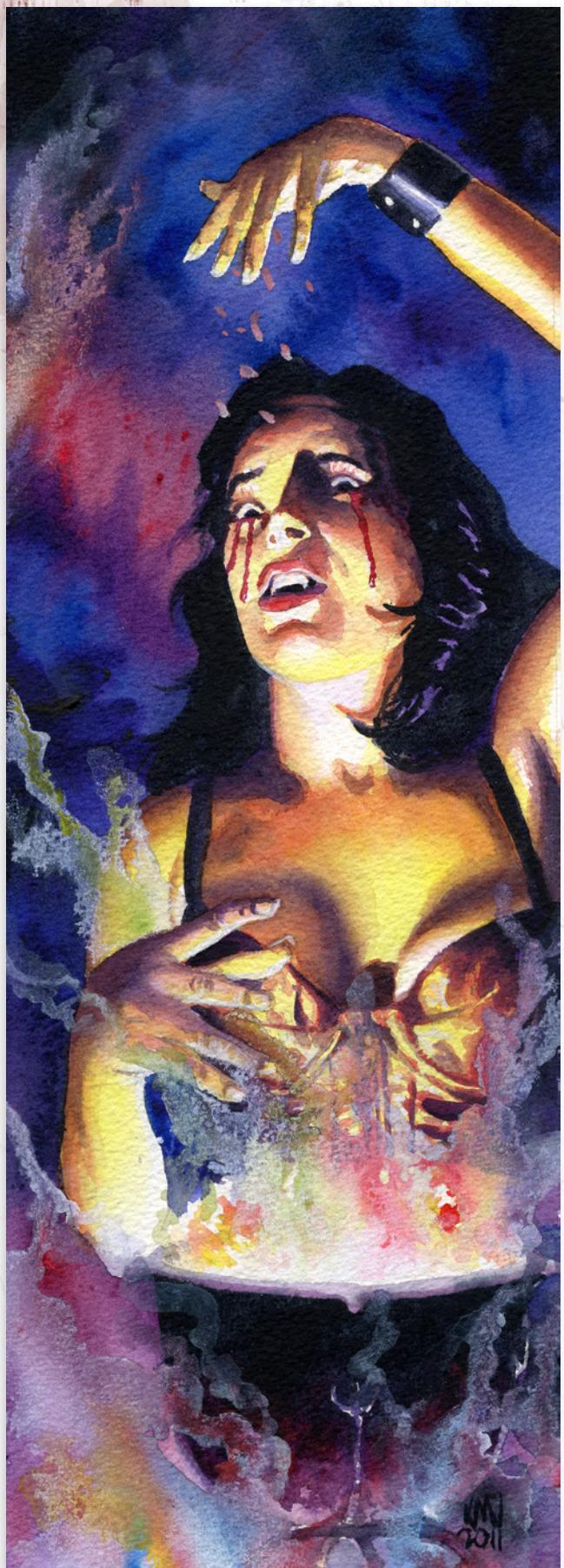
The deck is often stacked against vampires and mortals who fall in love. When they're cursed by Fate, however, they're screwed in inexplicable ways. This is the story about a Kindred whose Beast is out-of-control only when his lover is near. This is the tragic tale of a husband and wife who are hunted by vampires for no apparent reason.

The connection between characters doesn't have to be very strong at the start of the story. Characters might not even have feelings for each other until the very end. Imagine two young men meeting in classic romantic comedy style outside a coffee shop. Then, out of nowhere, a gang of thieves attacks. Without hesitation, the strangers protect each other and manage to fend off the assailants. They breathe a sigh of relief and hail a cab. All is well until one of them falls over dead on the sidewalk. Did Fate murder this would-be couple? Or was it something else, something more sinister? Tragedy struck and neither character managed to find out the other's name. If that doesn't kick you where it hurts, nothing will.

Unlike the Sacrifice theme, Cursed by Fate is all about the revelation that love isn't the answer to everything. It's about shattering the illusion that love cures all, love is safe, or, in some chronicles, that love is even attainable.

Vengeance

Relationships end in a horrible and surprising way before a theme about vengeance begins. Most commonly, one distraught lover avenges the death of the other. Sometimes, a supernatural creature (like a ghost) takes their revenge out on the living because they are lost or



unable to face the real bastard. Vengeance is also a great theme to pursue after a love triangle ends.

Flashbacks are common storytelling techniques that drag a character's memories back to the surface and remind them how happy he was. While it lasts? It feels great. When it's over, it's time for a little payback. The lover may not remember all the details about what happened, either. That's not required because part of her quest may be to uncover the truth so she can move on to wherever she needs to be. Sometimes, it comes as quite a shock when a lover finds out that his wife was pregnant when she died.

Kindred have long memories and, depending upon the slight, they won't forget who wronged them. Some vampires plot years of pain and suffering on their foes. In a paranormal romance, the Damned may or may not have that kind of time. Pacing will be crucial to this theme because a chronicle could last days, weeks or even years. Maybe a wife grieving for her partner sets out to kill a vampire. Maybe a Gangrel takes revenge on behalf of a human couple because he lost his only connection to humanity. Vengeance is a vampire's middle name.

Romance is a part of this theme but the plot is really about an act of justice taken to the extreme under a banner of love. For that reason, the emotional connection between characters already has to be established if the theme of vengeance is explored at the onset of your scenario. Intimacy isn't as important as the drive for retribution. This can be piggybacked on other themes after a moment of physical or emotional intimacy occurs. There's no reason why a happy couple has to stay that way.

Vengeance is a great theme for any character with Wrath as a Vice. How closely it fits depends upon the consequences of the character's actions and where the boundaries are. The characters involved are looking for trouble and feel justified in doing so. It's only a matter of time before wrongs are righted and someone pays. After all, the Damned have the advantage of sticking around for a long time. Imagine stealing a mortal right out from underneath another vampire's nose and then killing him. How long do you think that Kindred would wait to act?

Props

Props within paranormal romance bring dark passions to the surface. These devices don't ensure that characters will fall in love (or lust). That's up to you and your coterie to figure out. What these props will do, however, is invite mortals and vampires to dance.

Introducing props may bend the boundaries of the Masquerade and add new elements into *Vampire*. Some

props, like a supernatural nightclub, give Kindred and mortals the chance to get up close and personal in spite of the Masquerade. Others, like laws against love, forbid intermingling of any kind. The more boundaries are relaxed to accommodate new props? The more the **Vampire** setting will need to be adapted for romance.

Relaxed Masquerade

Forget about the First Tradition. Stop worrying about mirrors and legal hassles. The Masquerade has been relaxed. Now Kindred can live and love openly. Aren't you glad?

Explanation: Vampires shouldn't exist in a mortal's eyes. Mess around with those beliefs on a small scale and one or two mortals are easy enough to control. Now amplify that by a million. Would the police protect a Nosferatu? How would a therapist deal with a cheating wife and her Daeva mistress? You get the picture.

Several paranormal romances utilize a relaxed Masquerade. The more socially acceptable it is for vampires and mortals to mix, the easier it will be for them to date. That doesn't mean all humans and Kindred are going to wind up happily ever after. It may be okay for vampires to be out in public, but they're still Damned for all eternity.

Themes: The Masquerade can prevent romantic relationships from ever happening. This works for some themes like Against All Odds or Cursed by Fate. So what happens when a relaxed version of the Masquerade is introduced? Say a member of the Invictus got worked over by lovers who used him for money. A theme of Vengeance is a great fit here. The question then becomes: What recourse does this Kindred have?

That's why clear and distinct boundaries are important. Maybe a Ventrite can't rescue their kidnapped lover because they have to call police. Maybe a Gangrel couple is hunted down by a local priest who knows he's committing a crime. Or maybe a newly wedded couple's family and the Invictus tried to coexist and failed. These examples use a similar Cursed by Fate theme but leverage different versions of a relaxed Masquerade.

The Masquerade doesn't dictate what theme you use. It does, however, shape how you'll use that theme. Vampires and mortals can date. Awesome! Wait... Do mortals really believe a vampire can love like a human? Say a Mekhet is convinced she's found a descendant of Isis. In the theme of The One, he pursues her with abandon. Does the girl buy his story? Or does she run away screaming?

Mechanics and Setting: A relaxed Masquerade doesn't have any bearing on mechanics. It does have a huge impact on Kindred society because the First Tradition is

no longer crucial to vampiric rule. Power struggles take on new forms. A local Prince openly invites a mayoral candidate to be his guest in Elysium. The Pope publicly condemns the Lancea Sanctum as heresy. The Carthian Movement is joined by a crowd of mortals who support their rights.

Blood Alternative

Blood tastes damn good but it isn't the only thing to keep your Beast satisfied. A substitution for Vitae has been found and proven. Just take a drink and you can go right on flirting.

Explanation: Splash synthetic blood onto a relationship and watch it change. A vampire doesn't need humans as food anymore. Mortals don't automatically cower in front of vampires and some may even pity their condition. Alternatives for drinking blood are commonly found in paranormal romances to even the playing field and soften aspects of horror by turning the Kiss into a social taboo.

Removing the Kindred's need to feed allows them to act more like everyday humans, but it doesn't alter the Beast within. Some Kindred may embrace their Beast and shun a blood substitute because they think it takes the bite out of being a vampire. Others may want to perfect the formula because they view vampirism as a disease. Regardless, synthetic blood doesn't make a vampire any less scary. In fact, some Kindred may resist being domesticated and bare their fangs any chance they get — much to the chagrin of the Prince.

This prop allows vampires and mortals to become more intimate with each other because the Beast is sated by an engineered substance. Dampen the element of fear and the two can relate to one another in spite of their differences.

Blood substitutes also turn the Kiss into something mysterious, exciting, and dangerous. By turning real blood into a social taboo, you can transform the act of feeding into a forbidden expression of love. In some cases, a human may offer her blood to show how she feels about her beloved Nosferatu. Frustrated Daeva may pursue long-term relationships just to Kiss again. Now fresh Vitae is the foul temptress the Damned must avoid if they want to get it on with a mortal.

Themes: Romantic themes support this prop by piercing right through the heart of a Beast. The potential for intimacy increases because the lines between predator and prey are blurred. A priest may force a Gangrel to Kiss him as penance for his sins. A member of the Ordo Dracul may refuse to Kiss her teenage lover because she wants to shield her from her vampiric nature. Real blood

takes on magical, mystical properties within any theme because it's no longer required to ensure a vampire survives. When a blood substitute exists, the Kiss is reborn as a mind-blowing, life-changing, explosion of pain, pleasure, and passion.

When this prop is introduced, the emphasis is on the personality of the characters as opposed to their physical natures. Pour a blood substitute into a theme of Redemption and a Kindred's deepest desire to no longer be a vampire rises to the surface. Curiosity about what a particular human's blood tastes like (or what it feels like to be tasted) allows a theme about The One to flourish. A musician bares her neck because her Kindred can't find an alternative Vitae when she desperately needs it in a theme of Sacrifice.

Mechanics and Setting: Mechanically, a blood substitute isn't as fulfilling as fresh Vitae. Regardless of how it's made or ingested, an alternative to blood satiates a Kindred's Beast at one-half the normal rate. A replacement for blood doesn't have the same properties as its original counterpart; it will not create ghouls, foster blood bonds, or work in any blood rituals. The exception to this rule is the second tier within The Coils of the Blood. Now, a vampire can sustain herself with the alternative regardless of Blood Potency.

Introducing a new option for feeding will alter Kindred society in a number of ways because it forces vampires to take a long, hard look at the Requiem. The Masquerade may still be protected, but the punishment for breaking the First Tradition may not be as severe. The act of the Embrace may be easier for some vampires and harder for others. With a blood substitute lurking about, the act of diablerie becomes even more serious than it already was.

The production and distribution of the blood substitute will also alter how Kindred interact. Say it takes a rite of Theban Sorcery to make a batch. Can any covenant perform it or is it only for the Sanctified? What if the blood substitute is a scientific miracle? Once a batch is made, it still needs to be stored and distributed. Who does? Vampires, mortal entrepreneurs, or a mix of both?

As a Storyteller, you will need to decide who produces the synthetic blood, how it is distributed, and to what degree the Masquerade will be relaxed in your game to accommodate this prop. There's a lot of fodder for stories once a blood alternative is introduced, so there's plenty for a coterie to do – with or without it.

The Chosen One

You feed, you fuck, you rise, you retire. Face it. You're bored. Well, stop whining. God has a plan for you – and you alone.

Explanation: Falling in love doesn't just make characters feel special. Sometimes? One (or both) of the characters involved *are*. Whether or not they admit they've got a destiny is another story altogether. The reason why they're unique often plays into the relationship. A young girl must remain a virgin to use her powers. An elder Nosferatu willingly goes into torpor to save his lover.

This romantic prop can be a character or a myth. Introducing The Chosen One into a romance doesn't force intimacy or infatuation to occur unless the heroine is seen through the hero's eyes. In a chronicle, you're either with The Chosen One or you're against her. You either understand God has a bizarre sense of humor or you deal with the consequences. Typically, a timeline of events will be triggered when this prop is revealed. The Chosen One is often used a catalyst; the romance may or may not specifically involve this character.

Themes: The Chosen One is one of the most iconic and flexible props. Themes about Sacrifice, The One, Vengeance, Redemption or Against All Odds can work in many, different ways. A Gangrel saves a scientist to finish the cure for vampirism. A former member of the Sanctified kills other vampires for The Chosen One. A teenage girl risks a Prince's ire to beg for her Kindred's life.

Mechanics and Setting: The idea that a single character is important above all other characters will ripple throughout Kindred society. A Circle of the Crone sets out to prove it isn't true. A member of the Carthian Movement tries to enlist The Chosen One as an ally. One of the Sanctified hunts down and tries to kill the heroine. Here, occult-based evidence supports the identity and location of The Chosen One. Maybe a prophecy is about a virgin bride of Christ bedded by a Gangrel. Maybe a folktale describes a pair of vampire lovers who can walk in daylight.

Mechanically, there's no effect unless the Storyteller decides there's something unique about the character. Maybe Disciplines don't work on The Chosen One. Maybe she can soothe or enrage a Beast. Or maybe her Vitae doesn't nourish a Kindred, it poisons him.

This particular prop may encourage one vampire to seduce The Chosen One. That romance can be pretty powerful, but it shouldn't remove the rest of the coterie from the story. All players can be satisfied provided they have a vested interest in the success or failure of the relationship.

Cursed Heirloom

A cursed heirloom lures your Beast to an innocent mortal's side and contains deep, dark secrets the Fog of Eternity has obscured. Only time and a careful seduction will reveal the truth. Are you ready for a challenge?

Explanation: Cursed heirlooms are a romantic prop used to invite Kindred into a mortal's world or vice versa. Maybe a grieving son winds up with a mysterious locket that once belonged to a Daeva. Maybe a museum curator purchases an odd crown worn by a Prince in medieval times. Maybe a jeweler appraises a large ruby from a member of the Ordo Dracul that is more than it appears.

By itself, a cursed heirloom won't spark a romance. What it does do, however, is open the door to a conversation between two characters and a deeper mystery. After all, many paranormal romances are not just about sex; the couples have to have something to do within the context of a story. A cursed heirloom with an unusual history is perfect for a coterie because it gives each player something to do. Examples of cursed heirlooms include: blood lures, supernatural traps, containers to keep Vitae fresh, poisonous lockets, reappearing/disappearing pendants, etc. As a romantic prop, this one is the most flexible because it can either attract or repel characters.

Themes: When a cursed object is used as a prop in a romance, the theme will often reinforce its nature, its history, and how the characters intend to use it. Say an ancient blood lure brings a Gangrel to a college student's door. That scene opens the door to The One theme. When the student knowingly pours her blood into the locket a theme of Sacrifice comes into play. Strengthen the item's effects and two Gangrel show up. Triangles, Squares and Other Shapes is perfect for that angle. The better the prop and theme complement one another, the stronger the romance will be.

Mechanics and Setting: There are several mechanical options for a cursed heirloom depending upon the object. Does it attract vampires? If so, proximity to the blood lure will be important. Kindred can spend a Willpower point to resist the effects or roll Wits + Occult to determine the object is cursed. Is it a repellent? Then turn it into a poisonous pen that taints Vitae and forces Kindred to go hungry. The older the heirloom is, the more compelling it may be to Kindred who have experienced the Fog of Eternity.

Laws Against Love

Love feels damn good but it's not always right. You want to run straight into the arms of a hot-blooded human but there's a law against it. Are you a good little vampire?

Explanation: Laws Against Love is a common romantic prop that can be dictated by mortals, Kindred or both. It's designed to reinforce the notion that mixing predators and their prey isn't a smart idea. Some rules can exist within the confines of the **Vampire** setting. Other laws will force a relaxed Masquerade because they were

written by mortals. Like other props that expose the fact vampires do lurk at night, these rules can be introduced as rumors or heavily-enforced.

As a romantically-inclined prop, this one is easy for players to understand and a fun one to pursue. How would a young neonate react when she finds out her sire didn't Embrace her new husband? For a celebrity who's used to getting everything, what would she do when she's told she can't date a rich and powerful Ventrite? Or, what happens when a law against love pits one clan or covenant against the other?

Themes: Forbidden love affairs flourish when this prop is used. Themes complement taboo relationships and reinforce how dangerous they can be. Against All Odds works when the couple knows their love is wrong and tells the world to fuck off. Cursed by Fate is perfect for that pair who can't help falling for each other. Last but not least, a theme of Vengeance is appropriate here if the emphasis is on the law itself. If it's on the characters enforcing the prop, then you may want to reconsider how this is being used.

Mechanics and Setting: Under the Fourth Tradition, Amabilis, a vampire is prohibited from Embracing a mortal lover.

You are forbidden from Embracing out of love. If you violate this Commandment, both you and your childe will forfeit your claim to the Blood.

The interpretation of any law against love can be the source of great debate among Kindred. Is a flirtatious night out-on-the-town out of line? As such, the mechanical effects on the characters will be at the discretion of the Storyteller. This prop works well if the law is clear before it's introduced. It can still be a rumor or a taboo, but knowing what the law says will clear up any confusion.

Supernatural Nightclubs

You're all alone, horny, and dying to meet someone. What's a desperate Kindred to do? Then you remember there's that club. It's the place where anyone can show up: mortals, vampires, werewolves, mages. You name it. Every flavor of supernatural is there.

Explanation: For vampires and mortals on the hunt for love, they have to have somewhere to go. Supernatural nightclubs are fairly common in paranormal romances because it turns a night out into a social event where everyone's hoping to have a good time. These clubs usually have a law against violence that's strictly enforced through physical or supernatural means. Imagine a club where the bouncers are encouraged to use Carthian Law to get

partiers back in line. Picture a posh nightclub owned by mages where vampires are forced to feed before entering.

Supernatural nightclubs are a destination to meet openly (or secretly) and invite entire coteries to intermingle. As a prop, they can either be clandestine clubs with hidden entrances and passwords or out in the open. Either way, if you're hunting down a good location to meet someone new, you can't go wrong with a club like this.

Themes: The layout of a club supports a wide range of intimate expressions. A slow grind on the dance floor. Bodies jammed together. Eyes meet across a crowded bar. These physical acts in a public place can be sexy or innocent, intentional or accidental, rough or gentle. Regardless, intimacy will likely occur between interested characters. Romantic themes will support that intimacy if the characters are willing. The One theme will work if a Venttrue is fixated on "that girl in the bar." If it's an underground club, then the Against All Odds theme will be appropriate when a Gangrel decides to hook up with a werewolf. Steamy couple swaps and jealous rivals can dance together in the Triangles, Squares and Other Shapes theme.

Mechanics and Setting: Storytellers will want to explore this prop in the context of other props. If the Masquerade is relaxed, then a supernatural nightclub takes on a different flavor. If it's not? Then you'll have to decide who runs the clubs, how dangerous it is for anyone who gets caught, and what the rules of the club are.

Mechanically, the easiest way to handle unwanted supernatural activity is to build the inability to use Disciplines into the club. Blanket rules for clubs like these are not out of the ordinary and keep the focus on interactions.

Oracles

You think your lover is cheating on you and it's driving you crazy. After all that you've been through together, aren't you deserved an honest answer? Why not ask the oracle if you're both meant to be?

Explanation: When it comes to feelings, it's easy for characters to get confused about what's really going on, especially when the Damned are involved. There are many types of oracles found in paranormal romance. Pendants swing back-and-forth, tarot cards reveal hidden motivations, and tea leaves form pictures to be interpreted. They can be rare or fake, cursed or blessed, bought or stolen.

Oracles also take the form of mystical characters. Typically, such a character relies on her psychic abilities or vast knowledge to give an answer. When the couple faces the mystic, one (or both of them) will pay a price

for the service — blood or a favor in return. These types of oracles also take the form of a psychic mortal, scam artist, occult librarian, random passerby, etc.

In paranormal romance, this prop directly affects the couple's future. That destiny doesn't have to be spelled out or even true; what matters is that the characters hear it and have to decide what to do with it. An Acolyte finds out her destiny lies with a member of the Lancea Sanctum. A Venttrue is told he'll Embrace a mortal who loves him. If the stakes are high enough, characters surrounding the couple will act on the oracle's prediction.

Themes: Learning a couple's destiny will turn any romance on its head — especially if the characters are superstitious. Here, the answer that's revealed should dovetail into what theme is being used. Often, that fact will alter how the characters view the relationship and bring other facts and feelings to light. Use this prop later in a chronicle to ensure the oracle's prediction hits the couple where it counts.

In a theme of Vengeance, a grieving Mekhet visits an Egyptian oracle and is shocked to learn she caused her lover's death. An obsessed police officer visits a fortune teller, in a theme about The One, to verify if his feelings for a regal Venttrue are real. A happily wedded couple accidentally bumps into a psychic who declares they'll soon be Damned for eternity in a Cursed by Fate theme.

Mechanics and Setting: Physical oracles, like tarot cards, usually don't have mechanical effects in *Vampire: The Requiem*. Storytellers may want to consider using divination devices during a session to intensify the prop. Soothsayers, on the other hand, may have some crunch. Psychic mortals will be found in *Second Sight* and will have varying degrees of precognition. Kindred use Auspex to verify the strength of the couple's emotions through Aura Perception.

Storytellers may decide to develop new blood rituals that reveal a character's fate. The accuracy and nature of the revelation isn't as important as the atmosphere and how the couple reacts.

Supernatural Authorities

What's a vampire gotta do to have a little fun? You wanted to Kiss that cute waitress good-bye and now you have the Fang Police on your Beast's ass? Wait a minute. Since when did the cops start running after Kindred?

Explanation: There are laws against love and there are those organizations who won't hesitate to enforce them. These groups may be mundane or supernatural, legal or rogue, well-funded or grassroots.

In paranormal romance, supernatural authorities exist to ensure characters play nice with one another. Often, mortals are a big part of the supernatural authorities because the Damned are either seen as a threat or, more rarely, people to be protected. Priests, detectives, or even government agencies could hire and work with other vampires while they track down murderers, etc. The romance comes into play in a passive, rather than an active, way. Maybe a Mekhet who's spying for a local police chief falls for the accused. Maybe a Daeva helps a Nosferatu escape from a pair of armed soldiers.

By itself, this prop may not get a character's heart pounding, but add this to a relaxed Masquerade or a blood alternative and you've got a recipe for passion. — especially when lovers are wrongfully split up.

Themes: Timing is crucial to fitting this prop against a theme. Introducing the police isn't enough to drive a story. These enforcers have to have an effect on the re-

lationship between the characters. For example, say the U.S. government kidnaps a pair of Gangrel. A theme of Us Against the World is offered to the characters when the military gives them the illusion of choice. Or, maybe a Circle of the Crone warns a mortal couple that a secret sect within the Lancea Sanctum is out to destroy them. In that case, a theme using Cursed by Fate or Sacrifice could be introduced when the couple realizes they're in danger.

Mechanics and Setting: Storytellers should determine what the supernatural authority means to the Masquerade and to Kindred society. Does the Prince approve of an outside agency stepping into her city? How would the Sanctified feel if a group of mortals claimed to be doing "God's work?"

Introducing a supernatural authority into *Vampire* doesn't automatically relax the Masquerade: it changes how Kindred are viewed and treated by specific groups. Keep that in mind when exploring this as a romantic prop.

The first bullet took off my hat. The second nearly took off my head. I wasn't giving Dieter's men a chance for a third shot.

I dropped to the floor, rolling behind a sofa as I struggled to drag the snub nosed .38 out from under my jacket. The delivery company uniform hadn't left room for my regular sidearm between the shit-brown shirt and jacket, so I'd made do with what felt like a toy. More rounds zipped past, exploding in the wall behind me. Gun finally in hand, I hit the panic button on my cell phone with my other thumb. It was too late for Plan A, which consisted of me masquerading as a delivery driver and trying to get in and out without being noticed. Plan B — playing dumb if I got caught inside the house — had gone out the window when the bullets started flying.

Which left me with Plan C: Get out alive by whatever means necessary.

Bullets tore through the couch, leaving me with no doubt that Dieter's men had a different outcome in mind. I could hear them splitting up, covering the exits. They weren't letting me out of here in one piece.

"Fine," I grumbled to myself, stuffing my cell phone back into my front shirt pocket with the tiny box that had spurred all this trouble. "You wanna play rough? We'll play rough."

You don't last long in the Vice Squad without learning to dish it out. I dealt with hookers, slavers, tweakers, and pimps on a nightly basis. I've been shot twice, stabbed three times, and pepper-sprayed more often than I could count. I've dealt with attack dogs, hit men, and in the last few years, vampires. I was prepared for anything.

Or so I thought.

I peeked around the sofa, just enough to catch a glimpse of one of the men. I looked away fast, before he could make eye contact — I didn't know if Dieter's goons had any of his supernatural mojo, but I wasn't taking any chances.

“Come out now, if you please.” His voice was honey and silk, and I wanted nothing more than to meet the man behind it. He sounded so attractive, so handsome, so...

I shook my head, trying to recover my senses. This wasn’t a date, it was a gun fight. Something weird was going on. Was it some sort of vampiric power? This wasn’t the iron fist I’d been forced under before. It was...

“I really must insist you come out from behind there...”

It was like hearing the best sex you could imagine going on just outside of your reach. I wanted to crawl out on my hands and knees and beg to be allowed to join.

“I’ve asked politely. Put down your gun and come out, or I will be quite... disappointed.”

My pistol’s barrel dipped towards the floor as I stood up from behind the couch.

Chapter Two: Shards

Each of the variant chronicle ideas (or “shards”) in this chapter reflects a slightly different World of Darkness. You can use them singly or together as frameworks for your own chronicles. You’ll also find mechanical and setting tweaks to help play up the themes of each shard.

Strange Bedfellows

*He's sleeping with you, you're in love with her, and everyone is getting screwed.
Vampire desires are a powder keg full of fangs.*

“You were alone with him again.” Marcus looked up. Kendra slid into the room, the sheer fabric of her gown hiding little.

“It isn’t like that, and you know it. He wants me, that’s all.”

She turned sharply on him, boring into him with her stare. “That’s all? You don’t want him back? Don’t lie to me, Marcus. I can read it like words under your skin.”

“What do you know? What do you understand? Crawl back to your sire before you come to judge me.” He lifted his hand, and then stopped himself. He barely whispered “I love you.” She’d hear it.

Pitch

Desire is a wild and uncontrollable thing for the wisest Kindred — for the youngest, it's an unstoppable force. You will feel the need to love, possess, or consume one of your coterie mates, and it's only a matter of time. How long can you resist before you risk becoming their thrall?

Mood and Theme

Desire is a dangerously potent force that can destroy as much as it creates. Can friendships, rivalry, and the political arrangements between young Kindred in a coterie survive desire's fury? Vampires, when they love at all, don't love by half measures. Tension, jealousy, and suspicions underlay the sex and the need throughout this chronicle.

Description

At the start of the game, as the players are discussing their concepts, put the character names in a bag or bowl. Each player draws out a name, and that's the object of their Secret Desire.

The chronicle, on the face of it, is likely typical of *Vampire*: political intrigue, violence, the struggle with humanity, and so on. The unique focus here is on the struggles within the group.

The characters should not only be trying to deal with the night-to-night troubles of a young coterie, but also their secret passions. Most characters will suspect they aren't the only ones with clandestine desire, so the threat of being uncovered should pair nicely with the need to find out who they have such powerful sway over. The Storyteller introduces other Storyteller characters to be romanced or seduced, to seduce or demand, and lets the coterie relationships crumble under the weight of passion.

Character Considerations

The only thing that's important here is that the create characters that are receptive to desire. Appearing to be an "ice queen" or a "stoic" is acceptable, but secretly the characters need to be open to their desire.

Unlovable characters aren't necessarily a problem either. Passionate desire can cause even the most level-headed person to fall for an idea of a person and ignore the person's true nature.

Allies and Antagonists

Ideally, the Storyteller-driven characters in this chronicle should help to put pressure on these relationships or help to bring them into being in the first place. They raise the stakes whenever possible, putting the characters

into mortal danger right off the bat to help ensure that the characters discover their Secret Desire early on.

Characters like ex-lovers, sires, and love-struck competitors are obvious choices to fill this role, but don't be afraid to introduce less obvious characters as well. A meddling ancilla who keeps getting in a character's way may seem like a distraction at first, but later, the Storyteller may reveal they harbor a Secret Desire of their own, causing them to try and remove the competition. Tragic examples of these relationships gone wrong can also serve as symbols of how bad things can get.

Stories

Essentially, this shard casts a dark reflection on romantic comedy conventions: Everyone is sleeping with someone while wanting to sleep with someone else. Handily, stories told in this chronicle can also all follow the premises of these romantic comedies. All you have to do is add **Vampire**, and sit back to watch the blood fly. Here are some examples.

Meet the Sires: One or more of the characters' sires are returning to town or coming out of torpor. The coterie has to prepare for their sires' arrivals, hide the youthful trouble they've been getting into, and deal with the potential interpersonal pressures. After all, some particularly sensitive sires might be able to feel their childer's romantic obsessions. Awkward can turn deadly very fast with Kindred.

Cougar Town: Everything's normal within the coterie until an elder of the city starts flirting with one or more of the coterie members. This elder showers his paramours with attention, advantage, and wealth. But what does he or she want? With envy and suspicion a natural part of the coterie's existence, how will they deal with a *real* reason to be jealous?

Taming of the Beast: One of the characters has become a social liability, and needs to be forced out of the group before the rest of Kindred society comes down on them. Whose method will win out: violence, abuse, conditioning, reason, or even the pull of "true love"? Even the noblest aims can go bad among a web of emotion as complicated as this coterie.

Secret Desire

Your character has a second Vice, a Secret Desire for one character that incites a Vice response. For example, Pride might require bragging and bolstering the Desired's opinion of your character. Wrath might invoke violent jealousy over the Desired. Greed might involve giving dangerous gifts.

The first time you spend Willpower in relation to the object of your Secret Desire, or you or the Desired suffer injuries that would result in wound penalties while in the same scene, the Secret Desire activates. Until the Desired leaves your character's presence, if your character has the opportunity to fulfill their Secret Desire Vice and opts not to, the character loses one point of Willpower. For

Daeva, this in addition to the normal clan weakness, giving them two Vices to juggle. If you do not have two points of Willpower to lose, you must take the action. If you choose to fulfill your character's Secret Desire, your character gains a point of Willpower. This Willpower can exceed your maximum, but all surpluses at the end of a scene are lost.

The Prince's Childe

He's too "delicate" to hold the city alone. How can you assure you're the one he shares it with without losing all your allies in the process?

"Is it always like this for you?" you asked, and as soon as the words left your mouth, you realized how naïve they were.

When he turned, he looked paler in the fading light behind the Prince's mansion. Sick. He shrugged and turned away. "I'm a prize. The fragile steward of a mighty city. Centuries of power and authority and all one has to do is 'win.'" His gaze slid to the ground as he bowed his head.

"I was a person before all this. Now I'm just part of the economy, and most of those bastards in there would murder their own mother to...." He trailed off and pulled away, walking further away from the light. "This has never been about love."

Pitch

A Prince is going to slumber and leave behind one of the most powerful cities in the world. He's created a steward, a childe to hold his dynasty until his return from torpor. This childe is special, gifted in some ineffable way only the Prince seems to understand. He is also young and fragile. He'll need guidance and protection; he'll need help. It's got to be you — or if not you, then one of your coterie mates. The steward's lover will be, for at least a few hundred years, the real power in the city, and that's good for the whole coterie... if you can keep it together.

Mood and Theme

At its core, this chronicle is about courtly romance. Arranged marriages are more about politics than love, but they don't preclude stories dealing with the difficulties of the human heart, or even gentle seduction in the public eye. But when you take these romantic notions and put them into a **Vampire** setting, themes of objectification and territorialism are bound to come into play. The city is in the hands of someone who appears to need control or, at the very least, guidance. Romance can quickly take a back seat to domination when this much power is at stake.

Description

As soon as the Prince declares his intention to slumber, eligible Kindred in the city are invited to get to know the Prince's new childe. One lucky, well-received Kindred will enter into a Kindred marriage with him. That means, in essence, the consort gains the Prince's vast wealth and power for at least a century. Even if the Prince wakes early, any Kindred able to protect his dynasty and his childe is liable to be well-treated.

For whatever reason, the coterie is in the running.

The Prince has a number of rules for dealing with his childe. Some characters will find they aren't allowed to meet with the childe in private, while others may be declared acceptable companions, but only on some nights of the week. The reasons and patterns to the rules for meeting seem arbitrary, though people whisper that the Prince's ties to the Ordo Dracul may be a factor.

Character Considerations

In general, any character or coterie of characters would be perfectly acceptable in this chronicle. Still, at least a few characters with an interest in power, positions within the city, or even just a fixation on the Prince's childe will suffice to tie them back into the main storyline.

Group loyalty is handy. While characters might have a good time backstabbing each other to get their hands on the childe, enemies of whoever wins the childe's hand will find themselves left out in the cold when the new steward is handing out positions, domain, and feeding privileges.

It's important to note that not every character needs to be chasing the Kindred Marriage. After all, they can serve in support roles in very active ways, like supporting their coterie mate's bid for the position or actively trying to poison the chances of competitors.

Allies and Antagonists

The Prince: He's old enough to be going into his second or possibly third torpor, and has had a stranglehold over this influential city for as long as anyone can remember. This isn't his first time orchestrating his dynasty, and he's totally confident that his selection was absolutely correct.

The Childe: People keep calling him delicate. Maybe it's his youth, maybe it's something in his posture or affectations, but he comes across as frail somehow. Some vampires figure he was picked for unfathomable Ordo Dracul reasons. Others suggest he was psychic in life and capable of seeing into the future. Maybe, some whisper, the Prince just thought he was a fantastic screw, and preserved him as something to look forward to after torpor.

No matter the reason, the childe is seen as a helpless prize, and he's not happy about it. He won't rebel openly, but he will attempt to undermine people clearly trying to seduce him merely for the sake of power. It will take some very fancy footwork to convince him that there's something more to any advances made toward him than a play for power. He may be the only character that has pure intentions left, and that should be obvious in his behavior. He wants something good to come out of all of this, and since he has the final say in whom he'll marry, it's his desires that are worth addressing.

Suitors: The Storyteller should create a few competitors for the childe's hand. Each should have their own styles, weakness, and strengths, such as a suitor that believes herself naturally superior and doesn't bother to press her claim, or one who is obsessed but too shy to make his desire known. Each presents their own challenges and therefore gives the coterie characters to destroy romantically, politically, or even physically in order to ensure their coterie ends up in charge of the city.

While most of the rest of the city watches and waits, some covenant philosophies will make the characters some immediate enemies as they're drawn into the story. The Sanctified believe strongly that marriage between Kindred is blasphemy. Attempts to prevent the marriage from taking place could become quite violent. Additionally, the Circle of the Crone has its own beliefs about marriage. Many Acolytes practice a sacred marriage meant to tie two souls together even beyond final death. It is a deeply spiritual experience and using marriage for political reasons, or lightly, is something many would be deeply offended by — perhaps even enough to murder for.

Stories

In general, it's perfectly acceptable to steal from Shakespeare, opera, and even mythology for story outlines. The idea here is to draw out the most tragic abuses of love and marriage and then urge the characters to somehow make them right again.

Kiss Me Kate: The childe has decided that one of the characters is particularly vile. While pretending to allow himself to be seduced, he's actually manipulating the character to behave better. Somewhere between brainwashing and a Pygmalion story, the childe will nudge the character to being more reasonable, more humane, or any number of ideals important to a neonate and potentially dangerous to a Kindred of age and standing.

No PDA: There are rumors surfacing that the game is being fixed: someone is slipping the childe Vitae, and he may be as much as two-thirds bound already. Who could be getting the childe alone, let alone close enough to get

blood into his mouth? Could it be blood magic? And if so, how do you prove it before the childe declares his intentions to take his attacker as his mate? Is the bloody deed being done by a member of the coterie? If so, what is the best way to squash or misdirect the rumors to keep from facing destruction at the hands of an angry Prince?

Holding the Fort: Congratulations, one of you is now married to the steward of the city and wields untold power. The question is: how do you keep it? The Prince's allies and servants are at your disposal for now. Reinforce allies and hold back old enemies while dodging opportunists who would use the power shift to their advantage. Oh, and there's the little matter of the steward himself, now bound to one of the coterie members, and how best to keep him from getting into too much trouble that might threaten your hold over him and the city. Have fun with all that.

Bodas de Sangre

This ritual is an Invictus blood oath (similar to those in **The Invictus**, starting on p. 178) dating back many centuries, possibly as far back as the 9th century. While functionally it officiates a Kindred marriage, a power in the blood takes it to a different level. The officiator must know the oath; neither participant in the marriage can use the power. Both participants must be in sound state of mind, and aware of the consequences of the wedding. Once the ritual has been

completed, both parties share the benefits and risks, depending on the specific marriage agreement (usually relating to land rights, peace treaties, or feeding privileges).

First, both members may use the highest City, Clan, and Covenant Status that they have between them. If a member could not normally qualify for the Status, the Status score is considered one lower. For instance, a Nosferatu attempting to use her husband's Daeva Status 3 uses Daeva Status 2 instead. If both members share the category of Status and have at least one dot each, they are considered one higher. For example, two married Daeva with Daeva Status 2 and 4 may both use Daeva Status 5 once this ritual weds them. While they raise each other up, they can also easily pull each other down, and a strip of Status from one harms both. Similarly, because the city now sees them as one person, both characters can buy into their mutual Status Merit, like shared dots in Haven.

On the other hand, if one member breaks the agreements set forth in the oath, they lose a dot of Willpower, and take aggravated damage equal to the other member's highest City, Clan, or Covenant Status score. Their betrayed spouse regains all lost points of Willpower. If they betray one another, they each suffer the injury and Willpower loss.

Requirements: The oath requires Invictus Status 2 to learn, but not to be a party to.

Embrace for Love

Can you make yourself fall in love? Can you find the “right one” as part of a political game? Can you engineer your own lasting love, only to potentially destroy it?

Tears streamed down her cheeks and she shoved at the vampire, pushing him away. “That’s all this has been to you, a game? Some kind of test? You’re just as bad as the rest of them. You used me. You made me love you, and told me all those pretty lies.”

He looked away, rubbing his eyes with a sleeve to spare her the sight of his blood. “That’s how it started.” He was determined to tell the truth at this point. He owed her that much. “But things changed when I really got to know you and your work. You’re a marvel, and even if you never speak to me again, I want you to know I won’t ever regret falling just as hard for you as you fell for me.”

He heard her shuddering breath. He knew it meant something – that the game would go on.



Pitch

Any Carthian government is by definition a political experiment. When that experiment works, in this case a city-by-council with limited voting for the population, when it becomes stable, what's a Carthian society to do? Well, in this case, challenge other traditions among other covenants. Your coterie has been charged by the city council to "Embrace for love" as a challenge to the Lancea Sanctum's doctrine. But how do you "Embrace for love" on command? How do you fall in love? Is that even what they mean? Pulling it off and refuting the doctrine could mean a lot of sway inside the city, and a lot of angry Sanctified just outside of it. Or even worse, what if there's a reason for the belief that it's a bad idea, and you find out exactly what it is?

Mood and Theme

Is love real? Is it a tangible thing that can be proven to exist? Is it something Kindred are even capable of feeling? Questioning the existence of quantifiable love is an important part of the theme of this shard. While the write-up presented here includes a mechanic to reflect the deepest chemical responses to love, the characters

should never be able to objectively quantify that that's what love is, if they can even achieve the state described.

Description

There is some powerful politics going on behind the scenes of what seems like a simple, even childish request by the council of the city. Keeping neonates busy is always good policy, but there's more to it than that.

A Cardinal with an eye for expansion runs a Lancea Sanctum stronghold just north of the city. To the south, a collective of Acolytes has created a small but tyrannical Theocracy, and all over the region there are traditional Invictus cities. As far as anyone knows, this city is one of the few fully Carthian-controlled cities in the region. And it's certainly the oldest.

The council is trying a new sort of experiment: Using the rumor mill, they're challenging traditional beliefs in other covenants not just to undercut their authorities but to make waves among the impressionable young neonates. While it may seem like a small thing, challenging the idea that there's no harm in Embracing for love might lead to Kindred questioning other parts of the Testament and therefore weakening the overall power of the

Lancea Sanctum. The characters might not even know how closely they're being watched, or the full political ramifications of what it is they're doing.

Character Considerations

A character that is steadfast against ever Embracing for any reason would be problematic in this chronicle. Particularly stoic or heartless characters would also find themselves left out of the story, since so much of the overarching plot revolves around relenting to passion.

Allies and Antagonists

Get player input on what sort of childer they'd seek out, gather ideas for what sort of Storyteller characters would fit the bill, and then be sure to twist the characters a bit. A childhood sweetheart might reignite long lost feelings in Kindred, sure, but making her happily married with kids raises the stakes quite nicely.

Consider tragic stories that could be turned around by the Embrace, such as those of the terminally ill, abused ghouls, the disenfranchised victims of society, and so on. Some characters will need challenges, though, and their potential childer may need to best them at their own games in order to really click. Don't forget the possibilities posed by romantic rivals for both the players' characters and the potential childer.

The Lancea Sanctum could become a big problem for the characters as the rumors spread and the full implications of the experiment settle in. Even Sanctified loyal to the city may try to sabotage the characters. If the experiment fails before it starts, there's no need for a war of politics or philosophy between the two cities.

The rumor mill itself may become a friend or a foe of the characters. Popular opinion matters, and since the council is trying to use rumors to influence policy, the subjects of those rumors better stay interesting.

Stories

The stories in this shard should be personal and character-driven. After all, they are adventures in seeking out the perfect mate for at least some part of the lonely eternity of the Requiem. But there's more going on here than just some kids trying to fall in love. There is a tremendous social pressure from the outside to "succeed." Like the pressure for a young pregnant girl to marry someone, *anyone*, it's artificial and invasive. These are stories of love pushed into the public for scrutiny, approval, or rejection: love used as a wedge for politics.

Living Dead Girl: One of the characters thinks she's found the perfect girl. This girl is different, special, and every bit as intriguing and charming as any fellow Kindred. The character will soon discover, however, that her beloved is already dead. Is she Kindred, an embodied ghost, or

something else? Is there a way to get out of the competition, or to make her beloved alive enough for the Embrace?

Dangerous Liaison: While on the lookout for a potential childe, one of the characters realizes he's being seduced. The seducer is a ghoul of incredible charm and poise and perfect for the character in every way. He's sophisticated and can hold his own in a way the characters have never seen in a ghoul. There's a reason for that: the ghoul in question belongs to an elder member of the council. Hearing about the contest, he's decided to trick the character into Embracing him, and then return to the elder with his own exciting story of romance and blood to claim the praise for himself. He's wicked, vicious, and ultimately exactly the sort of monster a Kindred could really fall for.

Romancing the Dragon: One of the characters, who is either a member of the Circle of the Crone himself or has close ties with one, has stumbled upon a sacrificial ritual for finding the perfect mate. A bloody twist on the divination games children play at slumber parties, the ritual should be able to predict exactly how to meet and fall in love with the right person. If the character uses it, what will he do when he finds himself led to someone who appears to be completely incompatible? The ritual can't be wrong, so clearly he must be.

True Love

Within this shard, characters can choose to replace their Virtues with that of their True Loves. The rules are different for a vampire's love and that of a mortal. Once a True Love is adopted, a character's Virtue is effectively gone; they can gain no further Willpower from it, and any powers and effects that would rely on Virtue no longer apply.

To adopt a True Love, the character must act out their Virtue in pursuit of their beloved. For example, a character with Justice might hunt down their beloved's attackers after a brutal assault. Instead of regaining all Willpower, the player chooses to abandon the character's Virtue. In that case, the character's Virtue would be erased and replaced with the name of the character she avenged — this is now her True Love.

If a mortal character has a True Love, they get +3 to any roll that would keep them from dying, if in pursuit or aid of their beloved. If a Kindred character has a True Love, they may spend Willpower to resist losing Humanity. The love gives them a greater purpose and strengthens their souls against the ravages of time.

Note that True Love does not have to be mutual (and indeed often isn't). If a True Love dies, it is possible, with time and effort, to replace that hole in a character's heart. That could lead to an entirely new personal storyline, one that might be even more dramatic than falling in love in the first place.

Kick-Ass, Heroic Outcasts

You've always been an outsider, and now it's time to show them what you learned outside their dark halls and glittering salons.

The Prince's goon knocked Lilly back; she hit the ground with a heavy huff and a spatter of blood.

"That's enough," a voice called from the back of the warehouse. He stepped into the light, and for the first time Lilly met the Sheriff.

They locked eyes. His glowed red with his feral connection to the Beast. Her own went wide and for a moment, she choked down a scream.

Then something changed. The spark, the burning need for connection, ripped through both Kindred with such fire it was unmistakable. They were going to fuck; there was no way to resist the connection between them. The good Sheriff wasn't even going to have the forethought to send his deputies out of the room.

Pitch

You're playing a ragtag team of misfits: The vampire and werewolf husband and wife. The blood magician outside a spiritual covenant. The scientific Ordo following a path to stronger humanity. Whatever the reason you're outcast, you don't let that stop you from kicking ass and taking names. You're badass guys and chicks fighting the powers that be because there's a lot of evil and no one else seems willing to make the hard choice and stand up to it. The key here is battling evil with the potential to win. **Vampire** normally assumes that won't work out so well, but this chronicle is different.

Mood and Theme

This should be **Vampire** at its sexiest and most exciting. Skip the torment and angst and get right to the good stuff: fucking, fighting, and flying that freak flag high! The characters should be the oddballs, the outcasts, but instead of painting them in a hopeless light, these heroes are plucky. They're outside of the system, so they can see

its faults. Since they have nothing to lose, they can fight. Sarcasm and bemusement should beat out hopelessness; when in doubt, a splash of optimism thrown on top of failure will go a long way. Put down the Anne Rice and queue up your Ramones playlist, because it's time to bring a little attitude to the Danse Macabre.

Description

Start a scene with a brick going through a window. End a scene with a group of undead buddies, beaten, bloody, and laughing their asses off. That's how this chronicle should run.

These characters are the underdogs, forever resisting the status quo with the full burn of their passion. Women, minorities, homosexuals, religious outcasts, and revolutionaries, these characters are on the outside of "mainstream society" in the city, but they won't let that stop them having a good time.

On the surface, it may look like it's all sex and drugs and violence, but ultimately, this is a coterie trying to

change things to make it more equitable — if not for everyone in the city, at least for themselves. While all of this is possible in a standard **Vampire** chronicle, the difference here is tone. This chronicle is on the side of the underdogs, and every setback should be a set up for the next big win. Let them lose, but never let them give up, because no matter how minor the victory, winners are always sexier than losers.

Character Considerations

Any outsider concept can work in this shard. As long as they're willing (or forced) to fight the system, they're in line with what this chronicle requires. The Prince's favorite childe is out, but the Prince's secret, embarrassing, and illegally-Embraced childe is in.

Some characters may be real idealists, while others may be characters resisting the city structure because they are accidentally on the outside of it. It could even be hedonistic opportunists using the coterie to have as much fun as possible before it all goes up in flames.

Allies and Antagonists

Allies and antagonists in this shard should be loosely interchangeable. Fair weather friends, easily-duped enemies, and lovers on both sides of the fence help to keep the chaos at just the right level. If he was trying to kill you last week and now he's trying to get into your bed, he's exactly the sort of Storyteller character that should be featuring in this chronicle.

The “powers that be” should be oppressive and worth fighting. That said, be careful not to make them too campy, or they won’t feel worth the risks. No one is evil for the sake of it, especially in a setting where allegiances are constantly changing. Everyone should have valid mo-

tivations, and they must be worth changing or destroying for maximum satisfaction.

Stories

Rent: A new fat cat has taken over the domain in which the characters live. Suddenly, there's “rent” required for feeding rights in what used to be the only open feeding territory. He's got ghouls patrolling for poachers. Making a rental agreement is tricky, because he won't meet with Kindred not in good standing, and the coterie is pretty much exactly that. It looks like the characters are going to have to take some extreme measures to get noticed, or drive the fat cat out of their turf.

Irresistible Pull: One of the characters gave into their Beast and did something he or she will regret in the evening. It might have been easier if it had happened during a frenzy, but instead the character gave into their other base impulses and slept with the enemy. Worse still, that enemy thinks they have some sort of claim on the character now. The unwise Kindred must now resist further seduction, embarrassment, and possibly death at the hands of the jilted lover. If that's not enough, the enemy is going to start targeting other characters in the coterie for similar seduction. Will the coterie stand together or break apart?

Smash it Down, Build it Up: Okay, so they've heard enough. You've irritated the people in charge enough that they're willing to give you a shot, if only to get you off their back. You call it an experiment; they call it a temporary grant of domain. Now it's up to you and the other misfits to prove that your way is viable — and maybe even better than the status quo. Build up your own community up while resisting opportunists, do-nothings, and secret saboteurs of the Prince.

A Plague for a Dowry

When a Prince declares love and sex illegal, everyone's a potential criminal.

“Father?”

The Bishop tugged his robe closed and fixed the Carthian muckraker with a cold stare. “Judge not, least ye be judged.”

"She'll have you put to death if she finds out," the Carthian insisted as realization dawned on her. "That's why you've been murdering the neonates, isn't it? Better to kill your lovers off than be caught breaking city law. You monster!" She stepped back, horrified.

"I did nothing wrong" the ancient Bishop hissed. "My only crime was to love, and love I did."

Pitch

This is a shard about sex, politics, repression, and maybe even a little bit of love. You'll be playing rising stars in a city of Kindred who have a long history of making as many deals in the bedrooms as in Elysium. Now the Prince has, for whatever reason, declared that love, sex, and romance are illegal and punishable by death. Your Requiem is about to get tricky.

Mood and Theme

Secrecy, lust, and the thrill of illicit love should be the hallmarks of this chronicle. After all, one little law and the threat of death is hardly enough to make a city full of Kindred suddenly change the way they operate. Now it's just a matter of being sneaker about it. It's business as usual, just behind locked doors. The ever-present threat of blackmail makes everything that much more dangerous, and that much sexier.

Description

A year ago, a Sanctified zealot with some crazy ideas about humanity and the cleaving of Kindred from human behavior entered the city. He declared that any sort of contact between Kindred that wasn't a demonstration of power or devotion was a blasphemy. The Bishop found him overly zealous, but harmless.

It's also long been known the Prince is heartbroken. No one can say exactly what caused it, but the wounds have been apparent in the lines of her face for nearly a century. Something shattered her, and she's an empty shell most of the time. Despite the Bishop's declaration, the Prince seems to have taken an interest in the zealot's teachings. After a number of private meetings and confessions, the Prince made this strange belief city law:

"For the betterment of the city, any and all romantic or sexual behavior between Kindred is to be forbidden.

There is nothing but suffering in the Kindred experience, and the mimicry of human blessings such as love and pleasure are a slight in God's plan. Therefore, there shall be no more love, no more pleasure, and no more marriages."

Now the city is in a quiet panic. Clearly they can't ignore the way they've been doing things forever. The indignity of the new law is second only to the very real threat of death should they not follow it. Any liberties must now be taken in secret.

Character Considerations

A number of characters would fit nicely into this chronicle, but here are a few ideas to really spice things up.

The Pretty Face: Before the law, she was arm candy. Just a pretty thing Embraced for her looks and passed around between Kindred of power in a fashion that bordered on humiliation. Now, though, she's got something she didn't have before: power. With the new law on the books and her old benefactors addicted to her attentions (and possibly her blood), she's got leverage over them. After all, she can expose any and all of them as law breakers. While she too is guilty, being able to point fingers goes a long way with tyrants.

The Childe: The Prince is his sire. He was Embraced long after the heartbreak, and doesn't know the cause of it, but he is desperate to ease that pain in his sire's soul. Worse, thanks to the influence of that zealot, the Prince has spiraled further into self-loathing and depression. No else is close enough to try and change things, and any real gestures could get him killed under the new law. That's probably not enough to stop him, though — after all, a childe's love is sacrosanct.

The Penitent: She knows something about the zealot that would shock the Prince and the city. It's something so terrible and so twisted that it would cast into doubt

everything he's said and done to influence this city. The problem is that she's under conditioning that prevents her from even hinting at what she knows. She must find a way to expose the zealot for what he is without ever telling anyone else what she knows or what they should be looking for — no easy task.

Allies and Antagonists

Aside from the Prince and the Sanctified zealot, the city should be alive with freedom-loving, political, erotically-open Storyteller characters. Taking care of business was a business of its own, and while not everyone in the city should be a sex addict, a majority of the city's vampires should be at least insulted that such a limitation would be forced on them. Clandestine meetings supported by local Carthians intent on resisting the laws happen in many places throughout the city every night. The Circle of the Crone use Crúac to hide their blood bonds and emotions. The Ordo Dracul, limited in any research they might be doing on Kindred-to-Kindred social interaction, are up in arms. Even members of the Lancea Sanctum question the wisdom of forcing this sort of dogma on a city that might strain their covenant's standing.

Stories

Blood Disease: Something is slowly killing the Kindred in the city: some sort of mystical disease that is passed by blood contact from one Kindred to another. Ghouls can't suffer from it, and humans don't carry it. The only way for it to be spread is by illegal sexual interactions between Kindred, so tracking down its spread and source is going to be next to impossible for city officials. It will be up to the coterie, working outside the law, to garner enough Kindred trust to stop the spread of the plague.

The Ties that Bind: Maybe most Kindred don't realize the sheer number of "criminals" this city has due to the new law. Perhaps if there were a way to illustrate just how many members in good standing are at risk for death by

the law, the Prince could be bullied into changing her mind. One answer is to trace the blood ties and bonds, and rumor has it that there are certain Crúac rituals or strange alchemies that can follow the lines of blood. The coterie must find the rituals, trace the complicated network of blood ties, and hope for the best.

Owner of a Broken Heart: As if things weren't bad enough, the zealot starts preaching against nomads and shortly after, the Prince declares an open blood hunt on any foreigners attempting to make contact with the city court. Could it have anything to do with that long lonely look in her eyes? It might be worth asking some of the local Gangrel, but is it safe to ask?

You Can Pick Your Family

In this shard, characters can opt to join or leave blood lineages for the purposes of Blood Ties, Blood Sympathy, and the Taste of Family rules (*Vampire: the Requiem*, pp. 162-164). This shard also uses slightly stronger forms of those rules. Using these rules changes, a character may be part of multiple lineages.

To leave a lineage, a character must spend a dot of Willpower, and shed at least one point of Vitae. Immediately, all relevant characters may make Blood Sympathy rolls to know this occurred.

To join a lineage, a character must spend a dot of Willpower and ingest one point of Vitae from a member of the lineage in question (subject to normal Vinculums and addiction rules, as in *Vampire*, pp. 161-162). The member of the lineage whose blood is shared must spend a point of Willpower.

Blood Sympathy no longer carries the fifty-mile limit; characters may experience one another's most potent moments from any distance. In addition, family members need not spend Willpower to force sympathy. The social bonus for Vinculums becomes +4. When using Taste of Family, a single success can identify blood from a known lineage.

The Estate

The ancient halls of the Withersgate Estate have always housed secrets; you are cordially invited to be a part of the gossip, the romance, and the terrible truths within.

Mark couldn't shake the feeling that the harridan was still watching him, even after he left the tension of the dining room. After finding the network of secret hallways behind the walls, the feeling only intensified

Lost in suspicious thoughts, he walked straight into Marianne, the estate's owner, and found himself staring into her deep, passionate eyes. "I'm sorry." He stepped back and rubbed the back of his neck.

Marianne merely smiled, watching his hand as it moved near his throat. "You didn't hear me coming. Is everything alright?"

"Oh, yeah, well, dinner. Ms. Gritzel insists I have dinner with the household from time to time. It's a little awkward. You didn't get pulled in, I see." He tried to smile; it became easier when she smiled back.

"No, well, I have a delicate appetite, and I never drink at this hour."

Maybe he should have been on guard at that point, but it was just so much easier to fall into the depths of those eyes. It was familiar, as if he knew her, as if he'd always known her.

Pitch

The ancestral mansion in Withersgate has always housed strange people, from the insular family to the oddly behaved serving staff. With the return of a "long lost aunt," things are about to get even stranger, especially for Mark, the historian hired to oversee renovations in the ancient building.

You can take on the iconic roles of vampire, long-lost-love reborn, vampire's companion, or guardian of

the family secrets in this claustrophobically tense family home. Your character will earn experience points for creating vivid and exciting private scenes for the other characters to spy on for increased dramatic effects.

Mood and Theme

For the characters, claustrophobia and suspicion should mix with arousal and the allure of mystery. For the players, the Storyteller should encourage the voyeuristic pleasure of watching the drama unfold in soap opera-like

fashion. There is a strong parallel between the mood in this chronicle and television shows like *Dark Shadows* (a soap opera set in the mansion of an ancient family of monsters). As such, the choices the Storyteller makes should heighten that sense of drama, mystery, and obsession. The Estate should be a place the characters want to stay trapped in just as much as they want to flee.

Description

To set the stage, a number of odd characters are drawn into the Estate — characters with secrets and desires that can and should complicate every interaction in the strange atmosphere.

Character secrets such as their desires, jealousy, or passions should be a main motivator for character interaction whether they're player or Storyteller characters. These secrets really fuel the Clandestine Broadcasting (see p. 37) that set this style of play apart. The secrets should be flexible, and as a Storyteller you're welcome to twist or change existing secrets so long as it amps up the drama. What appeared to be a meeting between the two of the mistress's childer to plot her death could easily turn into a scheme by one to destroy the other and cement himself as the mistress's favorite. When in doubt, the

phrase "but what she *didn't* know" is a great way to start a stakes-raising plot twist.

At times, the players and Storyteller should be aware of the greater story and be willing to be cognizant of the soap opera tone of the story. The approval from the table can help when a choice is in doubt.

Character Considerations

The entire cast of characters is very small: a few family members, a few childer for the mistress of the house, the help, and a complete outsider somehow fated to belong among these strangers forever. The catalyst to the action is the return of a long-slumbering elder — the mistress of the house — and all the preparations and fears surrounding her return. A few character archetypes are ideal for this chronicle.

The Mistress: She's an ancient vampire recently risen from a long torpor that has reduced her in power and ability to that of a neonate. Still, the Estate is hers, and the threat of her political power is too much for anyone to question her. She's tired of the endless cycle of undeath and slumber, and is seriously considering a way out. However, the return of a man she lost lifetimes ago may change her mind and replace ennui with obsession.



The Outsider: He was called in to oversee restoration of the Estate, but he's not family, kin, or a part of the insular staff. What he doesn't know is that he shares a striking resemblance to the Mistress' long-dead beloved. It could be coincidence or the madness of slumber, but that wouldn't explain away why he's been dreaming of this mysterious woman his whole life.

The Loyal Childe: He's been loyal to the Mistress and her estate for decades, and he plays by the rules. Having his sire up and around is as terrifying as it is exciting — finally, he has a chance to prove himself to her. If only this pretty human hadn't shown up to ruin everything.

The Troubled Descendent: She's one of the last living relatives of the Mistress, and has been taken care of by the Estate's wealth most of her life. She parties hard and is always looking for a way out. What will she do if she discovers the family secret? After all, the Embrace would afford her freedom she'd never have as a mere mortal.

The Harridan: A century or two as a ghoul has hardened, and perhaps driven mad, this majordomo. All she wants is everything to be perfect for her Mistress' return. Everything needs to stay the same. She's not above threatening, bullying, and even murdering to keep things "just so."

Allies and Antagonists

In this case, the Storyteller should be running any concepts above that the players don't take on. The key is to keep their secrets just as dynamic and dramatic as those of the player characters without stealing the spotlight. Any chance to have something happen between two Storyteller characters should instead be reworked to include player characters as part of the action, and perhaps a secret observer.

Ghosts of the past, mysterious strangers passing through, and old enemies of the Mistress or her brood may present new story angles and more drama to keep things fresh for the characters inside the Estate.

Stories

Secret Wealth: Hidden in a secret compartment of a secret passageway in a part of the basement normally blocked off, one of the characters comes across the Mistress' secret treasure trove: Gold, jewels, coins, and

even a Crusader's sword. The treasures here are worth millions — maybe even billions. Mortal characters may try to discover why this much wealth is hidden down there, or how to smuggle some of it out without getting caught.

The Child: Another mortal relative of the mistress, a recent orphan, comes to the estate because he has nowhere else to go. The child is odd, and seems to be gifted in some way. Is he some sort of magical prodigy, or is there some other supernatural influence behind his strange behavior and talents?

The Nomads: A band of traveling Kindred has taken up camp on the moors surrounding the estate. They seem to have some connection to the mistress, but she won't say what. Will they expose the mortal characters to the secrets of vampirism too soon? Will they seduce a wayward descendant of the mistress and carry her off to a life on the road? Have they done it before? And if so, why didn't the mistress stop them before?

Clandestine Broadcasting

In this shard, clandestine meetings not only happen, but they happen frequently. Any time two (or sometimes three) characters get together in private to scheme, plot, plan, or otherwise be secretive, this rule comes into effect. The scene must be played at the table, in front of everyone. Any player whose character has a relevant Social Merit (usually Contacts, Allies, Retainers, or Staff) can spend one point of Willpower in order to have their Merit-based Storyteller characters privy to that scene's information. Perhaps the butler listened through the door, or the maid was cleaning in the closet. The point is to get the information out and use it to drive plot. This means the Storyteller character should not be discovered eavesdropping.

Instead of rewarding experience at the end of game sessions and chronicles, characters only gain experience points through these Clandestine Broadcasts.

In exchange, every participant in the clandestine scene receive one experience point for each character that "listens in." Highly dramatic characters, therefore, will advance rapidly. This is a good thing. Assume each character should get at least one such scene during the course of a game session, which ends up being about three to five experience points, similar to the standard system.

The Wild War

They say the wolves gave up their freedom for stability. But when wolf blood is the only drug worth taking, who can trust what the Kindred will do to get it?

"It's a simple job," the deputy told you. "Just go in and clean up after the fights. You get your feeding rights and everyone sees what a team player you are. That's important in this city."

Simple, sure, only you'd never seen before what a werewolf could do to another werewolf in a pit fight. The gore, the mess – it's horrifying even to you. These beasts must have suffered as they fought and died, forced with Dominate and cattle prods to keep fighting long after they'd given up.

And the smell! The sick smell of dead flesh and offal blends with the sweet, almost irresistibly powerful smell of werewolf blood. You've never tasted it, so they tell you you're safe, but you know on some level how dangerous it is just by smelling it. So you clean, mask over your face, and try to think about anything but what you're doing.

That is, until you realize one of the bodies is still alive, and very slowly healing. Its mournful howling is soft now, but you know soon it will be crying out its agony, and only you'll hear it. What are you going to do about it?

Pitch

You're all playing Kindred who have, for whatever reason, closer interactions with werewolf servants than many, and things are going to change forever. Can you stem the tides of a coming war? Can you stem the tides of your own passion for these magnificent beasts?

Resist becoming addicted to the power as you fight to do right by this indentured slave race, or help them overthrow their masters at great personal risk. It's up to you, but whatever you do, things just can't stay as they are. War is coming.

Mood and Theme

Erotic tension, obsession, and addiction all paint the canvas of this chronicle. Change is inevitable, as tension of another sort builds. As inevitably as the phases of the moon, the wolves in this chronicle won't stay bound forever, and it's up to the characters to decide which side they'll be on when the shackles break.

Description

A long time ago, the Kindred gained control over the wretched werewolves. They were enslaved "for their own

good.” After all, with Kindred help they’re no longer prone to wild violence on full moons; they no longer kill everyone they know and love in a burst of forgotten rage. They traded their freedom to a way out of their Curse. But you feel like something is wrong. The stories can’t be true. These are people, or at least they seem like people. They’re easy to love, especially when a cold Kindred is so easily drawn in by the raw heat and passion of the wild animal in chains.

The wolves in this story are a mystery, with mystical, compelling blood. Because of this, their plight should be nearly impossible to ignore for the young Kindred. Liberation for the wolves can come in a lot of ways, from the coterie earning the right to own a handful of the wolves to full-scale revolution, depending on how far the characters want to take it. But the costs are high, because the draw of passion is too hard to ignore. Whether it’s addiction to the blood or addiction to the feeling, the end result is the same: Ruin or salvation hinges on the choices the characters make.

Character Considerations

As long as the characters are young or otherwise open to changes in the status quo, they should be fine in this chronicle. Kindred scientists studying the shapeshifters’ nature, humanitarians looking to solve the werewolves’ plight, or even former addicts trying to stem the tide of addiction could all make fine character concepts.

Untouchable, loveless, or sociopathic characters won’t tie into the themes of this shard. A potential for vulnerability is always important in a character, but doubly so in this shard.

Allies and Antagonists

The werewolves involved are just people with no choices left. They’ve been forced into a situation they can only barely understand just because there’s something different about their physiology.

They should also remain in shadows, loved and desired but never fully understood. The focus should always remain on the Kindred characters (since this is a *Vampire* game), and the true nature of the wolves should be always up for debate. Most of the time, aside from their blood, they should be normal humans: sympathetic and innocent, even if they have blood on their hands. Yet there’s still something animal and raw about them, even under the confusion and the empathy. They’re equal parts underdog and threatening beast. Sometimes they lose it and become unstoppable killing machines, leaving blood and death in their wake.

The methods elders use to contain the wolves’ rage should likewise remain mysterious, as freeing the wolves will present its own set of problems. After all, they did agree to this long ago to save themselves the torment of their rage. Use what you like of *Werewolf: the Forsaken*, or use myth and legend instead. Just don’t ever leave the players feeling like they really understand what’s going on.

Stories

Like any other shard in this book, you’re ultimately telling tales of romance. Star-crossed doesn’t even begin to describe the misfortune of a love between a Kindred and a werewolf. There is an irresistible pull of animal passion, the tragedy of the disenfranchised, and of course being caught between the abused and a culture that abuses them. Just don’t forget that first and foremost, these tragic creatures are meant to be loved.

True Love: If it exists, true love is no magical cure-all and it certainly won’t fix the werewolves’ plight. But it can certainly complicate things. One of the characters develops a deep and passionate love for a werewolf. If that isn’t going to complicate things enough, the Kindred’s werewolf paramour is about to be sent to the fighting pits this coming full moon. Prepare her for combat, liberate her, get her out of the fight somehow, or risk losing the greatest love of all.

The Prodigy: The werewolves have whispered for generations that someday a child will be born to their race that can control his shapechanging, and that with his arrival, everything will change. Every Kindred has heard the story, and the twists the Kindred elders have given it: That the child will mark the end of all werewolves everywhere, or that his existence will somehow cause the wolves eternal torment. Whatever the truth is, while working with some of the werewolves, the coterie discovers a young one who can change on a whim. What do they do with him?

The Changing Moon: More and more, the elders’ powers over the changes of the wolves seem to be fading. With every full moon that passes, Kindred are hearing more and more reports of fatal werewolf attacks. Can the characters somehow use this to their advantage? What will happen when there’s nothing holding the wolves back at all?

Wild Blood

In this shard, lupine blood is a powerful yet highly addictive substance. Not only is it subject to the standard Blood Addiction rules (*Vampire: the Requiem*, p. 158), an addicted character may not earn Willpower points on nights where he has not partaken of werewolf blood.

However, the drawbacks are not without benefits. Track the lupine blood on your sheet with a W on your Vitae chart. For every two points of werewolf vitae in a character's system, the character gains a temporary dot of Vigor, Resilience, or Celerity. These dots are chosen at the time of feeding. These bonus Discipline dots can exceed the character's Blood Potency limitation by one. In addition, a character can spend a single point of werewolf blood per turn beyond their Blood Potency limit. For example, a Blood Potency 4 Kindred could spend three Vitae per turn, provided at least one of those points came from a werewolf. Any dots of Vigor, Resilience or Celerity gained from the werewolf blood persist for a scene even after the

blood is spent. After that, they are gone until you drink werewolf blood again.

Lastly, if you're using parts of **Werewolf: the Forsaken** in this shard, consider giving your werewolves Primal Urge for the sake of rolling Predator's Taint since both species are predators. Losing the roll always results in submission for the werewolf. Success could result in the werewolf losing control and turning into their murderous form. Because they're currently a mystically controlled slave-race, however, a successful Presence + Intimidation roll by a vampire can snap a werewolf out of its frenzy-like state. Failure on the roll, however, will result in bloodshed.

Beast No More

Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength, while loving someone deeply gives you courage.

- Lao Tzu

"Is this a joke?" You almost forgot it's not just any vampire standing in front of you; it's the city's Sheriff. "You really think you've found true love?"

"I can understand your skepticism and I pity you for it." The Sheriff is obviously in a good mood. On any other night he would have walked away. That worries you. "Will you offer your assistance?"

Something's not right. Sure, you've been asked to play security guard before, but not like this and not by him. Anxious to find out more, you ask: "What kind of ceremony is it?"

The Sheriff glances over his shoulder before he responds. "Oh, it's just a little sacrifice." After a long pause he adds: "So I can become human."

"You're asking me to betray our kind," you bite back. "Do you know what the Prince will do to me if he finds out?"

"I understand the nature of my request, but I need your help." The Sheriff clamps a cool hand on your shoulder. His voice softens. "Can I count on you to protect me and my wife?"

Pitch

Would you accept love to rid yourself of your Beast? Would you allow one of your coterie to break every Tradition to be human again? Whispers threaten to topple Kindred society: It's been confirmed: the love of a mortal can cure the Damned and no one knows what to do. Will you risk losing your status to pursue an impossible dream? Could you support a key member of Kindred society who will? True love may be the answer to restoring your humanity, but it's up to you and your coterie to figure out if true love is worth the trouble.

Mood and Theme

Love is the ultimate panacea. It redeems the Damned and permanently quells the Beast that lurks within every Kindred's chest. It is indiscriminate, transforming a centuries-old vampire back into a human or a childe who has yet to feed. Love can also threaten a coterie's place within Kindred society and may lead to a blood hunt, forever branded as a traitor to all vampires. The quest for true love, and all its tragic costs, is the undercurrent of this chronicle.

Description

At the heart of this chronicle is a character's deep struggle acceptance of their vampiric condition and their place in Kindred society. It isn't just forbidden romance that pits the players' characters against each other; it's the steps each character takes to find true love or help another Kindred find his humanity. It's the risks associated with romance when a Kindred and a mortal pair up in spite of the Masquerade. It's also about exploring the difference between loving selflessly and selfishly. The Damned seldom do anything not in their best interests.

This is a chronicle that can either be told for a new or existing group of players. Existing characters will undoubtedly have more to lose in the form of status, relationships, assets and goals. New characters may find themselves fighting to come to grips with the Danse Macabre, each other, their sires and the possibility of turning mortal.

The Storyteller can either drop this shard in as the main focus for the entire chronicle or as a subplot for one player during an existing story.

In this chronicle, the state of Golconda is clearly-defined: a Kindred regains his mortality through the miracle of love with a human. What isn't necessarily clear to the players, however, is *how* that process occurs. At first, the only thing they know for sure is that they'll have to break the Masquerade to do it.

Character Considerations

Since there is no way the players can prepare for the social and personal conflicts that will ensue as a result of a Masquerade breach, how the characters are created isn't as important as their personal motivations. Players should think about what being one of the Damned means to their characters, what loyalties they have to Kindred society and each other, and whether or not they believe love can save them from their Beasts.

Forbidden romance affects the couple and everyone around them, so every character has a part to play. Members of the coterie may not experience a steamy interlude, but will suffer the consequences of another couple's passionate embrace. Toss in more than one relationship and chaos can ensue. Plenty of opportunities for romance exist, but characters don't have to plummet into a tragic relationship. If a character idealizes true love, they can live vicariously through another couple's relationship. Some characters may be perfectly happy to help other Kindred wind up happily-ever-after, but may decide to avoid the quest until a later time.

Allies and Antagonists

Each character the Storyteller introduces should have a vested interest in the outcome of the plot, because the pursuit of Golconda will have long-term repercussions on Kindred and human societies.

In this shard, an ally may help a member of the coterie hide their relationship with a mortal lover. Characters willing to offer assistance will have a soft spot for the needy and may take pity on a vampire struggling against his Beast. This breed of ally may include volunteers, charity workers, romance authors, and housewives.

Allies can quickly turn into antagonists, however, if the character has more than one agenda. An eager-to-help vampire may witness another Kindred's transformation just to murder the mortal lovers and report back to the Prince. Kindred antagonists may range from jealous lovers to blood-ritual researchers. Human antagonists may have a religious motivation for ensuring the couple does not wind up together, or they may be personally vested in the mortal's well-being.

Characters may also be tied into the way the cure is presented. If you're playing up the Golconda angle, try introducing an occult bookstore owner with a curious-yet-old-fashioned nature. If you're emphasizing how love can cure anything, bring in a doctor who has witnessed a medical miracle or a priest who has just wedded an unusual couple. The mystic and the mundane can easily coincide in a chronicle like this. Storytellers shouldn't

be afraid to mix up allies and antagonists to keep the coterie guessing, either.

Crossovers

What happens when the news that the Damned can restore their mortality reaches beyond Kindred society? Hunters encourage and facilitate Kindred-and-mortal relationships to rid the world of vampires. Prometheans study the transformations as part of their Pilgrimage. Werewolves take advantage of the turmoil and claim the city as their own turf.

Stories

Many of these stories end in tragedy, as the mortal is ripped from her family and friends and the vampire's enemies are in constant pursuit. This is the couple that has nowhere to run.

Here are some examples of how a story like this would work in *Vampire*:

Love Never After: A coterie member is told by a mysterious messenger that his sire's apparently human corpse was found murdered, lying near a wedding certificate that had been haphazardly stapled to the wall. The messenger encourages the coterie to investigate further, but warns them to avoid the local Prince at all costs. What lengths will the coterie go to find out what happened? Who are the characters truly loyal to? When they cross paths with the sire's mortal spouse, how will she react when she learns the truth?

Secrets Revealed: The group stumbles upon the private files of a high-ranking member of Kindred society. They find a folder filled with photocopies and grainy

photographs of an ancient text. Once translated, the passages reveal the path to Golconda is reached through the sacrifice of a mortal lover tied to the Kindred's past. What will the coterie do with this new information? How will they react to the news that Golconda means something entirely different than they initially thought? Will they take a chance on love or revert back to their old, selfish habits?

Taming of the Beast: A high-ranking clan or covenant member asks the coterie to take a private class to help them better deal with their Beasts in exchange for a favor. The enthusiastic instructor teaches the coterie about the healing nature of love and proclaims that, if one of them is willing, she'll gladly cure their vampiric condition forever. Will the coterie feel compelled to silence their Beasts once and for all? How will the coterie respond when they realize they are being used as guinea pigs to test a theory?

Becoming Human

In this chronicle, a Kindred character will turn human once she achieves a Humanity rating of ten. That number can only be reached through a willing blood sacrifice by a mortal on behalf of the vampire in question. Since that sacrifice is a crucial plot element, as opposed to a covenant ritual, the precise details are at the Storyteller's discretion. Maybe the blood sacrifice is the mortal's life or the life of his son. Maybe it's a complete blood transfusion between Kindred and a mortal spouse.

The mortal cannot be a ghoul or have been manipulated with Disciplines in order for the transformation to work. The Damned may fall in love with such influenced characters, but they will never be redeemed by people they've warped with supernatural methods.

Tales of fated Lovers

If you prick us do we not bleed? If you tickle us do we not laugh? If you poison us do we not die? And if you wrong us shall we not revenge?

- William Shakespeare, "The Merchant of Venice"

Thunder cracks, and lightning splits an ominous sky. Cold rain pelts against your designer trench coat but you don't care. You slump against the side of a ruined cathedral, wondering if the only way to end your pain is to face the sun. Your heart has just been broken, crushed by a lover who dumped you for a goddamned thrall.

"I'm sorry, but I've found someone else."

You remember laughing, thinking it was a joke, but when you tried to wrap your arms around her, she pulled away.

"I've seen you frenzy, you know."

Her words continue to stab at your Beast, prodding It to do something. Kill something. Devour something.

"Your Beast disgusts me."

Your Beast? What's up with that? She liked you just fine last night, maybe even loved you. Who's to say *her* Beast is any less monstrous than yours?

"At least Kevin doesn't have one. Thank God he's human."

Kevin. The name rolls around on your tongue. Are you going to let her talk to you that way? Are you going to let your *food* humiliate you like this? Hell, you don't even know whose thrall Kevin is. But that doesn't matter, because you're one of the Damned, and you have no problem letting Kevin know who he should be afraid of.

You stand up. The rain stops. Your head clears.

Who are you? A vampire or a fucking victim? Not only are you going to eat Kevin alive, you're going to make *her* watch, and then? You're going to devour *her*, too. Won't that be fun?

Pitch

It was good while it lasted, wasn't it? You dove right into that romance and it was all candlelight and roses until something new came along, something nastier. So what are you going to do about your broken heart? Cry about it? Oh, no. Not when you're a vampire. Furthermore, you've found out there's a trail of broken hearts all over your fair city. Maybe this is bigger than you. Maybe there's something else making other Kindred so crazy they'll diablerize other vamps left and right. You and your coterie have no choice: Investigate these jilted lovers, or risk winding up on the wrong side of somebody's fangs.

Mood and Theme

Love is an addiction. Withdraw from love, forcibly or otherwise, and a kind heart may turn ice-cold. For the Kindred, rejection pierces through the heart of their Vices and taps into deep insecurities. Vampires don't take too kindly to being dumped. Some Kindred will turn the city upside-down to find a former lover or a hot, new love interest. Vengeance courses through Kindred and mortal veins in this chronicle in a bloody way.

Description

The terrifying nature of all Kindred is on display in this chronicle. Characters must deal with their ability to control their darkest urges. Fueled by a nasty break-up, the characters will test the limits of their Vices and their control over their Beasts as they investigate a bloody trail of broken hearts. This conflict is both personal and risky. Say the wrong thing, and the characters may create new enemies. Say the right thing, and they may earn status or favors from a grateful sire. Regardless of why the coterie investigates, one thing is clear: love can bring out the worst in vampires and mortals alike.

This type of chronicle is best introduced after a coterie member has either formed a romantic relationship, created a thrall or ghoul, or has met another Kindred who has. Here, the event that sets the coterie on the trail of the jilted lovers is a shocking or unusual break-up. This mystery will become the coterie's primary focus once they realize that a tainted blood supply is the root of this Kindred's woes.

The Storyteller should highlight out-of-the-ordinary Kindred behavior, test the coterie's ability to keep their Beast in check, and present options for them to deal with bad blood. The Masquerade may be relaxed until the coterie finds and deals with the source of the problem.

Character Considerations

Willpower and Humanity ratings will be important throughout this chronicle until the coterie finds and

eliminates the source of the tainted blood. Decisions may be heavily influenced by whether or not an individual character can keep her Beast in check. Personal drama will impact actions as strong emotions bubble to the surface. In short, the characters will struggle with their ability to remain in control.

Whatever happens, the characters may be blinded to long-term consequences of their actions (which may be as extreme as diablerie and murder) until the danger has passed. Once the characters realize the blood supply is tainted, they may explore other, more unusual options for feeding to ensure they're not affected any more than they have been.

It's important for the characters to balance their decisions with the tension in their present situation. The task at hand may vary wildly from chronicle to chronicle depending upon how many Kindred and mortals the tainted blood has affected. The more jilted lovers there are, the faster the chronicle's pace becomes.

Allies and Antagonists

Tainted blood shatters hearts all over a city. Storyteller characters enhance the mood and leave a trail of clues to the source of the trouble. They can also instigate arguments, create love triangles, seduce old friends, and help set aside differences.

Allies will most likely be high-ranking members of Kindred society who will award status and favors to the coterie who cleans up the mess. Sires, harpies, and visiting high-status Kindred may all fill this role. Other allies may include a jilted lover who pays the coterie to find out what's going on or a club owner who's desperate to get her clientele back under control.

Antagonists are characters who either want to attack the coterie for personal reasons or who have a vested interest in ensuring the tainted blood never leaves the city. The tainted blood may have been introduced accidentally, but a blood bank manager may be so low on blood he has no choice but to keep it around. Other antagonists may include a heartbroken Kindred who purposefully wants all other vampires to feel his pain, or an Ordo Dracul scientist who engineered a blood virus. Femme fatales are not uncommon in this chronicle.

Stories

The idea that blood can be sweet and pure is common in paranormal romance stories as a method to describe how a vampire experiences erotic desire. This shard turns that common trope upside down.

Let it Flow, Let it Flow, Let it Flow: The coterie is invited to a debuting night club attached to an abandoned



distillery, and is offered bottled draughts of blood. As the group works their way around the room, lovers quarrel, triangles turn ugly and characters may even find they've lost their sex appeal. How will the coterie respond when they find out that bottled blood turns jilted lovers into vengeance seekers? Will they be able to stop its distribution to other clubs? What will they do when their group becomes the target of a femme fatale?

The Poisoned Vessel: A coterie member has recently fed from a vessel. Not long afterward, both vampire and mortal are uncontrollably obsessed with one another. Maybe they coo at each other in romantic baby-talk. Maybe the Kindred attempts to take the vessel back to her haven. Maybe they have sex in front of the other characters. How will the rest of the coterie react to the odd behavior? What will they do when one of their own attacks them just for standing too close to her paramour? Will they help see the relationship through or report their coterie member to the Prince?

Love Potion No. 666: A high-ranking member of Kindred society propositions the coterie and asks one or more of them out on a date. When the coterie members appear, they discover their date has gone into torpor and

find a bottle of Vitae next to her body. What happens when the coterie is suspected of attempted murder? How will they study the vial's contents? What will they do when word starts to spread that diablerists are targeting couples? Will they find the real criminal before they are diablerized as well?

Tainted Blood

Tainted blood in this chronicle is used as a storytelling device to facilitate jealous behavior that may turn violent if not deadly. The more powerful the taint, the longer the effects will last on the characters. The less potent it is, the faster it will wear off.

If the Storyteller decides to use Vitae as the primary ingredient for this chronicle, then normal rules for creating thralls and ghouls apply.

Storytellers may also want to consider customizing the effects of the taint, depending upon what strengths and weaknesses the characters have. For example, a Storyteller may treat a character who suffers from a Vice of Envy differently than one with Gluttony. Disciplines like Dominance or Majesty may fail completely for a Kindred who suffers from the effects of tainted blood.

The voices of Dieter's men were barely audible, but the new one with the German accent was loud enough to yank me out of the merciful unconsciousness I'd slipped into.

It hurt to breathe. There was blood on my tongue and I couldn't feel my fingers. I hoped it was just because the ropes they'd tied me with were too tight.

Once Velvet-voice's sexy mojo had worn off, they'd played rough to try to get me to talk. I'd been tempted to tell them the truth — that I'd crammed the Key into one of the bullet holes they'd put in the sofa — just to stop the pain. But once they knew where I'd hidden that little box, there was no point in letting me live. Instead, I clung to the knowledge that I'd triggered my panic button message before the fire-fight. Help was on the way. I just had to hold on.

Footsteps grew near. I breathed shallowly to keep my broken ribs from grating, pretending I was still unconscious.

Fingers like steel claws tore the blindfold away like it was tissue paper. I tried to open my eyes, but between the bruising and the light sensitivity, I could barely manage to raise my eyelids before they involuntarily winced closed again.

That glimpse triggered the fears I'd been fighting back, like a series of bullets to my brain. The world outside the window was dark. Night had fallen. It had been hours. My call hadn't worked. I was on my own.

Worse yet, night meant the German was Herr Johannes Dieter, vampiric badass.

He leaned in close. He smelled like old paper, but beneath that was the odor of dirt and death.

“Open your eyes.”

It wasn't a request. I felt the same wave of will wash over me that had accompanied Gabriel's desperate order. But I wasn't any more interested in obeying him than I'd been with Gabriel. I squeezed my eyes even tighter, and hoped that he didn't have the same “make you

want to be my love slave" power that his henchman had used to end our gun battle so quickly.

"Where is the Key?" His breath was like the air inside of a mausoleum. Definitely no sexy mojo there.

"I don't know what you're talking about," I lied.

He pried one of my eyelids open, and for a heartbeat our gazes locked.

An explosion of shattered glass erupted from the other room.

Dieter's attention wavered only for a split second, but it was enough.

I kicked hard, throwing myself upward, and drove the top of my skull into his face. Dieter flew backwards. With the chair still bound to me like a rickety wooden turtle shell, I spun a roundhouse kick towards the reeling vampire's mid-section. I connected, but he grabbed my hair, using my momentum to keep him on his feet. Without the use of my arms, I couldn't stop the force of my kick, and we crashed across the room together. He pulled me back towards him, trying to force me to meet his gaze, but I jerked my chin down towards my chest and threw my shoulder back into his chest. Sandwiched between us, the rickety chair creaked, groaned, and gave up the ghost.

We sprawled to the floor, him and me with the chair in splinters between us. Weighed down by Dieter's grip in my hair, the fall took my breath away. The room spun.

The next room fell silent. Neither Dieter nor I moved as a shadow fell across the tangled heap we'd fallen into.

"This is over." The voice was familiar, but I couldn't place it before the spinning room did one final loop and went black.

Chapter Three: Storytelling

Prolific advice has been offered to Storytellers for both the World of Darkness and **Vampire: The Requiem**. However, Storytelling for the game while evoking the themes and atmosphere of the paranormal romance genre presents a unique set of challenges.

While there are definitely some mechanical complications in the paranormal romance genre, the majority of these challenges are much more esoteric. What makes a story paranormal romance as opposed to light horror, urban fantasy, or supernatural thriller is not *what* the characters are (gender, race, occupation, background, abilities, experiences, and so on), but *who* they are: their core goals and motivations, the choices they make when faced with adversity, and how they interact with the world around them.

The seeds of these intangible factors can be planted during character creation and nurtured throughout the game by negotiating the social contracts of the story arc, guiding mechanical choices, modeling of appropriate interactions and providing complementary backdrops. Ultimately, while you can't force a player to create and play a character that is true to any given genre, there are a lot of ways for you to help players who are interested in a paranormal romance game.

Social Contracts

As with any game setting, talking with everyone in your troupe before beginning a paranormal romance game begins goes a long way towards a satisfying outcome for both you and your players.

Most games begin with establishing "social contracts," although not all players recognize that this is what is happening. Social contracts are the implicit or explicit agreements drawn up between individuals about how they will interact as a group. When one gamer approaches another and says "I want to run **Vampire: The Requiem**," she is establishing a core social contract for gaming – determining the game to be played. Other common social contracts include things like where and when the game will be held, how often it will be played, and how long the story arc will take (whether that's specifics like "a one-shot" or "over the summer" or more flexible like "a

short run" or "an epic campaign"). They may cover certain character creation aspects, like which character templates are allowed or whether players are given any additional experience points to spend during the character creation process. In games with multiple player characters, a social contract can establish whether the characters know one another before the game, and if so, what the nature of their interaction has been: whether they were rivals or friends, or if they were ever in a coterie together before.

Social contracts can also be used to discuss what sort of atmosphere you and the players want to evoke, which is one area where they can be useful for replicating a paranormal romance feel within a **Vampire** game. By saying "we're going for a Gothic Antebellum, what's-lurking-below-the-surface-of-the-bayou feel," or an "urban jungle, leader-of-the-pack tone," you not only establish the environment of the game, but also begin to set some parameters.

These parameters aren't only for the sorts of characters that players will build, but also the types of Storyteller characters, plotlines, and conflicts they can expect their characters to face. Descriptors like "dog eat dog," "fighting dirty so that others can stay clean," or "standing strong in the face of temptation" are all evocative of the paranormal romance genre, but all carry very different moods. If you can provide your players with this sort of description, you're more likely to find players who are able to support that atmosphere through their characters.

For those who are unfamiliar with paranormal romance, a great pre-game social activity is sharing books, movies, or television shows in the genre to make certain that the whole group is on the same page. Discussing how a paranormal romance game differs from typical horror or other supernaturally-focused genres may also help establish the social contracts for the game, and determine if paranormal romance is truly the genre that everyone involved wants to be creating.

A vital part of successfully using social contracts is that they have to be understood by and acceptable to everyone involved in the game. If you're unable to communicate the tone or genre you're trying to replicate to your players, it is unrealistic to expect that they will be

able to create and promote that feel within the game. If paranormal romance isn't interesting to everyone in the game, attempts to build that type of atmosphere will be unsuccessful. Despite the potential payback of this intensely emotional and exciting genre, it is not a game style that you can or should force on your players.

Character Creation

Once the social contracts surrounding the game have been established, you are presented with another opportunity to help build the paranormal romance genre into your **Vampire** game: character creation. While it is possible to build a protagonist in this genre with virtually any type of character statistics, certain elements (both mechanical and cosmetic) can help ensure a character has a better chance of fitting within the paranormal romance paradigm. You can help players build characters that are well suited to the genre by encouraging them to use some of these themes during character creation.

Underdog: For the most part, characters in this genre are at least slightly outclassed by their rivals and/or enemies. They may be very good at one particular ability to the relative exclusion of other talents, or be well-rounded but not expert at anything.

Powerful Enemies: Whatever foes the characters are facing tend to be stronger, faster, richer, or better established than the characters themselves. This forces the characters to think creatively in order to succeed. It also often presents protagonists with the temptation to join the "winning side." Resisting that temptation is a core characteristic of a paranormal romance protagonist.

Friends and Allies: When a character in a paranormal romance finds himself outgunned, out-funded, overpowered, and out of options, he often turns to his friends and allies for support. There's a heavy emphasis on favors owed, promises made, trust extended, and loyalties betrayed. While Merits like Retainers, Allies, Contacts, Herd and the like can represent these connections on a mechanical basis, you may want to put a particular emphasis on these elements as more than just a statistic. They all represent people. Relationships. Connections. Keeping those connections thriving (and establishing new ones) is vital to establishing that same emphasis in a **Vampire** game.

Shades of Grey: Doing the wrong thing for the right reason is one of the defining features of a paranormal romance character. Whether that's working with one enemy to defeat another or compromising one's moral code for the greater good (or at least one person's greater good), even the white hats in this genre often find themselves walking in shadowy places. Building characters for

whom this is an interesting conflict can strongly support a game with this sort of feel.

Quirks: Whether it's an obsession with cheerleading, a hatred of snakes, a need to be the driver in any vehicle, or a favorite weapon or clothing item, quirks help make a character more three-dimensional. — These idiosyncrasies — especially ones with no real mechanical benefit — encourage roleplay between characters that goes beyond goal-achievement and external conflict resolution.

Emotions: Paranormal romances differ from other kinds of stories in their heavy emphasis on certain emotions: guilt, love, lust, obsession, envy, and regret. This is not a genre for truly emotionless characters, although those who want to give the impression of being uncaring (but are in reality a hotbed of emotion below the surface) can definitely find a place here.

Imperfection: Nobody's perfect. Everyone's got a soft spot. Maybe the character won't hit girls, would risk their life for any child, always offers a second chance, can't turn down surrender, or must always abide by the law. Maybe they've got an addiction, a prejudice, or a bad reputation (earned or not). Maybe they betrayed someone who trusted them, or owe someone terrible a big favor. All of these sorts of flaws can build roleplay and up the emotional ante in game.

The World Around Us

After characters have been created and gameplay begins, a world of opportunity arises for you to help create and support paranormal romance within your game. From Storyteller characters to pacing and plotlines, the way the characters' world is depicted is an infinitely powerful tool for influencing the genre of the game.

Storyteller Characters

Just as you can give players guidance when creating characters that suit a paranormal romance game, you also have the opportunity to create Storyteller characters to support the genre. When building Storyteller characters, you can use the same sorts of guidelines offered for building player characters, then add various antagonistic or support archetypes common in paranormal romance. These include (but are certainly not limited to):

The Coward: Unable to stand up to the threat of danger, this character often betrays the protagonist simply to protect his own skin.

The Thug: Slow (in more than one sense) but hits like a ton of bricks.

The Mastermind: Toys with the protagonist to show how intelligent he is, which frequently leads to his downfall.

The Double-Crosser: Someone the protagonist trusts, who ends up either working for the other side or selling the good guys out.

The Vamp: Tries to use seduction and attraction as manipulation tools. Often succeeds, at least for a while. Rarely is selfless in her desires.

The Alpha Male: The proverbial leader of the pack, who either wants the protagonist as a mate or wants to establish dominance over him. Sometimes both.

The Ex: Shares history with the player character, maybe even blackmail-worthy background ties. Often serves as the character's weakness.

The Specialist: Knows everything about one subject, and can be called on (usually for a price) to help provide information the protagonist needs.

The Rival: At least as good at what the protagonist does best as the protagonist is. Usually annoyingly smug about this fact.

The Ward: An innocent who the protagonist somehow becomes responsible for. Creates additional challenges for the player character: It's hard to fight evil while changing diapers, checking in on elderly relatives, or trying to keep teens from doing what teens do best.

Storyteller characters serve as the means by which you can offer the player characters temptations and challenges—physically, intellectually, and emotionally. They can model the emotional intensity of this genre, and provide a catalyst for protagonists' emotional growth.

They can also provide support for the protagonists, lending a hand when the player characters find themselves outgunned or over their heads, rounding out skill areas that the protagonists may be lacking in, and offering advice, experience, or support—usually for a price. When things go horribly wrong (as they should) and the player characters have exhausted every potential for success or survival, well-played Storyteller characters can sweep in to keep a storyline going—for a price. Favors owed to the wrong people can be an interesting conflict within the paranormal romance paradigm, one which raises emotional, moral, and philosophical issues for players and their characters which can deepen and intensify a story arc.

Pacing

In many ways, paranormal romance is a hybrid genre, combining the titillation of romance, the supernatural color of an urban fantasy, and the action of a thriller. Quick pacing and a heightened sense of urgency are just as much a part of the atmosphere as the interpersonal conflicts and supernatural elements are. Because of the

interactive aspect of a roleplaying game, some of the control of pacing falls into the hands of the players. Allowing players time to plan a course of action can end up reducing the inherent tension in a given scene, which reduces the overall intensity of the game.

Several methods are available you if you want to encourage a faster pace for a particular scene or throughout your games. You can choose to use one or more of these methods as written, or use them as a jumping-off point to create your own particular brand of pacing. Bear in mind that these options lose some of their intensity if used in every scene. They should be reserved for scenarios where increased intensity is called for: racing against time, trying to achieve a goal against overwhelming odds, etc.

Real Time: Like the real-time conceit of the TV show "24," time for the characters passes at least as fast as time for the players during pertinent scenes. Establish an understanding that, while the players are discussing options and forming plans, time is passing at least as quickly for their characters. This idea can be reinforced by a clock clearly visible from the gaming table, as you note the passage of time. Don't be afraid to let the characters show up too late to put a particular plan into action.

Alternatively, give players a set time for discussion and planning, marked by the use of an hourglass, kitchen timer, or other clearly visible timing device. This works well for plots that include clear deadlines: the bomb goes off ten minutes, the kidnappers have given you two hours to collect the ransom money, or the security guard's rounds will bring him back around in five minutes.

Atmospheric Clues: If you like using sound as a setting accessory, you can customize your story's soundtrack to represent and evoke growing tension in a scene. Increasingly eerie music can heighten anxiety during spooky investigations. Fast-paced, frenetic tunes can up the tension during a chase scene. While this requires some additional preparation on your part, the effects that music and sound effects can have on players really cannot be overstated. If you have a limited special effects budget, streaming Internet radio stations with appropriate genre themes can be played in the background during a game to help set the mood. Movie soundtracks are classic examples of how tempo and orchestration can be used to build tension. Categorized playlists on a portable music player make customizing a game's music on-the-fly simple. Consider individual playlists to represent different moods and situations: furtive conversations, stealthy investigations, interrogations, gun battles, or chase scenes.

Visible Tension: Use a tangible marker to visibly note the increase of stress in a given scenario. There are several

variations of this idea which can be put into play to mark (and increase) tension in a game.

At intervals of her choice, you can place some sort of marker (beads, coins, etc.) into a bowl in the center of the table. When the number of markers in the bowl reaches a predetermined point, the action takes place. You know how many markers are necessary to trigger the action, but the players do not. Alternatively, at intervals of your choice, you can ask the players to take a certain action. Perhaps they must draw a card from a deck, knowing that one certain card means the climactic event happens right then. Or, they can remove support pieces from a stacked set of wooden blocks or game of pick-up sticks. If the structure falls, the event comes into play.

A variation is that, in exchange for a small benefit (an instant success on a vital challenge, rewinding a failed challenge, gleaning a necessary piece of information, etc.), players may opt to voluntarily increase the scene's tension (by adding a marker to the bowl, turning over a card, etc.) This gives players a chance to become personally invested in the growing tension of a scene, weighing the relative merits of a small gain versus the shortened time.

Carrots, Not Sticks

Players who are chastised for breaking genre may become defensive, resentful, or even hostile towards you. On the other hand, those who are rewarded for staying within genre are more likely to continue to take their characters in directions where they will gain more praise (and benefits).

Depending on the power level and intensity of the game, a “carrot” for supporting genre might be as simple as an extra experience point at the end of a game session (along with a recounting of what you thought was worthy of the bonus). Supporting the mood and feel of the game to their character’s own detriment might be worth a bigger bonus, a few experience points or even a Boost (see pp. 57-58).

Two to Tango

Vampire: The Requiem generally assumes that you will be spinning plotlines and story arcs for multiple players at the same time.

Paranormal romance as a genre, on the other hand, often focuses primarily on the feelings, relationships, and challenges of a single protagonist. Other characters may share the primary character’s spotlight for a time, as a kind of supporting cast, but for the most part, there’s one star of the show.

This creates unique challenges for incorporating paranormal romance elements into a **Vampire** game. Most players do not want to consistently feel that their characters are just guests in another character’s story, or to sit on the sidelines while another character receives the majority of a game’s attention. But trying to replicate the narrow focus of paranormal romance for each character in a game can lead to *none* of the players feeling that their character truly got the attention it deserves. Luckily, there are opportunities for replicating the unique “star of the story” feel of paranormal romance into a roleplaying game.

Sidelines and Subplots

In a game that normally includes several player characters, one-on-one romances can be introduced around and within the main story arc. While the majority of the group’s time and energy is spent on plots and interactions that involve the group as a whole, additional side stories can be run between you and an individual player, to give that player character a limited opportunity to experience the spotlight.

These side plots can be run at any time, although you be careful to minimize the time spent focusing on one player to the exclusion of the rest of your group. Getting together either before or after a regularly scheduled game, running individual plots to the side while the other players are involved in another activity, and using remote methods (phone, text, email, IM, chat programs, etc.) all offer opportunities for you to focus on an individual without derailing the main story arc. The major challenge is being certain that every player feels they are inherently important to the game, and that her character is a vital part of the story.

It’s also important to remember that there are a plethora of different attributes to a paranormal romance-themed game – sex, romance, betrayal, intrigue – and that not all players may be interested in exploring all aspects. Just because one player wants to start a torrid, doomed relationship between his character and a member of a rival faction doesn’t mean that every player does. Customizing side plots and sub-stories to each player’s comfort and interest levels is a vital aspect of this sort of specialized one-on-one Storyteller attention.

You should also check in with the rest of the group on a regular basis to be certain that each player’s needs and desires – both for group roleplay and for individual focus – are being met. Offering each character equal opportunities for personal storylines can go a long way to preventing tension and resentment within a group. You

may be able to weave these subplots and sideline stories back into the main story. This allows each player to not only feel as if they are the star of their own individual tale, but also gives the sense that each of those individual stories strengthens and supports something larger.

You and Me Against the World

Sometimes a Storyteller and player choose to explore an entire story arc together without additional players. The specific reasons why this might come about are countless: not having other players nearby, having schedules that are convenient to one another but not to others, or simply preferring each other's company over that of a larger group. Regardless of the reason behind it, this sort of one-on-one ongoing game is one of the easiest within which to replicate the paranormal romance atmosphere within a *Vampire: the Requiem* game.

One of the advantages of a one-on-one game is that the sole player gets to reap the benefit of all your focus. Additionally, you are free to tailor plots and sub-stories specifically to the solo player's character, spending as long or as short a time period on each aspect of the game as they like.

Story arcs of this type are also a prime opportunity for a variation on the stereotypical Storyteller-player relationship: cooperative Storytelling, where the roles of Storyteller and player are less fixed than in a normal *Vampire* game. There are several manifestations that this sort of variation can take:

- The two individuals involved in the game can take turns performing the roles of Storyteller and player. This can be divided up chronologically ("You act as Storyteller for a month, and then I will take over for a month") or each can run a particular aspect of their in-game world ("You like political manipulation, so I'll run high society and government plots for you, and I like ass-kicking and combat, so you can run the street and crime stuff for me").

The advantage of this system is that each player has a set period for their character to take the stage, and a time while the other player's focus is entirely on providing Storytelling for them. It allows each Storyteller to customize the game to the type of focus their player most enjoys, without necessarily being subjected to being a player in that same type of game. And it also splits the (sometimes time-consuming) duties of Storytelling between the two individuals, so that neither becomes burned out on running games.

- Each player can handle Storytelling and rules-decisions for the other player's character, while the two player characters run together in a shared story-arc. Each individual incorporates some plot-threads into the story

which predominantly focus on the other player character, while simultaneously playing their own character. This can be difficult to juggle, as both players are simultaneously playing their own characters and managing plot for the other player. It requires that both players trust the other one to make rules calls on their behalf and commit to creating and running satisfying story-arcs for the other player.

In a paranormal romance-focused setting, this technique offers the option for power struggles or romantic interactions between the two player characters – a positive aspect for some player pairings, and a disadvantage for others.

- Both players can set aside the majority of the mechanics of the game and focus on telling a shared story. In this paradigm, the spotlight shines strongest on the interactions between the characters. This provides a perfect opportunity to explore some of the primary tropes of paranormal romance: internal conflict, trust, betrayal, and the like. While the players may choose to use mechanics and dice rolls for external conflict resolution, resolution between the player characters is predominantly done through negotiation: "Your character has about a 50/50 chance of succeeding at using that power on mine. Would it make better story if he succeeded or failed? Okay, I agree, let's run with that."

This technique can be challenging, both because there's no true authority figure for the game, and because it requires that the players have similar goals for their gaming interaction. On the other hand, it offers the opportunity for intense roleplay that can be uniquely satisfying.

Intensity for Two

One of the constant tropes of paranormal romance is the sense of heightening tension which pushes the protagonists faster and faster towards major drama scenarios. When using a cooperative storytelling system without clear Storyteller and player roles, it can be difficult to emulate that ever-increasing stress which is so inherent to the genre.

Some options for managing this are found under *Visible Tension* (pp. 50-51). These suggestions, especially the ones utilizing randomization, can easily be adapted to a two-person cooperative storytelling platform.

Another system well-suited to cooperative one-on-one storytelling is Intensity. This involves using a deck of cards where each suit represents a particular flavor of encounter: hearts for Romance, diamonds for Profit, clubs for Combat, and spades for Danger (i.e., danger outside of combat). The relative value of the card (from a low of 2 to a high Ace) represents the Intensity of that

particular flavor in the scene. Number cards are worth their value in Intensity, face cards are worth an Intensity of ten, and Aces are worth 15 Intensity. Multiple cards of the same suit denote even greater Intensity, adding their scores together.

Laying out a hand of cards before a given scene represents the relative significance of those four categories in the scenario. The first scene of a given game may begin with only a card or two, with larger Intensity hands being turned out for progressive scenes.

Example: The first Intensity hand laid out contains a 5 of Spades and a Queen of Hearts. This gives an Intensity of ten in Romance and five in Danger. This could represent the appearance of an ex-girlfriend, who tries to hire the protagonists for a job that involves some shady folks in the bad part of town. A later hand might contain an 8 of Clubs, a King of Clubs, a 3 of Diamonds, and an Ace of Hearts, for a total of 18 Intensity in Combat, 3 in Profit, and 15 in Romance. This might be a climactic scene involving a gunfight to rescue the same ex-girlfriend (who is ever-so-grateful to her savior), with a chance to recover some stolen money.

Players can decide between themselves how exactly the flavors portrayed manifest in the scene. Either player can, through the course of the scene, take appropriate actions to deal with their challenges, and may apply any levels of success in a pertinent challenge to resolve the Intensity of the scene. If all of the Intensity in a scene has been resolved, players should reward their characters an additional Willpower at the end of the scene.

Example: The first scene has an Intensity of ten in Romance and five in Danger. During the scene, Mark successfully uses Persuasion to convince the ex-girlfriend to give them additional information. His four successes combine with Lisa's six later successes on a Subterfuge roll, resulting in keeping the ex-girlfriend from knowing the truth about her and Mark's relationship. Mark's additional five successes from Stealth allow him to shadow the ex back to the office of the man who is really behind the offer. Together, they have gained successes during the scene that equal or exceed the scene's combined Intensity. They should award themselves an additional Willpower at the end of the scene.

Quickies

Not every story arc needs to be a years-long epic with sub-arcs and interweaving plots, and not every roleplayer has time or energy to commit to a long-running game. Sometimes a satisfying story can revolve around a single episode of game play, or a short series of stories being told over a relatively limited time. Because they allow a singular focus on a particular player character and a very specific scenario, these sorts of tales can work perfectly

for a Storyteller and a single player.

Quick scenes can be run to more fully represent specific aspects of a player character's background, with a single snapshot session representing a key event in the player character's history. Alternatively, you can present a series of challenge scenarios for the player character, each one representing a pivotal crossroads, with the time between these points glossed over between sessions. It's important, however, that the player be given enough information (or provides enough information to you) about what their character is doing between these snapshot scenes so that the continuity can be maintained between sessions.

These short scenarios can be used to provide an intense conflict-heavy roleplay experience by whittling away the day-to-day and focusing on the peak plot points. This can make extremely efficient use of limited roleplay time, either as the entirety of a game, to develop a character's personality before regular game sessions begin, or to satisfy roleplay cravings when more traditional game sessions aren't possible. They work well with a standardized Storyteller/player paradigm, with one individual handling the Storytelling and another controlling the player character. However, like the ongoing one-on-one story arcs described in the previous section, these short two-person plots can be a great opportunity to do cooperative Storytelling by either trading off the roles of Storyteller and player, or by giving each person involved in the scene a certain amount of leeway to represent both their own player character and the outside Storyteller characters involved in the story.

Behind Closed Doors

It would be remiss to discuss one-on-one roleplay in the paranormal romance genre without touching on more intimate. While there is certainly no requirement that in-character romantic interactions have any counterpart out of character, roleplay can be a way for two people to explore emotions, situations, or actions through their characters which they may not, for one reason or another, be able to delve into in real life. These kinds of roleplay scenarios can also be used to enrich or support real-life relationships.

The paranormal romance genre is one which exists in no small part because it evokes strong emotional reactions, and those emotions are all the more volatile when the game setting is pared down to two individuals. Being aware of this potential is vital to responsible Storytelling; the intimacy (mental, emotional, or physical) that can develop should be delineated and negotiated as a part of the social contracts discussed before starting the game. While discussing where the lines between in-character and out-of-character interaction merge or deviate may

be uncomfortable before a game, it is assuredly more comfortable to discuss them then, than it is to discover later on that the individuals involved had differing expectations.

While what goes on behind closed doors, in-character or out, remains solely the bailiwick of the individuals involved, a few words of caution should be offered: Whether you're a Storyteller or player, don't forget that a character's actions, thoughts, words, and motivations are not inherently the same as those of a player. When there is any doubt whether an action, attraction, or communication is between player characters or the players themselves, frank discussion about the confusion should take place as soon as possible. If there is any question about whether a certain action is permissible, permission should be asked for and granted before taking it. If anyone is uncomfortable, at any point, they should say so.

While clear and straightforward communication is an asset to any gaming situation, sometimes speaking up about discomfort can be difficult, especially while interacting in-character. One tool for dealing with this is a "safe word": a special word or phrase that is pre-negotiated and allows either member of a group to bring about an immediate stop to the current scene, so that comfort levels can be re-negotiated. Safe words should be easily remembered, but unusual enough that they are unlikely to be accidentally used, or mistaken for a part of the ongoing conversation.

Any individual in a given scenario has the right (and responsibility) to stop a situation at the point where it becomes uncomfortable, whether that means ending a scene, asking for a change in the direction of the roleplay, or simply requesting that certain actions "fade to black" (i.e., the characters do what the characters do, and the "on-screen" roleplay picks up after the uncomfortable scene has completed).

And no one, regardless of gender, role-play experience, sexual preference, marital status, or age should ever feel bullied, forced, coerced, or otherwise pressured into any intimate situation, in or out of character. While it can be fun to explore character discomfort, distress, and tension, when those emotions translate to the player, it's no longer fun and games.

All's The World's A Stage

There's something horrific about living in a world where nigh-eternal supernatural creatures exist by preying upon the blood of humanity. But that same swamp of fear is fertile ground for intensely personal, deeply emotional stories as well. Danger causes strange reactions

in human beings, which are often indistinguishable from those caused by passion, attraction, love, and lust. The same adrenaline that stokes a fight-or-flight reaction also courses madly through our veins when faced with the object of sexual or romantic interest. This crossover of fright and desire – coupled with our fetishization of the exotic and unobtainable – is part of what makes paranormal romance the wildly popular genre it is today.

It is also this juxtaposition of attraction and fear which can make roleplaying a paranormal romance such a fulfilling experience. Whether the goosebumps running up the players' arms and the shivers down their spines are raised by paranormal predators or sweet-talking suitors (or even better, both at the same time), you have a unique opportunity to elicit intense emotional reactions.

Choosing the right setting for a paranormal romance game can be crucial to successfully capturing the mood and feel of the genre. Certain environments, settings and backdrops are more evocative of various aspects of the genre, making it easier to create the desired atmosphere.

It should be noted that these settings apply to more than just a physical location. Elements of a Victorian atmosphere, for example, could be evoked through a Storyteller character, raised in 19th century London, who still clings to the morals and standards of his youth. It could be reflected in a single Gothic Revival estate that reflects the rigidly classist mentality of the era, or a business where the owners still carry a lady's packages out to her vehicle but don't hesitate to physically punish children who shoplift. Here are some setting elements that can help ground your story in a given era or atmosphere:

Gothic: Velvet furniture and stained glass windows, abandoned churches and old Painted Ladies. The elegance of days gone by is rarely captured as deeply as it is with gothic-themed settings.

Antebellum: Whether haunting the decrepit cemeteries of New Orleans or nestled among gloomy, ancient willows, there's something both creepy and romantic about antebellum environs.

Metropolitan: There's a darkness at the heart of the city, a fast-paced, dog-eat-dog predatory world where a city's denizens are surrounded by people and yet still so often alone.

Victoriana: Something about the straight-laced attitude of the Victorian era fairly begs for its inner gibbering madman to come out to play.

Wilderness: Whether in the unexplored depths of the Amazon jungle or the ever-shifting sands of the great southwest, there's something wild and untamed about the areas outside of the bounds of civilization.

Old World: Europe holds a charm that the New World rarely manages to recreate: Exotic accents, arts and architecture. There are centuries of love and death, war and romance, poverty and nobility, all tied into cultures dating back to pre-history.

Academia: Who knows what secrets lie tucked in the depths of the world's universities, libraries, bookstores, and archives? Those who haunt their halls are the ultimate secret keepers.

Arcane: The ancient secrets of Hermetic magic. The familial legacy of druids and hedge-witches. Stone circles, fairy rings, and sacrificial temples. Who could resist their forbidden knowledge?

Exploration of the Romantic Relationship

When building a character, players have a lot of factors to consider. Background and history, abilities and aptitudes, strengths and weaknesses, core personality traits—all of these are woven by the player to create a character that reacts to the world around it as a any living, breathing person.

One of the aspects of a character's personality which is less commonly included in the character generation stage of most games is how that character thinks, feels, and reacts in a personal relationship. With the heavy emphasis that paranormal romance places on interpersonal interactions, this can be a very useful (and yet often neglected) area to contemplate while creating a character for the genre.

Some helpful areas to consider when creating a character for a paranormal romance focused game include the character's past history, current connections, quirks, preferences, and hang-ups.

Past

While people grow and change, knowing what a character's romantic history has been gives a player a good foundation for what the character has been through and how that experience is likely to manifest in current and future interactions. Some aspects of the past to consider include:

- **Firsts:** Who was the character's first crush? Was their interest returned or unrequited? Who was their first kiss, their first true love, their first sexual partner?

- **Romance:** Has the character ever fallen in love? Been infatuated? Had their heart broken?

- **Marriage:** Has the character ever married? Been proposed to? Engaged? Divorced? Been left at the altar?

- **Background:** Is he the product of a happy marriage, divorced parents, a single parent family, or something else? What sorts of relationships did he have modeled for him growing up, and how has that affected him?

Present

- **Relationships:** Is the character currently in a relationship? How long, and with whom? Is it serious, casual, committed, polyamorous? Is he happy? Is he faithful to the tenets of that relationship?

- **Sexual Preferences:** Is the character heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual? Has he always self-identified in this manner? Is this something he's comfortable with? How does he feel about interest from those of other sexual preferences? Is he attracted to those who are similar to him, or does he find the exotic appealing?

- **Perspectives:** What is the character's perspective on romance? Is he shy or forward? How does he feel about sex? Is it something to be up front about, or a taboo topic? Is the character vanilla, or does he have exotic tastes of some sort? Do his preferences mesh with the majority of others of his social circle, or would others believe him to be a deviant if they knew?

- **Practices:** Is the character currently sexually active? Are his needs and desires being met, and if so how? Is there something he's seeking and not currently finding?

Future

While any given situation may provoke a unique and unexpected reaction from a character, when building a personality from scratch, it can be helpful to imagine the character's reaction to certain theoretical situations. How would the character react if he were approached romantically, sexually, or flirtatiously by someone of a different species (a supernatural if he's mortal, or a member of a different type of supernatural group if he's supernatural)? How would he feel if he developed an attraction to someone who was already in an exclusive relationship? Someone who had died (ghost or undead)? Someone who was working for the other side? Someone who had betrayed him in the past?

Heroic Mortals

Male or female, supernatural or merely mortal, wearing a white hat or shades of grey, a lead character must strike a careful balance between efficiency and imperfection to work well within the genre. In order to be satisfying as a protagonist, he or she must be both heroic and human. Within the World of Darkness, the best player characters to represent this genre possess the same qualities.



(Another take on extraordinary mortals can be found in **World of Darkness: Mirrors**, pp. 52-69. You can decide which of these methods work best in her game, but combining them may create characters that are a little more powerful than intended.)

Heroic

Heroism is not all about saving kittens and putting out fires. It can mean refusing to take the easy option (even when you would like to), risking your neck to protect someone weaker than you, or saying what needs to be said regardless of the cost. It can be giving up your senior prom to combat vampires, or watching the love of your life marry someone else because you can't explain why you missed your last three dates.

Heroic protagonists in the paranormal romance genre, regardless of their specific motivations, act in a way that stirs the reader to root for their success. Their goals may be stereotypically “for the greater good” — promoting peace, ensuring justice, protecting the weak, or bringing the truth to light. Or their objectives may be less selfless, but remain something the reader can empathize with — gaining revenge, defeating a nemesis, or overcoming personal weakness. Without this connection, the audience will not care deeply enough to emotionally invest in the story.

In a work of fiction, it is the job of the writer to create a background that acts as fertile soil for these heroic actions. In **Vampire**, players and Storytellers can work together to create this formula for Heroic Mortal player characters. It is the player's choice to determine how their character developed, but you can encourage choices that support, rather than contradict, the supernatural romance atmosphere of a game. With both of you working together to weave backgrounds, personality traits, and mechanics with a heroic outcome in mind, paranormal romance protagonists can easily be created even within the challenges and conflicts of the **World of Darkness**.

Mortal

A perfect protagonist is unbelievable, flat, and often annoying. Real people have weaknesses, foibles, and faults. They often make the wrong choices, even if it is sometimes for the right reasons. They fall in love — and lust — with the wrong people at the wrong times and take the wrong actions because of it.

From a non-mechanical perspective, much of the responsibility for portraying imperfections in Heroic Mortals lies in the hands of the players. But by discussing the value of weaknesses with players before and during character creation, re-

warding three-dimensional character representation throughout the game, and providing examples of how imperfections can contribute to the quality of a game through Storyteller characters, you can encourage players to emulate those same sorts of flavor-creating flaws in their own characters.

Mechanically speaking, these sorts of Achilles' heels can be represented through the use of some of the optional Flaws provided on pages 217-219 of *World of Darkness*, or in other *World of Darkness* books. Additionally, *Vampire*-specific flaws can be found in some of the supplemental books for *Vampire: The Requiem* (specifically *Ventrite: Lord of the Damned*, p. 107; *Damnation City*, p. 199; and *Ancient Mysteries*, p. 69). These flaws can add depth to Heroic Mortal characters, and at your discretion, might earn the player additional Boosts to balance the challenges they entail.

New Template: Heroic Mortal

Heroic Mortals, by definition, are faced with not only external but internal challenges to their success, their happiness, and their continued existence. In order to have a chance at holding their own in a world full of predators and preternaturals, they are likely to need a little Boost.

You should feel free to offer your players one or more of the following Boosts to a basic Mortal character. How many Boosts to offer depends on the relative power level of the antagonists you'll be presenting. One or two may be sufficient for a starting character, though in a particularly deadly environment, you may want to offer more. Additional Boosts can be offered along with standard experience (pp. 216-217, *World of Darkness*) after a story concludes, or whenever the story warrants it. You can offer players a particular Boost, or allow them to choose from the list, but the final call on what Boosts are appropriate for a given player character or story arc always remains with you.

Boosts are given at your discretion. These gains are permanent, and cost the player no experience points. Some Boosts are inherently more powerful than others, and you should take that into consideration when offering choices to your players.

More than one Boost may be given out at a time. Players may be given the same Boost more than once. For example, you could offer players the choice between a single Attribute Boost or two Skill Boosts, or give them two Specialty Boosts at one time, if you feel it's appropriate for the story. Boosts may be used either before or after experience points are spent on the character.

Despite the name, not all Heroic Mortals are non-supernatural. Some of the Boosts below represent minor supernatural abilities normally possessed only by creatures with supernatural templates. You may deem that these supernatural abilities are either inherent and have no cost to use, or are fueled by Willpower expenditures instead of the Vitae that would normally be spent to power them. However, note that even a minor supernatural Boost can drastically affect the power dynamic of a game.

Attribute Boost: Add a single dot to any Attribute. You can choose to allow players only to add dots to Attributes below a certain level, preventing them from taking a fourth or fifth dot in an Attribute with this Boost.

Skill Boost: Add a single dot to any Skill. You can choose to offer multiple Skill Boosts within the same Skill category at one point – three dots spread throughout Mental Skills, for example – or you can prevent this Boost from being used to raise a Skill higher than a certain level.

Specialty Boost: Add a specialty to any Skill currently possessed. While most Boosts are given either at creation or at the end of a story, you can offer this Boost during the course of a game session as an extra reward for significant use of a certain skill or exposure to supernatural influences. Examples might include giving Academics (Research) for a session spent primarily digging through ancient tomes or computer databases, Empathy (Lies) for having shared an extended telepathic link with an ancient and deceptive vampire, or Brawl (Dirty Tricks) for surviving a surprise fistfight in a back alley using improvised weapons.

Defense Boost: Add a +1 modifier to the character's Defense. You may decide that, unlike normal Defense, this +1 modifier applies to Firearms, and is not negated or reduced by surprise, immobilization, or multiple attackers.

Health Boost: Add an additional Health level to the character. You may decide that this additional Health

UNDERDOGS AND LONG SHOTS

You should use discretion in handing out Boosts.

Player characters should remain significantly weaker than the major antagonists they are facing. This encourages the protagonists to act in a manner true to the genre.

On the other hand, too large of a disparity between the power level of the antagonists and the player characters may end up leaving the players feeling that their characters have no chance of succeeding. Though playing the underdog is a basic premise of the genre, if the odds become truly insurmountable, few players will find it fun to keep striving.

point can only be removed by damage actually delivered as aggravated damage, rather than escalated up from bashing or lethal.

Willpower Boost: Whenever the character would normally receive a single point of Willpower through fulfilling their Vice, a full night's rest, achieving a significant goal, and so on, they receive two Willpower points instead (not to exceed their maximum pool).

Merit Boost: Add any Merit. Because of the special nature of Heroic Mortals, this may be used to add a "Creation Only" merit to the character after creation, with an appropriate story justification. If used to purchase a Merit with a ranged value, this Boost can only be used to increase the number of dots already possessed. Particularly apt Merit Boosts for Heroic Mortals include Danger Sense, Meditative Mind, Disarm, Fast Reflexes, Fighting Finesse, Fighting Styles, Fleet of Foot, Gunslinger, Quick Draw, Allies, Barfly, Contacts, Inspiring, Mentor, Retainer, and Status.

Supernatural Boost: Add one dot of a vampiric Discipline to the character's sheet. This represents the ability to replicate this power but not necessarily a particular tie to vampires. This could be an inherent ability of the character passed down through their family line, a power gained by exposure to some mysterious event, or a supernatural quirk with no clear genesis. On the other hand, it could actually represent some tie to the Kindred: becoming tainted by a dying vampire's death curse, being a former ghoul, having survived a partial Embrace – the possibilities are endless. As always, you have final discretion about what is acceptable. You may decide to assign the Discipline rather than letting the player choose, may allow other supernatural powers from other World of Darkness books, or (although caution is recommended) even grant powers higher than one dot if it is appropriate to the story being told.

“Knock-knock.”

I paused in the doorway, uncertain what the protocol was for entering a vampire’s bedroom.

From his bed, Gabriel smiled.

“You did it. We got the Key, Monique is safe, and Dieter won’t be blackmailing anyone for a long time to come.”

I winced at the mention of Monique. Gabriel hadn’t bothered to mention that the “Key” he needed to recover wasn’t some ancient relic or supernatural artifact, but a thumb drive containing the coordinates and passcodes to free Monique — a statuesque supermodel-look-alike that Dieter had been holding hostage.

Monique had been a surprise in more than one way. By the time we freed her, I was bruised, bloody, and covered in grime. I had several broken ribs, two black eyes, and my lower lip was swollen to roughly the size of South America.

She, on the other hand, looked like she’d just walked off the runway, despite having apparently been held captive for several weeks. She greeted Gabriel like he was a Thanksgiving Day feast and she’d been starving for months. I’d stood there, confused and more than a little embarrassed as she clung to him, but it didn’t seem to bother Gabriel in the least. Only the building’s catching fire and the roof’s starting to cave in had eventually separated them.

Once we’d made it to safety, Monique sashayed off to her room in Gabriel’s private mansion like she owned the place. Which, for all I knew, she did. He’d never mentioned her, not even when I was risking my neck to save hers, but maybe he just liked to keep his business and private life separate. Maybe she was his girlfriend... his wife? Did vampires marry?

They even looked alike, like they say married couples tend to do after time. She had his dark curls, the kind that no amount of product could replicate in my stick-straight hair. His swarthy skin. His emerald eyes. The only main difference was that her mouth was thin and harsh, whereas his was wider, his lips fuller.

Not that I noticed or anything.

I glanced across the room at Gabriel. His face was paper-white, shades lighter than the bandage his staff had used to cover the horrible burn across his left eye and cheek. He'd healed the bullet holes, broken bones, and stab wounds with a preternatural swiftness, but fire apparently was a trickier thing to deal with, even for him. If I hadn't pushed Monique out the door and gone back for him...

They'd spent the ride home in the back seat. I tried to ignore the noises as I navigated between Dieter's now-ruin and Gabriel's mansion, but moans, groans, and sounds of sucking are hard to ignore, even for a vice cop.

He left the car in much better shape than he'd entered it, but his staff had swarmed over us like a battalion of well-trained socialite soldiers, separating us and tending to our needs. They only brought me back to Gabriel when I insisted that I needed to discuss business with him before he fell asleep.

"So. We're square." My words were a statement, not a question, but he nodded in agreement anyway.

I exhaled, deeply. Somehow, until he'd agreed that my debt was clear, it hadn't seemed real. For years, I'd been living under the unspoken obligation to Gabriel. Knowing that I owed him my life had colored every aspect of our relationship, influenced every one of our interactions.

Where did that leave us now?

"It's almost morning. I should probably get out of here."

"What?" He sat bolt upright, winced, and slumped back against the pillows. "No. You're tired. You're hurting. And Dieter's men know who you are now. You should stay here."

"Here?"

"With me." His voice was a silken caress that drew me to the edge of his bed. His eyes invited me to join him. It wasn't until I'd sat

beside him, and my flushed hand was in his cool one, that I shook my head to break his spell.

I frowned and tried to retrieve my hand. “I don’t think Monique would like that.”

Gabriel refused to release my fingers, stroking them like one might do to calm a frightened animal. He tilted his head, arching the eyebrow his bandage wasn’t covering. “Monique?”

“You know... tall brunette? Big... smile? Your... your...“ I struggled to find a polite term to describe their relationship.

“My granddaughter?”

Now it was my turn to look confused. “Monique is your granddaughter? But you... in the back seat...” The distaste must have shown on my face.

“I fed from her. Yes. And she from me. As we have for many years now.”

“But that’s...” Incest? Cannibalism? What was the right word?

“It’s the way things are done, Alicia. She needs my blood to maintain her strength and youth. Training a proper heir takes many years. Dieter starved her, tried to drive out my bond with her so that he could make her loyal to him instead and then use her against me. Or, if that didn’t work, let her starve.”

“But you fed from her too.”

“I needed to heal my injuries. I didn’t have a lot of options.”

“You could have drunk from me.” The words slipped out before I could stop them, and the idea that followed was both frightening and fascinating. As if of their own volition, my thoughts flew back to the drive home, the sensual sounds emerging from the back seat, and I felt a blush rise to my cheeks.

Gabriel shook his head, decisively. “No. No, I couldn’t.”

I didn’t know whether to be relieved or insulted. “Couldn’t? Why not?”

“You really don’t know, do you?” He shook his head, incredulous. A tumult of possibilities jumbled through my head: fantasies, hopes, daydreams, each more impossible than the first. I took the safe route, and played dumb. “Know? Know what?”

His grip on my hand tightened as he sat upright, pulling me close until there were only inches between our faces. His eyes were alight with a feverish glow. My heart soared.

“Alicia, you and I have spent the past four years dancing around the fact that I saved your life. We’ve fought. We’ve laughed. We’ve shared a great deal. But that debt has always been between us. Tonight, you not only helped me rescue my granddaughter, but you came back for me, risked your own life to save mine.”

His voice dropped, until it was barely more than a whisper. I leaned in closer to make out his words.

“I owe you now, Alicia, and come hell or high water, I will find a way to repay you.”

And as his lips met mine, I suddenly had a thousand delightful and depraved thoughts about how Gabriel could work off his debt.