

# Mythologies

the World of Darkness



a sourcebook for  
**Vampire**

THE REQUiem





# Fading Away

By the time I noticed my heart had stopped, I didn't care anymore. It wasn't the strangest thing that happened to me that week.

I bought a mirror at an estate sale. It was this huge, full-length thing with a gilded frame. I couldn't see the frame real well from where I was sitting, but the mirror itself looked impressive. I needed something to dress up my room, and I had been planning on buying a piece of art or something. I'd heard that the deceased left behind nothing but debts and that all of his stuff was going cheap. I bid on a few paintings and such, but the mirror was what really struck me.

Now that I think about it, nobody bid on it more than once, except me. They'd bid, and I'd outbid them, and they'd squint at the mirror as though asking themselves if it was worth the money. In the end, I paid just over a grand for it, but when I had it appraised, the guy said it was worth almost 10 times that. When I had it appraised — shit. That was Tuesday. The estate sale was on Saturday. By Tuesday I was starting to get an idea of what was going on. Back up, Jon.





Saturday

I brought the mirror home, and I was struck by how light it seemed. I thought the gilding must be fake, and that's why I got it cheap. I set up it up in my room, facing my bed, on what used to be the big, empty part of my wall. I stood there for a few minutes, staring at myself, telling myself I like it. You know how it is when you spend a lot of money on something; even if you don't really think it's all that hot, you have to tell yourself it's cool. Otherwise you wasted the money, and you look like a chump, and who wants that? So I stood there and stared at myself, and told myself how great the mirror looked.

I guess nothing really happened Saturday. I set up the mirror and I went clubbing. I met a really hot guy, and we went back to his apartment. His roommate was some pudgy het who kept his music up loud so he wouldn't hear us, even though I thought we were quiet.

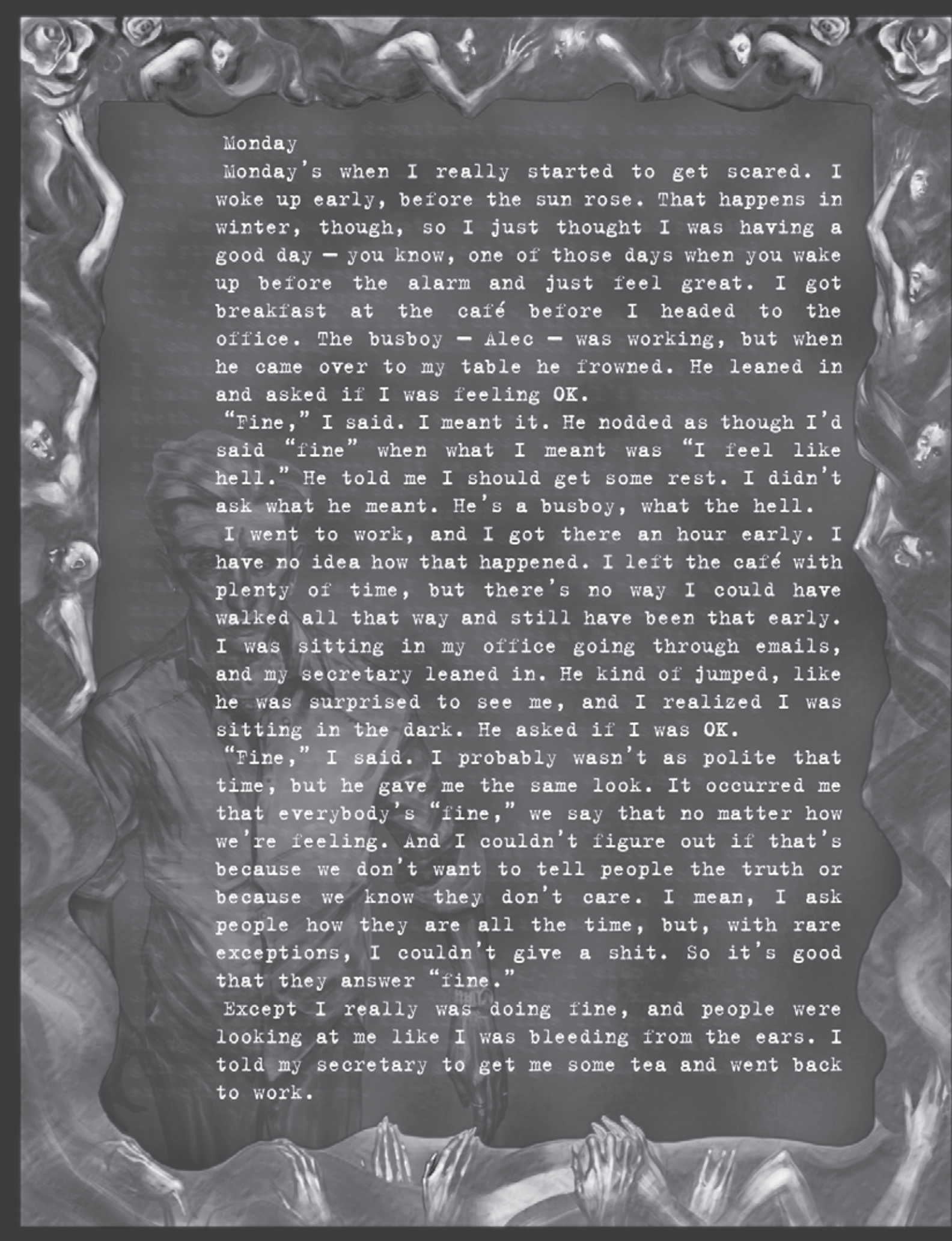
Sunday

I went home the next morning. Left before the guy woke up. I don't like seeing people the morning after. They never look as good, and then I start questioning why I went to bed with them in the first place. I'd rather duck out. So I got home, still sticky with club- and sex-sweat, still smelling like smoke and reefer and that guy's cologne, and I stopped in front of the mirror on my way to the shower. I had marks up and down my arms and my chest — the guy liked to bite, and that's OK.

But I couldn't see the marks in my reflection. I looked at my arms and my chest, saw the red and purple bruises already turning yellow. I looked up at the mirror . . . nothing but smooth, white skin. I must have stood there 20 minutes, looking back and forth. I couldn't get my mind to figure it. I kept thinking, I must have seen something about this on TV or somewhere, some reason for this, some trick of the light, some treatment on the mirror that doesn't pick up the colors. It sounded like bullshit in my head, too. I showered, and in the bathroom mirror I saw the marks clear as day.

I blamed it on the hangover and lack of sleep. I showered, shaved and went to get breakfast. I opened my shirt a bit at the café and asked the busboy if he could see the marks. He said he could, and he gave me a little smirk. He knows I like to get bitten. I felt better. Trick of the light. Hangover. Nothing to worry about.





Monday

Monday's when I really started to get scared. I woke up early, before the sun rose. That happens in winter, though, so I just thought I was having a good day — you know, one of those days when you wake up before the alarm and just feel great. I got breakfast at the café before I headed to the office. The busboy — Alec — was working, but when he came over to my table he frowned. He leaned in and asked if I was feeling OK.

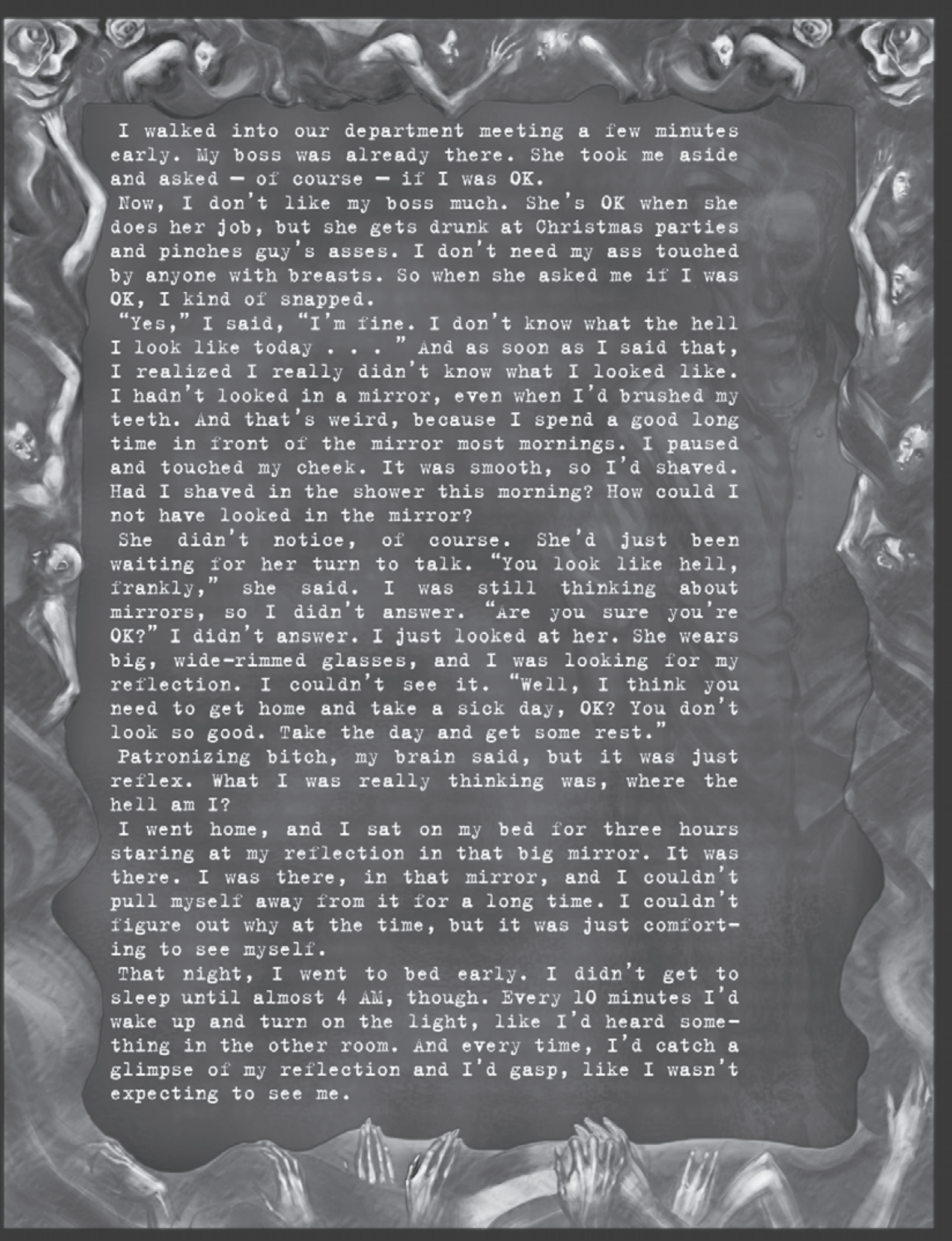
"Fine," I said. I meant it. He nodded as though I'd said "fine" when what I meant was "I feel like hell." He told me I should get some rest. I didn't ask what he meant. He's a busboy, what the hell.

I went to work, and I got there an hour early. I have no idea how that happened. I left the café with plenty of time, but there's no way I could have walked all that way and still have been that early. I was sitting in my office going through emails, and my secretary leaned in. He kind of jumped, like he was surprised to see me, and I realized I was sitting in the dark. He asked if I was OK.

"Fine," I said. I probably wasn't as polite that time, but he gave me the same look. It occurred me that everybody's "fine," we say that no matter how we're feeling. And I couldn't figure out if that's because we don't want to tell people the truth or because we know they don't care. I mean, I ask people how they are all the time, but, with rare exceptions, I couldn't give a shit. So it's good that they answer "fine."

Except I really was doing fine, and people were looking at me like I was bleeding from the ears. I told my secretary to get me some tea and went back to work.





I walked into our department meeting a few minutes early. My boss was already there. She took me aside and asked — of course — if I was OK.

Now, I don't like my boss much. She's OK when she does her job, but she gets drunk at Christmas parties and pinches guy's asses. I don't need my ass touched by anyone with breasts. So when she asked me if I was OK, I kind of snapped.

"Yes," I said, "I'm fine. I don't know what the hell I look like today . . ." And as soon as I said that, I realized I really didn't know what I looked like. I hadn't looked in a mirror, even when I'd brushed my teeth. And that's weird, because I spend a good long time in front of the mirror most mornings. I paused and touched my cheek. It was smooth, so I'd shaved. Had I shaved in the shower this morning? How could I not have looked in the mirror?

She didn't notice, of course. She'd just been waiting for her turn to talk. "You look like hell, frankly," she said. I was still thinking about mirrors, so I didn't answer. "Are you sure you're OK?" I didn't answer. I just looked at her. She wears big, wide-rimmed glasses, and I was looking for my reflection. I couldn't see it. "Well, I think you need to get home and take a sick day, OK? You don't look so good. Take the day and get some rest."

Patronizing bitch, my brain said, but it was just reflex. What I was really thinking was, where the hell am I?

I went home, and I sat on my bed for three hours staring at my reflection in that big mirror. It was there. I was there, in that mirror, and I couldn't pull myself away from it for a long time. I couldn't figure out why at the time, but it was just comforting to see myself.

That night, I went to bed early. I didn't get to sleep until almost 4 AM, though. Every 10 minutes I'd wake up and turn on the light, like I'd heard something in the other room. And every time, I'd catch a glimpse of my reflection and I'd gasp, like I wasn't expecting to see me.





Tuesday

Like Monday, only I woke up a little earlier, which is nuts considering how little sleep I got. I stood in front of my bathroom mirror for almost a half-hour. I flossed three times. I moisturized my face, did my hair perfectly and put on my favorite shirt, the one that always gets me laid. I went down to the café, and I decided that if Alec was working, I was going to hit on him.

Alec was working. I sat down at my table, and he came over and sat down. At first I thought he was on break, but then I saw the look in his eyes. He looked like he was a doctor about to tell someone their mother had died. He said, "Jesus, Jon. What's going on?"

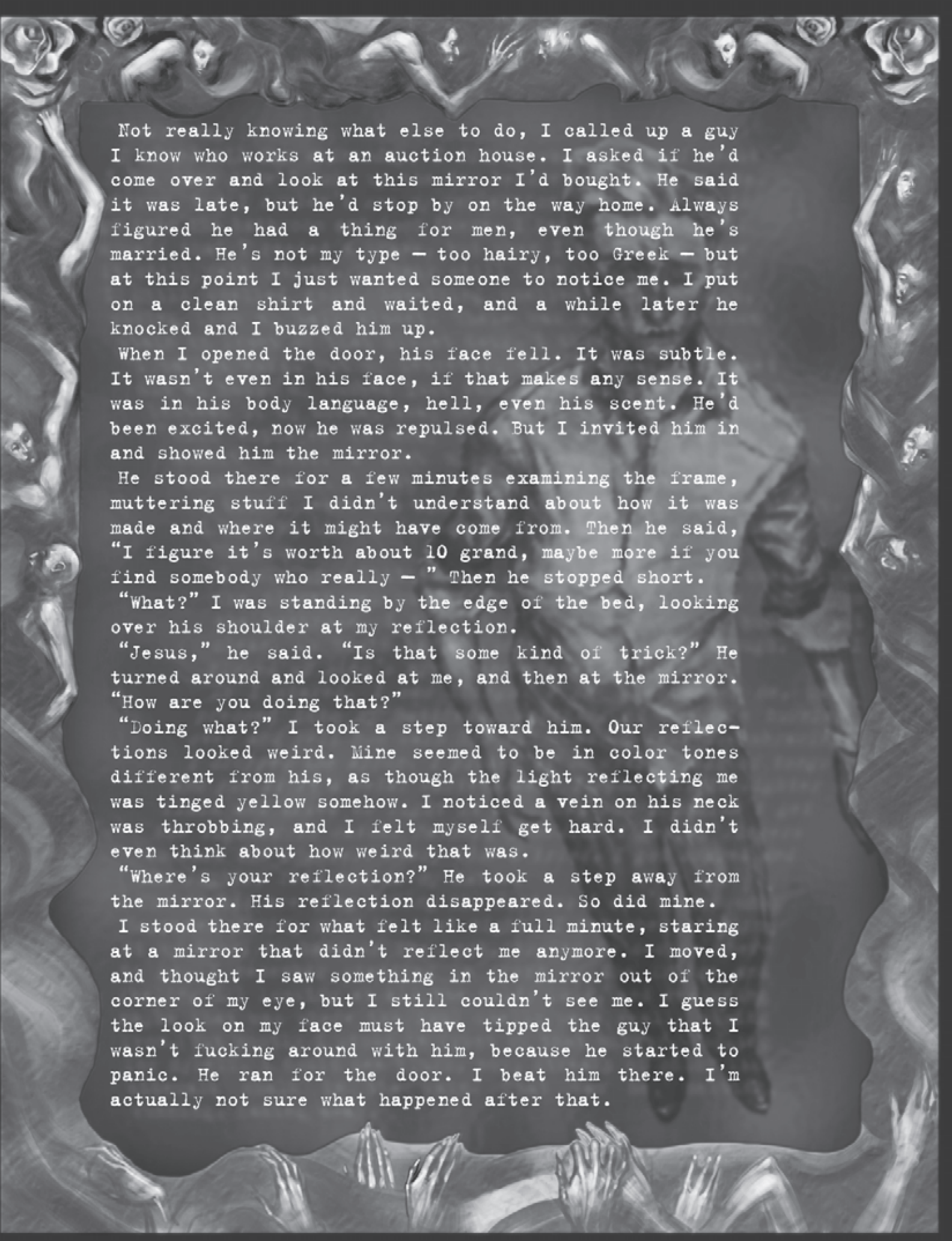
I almost broke down into tears. I was sitting at this café wearing an outfit that cost me over a thousand dollars (counting the shoes). I spend hundreds every month on my hair and skin. I look good, and normally this guy is so smitten he can't walk straight when I'm around. Now he looked like he was only talking to me out of pity. I looked around at the other customers, but no one was looking at me.

Someone's always looking at me. Even if it's not someone looking to pick me up, it's just someone who catches my eye. I watch people all the time. You have to avoid looking at someone, you have to decide to ignore them, right? But everyone in that café was looking somewhere else, and if they looked in my direction they were looking at Alec, or the painting behind me or the counter with the cream and sugar next to me.

I got up and ran back home. I scuffed the hell out of my shoes, and I brushed against the doorframe and stained my shirt. I ran upstairs and slammed my bedroom door and sat on my bed shaking, staring at myself. And the whole time I'm thinking I exist I exist I exist.

I must have fallen asleep, because when I woke up, it was dark. It wasn't late, though. It wasn't even 5 PM. I stood up and walked over to the mirror and looked closely at the frame for the first time. I'd never noticed before, but there were human figures carved into it. They were — embracing. I couldn't tell if they were meant to be men or women, and it didn't look like they were fucking. But they were embracing each other, and in each pair it looked like one of their mouths was wide open.





Not really knowing what else to do, I called up a guy I know who works at an auction house. I asked if he'd come over and look at this mirror I'd bought. He said it was late, but he'd stop by on the way home. Always figured he had a thing for men, even though he's married. He's not my type — too hairy, too Greek — but at this point I just wanted someone to notice me. I put on a clean shirt and waited, and a while later he knocked and I buzzed him up.

When I opened the door, his face fell. It was subtle. It wasn't even in his face, if that makes any sense. It was in his body language, hell, even his scent. He'd been excited, now he was repulsed. But I invited him in and showed him the mirror.

He stood there for a few minutes examining the frame, muttering stuff I didn't understand about how it was made and where it might have come from. Then he said, "I figure it's worth about 10 grand, maybe more if you find somebody who really — " Then he stopped short.

"What?" I was standing by the edge of the bed, looking over his shoulder at my reflection.

"Jesus," he said. "Is that some kind of trick?" He turned around and looked at me, and then at the mirror. "How are you doing that?"

"Doing what?" I took a step toward him. Our reflections looked weird. Mine seemed to be in color tones different from his, as though the light reflecting me was tinged yellow somehow. I noticed a vein on his neck was throbbing, and I felt myself get hard. I didn't even think about how weird that was.

"Where's your reflection?" He took a step away from the mirror. His reflection disappeared. So did mine.

I stood there for what felt like a full minute, staring at a mirror that didn't reflect me anymore. I moved, and thought I saw something in the mirror out of the corner of my eye, but I still couldn't see me. I guess the look on my face must have tipped the guy that I wasn't fucking around with him, because he started to panic. He ran for the door. I beat him there. I'm actually not sure what happened after that.





Wednesday

I slept all day Wednesday. I didn't wake up until about 5 PM. Same time I woke up the day before. I stared at the mirror, but I couldn't see my reflection. I was afraid to go into the bathroom and look there. I kept trying to tell myself that I needed a shave, but when I touched my face it still felt smooth. My hair still felt freshly washed. I still smelled good. Something smelled foul, though, coming from my hall closet. There was a big red-brown stain in front of that closet door. I didn't open it.

I called work, but my secretary didn't answer. Neither did my boss. My number just shunted me to voicemail, but instead of my normal away message it gave me the generic "this employee is away from his or her desk at the moment" shit. I sent my secretary an email, but it bounced back. I didn't bother trying after that.

I didn't leave the apartment all night. I swear I didn't. I have no idea how Alec's apron wound up on my floor.

Thursday

I woke up a little later, about 5:30 PM. The smell from the closet was worse, and I could smell some funk from the bathroom. I thought I'd want a shower, but I felt clean. My mouth had a funny taste to it, though, and I picked up Alec's apron and stared at it.

As I stared, I saw things. I saw Alec under me, face pressed into my mattress, writhing. I saw him turning over and felt how warm his body was. I felt us embracing.

I dropped the apron. I picked it up with a pair of tongs and put it in a metal wastebasket. I doused it in lighter fluid and tried to light it on fire, but I couldn't get the lighter to catch. Rather, I couldn't get my fingers to work the lighter. Every time I tried, I got scared and the lighter fell out of my hands.

The nights are long during the winter; I don't know what happened during most of that night. I remember standing at my door, my hand on the knob, trying to decide where to go. I remember standing in front of the fridge and feeling ill looking at all the moldy food, and reasoning maybe that was where the foul smells were really coming from. But mostly I stood in front of that mirror, looking for myself. I could see blurs, now, streaks of color like sidewalk chalk in the rain. That was me, melting, running, fading away.



Friday

My heart stopped on Friday. I guess it did, anyway. I woke up after dark, again, and the smells had gotten worse. I looked in the mirror and really strained, and suddenly I saw myself, clear as day. But I didn't have a beard, despite not shaving since Monday. My hair was still combed. My body was pale and smooth, and those marks that guy gave me had faded, even though I usually hold on to bruises much longer. I stood close to the mirror and stared at my eyes, trying to remember if they'd always been that shade of green — didn't I have brown eyes? — and that's when I noticed my breath wasn't fogging the mirror.

I took my pulse and felt nothing. I put a hand to my chest — nothing. I got a knife from the kitchen and dragged it across my throat, standing in front of the mirror, waiting for jets of blood to cover my reflection. Nothing. Just a little pain and a little cut, and it faded away as though it was never there.

"It won't work, anyway." apartment all right. I was

I turned around and saw a guy in my room. Maybe 30 years old. Chiseled, tight chest, slight hint of a beard. My type — and yet, I didn't feel anything. I just stared at him, and then back at the mirror. He wasn't there, just a few blurry streaks, just as I had been. And as I watched, my face ran, my clothes melted, my body softened and I was just color, just a blur, disappearing into the glass. Alec's apron and stared at it.

"What's happening?" I whispered. I saw Alec

He walked toward me and put a hand on my chest. "You bought my mirror," he said. He reached past me and ran his other hand down the frame, caressing the embracing couples. "You bought my mirror, and paid for it with your face." He pointed to one of the figures on the very bottom of frame. It had my face. The figuring was embracing a man who looked a lot like Alec. The man pointed at a figure about halfway up the frame. That one had his face.

"It stole mine, too," he said. "I used to be at the bottom. You have to work your way up." He nodded toward the bathroom, where the stink had worsened. "You've already started."

"What if I don't keep going?" I said. I was starting to figure it out. "What if I stop?"


He pointed to the bottom of the frame. The underside of the mirror was just hands, gripping onto the edge of the glass. "That."

I stepped back, suddenly dizzy. "Jesus," I whispered.

"It's OK." He put his hand back on my chest and smiled. His teeth were clean and white, and just a little too sharp. "You'll be fine."



# Mythologies™



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# Introduction

*Myth is the hidden part of every story, the buried part, the region that is still unexplored because there are as yet no words to enable us to get there. Myth is nourished by silence as well as by words.*

— Italo Calvino

**Mythologies** is an examination of distinctly vampiric myths and legends — not the stories that kine tell about vampires, but the stories the monsters tell each other — and themselves. Origin stories, hints of Golconda, myths about Kindred-eating super-vampires and lots of other heavy folkloric material that's designed to scare, awe and entice vampires have been circulating since the first nights of the Damned. Similar to the mortal men and women they once were, vampires are also afraid of vampires, no matter what they say to the contrary.

What it is vital for you to understand immediately, before you read any further, is that this book isn't concerned about what's true and what's not. That's not the point. Mutually exclusive tales meet and mix in this book. One origin story contradicts another, one legend of modern Damnation renders another impossible, one Kindred boogeyman has supposedly slain another — no one story is truly reliable.

## *For Players*

Because the truth behind any of these tales is ultimately up to the Storyteller, players can read this book without spoiling anything for themselves. What's in here is what Kindred are telling each other at Elysium, what they're whispering about in the Ordo Dracul chapter house and what neonates are hearing from that Mekhet sorcerer who heard it from that wizard who died last winter. This builds a sense of awareness for the player and her character, but it also creates an aura of mystery for them both. While your character is lying in a hole under his house, wondering if the Black Hounds are real, you the player are eyeballing the Storyteller, wondering if the Sin-Eaters are real in this chronicle.

## *For Storytellers*

With the material in here, Storytellers can turn their villains into new gods or ancient monsters, infuse MacGuffins with the awesome majesty of immortal legends and turn the

chronicle's central city into the fateful capital of an epic tale with massive repercussions. Arcane artifacts, stats for horrible monsters, notes on mystical sites and other mechanical odds and ends make this a valuable toolkit for folkloric-minded Storytellers.

As you read through this book, consider which entries you'll "turn on" in your current chronicle. Are there really Sin-Eaters and Blood Curses in your World of Darkness? Are the Kindred really descendants of Roman sinners? Are any of these tales *really* true, or are they just cover for the secrets you've written and hidden underneath them? Use too many of them at once, and you've got an overblown, overcrowded fantasy world flowing over with contradictory histories. Use just a few at a time to keep your players wondering what's true and what's myth.

## *Theme: Mystery and Truth*

You first heard the tale about the Just Angel when you were a neonate. Now you've been carrying it around for a century. It's gotten tangled with things you dreamed in the daytime and variations you've heard over the last hundred years. You're not even sure exactly how the story went when you first it. Tonight, though, the Prince is taking the tale seriously — his court seers say the Just Angel is in the city, cleansing Kindred with fire. How can you know the difference between what you were told and what's real without seeing the Angel for yourself?

Is any story ever truly accurate? Can you trust what your elders taught you? Did they lie to you or have they simply bought into the legends? If the myths you were brought up on — similar to stories about vampires — are based on fact, what're the facts behind the bedtime stories your sire told you?

The themes of mystery and truth lie at the foundations of all manner of stories, from detective yarns to



treasure hunts. A mystery can never be wholly solved, however, without trust. If you don't trust in the tale you find at the end of your investigation, the mystery lingers. There's not a lot of trust among the Damned.

Don't confuse the truth with the facts. The facts are what can be proved; the truth is what you take with you from the facts.

## *Mood: Wonder and Fear*

The Mekhet crouches in the catacomb, arranging fragments of a broken mosaic back into place around his feet. The Daeva steps around the velvet rope and puts her hands to the Sumerian wall, feeling out the faces of a long-dead king. The Nosferatu sits in the mud and the fog next to the car, listening to a teenage boy tell his date about the killer in the woods. The Gangrel leans against the peeling, yellowed wallpaper and listens to the rats tell him about the monster nesting in the tenebment. The Ventrue covers his mouth while his child's ghoul sobs out the story of her master's Final Death.

Just as mortals do, vampires fear what they don't know. Just as mortals are, vampires are intrigued by bits of truth. But the difference between a working flashlight and a fluttering battery can be the difference between wonder and fear. The hieroglyphs in the old subway tunnel may be oddities in the lifeless light of a florescent lamp, but in a Zippo's trembling glow hieroglyphs become omens.

All of Kindred existence is spent in the dark and in secrecy. The Requiem is spent in naked patches of light surrounded by a wilderness of black. Everything a vampire knows about the World of Darkness is just as delicate. Tonight's truth is just a candle's light in the dark. One night, the wind is going to blow the candle out.

## *What's Inside This Book*

In the following three chapters are numerous articles relaying stories and speculation from three millennia of Kindred mythology. These articles have been broken down into the following three broad categories:

**Chapter One: Damnation** presents a handful of origin stories for the Curse and its kin. "The Blood of the Bull" examines the roots of the Kindred in ancient Mithraic cults. "Sons of the Serpent" relates the myth of the Damned as heirs of the Biblical Serpent. "Embraced by Fear" supposes that every vampire is the descendant of a

risen corpse bound to the world by its own fear. "Blood Gods" looks at the idea of Kindred as the earthly remnants of all-but-forgotten demigods. "Emperors of Blood" explores the legend that each clan was built of sin on Roman pillars such as Julius Caesar and Cleopatra.

These tales are common in some cities, heard by Kindred of every covenant. In one chronicle, one of these tales might be imposed on the vampire populace by the Prince as the Truth. In another chronicle, these tales might be the roots of local symbolism and understanding, even if they're not considered accurate. In some cities, these tales are cherished secrets or academic oddities, known only by occultists and historians.

In **Chapter Two: Modern Legendry**, "living myths" of the Kindred get a closer look. These are urban myths maintained by the culture of the Damned and modern essays scrutinizing some supernatural aspects of the Requiem. "Eaters of Sin" presents a vampiric spin on the tales of Sin-Eaters, who devour the residue of vice from the earthly flock. "Breath-Drinkers and Liver-Eaters" looks at exotic, alternate vampire legends through the lens of modern Damnation. "Solace" reports on a supernatural street drug seeping into cities in the 21st century. "Sleep of Reason," "Understanding the Fog" and "The Second Death" all look at what Kindred think and believe about torpor, whether it's seen as a mystic portal to the Underworld or a supernatural psychological state or a medium for personal insight. "Art in the Blood" reveals a legend of vampire blood's mystic properties infused into paintings — and their subjects.

The final chapter, **What Monsters Fear**, looks at eight things that chill and terrify the Damned. "The Thing in the Mirror" considers Red Jack, the Kindred Bloody Mary. "The Just Angel" relates the myth of Raguel, who is either a Damned angel or a crusading vampire. "Blood Curses" looks at the power folkloric vampire weaknesses can have over modern Kindred. "My Ghoul, My Master" reverses the power dynamic of regnant and thrall through tales of ghouls enslaving and destroying vampires. "Frenzy Plague" examines a mystic disease rumored to be spreading through the Beasts of the Damned. "Black Hounds" gives a closer look at the shadowy, hellish dogs said to stalk vampires to this night. "The Hunter" is a classic Kindred boogeyman: the undead vampire-hunter. "Dreadful Night of the City" supposes that the darkness, sin and suffering of the cities where the Kindred hide might be an evil force all its own.









# Chapter One: Damnation

"I believe the story of the Damnation  
is so sad and shameful  
that we have chosen to forget it.

To escape it."

— The Archivist of Paris



*It is a myth, not a mandate,  
a fable not a logic,  
a symbol rather than a reason  
by which men are moved.*

— Irwin Edman

## *The Blood of the Bull*

*To him they give the name Mithras, and celebrate his rites in secret caves, that shrouded in the dim obscurity of the darkness they may shun the touch of the pure and glorious light. Truly an ill-omened exaltation of a deity! A hateful recognition of a barbarian rite, to deify one whose criminal acts you confess.*

— Firmicus Maternus, *Errare Profanis Religionis*  
Across the lands once ruled by the legions, especially in the forests of Germany, the moors of Britain and the urban jungle that was Rome, there are a few hundred mostly broken sculptures and carvings depicting a being known as Mithras. He is tall, and strong and clean-limbed. In almost all of the surviving images, he plunges a knife into the throat of a bull, which sprays blood out over the landscape in its death agony.

Most of these depictions lie hidden underground, in small, cramped, dark chambers known as mithraea. The oldest inscription to Mithras yet discovered is in a mithraeum near Vienna; it dates from AD 71, and was dedicated by legionaries who had just returned from destroying Jerusalem. The most recent known mithraeum is hidden in the Alps, and dates from just before the fall of Rome. One or two parchments from late antiquity bear obscure liturgies to this being; there are a handful of altars carved with dedications to him, and a scattering of references by early Christian scholars discuss his cult in tones alternately fascinated and disgusted. And that is all that anyone alive knows for certain about Mithras.

### *The Myth of Mithras*

*O Lord, while being born again, I am passing away; while growing and having grown, I am dying; while being born from a life-generating birth, I am passing on, released to death — as you have founded, as you have decreed, and have established the mystery.*

— from the “Mithras Liturgy” in the *Paris Codex* (B.N. Pap. 574)

The Roman Mithras, scholars believe, may have been the same god as the Persian deity Mithra. If so, by examining the Zoroastrian legends of Mithra, the enigma of Mithras can be picked apart. Mithra is the lord of light and fire, the representative on earth of the good creator god Ahura Mazda. He exists to aid humanity against the evil god of darkness, Ahriman. Ahura Mazda created

Mithra by cracking open a rock, from which he emerged fully grown. Mithra is the Mediator, the Intercessor, the Judge between the ultimate, unapproachable Good and the total, depraved Evil. In Persian myth, Ahura Mazda also created a mighty bull at the beginning of time, perhaps representing the material universe. With the death of the “Lone-Created Bull,” the world was born from its bloody corpse, and time began.

Based on these elements of Persian lore, archaeologists pieced together a story of the Tauroctony, the bull-slaying depicted in the place of honor in all mithraea. Ahura Mazda, so the reconstructed story goes, ordered Mithras to sacrifice the great bull, sending a raven to earth (or to the inside of Mithras’ cave) carrying the message. Reluctant to do so, Mithras eventually carried out his orders. When he tracked the bull down and cut its throat, all plants and animals grew from its blood, the cave split open and Mithras emerged into the world. With this act, Mithras became the favorite of Ahura Mazda, replacing the Sun. Mithras and the Sun shared a ceremonial meal of wine (representing the “blood eternal” of the sacrificed bull), sealing their covenant and marking the Sun’s acceptance of Mithras’ supremacy. Many depictions of Mithras and the Sun at a meal, the so-called banquet of Sol, survive on mithraeum walls. Mithras’ cult was especially popular with Roman soldiers (the large majority of mithraea have been found near legionary camps), who no doubt appreciated Mithras’ sensible dedication to following orders and spilling blood when need be.

Of course, this modern conventional wisdom does have one or two loose ends. Why would Roman soldiers worship the god of their ancestral imperial enemy, Persia? Why would devotees of a solar god meet in dark caves or cellars, where sunlight could never reach? Why were the mithraea so small, with only enough room for 20 or 30 worshippers?

And why are the original Persian myths so adamant that it was the evil god Ahriman, not the lord of light Mithra, who killed the sacred bull and spilled its blood across the world?

“THERE’S SOME BULL CULT DOING RITUALS OUT IN HIGHLAND PARK. I KNOW ONE KINDRED WHO HEARD IT STRAIGHT FROM A MEMBER OF THE CULT OUT THERE. I DON’T KNOW IF IT’S ACOLYTE MITHRAS SHIT OR WHAT. MIGHT NOT EVEN BE VAMPIRES.”



### *The Corrupt Covenant*

What travesty is it then that they enact in the cave with veiled faces? For they cover their eyes lest their deeds of shame should revolt them. Some like birds flap their wings imitating the raven's cry; others roar like lions; others bind their hands with the entrails of fowls and fling themselves down over pits full of water, and then another whom they call the Liberator approaches with a sword and severs the above-mentioned bonds. Other rites there are which are yet more dishonorable. What shameful mockeries for men who call themselves wise. But because these things are concealed in the darkness they think that they can remain unknown yet all these, the secret devices and contrivances of foul and malignant demons, have been dragged to the light and unveiled.

— Ambrosiaster, *Quaestiones*

A number of mithraea were simply walled up, leaving their statues, artifacts, icons and inscriptions behind in the perfect darkness. In one of these mithraea, excavators found a hideous statue of a winged being with the head of a lion wreathed in serpents, clutching a key. This lion-headed god appears in a few select mithraea across Europe, and at one mithraeum in York he is named: Deus Arimanius. The God Ahriman.

Very few human scholars have followed the track of the lion-headed god, and even fewer Kindred ones. The acknowledged master of the latter was the Lancea Sanctum Legate Ambrose Calmet. Although Calmet did not

have the advantage of modern archaeological findings, he was rumored to have visited a number of secret catacomb complexes beneath the great cities of Austria-Hungary during his time as Legate to the Archbishop of Paris. According to Calmet's quite frankly disorganized and murky compendium *Mithras Leontes*, some of those subterranean labyrinths contained (he uses the word "encysted") mithraea as yet undiscovered by mortal eyes.

Perhaps the largest single compendium of material on Deus Arimanius, Calmet's *Mithras Leontes* is virtually impossible to find today, and was perversely obscure even at its original publication. (There are rumors that the Roman Lancea Sanctum Inquisition attempted to suppress the book's distribution.) The first (1894) edition appeared only in a private printing of 124 copies, most of which disappeared with looted or bombed-out Kindred libraries during the tumult of the First and Second World Wars.

The following selections from Calmet's magnum opus (the majority of which merely reproduces in excruciating detail every inscription Calmet uncovered in his laborious researches) come, therefore, from a pirated edition crudely produced in Baltimore in 1925 with much of the Kindred-specific lore clumsily censored. Hopefully, Calmet's insights will still shine through the sloppy translation and haphazard editing by their unknown redactor:

*According to the Belgrade inscription, therefore, we can understand Mithras as an adventurer*





seduced by Ahriman with the threat of serpents and the promise of the key to knowledge. Mithras learnt of a rite, perhaps that described by Plutarch in AD 70 involving "the blood of a slain wolf thrown into a sunless place," that would grant him inhuman power . . . The degree of Lion, the Adept degree in the Mithraic Mysteries, thus indicates the replacement of Mithras' will with that of Ahriman, and, by extension, the replacement of the initiate's will with that of Mithras. (Mithras Leontes, p. 90) Tertullian (ca. AD 200) refers to the "tortures of Mithras," which the Armenian stelae indicate may have some similarity to the pre-Islamic salat ordeal, in which pagan wonder-workers stood beneath the blazing Arabian sun until they were "destroyed and remade." The connection with Mithras' defeat of the sun-bull is perhaps too obvious to elaborate upon, but this may cast some light on Tertullian's further characterization of the Lion of Mithras as "philosophical sacraments of arid and scorched nature." (Mithras Leontes, p. 175)

The "bull sacrifice" can thus be seen as a murderous theft of life from the universe, a Promethean First Violation of the laws of God, a bestial act rather than a redemptive one . . . . The "sharing of blood" for initiatory power, which rests at the core of Mithraic practice, has managed to hide in the shadow cast by the Cross for too long. Truly a blasphemous parody, and thus clearly the work of Ahriman. However, an understanding of Mithras' goal — to spawn an army of demons to serve Ahriman — helps us to reconcile the seeming paradox of Longinus' Law against Progeny. . . . No doubt in this context the historically attested titles of Mithras, "Giver of Bliss" and "Savior from Death," become lambently clear. (Mithras Leontes, pp. 208–211)

The human rites of Mithras, practiced by mortal soldiers and merchants, were misunderstood echoes of the bloody initiation practiced by these first Kindred. Perhaps a fugitive ghoul attempted to set up his own little church, or Roman legionaries who saw service in Persia brought the authentic Zoroastrian Mithra back with them and got caught up in linguistic confusion. Their meetings and altars were the antique equivalent of Freemasonry, a way to clasp each other in friendship and cement commercial and social ties outside the stiff formalities of Roman family and camp life. The true, vampiric Mithraists welcomed their human apes as camouflage — does not Ahriman rejoice in confusion and disguises? (Mithras Leontes, p. 234)

While no reputable Kindred scholar is likely to openly accept Calmet's apparent insinuation that Mithras was the first vampire, and that vampirism is essentially an extended initiatory test imposed by Ahriman to recruit demonic soldiers with which to defeat the good God, it

must be admitted that Calmet's theory, or one similar to it, clears up a number of enigmas, if only theoretically.

Calmet is still something of an enigma himself within the Lancea Sanctum. Sanctified gossip still recalls Calmet's refusal of the archepiscopal miter in 1903, followed almost immediately by his gory murder at the hands of a rogue band of human anarchists. In recent years, a letter have come to light indicating that Calmet may have expected his sudden, violent end. Unfortunately, Calmet's side of the correspondence is still missing, and we only have this 1903 letter from Professor Franz Cumont, a mortal philologist who discounted Calmet's fears as the product of overwork.

(Translated from the French)

My dear M. Calmet,

I have enclosed a copy of the English translation of my *Mysteries of Mithra*, which is but a pale shadow of the discussions you favored me with at the Ghent conference — was it truly eight years ago? Again, I urge you to publish, regardless of your superiors' fretting. I cannot help but believe that their cavils have produced these phantoms of persecution in you; believe me, my own University is likewise plagued by interfering churchmen.

Of course, my selfishness obliges me to add that if you seriously believe in these phantom threats to your own life, you who are the most vigorous man I have ever met, then by all means send me your "trifling monograph on the subject of Ahriman" so that it may escape your (surely imaginary!) doom. No-one values the delights of the study or the library more than myself, but I believe you owe yourself a rest. Perhaps a holiday in the sun, away from church politics, is what you need.

And should your holiday take you to Brussels, you will ever find me your friend and willing pupil,

F. Cumont

### *Dubious and Debatable Fragments*

If indeed a god, Mithras was rock-born;  
Now which came first? Here rock has  
Vanquished god: for who created it?  
If a god, by theft he could not live; yet  
Cattle-thief is the name he goes by.

Terraneous he was born, a monster.

— Commodianus, *Instructiones*

The study of Mithras remains a tangled, murky one, almost as if some unknown agent were driving scholars down false trails or concealing crucial evidence to this day. There are almost as many theories about Mithras, as god or vampire, as there are surviving mithraea to study.

- In many icons of the Tauroctony, Mithras is shown accompanied by other animals in addition to the raven, such as a wolf, a snake or a scorpion. Perhaps each of these animals, splashed by the eternal blood



of the cosmic bull, shared in its dark vampiric baptism. Could they represent subordinate bloodlines, or other supernatural beings such as werewolves?

- Depictions of Nergal, the Assyrian god of heat, plague and the dead, strongly resemble the lion-headed icon found in certain mithraea. If Mithras were actually an Assyrian, this could explain the Hittite references to “Mitra” as Lord of the Land dated to 1400 BC. Of course, that would leave open the question of what happened to Mithras’ cult, and to the vampires, between 1400 BC and the first century AD.

- Mitra, or Mithra, might well be a divine entity aligned with God or Ahura Mazda. The future vampire Mithras might have been a soldier or magician named for the Lord of Light, just as a modern Italian man might be named Angelo, or a Mexican named Jesus. If so, *Mithra* will be very interested in destroying any surviving *Mithras* cultists, not least for the stain on his name.

- Other recent scholarship has suggested, based on a hint in works by the author Porphyry, that the Tauroctony represents a star map. The killing of the bull depicts the precession of the equinoxes from the Age of Taurus to the Age of Aries and the “death” of Taurus as lord of the zodiac and home to the reborn Sun in spring. This may relate to attempts to identify Deus Arimanius with Aion, the Gnostic deity who began time but dwells outside it. By this understanding, the compact of Mithras with Ahriman primarily allows vampires to defeat not death but time, not merely through immortality but through such mechanisms as Celerity and even torpor, and perhaps in other ways unexplored since antiquity.

- The coincidence of seven grades of Mithraic initiation and the covenant VII is probably just that. Probably.

### *Behind the Sun*

*If Christianity had been halted in its growth by some mortal illness, the world would have gone Mithraic.*

— Joseph-Ernest Renan, *Marcus Aurelius and the End of the Ancient World*

The myth of Mithras’ Bargain is the classical “deal with the devil” story thrown against a mythic canvas. If this myth appeals to modern vampires, it is because the Sun was beaten once, and can be beaten again. Sure, that victory comes from a lion-headed demon. So what? He hasn’t been around to collect lately, has he? This is the sin of Pride, come round again.

In earlier times, Mithraism defined itself against its great rival, Christianity. Mithras’ male-only elitist cult of obedient slaughter appealed to soldiers and rich merchants eager for social advancement; Christ’s message of humble mercy spread through women and slaves who had no hope of such. Vampires who reject God might well embrace a cult that names its founder so forthrightly. This is the sin of Despair, tinged with bull-killing Romantic (or Hemingway-ish) bravado.

### *Storytelling*

The Mithraic Mysteries are just what the label says, mysteries. Nobody alive, and precious few undead, know just what the mysteries truly contained. In your chronicle, they may be anything from forgotten antiquities suitable for re-discovery and rebirth to the empty rituals of a mutual thumb-sucking society to the heresy of a horrific Kindred cult to an evocation of the very core of existence itself. A Mithras cult might be hard-bitten “occult special forces” warriors descended from the invincible legions, cackling worshippers of lion-headed demons, subtle orchestrators of religious conflict in the Middle East who feed on fanaticism as well as blood or a festering mafia of squabbling lodges each claiming the True Initiate Bloodline and killing anyone who says different. Pursuing the truth can lead into torchlit tomb-raiding expeditions beneath the streets of London or Budapest (both of which held major mithraea), terrifying personal chronicles of insuperable damnation or cosmic horror at its starkest when the characters discover to what time-lost monstrosities they owe their unives.

Perhaps the richest mine for a Mithraism-centered story is the fraught relationship between the Mithras cult and the Lancea Sanctum. While the Circle of the Crone might merely object to the Mithraists’ sexist elevation of their male murder-god above the Devouring Mother, the church of Mithras is a direct assault on the most sacred principles of the Lancea Sanctum. Mithraism and the Sanctified present starkly irreconcilable origins for vampires — hubristic bargain with Ahriman or stern lesson from God? Any chronicle involving a Mithras cult thus automatically has another set of fanatics on the other side, with the characters hopefully caught in the crossfire.

The contest changed history at least once: Julian the Apostate, the last Mithraic Emperor of Rome, was killed by a spear (or perhaps a Spear?) thrown by an unknown assailant — who, pious legend has it, was a Christian legionary in his own army. Still further back, Mithraism comes out of the same milieu as the legend of Longinus, the first century AD in the eastern Roman Empire. The cults even emerge from the same city, Jerusalem, within a generation of each other! The appalling parallels between Mithras, who spills the eternal blood of the “Lone-Created” of Ahura Mazda for vampiric glory and the power of Ahriman, and Longinus, who reluctantly spills the saving blood of the Son of God, guarantee plenty of blasphemous horror whichever direction your characters jump. The mythologies will inevitably tangle, and both sides will kill to protect their own vision of the past.

### *Mithraic Mechanics*

*Mithras, God of Midnight, here where the great bull dies,  
Look on thy children in darkness. Oh take our sacrifice!  
Many roads Thou has fashioned: all of them lead to the Light,  
Mithras, also a solider, teach us to die aright.*

— Rudyard Kipling, “A Song to Mithras”



This section presents one possible version of a secretive cult of Mithras, whether restricted to ancient Rome or surviving behind the curtain of vampiric society down to the present day. If the cult is a secret society, characters with a strong Occult background will likely have heard rumors, while Academics or Research will easily uncover at least the historical material presented in “The Myth of Mithras” above regardless of the cult’s continuation.

Initiation into the Mysteries of Mithras is similar, both in experiential terms and game mechanics, to initiation into the Coils of the Dragon. As the source of all vampires, Mithraic initiation is open to any clan — and, in theory, to any covenant, although the Lancea Sanctum reacts extremely unpleasantly toward any of its members caught truckling to the Giver of Bliss.

Mithraic initiation, in rules terms, is a three-step process. It includes the purchase of a dot in the Mithraic Status Merit, the in-game completion of an initiatory task, and the purchase of the equivalent level of Culter Mithras, the Mithraic Discipline, for each degree. In game terms, this represents, respectively, the insider politicking needed to convince the cult to advance a member’s candidacy, the formal act of cruelty and theft required by the original bargain with Ahriman and the training in the Mysteries that accompanies such promotion.

### *New Merit: Mithraic Status (• to .....; special)*

Similar to Covenant Status, Mithraic Status indicates rank within the Mysteries of Mithras. In the narrowest sense, each dot conveys only rank within the Mithraic cult, and if the Mysteries are weak (or very carefully hidden) in a given chronicle, that may be all. Within the cult, members of lower grade are expected to respect those of higher degree; as with other types of Status, Mithraic Status adds to dice pools for interactions with fellow Mithraic initiates. Unlike other Status types, however, Mithraic Status (based as it is on a supernatural bargain) *does* add to the dice pools predicated on supernatural powers. The Heliodromus of a Mithraic sect *would* add his Mithraic Status to the dice pool for use of his Dominate Discipline, for example, but only against fellow Mithraists.

- Corax (“Raven”)
- Nymphus (“Bridegroom”)
- Miles (“Soldier”)
- Leo (“Lion”)
- Perses (“Persian”)
- Heliodromus (“Courier of the Sun”)
- Pater (“Father”)

Mithraic Status has nothing to do with any other sort of vampiric Status — a Perses Adept may be nothing but a low-caste nonentity in the sight of the city’s Prince, or in the gossip of his clan. Since Mithraic initiation is a secret, a character can have more than three dots in

Covenant Status along with his Mithraic Status. Of course, that is a dangerous double game to play, especially if the covenant involved is the Lancea Sanctum.

### *Initiatory Tasks*

For entry into each grade, Mithras demands the initiate perform a ceremonial task. Note that the task is a demand made by Mithras, not the mere whim of the current cult head. (Although cult heads often have helpful suggestions of specific targets for a postulant’s initiatory treachery.) Each increasingly dangerous and difficult task recapitulates the First Violation in ritual form, indicating a step along the path of Ahriman. The task always involves violence — spiritual or physical — to a target, ideally an unsuspecting one. Since the will of Ahriman is that the weak tear down the strong, the target is almost always superior (in at least some fashion) to the postulant. Thus, Ahriman rewards subtlety and treachery; simple slaughter is beneath him, and honorable combat is anathema. Each task requires a different target. The task cannot be hand-waved aside or done in a half-hearted manner, and the initiate’s superior must agree that the result meets Mithras’ requirements.

Similarly, a Storyteller should allow an initiatory task to take center stage for a session or (in some cases) even a whole story line. Some tasks, though, are well-suited to running subplots, with an hour or so of game time devoted to the next step in an ongoing campaign of destruction or betrayal.

“DON’T TALK TO THEM. THEY’VE BEEN DOING THE SAME DANCE FOR A MILLION YEARS. IT’S TOO LATE TO GET IN ON IT. DON’T MAKE ANY SENSE.”

#### **Corax**

The Raven steals gold from paupers, and mutilates the faces of the dead so that their families do not recognize them. The postulant to Corax must destroy some crucial aspect of her target’s life — family, friendships, status, money, etc. In game terms, she must reduce her target’s dots in a relevant Merit (Allies, Fame, Haven, Herd, Mentor, Resources or Status) to zero. This will likely involve a series of roleplayed actions, perhaps one short session per dot, although an all-consuming apocalypse would work almost as well dramatically. The target must have more dots in that Merit than the postulant does.

#### **Nymphus**

The Bridegroom waits to ravish his bride, break her to his will and take her as his chattel. The postulant to Nymphus must break the will of his target, shattering her inner strength. In game terms, he must reduce the target’s Willpower dots to zero. This is a difficult task mechanically, and a Storyteller has two options to make it smoother. The first is to allow a reduction in Willpower *points* to count; if the initiate can so utterly harry and hound a target that her Willpower temporarily drops



to zero, that's good enough for Mithras. The other (more suitable for long-term explorations of persecution horror) is to use an optional rule to reduce the target's Willpower dots by one for every failed degeneration roll, instead of manifesting a derangement. Rather than breaking under the strain, the target has simply *weakened*. This is the kind of thing Ahriman likes. The target must have more dots in Willpower than the postulant does.

### Miles

The Soldier kills: he loots, he rapes, he burns, he enslaves. All without thinking, all without his own morality being touched at all. The postulant to Miles must destroy her target's moral self. In game terms, she must reduce her target's Morality to zero. This will almost certainly involve a series of subtle blandishments and temptations, followed by blackmail and grotesque moral dilemmas. The target must have a higher Morality than the postulant does, which at this point shouldn't be too hard.

### Leo

The Lion slaughters indiscriminately, and leaves his much of his kill uneaten for jackals to fight over. The postulant to Leo has, perhaps, the simplest of tasks, akin to the slaughter of the innocent Bull of Ahura Mazda. He must kill, using only natural weapons (including Protean claws, etc.), more humans in one night than he has Health dots (or Blood Potency dots, whichever is higher). Some Mithraic higher-ups insist that the postulant to Leo begin this task while starving, to increase the chance of hunger frenzy for a suitably bestial murder scene. The humans must be fully grown, but need not be capable warriors.

### Perses

The fleeing Persian turns in the saddle and fires an arrow into his foe, or poisons his king's cup at court or uses unhallowed witchery to work his dark will. With the achievement of Leo, the Mithraist initiate must turn her aim to her fellow Kindred. The postulant to Perses must treacherously kill another Kindred by indirect means; she cannot actually strike the fatal (or any) blow. Some Mithraic masters even insist on the use of human tools, to emphasize the indignity of this task. The target must have a higher Blood Potency than the postulant.

### Heliodromus

The Courier of the Sun carries the fruits of the world into the pitiless gaze of Sol Invictus, preparing a feast for the burning. The postulant to Heliodromus must diablerize a more powerful vampire, while that vampire dies the True Death in full sunlight. The target must have a higher Blood Potency than the postulant. This is the true meaning of the "meal shared with the Sun" depicted in Mithraist art, although the question arises: what, or Who, did Mithras originally "share with the sun," if he was the first vampire?

### Pater

The Father rules the table of mysteries with a firm hand, killing and sparing implacably. If the chronicle has gotten





to the point of a Mithraic initiation for Pater, it is up to the Storyteller to come up with something suitably depraved and awful for Mithras to demand of a would-be seventh-degree Hierarch. By this time, the player may have her own notions of what sort of appalling act of treachery and danger would be appropriate — since there aren't any Mithraists of higher grade to tell her differently, the Storyteller should go along with it if it sounds cool. "Mithras is pleased. Go, and return as Pater to my childer."

### *Culter Mithras*

The "Knife of Mithras" is the dark blessing granted to the true sons of Mithras by Ahriman. Each level of Culter Mithras makes attainment of the next level of Mithraic power easier. *Facili decensis Averno*, after all.

That said, a postulant cannot purchase a new Mithraic Discipline dot until after purchasing the equivalent new Mithraic Status Merit dot and completing the initiatory task. Unlike Coils of the Dragon dots, each Mithraic level — and the various effects and powers associated with them — must be learned in order. A Mithraist may not "substitute" a similar Discipline or Devotion for those dots — even one with the exact same game effect. Also unlike dots in Coils of the Dragon, a Mithraist vampire must have the same level of Mithraic Status that he does of Culter Mithras. For example, a Miles (Mithraic Status •••) initiate may not purchase a fourth or higher Culter Mithras dot until he raises his Mithraic Status to four dots. In fact, he may not even know what that power is. Storytellers are encouraged to make up wild rumors about what the new power, initiatory task and so forth for the higher grades are. (Some such misinformation may be inspired by the earlier discussion of the Mysteries in this section.) Should a Mithraist somehow lose dots in Mithraic Status (to represent being thrown out of a mithraeum or stripped of grade by an angry Pater), the Mithraist may not use the "excess" dots in Culter Mithras — Ahriman withdraws his bargain until such time as the postulant sees the error of his ways (or claws his way back up the tree in another fashion). However, upon regaining Status (by in-game action or experience point expenditures), the reinstated Mithraist can resume use of the higher arts without needing to re-purchase them.

Every Culter Mithras ability requires the expenditure of one Vitae in advance, except as noted in the specific descriptions below.

Characters purchase new dots of Culter Mithras similar to an out-of-clan Discipline. Thus, increasing a Kindred's grade in the Mysteries of Mithras costs an experience point total of nine times the new grade to be achieved. For example, a Miles initiate wishing to achieve the next degree, Leo, must spend 36 experience points to do so: 8, or 2 x 4 (for Mithraic Status ••••) plus 28, or 7 x 4 (for Culter Mithras ••••). Similar to the Coils of the Dragon, Culter Mithras Abilities are

not limited by Blood Potency Trait maximums. A Kindred need not have a Blood Potency of 4 to become a Leo grade Mithraist, for example.

#### • Coin of Betrayal

The bright eyes of Corax pick out the glimmer of silver.

Roll Manipulation + Occult + Culter Mithras in a contested action against the target's Resolve + Blood Potency (resistance is reflexive) to get him to give the caster a coin. (If the target has no coin on him at the time, this success is useless.) As long as the Mithraist holds that coin, the target loses one Willpower dot. That dot returns to the target if the caster returns the coin, if the coin is destroyed or upon the caster's True Death. This Discipline can only be used once per target. At the Storyteller's option, holding someone's coin may make using Glance of Weakness (below) or other Disciplines (especially Dominate) against the target easier by +1 or +2.

#### •• Glance of Weakness

The Bridegroom knows her secret sin.

Roll Manipulation + Occult + Culter Mithras in a contested action against the target's Composure + Blood Potency (resistance is reflexive) to trigger a target's Vice. At the next possible moment, the target will pursue her Vice regardless of cost or circumstances. This spasm of sin will last for at least a scene, until the target either succeeds at a degeneration roll (such as that likely brought on by a violation of her Morality during the pursuit of her Vice), until sunrise or until further pursuit of her Vice is impossible (no food left to eat for a Glutton, for example).

#### ••• Sword of Slaughter

The Soldier wields his blade with cruelty.

This power involves no roll; with a reflexive action, the Mithraist can imbue a sword (or any bladed weapon, such as a bayonet, dagger, etc.) with occult energy. The weapon will do aggravated damage for the remainder of the scene.

#### •••• Fire of Lies

The sign of the Lion is the sign of fire.

Roll Resolve + Occult + Culter Mithras to transform normal fire into balefire. Balefire burns with a nitreous green glow, and does only lethal, rather than aggravated, damage to Kindred. (Balefire damages mortals as normal fire.) Balefire cannot induce fear frenzy. For each additional success after the first, the caster can sorcerously hurl balefire at a target (treat as a standard thrown weapon attack) as follows:

Successes	Distance
1 success	0 yards
2 successes	1 yard
3 successes	2 yards
4 successes	5 yards
5+ successes	10 yards



The caster can also spend additional successes increasing a balefire's size or heat; one success increases either factor by one on the chart on p. 172 of **Vampire: The Requiem**. For example, a Mithraist who rolls six successes with Fire of Nergal could transform the flame of a torch (a small, normal fire) into a balefire (one success), blow it into a very hot (two successes) bonfire (one more success) and throw that bonfire for one yard (last two successes) at a foe.

The Fire of Lies requires an existing natural fire, and cannot be performed during fear frenzy, during the rolls to resist fear frenzy or upon any fire actually threatening the caster. In other words, characters cannot get out of fire attacks or incipient frenzies by transforming the flames into balefire — Ahriman doesn't grant defenses, he grants attacks. Balefire may not be "switched off" or transformed back into normal fire; when the scene is over, the fire simply gutters out.

#### ••••• Arrow of Thirst

The Persian fires poisoned shafts.

Roll Manipulation + Occult + Culter Mithras in a contested action against the target's Stamina + Blood Potency; resistance is reflexive. The target must *already* be wounded and bleeding. The target "bleeds out" one dot of his highest Discipline (in addition to his normal Vitae losses, if any, from the wound) for a number of turns equal to half the caster's dots in Culter Mithras (round down). The specific Discipline lost does not change, even if the bleeding process lowers it below the level of another Discipline. For example, if a Kindred with four dots in Obfuscate and three in Vigor was hit with an Arrow of Thirst by a Heliodromus initiate, all three dots the target loses would be dots in Obfuscate. Lost dots "heal" the next night, beginning when the target next gains Vitae. Thus, a captive Kindred can be bled completely dry of all his Disciplines over time.

#### ••••• Companion of the Sun

The Courier of the Sun gains admittance to his golden realm.

For the expenditure of one Vitae per dot of the caster's Blood Potency, the caster may exist in open sunlight without taking any damage. While in sunlight, the caster may not use any vampiric powers or Disciplines, including Culter Mithras. She may not expend or drain Vitae. Finally, all her physical Attributes (though none of her Skills) function as if they were half their normal level. This immunity from sunlight lasts until sundown.

#### ••••• Shadow of the Patriarch

The Father makes the rules for all of the house.

A Storyteller character Pater should be a mysterious, powerful being with all sorts of horrible powers and dark arts ascribed to him. Storytellers need never decide which of those powers exist, much less which specific one is the culmination of the Culter Mithras. If a player's character is advancing to the level of Pater, this should be the center of a storyline, or even of a whole chronicle.

In such an event, the Storyteller should come up with a suitably dramatic ability that fits the ongoing theme of the story, taking suitable inspiration from the myths of Mithras, Aion and Ahriman discussed above.

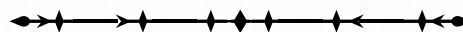
## Sons of the Serpent

*No seducer of the desert, no deceiver in the field, corrupted me; nor did the false, beguiling serpent sully the purity of my maidenhood; I lived with my husband all the days of my youth; but when these my sons were grown up, their father died.*

— IV Maccabees 7:23

Everyone knows the story of the Serpent in the Garden. In the beginning, God created man and woman and placed them in the earthly paradise of Eden, where all there needs were provided for. Their only injunction was against eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, for if they did, they would become like unto their creator and His angels in knowledge of sin. For a time, humanity's ancestors lived an idyllic life in the garden, free of strife and worry. But then the Serpent, the most subtle and cunning beast of the field, came to Eve and whispered honeyed words in her ear, telling her of the wisdom she would gain if she ate the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Eve resisted, but the Serpent was clever and persuasive, and eventually she relented. Not only did Eve eat of the fruit herself, but she convinced her husband of the Serpent's wisdom, and he, too, ate the fruit. For trespassing against God's commandment, Adam and Eve were exiled from the Garden and forced to live by the sweat of their brow in the harsh lands beyond Eden.

In most recountings of the tale, that's as far as it goes. There is another version of the story, recounted in forgotten texts and hinted at in extra-Biblical sources. In this version of the tale, the Serpent does considerably more than convince Eve to partake of the forbidden fruit—the Serpent seduced the first woman and fathered a child with her. That child, unrecorded in any canonical scripture, was the ancestor of the Kindred, born to plague the sons of Adam at God's decree.



## WHAT IS THE SERPENT?

Even amongst mortal Biblical scholars, there has been considerable debate as to the exact nature of the Serpent in Genesis. Although later Christian theologians identified the Serpent with Satan, it is debatable whether that was the intent of the authors (who had an entirely different view of Satan anyway). So just who or what was the Serpent? The answer is deliberately vague, but some possibilities include:

- **A snake:** In the early days of the world, the laws of biology were not as well fixed as they are now. In the mythical time before humanity's Fall, it is entirely possible that the snake was an



intelligent creature, capable of speech and even siring a child with a human woman. Mythology is rife with stories of half-man, half-animals, and many of them grow up to be monsters.

- **Satan:** Whether the traditional Judaic view of Satan as one of God's loyal angels set to test humankind, or the later Christian idea of Satan the rebel angel and enemy of God, this is the most commonly-held belief as to the Serpent's identity. If vampires are, indeed, the descendants of the Devil himself, this belief might explain the curious omnipresence of Belial's Brood, or the myth that holy symbols can repel or harm them.

- **Rival God:** During the time when Genesis was written, Judaism was not a truly monotheistic religion; the early Hebrews were *monolatrous*, meaning that they acknowledged the existence of many gods while paying homage to only one. If this belief were true, the Serpent might have been a god from a rival pantheon, such as Sutekh (Set) of the Egyptian pantheon. Such a theory would certainly not be popular with the Lancea Sanctum, but iconoclasts and especially the Circle of the Crone might be fond of a pseudo-Biblical origin myth that ties vampires to a pagan god.



## *The Serpent's Wiles*

There are hints and half-veiled glimpses of the truth to be found in the Genesis account of the Fall, and a few religious scholars have attempted to construct proof that Eve's firstborn son was the progeny of the Serpent based on subtle clues of context and translation. Genesis 3:13 is usually translated as "And the Lord God said unto the woman, 'What is this that thou hast done?' And the woman said, 'The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.'" The Hebrew word *nasha* is usually translated as "beguiled," but in most contexts, it means to seduce, specifically sexually. Likewise, God's proclamation in Genesis 3:16, that He would "greatly multiply the sorrow of [Eve's] conception" seems to imply that Eve's crime was in some way related to bearing children. Perhaps most tellingly, Genesis 5:1 gives the genealogy of Adam, but the first child described as Adam's is Seth, who certainly had at least two older brothers.

The canonical support for the belief that Eve was seduced and bore children by the Serpent is, admittedly, shaky. Sketchy readings of Hebrew grammar and discrepancies in genealogies do little to convince serious religious scholars, and, so, for the most part, the theory has remained a fringe belief. There is another source, beyond the Scriptures, that expounds upon Eve's liaison with the Serpent, and tells the story of the child born of their union. The text, titled "The Book of the Tribulations of the Sons of Adam," or simply "Tribulations," was found in a clay urn buried in a cave high in the Taurus Mountains in Turkey. The text consists of seven scrolls, each seven feet in length, with ancient Hebrew text written in a dark ink that Kindred scholars have theorized might

be blood-based. The scrolls were discovered in 1576 by a Turkish Mekhet named Oman Ayhan, an archaeologist and Kindred historian. The text was translated, first into Greek, and later into a variety of European languages as it made its way across the Christian world. A large portion of the text is devoted to a slight retelling of the Genesis Chapter 2 creation myth (the version of the creation myth presented in Genesis 1 is absent from the Book of Tribulations). The first meaningful diversion comes in Tribulations 2:10–14, which describes the first meeting between Eve and the Serpent.

*Now did the Serpent, with low cunning (literally "wise deceit") come to Eve as she wandered in the garden and said unto her, 'O Wife of Adam, why dost thou wander in the garden, away from thy husband?' And Eve replied, 'I sought only to gaze upon the trees (there is debate as to whether this refers to trees in general, or specifically the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge), for the sight of them fills gives me great pleasure (desire/longing).' And the Serpent smiled, for he knew then that Eve's heart was troubled. 'And has not the LORD thy God said that thou shalt have all the pleasures of His Garden, even unto the taste of all its sweet fruits?' And Eve was swayed by the Serpent's words, and commenced to have discourse (supposition; most of this word is missing from the original scroll) with him.*

Much of the remainder of Chapter 2 is a depiction of the Serpent's coupling with Eve, written in a style reminiscent of the *Song of Solomon*. Following that, beginning in Tribulations 3:1, is the depiction of man's Fall from grace and exile from the Garden. The bulk of this text is similar to the Genesis account, leading some scholars to surmise that the Tribulations narrative was built on the original Genesis manuscript. A few fringe scholars, mostly Kindred members of the Lancea Sanctum, posit that Tribulations is the basis for Genesis, but this is usually seen as a crass attempt to add extra validity to the story. Scholars point to dialectical differences between Tribulations and Genesis as indications that Tribulations is the later text.

The narrative again diverges from the Genesis story in Tribulations 3:28, which begins with the birth of Eve's firstborn child, and continues to describe the early life of the first humans in the lands outside the Garden. This text forms the bulk of the structure for the belief that vampires are descendants of Eve and the Serpent, and is often quoted verbatim or performed as a kind of "passion play" by cults of Kindred adhering to the philosophy. These plays are described in more detail below.

*And so it came to pass that Eve grew heavy with child, and her woe was great, for so the LORD had promised. In the fourth hour of the third night of her suffering, an Angel of the Lord came unto her, for pity had moved him. And the Angel said to her, 'The child which you bear is a thing of wickedness*



*and deceit (literally “the seed in your womb bears bitter fruit”). I shall take it from you and cast it into the wilderness, that thy husband will not know thy shame.’ And Eve said, ‘This shalt thou not do, for this child is of my belly, and I shall suffer no harm to come unto it.’ And the Angel replied, ‘If thy child is born, only woe shall it bring you, yea and all those whom thou lovest, for it has inherited the cunning wickedness (literally translated as “sharp fangs”) of its father and the inconstant wiles of its mother.’ But Eve would not heed the Angel’s council, and her heart was hardened to his mercy. Once more the Angel spoke, and his aspect was wrathful. ‘If you will not receive the mercy of the LORD, then thy child shall have His curse. As thy child shall be born in the hours of the night, so shall it dwell unto the ending of its days. It shall flee from the light of the sun, and be named Lîlû, for it shall hunt in the dark places and dwell in the empty wilderness beyond the cities (literally “encampments”) of men.’ And the Angel departed from her, and Eve wept and cursed her folly.*

At this point in the narrative, there is a significant gap in the manuscript where a large portion of the original scroll was destroyed. Debate over whether the missing portion was lost to the inevitable decay of years or deliberately excised at some point in the past has never been settled. Over the centuries, many scholars have attempted to fill in the missing section based on references from later portions of the text, but no one version has emerged as the accepted story.

What is generally agreed upon is that Eve gave birth to Lîlû in great pain and suffering, but survived the birth. The child, whose gender is not agreed upon, was frightfully intelligent from birth, and, like its father, given to malicious tendencies. Later references in the text refer to the child “sowing grief among the sons of men,” which has been interpreted as everything from instigating the first fratricide to culling the numbers of Adam’s descendants. Presumably, the creature was driven into the wilderness by the early descendants of Adam, because when the story resumes, it is with the tale of Adam’s grandson, Enoch, making preparations to go forth and hunt down the creature.

*Now Enoch was a righteous man, and he went to the slopes of Mount Harmon to make prayers and offerings unto God. And as the smoke rose to Heaven, Enoch cried out “Look here, O Lord! The child of the night-demons (this translation is heavily debated, as Lîlû is never again referred to as child of the night-demons) brings sickness and blight (sometimes blood-illness or, rarely, blood-slavery) upon thy people, and the children of Israel are brought low by its wickedness. Give unto me a sword of righteousness, that the children of Adam might be delivered from this evil.’ And the LORD saw Enoch’s offering and was much pleased by it,*

*and He sent his Angel to visit Enoch. And the Angel came unto Enoch in a form like unto the blazing of the sun, and said, ‘Take thou Enoch this sword of righteousness and go forth into the wilderness. Thou shalt follow the carrion-birds (literally “death-eaters”) for thy road, and the blood of thy kinsmen shall be thy road. Thou shalt meet the beast in its lair beside the river Gihon, where bones lie bleaching in the sun. The Serpent’s seed has grown strong and fat on the blood of thy family, but thou shalt come upon it in the noontide and pierce its heart with thy sword, and the torments of thy people shall be at an end.’ And Enoch went into the desert with his retainers, and found the lair of the beast, by the river Gihon where the bones lay bleaching in the sun. And he came upon the beast in the noontide, and he pierced its heart with the sword of righteousness, and the Lîlû was slain. And Enoch sealed the mouth of the cave, and anointed it with sacred oils, and the tribulations of the sons of Adam were at an end.*

### *Forked Tongues*

Since the book’s discovery, the Book of Tribulations has been the topic of heated debate, especially amongst Kindred religious scholars. The many translations and re-translations, coupled with the large section of excised text, has led to no small number of variations of the story cropping up among different sects. Some are minor, contextual variations, while others almost completely rewrite the story from the ground up. Some are sprung from simple disagreements over the translation; others are deliberate alterations to suit some dogmatic purpose. Scholars who study the Book of Tribulations have named and catalogued dozens of these variations. Three of the most common are described below.

### *Daughter of Eve*

The Circle of the Crone has a version of this story, one passed down from one Hierophant to the next in a few domains scattered around the Middle East and parts of southern Europe. In this version, “Lîlû,” a masculine name, is replaced with “Lilit,” or more popularly “Lilith,” and the child is always referred to as the daughter of Eve. In some domains, the Serpent is made out to be a foreign god, interloping on Jehovah’s creation to cause mischief, but in other variations the Serpent’s identity is left just as ambiguous as it is in Genesis. Elements of Eve’s dialogue with the Angel (who in this version is usually identified as Michael, the warrior archangel) are also changed, rendering the tale as a metaphor for unwanted pregnancy and the folly of squandering the generative power of motherhood. The “Daughter Variation” also describes in more detail the infant’s early life, before Enoch set out to slay her. When Lilith is first set to suckle at her mother’s breast, the child draws blood instead of milk and promises that



she will nourish herself on the lifeblood of Eve's children for "all the days of the earth." The Daughter Variation ends in much the same place as the original manuscript, but strongly implies that Lilith was not slain by Enoch, merely driven into torpor for a time. The Daughter Variation never comes out and directly states that the Lilith of this story is the Crone, but that is a fairly common belief among adherents of this myth.

The Circle of the Crone is, in general, an eclectic covenant that syncretizes a wide variety of religious beliefs, and, consequently, in many domains the Daughter Variation is accepted alongside worship of Isis, Istar or the Morrigan. Particularly hard-line Acolytes sometimes disapprove of the Daughter Variation, both for its obvious close ties to the Judeo-Christian mythos and for its removal of Lilith as Adam's first wife and the archetypal symbol of the sacred feminine rebelling against the patriarchal nature of society. Never mind the fact that "Lilith-as-wife-of-Adam" was wholly an invention of medieval Jewish mystics; some Acolytes are so focused on the veneration of the feminine principle of Lilith that they violently attack any mythology that casts her in another role.

### *The First Vampire*

Less accepted than the Daughter Variation is the so-called Progenitor Cycle. This variant, held sacred by a few dozen fanatical cults scattered across the Middle East, Europe and North America (where cults of the Progenitor have been rapidly gaining strength) translates many ambiguous passages in the Book of Tribulations as definitive proof that Lîlû was actually the first vampire, sprung full-formed from Eve's womb. In the Progenitor Cycle, Lîlû explicitly drinks the blood of his younger siblings and displays many of the mystical powers possessed by modern Kindred. When the Angel (who in this version is identified as Uriel, the angel of the sun) comes to Eve during her labor, he tells her not that the child will fear the sun and flee from it, but that the sun "shall be a bane



unto it, and shall sear its flesh that it dare not go about in the daylight." Uriel also delivers a prophecy, which has come to be known as the Prophecy of the Seventh Generation, which foretells that Lîlû's childer (curiously, that is the word used in the prophecy, possibly hinting at a fairly modern invention) will not be banished to the wilderness, but will move among the children of Adam "as vipers in the fold," wreaking havoc and sowing discord in the cities of men. Uriel also prophesies that Lîlû will create offspring, "bearing childer though he hath no wife." During the tales of Lîlû's actions between the time of his birth and his death, of course, the first vampire does just that, Embracing "three and 20 of Adam's sons and grandsons."

Perhaps the most significant, and startling, deviation in the Progenitor Cycle comes at the end of the tale. Adam's third son, Seth (not his grandson Enoch), prays to God for the strength to deliver his people. When the Angel comes to arm Seth for his task, the Angel brings not the "sword of righteousness" but a limb from the Tree of Knowledge, shorn of branches and sharpened like a spear. When Seth finds Lîlû's haven, Adam's son pierces the vampire's heart with the stake, then drags

the torpid carcass into the sun, where the corpse burns to ash. The first vampire is destroyed, but the story's coda is always that Lîlû's childer escaped destruction and fulfilled the Angel's prophecy. To illustrate this point, the Progenitor Cycle appends a genealogy of the first vampire, tracing his descendants down through 15 generations. Some adherents of the Progenitor Cycle believe that this genealogy contains the founders of the five clans, but nothing in the traditional text of the genealogies suggests that this is the case.

The Progenitor Cycle is fiercely suppressed by the Kindred power structure wherever the Progenitor cults arise; it is, after all, a Masquerade breach on nearly every imaginable level. The fact that Progenitor cults have a tendency to hearken to a fire-and-



brimstone style of preaching that makes the Lancea Sanctum seem like a pleasant Sunday sermon and a reputation for performing gruesome, bloody passion plays that often end with the death of several participants, mortal and Kindred alike, also factors into the cults' oppression. In one of the most notorious (and almost always reported second- or third-hand), Progenitor cults allegedly re-enact the birth of Lîlû by cutting open a female adherent's stomach and placing a ghouled animal inside the wound. Traditionally, the animal is a snake or other large reptile, but some sects are reported to use other small carnivores. While the ghoul claws its way free, the other members of the cult act out the roles of the Angel and Adam. If the "mother" survives the ritual, she is accorded considerable status in the cult.

### *The Messianic Spear*

In most Sanctified domains, those preaching from Tribulations are hunted down and dealt with harshly. In response, a rare and unusual variation of the Book of Tribulations has cropped up in some North American domains. The Kindred who preach it are called the Messianic Spear, and consider themselves to be a creed of the Lancea Sanctum (whether or not the local Bishop agrees is another matter entirely). The core of the Messianic Spear movement is their holy text, which is a variant translation of the Book of Tribulations to a slightly altered and expanded *Testament of Longinus*. The Messianic Spear translation draws parallels between its texts and the Old and New Testaments. Here, the Angel (identified as Gabriel, the Angel of the Annunciation) tells Eve that her child, and all its descendants, would be damned because of her sin, but that one day there would come a Messiah, "born of blood but not the child's," to whom would be revealed God's plan for the Kindred. The prophecy makes reference to a blind man made to see, and who pierces the heart of the church. This is Longinus.

### *The Truth in the Dragon's Eye*

The story of the Book of Tribulations is regarded as little more than a historical curiosity by most mortal religious scholars who know of it. For the Damned, at least those who believe the work, the story of Lîlû speaks powerfully to themes of damnation and corruption, of free will and the nature of the Embrace. Much as every vampire living tonight (with the possible exception of Dracula and Longinus), Lîlû was brought into the world as a creature damned by the actions of another. In Lîlû's case, Eve's rebuking of the Angel's attempt at mercy represents the way in which many vampires view their own sires — as prideful, arrogant parental figures inflicting the Embrace on innocent childer out of a twisted sense of love or a desire for possession. The first vampire is damned for its parentage before it is ever born, long before it has the chance to choose whether to be good or

evil. In the same way, Kindred assure themselves that their damnation isn't really their fault. Some cling to this fact like a life raft in their struggle to retain their Humanity, but just as many use it as their justification for committing the most depraved, monstrous acts imaginable. After all, if you're already Damned, what's the use in playing nice with others and trying to be a good person? If you're going to fry, you might as well enjoy yourself on the way down.

The story also resonates strongly with the sensual, seductive nature of the Kindred, and of **Vampire** itself. Eve is seduced by the Serpent, not only sexually but also into sinning against the commandment of God. The Serpent is a subtle, cunning hunter, who makes his prey come to him and entrances it with his hypnotic gaze, leaving it helpless before his fangs. Although the Serpent's role in Tribulations is small, in many ways he represents the modern face of the Kindred or, as some scholars suggest, the intelligence and charm of the Man, which allows the vampire's hunts to be more than a blood-soaked chase.

If the Serpent represents the Man, then Lîlû certainly represents the Beast, or, more specifically, the Beast's slow but inevitable erosion of the Man. Though born with considerable intelligence (in many versions of the story, the child speaks to its mother moments after being born), Lîlû is portrayed later in the text as a savage monster, living in a cave in the wilderness surrounded by the bones of its prey. As a child, Lîlû has the silver tongue of its father; in many versions of the story, the first vampire spends its early life tricking the children of Adam and Eve into committing all manner of wickedness. Exactly what happened between the child's birth and ultimate destruction is a mystery, but clearly Lîlû was unable to maintain a façade of humanity in the face of its overwhelming bloodlust. Even as Lîlû offers a kind of hope that the modern vampire might not deserve her damnation, its story also holds up a grim reminder of the fate that awaits the Kindred who loses her self-control.

Finally, and perhaps not least significantly, the story of Lîlû in many ways parallels the Gospels' description of the life of Christ. Both were born of a human mother (but not a human father), an angel announced both births and both display extraordinary intelligence and insight as children. Jesus famously debated scripture with the rabbis at the temple as a mere boy, and Lîlû showed its father's cunning as it tricked its half-siblings into sin and wickedness. A large portion of the lives of both figures is never described, leaving many questions unanswered, and, finally, both were killed by men who believed they spoke (or *were*) blasphemies. And, in each story, there is considerable doubt as to whether the central character is actually dead. Christians, of course, believe that Christ was resurrected three days after his death and ministered to his disciples for a time before returning bodily to Heaven, while any Kindred who

reads the Book of Tribulations will realize that, if Lîlû were a vampire, it's possible that Enoch (or Seth) only drove it into torpor and sealed it in a tomb, somewhere in the vast deserts of the Middle East. Even for Kindred who don't make an actual theological connection the story follows a powerful archetype that resonates through myth and culture.

## Storytelling

**Vampire: The Requiem** has no shortage of Biblical themes, and bringing in an origin story such as Sons of the Serpent provides ample opportunity to explore them. The story of the Book of Tribulations is rife with sex, vengeance and damnation, all of which are classic themes for vampire stories. Don't beat your players over the head with it, but subtly working motifs from the story into your chronicles can draw the players deeper into the story. Perhaps a character has been neglecting or mistreating the extended family that is his herd, and one of the younger sons decides to do something about it. Framed alongside the conclusion of the Book of Tribulations (perhaps the coterie has been recruited by the local Bishop to eliminate a cult preaching the tale of Lîlû, or the characters have recently translated a heretofore-unknown text of the tale), the parallel becomes obvious.

When building a chronicle that uses the Book of Tribulations as the origin of vampires, or even when introducing the story for the first time into an extant chronicle, consider the type of game you plan to run, and the sort of impact you want the origin story to have on it. The simple truth is, even if the finger of God inscribed the One True History of the Kindred on the night sky in letters of fire, the majority of Kindred will not care. The nightly struggle of a Kindred's Requiem leads to more pressing concerns than ancient history — knowing that vampires are descended from the firstborn son of Eve and the Serpent isn't going to find her a vessel from whom to feed, or stall the machinations of that Nosferatu bastard scheming to undermine her hold on her domain.

None of that is to say that the Book of Tribulations is irrelevant, of course. As a political tool, a rallying point or a source of conspiracy and mystery, Tribulations can be a central part of your chronicle. Throughout human history, religion in general and the origin of the species in particular have been hotly divisive topics (one need only look at the infamous Scopes Monkey trial for an example), and it is no different among the Kindred.

Religion has always been a powerful political tool. Religion has been used as an excuse to launch crusades, destroy rivals and disband organizations that posed a threat. For a politically-inclined Kindred, religion is just one instrument in his proverbial symphony, but, when carefully leveraged, religion can be one of the most potent. Consider the case of a young Mekhet member of the Invictus, dissatisfied with

his low place in the hierarchy. The Prince of the city, a staunch ally of the Circle of the Crone, is known for his brutal oppression of any Kindred who professes the faith of Longinus, whether a formal member of the Lancea Sanctum or not. Our charismatic young firebrand learns of the Book of Tribulations from a coterie of nomads that passes through town, and manages to acquire a copy of the text from an antiquities dealer. Careful doctoring of the translation yields a morality tale decrying the Prince's association with "those who know not God." In any domain, there is no shortage of disgruntled neonates looking to better their place, and the Prince's religious practices have ensured that there is a seething base of Longinian faithful who could easily be swayed toward revolution. The chronicle might center around a group that falls under the Mekhet's sway, working to overthrow the Prince, or the players might portray the Prince's agents trying to break up the Mekhet's revolution before it starts.

Any oppressed minority or group of malcontents needs a symbol to rally around. Sometimes, it's an event, such as the Boston Tea Party or Bloody Sunday. Sometimes, the symbol is an individual, such as John F. Kennedy or Joan of Arc. Often, the most effective symbol for a group to rally around is religious, or a doctrine that the mainstream considers heretical. A charismatic leader can use religious symbolism, scripture and the lure of secret knowledge to forge a common rabble into a frighteningly cohesive cult. For example, suppose that the Sanctified in your game's domain are on the outs, and the Bishop is looking to gain some footing in the local power structure. The Prince, who is not Sanctified, naturally wants to prevent that from happening. When an itinerant Unbound preacher comes to town, preaching the Book of Tribulations, the Prince seizes the opportunity and throws her support behind the preacher, even going so far as to appoint him as spiritual leader of the city's Kindred. When the Sanctified naturally condemn the blasphemy, the Prince delivers a stirring speech in Elysium, decrying the Lancea Sanctum for shamelessly attacking a true prophet in a blatant power grab. With enough of the Kindred population swayed by the preacher's sermons, the Prince is able to make a preemptive strike against the Sanctified and put an end to their ambition.

Of course, as useful as religion is as a political tool, religion can also be used to create a sense of mystery and secret conspiracy. As long as there is an established religious authority that fears losing its power, there will be those who wish to keep competing religious doctrines hidden and oppressed. Vampires, perhaps more so even than humans, fear losing power and will go to any length to keep it. Suppose the coterie is a group of Kindred archaeologists and occult scholars, who discover an ancient copy of the Book of Tribulations in the tomb of a torpid elder. They bring the text to the Ordo Dracul for help translating the text, but the Dragons fear this revelation of vampiric origins might drive Kindred away



from the rational theories of the Ordo Dracul and drive the Kindred back into the arms of foolish superstition. The Kogaion promises his aid, but quietly arranges to have the coterie murdered and the text destroyed.



### A BRIEF NOTE ON THE SANCTIFIED

When a story hook that links vampires to the Bible comes up, many players instantly assume that the Lancea Sanctum are involved. After all, that's what the Sanctified are all about, right? Although certainly plenty of stories can be told about the Lancea Sanctum and the Book of Tribulations, don't limit yourself to the obvious. The Lancea Sanctum is not a catch-all for any theory that links vampires with Judeo-Christian theology. In the specific case of the Book of Tribulations, the Sanctified actually consider the theory to be blasphemous. The core of Sanctified doctrine, after all, is that vampires were specifically created by God to be humankind's scourge, to be the creatures in the night that punish humans for their transgressions and herd them back into the arms of God for fear of the things beyond the glow of the torchlight. A story that depicts vampires as the bastard offspring of Eve and the Serpent, with God nowhere to be found, obviously sits poorly with the Lancea Sanctum.

Of course, that's not to say that *all* Sanctified decry the story of Eve and the Serpent. The Messianic Spear cult, described previously, is one example of a group that reconciles the teachings of Longinus and the story of Lilû. In other domains, the Sanctified might accept the myth of Eve and the Serpent and claim that Longinus was God's attempt to turn the descendants of the Serpent to a higher purpose in their damnation.



### Game Mechanics

The origin presented in the Book of Tribulations suggests a variety of game rule ramifications. As descendants of the Serpent, Kindred might be more hypnotically seductive, be harder to immobilize with a stake (or more susceptible to a certain kind of stake) or display a stronger affinity with serpents, whether actual snakes or the mythological Serpent.

#### *Serpentine Seduction*

The Serpent was the most seductive, cunning beast in God's garden, and the Serpent's descendants inherit that talent. Even the most depraved, vile beast exhibits a cold, hypnotic allure, such as a cobra swaying before the strike. When rolling a Persuasion dice pool for purposes of seducing a mortal, the vampire is not limited to a dice pool equal to her Humanity. Nevertheless, while the subject of the vampire's seduction attempt might be taken in, anyone observing a vampire with a Humanity of five or less attempting seduction will notice an extremely unsettling intensity to the Kindred's act, something akin to a

sexual predator on the prowl. Naturally, this rule only applies to insincere seduction and manipulation; if the Kindred attempts to express true feelings of love or desire to a mortal, her dice pools are capped by her Humanity per the standard rules.

#### *Branches of the Tree*

The Tree of Knowledge has been portrayed as an apple tree in religious art for centuries (the tradition originated as a pun on the Latin word for apple, *malus*, and the word for bad or wicked, *malum*). The Book of Enoch describes the tree as a tamarind tree, and religious scholars have claimed that it was most likely a fig tree. Whichever explanation you choose, this variant rule theorizes that vampires are especially vulnerable to stakes made from the wood of the Tree of Knowledge. This rule works particularly well with the Progenitor Cycle variation, described above.

If you want to make staking less of a threat, or something rare and significant when it occurs, then vampires are only paralyzed by a stake through the heart if the stake is made of the appropriate type of wood. Stakes made of any other kind of wood damage the Kindred normally, but do not automatically drive the vampire into torpor. Alternately, if you want to make staking *more* dangerous, then vampires are driven into torpor by staking as normal, but successfully staking a vampire (–3 penalty to the attack roll, exceptional success required) with a stake made from the same type of wood as the Tree of Knowledge destroys the vampire instantly. The purity of the holy tree burns the vampire's body to ash and dust in a matter of seconds. In order to keep a sense of mystery and power, this fact should be a closely-guarded secret by the few Kindred who know about it. Particularly perverse Storytellers might even present the players with a mortal witch-hunter adversary who knows about the special properties of the wood of the Tree of Knowledge, but has misunderstood and thinks that *only* that wood affects vampires. The players, whose characters likely have direct experience with stakes made of all manner of wood, will likely dismiss the belief as hearsay or false information until they find more direct evidence later.

#### *Serpent Kin*

If vampires are the descendants of the Serpent, it stands to reason that they would have a closer relationship with snakes and reptiles. Some options to illustrate this connection include the following:

- Vampires are immune to snake venom, even venom that dissolves tissue or breaks down blood cells.
- The initial forms available to a vampire who learns Protean •••• are asp and python instead of bat and wolf.
- As an innate property of the blood, a vampire may spend one Vitae to hypnotize and hold immobile anyone who meets the vampire's eyes. The vampire rolls



Resolve + Intimidation + Blood Potency, while the target rolls Composure + Blood Potency. If the vampire succeeds, the target is held immobile for one turn. If the Kindred is capable of spending multiple Vitae per turn, she may immobilize her target for multiple turns by spending more Vitae. She must maintain eye contact the entire time, or the effect ends immediately. This ability replaces the Kindred's ability to increase physical dice pools by spending Vitae.

- Snakes can be made into ghouls more easily than humans or other animals. Turning a snake into a ghoul does not require the expenditure of a Willpower point, and a ghoul snake only requires a minimum of one Vitae every two months.

"ONE THING I KNOW, IS THE FIRST VAMPIRE HAD TO HAVE FANGS. EVERYTHING ELSE IS OPEN TO DEBATE."

## *Embraced by Fear*

*This is not the first time I've encountered Kindred claiming to have been "born of fear." Indeed, I have heard Nosferatu in several different countries profess to be "nightmares made flesh" or some such grandiose and poetic nonsense. This was the first time, however, I had seen anything resembling a coherent fable using this notion. During my travels in the area, I asked a number of different Kindred, belonging to all of the popularly recognized clans and three different covenants (the Invictus and the Ordo Dracul do not exist in numbers in this region, though as I travel south I might encounter some members of both of those groups) to recount the story in their own words. Details varied, and I have made note of the significant differences, but the basic storyline remained the same.*

What I found truly striking about this legend is that most, though not all, of the Kindred with whom I spoke believe it as literal truth. I found this attitude strange, even laughable, but I must concede that a large number of mortals the world over believe in creation myths just as or more fantastical, and they believe these things without ever witnessing anything "supernatural" firsthand. I am not professing belief in this story, by any means, but I think that it's interesting to note that even as immortals, we still search for meaning to our existences.

— Michel Gaulte, Scholar of the Carthian Movement

Where did the Kindred come from? They have their stories, of course, and their histories are perhaps more detailed than mortal recounts of times past simply because some of the undead experienced them. And yet, the Fog of Eternity makes tracing fact and patterns through the ages difficult (not to mention that only a tiny fraction of the mortal population receives the Embrace, meaning that the number of people who received the dubious gift of undead in past centuries was commensurately lower than in modern nights). Many of the oldest stories take on the air of mythology rather than history, and the story of "the Fear Embrace" is no different. Still, this belief has a number of adherents

worldwide, probably because this story dovetails nicely with the creation myths of many different religions. It isn't uncommon to find members of both the Lancea Sanctum and the Circle of the Crone telling similar versions of this tale, and even in the secular covenants, many Kindred cleave to their own personal spirituality.

The myth in its most common form is recounted below, told in prose but pieced together by interviews and observations conducted by Michel Gaulte during his travels.

## *Selfish Fears*

People have always been afraid. Fear keeps us strong and alert. A person who isn't afraid of anything is a person not long for this world. A man in ages past needed to fear starvation, thirst, the elements and predators. And that's what kept a man going and led him to look after his family and his neighbors — the fear that something would rise up and kill them all, the fear that they would die of hunger before the snowmelt.

Who knows when the first man — or woman, we can't be sure — started fearing something selfish? Was this first person a woman who realized she was beautiful and feared to lose that beauty, or a man who knew he was strong and was terrified to show weakness? These fears probably started growing the moment that towns sprung up and people worked together enough that they had time for leisure. When people are idle, selfishness creeps in.

No matter how it happened, people started feeling afraid not of simply things that threatened their lives or their loved ones, but of the inevitable. People saw what they thought of as weakness in others, and were terrified that they might exhibit the same kind of failing. They saw their families and friends grow old and die, and were frightened by the notion that they had to share that fate someday. They committed wrongs against their fellow man, but felt that they shouldn't have to answer for their actions and feared discovery and justice. They felt afraid that they might be perceived as less than they were — that others might see them as the fearful saw themselves.

## *The First Kindred Rises*

Death comes to everyone, no matter how great their fear. Sometimes, though, fear can be great enough to keep the body moving after death. The natural terrors of life cannot do this, for they are, at heart, the fear of death, and this fear holds no strength for those who have already passed on. But the petty fears that should not matter to the living, let alone the dead, can wriggle their way into the hearts of the deceased. These fears are not as powerful as love or faith, but they are insidious and agile. These fears can bring a mortal back from the dead. The "life" to which he returns, though, is one we all know well — a half life, an *unlife*.

The first Kindred to rise, long ago before the continents were named, was a warrior in life. He was not a



hunter, and he was not a lawmaker. He followed the orders given to him by his chief, and killed other mortals during the course of those orders. He had no family, though, because he feared what would happen if his enemies learned of them. That fear was so great that he shied from all contact, never making friends, even with his fellows. He died alone of a wound sustained as he fought just over a hill from his comrades. He was too afraid of their scorn to cry out for help, even as the blades slid into his heart.

But he rose that night. He was too afraid of what the living might say about him to lie still. He rose up, pulled the broken bits of metal from his flesh and looked for the men who had killed him. He found his fellow soldiers instead, and, too afraid to tell them what had happened, he fell upon them and killed them, drinking their blood and eating their flesh. This was the first vampire, a betrayer and a warrior, a man whom no one would call a coward and yet who was ruled by fear. With their blood on his teeth and coursing through his veins, he found power. He was stronger than ever before, able to tear flesh apart like rotted wood. He consumed their spirits and found that others saw the faces of his victims rather than his. When he showed his true visage, though, people ran screaming or fell dead from fright. The soldier had become fear-made-flesh, the first Nosferatu.

“FEAR’S A SICKNESS. YOU CATCH IT. YOU SPREAD IT.  
YOU NEVER REALLY GET BETTER.”

### *More Vampires*

The soldier was only the first. Perhaps, in a way, his death and rise into undeath opened a floodgate allowing for this kind of perversion of nature to continue. Certainly his fear was much more multi-faceted and complex than the vampires who would follow him. But if he was a progenitor of the Kindred race, he could only claim the title in a symbolic sense. The mortals consumed by their own selfish fears who then came to damnation never knew or saw him. They, as he did, chose their state.

### *The Corpse Afraid to Rot*

She was beautiful, and her beauty was her greatest flaw. During her life, she was terrified that she would be forced to mar her stunning figure by carrying a child or by working. She took as a husband an influential but sickly man, and murdered him scarcely a month after they were wed. She claimed that the death of her love left her brokenhearted, unable to ever take another man into her bed, but all of this was a carefully constructed lie to keep her body untouched and unblemished.

She kept her beauty even into old age. An elderly spinster, she lived in terror of the worms and many-legged creatures of the earth feasting upon her rotting corpse, destroying her perfect face and matchless body as it decayed underground. She died one quiet night, but rose



up before the sun crested the horizon, overjoyed that she had conquered death with her beauty intact.

Now dead, she finally began accepting lovers, and her wanton debauchery became legendary in short order. After a lifetime of cowardly denial, no carnal or glutinous impulse was beneath her when she had nothing to fear from such behavior. She buried her face in her lovers' flesh, tearing off hunks of muscle with strength born of pure lust. She flew from house to house with the speed of the wind, always ready for the next sensation. And, of course, all who saw her bowed down before her beauty. This woman was the first of the Daeva.



### MODERN HISTORY

*Young Kindred of an academic bent sometimes research famous "historical" vampires such as Vlad Tepes and Peter Kurten. Of course, the "Bloody Countess" Elizabeth Bathory is a popular choice. Such scholars point out the similarities between Bathory and the so-called Corpse Afraid to Rot, the mythological first Daeva of the "Fear Embrace" legend. Bathory, after all, murdered or arranged the murders of hundreds of young women in order to bathe in their blood and stay young. Similar to the Corpse Afraid to Rot, Bathory shunned the company of men while alive (though sources point to this being simply a case of sexual orientation rather than a pathological fear of pregnancy).*

*I do not believe in the Fear Embrace, myself, but I do think that the root of at least one part of the legend might rest in the historical accounts of Countess Bathory. If this is true, if the Fear Embrace developed in Eastern Europe during the 15th century, then what historical analogs might we find for the other four Kindred mentioned in the Fear Embrace legend?*

— Michel Gaulte



### *The Will Afraid to Rest*

He was a priest, an interpreter of Divine law and the will of the Creator for all of the people of his nation. His words moved kings, governors and generals to action or gave them pause when they were hasty. He seldom slept, for matters of state kept him awake, and he was forever finding solutions to problems that hadn't even arisen yet. The people of his nation wondered how they had ever gotten along without him.

Over time, unfortunately, he began wondering the same thing. How *could* the nation survive without him? Before him, there had been chaos and uncertainty, but he had brought order. It wasn't a constant state, though. If he were to fall from power, if he were even to lapse in attention, the chaos would return and all of his grand works would crumble. The notion terrified him, not only because he feared randomness and disruption of routine.

Above all, he felt that everything in the nation, from the cycles of the seasons to the machinations of the leaders, was his responsibility. Only he could make sense of the signs that the Heavens sent, and only he could give the people guidance.

He was so afraid of what would happen if he stopped working that he fell ill. Even as a fever consumed his mind, causing him to rant and rave like a madman, he never lost the fear of unpredictability. He saw the world as a raging flood, held back only by his constant effort. When he died, he hardly noticed — he rose up because he felt he could not afford to rest.

The madness didn't leave him upon death, however. His selfish fear was that of a leader and minister, the belief that he and only he could govern successfully. In short order, that belief changed into a deep-seated feeling that he was entitled to sacrifice from his subjects. He commanded them, and they obeyed. His voice swayed even the beasts of the field, and his flesh was so sacrosanct that no blade would bite it. He took his tribute in blood and service, this Will Afraid of Rest, the first Ventrue.

### *The Heart Afraid to Bleed*

He was a farmer and a herder. He took a wife and sired many, many children, but he barely knew their names. This was not cruelty or callousness on his part, as he saw, but he watched as his friends, neighbors and family died off from decades of backbreaking labor. He saw what happened when loved ones died, and he wished for no part of it. Instead, he looked to his animals in their pens and to the wild creatures that prowled the edges of his farms, and admired their cold, practical, unforgiving lives.

He grew more distant as the years moved on. His sons worked the farm as he grew older and too bent and frail from years to take on the labor he once had. His mind, too, didn't suffer the ravages of time well, and he found he couldn't tell one child — or grandchild, or niece or nephew — from another. When his son, or perhaps his grandson, informed him that his wife had died, he could only stare blankly, too terrified to show that he was hurt, feelings buried by years of fear.

The farmer wandered confused, stumbling through his fields, until he finally fell dead. But that night, when the scavengers came to feast on his corpse, he stood, too afraid to let even the beasts of the wild see his heart. He fed upon them, instead, and then returned to his farmhouse and his wife's wake. He recognized none of the people there, and so had no compunctions at all about consuming their blood. Weapons could not bite his cold, unfeeling flesh, and when the villagers brought fire, the man fled into the wilderness. There he learned to converse with the mean creatures, and over time even took their shape. In this, he should have finally been satisfied, for animals do not feel the pain of the heart that he had so long feared, but they still felt pain, and this he



couldn't abide. Finally he learned to become mist, unafraid and unfeeling. This was the first Gangrel.

### *The Soul Afraid of Judgment*

It was many, many years before the fifth vampire arose. Rather, many years passed before anyone became aware of her. She was, in life, terrified of sin, regarding every stray thought, every pang of hunger or desire as a transgression against her husband, her priest, her parents or her Creator. She wasn't afraid of disappointing others so much as allowing them to discover her supposed crimes, because then they would have the right to sit in judgment over her. She, after all, had no concept of forgiveness — anyone who wronged her was punished. Their homes burned, their livestock were poisoned and, sometimes, she would creep into their houses at night and cut their flesh as they slept. It is said that she was so adept with a blade that she could bleed a strong man to death without waking him.

But every time she took revenge, her spiral of guilt grew a little deeper. She felt she was right to take action, but that the actions she took damned her further. Finally, one dark night, she sat covered in blood and opened her own wrists with her knife.

As she sat bleeding, she realized that she would have to stand and be judged in the hereafter, and she started to run. Her heart stopped, the last of the blood left her veins, but she saw the sun in the eastern sky and willed her body to keep running. Swift though she was, she knew she couldn't outrun the sun forever, but she was practiced at hiding as well. No one saw her as she hunted the night, forever evading justice. She was ever watchful, however, her keen and incisive mind showing her what others were thinking and feeling, enabling her to pick the best victims from the human herds. She was the first of the Mekhet.

### *The Embrace*

*Lest we suppose that any simpleton with a passing anxiety about something selfish spontaneously became a vampire, reflect on that these five people — and only these five people — rose to undeath during a period of decades or even centuries. And yet, in modern nights the Kindred are legion. How did these five early vampires pass on their curse?*

*The Embrace doesn't seem to have changed much. In this legend, these early Kindred still drained their intended childer of blood and gave them a draught of the Kindred's own Vitae. The Embrace only functioned, though, on mortals who shared the vampire's brand of terror. This has some interesting implications for the propagation of the Kindred race, as we will see anon.*

— Michel Gaulte

The Soul Afraid of Judgment was the first to pass the curse along. She found a murderer hiding in the mountains one night as she fled a village in which she'd left nearly a score of corpses. She listened to his tale of woe. He had killed, yes, but had only killed in order to protect his family. Now the family of his victim was hunting him

down, and was so tenacious that he had run for years with no rest. He feared, above all else, being brought to heel for his crime. The Soul Afraid of Judgment considered murder for any reason to be unforgivable (despite the many murders she herself had committed), but agreed that the man shouldn't be captured. She initially intended to kill him herself, but as his corpse lay before her, drained and pure white, her unliving heart was moved and a single crimson tear fell from her eye to his mouth. A moment later, he sat upright, and that morning they fled judgment together.

The other four vampires discovered that they could pass along their unliving state in similar fashions, but the only one who did so on purpose, the first time, at least, was the Will Afraid to Rest.

The first of the Ventrue had a stable of servants, mortals that he kept in thrall by the sheer force of his gaze. And yet one mortal woman resisted him. She, similar to him, was a spiritual leader, and, similar to him, was convinced that if she were to die or become distracted her people would forever lose their way. The Will Afraid to Rest saw this and attempted to bring her under his sway, but while she would follow his orders when they benefited her, she was far too afraid of the consequences to her people to submit. Threats against her life were effective, for a time, but soon she began plotting against the Ventrue, and he could not tolerate that. And so he forced her to drink his blood, hoping that by introducing some of his own spirit into her that he could rule her.

She struggled, but he was much stronger and finally her mouth opened to accept his blood. But no sooner had it touched her lips than she drew a blade and plunged it into her heart. She was afraid to die and leave her people leaderless, but even more afraid to surrender her will. And so she perished, and the Will Afraid to Rest roared in frustration.

For six nights, he stared at her corpse, willing it to rise up as he had. And on the sixth night, her eyes opened, and she stood next to him, his first childer.

### *The Story and Its Variants*

Gaulte spent more than a decade in the American South, particularly in Louisiana, interviewing Kindred on the subject of the Fear Embrace. Previously, he had researched the legend's presence among the Kindred of France, England and Canada (particularly Quebec). He found that although the story remained largely consistent, albeit with regional differences in storytelling technique and style, a few interesting variations arose.

#### *Christian Variant*

Some Kindred, often of the Lancea Sanctum but not exclusive to the covenant by any means, tell the story with a heavy Christian slant. In this version of the story, the first Kindred is not the Nosferatu (the embodiment

of selfish fear in a general sense), but the Soul Afraid of Judgment. Judas Iscariot is occasionally identified as the central character in this story, although this further contrasts with the more widely told version of the story in which the first Mekhet is female. Some Kindred know a version in which Mary Magdalene, having composed her own Gospel (which is, of course, rejected by the Apostles), becomes the Soul Afraid of Judgment, but most often she remains unnamed.

The Christian variant sometimes makes a point of identifying each of the first Kindred (and thus the clans) with one of the seven deadly sins. Typically, the Daeva are connected to Lust, the Ventrue to Pride, the Mekhet to Sloth (cowardice), the Nosferatu to Envy and the Gangrel to Wrath, although since none of the variants of selfish fear in the story neatly correspond to these well-known sins, the connections vary. Of course, the fact that there are only five clans of Kindred but seven deadly sins comes up in the story. Two explanations are common. The first is that two more clans were created, but that these Kindred were so heinous that God struck them down immediately. The second is that the last two clans have not arisen yet, but their appearance heralds some dire occurrence for the world's Kindred.

### *Clanless Variant*

A version of the story popular in the United States posits that the original five Kindred did not form the clans at all (occasionally, the clan names or versions of them are stated to be the given names of the vampires). These vampires' childer actually divided themselves based upon geography, capability, infirmity or even ideology, taking their sires' names for their new families. This variant is significant in that it grants the childer a great deal of responsibility for spreading the Kindred across the globe; in this variant, the original Kindred created only one or two vampires each, often by accident.

### *Bloodline Variant*

Gaulle found Kindred as far east as Russia who told this story, but with one major deviation — the five "original" Kindred were not the first of their kind, simply the first of their clans. This version posits that at any given time the world's population of vampires stems from five major families, but these families are consumed and replaced by offshoots every few centuries. This version of the tale places each of the five Fear Kindred dying either under the fangs or in the presence of an older vampire, vampires the Fear Kindred would later diablerize. After which, the Fear Kindred take control of the diablerized vampires' clans. Propagators of this version often end the story with a prediction about which bloodline's members will soon rise up to destroy their parent clan; though, since bloodlines tend to be localized, the bloodline mentioned might not even exist beyond the borders of the storyteller's city.

## *Analysis of the Fear Embrace*

As I stated earlier, I don't believe in the Fear Embrace. I, myself, have created two childer and neither of them was of the temperament described in the story of the Corpse Afraid to Rot (nor am I, for the record). The story, if true, would require that in order for the Embrace to work the intended childer would have to be an analog of these five original Kindred, selfishly fearing the inevitable. I'm sure that all of us can attest that this is not the case.

Furthermore, if we examine the implications of the legend, we find that the Nosferatu should be the most populous clan under the suppositions of the Fear Embrace. After all, the only requirement for Embrace into Clan Nosferatu is "selfish fear," of any type. The first Nosferatu (note that he is the only one of the original five Kindred not given a long-winded moniker) was a panophobic, afraid of almost everything. Surely so general a fear is much easier to find than the more rarefied neuroses of the other four Kindred.

But analysis of the data shows otherwise. I have conducted censuses of the Kindred on two continents in well over 100 cities, and I have not found a predomination of any clan. (The numbers actually lean slightly toward the Ventrue, but the margin of error is of necessity so wide that I can't in good conscience assert a majority.)

So a literal interpretation of the Fear Embrace is out. What, then, can this story teach us?

— Michel Gaulle

The Fear Embrace is a parable applicable to all Kindred because it speaks to the vampiric tendency of selfishness. The Kindred of the story were not "chosen" to rise into undeath because of their fear, and therein is the lie of the story. These people became vampires because they were arrogant, short-sighted, egocentric and generally narcissistic. Even the Soul Afraid of Judgment, who suffered from great self-loathing, was so consumed with herself and her own actions that she was prepared to die rather than submit to criticism by others. This is one of the fundamental riddles of Kindred existence — any good-hearted vampire should, by rights, greet the sun, because her continued existence serves only to cause death, misery and fear. And yet, the Kindred not only continue to hunt but also continue to make more of their own kind. Likewise, though not all vampires observe the Traditions, the creation of new vampires is seen as a grievous sin, but is *still practiced*.

Some Kindred note that mortals are quite capable of this sort of hypocrisy, carrying out the crimes that their religions and moral codes abhor on an almost daily basis. This underscores one of the central messages of the Fear Embrace story: people are selfish, but vampires are so selfish that not even death itself can change them.

### *Blood Embrace versus Fear Embrace*

Mr. Gaulle does not believe in the Fear Embrace, but there are many Kindred worldwide who know it to be true. One thing the legend does not point out, at least not as far as Mr.



Gaulle has seen fit to recount, is that change is possible, even for the Kindred. I, Embraced into Clan Gangrel, fit the description of the Heart Afraid to Bleed perfectly. Afraid of showing even the slightest bit of emotion, I was unable to relate to my fellow man even though my occupation as a minister required human contact. (I was, needless to say, terrible at my job.) When my sire came to me, drawn by the fear in my heart even if he couldn't consciously recognize it, God gave me a second chance to renounce this fear and "live" by faith instead.

The obvious question, though, and one that Gaulle raises, is why so many Kindred do not seem to adhere to the descriptions that their clans would indicate? This question has a simple answer: the world has decayed, morally and spiritually, to the point that throughout Western society, every mortal is infected with these fears to such a degree that any vampire can Embrace almost any mortal. Exceptions exist, of course — I personally met a Kindred of Clan Nosferatu who stalked, attacked and kidnapped a strapping young man with the intention to Embrace him. She found, however, that he was without fear. He had no wish to die, but was prepared for his own death. When the errant Haunt drained his blood and tried to force undeath upon him, he simply expired. It is my contention that a mortal who is centered, brave and true to his ideals (I would love to say "to the Christian ideal," but I must admit that many religions and even secular philosophies can impart the necessary courage) is impossible to Embrace. Likewise, even a person with the wrong kind of fear should find himself immune to Embrace by most Kindred. I, for instance, would not have been Embraced in Clan Mekhet. My fear was of showing weakness, but I met judgment with stoicism and courage.

— James Curtish, Sanctified theologian and Gangrel

As Curtish points out, for the Fear Embrace to be true, Kindred would either find it very difficult to create childer or the threshold for selfish fear required for the Embrace to "take" would have to be very low. Consider, though, that although the Kindred population remains extremely low in comparison to the mortal population, the number of Kindred has skyrocketed in recent decades. While this increase in vampiric numbers has followed a commensurate increase in the mortal population, proponents of the Fear Embrace point out that most Kindred go through a phase shortly after their sires release them into the Danse Macabre in which they feel powerless, out of control and, in a word, afraid. This is the natural time to create childer, since the vampire knows enough about the Requiem to do so but not enough to fully understand the ramifications. And yet, very few Kindred actually do create childer at this stage. Vampires who study and espouse the Fear Embrace assert that these Kindred *attempt* to create childer, but, without the instinctive knowledge of how to find an appropriate target, these Kindred only succeed in killing their would-be progeny.

Why, then, are such stories not widely repeated, and the Fear Embrace not commonly understood? Proponents of the theory feel that most of the Kindred who lose vessels in

an attempt to Embrace them don't report the failures out of guilt, shame or fear. The Kindred simply discard the bodies as they would the remains of any feeding gone awry, and perhaps broach the subject of the Embrace to their sires or mentors or coteries at a later date. Elders in the Kindred community don't always or even often understand the theory behind the Fear Embrace, if they have heard the story at all. (As mentioned, it is more prevalent in the southeastern United States, in France and in Eastern Europe than anywhere else.)

Another reason that the problems aren't reported, however, is that, as Curtish asserts, the vast majority of people in Western (especially American) society are selfish, lost and afraid, and so are already good candidates for the Embrace. Therefore, although careless Embraces shouldn't work often, they work often enough that failures can be explained away or ignored.

## Storytelling the Fear Embrace

The Fear Embrace probably has the greatest story potential in two arenas: choosing a childe or exploring a character's own psyche.

### Finding the Fearful

Suppose that the characters owe a powerful ancilla a favor. That ancilla wishes to Embrace, but believes that she can only Embrace a mortal consumed by the appropriate fear. The ancilla, however, isn't an expert on the Fear Embrace and doesn't have time to research it (or prefers to let the coterie do that legwork for her — maybe the characters are known as occult investigators, maybe she's just lazy). The characters, therefore, need to track down other vampires and learn the story of the Fear Embrace, and should probably discuss the theory behind it with a vampire of a scholarly bent (such as Michel Gaulle or James Curtish). Such discussions, incidentally, don't have to take place in a dusty sanctum or a quiet church. What if Gaulle is out in the bayous of Louisiana collecting stories from half-feral Kindred? He might be quite willing to help the characters, but he probably requires some kind of *quid pro quo*.

Once the characters understand what is required in the ancilla's potential childe, they need to find someone who fits the bill (in addition to any other requirements regarding gender, education, temperament and appearance that she might have). See Game Mechanics for ways to determine what a given mortal is afraid of and how it relates to the Fear Embrace.

### Confronting Fear

One of the central conflicts of **Vampire** is the struggle between the Man and the Beast. Every covenant has its own strategies for coping with the Beast, even in a very general sense. The Invictus espouses contact with mortals, the Lancea Sanctum and the Circle of the Crone both encourage spirituality (of very different sorts, of

course), the Carthian Movement asks its members to lose themselves in their own missions and the Ordo Dracul, of course, seeks to unravel the whole riddle of the Requiem. Key to all of these strategies, though, at some level, is an honest examination of what the vampire wants, what he hopes to accomplish and how he intends to go about it. That kind of self-analysis means coping with fear (which, lest we forget, is as much the province of the Beast as hunger and fury).

So what happens when a vampire discovers that her fear ultimately facilitated her own Embrace? The characters might learn about the Fear Embrace and initially scoff, but perhaps the vampire who tells them the story invites them to honestly appraise their lives and mindsets pre-Requiem. What might the characters find in their own memories (and are those memories reliable)? These questions might prompt them to search out their sires and find out exactly *why* they were chosen for the Embrace. The Storyteller might play this any number of ways, from having the sires give an answer that doesn't *seem* to support the Fear Embrace at all to saying that they just felt drawn to the characters for some reason to actually citing the legend of the Fear Embrace as a catalyst for the Embrace. In any case, the characters should be left considering whether their selfish fears were so great that the fears enabled them to become undead predators rather than passing on.

### Game Mechanics

If the Fear Embrace were true, what would that mean for the way vampires create more of their kind? Obviously, Kindred would be more restricted in their choices of childer, since a potential victim would need to be tainted with the appropriate kind of selfish fear (see sidebar).



#### JUST TO CLARIFY

The five clans and their corresponding fears:

- **Daeva:** Physical vanity, fear of aging, even the fear of losing one's mental faculties (to Alzheimer's, perhaps) might apply.
- **Gangrel:** Fear of seeming weak, showing emotion or being vulnerable.
- **Mekhet:** Fear of responsibility, being judged or just being noticed.
- **Nosferatu:** Fear in general. Any of the other fears mentioned here, plus anything that falls under the purview of "selfish fear."
- **Ventrue:** Social vanity, the fear that everything will collapse without one's direct influence. Egocentrism and egomania.

Note that many of these fears, taken on their own, are quite natural and understandable. What makes them fodder for the Fear Embrace is when they are applied selfishly, when a person would sacrifice others (literally or figuratively) or even herself rather than attempt to overcome them.



From a game mechanics standpoint, the only change brought about by the Fear Embrace is the necessity of making sure one's potential childer has the right taint to receive the Embrace. If the mortal does not this potential, he simply dies when the Embrace is attempted. Ascertaining this fear can be accomplished in a number of ways (see the following):

- **Psychoanalysis/Observation:** A Kindred might simply follow her intended childer, listening in on his conversations and even setting up situations that illuminate his anxieties. Since outside stimuli don't normally trigger these fears, though, deeper methods of discovery are necessary. The vampire needs to analyze the target's communication and behavior in order to be sure. This can be accomplished with an extended roll of Intelligence + Academics (if the vampire is reading mail, listening to conversation and generally just observing) or Manipulation + Empathy (if the vampire is actively engaging the target in conversation). Each roll requires one hour of conversation or research taking up one night. The player needs to accumulate a number of successes equal to the mortal's Resolve + Composure. Once this is accomplished, the vampire feels confident that the mortal either does or does not possess the right sort of fear to be eligible for the Fear Embrace. The player might suffer negative modifiers if the mortal lies in his conversation or otherwise resists giving up details about himself.

- **Auspex:** Auspex 2, Aura Perception, can detect the fear in a mortal's aura, but a vampire needs to be extremely perceptive to detect such nuances as "selfish fear" versus "sudden anxiety" or "long-standing phobia." In general, this requires an extended roll of Intelligence + Empathy + Auspex, modified as described on p. 121 of **Vampire: The Requiem**. The player needs a number of successes equal to the mortal's Resolve + Composure, and each roll requires studying the mortal for one scene (as such, Stealth rolls to avoid being noticed might also be appropriate).

Auspex 4, Telepathy, can be used to find out the desired information with much less effort, though the player's roll suffers a -2 modifier due to the subtlety of the information sought.

- **Instilling the Fear:** A vampire might choose her target first and decide to impart the necessary fear herself. Doing so in a mortal not otherwise inclined to selfishness, though, is extremely time consuming and difficult (plus, imparting fear also corrupts the mortal to a degree, which puts the vampire at risk for degeneration).

In order to nudge a mortal into feeling the right sort of fear to make him susceptible to the Fear Embrace, the Kindred must spend a great deal of time around the mortal. Placing the mortal under the Vinculum is actually a useful measure, since this obscene bond forces the mortal into a cycle of dependence and obsession that proves fertile ground for fear. In any event, the vampire's player engages in an extended Manipulation + Empathy roll, with every roll representing one month





(for a free mortal) or one week (for a mortal under the Vinculum). The player needs a number of successes equal to the mortal's Resolve + Composure. In order for the player to make the roll each week (or month), the vampire needs to spend at least 30 hours a week in the mortal's presence or actively arranging events to instill the proper fear.

How does the vampire go about instilling this sort of fear? Simple conversation and suggestion is a good start, but the vampire can also show the mortal how he will decay and degrade as he grows older (Daeva), how neglect or apathy on his part causes lives and events to fall apart (Ventrue), how showing emotion ultimately leaves him vulnerable (Gangrel) or how he is fundamentally flawed and guilty and will one night be called to task (Mekhet).

Once the requisite number of successes is achieved, the vampire is well-advised to Embrace the mortal before he can take any action that would allow him to regain his composure. Some mortals actively struggle against this treatment, allowing the target to oppose the vampire's efforts with a Resolve + Composure roll each month or week. If the mortal is bound under the Vinculum, apply a -2 to this rule.

Whether or not this endeavor is successful for the vampire, attempting it requires a degeneration roll (as for torture; roll 2 dice).

## *The Blood Gods*

*Fear not, for your lingering days on this earth are not in vain. We are monsters, but our hunger is not a curse, it is the mark of a chosen few. One day there will be a reckoning for those who enslave us with human virtue. One day we shall be free of these shackles and loose the gods that dwell in our blood!*

—Last sermon of Joseph Mourad, Former Bishop of Toronto

The past is often a mystery, even for those who make it their life work to uncover. Mortals toil and argue over the unknowable minutiae of history and often die in greater ignorance than they were born. How much more frustrating then is the murkiness of the past to the immortal vampire? To live countless lives but have no concrete anchor or origin to rely upon for guidance? Since the sanity-eating sleep of torpor makes all memories suspect, many vampires turn to faith to fill that ever-widening void. The Lancea Sanctum, the Circle of the Crone and even the Ordo Dracul all have played upon this emptiness to lure new recruits with the promise of answers.

Although many covenants over the centuries have placed an origin story at their core, few stories have survived a covenant's fall, and fewer still have become accepted by members of many different covenants. The tale of the blood gods is one such myth that refuses to die. One reason for the story's longevity is its emphasis on an unavoidable mystery of vampiric existence, the segregation of the bloodlines. The

supernatural vagaries of the blood that separate Gangrel from Ventrue and Nosferatu from Mekhet have long perplexed Kindred scholars and mystics. Although tribal clan loyalties have been superseded by the covenants, this was not always so.

According to the collection of texts known as the New Haven diaries, the worship of these blood gods was quite prevalent amongst vampire broods before the “peaceful” times of cosmopolitan Rome. The most common story associated with these archaic deities revolves around the creation of the original vampire bloodlines. Though sources differ over whether there were three, five or even seven initial clans, there seems to be some consensus about the three specific blood gods involved in their conception. Arranged in a loose and incestuous pantheon, the romanized names of many of them are still revered by a few Acolytes and ritually condemned by just as many Sanctified.

In the first cities, only the living worshiped the gods, for they had no time for the dead. There were many gods to choose from, but the three referred to as the blood gods are now called Aeshma, Athtar, and Turan. Whether these are their true names or the original pronunciations have been corrupted will probably never be known. In fact the Ventrue Acolyte and Orientalist scholar, Avey Rabe, has long disputed Athtar’s inclusion amongst the blood gods due to the names’ Yemeni etymology. Rabe’s objection notwithstanding, these are the blood gods as we now know them or as Barca’s red letters refer to them, “the Lasa.” Because the Lasa are rarely worshiped individually, many believe the Lasa’s hermaphroditic qualities or perhaps the gruesome peculiarities of the rituals used to glorify them have put them out of favor in the modern nights. Aeshma is commonly associated with the western direction and the red of the setting sun, Turan favors the cold winds of the north and the purple robes of a king and forever dying Athtar looks to the south and the rises from the black earth of the grave.

### *A Feast of Blood*

According to the legends, the Lasa were not always gods but spirits of hunger, love, freedom and the empty places of the world; these spirits were just weak capricious things that lusted for godhood. They were daring spirits, and often consorted with the gods, for the world was empty and provided no other distractions. It was during one such revel that the Lasa noticed the weakness of an aging god known as Ilmaku, the rainmaker. The greedy spirits immediately began to argue over their next course of action. Passionate Aeshma whispered murder (“we are many and could kill Ilmaku now”), cunning Turan spoke of seduction (“if he loved us, he would give us whatever we wished”) and smiling Athtar settled the matter, saying “I shall love Ilmaku and we shall take everything from him.”

Athtar was the most beautiful of the Lasa, combining the best parts of man, woman and beast. It did not take

long for Ilmaku of the thundershowers to become quickly enamored with the brash spirit. Athtar lured Ilmaku away from the other gods with half-spoken promises of lust and pleasure. And when they were alone, the Lasa struck. Smiling Athtar held down her betrayed lover while cunning Turan tore off his head, and, as ancient Ilmaku’s blood poured onto the earth, passionate Aeshma gave out a gleeful cry as her forked tongue lapped it up. The clever three bathed in the old one’s remains and drank and ate of the same. When they first claimed their godhood, they paid little heed to the mortal beasts and living men that were born of the gore the spirits left behind.

In time, the blood gods would expect worship from these mortal creatures born of their abominable act. Men and women of the first cities would spill the blood of animals as token repayment for being left the blood that flowed through their veins. Dark ichor would run from the statues when the Lasa were satisfied, and devoted priests would suckle the tarry stuff from stone orifices. From these human believers rose the many houses of the bloodless. Tasked by the Lasa to reclaim the lost blood of Ilmaku, the holy priests drank the blood of the living in eternal homage to the clever three. In festivals known as Lenaia, the Archons of the bloodless would preside over an orgiastic slaughter to appease the gods of blood for yet another year.

Although the names of these five priestly houses have been lost, they were indeed the first vampires and their hunger was but an echo of the appetite of their gods. Turan the lawgiver created the first house of the bloodless to insure the blood of the living would forever be spilled, feeding the hunger of the Lasa. All of the blood gods would found houses of their own and jointly the clever three would create a clan of kings to govern the rest. Each bloodline has claimed the title of first house at one time or another, but the truth of the matter will likely never be resolved. Are the Daeva the favored of Athtar as the Albi tablets claim, or do the Daeva owe their allegiance to the red altar of Aeshma?

But as is always the case with imperfect servants, the bloodless clans could not live up to the ceaseless demands of their unforgiving gods. The vampire priests grew lazy and prideful and thought the privileges of the Lasa were the priests’ own. Their numbers grew without care as they Embraced *en masse*, they terrorized mortal supplicants and freely drank the blood of living and unliving alike. The blood gods soon grew angry and chastised them, and Turan the lawgiver passed on to them the three curses. The first curse stole their faces, and forced the bloodless to hide themselves from the living. The second curse turned the Embrace into an ordeal, and each new vampire would diminish the sire. The third curse poisoned the blood of the undead and castigated those who would shirk their responsibility to gather the blood of the living.

Punished by the lawgiver, the vampires abdicated the golden thrones they had built instead of altars and sought



out the shadows for comfort. No longer the rulers of mortal men, the vampires accepted the three curses as their birthright and praised the wisdom of the Lasa for setting them back on the right path. Only those who feed in the name of the gods of blood can ever hope to find peace; for if their hunger is not satiated, it will consume the living and the dead alike.

### *All That Remains*

Worship of the Lasa was already fading by the time of the first Roman Emperors. The red letters of the Carthaginian Acolyte Barca speaks of the last gasps of Roman paganism. With competition from so many cults within cosmopolitan Rome, the popularity of the blood gods fell dramatically during the golden age of the Camarilla and was practically wiped out by the rise of the Lancea Sanctum. Even back then there was great disagreement over whether there were seven original vampire clans or five. Some Kindred even argued that a few of the bloodlines were but derivatives of the originals, not popular talk amongst the political correct senators of the Camarilla. Although the Traditions or "curses" remain almost unchanged, few attribute their supernatural hold on the Kindred to the edicts of the Lasa. Roses and myrrh no longer fill the halls of power among the dead, and the few who still pray to the gods of blood do so in secret.

According to Barca, the ancient ceremonies were conducted in a "Lasina" and included "burning incense, and offering burnt sacrifices, occasionally consisting of human victims." The officiating priests danced around the altars, chanting frantically and cutting themselves with knives to inspire the attention and compassion of the Lasa. The ceilings were painted as the starry sky, and, at the sides, benches were placed for the ritual feasts. In the center of the Lasina was a niche that held a relief of the gods, dressed in short tunics and slashing the throat of an old goat. Few covenants openly allow the worship of the Lasa for fear that clan or spiritual loyalties would interfere with political necessity. Although some within the Circle of the Crone maintain the worship of the blood gods, many feel the emphasis placed on bloodline endangers the hard-fought unity all covenants require. In the Dover Circle for example, worship of the Lasa is often confined to the lone god Athtar and then only in the guise of Adonis or Baal.

Currently a handful of Lasa cults still survive, often located in domains dominated by a single clan or an overbearing chauvinistic Prince. These blood cults are often obsessed with the recitation of familial lineages and the deeper exploration of the spiritual meaning of the "vampiric condition." Loyalty to the blood is greatly prized, and a religious respect for the Traditions is common. Some of these covens have adapted the myth of the blood gods to suit their own sensibilities. The Albi tablets detail the murder of Athtar by Ilmaku in a fit of jealousy and Athtar's subsequent rebirth after the Lasa

spill the old Ilmaku's blood. Others call Ilmaku, Zagreus, and claim that his spilled blood became all life on earth and that when the Lasa grow strong again they will send a Mahdi or Messiah to herald their return. The Mahdi branch of the cult attracted a greater following in the late 1990s and may have sparked the purge of San Francisco's Aoun Ventrue.

### CULT IN THE CITY?

Brooklyn, Feb. 10 - Despite years of working under the city streets, subway rail workers made a startling discovery last week. While making a routine service check, Anthony Russo found a 300-pound stone block at the end of an abandoned tunnel. Mr. Russo described the three foot by two foot artifact as "all notched up with spiral circles and beasties" and confesses to being completely surprised by its sudden appearance in the tunnels. "I've walked this track for years, no way that thing was here the whole time," exclaimed a bleary-eyed Russo as he was pressed by a mob of reporters. Mr. Russo, a recovering alcoholic, has been put on indefinite leave by the MTA as the facts of the incident are being investigated.

Although no evidence of foul play was discovered near what the police are calling an "altar," occult paraphernalia was in great abundance. "We've had trouble with teenagers digging up graves in the past," said police detective Mooney, commenting on the bones found at the site. "It looks like someone down here was hoping to break into the big leagues." DNA evidence collected at the scene confirmed the presence of blood, but the NYPD is confident that the blood is far too decomposed to point to a recent crime. According to Detective Mooney, "The advanced age of the bones and the blood sample, coupled with the objects recent appearance, I'd say we have an elaborate prank on our hands." Despite being short-handed, the MTA has assured straphangers in a written statement that the miles of tunnel under the city will continue to be rigorously inspected for any threat to public safety and health.

### *The Mahdi*

The Mahdi is a seemingly recent phenomena within the blood cult: no mention of a savior or "Mahdi" appears in reference to the Lasa until the New Haven diaries were uncovered in the 1790s. According to these fragmentary documents, the three Traditions shall be upheld until the Lasa forgive the bloodless; this forgiveness is thought to be marked by the coming of the Mahdi. A vampire Embraced into the priestly house of kings, the Mahdi will arise and free all believers from the three curses and the gods of blood will reinstate us as the kings of the mortal world. Obviously, messianic talk of this nature is never

condoned in a well-governed city and Mahdists or saviors are quickly exposed as charlatans and frauds. More than one Requiem has been ruined by an overzealous Kindred who has exposed himself to the kine in some futile attempt to speed the coming of this messiah.

### *Factions*

Just as the tales of the blood gods are many and quite often change in the telling, the cult of the Lasa is forever developing and searching for answers. Scholars, such as Avey Rabe, even think the very names of the blood gods have changed over the countless centuries and ideological factions have sprouted around the many paradoxes formed from such a convoluted history. Many who worship the Lasa do so as a matter of tradition and claim no allegiance with one faction or another. Only those who have dedicated their Requiems to better understanding the Lasa's wishes and the purpose of vampiric existence divide themselves so.

Reliable sources tell of four factions that seem to be struggling over the soul of the Lasa cult in the modern nights, each faction alienated by its understanding of the three Traditions. The two groups known as the "Seekers" and the "Abiders" seem to have the largest following and interpret the Traditions as hard rules that allow for little or no reinterpretation. The laws governing the Masquerade, progeny and diablerie are nearly inviolate to these vampires, and, in the case of the Abiders, the Traditions are seen as divinely perfect. While such dedication to these ideals is certainly praiseworthy, often these Kindred expect all to adhere to their Manichean ethics. The "Purist" group sees the Traditions as guidelines to better direct the secret hand of the blood god Athtar. Purists seem to think the world was created as their plaything and relish the role of manipulative puppet masters. Lastly, the "Saviors" believe the Traditions or curses of the vampiric condition are about to collapse. These extremists seek the divine intervention of a vampire messiah to create some kind of blood-drenched utopia on Earth.

Strife between the factions is limited, as rarely more than one or two is ever present in a single city. In the few places where worship of the Lasa is the norm, open warfare has broken out between the believers. While the danger the Saviors represent to the cult as a whole would seem plainly obvious, supposedly the greatest friction is generated by the Purist faction. These self-gratified hedonists have chosen Athtar as the sole focus of their worship and constantly petition their brethren to join them. While their small numbers certainly limit the ire brought to bear against them, only time will tell the fate of this burgeoning heresy within the blood cult.

"THEY SAY WE WERE GODS. ARE GODS."

### *Lore of the True Believers*

Devotion to inhuman gods that demand that blood be spilled in their name does not come naturally to today's

vampires. In times gone by, all gods required the sacrifice of precious blood, but now gods are appeased with crumpled bills and simple mumbles of praise. To give yourself body and soul to the Lasa is a great ordeal, but the cult of blood has developed many mystical philosophies and moral arguments to ease the transition from man to monster. Throughout the centuries, many ideologies and priestly houses have spawned their own philosophies. Below are detailed the few that have survived into the modern nights. Most worshipers of the blood gods do not possess these Merits, as they require an intense commitment to moral ideals many worshipers find hard to grasp.

Dots in these Merits must be purchased in ascending order. Each level of dedication is a prerequisite for the next. Thus, a vampire cannot learn Glorification of the Unifier until he has learned Acquiescence of the Unifier. The Storyteller may require a player to wait one or more chapters before the next level of the Merit can be learned.

### *Mental Merit: Trails of the Unifier (6 to ....)*

**Prerequisites:** Composure or Resolve •••, Academics ••, cannot have the Charity Virtue, must be a vampire

**Effects:** Followers of Athtar's way trace the origins of their current beliefs to a small fortress at the base of Mont Blanc in the French Alps. The basic principles of the Athtari were most likely formulated by an insulated group of heretical Lancea Sanctum scholars in the early Middle Ages. Their spiritual forebears only spread beyond those lands due to the persecution of their mortal herd and the destruction of their 'monastery' during the late Renaissance. Athtari, sometimes called Purists, believe that all of the blood gods are but representations of Athtar and that greater division came about by the intrusion of local beliefs. The true believer must return to the fundamentals of the faith, and all of the many names must be revealed as masks worn by the one Creator. According to the Purists, Athtar cast off his own flesh and transcended to the spiritual world. Seven tribes of men were given the god's sinful skin in seven portions to safeguard it against Athtar's many enemies. But each tribe was in turn overwhelmed by their own vices and devoured the god flesh.

After their feast, they were forever changed. They lusted for living blood, and each tribe bore their sin as a mark on their soul. When Athtar returned to the physical world, he chided them for their misdeeds, for those who ate of his flesh and blood would forever be denied entrance into the living world of spirits. Instead they would be trapped on the corpse world of material things, at best a prison constructed to test the virtuous. Now the tribes were as Athtar, dying every morning only to awake at sunset hungry for red blood.

Trapped in the land of misery, the tribes formed a pact in the name of Athtar to become the guardians of the spiri-



tual world and safeguard their god from the unworthy. Only the virtuous would transcend beyond this world and the tribes would test the living with the transient temptations of the rotting world. Purists aspire to gratify their every impulse and overindulge their every vain whim, hoping their avarice and gluttony will tempt or provoke others into similarly condemning themselves to the physical world. Since the damned tribes are forever locked out of the spiritual world, they must make their paradise on Earth.

**Initiation (•):** If a Purist's action or inaction while fulfilling his Vice causes him to make a degeneration check, the Purist receives a +1 die bonus on the roll. Acting modestly, altruistically or otherwise giving of himself without gain during a scene costs a Purist one Willpower point.

**Acquiescence (••):** No matter how cruel or callous a believer becomes, her intimate knowledge of human weakness gives her leverage when manipulating mortals. Athtari Social dice pools involving mortals are limited to a number of dice equal to the vampire's Humanity plus two.

**Glorification (•••):** Athtari regain Willpower as if they had the Vice of Greed in addition to their own

Vices. If this is already the vampire's Vice, then he regains two Willpower when he fulfills it instead of one.

**Liberation (••••):** A Purist requires only six experience points to buy back a Willpower dot expended to Embrace a mortal.

### *Mental Merit: The Red Path of Aeshma (6 to 4000)*

**Prerequisites:** Resolve •••, Occult ••, cannot have the Temperance Virtue, must be a vampire

**Effects:** The Red Path teaches that the primordial blood gods were, in fact, the first vampires and, in turn, created all modern vampires. Followers of the red or Eastern path are often known as Seekers. Unlike the Lasa's lesser offspring, the blood of the Lasa was pure and never weakened through the ages; Seekers look for the secret that will allow them to attain a similar god-like state. Emulating the tales of the blood gods, Seekers long for the power of a never-diminishing Blood Potency and aggressively perfect the powers of their blood. Aeshma's devotees spend long hours practicing with their



blood-fueled powers and take great pleasure in having to feed as often as they can.

Seekers also acknowledge the Beast as the whispering voice of the blood god Aeshma and hone their ability to listen to the Beast without succumbing to it. Frenzy is seen as a transcendent state akin to possession, and those who can ride the wave of frenzy are highly regarded by the followers of the Eastern path. While Seekers respect all of the Lasa, Aeshma is seen as the Seekers' patron and benefactor. Sometimes accused of being a diablerie cult, the priests of Aeshma actually see diablerie as an unworthy shortcut that betrays the third curse, for they are tasked with gathering *mortal* blood. But a degenerate few look to the example set by the tale of Ilmaku's murder; to them, the blood belongs to those who can take it.

**Questing (•):** If a Seeker's actions while feeding off a mortal cause the Seeker to make a degeneration check, he receives +1 die on the roll. This bonus cannot apply if the feeding occurs after the degeneration check is called for. Failing to investigate the origins of vampire kind or denying the blood god's role in vampire genesis in a scene costs the Seeker one Willpower point.

**Finding (••):** When a believer rides the wave of frenzy, he receives an additional +1 die bonus to all Physical actions, in addition to the frenzy's usual benefits.

**Becoming (•••):** Seekers receive a +2 die bonus to resist the effects of blood addiction, but not a Vinculum. Drinking animal blood in a scene (rather than human) costs a Seeker one Willpower point.

**Unleashing (••••):** If actions taken in frenzy cause a Seeker to make a degeneration check, he receives +2 die on the roll. The Seeker cannot regain Willpower from his Virtue if his actions benefit a mortal.

### *Mental Merit: The Enlightened Code of the Lawgiver (• to ••••)*

**Prerequisites:** Composure •••; Law, Politics or Science ••; cannot have the Hope Virtue; must be a vampire

Turan placed the three curses on the ancient vampire houses to teach the believers, not to punish them. The three curses show the way to better serve the blood gods and in turn, better the Requiems of all vampires. The rigorous teachings known as the Enlightened Code of the Lawgiver are thought to have been developed by a member of the Ordo Dracul in 19th-century Delaware. Obsessed with the vampiric traditions and shot through with Kindred chauvinism, the Enlightened Code is the most "scientific" of the moral teachings set forth by those who revere the Lasa. The Enlightened Code is also notorious for driving its more weak-willed adherents into intractable depths of madness.

Based on strict adherence to 'vampire law,' the Code revolves around the immutability of the vampiric Traditions. Even the Ordo Dracul has not openly defied

that core set of beliefs, for they are more ingrained in vampiric nature than the fear of daylight. If vampires could cleave wholeheartedly to the Traditions and to one another, their Requiems would no longer be plagued with trite psychological tribulations. The blood gods do not want us to suffer; they want us to unlock the mysteries of life and death and they have shown us how we must "live." Known as "Abiders," those who follow the Enlightened Code of the Lawgiver study with religious devotion the nature of death and the strange state of torpor. Hoping to scour themselves of mortal qualities, Abiders do not fear Final Death even though they know nothing but oblivion awaits them. By becoming "pure" vampires, they set an example for all Kindred to seek knowledge of the Lasa and themselves.

**Pledging (•):** If an Abider's action or inaction while protecting or enforcing the Traditions causes him to make a degeneration check, he receives +1 die on the roll. Enabling another vampire to violate the Traditions in a scene — or violating them himself — costs an Abider one Willpower point.

**Testifying (••):** An Abider may use his dots in this Merit in place of her Humanity to determine the length of voluntary torpor. In the event of involuntary torpor, consider the Abider's Humanity rating to be two dots higher, to a maximum of eight dots, when determining the length of her death-sleep.

**Affirming (•••):** An Abider gains +2 dice on rolls to resist fear frenzy. If an Abider attempts to "ride the wave" in a scene, he loses one Willpower point.

**Binding (••••):** An Abider may spend a Willpower point to gain one automatic success on one roll to resist fear frenzy. If an Abider succumbs to fear frenzy in a scene, she loses one Willpower point.

### *Blood Secrets*

Next to age, Blood Potency has always been seen as the most direct connection to the blood gods to which Kindred can aspire. When the cult of the Lasa spanned the known world and the power of Rome had yet to be born, great vampire mystics delved into the limits of the divine blood that had been gifted to them by the Lasa. From the power of the Blood alone, many secrets were revealed that were common to all vampires, regardless of clan and lineage. The Blood Secrets are similar to Devotions, but represent abilities inherent to all vampires with the will and experience to master the power of their Blood.



### BE CAREFUL

Blood Secrets grant vampires a few flexible and potent powers that they'd normally have to join a bloodline or a covenant to get. Adding these powers to your chronicle may diminish the worth of other mechanical benefits the players have



already spent experience points on. Be careful that you don't undermine one player's choices by granting another player access to a Blood Secret power that's just as good as a Crúac ritual, but cheaper. If nothing else, be sure that followers of the blood gods impose some story-specific consequences for these powers, such as obedience to the cult and participation in hideous, ancient ceremonies.



### *Blood Sense*

**Prerequisite:** Blood Potency •••

The Blood grants a sensitive vampire a taste of his vessel's soul.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** Intelligence + Occult – the subject's Composure + Blood Potency

**Action:** Reflexive

By tasting the blood of a mortal or vampire and burning a Vitae of his own, the character can determine the Vice or Virtue of his vessel. With an exceptional success, both Vice and Virtue are revealed to the drinker. If this power is turned on a vampire with whom the user shares a blood tie, he gains a +2 bonus to the activation roll.

This power costs nine experience points to learn.

### *A Dream Shared By Blood*

**Prerequisite:** Blood Potency ••••

This secret grants the vampire the power to see through the eyes and hear through the ears of those who serve him. The vampire may share the experiences of a mortal who drinks the vampire's blood as a kind of waking dream.

**Cost:** 1 Willpower and 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** Wits + Composure

**Action:** Instant

Each success on the activation roll allows the vampire to see, hear, smell and taste through a mortal subject for one hour, to a distance of one mile. Any Perception rolls the vampire makes, whether to perceive his own environment or that of his subject, suffer a –2 dice penalty due to the blurred, mingling details of the multi-sensual experience. The Auspex power of Heightened Senses negates this penalty.

This power costs ten experience points to learn.

### *Blood Hunter*

**Prerequisite:** Blood Potency •••••

The refined palate of a potent hunter can discern the unique scents of mortal blood.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** Wits + Survival

**Action:** Reflexive

A vampire with this power can smell the difference between the blood of particular mortals, identifying them without sight or sound. Every success on the activation roll extends the range of the vampire's olfactory sense by five yards. The user can identify by smell any mortal within that distance from which she has fed. The user can even smell the blood of a familiar mortal on the breath and in the skin of a fellow Kindred within about half a yard.

Air-tight and non-porous objects — such as refrigerator doors or quality car windows — may block the vampire's ability to smell a subject.

This power costs 10 experience points to learn.

### *Will of Blood*

**Prerequisite:** Blood Potency •••••••

Potent blood steels a vampire against danger and stress.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae (simultaneously with one Willpower)

**Dice Pool:** None. This power is not rolled.

**Action:** Reflexive

By activating this power in the same turn that the vampire spends Willpower to resist harm, the vampire supernaturally augments his natural endurance. The bonus the vampire derives from spending that Willpower point increases by one. So, his Defense or Resistance Trait gains a +3 bonus rather than the usual +2 Willpower bonus that turn.

This power costs 12 experience points to learn.

### *Blood Surge*

**Prerequisite:** Blood Potency ••••••••

With a mastery of the blood comes a mastery over the body.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** None. This power is not rolled.

**Action:** Reflexive

By spending an extra Vitae when augmenting a Physical dice pool, the vampire gains the benefit of the 9 again rule for that dice pool. Thus, a vampire could spend one Vitae to add two dice to a Physical dice pool and another Vitae to gain a 9 again on that roll. This power cannot be used by itself; it must add to at least one other Vitae spent to augment a dice pool per the normal rules.

This power costs 15 experience points to learn.



## SHOULD YOU USE THE BLOOD GODS?

The blood gods are a convenient and wide-ranging explanation for two of the most ancient questions known to vampires, "where did the vampire clans come from?" and "why are they here?" Whether used to explain a cross covenant



conspiracy or the mystical manifestations of the traditions, the Lasa cultists make great scapegoats and unnerving mentors. In a game in which clan loyalty supercedes the political roles of the covenants, the blood gods provide an ethos of vampiric superiority rooted in a mythos with no apparent mortal corollary. At the most basic level, the story of the Lasa adds depth and atmosphere to a chronicle, even if the story is nothing more than a tall tale told for far too long.



## Emperors of Blood

Kindred who want to know the history of their race learn two fundamental stories: the Kindred began with the Roman soldier Longinus, when he speared the side of Christ, and the oldest institutions of Kindred society began in Rome, with a covenant called the Camarilla. Between Jerusalem and Rome, however, the stories become a bit fuzzy. First, there's Longinus alone, then there's a covenant of many vampires.

Partly because of this, some Kindred don't believe the Longinus story. All the Kindred know about Longinus comes from his *Testament*, they say, and where's the proof of its authenticity? The Camarilla, on the other hand, left offices, customs, laws and traditions that had to come from somewhere, and would not have become so widespread without the support of a powerful covenant. These

Kindred suggest that vampires arose in Rome itself, and Kindred history begins with the Camarilla alone. "Romanists" also believe they know the names of the clan founders. As for how the first vampires arose — they have suspicions. Advocates of a Roman origin point out, however, that their nominees for the clan founders — members of Rome's first imperial dynasty, the Julio-Claudian Caesars — were sinners of epic proportions. These mortals earned damnation far more than some simple spear-carrier who was just doing his job.

## Spontaneous Vampires

The Ordo Dracul claims its founder, the notorious Dracula, arose spontaneously as a vampire, without the need for the Embrace. If one vampire could arise without descent from Longinus, why not more? As it happens, folklore in Europe and around the world says that mortals become vampires for many reasons. The Kindred know these stories aren't true, of course, but maybe they conceal some deeper meaning that may explain why a few exceptional sinners — such as Vlad Tepes — may arise as the undead.

One set of folktales says some people are cursed from birth. They were born with a caul over their head (also traditionally a sign of second sight), or with teeth already sprouted. They were born on Sunday or Christmas, cursed by the blood of delivery shed on a day consecrated to God. Kindred scholars think these "cursed births" are





codswallop, of course — but legends also say children born of rape or incest are doomed to undeath. It may not be fair for the evil of such deeds to be visited on the progeny, but the Kindred know life and undeath are never fair. Rape and incest cross boundaries that should remain inviolate, and every mystic knows such deeds carry consequences in worlds other than this one.

Other tales blame vampirism on an evil death or improper funeral rites. In China and the Balkans, an animal jumping over a corpse is said to confer a bestial half-life to the dead. Long, slow deaths from illness can predispose mortals to rise again, too: the mortals struggle so long and hard to live that they refuse to stay in their graves. Murder victims may also rise as vengeful vampires. Suicide, however, is universally considered the worst death of all, and therefore the most supernaturally dangerous.

The largest body of tales blames undeath on evil lives. Adultery, cruelty and murder all predispose mortals to become vampires. Savage men (and women) who drink or bathe in blood are almost certain to rise again, their appetites unslaked. In Christian lands, however, witches, sorcerers and heretics excommunicated by the Church are said to become vampires without fail. Balkan stories add that a dead werewolf becomes a vampire, too — though most Balkan stories also say people become werewolves through a tainted birth or sorcery, so it all amounts to the same thing.

In life, Vlad Tepes fit many of these tales (or the tales were added to his life after the fact). Some say he was born with teeth. He certainly was murdered. In life, his cruelty became legendary; he drank the blood of his impaled victims. By converting to Roman Catholicism, he earned the curse of the Orthodox Church; and he was said to have studied black magic in the Devil's own school.

Quite a few of the Caesars and their wives met the criteria from folklore as well. Roman historians, especially Tacitus and Suetonius, provide a chronicle of absolute power and absolute corruption, with murder, rape, perversion and madness extending generation after generation. Revisionist modern historians say at least some of the horror stories were slanders. The Kindred, however, see an all-too-believable portrait of their own kind. Such men and women would be fitting ancestors for the Damned.

**"WE'RE ALL PRINCES. YOU HEARD THEM. WE'RE HEIRS TO FUCKING CAESAR. LET'S FUCKING ACT LIKE IT."**

### *The Founders*

Two millennia after the alleged start of the Camarilla, a number of variant stories have arisen about who, exactly, among the Julio-Claudian dynasty became the founders of which clan. Nevertheless, the broad outlines of the story remain consistent throughout the Western

world. Believers in a Roman genesis for the Kindred say all five clans began within about a century, starting at the death of Julius Caesar.

### *Julius Caesar*

Romanists say Gaius Julius Caesar's preparation to become the first vampire began at his unnatural birth. Old tradition says he was cut from his mother's womb, an operation now called a "Caesarian." Modern historians insist this tradition is wrong: in Roman times, surgical extraction of an infant was practiced only on women who died in parturition, and Julius Caesar's mother lived for many years after his birth. The law regulating the practice was called *lex caesarea*, from the root *caesum*, "to cut off." Nevertheless, the legend of Julius' birth by the surgeon's knife was current in Roman times; Lucan mentions it in the *Pharsalia*.

Although Julius Caesar is now perhaps best remembered as a general, his political career surpassed his military achievements. Caesar accumulated most of the offices in Roman government, and kept them throughout his life. He was *quaestor* (a magistrate), *aedile* (a public works and entertainment administrator), *tribune* (a special magistrate representing the common people's interests), *praetor* (chief of civil service), *senator* (legislator), *consul* (the highest rank in government) and a few others.

Romanists, however, attach greater significance to his early election to the pontificate, a body of Roman priests, and elevation to pontifex maximus in 63 BC. History does not record Caesar as a dabbler in magic — but as head of the Roman religious establishment, he had access to the Sybilline Books. Roman leaders consulted these highly guarded books of prophecy during moments of crisis, or in the event of frightening portents such as comets or — monstrous or unnatural births. Caesar also would have known (if anyone did) the secret significance of enigmatic and bloody rites such as the Lupercalia.

Following the conquest of the Gauls in what is now France, Caesar fought a civil war against his former ally, Pompey. His famous crossing of the Rubicon River with a force in arms broke a long-hallowed law and announced his intent to seize absolute power. The campaign against Pompey led through Greece to Egypt — and Cleopatra, who was then engaged in a power struggle of her own. Caesar sided with Cleopatra against her rival, husband and brother Ptolemy XIV Dionysius. As everyone knows, Caesar's alliance with Egypt's queen became far more than military and political: they were married (making Caesar a bigamist, since he already had a wife back in Rome) and Cleopatra bore him a son, Caesarion.

In 46 BC, Caesar crushed the last of his military foes and returned to Rome as its unchallenged master. Among his other titles, he took *imperator*, "commander," formerly held only by generals in the field. He was declared a living god and his statue placed in the temples; the

month of Quintilis, when he arrived back in Rome, was renamed Julius, modern July. About the only title he didn't take was rex, or king, which he knew would have outraged the populace of the Roman Republic. As Romanist Kindred like to point out, this was the only time Caesar ever put a limit to his ambitions; but since he already held a king's power, the name meant little.

In 44 BC, a group of senators led by Gaius Cassius Parmensis and Marcus Junius Brutus murdered Caesar to free Rome from his king-like tyranny, on the portentous Ides of March. He died in the Senate House, at the foot of a statue of his enemy Pompey — a bad death for one of history's most ambitious, strong-willed and competent men.

Romanist Kindred point out that Caesar's murder was also blasphemous. A Roman tribune's person was inviolate: to strike one carried the death penalty, in an age when civil and religious laws were one.

A strange birth, an evil death, an ambition that overthrew centuries of republican tradition and access to the secrets of Rome's bloody religion — is it any wonder, Romanist Kindred say, that Julius Caesar would rise after his death as the first member of the Ventrue clan?



### LUPERCALIA

The Romans believed that this enigmatic rite began long before the city itself. Lupercalia took place on the Ides of February (the 15th, though, in the original lunar calendar of Rome, the Ides were the full moon). Teams of young men from patrician families gathered at a cave called the Lupercal on the Palatine Hill. The participants were called Luperci. They sacrificed goats and a dog. The bloody knife was smeared across the foreheads of two Luperci, and then wiped off with a flock of wool soaked in milk. At this point, the two chosen Luperci had to laugh. The Luperci then feasted in the cave and drank a great deal. After feasting, the Luperci ran a foot-race around the Palatine Hill, dressed only in strips of goat-skin. As the Luperci ran, they flicked goatskin thongs like whips at people they passed. This was believed to help women become pregnant.

The Lupercalia's significance was obscure even to the Romans. The usual guess is that it began as a religious rite to keep wolves away from livestock, and became a rite to ward evil spirits from the city. The ceremony remained popular until a Christian bishop banned it in the 5th century ce.



### *An Augustan Interlude*

After Julius Caesar's murder, Rome saw a period of instability and factional infighting until Caesar's grand-nephew and adopted heir, Octavian, maneuvered himself into power. While defeating his rival Mark Antony, Octavian encountered Cleopatra but did not fall for her

blandishments. Octavian obtained all his uncle's power and then some, with the approval of a Senate grown weary of civil strife. Octavian took the new name of Augustus and cemented the title of Emperor as the Roman head of state.

Augustus matched his great-uncle's ambition, but followed a path already trodden. His biography includes a number of murders, but no more than usual for Romans of the highest class and power. Augustus was frugal in his personal life and proved a sane and skillful administrator of his sprawling state. He died of old age, and the Senate declared him a god. He made his stepson Tiberius his heir — reluctantly, for Augustus thought his heir would not prove a worthy steward for the world's largest empire.

Skeptical Kindred sometimes ask how Augustus ruled so completely and successfully with his great-uncle Julius, now a vampire, lurking about. Some Romanists say Augustus was Julius' front-man, either a willing partner or bound through Dominate and the Vinculum. These Kindred believe Julius may have promised the Embrace to his successor but reneged.

Other Romanists believe, however, that Augustus somehow forestalled Julius' rise as secret master of the Roman night. Just as Julius had, Augustus became pontifex maximus, privy to Rome's deepest religious mysteries. Whatever his plan, it failed after Augustus' death in 14 AD.

### *Tiberius*

Romanist Kindred often nominate the secretive Tiberius as the next vampire to rise in Rome. Augustus' stepson had to wait a long time to become heir, until his mother Livia murdered every other possible candidate. Tiberius himself preferred a retiring life as a gentleman scholar, though he became a successful military commander. In his old age, Tiberius became decadent enough to justify damnation. He turned the island of Capri into his pedophiliac playground, and had his little boy lovers thrown to their death off a cliff when he tired of them. He also murdered many of his relatives and ordered purges of supposed conspirators, marked by utterly barbaric executions. After his death, the Senate refused to declare Tiberius a god. Indeed, Tiberius made himself so unpopular the historian Suetonius tells of people praying to Mother Earth and their ancestral spirits to deny him any resting place but among the Damned.

Most Romanists nominate Tiberius as the first Nosferatu, for his reclusive life, his tendency to be overlooked and the reigns of terror during his fits of paranoia. However, some Romanists assign this honor to the later Claudius and suggest Tiberius founded some other clan, became a vampire but never sired progeny or else became one of the first childer of Julius.

Strangest of all, Tiberius may have become a vampire and continued to rule from Capri several years before



history says he died. His nephew Gaius, a.k.a. Caligula — and one of Tiberius' terrorized catamites — once found his uncle apparently dead. The young Caligula rejoiced — and then Tiberius woke up. Several other people had similar experiences.

From Tacitus' *Annals*:

*As a private citizen, or holding military command under Augustus, his conduct and his reputation were excellent. While Drusus and Germanicus lived, craft and equivocation provided a screen of virtues. While his mother was alive, Tiberius still showed good and bad qualities; while he had Sejanus to love (or fear), his cruelty was appalling but his perversions remained hidden. In his last phase, there was a great eruption of crime and vice: set free from shame and fear, he stood out, at long last, in no other character but his own.*

### *Cleopatra Again*

A few Kindred wonder whether the secretive Tiberius might have founded the Mekhet clan instead of the Nosferatu, but most Romanists think the Shadows began outside the Julio-Claudian direct line. Egyptian gods had followings in Rome, especially the cult of Isis, but the ruling class didn't like seeing the religion of an enemy state grow popular: the Senate ordered Egyptian shrines demolished in 58, 53, 50 and 48 BC, and the Augustan administration banned them from the city entirely. This ban lasted until the emperor Caligula rescinded it in 38 AD and built a large temple to Isis in the Campus Martius. Neither Caligula nor anyone else in Rome's first imperial dynasty was truly devoted to Egyptian mysteries, though — not enough to give the clan of their childer an Egyptian name.

Instead, most Romanists believe the Mekhet clan began with Caesar's paramour Cleopatra. One reason the Senate murdered Caesar was the senators feared Cleopatra's influence as Caesar's mistress (she lived in Rome until his murder) and mother of his heir. She was part of the dynasty, if not a legitimate member.

Cleopatra also fit a distressing number of folklore's qualifications for becoming a vampire. She was a product of incest: similar to the pharaohs, the Ptolemy dynasty married brother to sister, to preserve the "purity" of a supposedly divine bloodline. She herself married her brother. Cleopatra supported the old Egyptian religion and became initiated into several cults; her knowledge of Egypt's faith meant she knew its magic as well, for Egyptian priests were also magicians. When her seductive schemes to protect Egypt from Rome failed at last, she died a suicide from the bite of an asp. Romanist Kindred can't be sure whether she rose immediately as a vampire — the second, after Caesar — or some time thereafter. Most Romanists believe she came to Rome some time late in Tiberius' reign, and that she persuaded

or compelled Caligula to end the ban on Egyptian temples within Roman city limits.

Just as Cleopatra's amours while living supplied material for dramatists through the ages, Romanist Kindred have produced a number of literary works about her reunion with Caesar and her eventual falling-out with him. Some Kindred believe Cleopatra debauched the Julio-Claudian dynasty as revenge for Mark Antony's death and the death of her mortal descendants. (Caesarion was executed by Octavian, and her grandson by way of Mark Antony was slain by Caligula).

### *Caligula*

Rome's third emperor was really named Gaius Caesar. His better-known nickname, Caligula, is the diminutive of *caligae*, or the hobnailed shoes worn by Roman soldiers: Gaius spent his childhood in military camps with his father, the general Germanicus. It's a little odd to realize that one of history's most infamous maniacs was called "Bootsie."

After his father's death, Caligula became the ward of Tiberius on Capri, where Caligula learned to fear his great-uncle's pedophilia and paranoia. Nevertheless, when the Senate and people of Rome chose Caligula as the next Emperor, the young man showed himself a generous and merciful ruler — for eight months. Then he suffered a severe illness. Afterward, Caligula surpassed Tiberius in cruelty and perversity. Not only did Caligula fritter away his financial inheritance, he banished or murdered most of his relatives, made his horse a priest and threatened to make it a consul and declared himself a god and ordered statues of himself placed in all the temples. He took his sisters as lovers. When his sister Drusilla became pregnant, he disemboweled her, possibly in an attempt to bring forth an infant divinity through the same means as his ancestor Julius. One of his favorite deities, the goddess Diana, was celebrated with secret rites of human sacrifice. Caligula also enjoyed having people tortured and killed as dinner entertainment. In 41 AD, one of Caligula's own guards stabbed him. The killer, Cassius Chaerea, is said to have become Julius' child — the Cassius who founded the celebrated Cassian lineage among the Ventrue. After Caligula's murder, the Senate reversed Caligula's proclamation of godhood and declared him accursed.

Romanist Kindred are sure that Caligula the blood maniac rose as a vampire. Many suspect he was one of history's first ghouls — the secret of his recovery from illness, and his madness afterward. Despite Caligula's interest in Egyptian religion, though, his patronage of other deities makes few suspect he founded the Mekhet. Rather, his brutality, patronage of the huntress-goddess Diana and unusually hairy appearance (noted by chroniclers) lead many Romanists to nominate him as the first Gangrel. However, a minority among Romanists denies



this as well. They say Caligula was the first Gangrel *childe*, Embraced as he lay in agony in the palace Tiberius built.

### Remus

The history of Rome begins with a brother's murder. According to myth, Romulus and Remus were twin sons of the god Mars, by way of a virgin priestess. Their great-uncle, the usurper king Amulius, had the infants consigned to the Tiber River in a basket. The careless soldiers left the basket in shallow water, though, so the basket didn't drift far before coming to shore again. A passing she-wolf — the wolf was an animal of Mars — suckled the infants before a herdsman found the twins and adopted them. As these stories always work out, Romulus and Remus grew up to become young heroes, recovered their rightful place and set out to build towns of their own. A petty quarrel escalated, however, and Romulus slew Remus.

Let Gangrel Romanist Dog Vucia tell the rest:

*"Supernatural birth? Suckled by a wolf? Murdered by his brother? What more do you need, man? Remus was the first vampire, not Longinus, Julius or anyone else. And Remus was Gangrel. I mean, he sucked at the Beast's own tit! How could he be anything else?"*

*"Yeah, Julius became the first Ventrue, Cleopatra the first Mekhet and the others. But the Gangrel came first, with Remus. He was Rome's bloody heart, the real god of the city, the secret Julius learned about when he became high priest. Remus took Caligula as his childe and his proxy in the Camarilla. But Remus was older and stronger than them all. Some of us think he's still around. Still sleeping somewhere beneath Rome. And stronger than all of us put together."*

### Claudius and Messalina

Caligula's uncle Claudius became the next Emperor of Rome; the Senate had few other choices, after Tiberius and Caligula's family murders. Claudius lacked the usual political or military credentials for a Roman leader: lameness barred him from military command, while a stutter and tendency to drool when angry kept him from public speaking.

As Emperor, Claudius gave years of reasonably competent administration. He didn't massacre his relatives (but then, he didn't have many left). Claudius enjoyed watching criminals and gladiators die in the Coliseum, even during the lunch break when most people left. Nevertheless, Claudius did nothing to shock Roman society. His greatest weakness was for women. Claudius died from his indulgences, but Romanist Kindred are quite sure he did not rise again as the first Daevas — not when his wives gave two superior candidates.

Claudius married four times. One wife, Messalina, became the most egregious nymphomaniac in history.



The chroniclers say this great-granddaughter of Augustus worked her way through the entire Praetorian Guard. Not only did she take Rome's handsomest men as her lovers of the moment, she took hideous men to her bed as well, for variety. Finally, she challenged Rome's most notorious prostitute to see who could satisfy the most men in one night; after 25, the prostitute conceded. A Roman wife was supposed to stay modestly at home. Even the uxorious Claudius could not ignore such scandal, and he ordered Messalina's execution. Some Romanists think Messalina rose as the first Daeva, and passed her insatiable sensual craving to her clan.

### *Agrippina and Nero*

However, more Romanists believe Claudius' last wife, Agrippina, makes an even better candidate to found the Succubi. Agrippina was one of Caligula's sisters and, hence, his lover. After having a son by another man, she seduced her uncle Claudius and became his final wife. Once she persuaded Claudius to make his stepson Nero his heir, over his own son Britannicus, Agrippina poisoned her husband with a plate of mushrooms.

Nero became Emperor at 16. He cemented his reign by murdering Claudius' son Britannicus. Nero remained very close to his mother — incestuously so, or so the chroniclers relate. In time, even he grew tired of Agrippina's control (and perhaps afraid), and he had her murdered. Messalina surely surpassed Agrippina in sheer debauchery, but Agrippina wins in perversity; moreover, she used her charms to gain power over others, as so many Daeva have since.

Nero brought the Julio-Claudian dynasty to a wretched end. He inherited the decadent hedonism of his line. His bisexuality didn't disgust his fellow Roman aristocrats; having his Greek slave ravish him *in public* did. After blaming the obscure Christian cult for the great fire of Rome, Nero's grotesque cruelty in burning the Christians alive to light dinner parties shocked even hardened Roman sensibilities. Worst of all, Nero indulged a showman's appetite by singing and playing in concerts, and driving his own chariot in the races, like a common entertainer. The palace he built after the fire, the "Golden House," nearly bankrupted the Roman government with the building's extravagance. An exasperated Senate finally ordered his murder. Nero gutted himself (with a slave's help) rather than face capture and execution. His final words were, "What an artist dies in me!"

Now and then, Romanists wonder if Nero could be the Daeva's founder. Most of them finally go back to Messalina or Agrippina, though. Nero was enough of a hedonist, sadist and pervert to justify undeath, with his suicide as the final straw — but he was too much of a *jerk* to found a clan. No Kindred who have fallen under a Daeva's spell — and escaped — thinks the clan is a joke. A preening poseur such as Nero could never give rise to such deadly allure.

### *After the Julio-Claudians*

After the death of Nero, the bloodline of the divine Julius ran out. The Romanists say the power that brought Emperors back from death ran out, too. Perverts, madmen and brutes would take the Imperial purple again, and they would be murdered or kill themselves, but none of them rose again as Kindred. Not until Vlad Tepes would another man escape the grave to feed on the living, and not all Romanists believe the Dracula legend, either. If any other vampires have spontaneously arisen since ancient Rome, they have not managed to start new clans, and most Kindred historians believe the Camarilla included all five of the presently known clans.

The Camarilla almost certainly meddled in Imperial politics. Some Emperors were good, some bad and a lot of them didn't live very long. The Emperor Domitian built a palace with mirrored walls, so he could see assassins trying to sneak up on him: Romanist Kindred think he may have sought a home where he could spot Kindred infiltrators through their blurred reflections. Then the Emperor Constantine made the once-despised faith of Christianity the Empire's official religion, and moved the capital out of Rome. The western half of the Roman Empire tottered on more than a century longer, but the center of Imperial power shifted for good and the Camarilla fell apart as the Dark Ages closed over western Europe.

Romanist Kindred do not know the fate of the five clan founders. Did the divine Julius, the Nile Queen Cleopatra, the reclusive Tiberius, the bestial Caligula and the debauched Agrippina destroy each other through centuries of murderous intrigue? Did Christian saints destroy them, or barbarian raiders burn the founders' havens as the barbarians sacked Rome? Did Remus wake up hungry and devour the five, before settling to sleep for another few centuries? Or do the five still lurk in some catacomb never found by either city workers or archeologists? Perhaps the clan founders still rule the night in Rome, hidden behind new names and new faces. Even the present Kindred of Rome do not know.

### *Meaning of the Myth*

Whether or not the Romanist origin story is true, belief in it places Kindred society in a subtly different light. For one thing, the Kindred really are kindred: the clans all begin with one extraordinary mortal family. In a sense, all the intrigue in Kindred society reaches back to family infighting that began 2,000 years ago.

More importantly, the curse of undeath is not an inexplicable punishment from an inscrutably vengeful God. Why did God make his curse on Longinus contagious, creating a scourge on humanity for all time? Where is the justice for all the mortals slain by vampires? Even the Lancea Sanctum must shrug and say God works in

mysterious ways. The Romanist origin ignores the puzzle of divine justice. The first Kindred cursed themselves by transgressing the laws of gods, men and nature not once, but many times.

The curse of undeath propagates itself down the generations much as each generation of Caesars twisted the next. The pedophilia and murderous whims of Tiberius drove Caligula mad. Caligula's incestuous lusts taught Agrippina how to manipulate Claudius. Agrippina's self-indulgent ambition made Nero a demented hedonist and tyrant. The mortal Julio-Claudian dynasty ended with Nero, but the Kindred dynasty continues.

The Romanist myth, therefore, treats vampires as an expression of worldly evil.

They embody the wickedness and abuse of power that afflicts the World of Darkness; and they propagate those sins, through the vicious infighting and ruthless exploitation of mortals that makes up the Danse Macabre. God didn't make this evil. Mortals did, and the Kindred continue to earn their damnation anew each night.

### *Storytelling*

A chronicle that emphasizes the Romanist origin myth should probably not place much emphasis on the personal damnation of the Kindred. Classic Roman morality dealt with social duty and public conduct rather than personal salvation. A Roman felt guilt because he had not lived up to the demands of his station; what he did in his private life didn't concern the gods.

This does not change the nature or game mechanics of Humanity, but does shade the interpretation in a different way. Kindred who believe the Romanist myth might not care much about the callousness that both induces and results from the erosion of Humanity. They will care a great deal about failure to act with proper decorum, lack of concern for the Masquerade and crude brutality in playing the Danse Macabre. In a Romanist chronicle, the Storyteller can emphasize the growing madness that comes with declining Humanity — just like the madness that overtook the Kindred's founders.

Politics and ruthless ambition are highly appropriate themes for a chronicle about Romanist Kindred. The Danse Macabre centers on gaining Status in clan, covenant and Kindred governance, and each office is a potential springboard to still higher rank. (Storytellers may want to invent more offices, too. See below for a few options.) Failure in a political struggle can mean exile, a quiet assassination or a public blood hunt called at the behest of victorious rivals.

Of the covenants, the Invictus and the Carthian Movement fit most naturally into a Romanist chronicle of high-stakes intrigue, but the Lancea Sanctum can play politics just as well. (Look at the government influence achieved by Cardinal Richelieu and other prelates

through history.) Leading Kindred may be attracted to the philosophy and self-mastery of the Ordo Dracul, just as Romans sought consolation in Stoic or Epicurean doctrines. The Circle of the Crone may command respect as custodians of the weird and bloody rites of ancient times, which all must revere even if few Kindred understand them. Depending on how Roman the Kindred behave, many Acolyte rituals may be public affairs performed at Elysiums, with the Princes and other high officials as participants. On the other hand, the Circle of the Crone may become a half-underground "foreign cult" analogous to the faiths of Isis, Bacchus or Christ in ancient Rome, popular but frequently the target of suspicion from those in charge.

For an especially Imperial Roman feel, all the main players in the central intrigues can be related. They can be broodmates, or childer of broodmates in an extended Kindred "family." Other Kindred join the dynasty through marriages that both sides calculate for advantage. Influential Kindred may also "adopt" other vampires as legal childer and protégés. Other Kindred may achieve great power by attaching themselves to the right member of the dynasty — or suffer in the purge following a patron's fall.

Stylistically, a Storyteller can create a quasi-Roman mood through scenes of excess. The city's leading Kindred engage in grandiose debaucheries and equally grandiose cruelties, often at the same time. The Prince may hold prodigious blood-feasts for her cronies, marked with every luxury that money can buy and every perversity the mind can imagine. For a "good" Prince, such blood-orgies are careful and occasional displays of power to cow rivals. For a "bad" Prince falling to the Beast, the orgy never ends.

An exceptionally ambitious Storyteller might even want to set a chronicle in ancient Rome, where the Kindred's founders still rule a Camarilla of their descendants. Doing justice to such a setting would demand a fair bit of research into Roman culture, going beyond watching *Gladiator*, *Ben-Hur* and other sword-and-sandal movies. The Storyteller would have an extraordinary supporting cast of characters, however, and players would receive the thrill of seeing their characters define Kindred society amid the brutal glory of Imperial Rome.

"SAY THEY'RE RIGHT. MAYBE WE FORGOT MOMMY AND DADDY FOR A REASON. LET'S NOT MAKE THEIR MISTAKES AGAIN, HUH?"

### *Roman Offices for Modern Kindred*

Modern Kindred believe that offices such as the Prince and Primogen date back to the Camarilla. Romanist Kindred may still compare the Prince to an emperor (or a consul, if they prefer Republic to Empire) with the Primogen as a senate. Indeed, in some cities, the Kindred may use the titles of Consul and Senator instead.





Kindred who consciously emulate a Roman model because it's "closer to the Camarilla" could adopt a few other offices from Roman government as well.

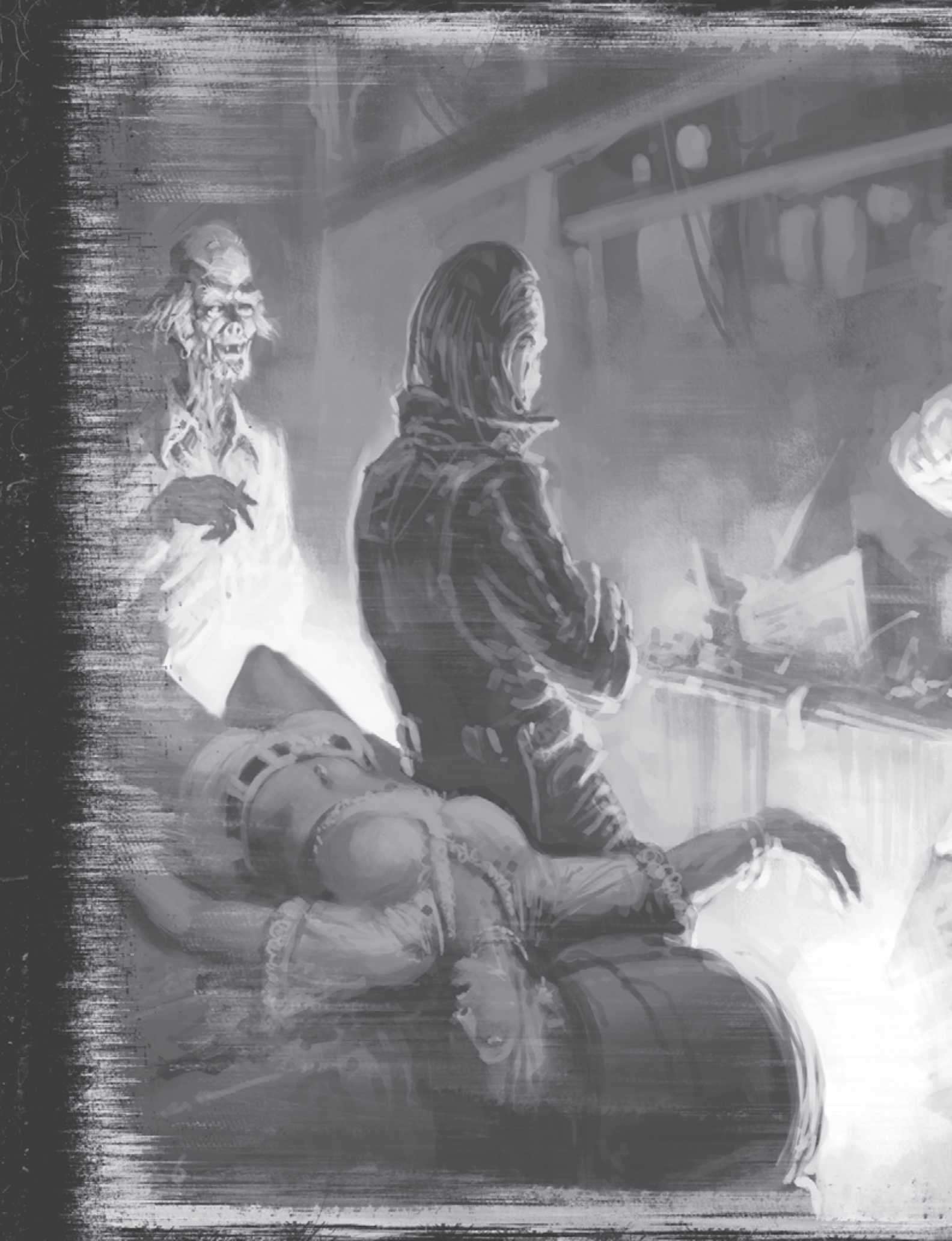
The *Pontifex Maximus* is the supreme representative of the Kindred religious establishment. Depending on the city, this might mean the Lancea Sanctum or the Circle of the Crone — but if neither covenant is especially strong, the Prince or some other powerful vampire might claim the office as a way to gain additional power. The *Pontifex Maximus* has the duty to ensure that Kindred governance adheres to sacred tradition — whether that tradition is said to come from Longinus or Julius doesn't much matter. If the Kindred have any bizarre civic rituals similar to the Lupercalia, the *Pontifex Maximus* arranges their performance as well.

The *Censor* began as the Roman official who took the census, enumerating the citizens and recording the value of their land. (Only later did the title gain connotations as a guardian of public morals.) A Prince might appoint a *Censor* to keep track of the Kindred dwelling in a city, where they keep their havens and their accepted hunting territories. The *Censor's* duties overlap somewhat with the *Seneschal*, *Herald* and even the *Sheriff* to some degree. If a city has an especially large population of vampires, though, a Prince might want to add a *Censor* to her staff.

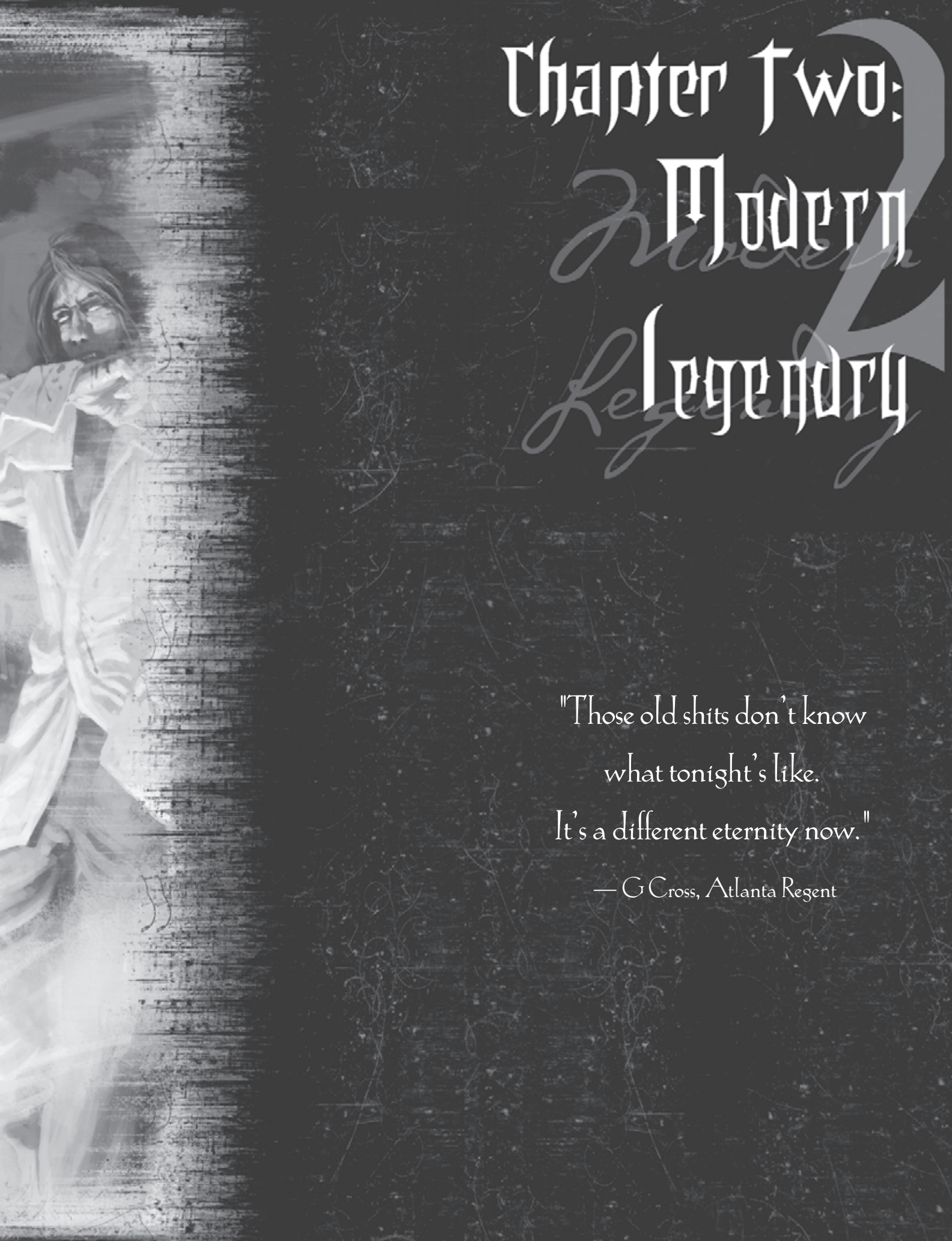
*Aediles* were officials in charge of public works and buildings, police and the city's grain supply. Romanist Kindred sometimes use *Aedile* as another name for the *Master of Elysium*.

*Tribunes* were special magistrates elected to represent the plebeians, or commoners, in Roman government. *Tribunes* could veto laws passed by the Senate. Some cities with a strong (but not dominant) Carthian element revive this office. While Prince and Primogen may still reach their offices through infighting and intrigue, the city's Kindred elect a *Tribune* as a check to their power. The *Tribune's* only power is the veto, however. A wise *Tribune* does not use this power very often, since it means annoying several powerful Kindred. A *Tribune* also has a set term of office before another election must be held. Of course, the election involves promising a lot of horse-trading with influential or opinion-making Kindred for support, so *Tribunes* are seldom truly independent servants of the Kindred populace. No one, even in the Carthian Movement, has seriously suggested that Kindred governance should include a *Tribune* for the true oppressed underclass — the kine. But then, Rome never appointed a state guardian for slaves, either.









# Chapter Two: Modern Legendary

"Those old shits don't know  
what tonight's like.  
It's a different eternity now."

— G Cross, Atlanta Regent

*Without an understanding of myth or religion,  
without an understanding of  
the relationship between destruction and creation, death and rebirth,  
the individual suffers the mysteries of life as meaningless mayhem alone.*

— Marion Woodman

## *Eaters of Sin*

*Surely he hath borne our Grievs, and carried our Sorrows;  
Yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of GOD, and afflicted.*

— Isaiah 53:4

The Kindred are creatures of sin. Their very existence is predicated on sin: they rely on stolen blood and lies to survive. They enslave others to their will, practice blasphemous blood magic and commit horrific deeds in the name of enlightenment, God or just their own personal advancement. Even a Kindred who strives to spend her Requiem in virtue or piety is virtually guaranteed to become a murderer eventually. The Beast can be held at bay only so long. The Lancea Sanctum preaches that all vampires are irrevocably Damned, and that the Beast is the indelible mark of their inherent sin.

Whatever the true state of their own salvation, vampires have an even deeper, more intimate tie to the concept of sin. Like the Biblical scapegoat, sent into the desert bearing the sins of the Jewish people on Yom Kippur, the Kindred are vessels for sin, both their own and others'. Vitae sustains the Kindred's body and fuels his supernatural abilities, but sin is the nourishment of the vampire's damned soul. Most Kindred avoid this "sin-eating" except in situations of dire need, for wickedness strengthens the Beast, whether the wickedness comes from the vampire's own deeds or the sins of others eaten by the Kindred.

Despite the risks, there are those Kindred who willingly devour the sins of their fellows. Not quite a bloodline and not quite a covenant, these Sin-Eaters take the sins of others, Kindred and kine alike, upon themselves. Some Sin-Eaters do this out of a kind of selfless martyrdom, saving the souls of others by piling their sins onto a soul that is already damned. Other Sin-Eaters simply enjoy the sickening rush the experience brings, sampling sins the way an oenophile samples the finest vintages. Some take their role even further, coaxing others to commit grievous sins so that the Sin-Eaters can savor the taste.

## *Goats for Azazel*

All Kindred are capable of eating sin. It is an innate property of the Blood, as instinctive as feeding or avoiding daylight. The first time, sin-eating is a rush — not

the same as the ecstasy of feeding, but no less intense. To taste someone's sin is to feel the emotions the vessel experienced during the act — not the aftermath, when grief and sorrow and regret come crashing down, but the pure, primal emotion of the act itself. Murder is a hot surge of bloodlust, embezzlement the thrill of stealing from under the boss' nose, illicit sex the raw, carnal desire for the best friend's wife. To the Kindred, who feel only dim echoes of the emotions mortals experience, the rush can be powerfully addictive. Only later does the Sin-Eater realize the danger that comes along with the thrill. Every sin eaten gives the Beast a stronger hold on the Kindred's soul. Eventually, the Beast will become strong enough to overwhelm the Man, and the Kindred will be lost.

What kind of individual, then, would willingly risk his own soul to cleanse another of its sins? Selflessness is not a trait commonly associated with the Kindred, after all. Once a vampire becomes aware of the risk, what keeps him coming back for more?

For some, it is a desire to make sense of their own Requiem. If they are, as the Sanctified claim, truly Damned no matter what they do, what is the point of anything beyond the self? Most Kindred are content to use that logic as justification for advancing their own personal power at any cost, but others, usually suffering from a martyr complex, try to find some higher meaning through the practice of sin-eating. By consuming the sins of mortals, Sin-Eaters believe they are releasing souls that would otherwise have been damned to proceed to Heaven. If the *Testament of Longinus* is true, and the Kindred are Hell-bound one and all, taking the sins of others onto yourself makes no difference to your ultimate fate. The irony is that, as the Kindred devours more sins in a vain effort to make sense of his place in the world, he strengthens the Beast until, inevitably, it overwhelms him and he truly earns the Damnation he once felt was so unjust.

For others, it's all about the rush. Vampires, in that respect, are no different from humans: there will always be members of either race willing to do monumentally stupid, dangerous things in search of the next big thrill. Kindred thrill-seekers keen to experience the pleasure of sin-eating seldom last long; they quickly succumb to their Beast as the heady power of



sin courses through their dead veins, and the local Prince is left with no choice but to call a blood hunt to preserve the Masquerade.

Still others risk the dangers of sin-eating not for redemption or for pleasure, but in pursuit of knowledge. These esoteric scholars of human vice and wickedness call themselves the Order of Sin-Eaters, and they believe that by understanding sin, they can understand the Kindred condition and their place in the world.

## *Is It Real*

According to legend, sin-eating is an ability all vampires possess at a basic level. In its simplest form, sin-eating allows a vampire to gain Willpower by “drinking” the sin out of another individual. The Kindred may eat the sins of any creature a vampire can feed from (including mortals, werewolves and mages). Eating someone’s sins requires the Kindred to successfully initiate a bite, just as the normal rules for feeding. Traditionally, Vitae is drunk from the throat or the wrist, while sins are drunk from the chest near the heart, but this is purely an occult custom whose origin has long since been lost. There is no actual significance attached to the location of a vampire’s bite.

## *Mechanics*

The vampire spends one Vitae and makes a conscious decision to eat the vessel’s sins rather than drink her blood. Instead of blood, a thick, black, tarry fluid wells up from the wound: the physical manifestation of the sin. The Kindred cannot choose *which* of the vessel’s sins he consumes; he always consumes the worst sin (that is, the sin ranked lowest on the Morality or Humanity scale) first. It takes a minimum of thirty minutes to draw forth sin with the Kiss. The rules for the Kiss still apply, but instead of a rush of exquisite pleasure, the victim is assaulted by a torrent of the emotions she associates with the sin. Depending upon the individual and the sin, this might be a pleasurable experience or a horrific violation but, either way, it effectively renders the vessel incapable of resisting, per the rules for the Kiss.

To successfully draw forth the sin from a vessel, a vampire attempts an instant Resolve + Occult action reflexively opposed by the vessel’s Resolve + Composure. The Sin-Eater’s attempt is limited by his own supernatural essence: his dice pool cannot exceed his Blood Potency.

The mechanical effects of sin-eating are, of course, quite different from those for drinking blood. The Kindred regains one point of Willpower per successful attempt, as the heady rush of emotion floods his cold, lifeless heart and reminds him of his breathing days. The vessel does not find the process nearly so invigorating: she suffers one point of lethal damage for each attempt the Kindred makes to consume her sin as her blood blackens and transmutes into the tarry stuff of guilt.

All vampires are creatures of sin, but each vampire is most closely familiar with the sins of a particular Vice. When a Kindred drinks a sin driven by his own Vice, he regains two Willpower points.

Sin-eating is much more than a way for Kindred to regain Willpower. Sin-eating is, on a deeper level, the removal of the stain of sin from one individual and its placement on the Sin-Eater. When a vampire eats someone’s sin, the vessel has a chance to regain a point of lost Morality (or the appropriate Morality Trait) that was shed due to an act of sin. The vessel makes a new degeneration roll as if his Morality was one higher than it currently is. If this check succeeds, the vessel regains one dot of Morality. A character’s Morality cannot be raised above 6 through sin-eating, however. Derangements are not automatically cured through sin-eating, but with the associated Morality dot returned, recovery becomes possible. At the Storyteller’s discretion, the subject may transcend his derangement if he goes a number of days equal to 10 – his Morality without sinning against his own Morality. Never erase a derangement overcome through sin-eating (see p. 93 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**) — only real changes in behavior warrant that.

The Kindred must immediately make degeneration and derangement rolls upon eating the vessel’s sin, as if he had committed the sin himself. If the derangement roll fails, the Kindred automatically suffers the same derangement as the vessel (if she had a derangement). If the rating of the consumed sin is high enough that the Sin-Eater would not be required to make his own degeneration check, then only the derangement check is made.

## **What Is a Sin?**

For the purposes of vampiric sin-eating, a “sin” is any deed a character committed that provoked a Humanity or Morality loss, but for which the character has not earned back the lost Humanity or Morality dot (through roleplaying or, in the case of Morality, experience). If a character loses multiple dots of Morality before buying dots back, have the player (or Storyteller, in a Storyteller character’s case) declare which sin is being “redeemed,” or decide based on the manner in which the player has roleplayed the character.

For example, Jack, a mortal thug with a Morality of 5, kills a man in a fit of passion. Jack fails his degeneration roll, and loses a point of Morality. Later, he buys a point back with experience points. If a vampire were to attempt to eat his sin, the murder could still count as an “edible” sin, because Morality doesn’t necessarily track directly to specific events on a dot-for-dot basis. A character’s remorse and regret doesn’t vanish when he buys Morality dots. A character’s feelings aren’t resolved with experience points, and sin-eating is as much about guilt as morality.

## VARIATIONS ON SIN-EATING

As described here, sin-eating is a part of the Kindred condition that reveals itself over time as the Blood gains power. To make sin-eating a part of your **Vampire** chronicle without actually committing to the truths supposed by this article, simply make the Sin-Eater Merit on p. 58 available to Kindred, ghouls and mortals alike. Alternately, you can use the same game rules for mortal sin-eating to represent vampiric sin-eating. Perhaps in your chronicle, sin-eating is something taught by archaic sects of the Lancea Sanctum, rather than a power of the Blood itself.

### *The Order of Sin-Eaters*

When most vampires think of sin-eaters, members of the Order of Sin-Eaters are the ones other vampires think of. The Order of Sin-Eaters is a small, loosely organized covenant with origins in the British Isles. Although they are nowhere near as prevalent as even the smallest of the five main covenants, the Sin-Eaters have spread from their origins and can be found, at least in ones or twos, in domains scattered across the Western world. They typically operate off the radar of the rest of Kindred society, as the Sin-Eaters focus the bulk of their studies on mortals. Kindred, after all, are already irrevocably Damned. If one wishes to truly understand sin and Damnation, one must look to those with a chance of redemption.

#### *Overview*

The Sin-Eaters began as an offshoot of the Ordo Dracul in the late 17th century. A Dragon coterie in Sussex observed that the custom of sin-eating, in a metaphorical sense, seemed to have carried over to the local kine population. Each village in the area had its own “sin eater,” who would ritualistically take the sins of the dying onto himself, thereby assuring the deceased a place in Heaven. The Dragons, curious as to whether this practice was tied to the Kindred ability to feed from the sins of others or whether the practice evolved independently, undertook a study in an attempt to trace the practice back to its origins. The historical endeavor proved inconclusive, but the coterie found the concept of simply bypassing one’s sins through the use of a scapegoat a fascinating proposition. If a mortal could be redeemed of his sins, then could a Kindred similarly sidestep his own fate? Was the inevitable Damnation of the Kindred condition an insurmountable barrier, or was there somewhere a sin-eater who could absolve even one of the Damned?

“THAT’S BULL. THE DRAGONS DIDN’T INVENT SIN-EATING OR EVEN RESURRECT IT. THESE SANCTIFIED MEKHET IN ITALY HAVE BEEN DOING IT SINCE THE DARK AGES.”

The local Kogaion, being a staunch traditionalist and believer that the Coils were the true way to enlightenment, disapproved of the Dragons’ experiments, and forbade them from calling on any Ordo Dracul resources in their studies. Undeterred, the Kindred announced their departure from the Ordo Dracul at the next night’s Elysium, gathered the notes they had collected to that point and simply disappeared into the night. Fearing their defection to one of the other covenants, the Kogaion naturally called for their elimination, but the coterie was long gone by the time the Sworn of the Axe arrived at their havens.

The Sin-Eaters have remained relatively low-profile since, but have spread to many domains in Europe and America. They often travel alone or with a small retinue of ghoul servants, and only occasionally induct new members into the covenant’s theories and practices. In domains with little or no Ordo Dracul presence, the Sin-Eaters are somewhat more open in their practices, but where the Dragons are strong, the Sin-Eaters often pass themselves off as Unbound or members of another covenant. Sin-Eaters avoid Dragon-controlled cities wherever possible.

#### *Philosophy*

The core of the Sin-Eaters’ philosophy is the idea that sin, guilt and vice are not punishments handed down by God or Providence or any such thing. Rather, what mortals and Kindred alike refer to as “sin” is merely a psychic residue that clings to the soul, weighing it down and pulling it upon death to Hell. This philosophy has its echoes in the Egyptian belief that, after death, the gods weighed the deceased’s heart against the feather of Ma’at, or absolute truth. If the sins of the dead person’s life were heavier than the feather, the soul was fed to Apep, the devouring serpent. The idea that sin is not absolute, the Sin-Eaters say, is proved by their own existence, for what God could be so easily tricked into allowing an unrepentant murderer into Paradise? Even mortal religions practice sin-eating after a fashion, from the ancient scapegoat of Yom Kippur to confession to the concept of karma.

According to the Sin-Eaters’ beliefs, vampires constantly exude this “sinful humour,” thus ensuring their inevitable Damnation. Not surprisingly, the Lancea Sanctum takes a dim view of this theory. The Sin-Eaters theorize that, if they can find (or create) a mortal sin-eater pure enough to continuously absorb the psychic “weight” of sin the same way vampires exude it, they will be able to siphon off their own Damnation in much the same way that they siphon the sin from mortals. Exactly what this will accomplish remains a debated topic whenever Sin-Eaters congregate: some believe that a cure for vampirism lies at the end of their road, some that they will reach a state akin to Golconda and still others believe that siphoning off the Kindred well of sin will finally quiet the Beast once and for all.



The Sin-Eaters see themselves as fundamentally altruistic in their experiments. After all, they are pursuing the end of Kindred Damnation, and even the subjects of their experiments benefit. What mortal would object to having his sins absolved with a kiss? The fact that their experiments are often horrifically damaging to the subject's psyche tends to go unnoticed.

Sin-Eater experiments range from the benign to the monstrous. Much like the Dragons from whom the Sin-Eaters broke off, Sin-Eaters have a tendency to let their thirst for knowledge override any sense of empathy or compassion, especially as their Humanity erodes. The driving goal of any Sin-Eater experiment, however twisted, is to understand and quantify the nature of sin, so that ultimately that knowledge can be applied toward the eventual creation or discovery of a human psyche capable of absorbing vampiric Damnation. Common methods range from the simple (drinking the sins of a wide variety of mortals to establish a catalog of the properties of different "kinds" of sin) to the grotesquely complex (forcing a mortal to commit grievous sins and then eating that same sin to see how the human psyche reacts) to the mystical (attempting to transfer some or all of the vampire's own sins to the mortal to study the mortal soul's ability to absorb sin).

While the Sin-Eaters' studies have not yielded a final solution to the issue of Kindred Damnation, the Sin-Eaters have managed to attain a deep enough understanding of

sin that they have created a unique Discipline, Hamartiaphage, which gives them even deeper insight into the darker aspects of the Kindred (and human) psyches.

### *Members*

Similar to the Ordo Dracul, the Sin-Eaters draw their membership from those Kindred with a scholarly bent and a keen desire to understand, and eventually transcend, their Damnation. Unlike the Ordo Dracul, the Sin-Eaters tend to attract Kindred of a more theological than rational bent. The nature of sin and its impact on the soul are topics that naturally draw religious philosophers, theologians and apostates of all creeds. A sizable minority of the Sin-Eater covenant are former Sanctified who disagreed with their Bishops' interpretation of Damnation and the Kindred's role in the world.

In an effort to slow the growth of the Beast's power over them, most Sin-Eaters adopt a rigid code of ethics and manners to reinforce the fact that they are civilized beings, not rampaging monsters. The society of Victorian England is a popular model, and many Sin-Eaters go so far as to affect the manner and dress of the time period. (Some, of course, remember this period firsthand, while others merely imitate it to varying degrees of success.) Other Sin-Eaters take the vows of ascetic religious orders, from the Franciscan friars to the Essenes of Qumran or certain sects of Buddhism.



However hard the Sin-Eaters try to hold to their rigorous codes, the gradual strengthening of the Beast erodes their efforts at civility. None but the youngest Sin-Eaters could be called anything less than grotesque, with their corpse-like parody of good manners and their teeth stained black with stolen sin. Even the Nosferatu find the Sin-Eaters somehow a little — off (and Haunt Sin-Eaters are practically inhuman).

### *Titles and Duties*

Because the Sin-Eaters comprise such a small covenant, they have comparatively few titles or positions. They seldom meet in groups of larger than two or three, and almost never have a sizable enough presence to be major players in domain politics. The few titles they do have tend to be honorifics rather than expressions of rank or position.

#### **Scapegoat**

This title is given to apprentices, those who have only just been accepted into the covenant and begun their studies under a tutor. Scapegoats typically serve as research assistants, gofers and “volunteer wranglers” for their masters’ experiments. There is no set criteria for a vampire moving from Scapegoat to full-fledged member; some tutors base it on mastery of Hamartiaphage, some on more esoteric occult knowledge and others on the prestige their apprentice’s theories garner from other Sin-Eaters (in other words, the Covenant Status Merit).

#### **Father/Mother Confessor**

This title is sometimes bestowed, but more often simply claimed by a Sin-Eater who feels he has earned it. A Father Confessor (or Mother Confessor, as the case may be) is a Sin-Eater who has mastered the Discipline of Hamartiaphage, and has also made a significant breakthrough in the study of sin and its effects. Occasionally, a dispute will arise over whether a given Sin-Eater has actually earned the title, but most simply don’t bother to question their fellow Sin-Eaters’ claims (and most Kindred outside the covenant don’t even know what the term means) unless the claim is blatantly false.

### *Human Sin-Eaters*

While all Kindred can be, to some degree, sin-eaters, they may not have been the first to exhibit that ability. Stories of living men and women who took on the sins of their communities to purify them in the eyes of their gods go back many thousands of years. Even as recently as the late 19th century in England and Wales, many villages had a resident sin-eater who would visit the dying or the recently-deceased and take their sins to ensure them a place in Heaven. Doubtless, few if any of these men and women actually possessed any supernatural ability, but there *are* rare individual mortals capable of sin-eating much the same as Kindred. The Order of Sin-Eaters searches intensively for these mortals, as they

believe them to be a key component in understanding Kindred damnation.

In game terms, this new Merit allows mortals to gain the ability to consume the sins of others. The process of mortal sin-eating is not the same as that used by vampires, though that’s hardly common knowledge.

### *Sin-Eater (•••)*

**Prerequisite:** Mortal, Resolve •••, Composure ••, Occult •, Occult Specialty: Sin-Eaters

**Effect:** Your character has the ability to draw forth the sins of other individuals, restoring lost dots of Morality (or the equivalent trait for supernatural characters). The customary technique for doing this is to place a small piece of bread on the chest of the person whose sin you wish to eat, offering a momentary prayer, and then eating the bread, which has absorbed the subject’s guilt. Others rituals, subject to Storyteller approval, may work equally well.

To consume an individual’s sin, spend a Willpower point and make an instant contested roll pitting the Sin-Eater’s Resolve + Occult against the subject’s Resolve + Composure. The Willpower point only makes the roll possible, it doesn’t grant any bonuses to the dice pool. Each attempt requires a complete performance of the sin-eating ritual, which never takes less than thirty minutes.

Success allows the subject to attempt a new degeneration roll for a past sin. The subject makes this new degeneration roll as if his Morality was one higher; if this roll succeeds, the subject gains a point of Morality. Morality may never be raised higher than 6 through sin-eating and derangements are not automatically cured through sin-eating, but with the associated Morality dot returned, recovery becomes possible. At the Storyteller’s discretion, the subject may transcend his derangement if he goes a number of days equal to 10 – his Morality without sinning against his own Morality. Never erase a derangement overcome through sin-eating (see p. 93 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**) — only real changes in behavior warrant that.

If the Sin-Eater achieves an exceptional success, both he and the subject enjoy a +2 bonus to their degeneration rolls for the ceremony.

If the Sin-Eater consumes a sin whose motive was driven by his own Vice, he regains a lost Willpower point exactly as if he had indulged the Vice himself. Likewise, if the sin was committed in the name of his Virtue (such as a vigilante killing for Justice or stealing from the wealthy to help the poor for Charity), he regains *all* of his spent Willpower as though he had acted on that Virtue.

**Drawback:** When you consume an individual’s sin, you are immediately subject to a degeneration check exactly as though you had committed the sin yourself. If you fail this degeneration check, you must check for a derangement as usual.



**Example:** Brother Roland, who is not actually a man of the cloth, is a practicing sin-eater at the local retirement home. He's performing a ritual to consume the sin of a war vet with Morality 3. Roland spends a Willpower point and rolls Resolve + Occult versus the vet's Resolve + Composure. Roland succeeds, and consumes the vet's sin. The vet makes a new degeneration roll based on Morality 4 — the moral height from which he last fell — and so rolls three dice. He succeeds.

Roland, meanwhile, must deal with the sin he ate; because it falls beneath Roland's own Morality of 5, he makes his own degeneration roll based on the same sin and fails. Therefore, Roland's Morality drops and he must make a derangement check. Over time, Roland's time with other people's evils slowly erodes his own mind.

## Hamartiaphage

Although sin-eating is an ability all Kindred possess, the Order of Sin-Eaters have refined the ability to an art form. With a mere taste, the Sin-Eaters can know the most intimate details of their vessel's darkest secrets, shield themselves from their own sin and even force their sins onto the souls of others with a touch. Hamartiaphage is principally a tool for aiding in the Sin-Eater's studies into the nature of sin, but this Discipline can be adapted quite well as a tool for information gathering and even a weapon, if need be. As with all unique covenant Disciplines, a character must have dots in the Covenant Status (Order of Sin-Eaters) Merit to learn Hamartiaphage.

As the Coils of the Dragon, Hamartiaphage is not a standard five-level Discipline with progressively increasing powers. This is still a relatively young Discipline, reaching back only to the mid-1800s, and thus only a few of its powers have been fully developed. These Sin-Eaters look on their work as science, and in science, progress sometimes comes from unexpected directions, outside the normal progression of research. At present, only three powers of Hamartiaphage are known.

### • *Knowing the Sin*

When a vampire eats another's sin, he feels the rush of emotions that accompanied the sin, but gains no insight into its specific nature. While oftentimes the feelings associated with the sin are enough to guess the nature of the sin (murder, theft, rape, etc.), the Kindred remains ignorant of the particulars. This power allows the Kindred to see the details of the sinful act as though he himself had committed the act. He sees through the sinner's eyes, hears through the sinner's ears and feels through the sinner's hands.

**Cost:** —

**Dice Pool:** Wits + Empathy + Hamartiaphage versus Composure + Blood Potency

**Action:** Instant and contested; resistance is reflexive.

## Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The character experiences the sin, but in such a chaotic jumble of thoughts, images and impressions that he cannot make sense of it, and may very well misinterpret what images do stay with him. Worse, the sudden, unexpected intimacy with the crime makes it harder to resist degeneration: the character suffers a -1 penalty to the degeneration check that comes along with sin-eating.

**Failure:** The character gains no additional information when eating the victim's sin.

**Success:** The character perceives the events of the sin from the vessel's perspective. The character does not gain any additional insight into his vessel's motive or who any of the other players in the drama might be; the character only gains direct, sensory information.

**Exceptional Success:** As a success, but the character also understands the vessel's mindset at the time of the crime, experiencing his emotions and thoughts. Assuming the vessel knows the other people involved in the sin (if any), the character knows them as well. The character also gains the equivalent of a Specialty in the vessel for one Social Skill of his choosing. Subsequent uses of this power can grant additional Specialties to other Skills, but never more than one Specialty per Skill per vessel.

This power confers no ability to read the target's mind beyond the specific instance of the sin. The character cannot pick and choose which sin to "read"; he may only read the sin he is drinking at the moment. The character perceives the scene as it actually happened, unmarred by the vessel's memory or personal bias of how the event occurred. In the event of eating the sins of other vampires, this power cannot read sins older than 50 years per success on the activation roll.

## Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	Power is turned on a vampire with whom the user has a blood tie (see <b>Vampire: The Requiem</b> , p. 162).
+1	Sin was committed within the last week.
-1	Sin was committed more than one year ago.

### •• *Gloak of Wickedness*

Through their studies, Sin-Eaters gain an intimate familiarity with their own sins by devouring those of others. By understanding his own wickedness, the Sin Eater may bolster his own soul's defenses against the slow, inevitable domination of the Beast. This power allows the Sin-Eater to consume the sins of a mortal, internalize them, and weigh his own sins against those of his victim. By comparing the "weight" of the two sins, the Kindred finds it easier to cope with his own and gains a bonus on his next degeneration check.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae and 1 Willpower

**Dice Pool:** Resolve + Empathy + Hamartiaphage

**Action:** Instant

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The character must face the fact that moral comparisons are little more than desperate rationalizations. When his own sin cannot be held up against another's, there is now cast shadow to hide the wickedness of the character's actions. The character suffers a -1 penalty on his next degeneration check.

**Failure:** The character gains no moral fortitude from the sin. Perhaps some mitigating circumstance rendered the "weight" of the sin less. Whatever the reason, the character gains no bonus on his next degeneration check.

**Success:** By weighing his own sin against the consumed one, the character gains some measure of solace from the process. He gains a +1 bonus on his next degeneration check.

**Exceptional Success:** His study of the two sins gives the character some profound philosophical insight into the nature of evil and sin. He gains a +3 bonus on his next degeneration check.

This power allows the Kindred to stave off his own moral degeneration to a limited degree. It is, however, hardly a panacea for Kindred damnation; if it were, the Sin-Eaters would have abandoned their quest for the perfect mortal sin-eater some time ago. For one thing, the bonus only applies to the *next* degeneration check, never to the degeneration check made for eating a sin in the first place. Furthermore, the character only receives the bonus on degeneration checks made for sins on the same level or *higher* as the consumed sin. No matter how the Kindred weighs it, petty theft cannot be used as a balancing factor against murder. "I may have hurt him," the character might say, "but at least I don't feel like I would if I'd killed him."

This power may only be used on mortal human beings. Its effects last until the character next makes a degeneration check, whether the next degeneration check is eligible for the bonus or not.

**Example:** *Edgar uses Cloak of Wickedness when he eats a sin from a mortal thief with Morality 4. If Edgar commits assault, petty theft, or any other sin of Morality 4 or higher, he gains a bonus on the degeneration check (assuming, of course, that Edgar's Humanity is high enough that such crimes require a degeneration check at all). If he commits premeditated murder next, however, he gains no bonus.*

### ... Sin Lash

The ultimate expression of a Sin-Eater's mastery of Hamartiaphage, this power allows the Sin-Eater to channel his own sin into others, essentially forcing them to consume his own sin. This process is excruciatingly painful, and often causes severe mental trauma. Needless to say, it must be used with caution, but the Sin Lash is a

vital part of Sin-Eater research and occult study. The fact that it is a useful interrogation tool, or even a weapon in a pinch, is merely a dreadful bonus.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae and 1 Willpower

**Dice Pool:** Manipulation + Empathy + Hamartiaphage vs. Composure + Blood Potency

**Action:** Instant and contested, resistance is reflexive.

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The attempt to inflict a sin on the target fails, and the target is immune to further uses of this power for the rest of the night.

**Failure:** The vampire fails to accumulate more successes than the target, the target is not affected. The vampire may try again.

**Success:** The target rolls fewer successes than the vampire and the sin is forced upon her. She must make a derangement check as though she had just committed a sin equal to her own Morality. If she fails, she gains a mild derangement or exacerbates an existing derangement at the Storyteller's discretion. This derangement persists until the victim succeeds on an extended Resolve + Composure roll with a number of necessary successes equal to 10 - her Morality. One roll can be made at the end of each night.

**Exceptional Success:** As above, but the target number of successes to escape the derangement increases by three.

To use this power, the vampire must meet his target's gaze. If the target is moving, distant, or deliberately trying to avoid eye contact, the vampire suffers a -1 penalty on the activation roll.

In many ways, this power is like the reverse of sin-eating, but with one notable exception: the character does *not* regain a point of Humanity by forcing his own sins onto his victim. This power draws upon the constant wellspring of sin that stems from the vampire's soul, inflicting that same damnation on the target. This power may never be used on the same character more than once per week.

A character can only be subject to one instance of this power at a time.

### Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	Power is turned on a vampire with whom the user has a blood tie ( <b>Vampire</b> , p. 162)

## Breath-Drinkers and Liver-Eaters

Vampires know perfectly well that it isn't the organic components of blood that sustain them. Blood is a lot more than liquid flesh: blood is the material vehicle for a supernatural life-force. Throughout history, vampires have wondered if there was not some way to take that life-force



without the need for blood. After all, it's a bit of trouble to keep a mortal from noticing you've bitten him. A subtler method of feeding would make unlife simpler.

As it happens, legends around the world tell of creatures that feed on human life-force without necessarily taking it in the form of blood. Some are people who return from death. Others are mortal witches. Still others are demons that take human form to approach their prey, or that were never human at all. Many of these creatures show just enough resemblance to the Kindred to make some vampires wonder whether the legends began as distorted accounts of their kind. Could a shapeshifting animal-demon be a Gangrel using Protean? Could a terrifying hag be a Nosferatu using Nightmare? Maybe so, maybe not.



### KINDRED SCHOLARS, KINE LEGENDS

Ironically, Kindred who want to study the vampires of distant lands and long ago often must fall back on mortal legends. Travel is difficult and dangerous for Kindred, so few would-be ethnologists of the undead can study their subjects directly. Ghouls can do some of the fieldwork, but ghouls are difficult to maintain from hundreds or thousands of miles away. So Kindred savants study kine legends about vampires and vampire-like entities as a first step in their inquiries.

These savants know perfectly well that they work from unreliable data. A legend about blood-drinking demons or cannibal corpses might be a garbled account of a vampire — or of some other supernatural creature — or disinformation spread by foreign Kindred to misdirect vampire-hunters, just as Kindred in the developed world may promote books and movies that delude the kine. Many foreign myths are just myths: the kine can make up stuff all by themselves.

Still, the dubious lore gleaned from legend is a start. It gives Kindred some idea what questions might be worth asking if they send a ghoul investigator to a distant land, or what experiments they might try in attempts to devise new Disciplines or sorcerous rituals. A folktale is better than starting with no idea at all. Until the invention of modern, rapid transportation and communication, Kindred scholars had literally *nothing* but myths to guide their inquiries.



### *Succubi and Soul-Batchers*

Many times, a legend doesn't say how a vampiric creature takes nourishment from the living. For example, the creature "takes the soul" (the Kephn of Burma) or somehow benefits from killing mortals (the Celtic Dearg-Due that dances with men until they die of exhaustion).

Many pseudo-vampires seem to feed off sex. At least, they seduce their prey. For instance, the Sundal Bolong of Java and the Zmeu of Romania both look like beautiful

maidens. They lure young men to hidden places where no one else can see them attack and drink their victim's blood. Other creatures, such as the Akakharu of ancient Assyria, or the Liderc Nadaly of Hungary, actually kill their victim through sexual exhaustion. Such legends inspire some Kindred to try draining life-force directly through sex, instead of merely using the act as cover for biting and feeding. The Kindred tell stories that some Daeva have mastered this art and can "feed on lust" instead of blood.

Other legends describe creatures that somehow feed on terror. For instance, the Sriz of Poland climbs a church steeple and shouts its intended victim's name. The victim dies within a few days, either from sudden sickness or just dropping dead. In some obscure fashion, the Sriz feeds on the terror the victim feels at being accursed. The Mara, Mora or Mare, known throughout Europe, squats on its sleeping victim's chest and saps his life while inflicting bad dreams and night-terrors. Other mortal cultures say their local witches or demons somehow feed on the grief, enmity or other social disruptions caused by their evil deeds. The Navajo, for instance, level this accusation at the murderous witches they call Skinwalkers. Kindred can see how applications of Nightmare could explain stories of fear-eating vampires. Few Kindred can imagine how a vampire could feed off abstractions such as "social disharmony," though.

Kindred who seek alternate means of feeding often pay special attention to legends about creatures that take life-force from their victims' breath. Next to blood, breath is the most common symbol for life-force or soul-force. "Spirit" actually comes from the Latin word for "breath," giving it the same root meaning as *chi* or *prana*, the Chinese and Indian words for supernatural power.

Not many quasi-vampires explicitly steal their victim's breath. The Nobusuma and Nodeppo of Japan are rare examples: these creatures are said to be bats that become life-stealing supernatural monsters through their immense age. When Kindred scholars look below the surface of myths, however, they find more suggestions of breath-drinking around the world.

For instance, the Chordewa of India is a witch who projects her soul in the form of a cat. If the Chordewa can lick a mortal's mouth, the Chordewa can feed on the life of its victim, who soon dies. The Japanese tell a story about O Toyo, a supernatural cat that took the guise of a courtesan to feed on the life of a prince. Stories about cats sucking the breath from newborns occur in many lands as an explanation for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

Then various ghosts or demons can capture the souls of the dying. The Keres of ancient Greece hovered above battlefields to seize and devour the souls of slain warriors. The ghostly Sluagh of Scotland can snatch the soul of a dying person. Such fiends take their prey at their *dying breaths*.





Such examples of disguised breath-stealing, with the comparative rarity of explicit cases, make some Kindred suspicious. They wonder if someone isn't trying to hide the truth. The metaphysical connection between breath, life and the soul leads Kindred savants to describe many sorts of non-physical feeding as "breath-drinking."

### *Kindred Legends*

The Kindred themselves tell stories about vampires who evolve beyond the need for blood. Some tales about Golconda say that a vampire who achieves that fabled state no longer must bite and feed. Instead, she receives sustenance from more arcane sources such as the Eucharist (the "body and blood of Christ") or the life-force of the entire world. Darker stories say that vampires who make pacts with the Devil can steal life-force without even touching their prey, or that they can leave their bodies to feed as astral predators.

The most common legend, however, says that Kindred can learn breath-drinking when their blood becomes strong enough. Not every vampire learns this useful art. Breath-drinking is not instinctive, the way feeding on blood is. Indeed, only a few Kindred know the technique, and they hide their knowledge to preserve their advantage over all other Kindred — that's why breath-drinking is still a legend. The mightiest of these elders can drink the life from a mortal with a brush of the hand, or merely a glance. Perhaps this is an alternative to the need for vampiric Vitae that afflicts the old and strong-blooded, or perhaps these elders slake their thirst on other vampires, and the younger vampires don't even know it!

### *Liver-Eating*

As a complement to the subtle and ethereal art of breath-drinking, there is a grisly mythology about the consumption of various internal organs. Mortal legends around the world describe a variety of cannibalistic fiends with greater or lesser resemblance to vampires. For instance, the Vjestitiza of Montenegro is a witch who projects her soul to prey on the living. She may cut out her victim's heart as well as drink his blood. One version of the Romanian Moroi (the name applies to several vampiric creatures) rips open its victim's chest to devour the heart as well. The Brahmaparush of India, on the other hand, prefers to start with a victim's brain before consuming his entire body, leaving only the intestines to wrap around its head like a turban while it dances.

The liver, however, seems to be the favored organ for monsters who like a little meat with their blood. In Cherokee legend, a supernatural hag called Utlunta, or Spear-Finger, paralyzes her victim with a magic song of "Liver I eat, su sa sai!" before she neatly slices open his body to extract that organ. The witch of India called the Jigarkhwar operates more subtly: she thieves a person's liver by magic in the form of a magic pomegranate seed.



The victim lives until the Jigarkhwar throws the seed onto a fire to restore his liver to its proper form, and cook it for her dinner. If the victim can find the witch and swallow the seed himself, his life is saved. The Japanese river-demon called the Kappa drags people into the water to drink their blood and feast on their livers. In Africa, a tale of the Congolese forest-demon called the Eloko describes how it mesmerized a woman into letting it first take a bite from her arm and then eat one buttock. The woman's husband rescued her and slew the fiend just before it could take her liver for a final, fatal repast.

But why the liver, of all organs, even more than the glamorous heart or brain? The largest of the glands produces bile vital for digestion, and performs many other humble but necessary metabolic functions — but none were obvious as the life-sustaining labor of the heart or lungs. Why not, instead, the spleen, the kidneys or the pancreas?

First, the liver is big. Early sages may have guessed its importance from its size. Perhaps this is also why ancient civilizations sacrificed a sheep to read divine omens from its liver. The size and placement of the liver's four lobes, its grooves and markings and the size and position of the gall bladder all conveyed messages to the trained hepatoscopist. The liver's size made it a suitably expansive message-board for the gods. Models of the liver wrought in clay or bronze, sectored and labeled with the significance of each location, have come from Mesopotamia, the Etruscans, Greeks and Romans, from a period of 3,000 years. Who are we moderns to argue with that sort of historical authority? Various ancient authorities also nominated the liver as the seat of thought and the soul. Aristotle himself dismissed the brain as simply a radiator to cool the blood. Plato, however, condemned the liver as the source of baser passions and elevated the finer sentiments to the heart, an honor that the simple pump has guarded to present times. Nowadays, only the French retain any trace of the ancient reverence for the liver, through a distinctive national hypochondrium about its care. In English, the last vestiges of the liver's power are a few uncomplimentary adjectives and metaphors, such as "bilious," "choleric" and "lily-livered."

However odd the legends of the liver seem now, some Kindred see significance in the worldwide distribution of myths about liver-eating witches and demons. The practice wouldn't appear in so many places if it didn't carry some supernatural power. They just have to find it. So naturally, the Kindred have their own legends about the alleged benefits of liver-eating. Some of the claims include:

- A human's liver is an even richer, more sustaining source of life-force than blood. A Kindred who's willing to kill and eat a mortal's liver receives all the Vitae she needs for an entire week, or even a month, without any further feeding.
- The legends of hepatoscopy hint at a prophetic power within the liver. A vampire who eats a kine's liver

will receive visions of the future, or information about the activities of her enemies, in her dreams.

- Eating liver gets a vampire high. (This is definitely a modern legend.)

- Just as mortals can treat certain diseases with the vitamins and iron in liver, Kindred can eat liver to remove curses or heal supernatural wounds that resist other treatment.

- Utlunta was also noted for rock-hard skin. A vampire can gain the same invulnerability through a regular diet of human liver.

- Any or all of these benefits might require that liver be consumed in the course of secret Crúac rituals known only to high-ranking members of the Circle of the Crone. This belief accounts for the condemnation of liver-eating as part of the blanket anathema against the Circle issued on 1732 by Willibald Helfgott, Sanctified Archbishop of Magdeburg. Bishop Helfgott's sermon is still occasionally studied in the Lancea Sanctum as an example of how to write a good anathema.

Only one consequence of liver-eating has been established beyond doubt, though. Repeated murders to obtain human liver rapidly erode an experimenter's Humanity, to the point where the experimenter often loses sufficient capacity for rational thought to record the results of his inquiries. But then, the experimenter must have surrendered a fair bit of himself to the Beast even to consider such cannibalistic research. Kindred who believe in the magical power of liver-eating often add that the practice, once fully understood, also must somehow enable vampires to resist the Beast enough to remain functional as exceptionally cold-blooded and heinous serial killers.

### *Who Knows the Secret?*

Kindred who believe in breath-drinkers and liver-eaters often claim that a cabal of elders keeps these arts secret to maintain an advantage over their rivals. They don't agree, however, about which covenant's leaders possess the secret.

The Ordo Dracul is the most popular candidate for the breath-drinkers. After all, they are well known for pursuing strange arts that grant them special control over their own undeaths. On the other hand, Kindred who know a bit more about the Coils of the Dragon sometimes doubt that the Dragons are the breath-drinkers. These Kindred suggest the legends about breath-drinking come from misunderstood stories about the Coils of the Dragon, which enable vampires to use blood more efficiently.

Some Kindred suggest the Circle of the Crone's leaders discovered how to feed without biting a victim, as an extension of their eerie blood-magic. Other Kindred aren't sure how well breath-drinking really fits with Crúac, but suggest the Acolytes' leaders could well be

liver-eaters. This is hardly the only lurid tale spread about the Circle. Who would be more likely, the Circle's enemies say, to experiment with forbidden, cannibal rites?

Other Kindred think the Lancea Sanctum receives the power of breath-drinking as God's reward for the Sanctified's devotion (an idea some Sanctified encourage to increase their covenant's prestige and attract other Kindred to the faith). Less friendly Kindred think the Sanctified might practice liver-eating as a complement to normal blood-drinking, in a ghastly imitation of the Eucharistic body and blood of Christ.

The Invictus lacks the esoteric, supernatural practices of the Dragons, Acolytes and Sanctified. Nevertheless, some Kindred suspect this covenant of being the true keepers of the secret. The decadent aristocrats of the night seem to collect so *many* advantages over other Kindred that one more doesn't seem implausible. In fact, partisans for this theory are often junior members of the covenant, who know all too well how their elders hoard power.

Of all the covenants, the Carthian Movement is least likely to be suspected as the keepers of breath-drinking, or any other mystic art. Nevertheless, a few Kindred suggest the unorthodox Carthians might acquire forbidden practices from distant lands, which covenants that are more conservative would eschew.

Of course, some vampires — especially among the unaligned — point out there's no reason why only *one* covenant's leaders should know the secret. These Kindred may even suggest that breath-drinkers or liver-eaters in each covenant form a secret society of their own, which uses these special forms of sustenance as a hidden advantage over their rivals and juniors. Some Kindred find this shared conspiracy the most plausible theory, just because it's the most cynical — and therefore, they say, the most in keeping with the Danse Macabre.

Still other vampires speculate that none of the covenants know how to feed on breath or livers. The vampires who know the technique form a society of their own. Maybe they are Golconda-seekers, or some other cult group. Perhaps they are a bloodline that prefers to hide from the Kindred who would wrest away their secret. Maybe they aren't Kindred at all, but some other sort of vampire. Whatever form the breath-drinkers take, they must wield considerable power to hide so effectively from Kindred and kine alike. The elders of the covenants mock the idea that anyone could manipulate *them*, or escape their covert nets of power. But then, they *would* say that, if they were part of such a breath-drinking or liver-eating cult, or knew that someone else could steal their Vitae from their veins . . .

. . . assuming that breath-drinking or liver-eating rites exist at all.

### *Doubters*

Skeptical Kindred have no problem deconstructing myths about alternate feeding methods. Vampires naturally feel

ambivalent about drinking blood. It's the most intense pleasure they experience, but it's also a peculiarly intimate assault. What's more, the Kindred know that survival of their race depends on hiding from the mortals: the power relationship of predator and prey could easily reverse. Is it any wonder that some Kindred wish they could escape the dilemmas of their existence? Succubus-like, sexual breath-drinkers are simply a pornographic fantasy, while fear-eaters are sick fantasies of power, revenge and domination of the kine who unwittingly hold such power over the Kindred. The subtler breath-drinkers simply reflect a desire to escape the perverse intimacy and risks of feeding. At the other extreme, liver-eating pushes the criminal aspects of feeding into outright grotesquery. That reduces the horror of blood-drinking by comparison: a vampire may feel bad about taking blood, but at least she isn't a murderous cannibal!

Of course, the speculations about secret societies or bloodlines are just plain old paranoia. The Kindred hide so much from mortals and each other that they see conspiracies in *everything*. And doesn't it make a convenient excuse for the tale-teller's inability to provide any real evidence?

### *Is It's Real*

If breath-drinking is possible, it can make unlife easier for the Kindred who know it. The strong-blooded have an alternative to feeding on other vampires. If weaker Kindred can drink breath as well, they may escape many of the dangers associated with feeding. (This depends on the method, of course. If breath-drinking requires terrorizing a mortal while staying in close proximity, the character hasn't really gained much.)

Part of the Kindred's curse is that greater power always carries a price. Storytellers should think twice about permitting anything that makes undeath easier to bear, without imposing some compensating price or limit. The system for breath-drinking described below assumes that Kindred simply cannot fill their Vitae reserves completely without consuming actual blood. A vampire who subsists entirely on breath is a vampire who's always hungry, and lacks the power (in the form of Vitae) of other strong-blooded Kindred who feed conventionally.

Still, if an elder vampire needs to drop out of Kindred society and abandon all his vessels, breath-drinking is a useful art. It's also a way to show a character's self-control and willingness to forego power for the sake of independence — though not necessarily her concern for the kine. Breath-drinking can harm or kill mortals as easily as blood-drinking. A breath-drinker may simply be a stealthier predator.

Liver-eating presents another way for strong-blooded vampires to escape the need to feed on other vampires — but in an appalling and perversely criminal way. Any vampire who regularly murders mortals to feast on their livers has good reason to hide the practice from other Kindred. Aside from the sheer, revolting evil of the act,



other Kindred have reason to fear a liver-eater. Any vampire hardened and jaded enough to kill so casually most likely has no problem with killing other Kindred for their blood, either. Indeed, a liver-eater is so close to losing himself to the Beast that he could easily become a powerful menace the other Kindred would have to hunt and destroy for their own safety. More than a few Kindred might decide they should try to pre-empt the danger to themselves, and to the Masquerade.

### *Finding Out*

Once characters hear a claim about alternate methods of feeding, they may want to learn more. As a first step, they can look at mortal folklore for clues. A Storyteller can create “folklore” of her own, which characters discover with successful Research rolls and access to academic libraries. If you don’t feel up to that (or as a way to buy time), just hand the players a book such as *The Vampire Book: The Encyclopedia of the Undead*, by Gordon J. Melton or the slightly campier *Vampire Slayers’ Field Guide to the Undead* by Shane MacDougall, and say this is what their characters found in the local library. Let the players make their own guesses about what might be a garbled account of breath-drinking vampires, and what’s disinformation or fiction. Even if you decide that none of the alternate feeding methods really work, the players and characters may initiate some interesting stories as they investigate the possibilities.

Characters may also make their own experiments in hopes of figuring out legendary means of feeding. Each experiment requires *at least* one roll using Medicine, Occult or Science, with high penalties for difficulty, as the characters try to sense and interpret the effects on their own undead bodies. Hey, if these practices were easy to discover, they wouldn’t be legendary. Most importantly, though, don’t overlook the dramatic effects of feeding experiments on mortals. Leaving aside the really gruesome and Humanity-destroying practices such as liver-eating, the characters are still experimenting on people. If the characters have mortal Retainers or an obedient herd (such as a blood cult), they might obtain test subjects without much trouble. Unknowing mortals may object to the experiments, or at least notice they’re part of something strange. For instance, prostitutes hired for experiments in sexual breath-eating may talk if their “john” insists on wiring them (and himself) to medical equipment. Even a knowing and obedient mortal is still a person with a mind and will of her own, which may complicate the research.

If secret societies practice alternate feeding methods, uncovering them is an exercise in detection no different from penetrating any other Kindred conspiracy. Characters who suspect their Kindred community includes breath-drinkers or liver-eaters can spy on their fellow vampires, seek informants through bribery, blackmail or Disciplines, or even try to join the society themselves.

### *Breath-Drinking*

Breath-Drinking is a non-standard Discipline, in that many of its powers are not rolled or do not grant the user extra dice. Still, its powers are purchased as though Breath-Drinking were an out-of-clan Discipline.

A vampire needs at least Blood Potency 3 to learn and use the powers of Breath-Drinking. If a character’s Blood Potency drops below 3, he can no longer use this power, though he does not lose his dots in it. Once his Blood Potency rises again, he can feed upon breath once more.

Stealing life-force from breath is inherently less effective than taking it from blood. A vampire can only fill a portion of her Vitae reserve through Breath-Drinking. Players may want to keep a separate tally of Vitae taken from breath instead of blood. When expending Vitae, the points from breath are expended first. In theory, a vampire within a certain age range could sustain itself entirely by Breath-Drinking, as legends say — but that would be a hungry vampire.

Blood Potency	Max Vitae from Breath	Max Breath w/ Vaulted Lungs
3	3	4
4	3	4
5	4	5
6	4	5
7	—	5

Breath-Drinking only works on human victims. The Kindred may inhale and exhale to speak, but they have no actual *breath*, mystically speaking. The life-force of animals is too feeble for this Discipline to steal.

A victim of Breath-Drinking feels tired, headachy and possibly nauseous afterward. This lasts until the victim recovers all lost Health. Although the victim suffers no visible wound, Breath-Drinking can still inflict wound penalties if a vampire steals enough of the person’s breath. A mortal can die from loss of breath; each Vitae taken through Breath-Drinking causes one point of lethal damage, as per usual feeding rules. If a victim runs out of Willpower from Breath-Drinking, she falls unconscious and can provide no further sustenance — at least, not through breath.

When using any of these powers, a breath-drinker has the option to take fewer than the maximum Vitae granted by his successes if he wishes.

### *Sips of Breath*

At first, a breath-drinking vampire must spend an hour in close proximity to her victim in order to steal life-force from her breath. Some vampires do this by lurking over sleeping victims, carefully inhaling their breath. Others stalk victims at clubs and parties.

**Cost:** —

**Dice Pool:** Varies. As with regular feeding, the dice pool depends on the vampire’s approach, such as Dexterity + Stealth to lurk in the dark or Manipulation +



Socialize to blend into a crowd (see p. 164 of **Vampire: The Requiem**). Breath-Drinking typically relies on Social Attributes and Skills.

**Action:** Instant. (Each attempt takes 30 minutes.)

Each success on the vampire's dice pool deals one point of lethal damage to the victim and gains the vampire one Vitae. If the vampire cannot consume any more Vitae through the victim's breath he cannot cause her any more damage. Excess successes are wasted.

### •• *Stolen Breaths*

A more experienced breath-drinker can take sustenance from a mortal in only thirty minutes. The vampire still must spend that minute close enough that he could touch the victim, but the process is more subtle than Sips of Breath. For instance, a vampire could stand next to a person at a cocktail party, engaging the victim in conversation. One way or another, the vampire must interact with a victim and keep her talking or laughing to feed on her breath.

**Cost:** —

**Dice Pool:** Presence + Socialize versus target's Composure + Socialize

**Action:** Instant and contested; resistance is reflexive.

#### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The victim doesn't know the character tried to steal her life-force, but it's clear that he's failed on a social level. The vampire suffers a -2 penalty on all Social actions involving the victim for the rest of the night.

**Failure:** The vampire's player fails to roll more successes than the victim's player. The character gains no sustenance. The victim doesn't know she has been the target of an attack.

**Success:** The vampire's player rolls more successes than the target's player. Each success deals one point of lethal damage to the victim and grants the vampire one Vitae. If the vampire cannot consume any more Vitae through the victim's breath he cannot cause her any more damage. Excess successes are wasted.

**Exceptional Success:** As above, plus the vampire makes a good impression as a person, gaining a +2 bonus on another Social action targeting the same subject during the scene.

### ••• *Vaulted Lungs*

With experience, a vampire can derive more sustenance from breath than was possible before. What's more, a vampire with a mastery over the essence of breath finds it easier to pass among mortals, to get close to them without offending their prey instincts.

**Cost:** 1-2 Vitae per scene (see below)

**Dice Pool:** Unlike many Discipline powers, Vaulted Lungs is not actively rolled. Rather, it empowers the vampire's abilities as a breath-drinker.



First, Vaulted Lungs allows a breath-drinker to store more breath-derived Vitae than normal. Plus, the breath-drinker can derive a modicum of sustenance from human Vitae longer than normally allowed by his Blood Potency. See the chart on p. 65 for the maximum amount of Vitae taken from breath that a vampire can store based on Blood Potency.

Second, a vampire with this power can spend 1 or 2 Vitae to raise the Humanity imposed on his Social dice pools for Breath-Drinking rolls. For the rest of the scene, the character's Humanity is considered one higher for each Vitae spent to activate this power. This Humanity augmentation has no actual effect on the vampire's morality, it only frees the Kindred from some of the penalties associated with dwindling Humanity (see p. 184-185 of **Vampire: The Requiem**).

**Action:** Instant

### .... *Spirit Thief*

With greater skill, a vampire can take more Vitae in less time.

**Cost:** 1 Willpower

**Dice Pool:** None. This power is not actively rolled. Rather, Spirit Thief optionally augments Sips of Breath and Stolen Breath. By spending one Willpower point, the breath-drinker is able to use either of these previous powers in half the time: 30 minutes for Sips of Breath and 15 minutes for Stolen Breath.

**Action:** N/A

### ..... *Drink With Thine Eyes*

When a vampire attains mastery of Breath-Drinking, she no longer needs to stalk and sip off his victims. The vampire merely needs to pass within a few yards of a mortal to steal a bit of her breath. By passing through a crowded store or striding down a busy street, the vampire can drink in the breath of the oblivious mortal flock, gaining power from shreds of Vitae.

**Cost:** 1 Willpower

**Dice Pool:** Varies. This power augments the vampire's ability to feed at large, as described on p. 164 of **Vampire: The Requiem**. Whatever dice pool is used to model the character's approach to feeding, his dots in Breath-Drinking can be added to it by spending 1 Willpower point.

**Action:** Reflexive

"WHERE MY SIRE COMES FROM, THAT BREATH STUFF IS FORBIDDEN. THE BISHOP THERE SAYS IT'S RISKIER, 'CAUSE IT ENCOURAGES YOU TO STICK AROUND THE FLOCK TOO LONG. I JUST THINK IT MAKES YOU A WUSS."

### *Merit: Liver-Eating (...)*

**Prerequisite:** Blood Potency 2+

**Effect:** The Kindred who believe that eating a mortal's liver can substitute for a period of normal feeding have

it wrong. Devouring a human liver, still hot and dripping from the victim's body, merely enables a vampire to subsist on less potent forms of blood. A vampire whose Blood Potency restricts her to human blood can subsist on animal blood once more; Kindred who must drink the Vitae of their fellow vampires can go back to merely mortal blood — for a while.

Liver-eating carries a number of restrictions. First and foremost, the vampire needs a living, human victim to kill. Aside from loss of Humanity, the character faces the practical difficulties of committing a murder, hiding the body and making sure the police can never tie the crime back to her.

Once the vampire rips the liver from her prey, she has to eat it and hold it down. To consume anything except blood, a character must expend one Vitae to keep from immediately vomiting what she swallowed (as described on p. 157 of **Vampire: The Requiem**). It isn't enough to hold the raw meat down for a scene before eliminating it, however. To gain the benefits of liver-eating, a vampire must also expend a Willpower point to keep the meat in her stomach until she sleeps. When she rises the next night, the liver is burned away by her Vitae and she can feed on weaker blood for a number of nights equal to 10 + twice her Stamina.

Liver-eating takes practice or training from someone who already knows the art. It therefore constitutes a three-dot Merit. As a character tries to develop the art, however, the Storyteller may ask the player to roll Stamina + Resolve each time the character attempts to eat a liver; failure means the character vomits up her cannibal feast (possibly just as she slipped into her daily sleep) and gains no benefits for the attempt. After the character succeeds three times (or so), the Storyteller can grant that the character has mastered liver-eating and no further rolls are needed.

"THE CRONES WHO RUN THAT PLACE PAY GOOD MONEY FOR LIVERS. NEVERMIND WHAT THEY'RE FOR."

### *Solace*

"Petra M. (not her real name) leans against the moldy, broken drywall of a cramped Manhattan apartment. Her eyes dart furtively around the room. She's checked three times already to be certain that only she and the writer are present. Still, she's wary. I'm cuffed to a radiator on the opposite site of the room. A high-caliber pistol sits on a table beside Petra's chair. She'll use it on me if I make a lunge for her, to steal the unimaginably precious treasure I'm here to see. Her paranoia is justified. Many of her fellow Kindred would thoughtlessly kill for this thing. Petra M. is about to inject a syrette of Solace.

"The object she pulls from her pocket resembles a small, metallic toothpaste tube with a gleaming chrome needle as its exit point. Petra closes her eyes, sticks out her tongue and jabs the needle into it. There's a brief shudder of pain, and

then she falls back against the wall. Her pale skin flushes. Her thin lips ease into a beatific smile.

‘How do you feel?’ I ask her. The question is tentative; I don’t want to ruin her hard-won high.

‘She remains placid. Her voice, which had been harsh and gravelly, has now softened into a mellifluous purr. ‘Human,’ she says. ‘I feel human again.’”

## The Myth

*“Petra M. is one of an unknown but growing number of our kind chasing the elusive, short-lived high of Solace, an incredibly rare drug that apparently works only on Kindred. Its chemical properties remain unstudied; its origins are fodder for endless druggie speculation. Many will tell you that Solace does not exist, that its users are deluded, its suppliers geniuses of underground marketing. If this is so, Solace is one hell of a placebo.”*

*“As any nightchild quickly learns, the cornucopia of pharmaceuticals available to alter the moods and of living subjects are incapable of exerting a direct effect on an undead physiology. Those of us who yearn nostalgically for the crack vials and LSD tabs of old must interpose a middleman between ourselves and our drugs of choice. We find a compliant or helpless mortal, wait for our accomplice to inject, ingest or otherwise consume and then get what buzz we can from their blood. It’s a wasteful and inconvenient process, resulting in a diluted thrill. Little wonder that many former freaks turn sober after their Embrace. It’s not the morality, it’s the frustration.”*

*“Enter rumors of the bloodsucking junkie’s Holy Grail: a drug we can slam directly into our desiccated veins. A substance designed purely for our abuse. The first time you hear about it, at some four AM debauch, you dismiss the possibility. Everybody says it’s nonsense. Crazy. Yet everybody keeps talking about it. The hope of the stone freak glimmers eternally. Even v-dogs who were fervent abstainers while breathing hanker for a taste, when they hear what it’s supposed to do.”*

*“When I first heard about it,” says Stefan Q., a Baltimore-based courier to that city’s midnight elite, ‘I thought it was an urban legend. Because it’s too good to be true, right? It sounded like total wish fulfillment — a drug that makes you feel human again. Gets your heart pumping. Makes you feel like you have blood running through your veins. Not Vitae, mind you. Freakin’ blood, man. I was at a Rack that night, waiting for a suitable lovely to sink my teeth into, when one of my old buds told me about it. I hadn’t even realized, until that moment, how much I missed the sensations of life. The exhalation of breath when you’re excited. Eating a good meal, that satisfied feeling you get when you push back from the table, loosening your belt. Not to be crude, but even taking a dump, you know? Now, it turns out that not all of those things are quite like you want them to be, due to duration issues. But still, that’s what hooked me. The promised physicality of it.’”*

*“For Imari S., a Vancouver-based IT professional, it was the emotional high that drew her to hunt for Solace. ‘There*

*are feelings you lose when you cross over. All your emotions are tainted by undertones of fear and hunger. You become a predator. Now maybe that’s fine for some people who were psychopaths going in, but I used to be a good person. I was nice and kind and considerate and all those other things my mother brought me up to me. And now, as a person, overall, I have to say that I’ve turned into a sack of shit. Sure, you can make the humans like it when you steal their blood. But it’s still exploitation. Soon as you accept that, you start to think like an animal. Well, when I heard that there was a thing you can take — at first, I was told it was a pill, which seemed less — unsettling, you know? When I heard there was a drug that could take away the stink of predation in your soul, even for a few moments. Well, I was, where do I sign up? What do I have to do? Because, you know, whatever it was, I was willing to do it.’”*

*“For many, the difference between hearing about Solace and laying hands on a dose of it is an unbridgeable chasm. Unlike human street drugs, which are plentiful throughout the urbanized world despite worldwide government efforts to eradicate their use, Solace is genuinely rare. You can’t score it by heading to a suitably skeezy-looking street corner. No good befriending the stoner dude in your dorm or the low-level record company executive on your condo board. On any given day in a large city, there may be little or no Solace available, even to those hooked into a trafficking network.”*

*“The problem? Supply. Solace can’t be grown as a cash crop or cooked up in a lab from commonly available ingredients. As always for the K-tribe, it comes down to blood. Solace works on the vampire physiology because it is a blood product. It is a substance of currently unknown chemistry naturally produced by a very small number of human subjects. They secrete it into their bloodstreams.”*

*“Estimates of the total number of Solace secretors in the human population are, for obvious reasons, impossible to compile. A persistent but unverifiable rumor has it that a foundation funded by either the Carthians or the Dragons is conducting systematic blood-tests under the cover of medical research, with an eye toward locating more secretors. Some wild theorists even suppose that the ultimate goal is a breeding program.”*

*“For the moment, however, secretors must be found on a catch-as-catch-can basis. Wilder A. of Washington, DC, is a former Solace slinger who’d like back on that particular gravy train ASAP. He’s what’s known in the trade as a lucky bastard: he found not one, but two secretors during the course of his career. Secretors fit a profile, he claims. He uses these criteria in his search for lucky source number three. He calls them S-girls. ‘Every secretor I’ve ever worked with or heard of is an adolescent female. Most often she is Caucasian, with a pale complexion. Usually with blue eyes. She is either blond, or funnily enough, dyes her hair blond. But aside from age and gender, the one absolute constant is that she’s a cutter.’”*

*“The phenomenon of cutting, known to mental health professionals as Self-Harm, or Self-Injury (SI for short), is*



well-documented and variously understood. Classically, the subject self-inflicts a series of minor wounds to achieve release from emotional pressure. Suicide is not the objective. The subset of self-mutilators known as cutters inflict shallow wounds on their limbs, chests and, in some cases, the genital organs.<sup>1</sup>

"It's not politically correct to make this observation," says Masha V., a clinical therapist who has tried Solace, 'but the effects of SI on its practitioners can be described as drug-like. It produces a short burst of intense emotion, which the user then attempts to replicate through habitual behavior. It radically connects body and mind. And it allows the user to exert a measure of control or dominance over her physical self. Self-harmers often have a completely fraught relationship with their bodies, which they perceive as being in open rebellion against them.'

"When prompted, Masha cautiously allows a correlation between the experience of self-mutilators and of the Kindred. 'Yes, you could say that we as a sub-species, or whatever you want to call us, are faced with a particularly acute mind-body split. Our new biological urges permeate our personalities. We might wish to rise above our need to prey on others, but cannot. In a way, when we take Solace, we fight back against our hungry, demanding bodies, achieving momentary power over them. The cutter gets the same charge when she pushes the tip of a box-cutter into the soft flesh of her inner thigh.'

"Wilder A., who hunts cutters, offers his own insights. 'These girls are often shy, socially crippled, yet they're pleasers. They're perfectionists who turn their high expectations on themselves. They're afraid to enter into any kind of social interaction because they feel they're not smart, or outgoing or, in most cases, beautiful enough. That's how I spot them. I hang around schoolyards, look for the girls walking around with their heads down and their wrists covered. Sometimes they have their bandages out in plain sight. Mostly they conceal them. Sweaters in the summertime. If they go to Catholic school, they keep their skirts down to their proper length, instead of hiking 'em up like all the rest do. And they wear long wool stockings or those fucking leg warmer things. That's another tip-off. I look for generally conservative dress, but with the odd goth or SM touch hidden in there. A studded wrist collar or a heavy hand with the mascara.'

"Once he's identified a likely cutter, Wilder makes his move. 'Cutters are socially wary, so it's a waste of time trying to befriend 'em. For every one of them secretly harboring a fantasy for a goth bad boy, there's another ninety-nine who pull back into their shells at the slightest advance.'

"The only approach really,' Wilder continues, 'is your classic blitz attack. Drive up in your serial killer van, jump out, put the grab on her. KO her with chloroform or, if you got it in you, mind-meld the skinny bitch's ass. Then toss her in the back, shackle her and sample the merchandise. If she tastes high, sharp and bitter, you hit paydirt. So then you drive her to your den.'

"Would-be Solace users aching for the feeling of moral release the drug creates may not wish to know about the long-range repercussions suffered even by rejected candidates. 'If she doesn't taste of Solace, I dump her in the nearest safe place. Parkette or whatever. For security reasons, you might argue I ought to kill her. But I want to leave her out as a decoy to distract my rivals. So sure, she probably concludes she's been raped or molested or whatever. I concede that. Cost of doing business.'

'Actual Secretors fare worse. With every milligram of Solace-laced blood streeting in the low four figures, vendors such as Wilder have a mighty incentive to keep their golden geese tightly shackled. Although it is possible to taste the presence of secretions by feeding on an S-girl, the truly potent stuff can be harvested through one method alone. The victim must cut herself, bleeding into a sterile receptacle of the supplier's choice. The same cuts made by another provide a significantly less potent chemical. This anomaly strongly suggests to some that the process that produces the secretion has a psychic or supernatural element to it. Others, such as Masha V., are slower to rule out a scientifically explicable explanation. 'It may be that the chemical originates in the brain and flows back into the bloodstream. That chemical may be triggered by the euphoric state brought about by the cutting experience.'

"S-girls who refuse to produce are soon shown the error of their ways. 'It's a bit like pimping,' says Wilder A., who boasts past experience in that related field. 'You've got to be harsh with them, to make them love you, so you get total obedience. You're inducing the Stockholm syndrome. Stick and carrot, you know? Slap 'em, starve 'em, defile 'em, whatever. They've got to cut and keep on cutting. Be good earners.'

"The Solace supplier, variously known as an Esser, Cupholder, Halobender or Cloudbringer, must be prepared to use violence against more than just his S-girl. He must defend his prize from rival dealers, and from powerful end-users hoping to eliminate the middleman. 'Let me tell you, if you're high up in any kind of power structure, I want nothing to do with you or your business. I been burned too many times by grabby Primogen trying to swipe my S-girls. I sell only to nobodies, or through cut-outs.' The Cupholder business takes competition to extremes. 'That's why you got to keep your product on the down low and sell only to trusted customers. Even if you could get 10 times more for the stuff in an all-out open market. Because other heavies get wind you got an S-girl stashed in your basement, they're gonna come crashing down on you. Personally, the business would be safer if the stuff weren't so rare. I'd rather see the price go down to a thousand a pop. Right now it's like freaking liquid gold.'

"(In fact, liquid gold is considerably cheaper than Solace.)

"Others find it safer to merely acquire S-girls and sell them to powerful individuals. Austin Rickey of Boston operates as a bloodhound only. 'It's way easier to find a secretor than to keep her,' he affirms. Supported by a heavily-armed crew, he auctioned off his three discoveries to unidentified bidders. The

last two auctions took place virtually, over the Internet. 'The live event reminded me too much of a slave auction. I'm part African American so that wounded me inside, a little.' Austin, who claims to be retired from the cutter-snatching racket, soothes his jangled sensibilities in a multimillion dollar mansion in Boston's Beacon Hill neighborhood. There he pursues his passion for art, maintaining the deepest collection of 1950s color field paintings still in private hands.

"S-girl owners generally maintain several layers of organizational insulation between themselves and their customers. Even if you can find a Cupholder to sell you some Solace, it's highly unlikely that he's the one in possession of an S-girl, or even knows where the supply chain leads. Even low-level slingers must be on constant guard against product jacking. As a consequence, they are typically rough customers, or travel in the company of intimidating bodyguards. 'Let's say you do sniff out a Solace hook-up. Don't expect a visit from your friendly college student dope dealer,' Wilder warns. When asked to square this statement with his own unprepossessing appearance, he replied nonverbally, by unsheathing a set of serrated, razor claws.

"The need to protect one's captive S-girl is sharpened by her perishable status. 'They tend to drain out in one to four years,' says Wilder. 'If they don't get away from you and top themselves first.' Austin Rickey agrees. 'I've never seen a girl continue to secrete after her eighteenth birthday.' The two human traffickers dispute one another on an essential point.

'Never let 'em lose their virginity,' Rickey advises. Wilder says that's nonsense. 'The sex act has zero to do with it.'

"What happens to a used-up S-girl? 'That's up to the owner.' Rickey shrugs. 'I got nothing to do with that.' Wilder refuses to be drawn out on the subject.

"Devoted users of the drug employ diverse strategies to cope with this unsavory aspect of their soul-cleansing high. Many deny it altogether. Says Imari S., 'I don't know where you're getting your information from, but it can't be true. I've felt what Solace gives you. The name is apt. It can't come from such a dirty, exploitative place. There's no way. You try it and you'll see.'

"Others employ more sophisticated means of denial. Several urban legends, more pleasant than the reality, explain away the nasty facts. Hong X., a Miami financier, takes this reporter to task. 'You've fallen hook, line and sinker for a load of bull. That's what the manufacturer of Solace wants you to think. That they're all bad guys and cutthroats, and that they have to harvest young girls to get the stuff. I happen to know for a fact that it's a chemical process, all controlled by the same consortium, and the whole smokescreen is to keep others from analyzing the drug and replicating the formula. Maybe I shouldn't tell you this, but I know some guys who right now are setting up a lab to do just that. And when we see true competition in this space, Solace will be commoditized. It will be as commonplace as frickin' Dr. Pepper. And then we can all feel human, nearly all the time. It will revolutionize





goddamn Kindred society, I can tell you that. It will all be different. Golconda in a jar!’

“Some users confirm the S-girl story but give themselves an out. ‘That’s how it was originally discovered,’ says Petra M., ‘and maybe some Solace is still made that way. But those witches from the Crone Circle have this magic ritual to duplicate it. They’re just giving us a taste now, and later they’ll make it more available but also force us to obey them. Which is fine by me, even though I hate those self-righteous hosebags like I hate my own stepfather, because a steady supply of stuff would be worth it. Worth anything.’

“Statements such as Petra’s typify the desperation expressed by many users. For those who care about such distinctions, Solace is emotionally rather than chemically addictive. During the 10 to 30 minutes a Solace high can be expected to last, users report a potent combination of physical ecstasy and spiritual peace. When the effect subsides, the spiritual pain of vampiric existence floods back in. Users retain a memory of their momentary absolution just strong enough to fill them with an all-surpassing desire to recapture it. ‘It’s like the crash you get after Ecstasy,’ says Petra, ‘multiplied by a hundred thousand million.’

“What about subjects for whom mortal life was no bed of roses? ‘I used to say, I’ve been alive, and I’ve been dead and dead’s better,’ says Michael K., a transient originally from the Texas panhandle. He recounts a childhood of staggering abuse at home, followed by a nightmarish existence as a street hustler. ‘Never for a minute did I feel safe or happy when I was breathing. After my Embrace, I became confident, powerful. A killer. Now I was the predator, and never again the prey. Screw the angst, poppy. Being a v-dog is the bomb, I used to think. So I roll this punk-ass Daeva one night in back of a truck stop near Plano. He and I go way back and he knows my sorry history and he figures he’ll mess me up by tricking me into taking the stuff. The theory being that it will dredge up the primal horrors of my lifetime. So I stick it in my tongue and bam. Tears roll down my cheek. I’m flooded with the happiness I’d never known. What life coulda been like if somebody in my family had treated me right, instead of all the beating and raping and burning. I ripped that Daeva scumhole to fragments. Because he took away the last thing I had going for me — the thought that I was better off undead. Since then, I realize I’m only better off for the few minutes a hit of Solace lasts. Then I need some more.’

“Some users hotly maintain that they’ve kept their affair with Solace strictly casual. ‘For me it’s mainly about the physical sensation,’ explains Carter B., a jazz trumpeter based in San Diego. Carter’s normally a devout horsehead, nodding on the blood of a harem of pet heroin addicts. ‘I dig how S works directly on your body. Heroin-laced Vitae is fine, but this brings back the good old days, the visceral jolt of jamming a spike into your very own vein.’ Even so, the chance to jab in the occasional unit of Solace hasn’t altered his coping strategies. ‘It was a novel trip, sure, but you hear about the Damned who take one taste and all they can do the rest of

their lives is chase it. I’m not wired that way, I guess.’ Or maybe it’s because his constant state of heroin intoxication has dulled the keen hunger for Solace that would otherwise be nailing him to the wall? ‘Anything’s possible,’ he says, as he reaches for the neck of a pliant, glass-eyed blood doll sprawled on his crimson-sheeted bed.

“Addicts describe the desperate ache that drives them toward another elusive fix as a constant hell of striving and obsession. ‘It’s worst right after the comedown. All you can think about is, where can I get another syrette? You can’t concentrate on your work, on the people around you. Not even on protecting yourself. One time I thought I saw a syrette lying out on the open on the dashboard of a parked Volvo. This was right as dawn was approaching, and I should have been getting home to my lightless room. It was already too late when I saw it. I got home just before the sun came up. When I got inside, my hair was on fire!’ But did she get the syrette? ‘It was a tube of frigging lip balm,’ she ruefully moans. ‘My mind was playing tricks on me. Showing me what I wanted to see.’

“If you say you got a syrette for me,’ says Michael K., his dry tongue whetting the chapped tissue of his lower lip, ‘I don’t even got to see it to dance to your tune, boy. Just the damn hope of it will have me doing whatever it is you want. Even when in the back of my mind, I’m thinking, this dude’s got to be running a game on me. I don’t care. I’ll take that risk. S is rare, boy. I mean, rare! The slim chance of it’s better than no chance at all. That’s how it plays with your head. You want me to kill for you, I’ll kill. Torture? I’m up for that; when I’m on the S, the screams of the victims will all go away. Betray my closest friend? Hell, Solace is my closest friend.’

“This breakdown of all social obligation frightens our betters. All mainstream Kindred organizations, from the Carthian Movement to the Invictus, work to stamp out Solace within their ranks. In some cases, they’ve taken ruthless measures against the pushers.”

## OTHER SOURCES

“Druggies love to speculate, especially about even more potent highs and plentiful supplies right around the corner. Solace junkies, for whom drought is the default condition, are no different. One common theme is the possibility that secretors outside the S-girl profile exist.

“During my research for this piece I heard it said that seventh sons (or daughters) can secrete the fluid, too. Other mooted candidates include persons whose fathers were Embraced while they were in utero, descendants from a particular village in either the Caucasus mountains or the Mayan lowlands and individuals in their first six months of HIV infection. The appalling 1998 deaths of a Montana family can be traced to would-be S-slingers pursuing a theory that people on the verge of starvation produce the substance.”

## Storytelling

Solace suggests many possible storylines, including:

- A character tries the drug and then wrestles with the consequences of addiction.
- The coterie comes into possession of an S supply, and find themselves in the frying pan as addicts and power-seekers surge out of the woodwork to get the supply away from them.
- The coterie must safely transport a secretor to her new owner. Do they develop a conscience and set her free? Can they protect her from kidnappers intent on keeping her crimson bounty for themselves?
- An ally, secretly addicted to Solace, betrays the coterie for a hit.
- The coterie investigates a murder among the Kindred; the dispute was over a supply of the drug, or part of a war between rival traffickers.
- A local Kindred authority declares war on the Solace trade. The coterie fights either to eradicate the supply network, or to protect it from the authorities.
- A Damned scientist develops synthetic Solace. Establishment forces within the community, such as the Lancea Sanctum or Invictus, fear the transformation of vampire society that widespread availability of the drug would foster. They want to destroy him, and the formula. The coterie works either to protect the scientist, or the status quo.

## Game Mechanics

Characters taking Solace are at risk of acquiring the derangement of Solace Addiction. (It poses a much more active detriment to characters than addictions to standard substances, and is therefore not treated as a Flaw.) A single hit can be sufficient to trigger an addiction.

Hits of Solace range in purity. The Storyteller decides how pure any given hit is, on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is weak, and 5 is transcendently brain-melting.

When your character takes a hit of Solace, roll Stamina + Composure (if you want to experience the effect) or Stamina + Resolve (if you have been dosed against your will and are attempting to resist its effects) in a contested action against a number of dice equal to the purity rating.

If your Stamina + Resolve successes exceed the Purity successes, you feel nothing. You've successfully resisted its effects. Solace users who witness this may regard you as a weird superbeing of incredible inner toughness, or a poor benighted soul enable to experience spiritual transcendence.

If your Stamina + Resolve or Stamina + Composure successes equal the Purity successes, you feel the drug's legendary physical and emotional wallop but do not develop a habit.

If your Stamina + Composure successes exceed the Purity successes, you feel a mild form of the high. You do not become addicted, but remain curious about its full effects. Although you do not feel a compulsion to seek out another dose, you will be tempted to indulge again if you





ever stumble across another opportunity to take a hit. When presented with a syrette, you must succeed on a Resolve + Composure roll to turn it down. Naturally, if your character wants to partake, you can forgo this roll.

If your Stamina + Resolve or Stamina + Composure successes are less than the number of Purity successes, you experience the full impact of Solace in both body and soul. You acquire the Solace Addiction derangement.

“SURE, THEY GOT IT OFF THE STREETS, BUT YOU DON’T EVER GET OVER IT. THOSE EAST SIDE CARTHANS ARE ALL STILL ON IT. BRING A BIT OF THAT STUFF BACK INTO TOWN AND IT STARTS ALL OVER AGAIN.”

### *Solace Addiction (Derangement)*

You are emotionally addicted to the incredibly rare drug Solace. The effects of this derangement vary depending on how much time has passed since you last had a dose. Time spent in torpor does not count toward this calculation.

**One week or less:** As soon as you get up, you start looking for another hit. Scoring is your top priority. You can take other actions only if convinced by another character that they will eventually lead you to a syrette of S. (The convincing character must beat you in a contested action pitting Wits + Persuasion against your Resolve + Composure.) If then you come across a more promising means of securing a dose, the persuasion loses its force, and you pursue that lead.

**More than a week, less than a month:** You’re still on the alert for the next hit, but your recent inability to score has resigned you to disappointment. You must score a success on a Resolve + Composure roll with a –2 penalty at the beginning of the day to avoid spending it in a search for another hit. As above, another character can persuade you to abandon your quest in favor of other activities. Whether you resist the urge or are persuaded, a newly discovered opportunity to score forces you to roll Resolve + Composure at a three-die penalty; if unsuccessful, you drop what you were doing to pursue the high.

**More than a month, less than a year:** As above, but the roll at the beginning of the day is taken at no penalty, and rolls when you’re confronted with the chance to score face a mere one-die penalty.

**More than a year:** Your nights no longer revolve around the hunt for Solace. However, if presented with an opportunity to score, you must roll Resolve + Composure or pursue it to the exclusion of other activities.

No matter how long it’s been since your last emotional cleansing, you may find yourself tempted to perform acts you otherwise wouldn’t in order to get yourself a syrette. You may lie, kill, betray or debase yourself for the cash to make the buy, or the holder of the goods may ask you directly to do something awful. You may then take another Resolve + Composure roll to maintain your selfhood

and refuse the dose. For especially heinous acts, a generous Storyteller may allow you a bonus of one to three dice on this roll. On a success, you stick around and attempt to gain the syrette through other means. On an exceptional success, you are able to walk away entirely.

Solace use isn’t all bad. Whenever you take a hit, you regain all spent Willpower — unless you successfully resisted it with Stamina + Resolve.

## *The Sleep of Reason*

Immediately one of the stars I saw in the sky began to grow larger, and the divinity of my dreams appeared to me, smiling, in a sort of Indian garb, just as I had seen her before. She walked between us, and the meadows turned green, the flowers and leaves sprang up from the ground beneath her feet . . . Day was just breaking, I wanted to have some tangible sign of the vision . . . and I wrote on the wall these words: ‘You visited me this night.’

—Gérard de Nerval, *Aurélia*

## *Drink a Little Dream from Me*

If you pick the moment right, you can spot when a human is dreaming. His heart rate speeds up, like a drummer moving into swing time, and you can hear the blood pour through his veins like a Maserati through the world’s longest underpass. His eyelids twitch as his eyes move back and forth behind them, reliving monkey fears that we have shed like dry skin with our Embrace. His sweat smells sharper, like raw pork ever so slightly seared in acid, and when the smell of his mouth sours is your moment. If you know the right way to sink in your fangs, and the right syncopation to hit with his carotid artery thumping up and down, you can ride the slick of his glands all the way down into the shadows thrown up by his misfiring brain. You can drink his dream even as he gropes Miss Teen Download or flees a headless ghost or finally, finally learns how to fly.

The Kindred called Terry Lee Thorp, whose full identity was suppressed by order of an investigating Myrmidon, gave this testimony at his trial in Elysium:

*The hardest part, for me anyway, is resisting the temptation to just poison the stupid cow while she lies there. In fact, I’ve done it more often than not; you go to all the trouble to set it up and sip just as her eyes twitch and her throat tightens and all you get is being late for the test in Mr. Baines’ American History sophomore year or some soft-focus crap with Brad Pitt picking apples in Vermont. The fun you get when you turn Brad into a Nosferatu and make him lunge for her throat isn’t worth it. If I wanted to watch a Nosferatu kill some tubby bitch, I wouldn’t have to screw around with matching pulse rates, I could just hang out on Kingsbury Road after two. And half the time she wakes up in a panic, and then I have to kill her anyhow.*

Dream-drinking shows up at odd moments throughout Kindred history. Some Roman vampires would supposedly undertake no major action without drinking the dreams of the first slave they encountered, by way of augury. The delicate art of drinking dreams was supposedly highly advanced during the early Renaissance, and the quality of ones' mortal attendants' dreams was a major bragging point for vampiric courts across Italy. Mentions of the practice almost entirely cease for some reason around 1475, and don't recur in Kindred writings until the late 19th century.

It took some time to return to Kindred consciousness, and even now it remains a curious, outré practice, rather like "lucid dreaming" among mortals. The acceptance of dream-drinking was not hastened by the tendency of jaded, rebellious dream-drinkers to batten on to every new human drug craze from absinthe to ether to LSD to Ecstasy, in search of ever wilder dreams to guzzle. Even today, probably the majority of dream-drinkers do it for no other reason besides the rush. Take the journal of Cynthia Trevithick, a Carthian Daeva, for example:

*I cannot tell you what it meant to see the sun once more, to feel true lust for someone, to taste fruit and smell water and even to be afraid of the dark again! I would kill a hundred of them if I could feel that every night . . . How dare these worms keep such things from us?*

A few Kindred groups, especially those associated with the Invictus and its allied power structures, have begun tentatively experimenting with dream-drinking as a tool of control and information. As they learned it was sometimes possible to guide dreams as well as drink them, dream-drinking became almost standard procedure for some Primogen courts. A few Harpies have succumbed to the temptation to get inside information on their rivals by drinking the dreams of those vampires' human servants. Of course, the danger of drinking up a blood bond (if a servant turns out to be a ghoul — whose dreams are most often monotonous panegyrics to their masters, to boot) makes them more likely to turn such delicate procedures over to their own thralls. Of course, that leads to potential betrayal and retaliation, as well. A few Princes have simply banned dream-drinking in their domain as too likely to cause yet more inter-Kindred friction.

From the August, 2001, transcript of the mesmeric debriefing of Larry Kurzweil, Invictus and Gangrel:

*I'm in a corridor, and I know that it's where I work. I'm walking, or flying, down to the basement, past the security grille and the electrified wires and the ultraviolet lamps. Now everything is twisted around like taffy, but I'm pretty sure that's just the meat dreaming. Anyway, there's these big stairs, like giant Stonehenge stairs going down and the guards aren't wearing uniforms any more*

*and their guns have gotten a lot bigger. I think I'm still wearing my uniform, though, and I'm holding onto a cross like I think it will help. I'm not sure if I believe it in the dream or not; it gets hard to separate us here . . . oh, finally, another set of wires with herbs hanging from them tied in sacred knots (no, I just know they're sacred knots somehow, I don't think . . . look, maybe he was briefed while he was awake, or something . . . let me finish) and behind all that is the big lead coffin. It's opening, and the room is turning pale and frost-colored . . . and I'm riding giraffes and chasing owls and hell and damnation the dream changed again.*

### *Mixed Drinks*

*I know you fear me/I know you do/I see it in your dreams/  
I see me kill you every night.*

— "Glad To Be Your Nightmare," The Carmillas

Every dream-drinker has his own set of taboos and tricks, stories he has heard about "the last vampire to try this" and special music to play or food to feed a victim to guarantee really special dreams. Other rumors are urban legends, superstitions about a practice that's half superstition to begin with.

- A human who dreams about vampires is already "claimed" by another dream-drinker. Don't trespass.
- Certain herbs or resins can force mortals to dream of specific topics, block out dreams or allow perfect dream retention. There may be some connections between dream topics and the "language of the flowers," which was sometimes based on Renaissance herbalism. Experienced dream-drinkers know to keep an eye out for flowers in dreams, anyway.
- There is one vintage of wine that, if you drink a human with it in his blood, will give you his Vice, too.
- The last dream of a dying human is prophetic. Some dream-drinkers say that if you drink it as they die, it will prophesy your own death.
- Drinking a whole night's dreams from a freshly baptized child can cure any magical ailment.
- There are Beings who show up in a lot of different human dreams. Not Britney Spears, but uncanny spirit entities who are at home in dreams, such as the Handless Killer, the Too-Small Cat or the Lady of the Aquamarine Room. If you drink from a dream they have claimed as their territory, they will follow you into your dreams.
- If a vampire drinks a dream in which the dreamer dies, she will slip into torpor.
- Never let a thrall share a dream you've drunk, because the thrall can reverse the Vinculum on you while you're both asleep.
- If you open a human's eyes while she's dreaming, you can use Auspex to just see what she's dreaming of,



reflected in her cornea. If you eat her eye right then, you can have that dream whenever you want.

- If you drink the dream of a dog, the werewolves will find out somehow. They will track you down through the dream world and core out your eyes from inside your head the next time you enter daysleep during a full moon.

- If you drink a dream during a thunderstorm, you can spread it to another sleeper right when the lightning strikes next.

- If you drink the dream of a twin, his brother will know. If he's awake at the time, he'll know you're a vampire.

- The government is putting stuff in the water supply, and in fast food additives, to let them control people's dreams. If you drink from someone who eats a lot of fast food, the government will be able to control your dreams, too.

- There's a special dream called Red Ruin, which a lot of people in Eastern Europe have because it's based on a scene in some Polish movie. If you can drink that and kill the dreamer while you do, you get twice the Vitae from his blood.

- There's nothing better than having sex while you both kill someone in their dream. It's almost as good as when you were alive.

### *They're All Just Things in Your Dream*

For vampires, dream-drinking (and retailing urban legends about dream-drinking) gives them a whole new realm of mystery and mystification to explore. Here they seem to remain comfortably in their familiar dominant role, but what is more fluid and changeable than dreams? So the frisson of danger, a sensation as exciting to many vampires as it is to us, remains ever present. To vampires, it has much the same resonance that absinthe drinking does for modern Americans — “it's *probably* safe, but I heard this one guy got ahold of some weird Bulgarian shit or something and sawed his tongue off . . .”

Should dream-drinking once more enter the vampiric mainstream, the clan members most likely to adopt dream-drinking on a wholesale basis are the Mekhet, self-styled masters of darkness and night. Their dominance of Auspex makes them naturals to learn this Devotion, and their Mnemosyne bloodline seems like an ideal secret guardian for the art in a chronicle in which dream-drinking is not openly spoken of.

The covenant most likely to use dream-drinking ritually (as opposed to the pragmatic dream spies of the Invictus) is the Circle of the Crone. Not only is there the innate connection to Vitae, but the shadow of the Crone falls across the legend. In mythical terms, this tale opens the door between the vampire and his legendary cousin the night-hag. In northern European lore, the night-hag sat on the chest of a sleeping mortal and

gave him horrific dreams, draining his breath as he strained against her terrible weight. (“Mara” was Anglo-Saxon for “hag,” which is why we call such an experience a “night-mara.”)

“YOUR GIRLFRIEND DOESN'T DREAM ABOUT YOU.”

### *What Dreams May Come*

In game terms, dream-drinking allows the Storyteller to add not merely an unfamiliar power, but a perhaps unfamiliar feel to his game. The hypnagogic eerie surface calm that seamlessly slides into nameless terror carries a slightly different weight than the emotional horror of a standard **Vampire** chronicle. It's also a great hook for sex and eroticism, should the Storyteller be interested in such themes. Beginning at least with Stoker and LeFanu, authors have connected vampiric attacks thematically or explicitly with erotic dreams. It may spring from something as simple as the stealthy approach of the vampire into the sleeper's bedroom by night, but that's just the beginning.

The key to dream stories is that they always have a logic of their own, just not waking-world logic. The Storyteller is therefore free to riff from scene to scene, linked only by a bright shade of blue, a wrinkled blood-stained monkey or the phrase “Have you nothing any colder?” As long as the progression is toward dread and unease, the story will continue forward on its own. Once it slows, “then you wake up.” Chasing down a dream's meaning in the waking world (if any) can take several sessions or a single Research roll, depending on how much the Storyteller wants to return to that undiscovered country.

### *Get in Touch with That Sandown Fella*

If dream-drinking is an acknowledged part of vampire lore, a character will know about it just as he knows about any other Devotion or Discipline. It's more fun if dream-drinking remains in a kind of murky borderland realm of misinformation and confusion. In that case, a vampire will need at least one dot in Streetwise to have any idea where to “hook up” with someone who can teach the Devotion. (That said, a Storyteller might have dream-drinking as a hobby for the bored and jaded at the highest pinnacles of vampiric power, in which case dots in Status will be de rigueur for would-be sand-sippers.) Chasing down a fringe rumor of this sort is a Wits + Streetwise task; deducing the technique from Renaissance court diaries will tend toward Research or Occult tests. If dream-drinking is the carefully guarded secret of some oneiric cult, of course, then standard conspiracy-breaking techniques, from Investigation to blackmail to Telepathy, come into play. If the character is a member of the cult (if, say, dream-drinking is one of the lesser secrets of the Crone), then Covenant Status or the like will be all the prerequisite needed.



### *Dream-Drinking*

(Auspex •, Dominate or Majesty •)

Kindred who peer behind the veil of sleep can sometimes drain such insights from their prey. By means of this Devotion, a vampire can find the moment at which a sleeper dreams, and drink that dream for herself along with the blood of the dreamer. She will dream along with the sleeper until the dream stops, and can “replay” the dream in her own mind, dreaming it again at any time until her next feeding. Tasting new blood, even from the same dreamer on the same night, washes the dream away.

Ordinarily, dream threats pose no real danger to a dream-drinking vampire. The Storyteller may still call for Composure rolls to avoid waking up or fear frenzy (if the sleeper is dreaming about his Boy Scout Jamboree bonfire). If the stories of a “dream world” are correct, it may be inhabited by spirits or dream entities of some sort, which might be able to harm a dreamer — or a

dreamer’s leech. Giving powerful dream entities the equivalent of the Nightmare Discipline is probably a good start; Storytellers who really want to escalate can have a vampire awoken from a mortal nightmare to discover claw marks in his own chest, an eye missing or some other dream-inflicted wound.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** Wits + Empathy + Auspex

**Action:** Extended. Target number equals subject’s Resolve + Composure; one roll represents three minutes.

Dreams occur during REM (Rapid Eye Movement) sleep, which sets in about 90 minutes after falling asleep or 90 minutes after the end of the last REM phase. The average human sleeper goes through three or four REM phases per night, each one usually longer than the last. Humans familiar with lucid dreaming, or with the visualization exercises common in some esoteric traditions, have better instinctive control over their subconscious minds; they add their Occult score to their target number.



A vampire who has shared the proper dream (or dreams) with a mortal will be at an advantage when manipulating him. Such a vampire should add +1 (or more for more intense or frequent sharing) to Social rolls against him, especially Empathy, Intimidation and Seduction. Pure information gathering is also possible through dreams, replacing Empathy in the activation dice pool with Investigation or Subterfuge.

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The subject awakens in a panic, and the user accidentally drinks (and manifests) any derangements present in the target for the rest of the night.

**Failure:** Failure means no dream found or consumed.

**Success:** Success allows continued dream-drinking; when the required total is reached, the user has drained the subject's dream, and can experience it herself.

**Exceptional Success:** A dream is fully drained, and the user can nudge the sleeper into a new dream, retaining previous successes.

### Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	Power is turned on a vampire with whom the user has a blood tie.
+1	The character has drunk the dreams of the subject before without incident.
—	Not looking for any specific dream.
-1	Each derangement the subject possesses.
-1	Seeking a specific flavor of dream (erotic, heroic, nightmarish, etc.).
-2	Seeking a specific setting or element of dream (ideal lover, childhood home, the character, etc.).
-3	Seeking a specific memory or experience (security codes, a witnessed murder, etc.).

This power costs five experience points to learn.

"THEY'RE SIPPING OFF COUNCILMEN AND STATE SENATORS.  
TWO A.M. ON TUESDAYS IS WHEN *THEY* GO LOBBYING."

## Understanding The Fog of Eternity

*Truths are illusions we have forgotten are illusions; they are metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force, coins which have lost their embossing and are now considered as metal and no longer as coins.*

— Bernard Williams

When one cannot remember, one cannot know the facts behind one's existence. When one remembers incorrectly, what one believes to remember is not truth but rather an illusion explaining what one claims to understand. It is no longer memory, but rather mythology used to explain

what cannot be explained. When one cannot remember an event, how can one explain the result of that event?

Most can remember enough to claim at least some true understanding of their own existence. Vampires however, exist under the Fog of Eternity, which removes and distorts their memories when torpor occupies their bodies. For them, nothing recollected is truth, but rather mythology attempting to find truth through illusory explanation.

## The Complex Memory

Memory is the retained and retrieved knowledge of one's own history. Through the perception of the physical world, the mind collects facts, organizes experiences as they occur and maintains them for later understanding and reflection. Yet, all memory is fallible. Experience distorts as it impresses our senses, intense emotions violate experiences of struggle and desire and time's continual march forces one to move away from one event and on to another. Some memories are biased as those who recollect their pasts often do so selectively. When they report an event from memory, they do not describe every scientific detail of their experience, but instead give accounts of what they believe to be the truth. Their descriptions alter based on mood, perception, hormones, previous memories and many other psychological facets of their delicate mind. In the end, their understanding of true events may be nothing more than illusions corrupted by prejudice.

Existing among Kindred adds to the possible nuances that can distort the delicate map of an individual's memory. A vampire's will can affect what one fears, perceives or even remembers based on the circumstance of the situation. One possessing these supernatural skills can reshape another's memory, and what he remembers has nothing to do with the will of his soul.

Failure to remember accurately is therefore failure to recount the truth; however, when one remembers something entirely different from what occurred, truth itself no longer matters. Instead, accuracy begins to matter. Yet, what good is accuracy when there are those so ruthlessly devoted to their own cause that they are willing to violate the memories of even the most sincere individual? What of one's own sincerity when one suddenly realizes one is susceptible to the mental manipulation of those who hold no value for truthfulness? What can they think of the world they perceive, or do they find themselves drowning in a Cartesian<sup>3</sup> nightmare?

Even those manipulating the memories of others find themselves dependent on their own private memories. For without memory, how can one understand what one wants? How can one know where to go if one cannot remember where one has been, and how can one manipulate the beliefs of others if one cannot believe in one's own past? In the end, how can one know what one holds in one's best interest if one cannot trust this knowledge to the test of one's own memory?

## *Dreaming from a Common Ground*

As one's mind wanders in a moment of philosophy, distraction or in the moments before drifting asleep, one may wonder if one can rely on one memories. After a vivid dream, one may ask oneself if the experiences one senses are real, or if everything one experiences is nothing more than a dream. Human beings probably have these thoughts on occasion, yet most can find solace in the company of others who share their sense of reality. They can talk with each other about experiences they once shared, argue over particulars and call on each other when their memories conflict on details. Yet, they still have general recollection of the event. They, at the very least, agree that they share a common ground upon which their recollections derive.

The Embrace rips vampires of this luxury. Once vampires are forced to succumb to torpor, the Fog of Eternity distorts their memories so much that they cannot be sure of their common ground. They may believe they share experiences with others of their kind, yet they will never have the reassurance of approaching these individuals and asking them what they recall. Unable to share memories, vampires live isolated from their own kind and must reinvent their history through myth if they wish to have a history at all.

Kindred therefore exist in silent horror and as constant strangers to their own souls. Unable to call upon their own memories, they rely on what they believe to be true. They must reinvent an image of themselves through myth.

## *The Mnemonic Mythology*

Kindred do not have a traditional history because they are not able to collectively recall past events. Instead, vampires must heavily rely on mythology to describe why they are the way they are, or how they came to be. Why the Embraced curses vampires with the Fog of Eternity is a question that also shrouds itself in mythology.

## *The Mnemonic Treatise*

The Myths describing why there is a Fog of Eternity borrow influence from a collection of knowledge that makes up the Mnemonic Treatise. Established by Agoniste and Mnemosyne scholars, the Mnemonic Treatise is not one text, but rather a work in progress nourished by Kindred who dedicate their existence to documenting the history of the world. Their effort is selfless, and they aim for a collective goal. In addition to considering vampiric myths, doctrines and testimonies, the Mnemotechnics also collect humankind's intellectual legacy and attempt to find similarities within the two through cross-text examination. While critics of the Mnemotechnics suggest this scholarship is nothing more than ego-fulfilling

dogma, the Kindred establishing the Mnemonic Treatise do not profess to know any one truth. While they may have individual beliefs about the universe, they would never admit to owning them. Furthermore, they realize the tragedy that belies the Kindred intellectual condition, and this awareness alone limits their ability to claim any truth and yet maintain the true mission behind their efforts. This Treatise, therefore, borrows not only from Kindred mythology, but also from the great minds and works of human intelligence.

## *The Poison of Lethe*

The ancients held a belief that memory was proof of the soul's immortality. The immortal soul inhabits a mortal body and infuses the mind with a life. The human soul is intellectual, rational and in harmony when feeding from knowledge. In the *Meno*, Plato describes the soul as an entity that learns through recollecting what it forgot in the underworld between mortal lives. Yet, unlike mortal counterparts, vampires do not perish. Their souls remain prisoners in mortal shells still inflicted by the chaotic disorders of the physical world. Furthermore, when vampires slip into torpor, their souls do not simply forget. Instead, the souls participate in waking dreams, which threaten to twist the memories of the one at rest. While asleep, these vampires dream illusions that threaten to penetrate through the mind with the vividness of reality.

Seeking a theoretical origin behind phenomena, many philosophically minded Kindred scholars look to a myth passed from Er and through Plato's doctrine. In this doctrine, souls of mortals forget what they have learned in their previous lives because they feed from the ~~r~~iver Lethe. According to Kindred mythology, vampires forget because they receive this essence through the mortal blood by which they need to thrive.

## *Er of Pamphylian and The Chronology of Agonista*

When the rest of the dead were picked up 10 days later, they were already putrefying, but when he was picked up, his corpse was still quite fresh. He was taken home, and preparations were made for his funeral. But on the 12th day, when he was already laid on a funeral pyre, he revived, and having done so, told what he had seen in the world beyond.

— Plato, *Republic*, 614b

Buried within the Greek fragments of the Mnemonic Treatise is the Myth of Er and his encounter with the vampire Agonista. Indeed as the myth suggests, most mortal and Kindred scholars familiar with this myth are familiar with the Platonic doctrine from which it came. Mortals indeed pass the myth off as nothing more than Socrates' way of educating his pupils through storytelling. Yet Kindred historians and



scholars believe this is evidence enough to prove that Er was a vampire who fell into torpor during battle and arose 12 nights later. These Kindred believe Er's message is not for the benefit of mortal souls, but instead for that of Kindred.

If taken from Plato's political discourse, the myth follows as such. When a mortal dies, his soul journeys into the Underworld, where it receives either punishment or reward for its behavior while among the living. After a period of rest, observation and travel, the soul must pick a new guardian that will play as the soul's host in the next life. Though chance limits the selection of lives from which to choose from, the soul always has an opportunity to pick a virtuous life.

Once souls find a corporal existence for themselves, they journey through a scorched wasteland and to the shallow riverbeds of Lethe, where they have the option to refresh themselves. All must drink, yet those who care little for virtue or their neighbors intoxicate themselves with this elixir, and those who maintain themselves with virtue and honor drink only what they need. The elixir drugs the souls, and, as they sleep, it dissolves the number of their memories based on how much the souls consumed.

For mortals, the myth exemplifies why Plato's stresses the importance of studying philosophy in order prepare one's soul with the knowledge needed to choose the best life possible after this life terminates. Vampires, however, have little hope for such an opportunity. As a result, the myth resonating behind the myth reveal perhaps a disturbing reality behind the Vampire's own soul.

"IT'S NOT LIKE A FOG, THOUGH. IT'S LIKE A SEA.  
YOUR MEMORIES AREN'T RIGHT THERE, BUT HIDDEN.  
THEY'VE FLOATED AWAY. THEY SANK."

### *The Ethonic Prison*

What Plato does not recount is the horror Er feels when the travels of the souls before him remind him that he chose to imprison his soul in a physical corpse. Observing the souls in their passing, he saw few who chose such an existence. Those who did were not yet ready for the struggles the Embraced would inflict upon their beings, and far from prepared to deal with existing among a more disorderly chaos for an unnatural length of time. For the soul is immortal by nature, and desires to retain the order it had in the cosmos. Though they were not born Kindred, they decided upon bodies that would become immortal at some point after birth. In doing so, these souls chose a slavery, and their extended existence in the physical world is, therefore, failing to progress at the best pace possible. They set themselves up to struggle against their nature as living entities.

Mnemonic commentary suggests this struggle is not necessarily a poor choice for some souls.

## WHY THE GREEKS?

Though the philosophy and mythology depicted in this Treatise derive from one general region, there are reasons vampires might at least consider the Greek intellectual tradition. First, Greek mythology and Platonic philosophy does not espouse the notion of an inherent evil. Evil as most understand it largely exists as the result of poor decision making, ignorance or chance. The material world causes suffering in its flux and necessity enslaves mortals to desires and emotions, which obfuscate the good and sway the soul to choose in favor of hubris. The soul itself only attains understanding of the good through immense folly, struggle, and, finally, developed and disciplined habits of intense study. These feats require several lifetimes to master. Therefore, even those with the best intentions often err out of ignorance or youth. When they die, their souls may receive punishment for their poor choices; however, they have the opportunity to learn from their mistakes and it becomes the souls' responsibility to choose a future life, which will further avail themselves to the good.

This does not resolve the soul from infliction outside of its control. Inherent evil, therefore, has little room in Greek philosophy. When a soul is free of curse and lacks the infliction of chance, the soul cannot choose the immoral route and at the same time escape the blame of doing so. A soul chooses evil either out of ignorance or out of its own volition. Admitting otherwise is slavishly weak.

This secular and more philosophical notion of the soul is a dogmatic contrast to the Judeo-Christian tradition of the eternally damned soul that cannot do anything about its condition. Therefore, this provides hope for souls currently caged in the vampiric condition. These vampires religiously devote their energy to uncovering the history of their kind through the intellectual efforts of others.

In addition to providing a philosophical tradition that does not eternally punish the Kindred state, Greek philosophy was the foundation and influence of Roman philosophy, politics, scholarship and religion. If the Camarilla indeed held its domain in Rome, then history would suggest the Camarilla was influenced by Roman and, in turn, Greek ideals.

Despite its detachment from the Judeo-Christian tradition, those who wish to find affirmation in that tradition also frequent Greek philosophy. From philosophies espousing moral purity to lessons teaching selflessness and monastic suffering, Christians and Jews have borrowed Greek doctrine to rhetorically support their arguments and teachings. Vampires holding this tradition can therefore use Greek philosophy as a device to persuade others to their own following. There is even commentary attributing Greek philosophy to the *Testament of Longinus*.

## *Er Encounters Agonista*

Er paused at the river and observed the soul whose best choices were lives belonging to Athenian wives. One was that of a scholar's wife whose existence was sheltered and whose freedom was limited due to poverty. The other was the life married to a noble statesman, and it ended in immortality. Er moved to the soul and urged it not to pick the grand life ending in immortality. For only misery would come from what the soul stood to lose.

Ignoring him, the soul chose immortality and was given the name Agonista as a warning to what she would endure. Troubled by the warning, the soul lost its thirst and drank lightly from the waters Lethe. The soul forgot little of truth and would quickly recollect the virtuous life. What the soul needed most however, was the memory of its new name.

In much mythology, appearances deceive. The Mnemonic Treatise include documents of the woman's life, and many believe one of the many Greek historians writing in the time of Thucydides authored the manuscript.

The myth itself portrays the story of a girl who believes she understands, but fails to recognize the best existence for her soul even when provided with sage advice. Like the Invictus, ancient thinkers saw that knowledge and memory helped "the best" people achieve power through infliction of their word, belief and will as well as physical strength. But similar to members of the Ordo Dracul, many ancient philosophers and poets believed that knowledge for the sake of power alone, and without understanding, can distract from understanding itself. Those who sought knowledge without understanding were therefore dubbed "sophists," and, consequently, many accused of being sophists also had great political power in the Athenian and Roman republics. Whether these sophists were protagonists or antagonists, if they failed to

understand what they knew, learned or remembered, they ended up in tragic or especially difficult situations.

## *The Life of Agonista and the Oracle of Trophonos*

The last time he saw his wife, he praised her virtue and reminded her he was honored to share his present family with a philosopher-king of tomorrow, and he thanked her for not telling him how he should improve his own duties. Though she fell asleep longing to be with her soul's match, her mind quelled her emotions by recalling to her how close she was to finally achieving a mind most like the eternal.

Now the scholar's first student was a jealous man and held himself in higher esteem than any priest held a god because he was himself immortal. He recognized the scholar's attention to the house and in particular Agonista and her boys. Fearing her progress would prove him weak and slavish, he sought to remove her as a threat. Yet, knowing her advancement, he realized her death would only quicken her progress. He instead wished to terminate the possibility that his soul might one day exist as a servant to hers.

That was the night of Agonista's Embrace, and failing to recall her choice in this matter, Agonista blamed the cruel fates and succumbed to an existence of helplessness. It consumed her, and she slept.

The doctrine depicting Agonista's mortal life is one that describes the life of a virtuous woman whose soul is on the brink of higher transcendence. The lesson, however, is not how the woman lived her life, but what she lost when her soul chose earthly immortality during the events that proceeded her mortal life. This lesson often derives two meanings for most Kindred. Those ignoring the myths of the underworld believe the myth describes the fatalistic ideal that one is pre-determined to be what one is at birth.

This chapter of the myth also glorifies mortal life and mortal





experiences forever removed from vampires. The story tells of the happiness Agonista feels when she finds the one she can trust, and esteems her position as mother to wonderful children. Her tragedy, therefore, is losing this bliss and her failure to recapture what she previously chose to lose.

### *The Thirst for Virtue*

So, Agonista indulged, drinking first from animals, then from criminals and, on occasion, from sophists. She soon realized the blood of those whom she observed to be virtuous was blood that did not cloud her mind as violently. With this revolution, she discovered her mind to be clear, and as she experimented, she fed, too, from philosophers who, through action, teaching and philosophizing, showed to her their understanding of virtue and wisdom.

In her story, Agonista struggles with idea that she stole from another in order to maintain her own identity. For some time, therefore, she savored the blood only from the wise who willingly entered her embrace, and took only as much as to sustain her. Yet such could not be said for her Kindred contemporaries. As she existed, Agonista observed the evidence of virtue diminishing within her city as vampires increased in numbers. She watched imprudent vampires unable to recognize mortal virtue through act, but rather possess the skill of seeing virtue in the mortal's eyes. Here the myth again emphasizes the importance of understanding. For though the vampires see virtue as one might a color, they fail to understand the meaning behind that virtue, and act carelessly. They remove volition from these mortals who should have them, enslave them as ghouls or Embrace them as thralls. Society therefore erodes; legendary cities crumble without virtue to maintain their laws.

Eventually, and in anguish, Agonista happened upon Er. Observing her troubles, he described to her their first meeting and told her to seek out the Cthon Mnemosyne, who was the guardian of the river bearing her name.

### *The Oracle of Trophonos*

Agonista sought this river, and following it to where it paralleled with a second more familiar river at Profitis Ilias. Before her, an ebony void opened like a mouth of a large predator, and it carried forth the high-pitched screams of terror. A shrouded high priest with a staff decorated with a stone image of the winged serpent asked her what business she had with this oracle. She told him she sought a trial with Mnemosyne and wished nothing more than to understand the truth. Not recognizing her as a follower of the winged serpent, and seeing in her eyes a soul that surpassed his own, he told her she was too weak to endure the terrors awaiting within and ordered that she leave at once. As Agonista pleaded her case, Mnemosyne heard her wise reasoning for coming here through the depths of the cave.

Observing a soul wiser than that of the priest through the girl's eyes, Menosyone informed Trophonos that his priest was envious and denied access to a person who had potential and was truly worth interrogating. Trophonos at once admonished the priest,<sup>4</sup> and excused him. He then greeted Agonista, and studied the depths of her eyes. Observing also that her soul bore the impressions of struggle, and shame, he asked her how he could be of any benefit to her since her soul possessed understandings beyond his comprehension. She was exhausted from living a waking dream in which she could not trust the words of those around her let alone the thoughts she within her mind. She described to him the others of her kind who recognized the virtuous from the image of virtue, and yet they proved they did not understand virtue itself by enslaving and excessively feeding from the virtuous and Embracing their bodies so their souls could not move into the next order of completion.

Trophonos nodded and commanded Mnemosyne to blind all vampires from recognizing the virtuous unless their souls shared an understanding of virtue.

### *Variants*

Beyond the mythology of Er and this chronology of Agonista, Mnemonic scholars have not disclosed anything indicating the true existence of the characters within the mythology. If they have found such evidence, they certainly seem unwilling to discuss it.

Yet, even the discovery of these doctrines has a mythological history of its own. Greeks have claimed existence to the Oracle of Trophonos for centuries. Unlike most oracles in ancient times, the Oracle of Trophonos did not profess the future. Instead, the oracle allowed one to see the array of choices one had; however, similar to the souls in the Myth of Er, one must understand one's own soul in order to make sense of these choices. Therefore, one endured a process similar to the souls in the myth, and drank an ointment, which made one forget. A person was put on "trial" by the muse of Memory, and through intense Socratic dialectic, was forced to recollect his past and rediscover the individual he really was when he walked into the oracle. Often, individuals find themselves shocked to realize what they knew walking into the cave, and how well they hid the truth of their own beings from their minds. Some were not surprised; why would they come to the oracle if they did not need to see a new side of themselves? Others found themselves enlightened, and changed for the better. Still some, unwilling to believe what they recollected, fell into denial, went mad and left the cave without their minds. Regardless of how one left, most who entered endure traumatic fits as they must re-live their most trying and painful moments. For this reason, most avoided the "cave of terrors," out of fear for what they might discover about themselves, their memories and their past.

## THE MIND AFRAID OF MEMORY

Given the traditions behind this myth, it is easy to see why some Mekhet adopt it. Some, who believe vampires to be born of fear, even suggest Trophonos was the first Mekhet afraid to be judged. Therefore, instead of receiving judgment, he administers just that to those who seek his oracle, and perhaps even Embraces those who cannot leave the cave accepting the truth of their souls.

Others suggest the terror of the cave so overcame mortals who entered that when they left, they left as vampires, or as minds afraid to remember. For these individuals, the Embrace and its Fog of Eternity was both a curse and a blessing. They would never physically die, and though their memories shift and morph as they sleep, their corporal prisons would keep their souls from enduring the recollection of their former lives as their souls would not have the opportunity to reincarnate in new bodies.

Kindred scholars debate this speculation. They suggest if this were the case, then certainly there would be more clans. Yet, some counter this debate to suggest the vampires created in this manner fell into their clan based on why they fear what they remember. (See p. 30 for more on vampires Embraced by fear.)

Due to the myth's place in both Kindred and mortal lore, the myth explaining the Fog of Eternity has variations that either reshape the myth or add to its complexity. Additionally, meanings existing behind the myth vary depending on the traditions attributed to the foundation of the myth. For example, many Kindred, and especially those belonging to the Circle of the Crone, attribute this myth to the Greek tradition. They point to the myth's specific relationship to other Greek doctrine and suggest the myth proves that vampires existed before Rome. For them, the myth maintains much of its Greek assumptions, derive parcels of truth from its story and assess its meaning within the context of the Greek literary tradition. Others see the myth as one written during the time of Rome. For them, the myth is nothing more than that, and its truths are not found in the stories the myth tells, but rather in the metaphors behind these stories.

Regardless of the myth's variants, Kindred scholars believe the myth remains because it holds promise of Golconda through the rediscovery of one's own soul. Most derive this meaning when they understand this myth in light of Apollonius Sophistes and the book he attained when leaving Trophonos' oracle. Whether one must remember the particulars of one's existence to achieve Golconda is yet to be seen.

**"YOUR PAST GOES INTO HISTORY.  
YOUR MEMORIES FEED THE BEAST."**

There is a different conclusion to Agonista's experience in the cave. Once Agonista is in the cave, some claim that her trial and education is to prepare her for a more immediate death. Once Agonista comes to understand herself and her soul as it relates to her vampiric state, she drinks the waters of Lethe. When the water cleans the memory of her physical experiences from her mind, she must endure a second test in which she demonstrates an understanding of the forms, first by recognizing their shadows, and then by the physical objects that formerly created the shadows. When she at last proves she cannot further her understanding without seeing the forms themselves, Trophonos and Mnemosyne release her and allow her to walk into the sun. This, of course, destroys her undead body, but at least her soul is free.

Or is it? Kindred, particularly those with ties to the Carthians or the unaligned, propose a tactless ending to this tawdry myth, which they believe interesting to any who dare to listen. Indeed, paranoid vampires, who maintain a cynical skepticism that only caters to their nervousness, bark criticisms at those idiotic enough to believe the best release for the soul is one that ends in combustion. Fire is torrent and even more chaotic than matter. Kindred who had the lessons of the Greeks shoved down their throats as fledglings know fire to be the most destructive force in Hellenic tradition. These Kindred conclude that if flames can destroy the best cities and send demigods in chariots tumbling to the earth, then fire certainly has the ability to warp or even incinerate the soul. They might even argue that any soul that receives impressions from such scorching and chaotic pain must end scarred.

Indeed, who can blame these cynics for having a dark understanding of their existence such that they would come to such conclusions. In all honesty, they do not wish to waste the present on matters that do not directly involve them. Only, they find the counterarguments to their understanding of this myth — amusing. Indeed, these Kindred welcome those who would debate this ending with them. Anyone who sincerely wishes to prove them wrong is more than welcome to so. For dawn is only a few hours away.

## *The Tomb of Sophistes*

There is a myth about Apollonius Sophistes who, like Agonista, did not follow the "winged dragon" but sought the oracle merely to understand the purest philosophy. Trophonos was impressed, chastised his priests for deceiving him and allowed Apollonius to enter. When Apollonius left, he possessed a green book, which held the secrets of Pythagoras, the eternity and the forms of eternity.

Many who see this myth pass it off as a variant of that of Agonista. Others see it as affirmation and believe there was (and perhaps still is) an Oracle of Trophonos one can consult. Though experiencing what awaits within



this oracle must be daunting, a successful result promises solace, power and perhaps Golconda.



### VISITING THE UNDERWORLD

Some discredit the belief that vampires receive a secondhand dose of Lethe's waters through mortal blood. They instead speculate that their souls actually visit the Underworld as their bodies lay still in torpor. (For more information, see p. 86) For these Kindred, the myth may hold just as much weight purely because their souls undergo the same process that mortal souls endure. In this process, Kindred souls, like those of mortal souls, drink of the river Lethe. Yet, the Kindred who hold this myth to be true must accept another principle. Unlike mortals who choose new lives for themselves, Kindred souls do not have this choice. They must instead return to the bodies by which they first came. Regardless, many still argue that their minds may benefit from this private experience if they walk paths of high moral standards.



### *Evidence of the Moirai*

The Moirai do not surface frequently in vampiric mythology. In light of their specialized topic, the Mnemotechnics uncover very little evidence of the Moirai. Yet, they are not the only vampires who skim doctrines and hunt for evidence of the Moirai. In light of the myth at hand, there are some who profess that the characters who do not share Agonista's struggles are Moirai. Er, some speculate, must be Moirai, and though the myth does not mention his vampiric state, Trophonos would most likely be a Moirai if he were Kindred.

There is a poetic prelude to this myth, which establishes Trophonos to be of the Moirai. In this account, the Moirai, eternally bound to the Earth, are extremely jealous of the heavenly immortals and the human beings whose souls transcend. In this account, Trophonos is the central antagonist. He observes Memnosyne aiding the mortal souls with their memories so they can achieve understanding. Infuriated, he enslaves the woman, Embraces her and imprisons her in a dark cave. Trophonos then causes a great chasm that springs two rivers from his cave, and guides them down to pour into the Underworld and mingle with the rivers that refresh passing souls. Trophonos then poisons the water with an addictively sweet elixir, which, once ingested, corrodes the memory of its drinker. Satisfied, he sits back and waits until humankind has no recollection of his existence. At that point, Trophonos opens his cave to those who desire an understanding of their own being. With the diligent attention of a wise teacher, Trophonos invites them in and explains they cannot come to understand anything if they at first do not know suffering. When they agree to his invasion, he intoxicates their

minds with the waters of Lethe and physically tortures their bodies. At this point, Trophonos orders Mnemosyne to interrogate the victim's memory and provide him with proof that the victim will leave the cave knowing absolutely nothing.

When this prelude becomes the premise of Agonista's myth, the outcomes and meaning logically distort. Some, such as the cynics, conclude Agonista's fate to be one of destruction while others suggest that Mnemosyne saves Agonista.

### *The Winged Serpent*

In some legends, Trophonos is not only an earthly immortal, but a winged serpent professing the importance of knowledge and the value of truth. Some Dragons therefore see this myth as a variant of their own legendry. They have reason to do so as much of their philosophy also shares its teachings with the philosophies taught in the early Greek academies. While many among the Dragon's Coils attribute Trophonos as validating to their own ways, their attitudes towards this validation vary. Some wish to say Trophonos is in fact Dracula as remembered by one whose memory lost much of its teachings while in torpor. They suggest the myth derives from valid mythology, and proof of what happens to the truth when the Fog of Eternity distorts memory.

Others believe the myth is nothing more than a distraction authored by individuals who wish to discredit the Ordo Dracul's own litany. Regardless, the Dragons still find meaning within its doctrine.

### *Analysis and Meanings*

The beauty behind this myth is the many meanings individuals can derive from its text. Vampires have espoused a few understandings of their own, and often to fulfill their own agenda. Though these viewpoints do not neatly divide from covenant to covenant, members within covenants understandably share viewpoints.

### *The Blood of the Virtuous*

If this myth were true, one might assume Agonista can spare her memory from forgetfulness if she fed purely from virtuous souls. While she would not be completely sure whether her memories truly belonged to herself, she would have some reassurance that her memories hold at least partial truths.

Yet, the myth also hints that vampires cannot recognize virtue unless they truly understand what virtue is. From this, one might assume that no one can prove the truth behind this myth; however, this does not stop vampires from trying.

Still, the myth gives vampires an idea for what to look for. For one, Er does communicate that inferior souls who drank far more than their share of Lethe's waters also chose the lives of animals. On this account,





individuals among the Kindred community may use this to justify drinking exclusively from mortals.

What the myth has to say about the virtue within a Kindred's soul is not certain. Some argue, as the myth suggests, that those who feed from virtuous souls to avoid the Fog's amnesia are not virtuous. They would suggest those with an understanding for virtue might recognize virtuous mortals, but would also see their own souls as tainted and refrain from victimizing those who, by moral code, do not deserve to suffer.

Others, believing their sense of virtue is one that entitles them to self-importance, might argue in favor of feeding from virtuous mortals. For their mortality is their own folly, and, if these mortals knew true virtue, they would have chosen to be Kindred themselves.

### *The Superior Souls*

The Embrace limits the soul's ability to grow; however, both novice and advanced souls fall into the Kindred condition. Kindred leaders therefore use this fixed hierarchy in their favor. They profess their right to rule over other Kindred and use this story to illustrate what happens to societies when Kindred do not see that those who best understand virtue are those who have the capability to preserve and protect society.

It is not surprising that members of the Invictus favor this interpretation, though Sanctified often adopt similar points of view.

### *Memory, Tradition and Power*

Remembering is a way of observing habits of self-control in the mind and historical patterns among power structures. These Kindred interpret this story as a tribute to remembering as a way to achieving power. They further believe that a way to maintain this memory is to execute and maintain the Traditions. Yes, upholding these Traditions requires discipline, just as recalling requires one to endure troubles one might otherwise avoid. Yet these Kindred believe that those who are too weak to endure these struggles are those who are better off dead.

### *True Understanding and the Folly of Memory*

Memory and knowledge for the wrong reasons can distract from true understanding, power and the possibility of the now. Additionally, memory of the physical does not necessitate an understanding of the eternal. Kindred who understand these philosophies see this logic reversed in Agonista's role. For, as she exists, she does not remember the exact details of the experience she receives from the senses. However, her mind quickly recollects that which is eternal and truthful.



“THERE’S ONLY SO MUCH WE CAN KNOW. TORPOR IS AS MUCH MAN AS BEAST, YOU KNOW? IT’S LIKE FASTING FOR THE MIND, CLEANING IT OUT.”

### *Storytelling*

Using mythology that explains the Fog of Eternity can change the mood of your chronicle if you have yet to pay any real attention to the mental condition vampires endure when they fall into torpor. Psychologically speaking, vampires are less sure of their own existence and cannot kid themselves otherwise, despite what they do.

### *Isolation*

For mortals, mythology is one way to collectively understand one’s past as united to the reality of others. Historical accounts, records, heirlooms and traditions often create the same effect. Memories shared by groups of individuals have more authority simply because many attest to their truth. An individual sharing a memory can identify his thoughts and recollections as real and as his own. In this way, collective memory grants mortal minds permission to indulge in the truth behind their perceptions. Those with the imagination to do so may escape with the skeptical intellectuals and radical conspiracy theorists, and indulge in the notion that the world is a mere illusion of the mind and memory enslaves the mind to the limits of time. Yet, in light of collective memory, most relinquish these thoughts in order to participate and progress in the social reality they share with their species. Mythology remains as an integral piece to this puzzle. Those who share the myth with their relations will do so as customary tradition even if they no longer believe in the myth.

While vampires cling to myth for similar reasons, they can’t be certain if they truly belong among those they associate with if they truly understand their condition. A vampire who depends on stories of her former self understands herself no differently from those who look to mythology and epics to understand the world’s creation. She is, in essence, a myth unto herself. She can interpret who she is through the metaphors in her stories. Often, with no one to recount her past with, she finds herself historically isolated from those she believes she knows. Even if she knows someone who can discuss the old days with her, she might discover that person’s understanding of what she experienced differs so much that she must question his honesty. She then feels deceived by those she believed she was able to trust, or she grows paranoid, constantly questioning their previous influence and their present intentions. She may seek truths through empirical inquiry, but she will never trust that her discoveries are real if she remains aware of her condition. Truly, the Embrace severs vampires from the possibility of ever possessing a reliable collective memory with another of her kind. She, just as other vampires aware of their condition, is an exiled dreamer lost in her

private realm of fantasy. Estranged from her own soul, she is in the dark, alone.

### *Zeitgeist*

From Plato’s creation myths, which support the immortality of the soul, there comes the famous saying, “time is the shadow of eternity.” If time is the shadow of eternity, the Fog of Eternity works as a metaphoric parallel describing what happens to the Kindred perception of time while in torpor. In essence, that perception is warped, and a vampire wakes perhaps having no idea as to how many years he slept through.

He also finds himself walking in a world he cannot recognize or understand, and while he may not remember the time to which he was born, he senses he does not belong to the current time with which he walks.

Chronicles enhancing the Fog of Eternity may be chronicles weighted with the theme of zeitgeist. A Storyteller can manifest this theme by paying particular attention to when an older vampire encounters modernity. Technology could stifle her. The chirp of a cell phone might startle her into a frenzy, or she may have difficulty learning how to drive or use a computer. Zeitgeist may have a subtler effect as well. Vampires in social situations may feel slightly humiliated by their antiquated manners or dress, and they could have difficulty keeping up with the rhythm of modern music. In the end, there is no correct way to use this theme; however, using it can add to the Fog of Eternity and the weighted reality it entails.



## COMPLETE CONTROL

Although most players walk into a game expecting that the futures of their characters are fairly uncertain, the players generally assume their characters’ backgrounds will remain intact and under the players’ own creative jurisdiction. When a player steps into a **Vampire** game, he is in effect relinquishing the creative rights to the character he may have spent hours constructing. Therefore, whether your players like it or not, the Fog of Eternity gives you immense power over the characters involved in your chronicle.

Theoretically, you can adapt any character’s history and in the process involve the players in psychologically horrifying plots. You might decide that it would suit your plot best if the devout life-preserving monk existed as a murderous glutton. What if he somehow discovers that he slaughtered a town in the existence prior to his last torpor? What of his self-image if he learns he led a massacre that destroyed the very people he currently claims to have saved? What of his story when he stumbles upon proof that, for some reason, he cannot discredit? This would, indeed, add to the character’s sense of cerebral horror and could enrich the mystery as you work to unfold your plot.

Yet, to be fair, many may not play **Vampire** with such possibilities in mind, and you run the risk of offending your players if you change their backgrounds recklessly. Therefore, to best utilize this control, you may want to remind players what they give up when they play **Vampire**, and warn them how this device will effect the chronicle.



### *The Mnemonic Institute*

At the foot of a crude hill garnished with oak and pine trees rests the quiet Greek village of Livadia. Though too small and penniless to provide a resource for those seeking temporal power and social prestige, the village is haven to a tightly knit organization of Mnemotechnics. Dwelling together in an abandoned monastery, these Mnemotechnics work together to unravel and maintain the entirety of vampiric existence. Bound to each other through a network of blood oaths, and religiously devoted to the intellectual life sketched by Stoic philosophers, these vampires are well aware of the Fog that plagues their blood while in torpor. They therefore cycle between study and sleep in order to continue their project. The institution by which they work is resourceful yet modest, and, while they do not shroud themselves in secrecy, they take precautions to protect themselves from those who would do them wrong.

Although these Kindred highly esteem the importance of truth, they do not profess the truth. They speculate, theorize, report, strategize, consult, study and attain the skills needed to do the former to the best possible potential. They are interested in their supernatural skills only to the extent that the skills are necessary to furthering this study. They sacrifice their identity for the preservation of greater understanding. They therefore see themselves as analytical machines. They suppress emotions and detach themselves from everything that draws them. They take only what they need to continue existing, and when their needs outweigh their analytical productivity, they take their turn to rest.

Though selfless, discreet and modest, these vampires are ruthless in their mission. They desire nothing further than the acquisition of knowledge. They are not an Illuminati disguised as youthful Rhodes Scholars and wise clergymen; they are not a secret cult boasting the mysteries of time. They are, in effect, analytical machines seeking to harvest their own collective Zeitgeist, and they stave the progression of their own understanding when they commit to what they understand as the Mnemnotic Way.

Their scholarship, though largely speculative, is impressive. While concerned with other Kindred scholarship, these knowledge-seekers take care not to slight the ever-growing knowledge produced by mortals. Within this information bank, they then search for evidence of Kindred existence, and theorize accordingly. Often their

theories are little more than coincidences and fail to share any similarity with the myths Kindred pass on to each other. Yet, sometimes a myth favored by many Kindred communities is a myth these scholars can track across many doctrines.

### *If the Myth Is True*

Kindred who see truth within the myths explaining the Fog of Eternity may strive to take actions based on their beliefs. Some may do so hoping to remember their pasts and perhaps achieve Golconda. Others may seek to forget what they cannot bear to remember.

### *The Emerald Tomb*

Many believe there is a tomb that decodes the mysteries of not only Golconda, but also of the phenomena yet to be explained or understood by science. Though legend suggests that this tomb has a jade cover, most practical scholars believe the tomb to be in pieces, if it exists at all. Still, like any relic of the past, the tomb has a following of treasure hunters determined to uncover its location.

Many have begun their search within the sterile walls of the Mnemonic Institute. Though they do not find the tomb itself, they have uncovered evidence of rituals that might have come from this tomb.

### *The Second Death*

All Kindred fear torpor. Quite apart from the fact that it leaves them lying insensate, utterly helpless before the machinations of their enemies, they fear the madness that comes with that deepest of sleep. They fear the insane, twisted dream-logic that assaults their sleeping minds, they fear the erosion of their memories and, most of all, though few are willing to admit it, they fear that their slumbering torments are more than just the Beast having its way with their subconscious. What if those visions come not from within, but from without? What if the delusional memories of events that never happened are not phantoms conjured by the psyche, but the leavings of something else, clawing at the soul in search of a way in?

As it turns out, the Kindred are right to fear. Torpor is more than just a deep slumber, a dreaming madness that afflicts elder and neonate alike. Vampires who go into torpor, willingly or unwillingly, are dead, pure and simple. While their corpses lie in repose somewhere, their souls are flung into the Underworld, cast loose to wander among the dead. Lucky Kindred survive the experience and return to their bodies after a time, with only hazy recollections of terrible nightmares and perhaps a false memory or two. The unlucky suffer a far worse fate: the dead always hunger for a path by which to return to the land of the living, and the connection between a torpid vampire's soul and his corpse, however tenuous, is just



such a path. A vampire who cannot keep his wits about him and survive his stay in the Underworld rises from torpor a different person, his soul devoured and replaced by the hungry ghosts imprisoned in the Underworld.

“SOME NIGHTS YOU’RE MORE DEAD THAN OTHERS.”

### *Death of the Flesh*

When a mortal is Embraced, he dies. Not in the medical sense of momentarily flatlining, or in the metaphorical sense of ending one life and starting a new one, but actual, literal death. The soul leaves the body and begins its journey to its final destination (whatever that might be), but the power of Vitae chains it and draws it back into the body, where it is anchored along with the Beast. The chains of blood that bind the vampire’s soul to his flesh are less secure than the spiritual anchor of a mortal, but they are more resilient. Masters of Auspex learn this truth when they master the ability to project their souls into Twilight and yet still return to their bodies. Dominate also allows the Kindred to temporarily loose their souls from their flesh. The ability to voluntarily enter torpor is the simplest, most basic expression of this quality of the vampiric soul; astral projection and possession are the result of the Kindred strengthening his will to the point at which he can resist the pull of the Underworld.

When a vampire’s body suffers grievous damage, or when the hunger for blood becomes too overwhelming, the soul’s natural “instinct” is to leave the body and travel to the next world. The undying curse of Kindred existence is not so easily avoided, though, and the soul remains tethered to the body by invisible gossamer chains even as it is cast loose in the Underworld. Once the body has had sufficient time to recover, or has been fed sufficient blood to slake its thirst, the chains pull taut and draw the soul back. Because the Underworld is a realm with vastly different laws of reality than the physical realm, the soul’s experiences do not translate into clear memories once it returns to the body; the Kindred only recalls glimpses and shadows of the ordeal in the form of nightmares and visions. Most Kindred remain unaware of this fact of their existence. Only a few scholars of the Ordo Dracul have learned a hint of the truth by experimenting on torpid Kindred, and even these Dragons do not understand all of the facets.

The Underworld is a dangerous place for a Kindred soul. The ghosts that dwell there have been locked away from the land of flesh that they remember for years, sometimes centuries or longer, and they hunger for a way to return to it. The keepers of the Underworld stand watch over most paths between the lands of the living and the dead, but a torpid vampire is a wildcard. The very tether that prevents the soul from being lost to the Underworld forever makes it a target for desperate, hungry ghosts eager to return to the sunlit lands. These ghosts will stalk a Kindred’s soul, alone or *en masse*, in an effort to cannibalize its Essence



and steal its connection to the vampire's body. When that happens, the Kindred's soul is destroyed (or lost even beyond the knowing of the Underworld's denizens), and when the vampire wakes from torpor, his soul is that of the devouring ghost.

The possession is neither perfect nor complete; memories of the body's Requiem clash with the invading soul's memories of its life, and the vampire's new mind strains to synthesize the fragmented memories. Often, events from one life will be transposed onto characters from the other, and vice versa. For example, upon waking, the vampire might remember his old coterie-mate betraying him over a woman, even though the memory of betrayal comes from the possessing soul's life centuries before the Kindred and his coterie-mate ever met. The few occultists aware of this phenomenon theorize that this is the source of most of the false memories that arise from torpor — a truly chilling thought when you consider how many vampires wake from torpor with false memories.

Ghosts are not the only inhabitants of the Underworld. There are creatures that seem to serve as wardens, watching over the paths out of the Underworld and ensuring that the ghosts that dwell there do not return to the lands of the living. The Ordo Dracul scholars who study the Underworld call them psychopomps, but those who dwell in the Underworld and those able to remember their visits there call them Reapers. They can appear in many forms, from the classic black-cowled, scythe-bearing skeleton to black-winged angels to jackal-headed men and even stranger forms. As their duty is keeping souls in the Underworld, they are understandably less than fond of the souls of wayward Kindred wandering through their realms, offering any ghost that can take it a free pass back to the world of flesh. Though Reapers seldom actively hunt Kindred souls the way the ghosts do, and can occasionally be reasoned with after a fashion, Reapers will usually attack Kindred souls on sight, seeking to sever the gossamer chains that bind the soul to its physical form. Should the Reaper succeed, the Kindred soul is trapped in the Underworld, essentially rendered another ghost, albeit one that may have enough knowledge to successfully ambush the next Kindred soul that appears in the Underworld.

### *Laws of the Grave*

When a vampire enters torpor for any reason, voluntary or involuntary, his soul immediately travels to the Underworld. The location of this manifestation is random, or at least it seems to be; the Underworld does not have fixed geography in the same way that the physical realm does. A Kindred soul generally resembles his physical body, but characters with low Humanity often appear monstrous or bestial, while exceptionally high-Humanity characters tend to look more like living human beings. The character's soul is "tethered" to his body, and

the character has a general sense of what is happening to his physical form — not that he can *do* anything about it, of course. Although these tethers are normally invisible, Kindred with Auspex •• can perceive them as chains of blood and darkness, winding around the character's spectral form and stretching infinitely off into the darkness. There is no known Discipline or ritual that can affect the chains of a vampire's soul, but the creatures called Reapers can sever them and strand the Kindred's soul in the Underworld. Other denizens of the World of Darkness might have magic that can affect the bonds of a Kindred's soul. For the sake of simplicity and ease of bookkeeping, do not adjust the Kindred soul's advantages, even if the new Attribute values would affect them.

### *Character*

Because the Kindred is, for all intents and purposes, a ghost, his statistics undergo some changes to reflect his new state of existence. Like all ghosts, a Kindred soul has only three Attributes: Power, Finesse and Resistance. To calculate these Attributes, simply add up the Physical, Mental and Social Attributes for each category, then divide by three.

**Example:** *Strength, Intelligence and Presence are the Physical, Mental and Social Attributes in the "Power" category, respectively. A Kindred with Strength 3, Intelligence 2 and Presence 4 has Power  $(3+2+4=9; 9/3) 3$  when his soul travels to the Underworld during torpor.*

Unlike ghosts, Kindred souls retain enough connection to the memories of their bodies that they retain the ability to use Skills. Whenever a Skill roll is called for, substitute Power for Strength, Intelligence or Presence; Finesse for Dexterity, Wits or Manipulation and Resistance for Stamina, Resolve or Composure. Obviously, certain skills (such as Computers, Drive, or Firearms) will be of limited use in the Underworld.

In this incorporeal state, a Kindred has no need for Vitae to sustain himself or fuel his powers. His body still requires blood, of course, and continues to expend Vitae as described on p. 175–178 of **Vampire: The Requiem**, but the soul draws its energy from a different source. When a Kindred soul enters the Underworld, the soul loses access to its body's Vitae supply, but gains an Essence rating equal to the Vitae the Kindred had when he went into torpor.

Essence powers the Kindred soul's Disciplines in the same manner as Vitae, but the uses of Essence are not as versatile as Vitae. A Kindred soul may not spend Essence to increase Physical dice pools, and he may not use Essence to heal himself. It goes without saying that a Kindred soul's Essence cannot create ghouls or a Vinculum. The Kindred's Blood Potency determines the maximum Essence he may have as well as how many Essence he may spend per turn, just like Vitae. When a vampire awakens from torpor, this Essence is lost; it is not converted back to Vitae.



The soul has a Corpus equal to, but separate from, the Kindred's Health. Do not transfer wounds over from Health to Corpus, or vice versa when the Kindred awakens from torpor. Willpower, Speed and Initiative are likewise equal to the Kindred's normal Traits. Unlike Vitae and Essence, the Kindred uses the same pool of Willpower points when in the Underworld or the physical world.

The Kindred retains his Humanity score while in the Underworld. Sins committed there carry over when the Kindred awakens.

### *The Supernatural*

As the Kindred's soul is separated from its body, several of the earthly concerns of the Requiem do not apply in the Underworld. There is no sun in that dim, gray Limbo, and so the Kindred need not fear the sun's touch. Because there is no sun, there is no day, and Kindred are consequently not driven to slumber during daylight hours. Unlike Kindred flesh, which can only be healed by Vitae, the soul regenerates at the same rate as a human body heals.

Other supernatural aspects of Kindred existence still apply. The Beast is still present in the Kindred's soul, and so he is still subject to frenzy and the Predator's Taint. Hunger frenzies do not apply, as the soul is not chained to the eternal hunger for Vitae, and Röttschreck is all but unheard of, because the Underworld has no sun; fire is all but unheard of there. Anger frenzies are still a very real possibility, of course.

Kindred souls regain Essence much the same way as vampires acquire Vitae: the souls drain Essence from others. A Kindred soul can feed on other ghosts in the Underworld using the normal feeding rules. The Kindred gains Essence instead of Vitae, and the maximum Essence he can gain is equal to the ghost's Corpus. Each point of Essence drained inflicts one point of lethal damage to the ghost's Corpus. Kindred souls can even feed from other Kindred souls, but there is no special bonus or penalty for doing so. There is no risk of blood addiction or Vinculum, and a Kindred soul cannot attempt to diablerize another Kindred soul.

Most of a Kindred's Disciplines work just as well in the Underworld as they do in the physical realm. Any Discipline that normally requires Vitae to function instead requires Essence, and dice pools are calculated in the same manner as Skills. There are a few special-case scenarios for Disciplines, however, and they are addressed below.

- **Animalism:** For the most part, animals seldom leave ghosts behind. Animals generally do not hold the same attachment to their lives that humans do, and so they do not linger, either in Twilight or in the Underworld. Consequently, Animalism is generally not much use in the Underworld. Should a character happen across an animal ghost, this Discipline works

normally. The exception is Animalism ••••, which cannot be used in the Underworld. A ghost cannot possess another ghost.

- **Auspex:** As with Animalism ••••, Auspex ••••• cannot be used by a Kindred soul in the Underworld. The Kindred's ephemera is already separated from its body; it cannot separate from itself again.

- **Dominate:** Dominate ••••• does not function in the Underworld, for the reasons already given under Animalism and Auspex.

- **Protean:** Although ghosts in Twilight are incorporeal to the physical world, ghosts in the Underworld exist in no such special state. The geography of the Underworld is just as solid to its denizens as the physical world is to mortals and Kindred. As such, Protean •• and ••••• still serve a useful function.

- **Crúac:** Because it is intimately tied to the mystic properties of blood, Crúac rituals cannot be performed in the Underworld.

- **Theban Sorcery:** Theban Sorcery rituals do not function in the Underworld. The Lancea Sanctum, at least those members who know the truth of torpor, speculate that the Underworld is farther removed from Heaven and the dominion of God and His angels, and thus calling down the power of righteousness in that cold and gloomy place is beyond their means.

- **The Coils of the Dragon:** The Coil of the Beast functions in the Underworld, but as the Coil of Blood and the Coil of Banes focus on aspects of Kindred existence that do not apply in the Underworld (a Kindred's soul is not a slave to Vitae, and there is no sunlight, and consequently no day, or fire in the Underworld).

### *The Underworld*

The Underworld is not truly a "place" in the sense that most would understand it. It is a kind of Limbo, a vast, perhaps infinite reliquary where ghosts banished from Twilight dwell. Ghosts whose anchors are destroyed, who are exorcised or are destroyed themselves end up in the Underworld. It is not the afterlife, per se: individuals who die and pass on without leaving a ghost behind, or ghosts whose anchors were resolved, allowing them to "move on," do not go to the Underworld. Where such souls *do* go is a mystery.

The Underworld seldom appears the same way twice. Sometimes, the Underworld seems to be a vast network of subterranean caverns, connected by miles of dark, winding caves. Sometimes the Underworld appears as a gigantic mansion of cold, gray stone, a mausoleum that stretches for miles in all directions. Sometimes the Underworld is a thick, dank forest, so overgrown and foggy that no sunlight could ever penetrate. Whether the Underworld actually appears based on an individual's perceptions, or whether it is so vast that it encompasses hundreds of different regions, has never been determined.

The Underworld follows the same basic laws as the physical realm, or at least, the Underworld is perceived as such in order to be comprehensible to the human soul. In game terms, that means that all the normal rules still work in the Underworld. Characters move at the same rate, deal the same damage in combat and so forth.

When a soul (Kindred or otherwise) reaches the Underworld, the soul usually arrives with no items or equipment of any kind. The soul appears as its own, personal image of itself. Usually, this is much the same as the individual appeared in the physical realm, but the truly disturbed sometimes have a more bestial, monstrous appearance. Sometimes, an individual identifies himself so strongly with a specific item that that item appears in his possession in the Underworld. Whether this item actually functions, or is simply an extension of the character's psyche, is left to the Storyteller's discretion.

Leaving the Underworld is a difficult proposition. Kindred souls, of course, return to their bodies at the end of their torpor duration, assuming they haven't since been devoured by hungry ghosts or stranded by Reapers. There are, according to rumors whispered by the ghosts that dwell there, paths between the Underworld and the physical realm that do exist, but they are hard to find, constantly-shifting and guarded by Reapers. Still, for old and powerful Kindred who might otherwise be in torpor for decades or centuries, the prospect of evading hungry ghosts for several mortal lifetimes often sounds riskier than trying to find a way out early. Should a Kindred soul manage to find one of these paths, defeat or slip past its guardian, and return to the land of the living, his soul is pulled back to his body and he awakes from torpor.

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### ONE THOUSAND UNDERWORLDS

All this supposes this is true. The name "Underworld" has been given to many different ideas by millennia of mages, mystics and fools. Perhaps the Underworld visited in the Second Death isn't the same Underworld written about by ancient mages. Maybe the Underworld isn't a shifting, ever-changing ephemeral landscape but a thousand different Limbos, some interconnected and some isolated, accessible only through death and torpor.

Don't sacrifice the mystery of the Underworld. Nothing matches it. It cannot be mapped, catalogued or easily explained. It cannot be known or truly understood. It can only be felt and experienced.

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### Storytelling

The introduction of the Second Death myth into your chronicle brings a plethora of options to the table. Aside from the fact that Second Death can give players whose characters have been struck down something to *do*, it

offers the opportunity to bring several new kinds of horror to your **Vampire** game. As the Second Death myth deals strongly with themes of death and loss, this storyline can also be a potent vehicle for tragedy.

### Theme

The central, overriding theme of the Second Death scenario is fear. Kindred fear torpor already because of the effects it can have on their minds, but this myth gives them something specific and concrete to fear. In a World of Darkness where a stretch of torpor can leave you trapped forever in the Underworld, or worse, devoured and replaced by a doppelganger, Kindred will go to even more extreme lengths to avoid that fate. Open combat or direct, physical action against other vampires will become much rarer, as no one wants to take the chance that *she'll* be laid out in torpor. In some domains, the Prince might sentence the worst offenders to be staked into torpor for a period of days, months or even years, the kind of sentence that makes other Kindred shake their heads and mutter that Final Death would have been kinder. Even if they don't know the exact details of what happens in torpor, after millennia of Kindred society, most vampires will realize that, when you go into torpor, sometimes you don't come out, and sometimes you come out — different.

### Mood

The Second Death offers the chance to explore a variety of moods, depending on how you want to incorporate it into your chronicle. Leaving the Second Death in the background fosters a mood of paranoia and suspense. Vampires go into torpor relatively frequently, between injuries sustained in combat, lack of suitable blood supply or just a desire to wait out an objectionable era in the hopes that the future will be better. Any Kindred, then, could at almost any time have changed completely and utterly. How can you know that your closest confidant's soul hasn't been devoured by hungry ghosts, and that he isn't planning to murder you because he falsely remembers you diablerizing his sire?

Bringing the reality of torpor to the forefront prompts a mood of grim fatalism reminiscent of classic survival horror. No vampire can avoid torpor indefinitely, so the Requiem becomes one of preparation for the inevitable — or spitting in the Devil's eye and squeezing every debased pleasure you can out of unlife. When torpor finally does come, the mood becomes one of isolation and survival. Almost every intelligent being a Kindred soul meets in the Underworld wants to destroy her in some fashion or another, and the only things she has to rely on are her wits and her raw cunning.

### Story Hooks

A torpid journey to the Underworld is the perfect opportunity to engage in a little survival horror. Depending



on your preferred play style, this could be a tense, suspenseful survival horror in which danger might (and probably does) lurk in every shadow, or it could be balls-to-the-wall action survival horror, as hordes of hungry ghosts surround the characters at every turn, snapping and tearing in an attempt to secure a trip back to the lands of the living.

The theme of being possessed or replaced by an alien entity is excellent fodder for a paranoid, *Invasion of the Body-Snatchers* type of game. For added impact, consider the possibility that one very old, very powerful ghost is orchestrating the destruction of Kindred souls and is sending ghosts back to the land of the living as part of some agenda, perhaps to throw open new paths from the Underworld to the sunlit lands.

There are hundreds of stories throughout human mythology about individuals who enter the Underworld to free a loved one. The Greeks told the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice, the Sumerians of Gilgamesh and Enkidu and even modern sources have portrayed versions of the story, such as the novel (and the movie based on it) *What Dreams May Come*. **Vampire**, at its heart, is a tragedy, and the doomed attempt to enter the Underworld and rescue a loved one trapped there (whether a mortal who passed on or a torpid Kindred stranded there by a Reaper), has the makings of a great tragedy.

### *Using the Second Death*

Obviously, the Second Death scenario represents a major change to your **Vampire** chronicle. This scenario provides you, as Storyteller, with no shortage of options, but trying to use them all at once runs a very real risk of undermining the themes of your game.

Leaving the Second Death myth in the background is, of course, the simplest option. You can use the Second Death in your chronicle without changing a single rule from the core rulebook. Simply knowing that the Underworld exists and is the source of the Kindred's torpid nightmares and altered memories is enough to spark any number of chilling stories. Perhaps the players take the roles of a coterie of Ordo Dracul researchers, looking for the answers to the mysteries of torpor. Or perhaps an elder who was their patron goes into torpor and, upon waking, becomes their bitter enemy.

You might also use the Underworld to run a type of story your chronicle wouldn't ordinarily encompass. A survival-horror story in the vein of classics such as *Night of the Living Dead* is ideally suited to the Underworld, as the coterie desperately tries to find a secure place to fend off hungry ghosts and Reapers for the days, weeks or months it will take to wake from their torpor. This option works best with relatively young Kindred with moderate-to-high Humanity and low Blood Potency, to ensure that there is a proverbial carrot (escape from the Underworld) within the characters' reach. This sort of

story also requires all the characters to enter torpor at roughly the same time, which can be difficult to arrange.

Alternately, you might set an entire chronicle in the Underworld, with the players taking the roles of torpid ancients searching for a way to return to the physical world. Such a story isn't really a **Vampire** chronicle any more, but that's not to say it can't be a fun and engaging game.

### *Antagonists*

The Underworld is a dangerous place for a Kindred soul. Hungry ghosts stalk its dim caverns, and the Reapers stand watch over its gates, ready to strand the unwary vampire forever.

### *Hungry Ghost*

**Quote:** "Please, I just want to see my wife again . . ."

**Background:** "Hungry ghost" is the term given to the inhabitants of the Underworld by those Kindred scholars aware of their existence and nature. Strictly speaking, not all ghosts in the Underworld are hungry ghosts; some are resigned to their fate and have no interest in returning to the land of the living, while others simply don't know how. Hungry ghosts are, specifically, those ghosts with both the will and the knowledge to cannibalize a vampire's soul and claw their way back to the world of flesh. Some are twisted, insane specters driven mad by centuries in the dark; others have sympathetic motives but are willing to go to horrific extremes to accomplish their goals.

**Description:** Hungry ghosts vary in appearance as much as any other ghost. Some look just as they did in life; others display horrendous death wounds or bear shapes such as no human that ever walked the earth. Because they dwell in the Underworld and are not bound by anchors the way most ghosts are, many hungry ghosts are much older than those found haunting the living. That fact is reflected in their appearance; some sport modern styles, while others dress in Elizabethan finery or the purple-bordered togas of Roman senators.

**Storytelling Hints:** Not all hungry ghosts are ravenous spirit-zombies, shambling toward the characters and moaning for souls. Such ghosts do exist, and there is certainly a place for them in your chronicle, but villains with compelling, sympathetic motivations are much more interesting. Consider the ghost that just wants to see its wife again, or one that wants to warn its partner that the thugs who killed it are still looking for him. Sympathetic motivation or not, it takes a certain kind of personality to willingly tear into the "flesh" of another soul, devour it and attach yourself to the blasphemous tethers of blood that anchor that soul to a body of flesh. No matter how sympathetic or articulate the hungry ghost might seem, never forget that it is quite willing to *eat people's souls* to get what it wants.



**Attributes:** Power 4, Finesse 2, Resistance 3

**Willpower:** 7

**Essence:** 4

**Morality:** 4

**Virtue:** Fortitude

**Vice:** Lust

**Initiative:** 5

**Defense:** 4

**Speed:** 16 (species factor 10)

**Size:** 5

**Corpus:** 8

**Numina:** Attach (dice pool 7), Phantasm (dice pool 7), Terrify (dice pool 6)

**New Numen:** Attach

This Numen allows a ghost in the Underworld to attach itself to the tether of a destroyed soul and pull itself back into a physical body. Only souls still nominally “attached” to a physical body have these tethers: Kindred in torpor, mages using certain astral-projection spells and the like. Once the ghost has reduced the soul to zero Corpus, the ghost may spend a point of Essence and roll Power + Resistance. If the ghost succeeds, it anchors itself to the destroyed soul’s tether and immediately pulls itself into the body of the destroyed soul. The ghost must use this Numen within one turn of destroying the soul, or the tether snaps back to the body and is lost. The ghost using this Numen need not be directly responsible for destroying the soul.

This process is a violent, disruptive one, and the host body’s memories and personality traits mingle with those of its new soul. In general, Traits remain the same as the host body, but at the Storyteller’s discretion one or two Traits (Virtue, Vice, Humanity, etc.) might change to match the possessing ghost’s. This Numen is permanent, unless some external event drives the ghost out again (for example, if the host body is a vampire and it is driven into torpor again). The possession is also undetectable; for all intents and purposes, the hungry ghost is now the body’s actual soul.

*Reapers*

**Quote:** “The way is shut.”

**Background:** Reapers, or “Psychopomps” as scholars prefer to call them, appear to be the “native” inhabitants of the Underworld. Whether they are extremely ancient ghosts from the dawn of human civilization or some strange form of spirit charged with watching over the dead is unknown. They seldom travel the Underworld, preferring to remain on guard over the strange, twisting paths that lead from the land of the living to the land of the dead. Most are silent and dour, seldom moving or speaking except in pursuit of their duty: keeping the dead in the Underworld. (Reapers seem to



care little whether the living enter.) Because the soul of a torpid vampire is, essentially, a movable door back to the lands of the living, Reapers endeavor to deal with Kindred souls whenever one crosses their path. Their preferred method for doing so is to sever the tether from the Kindred's soul, stranding that soul as a ghost in the Underworld.

**Description:** Reapers take many forms, often based on the death-gods of various cultures. Some resemble the classic Grim Reaper, others a black-winged Angel of Death. Some resemble the Egyptian god Anubis, the Norse Hela or the Greek Hades. Whether this is a case of the Reapers aping figures from human myth or the myth-makers catching glimpses of the Reapers is a subject of much discussion in occult circles.

**Storytelling Hints:** Most Reapers are grim, implacable creatures that take little action save to attack a Kindred soul when they perceive one. They favor straightforward, direct confrontation, slashing at the spectral tether with scythe or sword or snapping at it with strong jaws. Some Reapers can be reasoned with, and some have been reported to offer travelers from the world of flesh an opportunity to "win back" a ghost in some sort of wager. Usually, the terms of the wager are impossibly difficult (for example, move a Reaper to tears with a song, find the ghost in question amid a thousand other ghosts who look just like her), but sometimes a more reasonable contest is offered. Even in those cases, the Reaper usually proves to be supernaturally talented and almost always wins.

**Attributes:** Power 8, Finesse 4, Resistance 7

**Willpower:** 15

**Essence:** 13

**Virtue:** Temperance

**Vice:** Wrath

**Initiative:** 11

**Defense:** 7

**Speed:** 25 (species factor 10)

**Size:** 5

**Corpus:** 13

**Numina:** Clairvoyance (dice pool 12), Ghost Sign (dice pool 12), Phantasm (dice pool 12), Sever (dice pool 12), Telekinesis (dice pool 12)

#### **New Numen: Sever**

This Numen allows a Reaper to cut or bite through the invisible tether that binds the soul of a torpid Kindred (and certain others using supernatural abilities to travel apart from their bodies), stranding the soul in the Underworld. The Reaper spends a point of Essence and makes an attack roll against the soul with a -3 penalty. If an exceptional success is achieved, not only does the attack deal damage, but the attack severs the soul's tether instantly and irrevocably. The soul is not

destroyed (unless it was dealt enough damage to reduce it to zero Corpus, of course), but it is permanently trapped as a ghost in the Underworld, at least until it learns the Attach Numen and cannibalizes another unfortunate soul.

"YOU'LL BE DEAD AGAIN SOON. I'LL SEE YOU AFTER."

## *Art in the Blood*

*A cry of pain and indignation broke from him. He could see no change, save that in the eyes there was a look of cunning and in the mouth the curved wrinkle of the hypocrite. The thing was still loathsome — more loathsome, if possible, than before — and the scarlet dew that spotted the hand seemed brighter, and more like blood newly spilled.*

— Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

This much is known: it is historical fact, available to anyone who cares to look in musty books of outmoded academic art. No amount of investigation and whitewashing by the Primogen of three cities has refuted, or even disputed it. Antoine Charles Horace Vernet, better known as Carle Vernet, was the son of the great painter Claude Joseph Vernet. By the age of three, Carle was drawing horses with such realism that they seemed to gallop off the page. In 1782 he won the coveted Prix de Rome for painting at the age of 24. He traveled to Italy to accept the award, but underwent an amazing personality change after a "mystical experience." He suddenly lost interest in everything he had enjoyed before, and his father had to send agents to remove him from a mysterious monastery he seemed intent on joining.

When he returned to France, he married. In June of 1789 his son was born in the Louvre, where his father died six months later. Vernet resumed his painting career, returning to studies of the equine form and showing an ever-greater mastery of fine detail. In 1794, his sister Emilie was guillotined, and he switched career tracks again, this time to portraiture. He embraced historical topics, again demonstrating complete mastery of arcana thought long forgotten. Napoleon awarded him the Legion of Honor in 1808 for a painting of the Battle of Marengo. His career thereafter was an exemplary one, continuing to prosper despite Napoleon's fall and the return of the Bourbons. He saw his son Horace, also an artist of promise, apprenticed to masters he knew of in Rome. At the age of 77, he still showed all the vigor of a young man, and his death in 1835 from unknown causes was entirely unexpected by those who knew him.

From D. Tibere-Vidocq's *Catalogue Raisonné du Carle Vernet*:

*"Young Woman With Red Ribbon At Her Throat," Oil on canvas, 58 x 70 cm. Thought to be a painting of Marguerite Emilie Vernet, Mme. Chalgrin. Ascription to Carle Vernet made by Vamberg (1854)*

*before the painting's disappearance in 1871 during the Paris Commune. Supposedly seen in a private gallery in Rome during the Allied occupation (Nash, 1946). Painting can be identified by brownish thumb-mark covering the signature, resembling a bloodstain.*

In fact, the agents of the Ordo Dracul who seem most intent on unraveling the mystery of Carle Vernet cannot even discover whether he was ever Embraced. On the one hand, the "monastery" in Rome he entered after his "mystical experience" was a Lancea Sanctum chapter house (later sacked by Napoleon's troops in 1798). On the other, there are numerous surviving landscapes by Vernet that would seem to indicate that he stood outside for hours in full sunlight painting well into the 1820s. Current speculation holds that the Vernets were scions of a ghoul family claiming service to a Daeva sorceress in the Circle of the Crone. Their supposed mistress, however, disappeared like so many loose ends in this tapestry, and has not been seen since 1610. The Vernets, goes the theory, may have become rogue ghouls, slowly weaning themselves from the blood bond and subsisting on Vitae obtained by various subterfuges.

Certainly during the Reign of Terror there was enough blood flowing through the gutters of Paris to feed a dynasty of ghouls, and, for the Vernets, this may have been the final ingredient needed. Between this sanguinary gusher, the Crúac rituals gleaned from their mistress' records, their own artistic genius (in an era when every painter still learned to mix his own pigments from secret family formulae) and (just possibly) the elusive Tsarogy Elixir (which went missing in Paris in 1761), the Vernets could have accomplished dark wonders indeed. The Ordo Dracul investigator most dedicated to the conundrum, Tobias Grigovich, believes that Carle Vernet managed to transfer his sister's soul to a portrait after her execution, creating an Imago, a sort of painted homunculus.

What gives Grigovich, and the few other Kindred who bother to take the matter seriously, severe pause is the fact that between them, Carle Vernet and his son Horace painted more than 500 portraits, which have scattered the width and breadth of the art world. (They may well have painted more; the Vernet catalogs are a morass of theft, forgery, misattribution and simple slipshod scholarship.) Of course, the resources of the Ordo Dracul should be sufficient to track down the Vernet oeuvre and resolve the matter one way or another — by a bonfire of the vanities if need be. But powerful forces within certain clans — and within the Circle of the Crone — seem to be willing to block such action. Even the Dragons are not in agreement; many of them see the pursuit of an eccentric ghoul or renegade Daeva far from the most urgent crisis faced by the Kindred today.

And, no doubt they're correct, from one perspective at least.

## FIVE DEAD IN BOTCHED ART THEFT

BOSTON GLOBE, MAY 2, 2002

The morning reception staff of the Marengo Gallery, an anonymously owned private art museum on Beacon Hill, discovered five dead bodies in the Vernet Alcove of the museum yesterday at 10:00 a.m. The deaths apparently followed a violent dispute during an attempted robbery of the Gallery's great treasure, an 1835 self-portrait of French painter Carle Vernet insured for over \$3 million. The portrait was found undisturbed in its normal spot on the wall about six feet from the dead men. This is the first known break-in at the Marengo Gallery, which prides itself on a "natural display environment" that rejects security cameras and refuses to place so much as a sheet of glass between its masterpiece and the portrait's admirers.

Police would not comment on the reports of "unusual wounds" on the would-be thieves, saying only that, pending the notification of families, the bodies would be sealed in the police morgue. A source close to the investigation, however, characterized the intruders' injuries as "savage," suggesting that an argument about the distribution of the proceeds broke out during the theft, ending in mayhem and eventually five deaths. Police declined to say whether they are seeking any other members of the ring on homicide charges, and department spokesmen refused to discuss the direction of the investigation at all.

James Sherrinford, agent for the painting's owner, did assure the Boston art community that the painting was not damaged during the affray. "In fact," said Sherrinford, "the painting looks better than I've ever seen it." Sherrinford said the owner will resume scholarly access to the painting as soon as the police have closed their investigation.

## *Pictures of You*

The artistic ghost story above, told in whispers by nervous Kindred (or perhaps by Toreadors wishing to justify the appalling prices they pay for academic French artists) might have any number of explanations or outcomes:

- The Vernet canvases are a hive mind, plotting their revenge on the Daeva, or Kindred in general, or on the heirs of the Jacobin revolutionaries who executed Emilie.



They have been co-opted by, or have duped, a powerful Kindred faction.

- The Vernet canvases are ikons in a vast ritual being carried out over centuries and continents by the Circle of the Crone with the aid of their faithful servants the Vernets.

- Vernet was Embraced, probably by a Daeva of the Lancea Sanctum. His other great discovery, besides the Imago ritual, was the formula for a sun-blocking pigment, which he used to paint his landscapes and throw his pursuers on to the wild ghoul chase he set up for them. His real plans are a mystery.

- Claude Joseph Vernet's lifespan closely overlapped the European travels of Garcilaso de Castillejo, who would soon found the Toreador bloodline. The coincidence of an art-collecting vampire lineage appearing almost precisely when Carle Vernet was born seems awfully uncoincidental somehow. Are the two lines are pawn and player, two halves of a single plan or moves in some yet grander scheme?

- Vernet was some other sort of supernatural entity entirely, possibly a *tulpa* (a thought given material form by a powerful psychic) or a Lar (the Roman spirit of a family line) incarnated in the three-year-old Carle as an inhuman artistic genius. His agenda is likewise mysterious; maybe painting Imagos is how he pollinates.

- Vernet was a brilliant human alchemist or mage who discovered the Imago ritual, perhaps by poring over Crúac tomes uncovered during the turmoil of the Terror. He harbors a hatred (perhaps born of justified paranoia) of the vampires from whom he harvested the Vitae he used in his works. He managed to perfect the Imago ritual and transferred his soul into a self-portrait, from which vantage he runs a secret society of sorcerous, artistic reactionaries spread over two continents.

Discovering the truth can begin with Investigation rolls of various high-profile art heists or gallery owners' "suicides." The existence of Imagos has entered the Occult rumor mill (where 20th-century Kindred call them "Dorians" or "Curwens"), and one or two might surface in art society gossip (as "cursed paintings") obtainable with a suitable Socialize roll. Uncovering the Vernet Ritual itself is an exhausting, daunting task (20 successes, one roll every month) regardless which the tactic the character chooses. She might try to locate Vernet's original notebooks (a series of Research and Working the Black Market tests, followed by a slog of Solve Enigmas rolls to decode them). Or she might try to track down one of Vernet's apprentices or descendants (yet more Research, along with Subterfuge among his tight-knit family circle and Carousing along the Left Bank in Paris) and bully the secret out of them (Strength + Intimidation, or a suitably effective Discipline). *In extremis*, she might recreate the ritual from first magical principles (Intelligence + Crúac), which will require at least one genuine Carle Vernet Imago to experiment on

(Working the Black Market, Cutting a Deal). And you just know that's not going to sit well.

### *Every Picture Tells a Story*

For the Storyteller, the legend of the Imago can function in one of two threat modes. As an external threat, it becomes yet another concern for players to worry about. ("Wait, did you say there was a portrait on the wall?") They will definitely cast a more suspicious eye on any Toreador they run across, and you may actually get some mileage out of the old horror chestnut, "the eyes of the painting seem to follow you across the room." Keep the threat balanced and doubtful; don't allow the characters to short-circuit the horror with a well-placed bread knife or a flask of turpentine. If you decide to make the Vernet Imagos a threat, keep them in the background shadows, or give them a credible defense against a panicky vampire with a Zippo.

A more subtle way to use the Imago is as an internal threat. The Imago represents the soul sundered from the body, accenting the themes of alienation already present in **Vampire** chronicles. A vampire is already split between beast and man; what if the wrong half gets painted away? In terms of story potential, it's obviously juiciest if a player somehow decides that his character needs to have an Imago painted — as life insurance, perhaps, or in order to have a presence at some crucial ritual or Elysium. Failing such a decision, the Storyteller can always introduce an Imago painted before the character last entered torpor, forgotten along with so much else. But Imagos of trusted mentors, enigmatic sires, surly childer and hated enemies can also nicely splinter the comfortable emotional focus players subconsciously depend on. If the hidden side of someone significant is no longer hidden — what does that say about us and our secrets? What does it say if that hidden side, which knows our secrets, has decided to work against us? What if it's right? What if the portrait knows the truth?

### *The Vernet Ritual (Blood Portrait)*

The ritual developed by Carle Vernet to paint unlife into a portrait has strong resemblances to the Crúac arts of Vitae manipulation. Similar to them, the Vernet Ritual requires the subject (and the painter, if they are different) to actually spill her blood to supply the Vitae for the effect, and requires an extended casting time. The ritual must be cast each night over a maximum of seven nights, through the dark of the moon.

The model for the portrait need not sit for it, and need not know the ritual for an Imago of her to be created. She must only provide (willingly or unwillingly) at least three Vitae to be mixed with the pigments to form the paint. Only the painter must know the ritual; his spilled blood, taken with a sacred or enchanted knife, does not mingle with the pigment. The painter may paint the

model at any age; as far as can be determined, however, the only consideration here is the sitter's vanity.

At any age, the Imago resulting from a successful casting begins with the Vitae painted into it. The Imago's immediate attitude toward the model and painter varies with the degree of success (and most likely with Storyteller whim). Rumor has it that Vernet experimented with attempting to blood bond an Imago to himself by painting his own Vitae into the canvas along with the sitter; the experiment was apparently unsuccessful.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae every other night from the painter; at least three Vitae from the model

**Dice Pool:** Intelligence + Crafts + Blood Potency; with an unwilling model, the roll for this ritual is penalized by the model's Resolve.

**Action:** Extended (six successes; one roll equals a night of painting)

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The portrait is destroyed in a sorcerous feedback loop, and the model loses all budgeted Vitae at once. For example, a sitter intending to pose for an Imago with five Vitae who suffers a dramatic failure on night two loses five points of Vitae at once, even though she has already lost two Vitae over the last two nights in the nightly casting process. A really dramatic failure might create a homunculus (see p. 225 of **Vampire: The Requiem**) from the lost Vitae, with the closest of blood ties to, and a psychotic grudge against, the model.

**Failure:** The portrait goes awry and cannot become an Imago. The portrait cannot be used as the basis of a new Imago, and all spent Vitae is lost.

**Success:** The portrait continues to take shape.

**Exceptional Success:** The Imago is completed that night, with one more than its full intended Vitae score. The painter can determine its initial attitude toward the model and himself. In addition, the portrait is a near-masterpiece in appearance (+1 modifier on all rolls to fascinate, attract or compel a viewer).

### Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	Self-portrait.
+1	Portrait is of a model with whom the caster has a blood tie.
+1	Model's native soil used in pigments.
-1	Model is unaware of the ritual nature or existence or both of the portrait being painted.
-2	Portrait is not being painted from unlife.
-3	Caster has no specialty in Painting.

The Vernet Ritual costs 10 experience points to learn. If the ritual turns out to have originated with the Crone after all, the dice pool is Intelligence + Crafts + Crúac, and it is a level-three Crúac Ritual.

## Imago

An Imago is a sorcerous creation, a living portrait of a vampire (or ghoul) painted in his Vitae. The Imago cannot leave the canvas or panel on which it was painted, but it does not age, increase Blood Potency or enter torpor as the years pass. An Imago does not expend a point of Vitae to awaken each evening. An Imago cannot sire childer or create ghouls (at least not in the normal vampiric fashion). In fact, for an Imago, as Keats noted about the lovers painted on his famous Grecian urn, time seems to stand still. And since an Imago cannot enter torpor voluntarily, an Imago slowly goes mad instead.

Where a value is given below as "Model," it is the same as that of the being whom the Imago represents, the sitter for or subject of the portrait.

**Mental and Social Attributes:** Model

**Physical Attributes:** 0

**Skills:** All skills that do not require physical mobility or activity (most Mental and Social skills): Model; Other skills (most Physical skills): 0

**Merits:** Model, where possible or applicable

**Willpower:** Model

**Morality:** Model -2 or lower; the Imago is even more separated from human concerns than the Kindred normally are.

**Virtue:** Model

**Vice:** Model

**Initiative:** Model's Composure

**Defense:** 0

**Speed:** 0

**Blood Potency:** Model

**Vitae/per Turn:** Var./1; Vitae possessed by a given Imago usually equals the Vitae originally painted into it.

**Weapons/Attacks:** None usually, although a Storyteller might allow a powerful Imago with high skill in Protean to extend a slashing claw (perhaps disguised as a splinter in the frame) for purposes of drawing blood from a careless examiner of the Imago's frame. Other artists might embed disguised hooks or barbs in the frame for the same purpose; a contest of the artist's Wits + Crafts versus the victim's Wits + Composure determines if blood is drawn. Damage from such hooks or splinters is 0 (L), and seems minor at the time. Any successes at all draw a drop of blood and allow the Imago to drink one Vitae from the victim.

**Armor and Health:** Durability 1, Size 3, Structure 4

**Disciplines:** Model; an Imago can have no more dots in any Discipline than points of Vitae originally used to paint it. Some Disciplines, or individual powers, may be impossible for an Imago to carry out (Celerity, for example) but it still knows them.





(Footnotes)

<sup>1</sup> Other self-harm methods, such as bulimia, burning, the consumption of poisonous substances or self-inflicted blunt force injuries, are considered part of the behavioral nexus, but do not appear to correlate with Solace secretion.

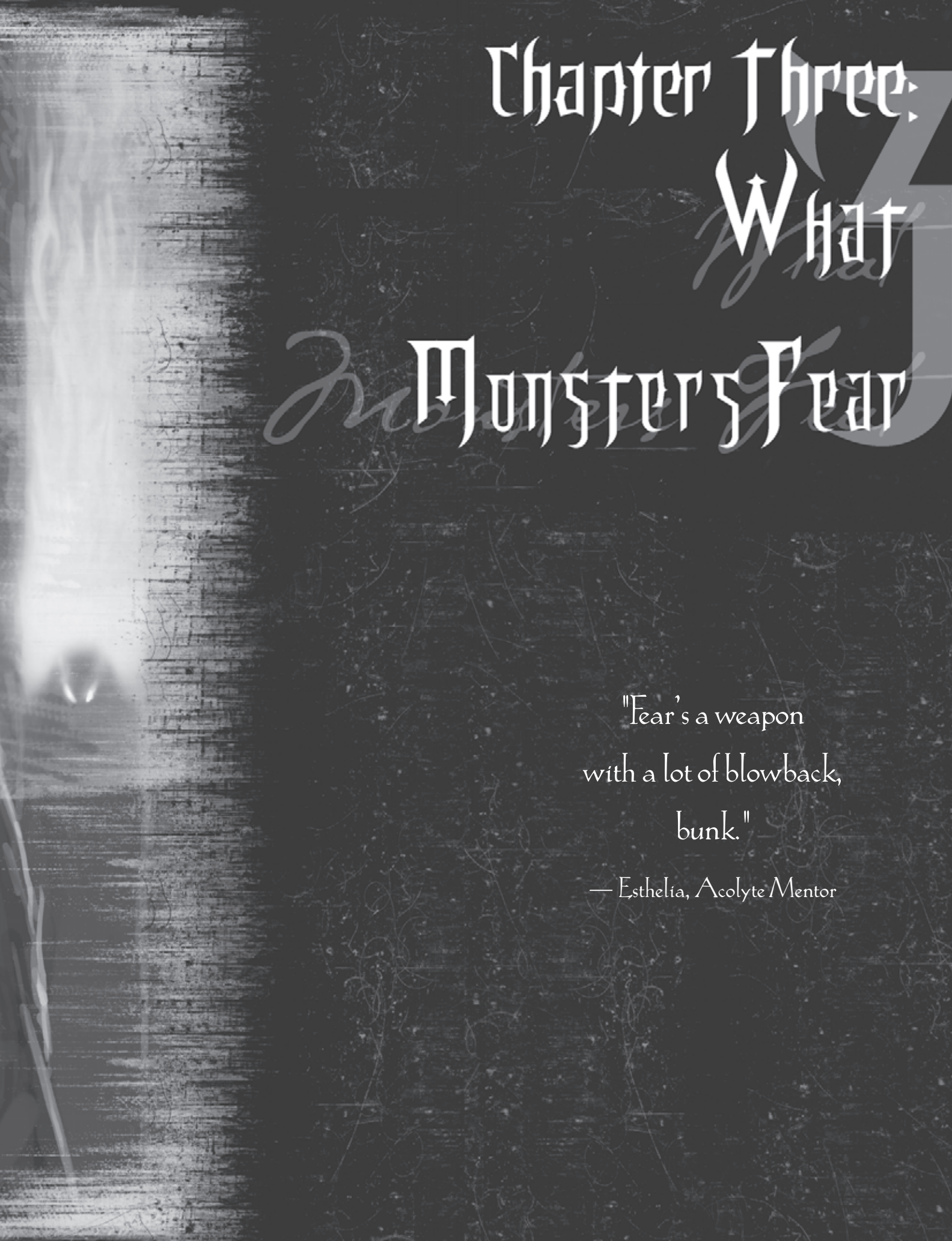
<sup>2</sup> This writer is forced to unkindly note that Wilder presents as a paunchy, middle-aged raincoater — a man who would appear in no way seductive to a shy, troubled teenager. A more suave hunter could well prove this theory wrong.

<sup>3</sup> Renee Descartes penned the famous “dreaming argument,” which asked, how do I know if I exist if my dreams are as vivid as my memories?

<sup>4</sup> One legend claims Trophonios allowed only those who followed the winged serpent (or dragon) to enter. Over time, these followers grew arrogant and only allowed individuals who would not upstage them into thrall, and told Trophonios that those who did not belong sought understanding for the wrong reason.







# Chapter Three: What Monsters Fear

"Fear's a weapon  
with a lot of blowback,  
bunk."

—Esthelia, Acolyte Mentor

*He who seeks to terrify others  
is more in fear himself.*

— John Clarke

## *The Thing in the Mirror*

*It is unlucky to look into a mirror at dusk, or night-time . . . there is a dread of something uncanny peeping over the shoulder; such an apparition would portend death.*

— Sarah Hewett, Devonshire Customs

When a person receives the Embrace, she leaves much of her old life behind. Soon enough, she learns to discard her mortal politics, and eventually her Mayfly family ties. Her religious views almost always get a mighty twist, at the very least, and she may even stop rooting for the Phillies after a few decades. But one thing that hangs on, clinging to the corners of her brushed-off humanity, is fear. Not the big fears, of terrorism or of lung cancer or of being mugged, but the little fears, the ones she never admitted to herself when she was alive. Those linger for a while, like a phantom tooth that doesn't know it's pulled yet.

Human urban legends melt and deform in the forge of unlif e. But the channels of thought stay, and so they take new forms, suitable to a dark world. One of the most common urban legends in the English-speaking world is the tale of "Bloody Mary." Supposedly a witch who died in a terrible car accident, Bloody Mary appears in the mirror if you say her name five times by candlelight. And when she does, she'll scratch your eyes out unless you turn on the light or run out of the bathroom.

One anonymous report on Snopes.com, collected in 1995, goes like this:

*I was told that if you said "Hell Mary" seven times in front of a mirror in a dark room, you would see Satan's image in the mirror. The story was embellished further by the teller, who claimed that after three "Hell Marys" the mirror turned red, and that after five an unclear face appeared.*

There are hundreds of variants. In some, Mary lost her children in the accident; in others, she killed them and kills those who summon her. In some, her eyes are bleeding, and in some she has a pair of scissors embedded in her neck. Her name changes from Bloody Mary to Hell Mary to Mary Worth to Mary Wales. You summon her by saying her name three times, or 13, by holding hands or spinning in circles. She only appears to girls, or to people with secrets or if you say you have her baby.

And she appears to vampires, too. Or that's what they hear, anyway. Consider the following account provided by Paul Stive, unaligned Nosferatu neonate to the Sanctified Inquisition of Lesser Heresy, in a St. Louis parish:

*The way I heard it was there was this one chick, and she was like gorgeous in life — Brazilian porn-star gorgeous, Bollywood beauty-queen gorgeous. Anyway, she gets Embraced by the Sucks, and now she can't see herself in the mirror. And you know that's gotta kill a Succubus anyway, and she makes your average Daeva look like a mud fence to boot. So she knows about the way to tweak your will to show up in the mirror and she tries it but for some reason it doesn't work for her, or she's too freaked out to do it right. So she hears from some Crone that if you want to see anything in a mirror, you've got to ask Queen Mary or better yet, Red Jack. So she stands in front of her vanity next day, crying bloody tears, and begs Red Jack to show up and let her see herself clearly. And she begs him five times, and she sort of sees his shadow in the mirror. But just as she's about to ask him, she sees his eyes clearly and she smashes the mirror and walks outside and permanent suntan, man. And I heard it from a guy who knows the guy who they sent out the next night to sweep up the ashes, so it's for real.*

The way the Kindred hear it is like this. If you need something from a mirror, you have to ask Red Jack. Whatever it is, Red Jack can hook you up. He knows the True Ways of Seeing, the Secret Door to Your Enemy and all sorts of useful tricks like that. All you have to do is smear a little of your blood on the mirror and say *Veni Ioanne Rube*, "Come Red Jack" in Latin, five times. He's a natty-looking fellow in a frock coat, top hat and a cravat, with a big Snidely Whiplash mustache and a waxed goatee. He's always smiling, always in a good mood. That's not the problem. If he appears wearing smoked glasses, he will grant your request. If he appears without them, and you see his eyes, well — the stories kind of trail off there.

Other Kindred hear it a little differently. To start with, he's not always Red Jack. Plenty of vampires know him as Ruddy Jack, Gian' Rosso, Jean Rouge, Rot-Johann, Ivan Krasny, Sean Flann and so forth. Sometimes he's Bloody Jack, or Smoky Jack or Jack Scarlet. But the descriptions



tally pretty closely across the board — and almost every vampire who knows the story knows about the smoked glasses. (They don't call them sunglasses, or even dark glasses as often as they might, either.) The clothes, the mustache, the top hat: Red Jack is an apparition of habit.

Except when *she* is; about a quarter of the stories are about Queen Mary instead of Red Jack. On average, according to those Kindred in the Ordo Dracul and elsewhere who make it their business to keep track of new rituals, female vampires see Red Jack more often than male Kindred see Queen Mary, but it's not perfectly consistent either way. You don't summon Queen Mary with *Veni Ioanne Rube*, of course; she comes to *Maria Regina Invito*, "I invite Queen Mary." Other than that, it's the same thing, a smear of blood on the mirror and a chant five times in the dark, except that with the Queen, you see her eyes, but you don't see her teeth. She smiles a lot in a satisfied, secretive, occasionally inviting way, but she keeps her lips closed. When she talks, she's too well-bred to open wide, murmuring in ladylike (but crystal clear) fashion. But if she should grin at you, it's not a happy smile but a skull-faced rictus.

*"The Zulus will not look into a dark pool because they think there is a beast in it which will take away their reflections, so that they die . . . In Saddle Island, Melanesia, there is a pool 'into which if any one looks he dies; the malignant spirit takes hold upon his life by means of his reflection on the water.'"*

— Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough*

*But Is He Real?*

You are slightly more likely to get a respectable vampire to admit to Red Jack's existence than you are to get an American man over 30 to admit to believing in Bloody Mary. After all, the Kindred know that ghosts and werewolves exist. But the parallels with a Midwestern urban legend probably not much more than a century old are just so overwhelming that serious Kindred scholars dismiss the whole phenomenon as "mortal leftovers." Mortal misconceptions about the Kindred sometimes show up in vampire society, after all, so it's only natural that mortal ghost stories might still appeal to the nervous neonates still trying to adjust to their strange new unives. The blurring of the new vampire's mirror image is tailor-made to spark vampire superstition; it's a visible representation of their uncertain status, and that of their souls. Perhaps, suggest some Lancea Sanctum investigators, local ghosts, spirits of people who committed suicide in bathrooms or hotel suites, pick up on the aura of insecurity coming off a new-fledged Kindred. When they appear, the questioning vampire sees what his human memories condition him to see.

On the other hand, Red Jack is pretty omnipresent for a simple case of "teething fang." He certainly behaves,

and dresses, consistently in the few stories that the Ordo Dracul considers confirmed. In short, given the spectral vistas open to the undead, it seems premature to consign Red Jack to the campfire story circuit.

From word-of-mouth speculation, cryptic hints in moldering tomes and high-powered divination, the Ordo Dracul loremasters have assembled the following list of possibilities about Red Jack's identity and origin:

- Red Jack is the Devil, Satan. Why exactly Satan would bother appearing in vampires' bathroom mirrors remains unclear, especially if the Kindred are already Damned.

- Red Jack is Jack the Ripper, who was a powerful ceremonial magician, or a liver-eating Jigarkhwar from India or something puissant enough to make himself immortal and hide out in the mirror world.

- Red Jack is the mirror reflection of the First Vampire. Be he Dracula, Longinus or an Etruscan shaman, the first man to look into the mirror after turning saw Red Jack looking back. When Red Jack walked away, he took all vampires' reflections with him, leaving only blurs in their place.

- Red Jack is the Aztec god Tezcatlipoca, known as the Smoking Mirror, who dined on burning human hearts and blood for centuries before the conquistadors toppled him from power in Mexico. Admittedly, Red Jack doesn't look particularly Aztec now, but if Quetzalcoatl could be a white god, perhaps so could he. And, of course, as master of the mirror image, Red Jack could make himself look Aztec, or Spanish or anything.

- Or Haitian. Alternatively, Red Jack is Maître-Carrefour, the voodoo lord of the crossroads. A crossroad is a mirror image, after all, and voodoo *bokors* use mirrors in shrines to Maître-Carrefour and his mirror image Papa Legba, who is invoked with the phrase "O fathom the mirror, O Legba."

- Queen Mary is the reflection of the Gorgon Medusa, caught in Perseus' shield in the age of heroes. She has flitted from mirror to mirror since then, changing her appearance bit by bit over the centuries. Only her teeth retain the power of the Gorgons, and when she has bathed them in enough vampire blood, they, too, will be normal. Red Jack is a cockatrice, and her consort.

- Red Jack is a demon summoned into a magic mirror by Vergil Magus, or Agrippa, or John Dee or Merlin, or some other human mage who bit off more than he could chew. Rather than try to banish the fiend, the cowardly sorcerer merely hid the mirror somewhere and moved on. Ever since, Red Jack has bounced from mirror to mirror looking for a way out. If that "mirror zero" could be uncovered, the finder would have something Red Jack wants — a way out.

**"I CAN TELL YOU THIS: THE PRINCE DOESN'T TURN UP IN PHOTOS OR MIRRORS OR ANYTHING. HE SOLD HIS REFLECTION TO RED JACK. TRADED IT FOR SOME KIND OF WITCHCRAFT."**

## *Ars Speculorum*

Red Jack is the master (and, he claims, inventor) of the Ars Speculorum, or Art of Mirrors, which he teaches to those Kindred who seek knowledge in the glass. Only Red Jack can teach Ars Speculorum; no vampire can learn it from another, except (possibly) through diablerie. Summoning Red Jack with his chant requires no Vitae, only the fivefold repetition of his name and the reflexive expenditure of a Willpower point. Once summoned into a given vampire's mirror, Red Jack can return later at will, unless somehow forcibly and magically restrained. Red Jack can even be in two mirrors at once, a trivial use of his mystic powers.

For the Kindred, however, every use of Ars Speculorum requires the vampire to smear at least a drop of his blood on a mirror, "paying the Queen's silver toll" for access to the power Red Jack grants. A Storyteller who wishes to further explore themes of blood payment and addiction to dark knowledge may allow excess Vitae to translate into extra dice in the activation dice pool, on a one-for-one basis. Every use of Ars Speculorum requires an *intact* mirror; if the activating mirror breaks, the power ends immediately.

It is important to remember that Red Jack has no sway over non-mirrors such as photographic negatives, video footage or reflections in windows — unless the Storyteller thinks that horror demands it, of course.

### *• Wry Opticks*

This power allows the vampire to manipulate images in mirrors, including his own reflection, for the remainder of the night. He need not spend a Willpower point to "de-blur" his reflection in the mirror as described on p. 170 of **Vampire: The Requiem**. He can alter, blur or disguise his reflection or any mirrored image. This may be overt (causing a bystander's reflection to bleed) or subtle (shifting his own position in a security mirror). To detect anything other than an obvious difference between a reflection and its material source a viewer must make a reflexive, contested Wits + Composure roll and score more successes than those rolled for the activation of the power. A viewing subject with two or more dots in Ars Speculorum gains a +2 bonus on perception rolls to scrutinize the effects of another practitioner — except Red Jack.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** Wits + Crafts + Ars Speculorum (possibly versus Wits + Composure + Ars Speculorum)

**Action:** Instant; contestation is reflexive.

### *•• Catoptromanticks*

Catoptromancy is the art of divination by mirrors, practiced by Etruscan sibyls and Vergil Magus. Although Red Jack grandly claims mastery of all such lore, he teaches a subtler power to his Kindred acolytes.





Using this power, the vampire may gaze into a mirror and receive the answer to one question regarding an unknown identity. In response, the slightly murky and distorted face of the person (or Kindred) who most closely answers the vampire's question appears in the mirror for a few seconds. (Definitively recognizing a face may require a separate Wits + Composure roll.) Questions might range from "Whom will I marry?" to "Who ordered my haven burnt out last week?" to "Who is trying to kill me?" Even if a complete answer would involve many people, only one face appears.

For example, in answer to that last question, if the Prince of Kansas City ordered a mortal assassin to kill the questioner, only the human assassin's face would appear. If the true answer is "nobody," a face unknown to the querent appears anyway. A creative Storyteller may answer questions with grinning skulls, severed heads or any number of variations on the general theme. Remember that Red Jack's mirrors do not provide any clear answers that work against his interests, save perhaps as a cruel taunt or to close a trap.

Catoptromanticks can only be used once per night, and cannot be successfully cast in light brighter than that of a single candle.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** Wits + Occult + Ars Speculorum

**Action:** Instant

#### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** No face appears, and the mirror is shattered. The subject of the question feels "watched," and may even suspect the questioner for no good reason — perhaps the subject thinks she catches the questioner's image in a nearby mirror. Alternatively, a completely misleading face appears.

**Failure:** No face appears, but the character may try again.

**Success:** The character sees the face that most closely answers her question.

**Exceptional Success:** The face appears clearly and without blurring or distortion.

#### Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+1	The person sought has gazed into a mirror tonight.
—	The face is that of a mortal, or of a vampire with a blood tie to the character.
–2	The face is that of a vampire with no blood tie to the character.

#### ... Panoptickon

With this power, Red Jack opens a crack into the mirror realm for his pupils' use. After activating this power, the character can look into a mirror and see out of any other mirror. He may freely switch his gaze from mirror to

mirror inside a single dwelling, but to change locations he must pay a Willpower point. The image of the viewer will appear in the destination mirror, but in dim shadows or faint outline. To notice this ghostly image, an observer on the other side must be looking at the mirror and make a Wits + Composure roll; successes from which must exceed those rolled for the activation of the power.

A Kindred may not use Auspex with Panoptickon alone (but see Childermass Surprise, below). The effects of Panoptickon fade at the end of the scene.

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** Intelligence + Occult + Ars Speculorum

**Action:** Instant

#### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The character sees nothing, but the character's intended target feels "watched," and soon realizes why. The target can see the character gazing at him through the nearest mirror. Following this unpleasant reversal, the character's mirror shatters.

**Failure:** The character cannot see through the mirror, but may try again.

**Success:** The character sees through the desired mirror.

**Exceptional Success:** The character can change locations and switch from dwelling to dwelling without paying a Willpower point.

#### Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	Power is aimed at a mirror in which the character has previously used Ars Speculorum.
—	Power is aimed at a mirror the character has looked into before.
–1	Power is aimed at a mirror the character has noticed in passing, seen in photographs or drawings and so on.
–2	Power is aimed at a mirror the character has had described to him, or can rationally assume must be there (the bathroom mirror in an ordinary apartment or hotel room, for example).
–3	Power is aimed at a mirror in a location the character knows little or nothing about (an enemy vampire's crypt, the war room of the Mossad and so on).

#### .... Childermass Surprise

Childermas, the Feast of Holy Innocents, marks the slaughter of children in Herod's Judea while his soldiers searched for the infant Christ. Childermass falls on December 28 in the church calendar, and is symbolized by four mirrors. In a sportive mood, Red Jack has been known to call December 28 his birthday.

This power allows a Kindred to use some Disciplines through a mirror, usually against a target spotted using Panoptickon. The exception are targets in the same room

as the caster, who may be attacked through any mirror in the caster's field of vision. Childermas Surprise does not allow any physical attacks, but does allow some Theban Sorcery or Crúac spells.

**Cost:** 1 Willpower

**Dice Pool:** —

To use a Discipline through the mirror, the character makes her Discipline activation roll as normal, with a -2 modifier. A mirrorist with five dots in Ars Speculum suffers no negative modifier.

**Action:** Instant

Childermas Surprise ends when Panoptickon does, or at the end of the scene.

### ..... *Quicksilver Shoes*

The final step into the mirror realm, this power allows a vampire to actually travel physically between mirrors, stepping into one and out of the other almost instantaneously. He must be able to physically fit through the frame of both mirrors, so Kindred uncertain of their destinations are well advised to travel in bat or mist form. If the destination mirror proves unsuitable (or broken), he must return to his origin point and try again. A vampire traveling to a given mirror is clearly visible in it, growing larger and closer for a number of turns equal to 10 minus the total successes rolled to activate this power (minimum one turn).

**Cost:** 1 Vitae

**Dice Pool:** Presence + Occult + Ars Speculum

**Action:** Instant

#### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The character enters the mirror realm but becomes hopelessly disoriented and lost. Whatever he was fleeing, there are worse things in here, and chances are that whatever mirror he finally stumbles out of will be in full daylight.

**Failure:** The character cannot enter the mirror realm, but may try again.

**Success:** The character successfully transits the mirror realm to the destination in a number of turns equal to 10 minus total successes (minimum one turn). The mirror realm is bizarre and distorting; a vampire who passes through it (whether he reaches his intended destination or not) must succeed at a Resolve roll or be completely disoriented and unable to act on the turn he emerges.

**Exceptional Success:** The character successfully transits the mirror realm in one turn, and need not make a Resolve roll to reorient himself.

#### Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	Power is aimed at a mirror in which the character has previously used Ars Speculum
—	Power is aimed at a mirror the character has looked into before.

- 1 Power is aimed at a mirror the character has noticed in passing, seen in photographs or drawings and so on.
- 1 to -3 The character is rushed or distracted, such as by combat or while being harried by pursuers. This penalty is cumulative with multiple distractions (such as attempting a mirror-walk while in a running gun-battle with pursuing FBI agents in a burning building).
- 2 Power is aimed at a mirror the character has had described to him, or can rationally assume must be there (the bathroom mirror in an ordinary apartment or hotel room, for example).
- 3 Power is aimed at a mirror in a location the character knows little or nothing about (an enemy vampire's crypt, the war room of the Mossad and so on).

### *Seven Years' Bad Luck*

Red Jack teaches his arts for the same reason the Kindred seek to learn them: power. But what he wants is power over the Kindred, and by forcing them to pay for their power with Vitae, he gains it. Once a vampire has spent more points of Vitae using Ars Speculum than she has dots of Humanity, she is in Red Jack's power. The following possibilities are some of what Red Jack might do to a vampire who gazes too long into the mirror; Storytellers can make some, none, or all of them true.

- Any degeneration roll that she makes within sight of a mirror is made at -1 die, or -2 dice if she has five dots in Ars Speculum.
- Any frenzy roll that she makes within sight of a mirror is made at -1 die, or -2 dice if she has five dots in Ars Speculum.
- Any attempt to resist Red Jack's will is made at -1 die, or -2 dice if she has five dots in Ars Speculum.
- Red Jack demands respect for his domain from his acolytes. For each mirror she breaks, she must swap out the highest die in her next seven rolls for a 1.
- With a Wry Opticks roll (resisted reflexively by Resolve + Blood Potency) Red Jack can secretly alter her appearance while she looks in the mirror, perhaps emphasizing her undead nature or otherwise making her unlife miserable.
- Red Jack can give unlife to her mirror image, and send it out of the mirror realm to do his bidding. A mirror doppelgänger has all the Attributes, Skills, Disciplines and so forth of its original, but is (of course) completely under Red Jack's command, and has a Humanity of 2. The doppelgänger's Vitae equals the difference between the original's Humanity and the number of dots of Vitae she has spent using Ars Speculum. (For example, if a vampire has a Humanity of 6 and has spent 20 points of Vitae using Ars Speculum, her doppelgänger would have 14 Vitae.) It is of opposite "handedness" from the original, and any scars or



other characteristics will be reversed, including lettering on T-shirts and so on. Telling a mirror-doppelgänger from the original Kindred requires a Wits + Composure roll.

**“WHEN I GOT BACK THERE WAS A BIG-ASS MIRROR IN MY CRIB, BLOODY AND SHIT. I AIN’T GOIN’ BACK THERE.”**

*Red Jack*

**Quote:** “Well, well, well, if it isn’t little Alice, all grown up.”

**Background:** Various theories of Red Jack’s origins appear in this section. He is a very powerful spirit with a vicious, sadistic streak he enjoys turning on vampires.

**Description:** Red Jack dresses in the height of century-old fashion, in bottle-green satin frock coat and matching top hat, starched collar, mauve ascot, kid gloves and a narcissus blossom in his buttonhole. He pomades his hair, waxes his mustachios and favors silver-framed, smoked eyeglasses. He usually looks like a middle-aged man of indeterminate Mediterranean ancestry, although in some lights he seems more like a gaunt Anglo-Saxon type. His teeth are very strong and fine looking.

When he appears as the Queen (if they are, in fact the same entity), she is the epitome of romantic goth, all black lace and pale lipstick and heaving bosom straight from Edgar Allan Poe’s wettest dreams. The only incongruous notes in her pallid lustmord chic are the occasional bloodstained tear tracks running down her cheeks.

**Storytelling Hints:** Red Jack is a dashing figure. He is all smiles and good humor, with a hint of menace that seems almost camp to thoroughly modern vampires. His 19th-century circumlocutions are quaint, and the quirk in his lip shows that he knows it. He resembles nothing so much as that century’s folk characterization of the Devil, all suave menace and glib repartee, and one could be forgiven for assuming that he is a ham actor playing that part deliberately. Until, of course, he has you in his power.

Red Jack is designed to be a major nemesis, a serious villain and a real threat to a coterie of vampires — especially to a coterie of vampires thirsty for knowledge. He can be a menacing figure on the sidelines, appearing



every so often in an ongoing chronicle, or he can be the focus of a storyline in the classic “things Kindred were not meant to know” mode. Mirror imagery and Red Jack in particular resonate well in chronicles centering on identity issues: Who am I? Am I man or beast? Who is the killer in the mirror, the one behind my eyes?

Note: Though he’s a spirit, Red Jack’s statistics are based on the rules for ghosts from the **World of Darkness Rulebook** (pp. 208–216). If your chronicle uses supplements for **Werewolf: The Forsaken** (such as **Predators**) or **Mage: The Awakening**, you might also empower him with Numina from any of those books.

**Attributes:** Power 7, Finesse 9, Resistance 8

**Willpower:** 15

**Morality:** 2

**Virtue:** Prudence

**Vice:** Pride

**Initiative:** 17

**Defense:** 9

**Speed:** 25

**Size:** 5

**Corpus:** 13

**Essence:** 20

**Numina:** Compulsion (dice pool 16), Ghost Sign (dice pool 16), Ghost Speech (dice pool 16), Phantasm (in mirrors only; dice pool 16), Terrify (dice pool 16)

**Supernatural Powers: Mirror Mastery** — Red Jack has the equivalent of *Ars Speculorum* 5, although, rather than *Vitae*, he spends Essence to fuel its powers. He suffers none of the “bad luck” effects of using these powers, of course. He also has the equivalent of five dots in a mirror-related aspect of any Skill (mirror lore in the Occult, for example, or Academics on the history and optics of mirrors). Within the mirror realm, he possesses the equivalent of *Protean* 5 for the purpose of attacking its denizens or visitors.

(No, nobody knows what happens when he takes off his glasses, but there are rumors . . . )

## *The Just Angel*

*And I will smite the winter house with the summer house, and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end, saith the LORD.*

—Amos 3:15

His name is Raguel, and he is an angel of the Lord. Or at least, so the Kindred who have met this strange figure and lived insist. Others claim that he is an ancient vampire driven insane by a long obsession with Theban Sorcery, a mortal mage or even just a very successful mortal witch-hunter, but those rare few who have looked in his eyes insist that the truth is that an avenging angel walks the night, and woe to the unrighteous vampire who crosses his path.

## *History*

“Raguel” has been a figure in Kindred folklore since at least the Middle Ages, appearing predominantly in Lancela Sanctum tales. In these earliest stories, he is usually presented as a tester of the Damned, in much the same way that Satan was appointed to test mortals and tempt them into sin. Sanctified dogma portrayed Raguel as an aide, subordinate or, less frequently, superior of the angel Vahishtael, who first appeared to the vampire Longinus at Christ’s tomb and revealed God’s plan for the Damned.

The usual model of these stories involved a simple pilgrim arriving in the domain of some Prince who had spurned the *Testament*. The pilgrim, who is almost always explicitly described as barefoot, presents himself before the Prince at Elysium and engages the assembled Kindred in a discussion of the *Testament of Longinus*. Inevitably, most of the Kindred are unable to respond, and eventually the Prince, or occasionally one of his subordinates, violates the peace of Elysium and orders the pilgrim destroyed.

At this point, the pilgrim reveals himself as the angel Raguel, and the wicked who strayed from Longinus’ teachings are consumed by the fiery radiance of the angel. Invariably, there is one vampire present, usually a fledgling, who has studied and believed the *Testament*, and thus is spared the angel’s wrath and permitted to carry the cautionary tale to other domains.

Stories about Raguel declined in popularity among Sanctified clergy after the Renaissance, but the occasional tale in the traditional form still crops up as late as 1797, when a Kindred claiming to be from a small domain in eastern Austria arrived in Paris and claimed that Raguel had purged the city of all vampires save himself. The Parisian Kindred had more on their collective minds at the time than investigating the traveler’s claims, and the tale’s veracity was never tested.

During the last two centuries, popular folklore has transformed Raguel from a tester of Kindred adherence to the *Testament* into a judge of individual Kindred. He has gone from being a character out of myth to an urban legend, not an abstract figure in a morality play for the Damned but a very real bogeyman who will burn the unfaithful to ash with holy fire or lay open the roofs of their havens at three in the afternoon.

The exact reasons behind this shift are less than clear. Kindred historians point to a general shift in Sanctified theology from the importance of a righteous domain to a righteous individual. Believers, of course, will tell you that the stories changed because Raguel changed his tactics, but circular logic does little to cut to the truth of the matter. Whatever the reasons, stories of Raguel’s judgment, or “bird watching,” as less-than-pious Kindred call them, have undergone a sharp upswing in modern nights. Even domains with little or no Sanctified presence have been visited by a strange being calling itself Raguel.



## THE NAME

Raguel's legend may well predate his angelic associations. To the Hittites, he may once have been known as Ragam, known as "a questioner and spirit of judgment." Tonight, Judeo-Christian legendry has rubbed off on the ancient legend of the "just angel" and given it the name Raguel. Even many who use the name in reference to this fearsome being don't buy into the idea that it's a bona fide archangel — just because somebody gets called the Devil doesn't mean he is the Devil.

## Using Raguel

Depending on the tone of the story you want to run, Raguel might feature as an intriguing piece of Kindred mythology, perhaps one whose stories play a major role in your chronicle, or as an actual, physically-present antagonist causing no end of trouble for your players. He might incontrovertibly be an Angel of the Lord, which throws a great deal of Kindred theology into question, or the major focus of your chronicle might be figuring out exactly *what* he is.

## Myths and Legends

Raguel can be a major player in your chronicle without ever once making a personal appearance. He might be a prominent figure in local Kindred folklore (perhaps the Prince a few decades or so ago was purportedly one of Raguel's victims, or the local Bishop witnessed one of the angel's purges before coming to this domain). Raguel might be the focus of study for a Mekhet occultist who wants the players' help in tracking down domains where Raguel reportedly appeared, or he might be the rallying symbol for a young firebrand's revolution.

### Story Hooks

- **Murder Mystery:** The Nosferatu Primogen, an influential member of the Circle of the Crone, is destroyed when his haven burns in the middle of the day, and the local Bishop is quick to advance Raguel as an instrument of divine vengeance come down to punish the unbeliever. The Sanctified, of course, toe the party line, while the Acolytes insist that the Bishop murdered the Primogen himself and is using a fairy tale in a feeble attempt to disguise his involvement. The Sheriff, eager to see the matter resolved without a bloody, Masquerade-threatening war between covenants, tasks the players' characters with finding the truth.

- **The Figurehead:** A Gangrel ancilla who dwells on the fringes of the domain and has, until now, expressed little or no interest in politics suddenly sweeps into Elysium one night with an impassioned tale of a visitation from the archangel Raguel. The Gangrel tells of

the angel's warning that the domain was falling into unrighteousness, and that a return to the values of the *Testament of Longinus* is the only way to escape utter annihilation. This "prophet" does not make any overt calls for regime change, but quite a few power-hungry young Carthians, sensing a potential opportunity to stick it to the establishment with their very own preferred tool of repression, have flocked to his banner and begun subtly steering the naïve Gangrel toward revolution.

- **Vanishing Praxis:** The players' coterie has been tasked with delivering a message to the Prince of a neighboring domain, preferably one they have visited before. When they arrive, they are unable to find any of the local Kindred population. That wouldn't be unusual, as vampires seldom leave out signs pointing the way to Elysium or the Prince's domain, but the characters were told they'd be met at the city limits. A preliminary search of the city gets them no closer to finding any vampires, and even cruising the Rack, feeding on mortals with almost Masquerade-breaching blatancy elicits no response. It's as though the entire domain just vanished. Eventually, the characters locate a single ghoul, completely out of his mind and nearly dead from Vitae deprivation, who screams incoherently about a fiery angel of judgment. Did the archangel Raguel *really* come down from Heaven and lay waste to an entire domain, or is there a more earthly threat at work?

"FEAR IS A KIND OF BELIEF. IF YOU FEAR HIM, YOU'RE JUST GIVING HIM POWER. BUT IT'S PROBABLY SMART TO FEAR HIM, ANYWAY."

## A Matter of Faith

Even if you do choose to have Raguel make an appearance in your campaign, it doesn't mean that the Lancea Sanctum is automatically in the right, or that Raguel is in fact a member of the Heavenly Hosts. Entire stories could be built around the attempt to unearth the true nature of Raguel, whether to quash the notion that he is a divine messenger or to prove that God's will is manifest in the unlikes of the Kindred.

### Story Hooks

- **Scholarly Curiosity:** A Mekhet scholar of the Ordo Dracul contacts the players' characters with an intriguing offer. She has uncovered what she believes to be evidence that the being who has been known as "Raguel" for the last two centuries is, in fact, a Daeva elder of the Lancea Sanctum who went mad after learning an extremely rare and powerful Theban Sorcery ritual. In the interests of "scholarly curiosity" she wants the characters to track down this Daeva and attempt to verify that he is, in fact, Raguel. Of course, the Dragon's real motive is to acquire the Theban Sorcery ritual that drove the Daeva insane, but what happens when the characters track down this Daeva and discover that he has been in torpor for the past 150 years?

• **False Prophets:** As the climax of one of the story hooks described above nears (“The Figurehead” or “Murder Mystery” works especially well), an individual claiming to be the archangel Raguel arrives in the domain and backs one side or the other in the conflict. The “angel” certainly demonstrates a deep understanding of the *Testament*, and his mannerisms match nearly every story about Raguel, but he seems reluctant to demonstrate the extent of his angelic powers. Perhaps Raguel is simply offering the city’s Kindred a chance to reform on their own, or perhaps he is an agent of one of the factions in the dispute making a clever ploy to give his group the edge.

• **The Pilgrim:** A young nomad who bears a striking resemblance to Raguel arrives in the domain and presents himself as a mendicant priest come to offer the words of the *Testament of Longinus* to any who would listen. The Prince, an old, paranoid Ventrue, becomes convinced that the pilgrim is, in fact, Raguel come to test him. In a stunning move, the Prince announces his defection from the Invictus to the Lancea Sanctum, throwing the city into political upheaval. As the elders scramble for power, the Prince sinks deeper into his fervor, and unless the players’ characters can manage to prove to him that “Raguel” is not who he seems to be, a full-blown religious war seems inevitable.

## The Glory of God

Uncertainty and ambiguity are all well and good — in fact, the unknown mysteries of the world are a major part of the World of Darkness. Sometimes, though, you just want to get Biblical. Introducing a true, bona fide Angel of the Lord in a shining pillar of light can be an impressive climax to any story, but be aware that overt manifestations of the Divine tend to answer a lot of questions that might be better left unanswered. Still, if you don’t mind straying a bit from the baseline **Vampire** game, this sort of event can be a memorable one.

### Story Hooks

• **Repent, Sinner:** One (or all) of the players’ characters is visited by the angel Raguel, who warns the character that he has strayed from the fold and must be set back in his proper role as the monster that stalks humanity from the darkness. The irony is that the angel is, in all likelihood, chastising the character with the *highest* Humanity rating, since living among humans and attempting to cling to one’s former life is one of the chief sins in Sanctified doctrine. How does a character who has been struggling to hold the Beast at bay and maintain some semblance of his old self react to what is, essentially, a message from God Himself telling him to be a monster?

• **Fallen Angel:** During a Sanctified religious rite, one of the characters (or all of them, if they are all members





of the covenant) receives an angelic vision. The messenger is not Raguel, but Vahishtael himself, who informs the faithful that Raguel has strayed too far from his original purpose. In executing his duties, Raguel turned away from God, and is now fallen. The characters are charged with locating a lost Theban Sorcery ritual, said to be capable of binding an angel to face judgment, but Raguel is also aware of the ritual's existence, and will exert all of his not-inconsiderable power toward preventing anyone from finding the lost ritual.

• **Apocalypse Here:** Similar to the events of the “Vanished Praxis” story hook, the archangel Raguel has determined that the Kindred of a domain are unworthy sinners who must be eradicated. The difference is that this time the chosen domain is the players’ characters’ and they are present when it happens. Against the backdrop of a terrible natural disaster (fire, earthquake, flood and so on), Kindred are dropping one by one as the angel slowly and methodically completes his purge. The characters have to decide whether to try to appease the angel, lay low and hope he misses them (putting them in a prime position for a power grab after the purge is over) or just get the hell out of Dodge and take their chances on the road.

## Raguel

**Background:** According to the “angel” himself, Raguel is an archangel of the second and fourth heavens, whose charge is to administer justice and watch over the behavior of lesser angels. When the angel Vahishtael told Longinus of his divinely-ordained duty, the Damned were likewise brought under Raguel’s aegis. As God’s minister of justice, Raguel expects the Kindred to do their duty as set forth in the *Testament of Longinus*. Vampires who shirk their sacred position as the predators of humankind can expect to draw the ire of Raguel, though the angel usually offers the Damned a chance to repent.

According to Kindred of a more skeptical bent, Raguel, if indeed there is an actual individual by that name, is more likely a vampire himself. Certainly there is evidence to suggest this: in many accounts of his visitations, Raguel enters a domain and mingles with the local Kindred without drawing undue suspicion until he reveals his “divine” powers. A powerful elder, possibly from a unique or little-known bloodline and with extensive knowledge of Theban Sorcery, could easily create an illusion of divine power and pass himself off as an angel, even to other vampires.

Another popular theory among the skeptics is that there is no Raguel per se. Assuming the stories are not simply made up out of whole cloth to frighten Kindred into the bosom of the Lancea Sanctum, “Raguel” is merely a name bandied about after the fact of a vampire’s mysterious death or disappearance. Conspiracy-minded Kindred claim that an organized network of Kindred, mages and possibly even stranger beings creates the illusion of an omnipresent angelic judge to mask their own

agenda, while more rational vampires observe that, most of the time, the Kindred community attributes mysterious deaths or “divine visitations” to Raguel, and it is very likely that Raguel the angel is given credit for the actions of Kindred fanatics, Lupines, mortal witch-hunters and God alone knows what else.

**Description:** Raguel usually appears as a youngish man dressed in simple black garments reminiscent of a priest’s garb. Sometimes he wears the white collar, but just as often it goes unmentioned or is explicitly absent. He is almost always described as barefoot, with curly black hair, dark brown eyes and vaguely Semitic features. Those who have met him and looked into his eyes swear that he truly is a divine being, though they are unable to articulate exactly *why* they are so certain of this fact. Raguel usually carries a copy of the *Testament of Longinus*.

When he reveals his wrathful countenance, Raguel seems to become larger and more imposing, and a harsh golden light shines from inside him, like a lamp covered by a thin cloth. His eyes flash, and his voice is like the thunder. Kindred who have seen him in this aspect sometimes report him as having a pair of tremendous, snow-white wings, but this affectation is not universal.

**Storytelling Hints:** Most of the time, Raguel is portrayed as a soft-spoken, unflappable individual with a deep knowledge of the *Testament of Longinus*. He almost always tries to convince wayward Kindred to return to the path of Longinus of their own free will, meting out divine retribution only as a last resort. On rare occasions, usually when the faithful are being actively persecuted or an entire domain has abandoned the teachings of Longinus, the angel appears in his wrathful aspect and lays waste to the domain.

Above all else, Raguel should be an enigma, a cipher the players never quite manage to crack. Lead them on with clues that Raguel is a fanatical vampire or a delusional mage, then pull the rug out from under them with something that hints that maybe, just maybe, there really is a God, and Raguel is an archangel.

**Clan:** Unknown (popularly believed to be Daeva)

**Covenant:** Lancea Sanctum

**Embrace:** Unknown

**Apparent Age:** mid-20s

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 4, Wits 3, Resolve 5

**Physical Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5

**Social Attributes:** Presence 5, Manipulation 2, Composure 4

**Mental Skills:** Academics (Testament of Longinus) 5, Crafts 1, Investigation 3, Occult (Angelology) 3

**Physical Skills:** Athletics 1, Brawl 2, Weaponry (Swords) 3

**Social Skills:** Empathy 3, Expression 2, Intimidation (Fire and Brimstone) 2, Persuasion 3

**Merits:** Danger Sense 2, Eidetic Memory, Fame 2, Inspiring, Iron Stamina, Language (Hebrew 3, Latin 3)

**Willpower:** 9

**Humanity:** 8

**Virtue:** Justice

**Vice:** Wrath

**Health:** 10

**Initiative:** 8

**Defense:** 3

**Speed:** 11

**Blood Potency:** 7

**Disciplines:** Auspex 5, Celerity 2, Dominate 1, Majesty 5, Obfuscate 1, Protean 1, Theban Sorcery 5

Theban Sorcery Rituals: Blood Scourge (1), Liar's Plague (2), Blandishment of Sin (3), Malediction of Despair (3), Stigmata (4), Transubstantiation (5), Wrathful Judgment (5). Storytellers are encouraged to devise new Theban Sorcery rituals for Raguel to utilize, beyond those listed here.

Vitae/per Turn: 20/5

**Other Supernatural Powers:** In addition to the Disciplines and Theban Sorcery rituals listed above, Raguel has demonstrated, or been reported to demonstrate, several other unique supernatural powers that don't fall into any known Discipline. Raguel has been attributed with almost as many different divine powers as there have been stories about him, so consider the following examples and suggestions, not concrete abilities. In your game, Raguel might possess all of these powers, none of them or just a few, and he may even possess more unique powers of your own devising.

**Burning Blood:** In several cautionary tales about the sin of Amaranth, Raguel's divine nature is revealed when a wicked Kindred attempts to diablerize him. The "blood" coursing through Raguel's veins is pure, holy ichor, and anathema to the Damned. A vampire feeding from Raguel suffers one point of lethal damage per point of Vitae consumed. Raguel may spend a Willpower point to make this damage aggravated.

**Holy Aura:** In most circumstances, Kindred are not adversely affected by the presence of holy objects such as crucifixes or holy water, but Raguel is possessed an aura of such overwhelming righteousness that any Kindred with a Humanity of less than 7 suffers a -2 penalty to all actions in Raguel's presence. A Willpower point may be spent to negate this penalty for a scene. Raguel can suppress this ability at will, but it requires concentration, and he suffers a -1 penalty to all actions while holding back.

**Wrathful Aspect:** By spending five Vitae and a Willpower point, Raguel may invoke his "wrathful aspect," which he uses to punish unrepentant sinners against Longinus' commandments. In Raguel's wrathful aspect, he gains a +1 Size increase, +2 to his Strength and Stamina and a fiery aura that inflicts one point of lethal damage per turn on any Kindred within three yards of him. The wrathful aspect lasts for one scene.



## HOW THE HELL DID HE DO THAT?

The statistics presented here for Raguel give him several Kindred-exclusive traits, such as a Blood Potency rating and access to Disciplines. This should not, however, be construed to mean that Raguel is, strictly speaking, a vampire. If you decide that Raguel is a vampire, these stats are of course appropriate, but they can just as easily be explained away as the best approximation of angelic powers in the context of Kindred understanding (and in the mechanics of **Vampire**). It should be noted that, even though Raguel is assumed to spend "Vitae" to power his supernatural abilities, no story has ever depicted him as actually feeding on a human being, creating a ghoul or using Vitae in any other manner besides fueling Disciplines.

If you, the Storyteller, really want to confuse your players as to what Raguel is and what he can do, consider taking a page from other Storytelling games. If Raguel suddenly displays an ability to use a werewolf Gift or a mage spell, his true nature becomes even more mysterious. You might even rebuild Raguel's statistics using the spirit-creation rules in **Werewolf** or **Mage**, to be sure players can't easily categorize his supernatural powers.

If you do give him additional powers, do so sparingly. Raguel is already a powerful entity; giving him a grab-bag of supernatural powers can very easily make him nigh-unstoppable and annoy players.



## Blood Curses

*We were on the way to pick up Dwayne's date, this cute little gloom cookie he met at the club a few nights back. He was excited about it — I mean, all he was gonna do was bite her a little, but Dwayne's young. He still thinks any breather who can quote Byron might "understand" us. It's sweet, in aretch-inducing kind of way. Anyhow, there was a guy selling roses on the corner, and Dwayne stopped to buy one. We couldn't have gotten 20 feet away, and Dwayne pricks his finger on one of the thorns. He stumbled, looked at me and said something like, "Sis, I don't feel so good," and then — he just crumbled away to dust.*

— Valerie Oler, Invictus Gangrel, on the Final Death of her coterie-mate and brother

The Kindred don't have much in the way of reliable history. While their accounts state that they were active at least as far back as ancient Rome, human legendry speaks of blood-drinking monsters much earlier. In fact, nearly every human culture has stories about a creature that resembles a vampire in key ways (notably returning from the dead and drinking blood) and these stories invariably tell of ways to repel, destroy or imprison such monsters. These methods usually include abjurations from the religion of the area and the era, as well as substances,



herbs and practices considered holy or protective. For the most part, as any modern vampire can attest, these methods are worthless. Yes, a stake through the heart will paralyze a vampire, but even this only came into widespread knowledge comparatively recently, and the mortals still have some key details wrong. The effect on sunlight on vampires is well known, true, but again, vampire scholars point to the fact that not all cultures recognized this fact until books and stories about the undead went into wide circulation. And fire, well, *everything* burns.

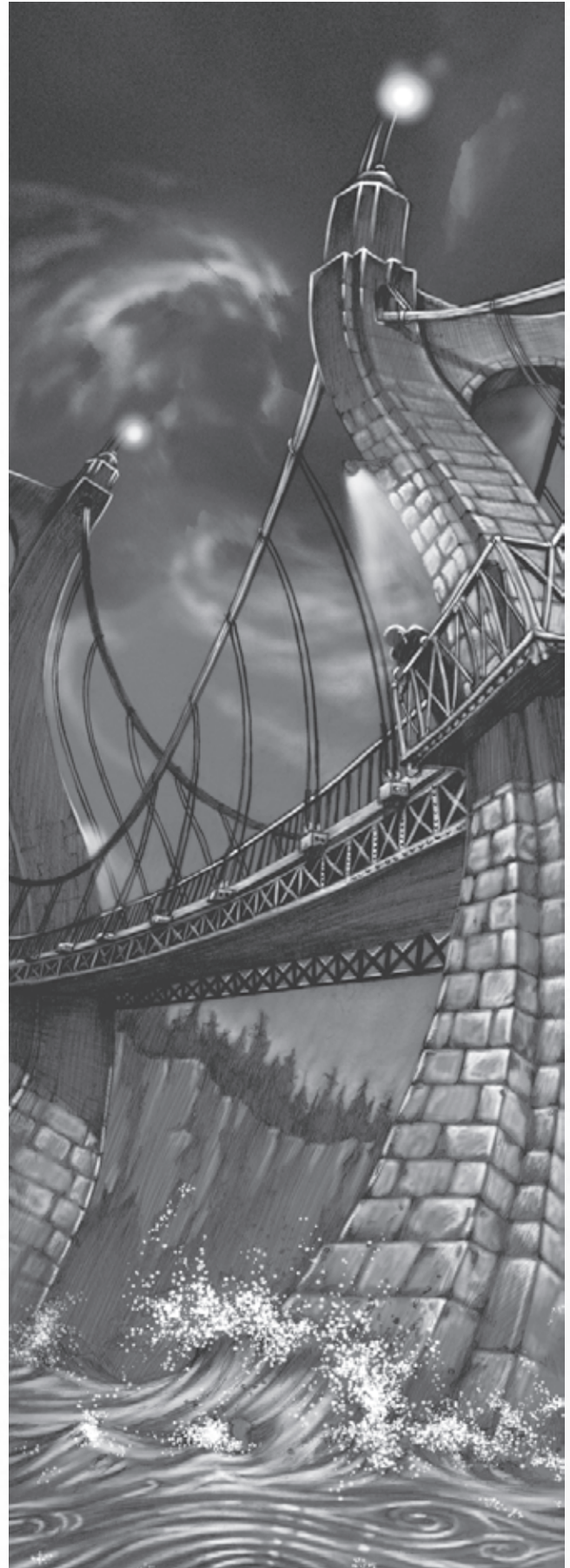
The modern Kindred, therefore, laughs at the notion of a vampire not being able to leap across a stream or stopping to count the grains of rice scattered before him. These proscriptions surely had some meaning to the mortals who thought them up, and might even represent the foibles of some long-extinct bloodlines, but the vampires of tonight have nothing to fear from them.

And yet, once in a while a story such as the one told by Valerie Oler surfaces. A vampire falls victim to a curse that the Kindred didn't think had any merit outside of fiction or folklore. Sometimes these stories are dramatic, like Valerie's, and other times they are subtle. Consider the following account from Ricardo Martinez, an unaligned Ventrue:

*I was walking into the city. My car had broken down a mile back, so I was hoofing it, but I figured I still had plenty of time to get across the bridge and into the city limits before dawn. Worst came to worst, I reckoned I could flag somebody down and persuade them to give me a lift. Anyway, I was approaching the bridge, and I started feeling sick. Not hungry or angry or scared — those are usually the feelings that hit out of nowhere, right? No, this was like vertigo, like everything around me was spinning. I looked down at the river below me, rushing past, churning up everything in its past and carrying it away. I was struck by how alive it all looked, even at night, I had this crazy thought. I thought that if I fell in, I'd melt like a snowflake on a palm. I just turned around and walked back a ways, then flagged somebody down, like I said. When we drove over the bridge, I felt it again, but it wasn't nearly as strong, and as soon as we crossed the river I felt fine again.*

These stories are uncommon, or, at any rate, they aren't reported often. But how many neonates experience such phenomena and simply never relate the experience to their sires out of embarrassment or fear? How many Kindred with status in their cities and covenants refuse to speak of such occurrences out of a reticence to show weakness to their peers (and enemies)? How many Kindred have simply been destroyed outright with no witnesses, laid low by an object, plant or circumstance that they never considered might be deadly? And, more to the point, why don't all Kindred share these curses?

The few vampire scholars and theologians who have noticed and studied this phenomenon have drawn a few





initial conclusions. First, it's obvious that not every vampire suffers from these curses at any given stage during the Requiem. That is, as a vampire ages and his blood grows more potent, he doesn't become more or less vulnerable to running water, crosses or garlic. Second, the cultural background of the vampire doesn't seem to matter, or the culture in which the vampire currently resides. For instance, a vampire of Chinese birth has just as much chance of suddenly finding that a nail driven into his head is immediately fatal as he does of being repelled by the ringing of copper bells (the former stems from Russian legend, the latter Chinese). Likewise, a vampire dwelling in Romania doesn't suddenly fall under the many proscriptions mentioned in the folklore of the area. Finally, these curses don't seem permanent. Ricardo, the Ventrue who found he could not cross running water, reported that after a few months he attempted to leave the city by the same bridge and felt no trace of the vertigo and fear that had stopped him initially.

"THEY'RE LYING TO YOU, MAN. THE STORIES ARE RIGHT! YOU WALK IN THERE WITHOUT AN INVITATION, YOU TOUCH THAT CROSS AND YOU'LL GET HURT. WEAK. YOU CAN FEEL IT."

Working from the presumption that any vampire can develop a curse and that age, culture and ancestry have nothing to do with it, scholars have a few shaky theories. They believe that a vampire can develop these curses in response to some action or circumstance. The following have all been suggested as "curse triggers":

- **Contact with mages:** Vampires do not typically understand the magic of the Awakened or of colloquial warlocks, and many Kindred aren't even aware (or credulous) that mortals can perform magic. That said, those vampires who have met mortal wizards report that they are powerful and mysterious, and that their magic can accomplish things many Kindred can't conceive. A mage, therefore, might be able to awaken a curse in a vampire (or, theoretically, reverse one).

- **Diablerie:** Possibly the worst sin in vampire society, the act of consuming another vampire's soul is frightening to consider. The ramifications for the diablerist (outside of political and societal complications) are typically thought to be limited to the Beast gaining power. Some Kindred feel that consuming a vampire's soul also transfers the worst facets of the victim's personality, or even the victim's clan defect. It's not such a stretch, then, to assume that a diablerist might suffer some supernatural curse as a result of his crime.

- **Drinking Kindred blood/learning Disciplines:** Some Kindred feel that the roles set by a vampire's clan, defined by the vampire's innate talents and deficiency (Disciplines and clan weakness, in game terms), should be rigid boundaries. Trying to step out of those roles, either by consuming the blood of other Kindred or learning the secrets of other clans, might put the vampiric curse into flux, resulting in unique (and sometimes temporary) curses.

- **Curse from victims:** Kindred are often unwilling to grant any kind of power, real or symbolic, to their prey. The notion that the people the Kindred prey upon have any way to exact revenge is terrifying, particularly for older vampires who have hundreds of victims to account for. And yet, Kindred who go mad (which is most of them, eventually) often believe they hear their victims' voices in their minds. Some vampires take this a step further, stating that if a mortal understands what is happening when the Kindred bites her, she can curse her assailant, levying a weakness or bane upon him, at least for a time.

- **Tainted blood:** While most of the time vampires don't fear disease or poison, they are aware that foreign agents in a vessel's blood (such as drugs) can affect Kindred as well. A mortal with the right kind of "taint" in her bloodstream might infect a vampire with one of these curses. Some Kindred go so far as to suggest a direct correlation between the agent in the blood and the curse. For example, a mortal who takes garlic pills for medical reasons might inflict an aversion to garlic in a vampire. Serious scholars of the matter find this a bit simplistic, but do agree that there might be some merit to the notion of blood-borne curses.

Tainted blood might be the result of a medical condition (from a hereditary disease, an exotic flu or an infected wound), a chemical effect (from narcotics or substances being passed off as narcotics) or a supernatural affliction (from a cursed artifact or a sorcerous transmutation). No clinical or authoritative definition of tainted blood exists because no test exists to adequately measure or predict the supernatural properties of Vitae.

- **Mystical Confluences:** Rumors circulate among the Kindred warning vampires to avoid feeding on certain people or at certain times. For instance, a vampire might warn his childe never to feed on pregnant women, lest he find that children can repel him with a simple yell. Another vampire might mention to her coterie that feeding during the vernal equinox makes vampires vulnerable to certain early-blooming flowers.

Any or all of the methods described above might result in a blood curse, or the whole notion might be a myth, just the result of legendry and coincidence combining for a few unfortunate Kindred. Given the secrecy and skullduggery with which vampire society is rife, it's unlikely that any real conclusions can ever be drawn. All the Kindred can do is be careful.

## *Meanings of the Blood Curses*

Blood curses signify, most simply, that vampires are by no means untouchable immortal predators. The natural world seems to detest them. This should already be apparent, given their reaction to sunlight, but, as more of the niceties of society become available 24 hours a day, even this monumental weakness pales a bit. The blood curses can stem from objects as mundane as salt or a rose, and can result in anything from a sudden repulsion to instantaneous



Final Death. Blood curses serve to remind the Kindred that no matter how cyclical the world seems, an element of danger and unpredictability is always present for the Damned, simply by dint of their supernatural stature.

From a mortal perspective, the blood curses are empowering. There *are* ways to fight vampires, provided one can discover them. Most of the blood curses stem from items or plants that older cultures considered protective or holy, and every time a vampire falls victim to such a curse he must ask himself whether the culture that came up with that proscription *knew* something about the Kindred that other civilizations missed. In the case of widespread myths (such as the belief that garlic repels vampires, which shows up in both Chinese and European tales), the vampire must instead consider why the blood curse isn't more prevalent. Kindred of all covenants might look to a blood curse as the first piece of a puzzle, a puzzle that, when complete, might reveal a great secret about the origins of the undead.

### *Storytelling the Blood Curses*

What the blood curses mean in the context of your **Vampire** chronicle depends on the needs of your chronicle. Following are some suggestions for how you might use these phenomena.

- **Repercussions:** The Humanity chart serves as a check for the brutal and callous actions of vampires, up to a certain point. But if characters are killing every time they feed, but not being particularly brutal or cruel about it, a vampire's Humanity can fall to 3 or 4 and remain there. Other options for showing the repercussions of such an unlifestyle exist (police involvement, sanctions from other Kindred, even vampire-hunters) but they all stem from external sources. They send the message that other people might get annoyed at the inhuman excesses of a vampire's predation, but there's nothing really *wrong* with it in a tangible sense. The blood curses allow you to interject this kind of consequence.

Blood curses, in this case, should probably stem from mortal curses. If the victim understands, even on a subconscious level, that a vampire is attacking her for her blood she can lay a curse on the offending Kindred. This doesn't have to be specific (very few people would think to say "May juniper leaves sicken and repel you!" during an assault), but can be as simple as "Damn you," "go to Hell" or something even more profane. The invective is the important thing, the moral expressing hatred and ill will at her assailant. As another option, what if the curses befall vampires not when their victims curse them, but when those victims ask for mercy? In that case, the vampire has the chance to show compassion and chooses not to, thus opening himself up to a blood curse.

- **Story Hooks:** Probably the broadest use of the blood curses is to draw the players into a given story. A blood curse can hint about greater truths about the Kindred condition, about a specific vampire or about a given event or circumstance within your chronicle.

Vampires have stories about how they came to be cursed, why their Disciplines and other abilities function the way they do and why their banes are so detrimental. Not all Kindred are concerned about these questions. Some vampires simply experience their Requiem taking what they see at face value; others (the Ordo Dracul particularly, but curiosity and philosophy is not exclusive to any covenant) seek answers for their unearthly state. The sudden and seemingly spontaneous development of a blood curse could be a red herring, a tantalizing riddle or a vital clue about such matters, depending on where the Storyteller wishes to take the chronicle.

A major consideration here is where these curses actually come from. If they stem from being cursed by mortals during the moment of the Kiss, can *all* mortals achieve this effect or only a certain class of people (women, the elderly, Catholics, members of a certain ancestral line)? The answer could point to a common origin for all Kindred. When using the blood curses in this manner, it might therefore be helpful to use them in conjunction with one (or more) of the origin myths in Chapter One.

A more local, personalized approach to the blood curses is also possible. If the Kindred who falls to a blood curse is somehow important to the characters (a Contact, Ally, Mentor or even an enemy), they might be interested to know the particulars of how he came by the curse, if only to avoid his fate. But what if a vampire is setting up other Kindred to suffer the blood curses? Again, this requires you as Storyteller to know how the curses are spread. It might be that a particular vampire is a kind of plague dog — anyone upon whom he feeds acts as a carrier who can spread a curse to other vampires. Or the vampire might be practicing a long-forgotten and quite taboo variant on Theban Sorcery or Crúac, one that allows mutation of the vampiric condition.

Finally, you could use stipulate that the blood curses point to events within your chronicle that don't originate with vampires at all. The blood curses might stem from Divine retribution — God (in whatever guise fits your chronicle) curses the Kindred of the area and they begin manifesting these curses seemingly at random. Is the curse random, or is there a hidden pattern, one that could break the curse? Or perhaps the entity responsible isn't quite so inscrutable as the Divine. Mages are mentioned above as a possible source for the blood curses, and a powerful warlock might be able to levy such curses on Kindred (this would explain why the curses are usually temporary — most such spells do not last indefinitely). This take on the blood curses could be a story that bridges **Vampire: The Requiem** and **Mage: The Awakening** for your chronicle.

- **Customization:** Fair warning: This suggestion involves breaking some of the established rules and assumptions of **Vampire**.

The blood curses can be used to customize **Vampire** characters to a degree much more complicated than that allowed

by the game as written, at least insofar as the vampiric condition is concerned. Consider: With the blood curses and the five clan weaknesses (and even the bloodline weaknesses detailed in Appendix One of **Vampire: The Requiem**, if you like), you have a way to eliminate clans from the game entirely. At the base of it, the clans can be seen simply as interpretations of different vampire archetypes: the occulted predator, the hideous monster, the shapeshifting nightstalker, the magnetic seductress and the bloody ruler. Those are extremely broad categories. This is deliberate, of course, since any given character concept for **Vampire** can fit into one of the clans, but your troupe might not want to work with those archetypes at all. In that case, simply choose one or two blood curses, pick three favored Disciplines (subject to Storyteller approval) and ignore the notion of clan entirely (this also removes bloodlines from the game, of course). Such a chronicle would probably focus heavily on covenant, and removes a way to unify disparate Kindred, but since clan isn't as big a rallying point as covenant anyway, this is hardly an insurmountable problem.

Something to consider in this scenario: Can Kindred gain new curses? If so, how? Any of the methods described above are appropriate, though drinking Kindred blood, learning Disciplines and especially diablerie probably make the most sense.



### IT'S A BIG STEP . . .

. . . so think before you take it. Removing clan from the game not only allows for a greater degree of customization for each character, but takes away an easily definable point of reference for the characters. If the players hear that the Prince of a city is a Gangrel, they probably have quite different assumptions than if the Prince is a Ventrue. Removing this facet of the game enhances the mystery of the Requiem greatly, since every vampire is, essentially, a member of a clan of one. This raises the question of whether or not a vampire's weaknesses can be passed down to his childer and whether Disciplines likewise follow a "hereditary" line. "Clans" might be much smaller and more localized; "Clan Mekhet" might exist, but only be seen in the Pacific Northwest, while on the East Coast a family of vampires with a similar aptitude for stealth and perception but an aversion to salt predominate (and have a different name).

In such a chronicle, a vampire's unique weakness is probably his most carefully guarded secret. Perhaps that secret is instinctively passed along to his childer, so even if a vampire doesn't share her sire's weakness, she knows it. The weakness of a given vampire might be a powerful bargaining chip, especially if you decide that the "universal" Kindred weaknesses (sunlight and wooden stakes) don't apply to all vampires.

More advice and game mechanics for removing the clans from **Vampire** can be found in the **Requiem Chronicle's Guide**.



## Game Mechanics: Being Cursed

It's all very well to say that a given substance "repels" or "injuries" a vampire, but what does that mean in terms of game systems? Looking at the clan weaknesses (which are the closest analogs to the blood curses currently present in **Vampire**) shows several different ways to model them. This section presents a few options for game mechanics for blood curses, including how Kindred come by them, what effect the curses have and how long they last.

Several methods of acquiring blood curses are listed on p. 112. Here, we take a closer look at those methods in terms of game mechanics.

### Contact with Mages

A mage can, theoretically, impose a blood curse upon a vampire. If the Storyteller has access to **Mage: The Awakening** or **World of Darkness: Second Sight**, he has the spells therein to guide him. Game mechanics for effects and duration — and even for a "trigger" that could lead to acquiring a blood curse — are well within the purview of **Mage**.

If the Storyteller does not have access to either book, however, there is no need to despair. Instead, he could use a magical system similar to the one presented for Theban Sorcery or Crúac. Cursing a vampire directly might be an instant action, requiring the expenditure of Willpower and a roll of Resolve (or Intelligence or even Presence, depending on what you think is appropriate) + Occult. Success imposes a curse with an effect of Repulsion or Damage for one night. Alternately, the mage might cast the spell as an extended action, with commensurately more severe effects and duration depending on how many successes she accrues. (For instance, a curse with the effect of Repulsion and a duration of one week would require more successes than one with the Destruction effect and the same duration.)

Unless the characters have a chance to find and prevent the spell from being completed, though, deciding upon whatever duration and effect you need for the story and not bother rolling dice for an action that happens "off stage" is just as easy. Not every warlock and thaumaturgist in the World of Darkness is a fairly built game construct. Not every supernatural force is the work of a player-accessible spell or incantation. Some are narrative instruments — MacGuffins or *deus ex machinae* installed to make the story happen in the first place.

### Diablerie

The systems for committing diablerie can be found on p. 159 of **Vampire: The Requiem**. If you wish to add the risk of blood curses to this already heinous act, have the diablerist's player roll a number of dice equal to her Humanity following the completion of the deed (and any associated degeneration). This dice pool cannot be reduced to a chance die, however. A Humanity 0 vampire rolls a single die.





### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** Not possible. The roll cannot be reduced to a chance die.

**Failure:** The character gains a blood curse with one of the following effect/duration spreads: Damage/One night, Prohibition/One week or Repulsion/One month.

**Success:** The character gains a blood curse with one of the following effect/duration spreads: Prohibition/One night or Repulsion/One week.

**Exceptional Success:** The character gains a blood curse with the following effect/duration spread: Repulsion/one night.

### *Drinking Kindred Blood*

When the vampire consumes Vitae from a vampire whose blood the character has never tasted before, the player must make a reflexive Resolve + Composure roll.

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** Not possible. The roll cannot be reduced to a chance die.

**Failure:** The character gains a blood curse with one of the following effect/duration spreads: Damage/One night, Prohibition/One week or Repulsion/One month.

**Success:** The character gains a blood curse with one of the following effect/duration spreads: Prohibition/One night or Repulsion/One week.

**Exceptional Success:** The character does not gain a blood curse.

### *Learning Disciplines*

Blood curses might be acquired while learning out-of-clan Disciplines. Crúac and Theban Sorcery might risk blood curses, depending on what the Storyteller has decided about the origins of the curses. The Coils of the Dragon are highly appropriate as a method of gaining curses, since they already involve meddling with the vampire's weaknesses. The system for gaining blood curses along with new Disciplines is the same as for drinking Kindred blood, except the player makes the Resolve + Composure roll the first time the character successfully uses the new Discipline power, completes a ritual at the new level or learns a new Coil.

### *Curses From Victims*

As stated before, a victim must be aware that she is being attacked by a vampire to have any chance of invoking a blood curse. The victim must also be suffering wound penalties from lethal or aggravated damage caused by that vampire. Pit the victim's Presence + Occult in a reflexive, contested roll against the vampire's Resolve + Composure. If the victim wins the contest, the vampire receives a blood curse based on the following roll results and the victim's will.

Remember, not just any person killed by a vampire should have this power. These kinds of desperate curses aren't reliable systems, they're dramatic tools that belong to the Storyteller. A curse has a chance to take effect when the Storyteller chooses to use the system above, or it works when the Storyteller says it works.

### Roll Results

**Dramatic failure:** No special penalty for a dramatic failure.

**Failure:** The vampire wins the contested roll and suffers no blood curse.

**Success:** The victim rolls more successes than the vampire and the vampire suffers a blood curse. The severity of the blood curse is based on how many successes the victim achieves. Each success increases the severity of effect or duration by one "step." Thus, if the Storyteller rolls five successes for the victim, the curse could have an effect/duration spread of Destruction/One night, Repulsion/Until Dispelled or Prohibition/One Week.

**Exceptional success:** The victim rolls more successes than the vampire and the vampire gains a blood curse, as above. Extra successes are their own reward.

### *Tainted Blood and Mystical Confluences*

When a vampire ingests tainted blood, reflexively roll his Resolve + Composure and consult the roll results for diablerie, above.



## THE MYTH OF GAME BALANCE

These systems don't try to draw any kind of balance when it comes to the severity of blood curses. Damage, if any, may be rolled, but some forms of curses can destroy a Kindred instantly. This might seem harsh, and it would be, if such systems were simply implemented with no warning to the players.

The reason there's no lengthy, balanced system here is that these curses aren't meant to be fair. The dramatic reason you're using these blood curses should dictate their severity and duration, not the needs of a level playing field. These curses aren't just a new supernatural effect to add into your chronicle. They're potent, Requiem-altering afflictions to be used for the sake of drama and peril. A blood curse isn't meant to be balanced, it's meant to be a curse.

Thus, as a Storyteller you can alter these curses easily. The difference between a damaging curse that threatens Damage 3 and one that threatens Damage 5 is plain to see. If the needs of your particular story inspire you to weaken or strengthen these curses, you can do that.

Beware, however, that blood curses aren't punishing *players*. Curses should challenge players and their characters, not frustrate them. Use these to create peril and fear for the troupe's characters, not regret for the players.



## *Game Mechanics: Effects of Blood Curses*

Blood curses have one of four basic effects: Repulsion, Prohibition, Damage or Destruction.

### *Repulsion*

The blood curse overwhelms the vampire with fear, forcing her away from the object, circumstance or substance at the root of the curse. The player rolls Resolve + Composure.

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The vampire immediately enters Röttschreck and flees from the object of the curse.

**Failure:** The presence of an anathema object requires the vampire to roll to overcome a fear frenzy, with a -2 penalty (see p. 179 of **Vampire: The Requiem**). The vampire must achieve a number of successes equal to the Size of the anathema, plus one success for each additional anathema item present, to avoid the Röttschreck.

The vampire cannot willingly touch the object of the curse for the duration of the scene. If the anathema approaches him (someone holds a cross out to him, for instance) while he attempts to overcome his frenzy, he must move away from the anathema on his turn. The vampire cannot use Disciplines to circumvent the curse (Dominate to force a person to drop a cross, for example).

**Success:** The character cannot touch the object of the curse, but can use Disciplines to circumvent it. Any attempts to do so suffer a -3 penalty. The vampire must still struggle to resist the Röttschreck, but without the dice pool penalty for failure, above. The target number of successes is equal to the Size of the largest anathema present.

**Exceptional Success:** The character may handle the object of the curse at will, but feels queasy and uncomfortable doing so. The player suffers a -2 modifier on all attempts to affect or interact with the anathema.

### *Prohibition*

A Prohibition curse prevents a character from taking a proscribed action. This might include entering a home, crossing a barrier or bridge or attacking a particular type of person. The vampire cannot use Disciplines to circumvent this limitation. For instance, a vampire with a Prohibition against crossing running water cannot use the Protean power Shape of the Beast to fly over a river. The Kindred can, however, use mundane means to bypass the Prohibition (riding in a boat over the river, for instance).

The character cannot circumvent a Prohibition *except* in a situation in which the alternative is Final Death. If the character is stuck at dawn and cannot enter a house without an invitation, but has no other shelter, the player can expend a *dot* of Willpower to ignore the Prohibition for one scene.



## Damage

Anathemas damage the cursed vampire. Garlic burns like acid, holy water sticks and scalds like tar, crosses sear like branding irons. Anathemas that would be weapons even if they weren't cursed — such as crosses large enough to qualify as clubs — gain bonus lethal damage dice equal to their Size.

Anathemas that wouldn't normally inflict damage, such as a small ornamental cross or a handful of grave dirt, need only touch the vampire to do harm (see "Touching an Opponent, p. 157 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). If the touch succeeds, a damage roll is made separately. The damage dice pool is equal to the Size of the anathema that was brought against the vampire, whether it's a fistful of garlic or a bucket of holy water. No anathema can cause more than 10 dice of damage in one turn, however.

## Destruction

The most potent curses burn away a vampire like the sun burns away fog. When the vampire comes into contact with the anathema, he suffers 10 dice of aggravated damage. Sustained contact requires a new damage roll each turn. In most cases, a vampire has an instinctual fear of the anathema and must struggle against the Röttschreck in its presence as if it were obscured sunlight (see p. 181 of **Vampire: The Requiem**). Stories persist, of course, of anathema somehow, insidiously cursed so as to give no clue of their destructive nature to the Beast. If such things exist — a saintly relic, a holy skull that turns the Damned to ash with a touch, for example — the Kindred are doomed.

"THERE'S ONE NIGHT A YEAR, THE NIGHT OF SOME OLD PAGAN HOLIDAY, I THINK, WHEN THOSE OLD VAMPIRE TRICKS YOU HEAR ABOUT, LIKE GARLIC AND CROSSES, REALLY WORK."

## Duration of Blood Curses

Blood curses have five possible durations, ranging from one night to eternity. These durations aren't common knowledge among Kindred, cursed or not. Seldom does any vampire know that she is unable to cross running water — but only until March. No mystic timer goes off in the Blood when a curse dissipates. To discover if she is free of a curse, a character must risk its consequences. She must dip her foot in the river.

Here are the five generalized durations for blood curses:

**One night:** The curse ends at the next sunrise. This is a good choice for sudden, anonymous curses, like those that might be contracted by chance from tainted blood or mystic artifacts. Use these for hellish survival stories that challenge the characters to endure or overcome one awful night. At this level, the curse is little more than a nasty game effect.

**One week:** The curse ends at sunrise one week later. If contracted on a Sunday night, the curse is lifted at dawn on the following Sunday. This duration puts real pressure on a character to think and work around it from night to night without pushing the curse too far past a single story. Use this duration for stories about the curse itself — about the witch who imposed it or the action that provoked it — and how the characters deal with its nightly difficulties.

**One month:** The curse ends 30 days after it was contracted. Depending on who levied it, the curse hinge on the lunar cycles instead, lifting on the night of the next new moon, for example. A curse of this duration can have a serious effect on how a character must be played, possibly altering his behavior over the course of several stories. A month-long curse isn't just something that happens to a vampire during those weeks, it's likely to become a vital part of her character over those nights. At this duration, stories are less likely to be about the curse and more about the character herself. Use this kind of curse to create a short story arc for the characters and for a source of suspense as the dawn of its dissipation draws near.

**Until dispelled:** The curse ends when the vampire performs a certain act or achieves a certain goal. For example: go 30 days without feeding from a human, slay the hag who cursed you or regain Willpower through Virtues instead of Vices nine consecutive nights and the curse will be broken. Obviously, the conditions of the dispelling can be based either in storytelling goals (destroy a mystic artifact) or in game mechanics (achieve Blood Potency 3), but you must have some means of expressing them in the game world. In the case of raised Blood Potency, for example, the condition of the curse's end might be found in a crumbling tome, which reads "when the Blood is aged and the taste of beasts no longer satisfies, the hex is transcended." At this point, the curse becomes a story hook — or an ultimatum for the player: pursue the story about the Basque girl or your character gains a new weakness. Don't abuse it.

How does a character know how to dispel her curse? Sometimes, she doesn't — not at first. If the source of her curse isn't a vengeful witch screaming her hex into the night, the character may have to do some deep research into Kindred lore, making pacts with Acolytes to get access to ancient texts or dealing with black-market wizards to purchase engraved artifacts looted from distant lands. Just discovering how to lift an otherwise-permanent curse can be the motivating factor behind a whole chronicle.

**Permanent:** The curse is an integral part of the vampire, whether it's just been cast upon her or whether she's had it since the first night of her Requiem. At this point, the curse is more like an additional clan or bloodline weakness than a story element. Permanent curses utterly change the way a character is played and shouldn't be levied without serious consideration of the ramifications for the player and the chronicle. Is the player going to lose interest in either if her character becomes

hindered with a permanent curse? Is the character going to be left out of almost every scene if she can't enter houses without an invitation or ride by a church? A permanent curse should only be used on a player's character when she has a choice whether to accept or refuse the risk of contracting it. A permanent curse may be the consequence for handling a cherished Sanctified relic, for example, which the character accepts to gain the title of Bishop, or it may be widely whispered that any Kindred who slays the Prince will suffer his curse. To avoid the curse, the character has only to avoid the associated action. Therefore, the benefits of the action must be as tempting as the curse is fearsome — that's the terrible greatness of a dramatic dilemma.

"THEY SAY SHE WAS CURSED BY THE PRINCE BEFORE HER. THAT SHE'S FORBIDDEN TO GO ANYWHERE JEWISH BONES HAVE BEEN BURIED UNTIL SHE MEETS HER DAUGHTER AGAIN. THAT'S WHY WE MEET HERE."

### *Sample Blood Curses*

Below is a list of some legendary vampiric weaknesses, curses and supernatural hindrances. You could assign any level of severity to these curses using the rules above, though suggestions follow. This list is merely meant to show a range of possibilities for the curses, not to limit the ways you could put these curses into action.

This is by no means an exhaustive list of every substance, practice and object that has ever been described as proscriptive against vampires. Note also that the line between "vampire" and "demon" or "evil spirit" is blurry in many legends, and that in many ancient stories vampires bear a greater resemblance to zombies or even ghosts than they do to the Kindred of **Vampire: The Requiem**. A little time on the Internet or a trip to the library should expand your inspiration for blood curses considerably, should you need more than are listed here.

- **Running water:** Vampires are often portrayed as being unable to cross running water under their own power, though able to ride horses, ships or carriages over rivers and oceans. Some legends even hold that running water destroys a vampire's flesh.

- **Salt:** An unbroken line of salt on a windowsill or doorway prevents a vampire from entering the house. A circle of salt around a vampire's coffin might prevent him from rising at night.

- **Garlic and other herbs:** Garlic disgusts and repels vampires, and sometimes can cause injury. Leeks, rue, thistle and juniper berries or leaves are also reputed to have this effect.

- **Holy symbols:** The image of a vampire recoiling before a cross is iconic, but other holy symbols, prayers or even the presence of a priest or other spiritual authority might repel or damage a vampire.

- **Grave soil:** A handful of grave soil on a vampire's coffin might prevent her from rising. Grave soil thrown

in the face of a vampire can repel the monster, or even cause its flesh to crumble away.

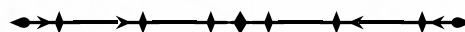
- **Entering a home:** Some legends state that vampires cannot enter a home without invitation from the home's rightful owner (or, in more lax versions of these stories, from anyone currently inside the home). If the owners of the house leave offerings outside for the vampires (out of respect for the dead), the creature is likewise barred from entering. Any method listed here for repelling a vampire might also keep the monster out of a house.

- **Bells and loud noises:** Ghosts, demons and vampires have all been reportedly frightened away by sharp noises. Bells, especially, are said to cause pain to such creatures.

- **Compulsions:** The Chinese claimed a vampire would stop to count grains of rice; the Greeks said the same about vampires and mustard seeds. In any case, the vampire supposedly has no control over this compulsion and sometimes remains lingering over spilled grains until the locals capture or destroy him.

- **Nails:** A nail driven into the head of a vampire might paralyze or destroy her completely. Many legends speak of immobilizing the undead by driving nails into their hands, feet, eyes, sides, lips or stomachs.

- **Thorns:** Some legends state that vampires can become trapped in thickets, unable to escape until daylight destroys them. More severe legendry asserts that a vampire can prick his finger on a rose thorn and crumble away to dust instantly.



### SIMPLE ALTERNATE CURSES

Just in case the flexible system for blood curses above is too much work for you — maybe you need a blood curse right now to prepare for tonight's story — here are a few ways to model some archetypal vampire weaknesses using game mechanics. These options don't follow the previous systems, they're here to be used as simple alternatives if they appeal to you. Use them as bloodline weaknesses for your own creations or pull them out as one-shot obstacles or complications.

- **Running water, salt, grave soil and invitations:** The vampire cannot cross the warding line — running water, thresholds, salt, soil or sills — without spending a point of Willpower and succeeding on a Resolve + Composure roll. The Willpower point makes this roll possible, it does not add dice to the pool.

- **Garlic and other herbs:** A subject wearing an amount of garlic (or some other herbal anathema) equal to Size 1 or more gains the same benefits of a spent Willpower point on all rolls to contest or resist vampiric Disciplines. Thus, the subject gains a +2 bonus to resistance traits or a +3 bonus to dice pools to contest Disciplines. A vampire wearing protective herbs gains no benefit and suffers a -2 penalty on attempts to use his own Disciplines.

- **Holy symbols:** Holy symbols stir frenzy in the vampire. The type of frenzy — anger or fear — is



specific to the character, but once decided on by the player cannot be changed. The Size of the holy symbol, minus its distance from the vampire in yards, determines the number of successes the vampire must overcome in a scene to avoid frenzy.

- **Bells and loud noises:** The vampire is affected as by holy symbols, above, except he only needs to hear the anathema. Bells and protective noises always provoke fear frenzies instead of anger frenzies.

- **Compulsions:** The vampire must make a Resolve + Composure roll to resist stopping and counting spilled grain, coins or other compulsory objects, depending on the curse. If the vampire's Humanity is less than 6, he suffers a -2 penalty on the roll. If the vampire's Humanity is less than 3, he suffers a -4 penalty on the roll. If the roll fails, the vampire must perform an extended Intelligence + Wits action to count enough of the spilled items to satisfy his compulsion. The number of successes necessary is equal to the Size of the spilled container, whether it's a handful (Size 1) or a truckload (Size 6).

## Try Ghoul, Try Master: The Phanariot

*We are one blood, one fang, one will. Let all keep faith and let all keep silence. The enemy is strong, and those who should lead are already enslaved, but we shall fight to the end. In the holy name of Longinus, we swear vigilance. Let the Society of Louchet not rest until the cursed Phanariot are destroyed. So swear we all!*

— Oath of the Society of Louchet

A few Kindred refuse to have any truck with ghouls. Not only do these Kindred refuse to create ghouls of their own, they distrust any vampire with such servants. Such Kindred even lobby Princes to forbid ghouls, and to destroy any of these vampire-tainted mortals that already exist. Radicals are even said to murder ghouls themselves, though killing another vampire's property this way is a crime that brings severe punishment if discovered.

These ghoul-hating vampires insist that the Kindred's Vitae-empowered, Vitae-bound servants actually present a deadly danger. Most Kindred believe the Vinculum and dependence on the Blood ensure a ghoul's loyalty, but a few vampires disagree and say no ghoul can be trusted. They claim that among the Vitae-addicted servants lurk predators of fiendish cunning and unguessable power — predators who enslave the Kindred in their own havens and steal their Vitae for their own unholy purposes. They name this hidden menace the Phanariot.

Kindred who believe in the Phanariot risk ridicule at the very least. Most Kindred refuse to believe the Phanariot exist, and think that anyone who does must be nuts. How could such creatures hide within the households of such paranoid and powerful creatures as the Kindred? How could

the Phanariot exist in the first place? The Phanariot are just a just a legend. Or more precisely, *two* legends.

## The Phanariot

The legend of the Phanariot is only about 200 years old. The original account comes from the Balkan region of Europe. Early in the 19th century, reports filtered into Western Europe of ghouls massacred in Bucharest, Jassy and Sofia. The somewhat garbled reports said the ghouls were associated with "Phanariot" and endangered the local Kindred.

At that time, the three cities were all part of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman government, the Sublime Porte, sent governors to oversee its European provinces. In the provinces of Wallachia and Moldavia, these governors were usually Greeks from the Phanar district of Istanbul, so the governors and their administration were called Phanariot. Governors obtained their position through bribery, and their terms of office were short — but they were allowed to tax the populace as they pleased while they had the office. They were slaves of the Porte, but autocratic masters of everyone in their province. The rapacity of the Phanariot, as they tried to satisfy the fiscal demands of the Porte while lining their own pockets, made them among the most hated overseers in history.

The official story behind the Phanariot ghoul massacres is that the Prince of Istanbul tried to assert hegemony over the provincial Princes, using the Ottoman colonial administration as his instrument in concert with Turkish and Greek Kindred and their ghouls. These ghouls took influential positions in the Phanariot administration; their massacre was a strike against the Istanbul Kindred.

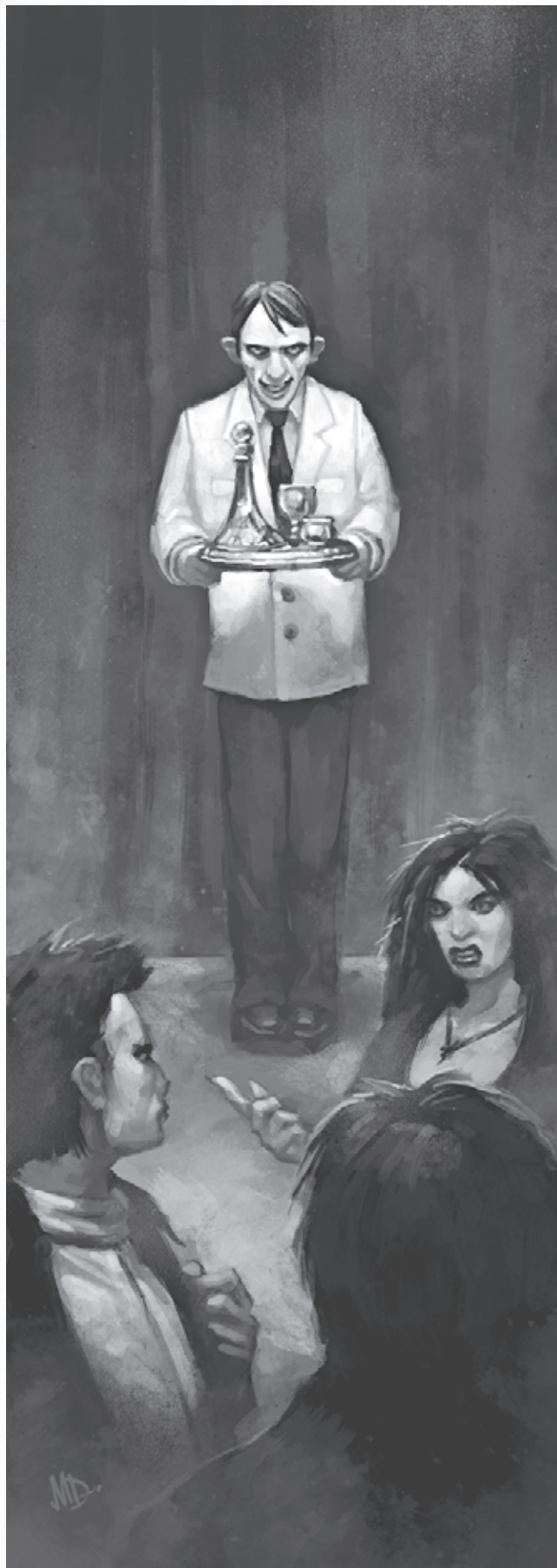
It's a plausible story. Although the Balkan Kindred suffered far less than the kine under the centuries of Ottoman rule, native vampires carried their resentments into undeath. Balkan Kindred histories award their Princes influential roles in the 19th- and early 20th-century struggles of national liberation (though such histories are themselves perhaps not entirely reliable).

On the other hand, some Kindred believe the official story is a cover for something darker and deadlier. They say memoirs from ghoul and mortal envoys from other cities speak of vampires enslaved by their own ghouls, and sinister magic powers. From scant, third-hand evidence, they construct fearsome conspiracy theories.

**"THE BISHOP'S NOT THE BISHOP. HE'S JUST ANOTHER FUCKING RENFIELD, MAN."**

*Witches*

One version of the Phanariot legend says that some ghouls deliberately seek to join the households of unwitting Kindred. These mortals are witches and Satanists. Their pact with the Devil renders them immune to the Vinculum and mind-controlling Disciplines. They want Kindred blood for more than the immortality and power they receive as



ghouls. The Phanariot also use Kindred blood in rituals of Satanic magic. Vitae carries the power of God: a divine curse, to be sure, but still the power of the Supreme Being. These Satanists delight in stealing that power and turning it toward the purposes of their infernal master.

According to the legend, the Phanariot know spells to cause a wide range of evils, from impotence to storms. Most importantly, from the Kindred point of view, the Phanariot's spells can subvert the wills of their own supposed masters, forcing them to serve the Devil as well. If a witch can become a vampire's ghoul, the witch soon becomes the true master. Phanariot draw other ghouls into the Satanic cult as well, enabling them to enslave their domitors in turn.

No one can say how far this evil cult has spread, or how deeply it penetrates Kindred society. Some vampires claim the Phanariot secretly rule entire cities of Kindred through enslaved Princes, Primogen and other Kindred officers. Naturally, the Phanariot use their pawns (as well as their dire magic) to discredit and destroy any Kindred who discover the truth.

Of course, the Phanariot want more than just control of Kindred society. They want to grind the entire world under Satan's heel. The Kindred are the Satanists' instrument. All the wealth and political power of the Invictus, the social connections of the Carthians, the esoteric lore of the Acolytes, Sanctified and Ordo Dracul — all can become tools the Phanariot use to drag the world into Hell.

This version of the Phanariot legend is most popular among the Lancea Sanctum, the covenant whose members worry the most about religious matters and believe most strongly in a transcendent Adversary. This legend also finds adherents among other Kindred who come from societies or social strata in which belief in witchcraft, the Evil Eye and other magic is still strong among the kine.

### *Spirits*

Another version of the myth, based on a different selection of third-hand reports, says the Phanariot are spirits. There's no consensus about what kind of spirits they are: some tellers believe the Phanariot are spirits of the dead, while others believe they are devils conjured from Hell, or elementals created by grim and bloody rites. A few Kindred even believe the Phanariot are angelic spirits tasked with the Kindred's destruction.

Regardless of the Phanariot's nature, they were conjured and set on their task by an extremely powerful Kindred sorcerer. Most versions of the myth call the sorcerer Phanes. According to this legend, Phanes knew his enemies would destroy him eventually, and so created the Phanariot as a "gotcha last" retribution. Most believers say Phanes was the most powerful sorcerer the Circle of the Crone has seen in the last millennium. However, a few advocates think he belonged to the Lancea Sanctum. A few believers think Phanes was not a Kindred at all,



but the Wandering Jew, seeking God's forgiveness by attacking the scions of God's curse on Longinus.

Most versions of this myth also say the Phanariot bear a special enmity for one particular covenant. The Invictus is the most popular candidate, since the First Estate held the Princedoms in Sofia and Bucharest (though the during the early 19th century, the Prince of Jassy belonged to the Ordo Dracul). However, some Kindred who believe Phanes was an Acolyte think he set the Phanariot against the Lancea Sanctum instead, or as well as the Invictus. Kindred who say Phanes was Sanctified, meanwhile, suspect he wanted to destroy the Circle of the Crone for its pagan ways.

Whatever the stories' nature and purpose, they agree the Phanariot can take possession of weak-willed ghouls. The spirits are skillful at pretending to be the ghouls they possess, but slight changes in personality can give the spirits away. Of course, the vampire who knows them best becomes the first target for enslavement, so other Kindred are not likely to realize the truth until it's too late. The possessed ghoul uses his domitor's position and resources to set the Kindred against each other, undercut all their plans, steal resources for other Phanariot to use and ultimately lead as many of the city's Kindred as possible into a deadly trap. Believers say Phanariot have destroyed dozens of Kindred at a time — for instance, by locking and barring the doors of an Elysium and setting the building on fire. The infamous Immolation of Danzig, which destroyed the city's entire Primogen Council (and several other Kindred besides), is often cited as a likely case of Phanariot involvement: the only surviving witness claimed the suicidal Nosferatu Primogen set the blaze . . . but the witness was a ghoul, and the Nosferatu's ghouls had barred the doors so no one else could escape — supposedly at their master's orders, but who really knows what happened?

The greatest danger of the spiritual Phanariot is that no one knows how to destroy them. If a Phanariot's ghoul host is slain, the spirit simply looks for another ghoul to possess. A possessed ghoul may even destroy itself in order to complete some murderous plan against a city's Kindred.

### *Protection Against the Phanariot*

Both versions of the Phanariot myth emphasize the difficulty of telling whether a ghoul is actually a Phanariot and the Phanariot's general resistance to the Kindred's powers. Only minute surveillance of a ghoul, taking great care that it never knows anyone is watching, might reveal that a ghoul is actually a cunning, ruthless enemy of the Kindred.

The only defense suggested against the Phanariot is religious devotion and display of the crucifix (as well as holy icons, for Orthodox Kindred) within the haven. If the Phanariot are devils or Satanists, these holy items might prevent them from entering the haven, or weaken

them too much to enslave the haven's master. If they are angels or minions of a long-destroyed Sanctified, a display of piety might turn them aside so they attack some other Kindred. None of the legends suggest any sort of ritual to reveal or exorcise the Phanariot. If neither faith nor magic works, the Kindred's only defense is to eschew keeping ghouls — and eternal vigilance.

### *The Society of Louchet*

Kindred who believe in the deadly danger posed by the Phanariot may join a secret group called the Society of Louchet. The society takes its name from an otherwise unknown delegate to the National Assembly during the French Revolution, who proposed the arrest of Robespierre. This motion broke Robespierre's grip of terror over the government and led to his swift arrest and execution. The founders of the Society, back in the 19th century, mostly belonged to the Invictus. They considered Robespierre — low-born king-killer and ultimately unsuccessful dictator — a perfect model of what the Invictus had to guard against.

French Kindred may recall that the Society began as a sort of vigilance committee against the Carthians and attempts to lobby Princes to give greater rights to ghouls. This, of course, trespassed against the Invictus' traditional assertion that every Kindred held absolute power over her ghouls and could treat them any way she liked. The Princes of Paris and Marseilles outlawed the Society of Louchet after members murdered a number of ghouls they considered "rebellious and acting above their station." The Society apparently withered in other cities; but, in fact, it went underground. The Society's own accounts say that early members discovered the Phanariot in the members' searches for ghoul treason.

The Society of Louchet necessarily adopts a cellular structure. In fact, the members in one city have probably never met members in any other city. The Society propagates itself through personal connections and pamphlets that members copy and slip to other Kindred who show a dislike for ghouls or who seem curious or worried when they hear stories about the Phanariot. Every few decades, a member writes a new pamphlet about Phanariot machinations exposed in the writer's city, or reported from elsewhere, and sends it to any Kindred he knows in other cities.

Judging by the pamphlets, the Society's criteria for detecting a Phanariot are somewhat loose and subjective. Signs that a ghoul may be a Phanariot include the following:

- Does the ghoul make frequent suggestions that her domitor accepts?
- Has the domitor ever withheld Vitae from the ghoul? Recently?
- Does the ghoul avoid the company of Kindred sorcerers? (Pamphlets differ in whether Phanariot perceive a threat from Acolytes or Sanctified.)

• Does a haven completely lack tokens of Christian faith? (If the pamphleteer believes the Phanariot are Satanists.)

• Does a haven show *too many* tokens of Christian faith? (The Phanariot is trying too hard to fool other Kindred!)

• Does a ghoul's domitor avoid feeding him in front of other Kindred?

• Does a haven include paraphernalia for sorcery, when the vampire is not a sorcerer? ("Sorcerous paraphernalia" here includes colored twine, a black-handled knife, wax or any claylike substance.)

• Does a ghoul's domitor ever mock the possibility of a Phanariot threat?

The Society's pamphlets recommend that vigilant Kindred not wait for absolute proof of Phanariot activity. Suspicion is enough to condemn a ghoul, if there is no evidence that a ghoul is *not* a Phanariot. Better to destroy a possibly innocent ghoul than allow one Phanariot free to work its evil schemes!

Members of the Society of Louchet are particularly active in lobbying Princes to restrict the creation of ghouls. In most cities, though, Society members must hide their allegiance lest other Kindred punish members for murdering Phanariot — or blame members for the murder of a rival's ghoul. Pamphlets even enjoin members to denigrate the Society around other Kindred, so the Phanariot will not realize that the members belong to the only group of Kindred that stands against the Phanariot.

## Meaning and Playing

It's not hard to see why the Phanariot legend persists. It neatly ties together three of the Kindred's greatest insecurities, and vampires are still human enough to believe something precisely because they fear it.

Kindred existence depends on secretly exploiting the kine. The grand deception of the kine works, too: the mortals don't suspect the Danse Macabre weaving around them. At some point, an intelligent vampire has to ask herself if anyone else is hiding behind his own Masquerade — and perhaps manipulating the Kindred the way they manipulate the kine. Goodness knows, the Kindred try to exploit and manipulate each other often enough. If someone else actually called the tune for the Danse Macabre, and all the horrors of Kindred existence were to serve someone else's plan . . . . It doesn't bear thinking about, so naturally some Kindred can't help thinking it.

Ghouls are slaves, and oppressors always fear the oppressed. What if the downtrodden aren't as weak and submissive as they seem? Throughout history, peasants have revolted, slaves have turned on their masters, workers have defied the bosses. And so, tyrants and masters have always terrorized subjects and servants, because the masters feared that their power was not secure. All the while, of course, they knew their crimes bred more hate, maybe enough to overcome the fear. Vampires are no different.

They wonder if their cringing ghoul Retainers are really kept loyal by the Vinculum and the fear of losing the Vitae that keep them immortal. Maybe their faithful ghouls aren't *really* so frightened, so eager to please. Maybe they are just waiting for the right moment for revenge . . . .

Kindred also don't like to think about how much power they give to their Retainers (ghoul or otherwise). A vampire trusts her Retainers to protect her during the day and manage whatever personal or business affairs that can't be handled at night. Vampires *hate* dependency: one of the bitter lessons learned after the Embrace is that no Kindred can fully trust anyone else. Even the most abused ghoul, however, receives a formidable degree of power over his master. He knows her activities, possibly her plans and very likely where she sleeps during the day. A treasonous ghoul could deliver his master to her enemies — or to destruction.

Ghouls may acquire more emotional power than they realize, too. A ghoul may serve her master for decades and become his most enduring and intimate associate. A vampire must hide his nature from mortals, and his thoughts and plans from other Kindred, but not from his ghoul. The Kindred tell each other to be harsh and callous, but a domitor can come to rely on his ghoul Retainer's presence more than her service — yes, even the ghoul he insults, beats and threatens. This emotional connection makes the thought of betrayal more terrible, while making other Kindred wonder if a ghoul is always the servant and the vampire is always the true master of his haven.

The particular forms of the Phanariot legend present different attempts to rationalize the fear of betrayal and servitude to a secret master. Some vampires believe that witches cause the evils that afflict them for the simple reason that many *mortals* believe this. In large parts of the world, most people still believe in witches who work malice against others using spells or the Evil Eye. Even in the developed world, more people believe in curses and ill-workers than care to admit it. Indeed, many of the mortal legends about vampires are actually about bloodsucking mortal witches. Just because the Kindred know *their* type of vampire exists, while not precisely following any of the legends, doesn't convince all of them to abandon the myths they believed in as mortals. Indeed, vampires *know* that black magic and curses are possible. If the Acolytes and Sanctified can work magic, why can't other people? Belief in Satan as a real, active power in the world is common, too. For some Kindred, therefore, it's not much of a stretch to blame their troubles on Satanic witches who try to steal vampire blood.

Evil spirits working vengeance for a long-dead Kindred master isn't too far beyond mortal beliefs and Kindred experience, either. Similar to witches, possession by evil spirits remains a common belief in many parts of the world, including some educated, "modern" people in the developed world. The Kindred also know



how old, powerful and cunning members of their race can secretly maneuver their pawns against their enemies, in plans that may last centuries. The Kindred can manipulate institutions and families to work the Kindred's will. Why not spirits, too? Can any Kindred say this *wouldn't* be possible for their mightiest sorcerers? (And if a Hierophant or Archbishop said his covenant's magic could not bind spirits to such vendettas, how many Kindred would trust his word?)

Spirits also represent a special fear for vampires, for in many ways a spirit is to the Kindred as the Kindred are to mortals. A spirit is immortal; it affects the world through secret, supernatural influences while remaining unseen. It seems beyond retribution, because who can even sense its presence?

### *The Truth, or Part of It*

A Storyteller could make any version of the Phanariot myth true and create a threat to the Kindred well able to justify their fears. This version, however, assumes that both of the main versions of the myth contain elements of the truth, but miss others and include a few outright falsehoods.

The Phanariots are indeed ghouls possessed by an evil spirit. They are also blood sorcerers of considerable power. They possessed no supernatural powers before becoming ghouls, however, and the possession does not happen at random.

More than 200 years ago in Eastern Europe, a member of the Ordo Dracul studied one of the Dragon's Nests that so fascinate that covenant. This vampire's experiments

opened a door that should have remained closed, called up what he could not put down — and he was possessed. The force that entered this world lodged in the vampire's blood. Through his blood, the force passed to his ghoul servants. Generously, the vampire gifted a few other Kindred with already-trained ghoul servants — and the plague began. Once the Kindred realized what was happening, the purge reached from Jassy to Belgrade. At least one ghoul escaped, though, to spread the infection anew.

The Phanariots serve something from Outside. Even they do not understand the force that shapes their thoughts. Phanariots retain all the knowledge and cleverness of their former existence (and then some) — but they are fanatically, unbreakably loyal to their unknowable master. They seek more Gates to Outside, so the Ones Beyond can enter this world, and claim it for their own.



### THE ONES BEYOND

Who or what are the Ones Beyond, and what do they want?

Obscure, forbidden lore suggests there are other realms besides this world or any Heaven, Hell, ghost-realm or god-realm where human souls may go. These utterly alien realms hold powerful entities of their own. Some loremasters believe these foul demon-gods once ruled this world in a grip of horror, and left relics of themselves when they left the Earth for unknown reasons. Other loremasters believe that unwary sorcerers of long ago opened portals to Outside, and were driven mad by the terrors they discovered.



The Ones Beyond defy physical description, and their abilities defy explanation or classification. The few savants who dare to learn the legends of these creatures say that if the Ones Beyond enter this world, they won't appear as giant, slimy, destructive monsters — nothing so comprehensible as that. They'll be a tune you can't get out of your head, until you can't think anything else. They'll be a symbol people cut into their flesh because a dream told them to. You'll hear the Man in the Moon's eternal scream, and know the reason why. And the Ones Beyond will make Earth a Hell so terrible that the living shall envy the dead — if there's anything left human enough to feel such emotions.

(The mortal mages from **Mage: The Awakening** might call the Ones Beyond creatures from the Abyss. **Vampire** Storytellers, however, are not obliged to pay the slightest attention to that game's definitions. The Ones Beyond are simply horrific, incalculable dangers that have to be prevented from entering this world. Their powers may be treated as pure plot devices to create secret terrors such as the Phanariot.)



### *Phanariot Contagion*

The Phanariot “infection” works in two phases. The curse of undeath is too strong for Kindred to remain infected and possessed for long; however, the Kindred transmit the infection from ghoul to ghoul. Kindred become infected when they feed on a Phanariot, and they in turn may infect new ghouls through their Vitae.

A Phanariot can spread the taint to any vampire who drinks the Phanariot's blood. This costs the Phanariot one *dot* of Willpower: turning a vampire into an unwitting vessel for the Ones Beyond is nearly as drastic a transformation as the Embrace itself. The infection remains dormant, however, until the next time the vampire uses her Vitae to create or sustain a ghoul (one who is not a Phanariot already). When that happens, the character expends a *dot* of Willpower instead of just a point, to pass the supernatural infection to another ghoul.

The Storyteller probably does not sense that something strange happened, though. The Storyteller makes a contested roll of the character's Humanity against her Resolve + Blood Potency. If the Humanity roll scores more successes, the character feels her Beast-tainted soul expel something into the ghoul, something beyond the power of the Blood to create or sustain a ghoul. If the Resolve + Blood Potency roll scores five or more successes, though, the Beast has expelled the infection completely and the character is no longer a carrier.

An infected vampire doesn't lose Willpower dots every time he feeds his Phanariot ghoul: only when he gets a chance to spread the contagion to an uninfected ghoul. If, however, the character's Willpower points drop below her Blood Potency, he must fight a powerful urge to

create a new ghoul. Resisting the urge requires accumulating five successes on Resolve + Composure rolls, just as resisting frenzy. What's more, the character must struggle against this urge once every night, until his Willpower points again equal or exceed his Blood Potency. The Beast instinctively senses the supernatural parasitism, and tries to get rid of it — but the infection uses this instinct to propagate itself.

### *During the Injection*

If a Kindred had any reason to suspect she carried a supernatural parasite in her Vitae, she could try to sense it using Meditation. (See the Meditation rules on p. 51 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.) The character must accumulate 10 successes to sense the alien Phanariot taint.

Getting rid of the infection is more difficult. Neither Theban Sorcery nor Crúac include exorcisms for anything so far outside the spiritual experience of the Kindred. (Or if they do, such rituals are extraordinarily obscure and hard to find.) A character who succeeded in sensing the infection through Meditation, however, instinctively knows the Beast resists this otherworldly taint. An expert in Crúac, Theban Sorcery or the Coils of the Dragon might guess this as well. A character can devise a possible treatment program with a dramatic success on an Intelligence + Occult roll, with the rating in those mystic Disciplines as bonus dice. (If players try to think of something themselves, of course, the Storyteller should encourage them not to leave the matter to dice rolls.)

Unfortunately, the Beast is too mindless to use its power effectively: the Man must also be involved, to guide its terrible fury. The cure for Phanariot infection, therefore, is to “ride the wave” in a deliberate frenzy, while concentrating on the taint in the Vitae. First, the character must meditate until she can sense the taint. Then the character tries to goad her Beast into frenzy, but must accumulate 10 successes on the successive Resolve + Composure rolls: frenzying and meditating at the same time is not an easy task. If the character can pull it off, though, she cleanses herself of the taint. She may even have a vision that hints at the true source of the Phanariot.

Ghouls cannot be cured. Denying them Vitae removes all their powers, and the mental hold of the Ones Beyond recedes to leave the mortal's personality ascendant once more. Or at least, the Ones Beyond let the character act as a free person for a while. Sooner or later, the mortal is compelled to seek out another vampire and try to become a ghoul again. Only death ends a Phanariot's danger to the Kindred, and the world.

### *Powers of the Phanariot*

Phanariot are immune to Vinculum. If a ghoul had a Vinculum before, it breaks once he becomes a Phanariot, and no vampire can bind him again.



When a ghoul becomes a Phanariot, his Wits, Resolve, Manipulation and Composure ratings all increase by one, as an alien will increase his cunning, determination and ability to deceive the Kindred. A Phanariot also has a dice pool of 10 to pit against magical or mundane attempt to wring the truth from him, such as Dominate, Auspex mind-reading or simple torture: the ghoul's persona is just a mask over an inhuman will that would rather sacrifice a pawn's life than reveal its presence.

A Phanariot has four dots in Dominate. However, the Phanariot can use The Forgetful Mind and Conditioning only on Kindred who have fed the ghoul, or are a carrier for the Phanariot contagion or fed on it within the last month, in any case.

All Phanariot also know a kind of sorcery that requires the power of Kindred Vitae for its rituals. Storytellers can treat this as four dots of a sorcerous Discipline, and give the Phanariot at least one ritual per dot. Choose whatever rituals from Crúac or Theban Sorcery that seem appropriate, or take powers from **World of Darkness: Second Sight**. Phanariot learn additional rituals at a cost of one experience point each (or when the Storyteller wants them to).

In addition, Phanariot know how to open portals to the Ones Beyond. Phanariot cannot *create* such portals, but they can unseal ones that already exist, letting further horrors into the world. The rituals to unseal a portal are lengthy and awful in the extreme, and require the sacrifice of mortals or Kindred.



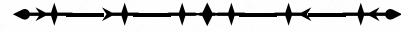
### ALTERNATE PHANARIOT

Storytellers may prefer that one of the legends be completely true. Here are some guidelines for these other versions of the Phanariot. Both versions retain the immunity to the Vinculum, a resistance to magical or mundane interrogation and bonus Attributes.

**Witches:** If the Phanariot are mortal Satanists, their Dominate and sorcerous Abilities stay largely the same. The Forgetful Mind and Conditioning, however, require some spellcasting huggemugger such as tying knots in cords, or catching the target's eye with some glittering trinket consecrated by soaking it in Vitae. Other spells might involve dribbling Vitae offerings into flames, prayers to Satan, "voodoo doll" images of a spell's target and similar black magic paraphernalia. Phanariot witches do not spread a contagion through the Blood, but they can recruit other ghouls or mortals to the Devil's service. They become Phanariot as well once they sign their pact with Satan.

**Spirits:** If the Phanariot are spirits that possess ghouls, they have four dots of Dominate with no restriction on its use, but no sorcery. Exorcism becomes theoretically possible — but first someone needs to figure out what sort of spirits the Phanariot are. The exorcist rite is at least a level five ritual for either Crúac or Theban Sorcery,

depending on how the Storyteller defines the Phanariot. Theban Sorcery most plausibly expels angels or devils; pagan spirits or elementals created by blood magic are countered using other blood magic. Either form of sorcery might affect spirits of the dead. (And perhaps such spirits are released into the world by torpid vampires; see "The Second Death," on p. 86.)



## Frenzy Plague

*The following was recovered from the hard drive of a laptop found in the wreckage of a burnt car near Salt Lake City:*

"In the Sevier Desert, near Sugarland, Utah, an unceasing wind keens through a stand of abandoned buildings the locals call the old Collins property. In 1974, these derelict structures housed a grand experiment in undead existence. They housed the largest cohesive vampire community in the state. Nearly 100 Kindred lived with their willing herd. Food and prey coexisted happily in a communal, self-sustaining settlement. Its founder, the visionary social theorist Harriet Guidry, proclaimed it as the basis for a new relationship between the Damned and the breathing. In her manifesto, *The Sevier Project*, she described the commune as the basis of a global movement that could end the Masquerade, allowing our kind to exist openly alongside mortals. Hopeful Kindred found in the manifesto's mimeographed pages a tantalizing portrait of hearth, home and harmony.

"By the summer of 1975, every Kindred resident of the Sevier Project had suffered Final Death, fallen into a strange, irretrievable torpor or had succumbed to permanent psychosis. All of their human cohabitants were slain.

"From diaries and journals retrieved from the site, including a detailed diary kept by Guidry herself, we now possess as complete an account as we are likely to get of the little-understood phenomenon known as the frenzy plague. The following is a précis of my complete monograph, *Frenzy Plague: A Constellation of Inner Catastrophes*, published by RedEye Press.

## The Complex

"Frenzy, a condition of sudden, virulent and temporary madness triggered by fear, fury or the threat of starvation, is too well known to all of us. According to the Hector Study<sup>1</sup>, 95.7% of all respondents had undergone at least one frenzy since their Embrace. Yet the base phenomenon itself is nearly impossible to study under laboratory conditions. Although it is a simple matter to provoke frenzy in the lab, to safely monitor the vital signs of a subject homicidally determined to escape all confines has proven prohibitively challenging. To study an extremely rare set of symptoms arising from frenzy, whose causation remains unclear, is to enter an area of anecdotal data where hard science fears to tread.



“Frenzy plague, or Guidry syndrome (GS), is a condition of long-term or even irreversible madness in which an empowered Beast takes control of the subject’s body, and its higher cognitive functions are either obliterated entirely, or are temporarily overwritten. The condition is in certain instances contagious: one subject suffering from frenzy triggers another, who in turn is permanently infected by madness, and may then go about passing the disorder along to others.

“In addition to a loss of memory, cognition, identity cohesion and other higher brain functions, victims of GS appear to suffer physical deterioration as their frenzied condition persists. A permanently speeded-up vampiric metabolism increases the speed at which Vitae is consumed during normal bodily functions. Damage to the brain and other organs may persist after a GS episode. However, the greatest risk is secondary in nature. In a classical fear or hunger frenzy, the subject’s behavior is directed by the Beast’s primal instincts for survival. In a GS sufferer, the Beast itself goes haywire. An analogy used by Harriet Guidry is that of the rabid animal. The Beast, wounded and mad, takes out its fury on the nearest moving object in the Beast’s environment. The Beast attacks clearly dominant opponents, runs toward fire or becomes otherwise heedless of its safety. GS victims have been observed running headlong into traffic and leaping from great heights. In their madness, the strictures of the Masquerade mean nothing to them. They may dive into a heavily-policed crowd of mortals, setting upon them with gore-flecked claws. Most fatally of all, the GS sufferer may in extreme cases disregard his instinctual drive to seek shelter from the rising sun.

“Of the Kindred fatalities recorded in Harriet Guidry’s diaries of the Sevier Event, 41% occurred when victims failed to return to their havens at dayfall. Thirty-four percent were as a result of fights between GS victims. Twelve percent were also as a result of Kindred-on-Kindred violence, but

were cases in which an uninfected individual successfully ward off an attack by a sufferer. In 5% of cases, mortal defenders successfully defended themselves against GS-crazed attackers, with lethal results. The remaining 8% of mortalities can be attributed to systemic shock brought about by metabolic overload.

## Causation

“Several conditions appear to provoke episodes of GS.

“A morally negative transformative event (MNTE) may unleash the inner Beast — or, depending on how one wants to view the event, may disempower the rational mind. Such an event occurs when the subject commits an act that he would previously categorized as evil, immoral or in some significant way contrary to his code of acceptable behavior. Normally, an individual feels a sense of guilt or remorse in the wake of such an act. In an MNTE, the subject now retroactively alters his worldview to accommodate the act. What was once forbidden is now acceptable. This identity shift creates a fissure in the psyche, which the Beast can exploit in an attempt to manifest itself permanently. However, as persuasively argued by al-Hariri<sup>2</sup>, the Beast does not exist

separately from the vampiric psyche but is an archetype integral to its very structure. The psychic fissure damages the psyche, as well, converting it from a dangerous but predictable creature to a rabid, frothing well of unquenchable violence, anger and despair.

“Reconfiguration of identity in the wake of an MNTE is not the only psychic disjunction a Kindred might suffer. To be a vampire is to exist in a constant state of alienation from one’s original identity formation. I propose the existence of a less influential but still important element of the Kindred psyche, the Inner Mortal. The Inner Mortal is a psychic revenant of one’s previous self, before the Embrace. In order to function as a member of undead society, one must repress certain emotional





impulses. As any Freudian will tell you, to repress a thing is to push it away from the surface of our thoughts, but also to make it stronger. The Inner Mortal lurks deep in our unconscious minds, bitter and seething, knowing that it can never fully reassert itself, but anxious to do so nonetheless. It waits for the opportunity to strike, to destroy the new vampiric self that has negated its development and exiled it to the sub-basement of consciousness. The Inner Mortal represents everything that is powerless about our old selves, so it lacks the wherewithal to induce harmful behaviors in and of itself. What it can do is unleash the Beast, an archetype with which it cohabits. The Beast, too, exists in the dark reaches of our subconscious minds, coming out only when our conscious will fails us. The Inner Mortal, as rational and calculating as the Beast is feral and primal, is always ready with his hands on the cage door. He whispers into the Beast's ear. Befriending it. Warping it. For what the Inner Mortal seeks is our — and his — destruction. He represents the thwarted life impulse, hating how we hover on the border between life and death. He wishes us to be exposed to the immolating sunlight. To be turned to ash.

"Thus when he witnesses another individual in the grip of GS, he takes inspiration, unleashes a corrupt, self-destructive Beast and causes the new subject to undergo a GS convulsion. In this manner, a purely psychological syndrome appears to become contagious, just as if it were communicable via an airborne virus or bacteria.

"It is well established that the Beast is unleashed by hunger. Under certain conditions, the Inner Mortal can employ its advanced cognitive awareness to convince the Beast that starvation is imminent, *even when the Beast is not yet hungry*. If a subject's conscious mind becomes preoccupied with worries regarding the integrity of his blood supply, the Inner Mortal's ability to open the Beast's cage increases.

"The Sevier Event is a prime example of this. It was sparked by an increasing discontent expressed by a new arrival among the commune's mortal herd. This individual, Steven Notis, was recruited by an ex-girlfriend, who was by then besotted with a Kindred community leader. An articulate rabble-rouser with a long activist resume and previous experience in the communal living movement, Notis fomented considerable discontent within the human herd in the months leading up to the Sevier Event. Notis' would-be revolt failed; he left the community voluntarily, after becoming ghoul to a departing member. Even so, the simmering resentments he'd stirred remained in force after his exit. An anxious Kindred-only meeting was called, to express worries about the continued viability of the commune. In other words, the food supply *appeared* to be threatened — and, even then, only in the long term. It is my contention that certain of the Kindred residents had so thoroughly acclimated themselves to existence at Sevier that they subconsciously conflated it with the entire world. No more blood at Sevier

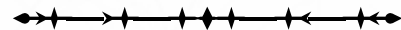
meant no more blood anywhere. The first incident of GS erupted the evening after that tense meeting. Within days, GS spread, and, in a wave of violent hysteria, the community was destroyed. The Inner Mortals of the Sevier residents smelled weakness, opened the cages of the Beast and were granted their most fervent wish.



### WHAT ABOUT MAGIC?!

*What contortions this guy goes through to create a scientific pseudo-babble bubble around this issue! It's magic, you jackass! Being a vampire is magical. You don't need to invoke your own personal, made-up Jungian archetype to explain the contagion. The Beast is a collective entity. It's one sharp-toothed consciousness, with a little bit of him in all of us. When he takes over Joe over there, he's emboldened, and he looks over at me, and boom, now my Beast is in full-blown freak-out mode, too.*

*And all of these clinical ideas for curing it, also unbelievable crap! If one of your friends gets himself perma-Beasted, drag his ass tout-suite to a Cruac or Theban spellchucker! Otherwise you're royally screwed. And cover yourself in amulets and warpaint so his Beast doesn't activate yours. It's the only way!!*



## The Doomsday Scenario

"It is of utmost importance that we all recognize and understand the Inner Mortal just as we do the Beast. If we do not, we risk a possible apocalyptic scenario, brought about with the connivance of this thought-construct quailing.

"In his book *Collapse: How Societies Fail Or Succeed*, evolutionary biologist Jared Diamond<sup>3</sup> proposes a chilling shortlist of factors that bring civilizations to a sudden, catastrophic end. Foremost among them is environmental pressure, which reduces the supply of available resources. These in turn create an uncontrollable social anxiety, which provokes frenzied responses, including genocide. Diamond uses the Rwandan genocide as a case study for this theory.

"If reasoned anxiety over decreasing resources can destroy a mortal society, even an unfounded but sufficiently widespread fear, could, with the collusion of our Inner Mortals, precipitate a worldwide meltdown of the Kindred population.

"GS incidents increased by 20% during the early years of the AIDS crisis, when many Kindred feared our food

supply would be irretrievably tainted. During the winter of 1997, when a persistently troublesome hunter team made many Parisian Racks and feeding grounds temporarily untenable, GS incidents in that city leapt by 23%.

“Sevier was a microcosm, a thankfully isolated fishbowl that provides a model for how the event might play out globally. Modern communications allow for the transmission of information that provokes resource-anxiety without regard to geographical boundaries. Imagine if Sevier happened today. An outbreak of GS contagion in a commune replete with blogs and a webcam could spread like a brushfire to major cities. From there, the contagion would spiral out of control swiftly.

“A GS outbreak requires the flashpoint of hunger anxiety or an MNTE to get started, but once the fatal contagion begins to spread, the phenomenon feeds itself circularly. Fear of death by frenzy causes death by frenzy.

## Treatment

“According to the Sevier document, several victims of GS had their conditions arrested or even reversed through a process Guidry refers to as ‘downing.’ This seems to be some sort of method for slowing or stopping the victim’s brain functions, perhaps as simple as induced unconsciousness through blunt force trauma. The lack of a precise description of ‘downing’ stands as one of the document’s most tantalizing elisions.

“It is my belief that prolonged talk therapy, especially one based on the Jungian model, could prevent the onset of GS symptoms in the especially vulnerable — that is, those in whom the Inner Mortal is a numinous suppressed archetype. The objective of this therapy would be to integrate the Inner Mortal into the subject’s conscious understanding, thus eradicating the Inner Mortal’s presence from the subconscious and removing access to the Beast.

“Certain meditative or spiritual techniques, perhaps conducted by a shamanic guide, might allow direct interaction with the Inner Mortal, to bring about its destruction or imprisonment.

“Psychotherapy has fallen into disrepute of late, in favor of a pharmaceutical approach. Others might argue that a chemical vanguard against GS, such as a vaccine, would be more reliably efficacious, not to mention more time-efficient. To this, I would point to the known logistical challenges of introducing drugs into the vampiric physiology.

## Questions For Further Study

“Some, most notably the Iberian scholar Matias Contafio, contend that the Sevier incident is a whole-cloth hoax<sup>4</sup>. He extends his baseless calumny by accusing this author of spreading and inculcating frenzy plague in a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy of hysteria. I look forward to offering concrete proof of the underlying document’s authenticity, at which point one might

begin to wonder what Contafio has to gain by confusing the issues around this very real and potentially devastating health threat.

“Contafio hints that I am a dupe of some enemy force seeking to reduce the Kindred population. Just as a stopped clock is right twice a day, he may in fact be blindly groping toward a sort of truth. The Sevier incident was real, but was it deliberately induced by an outside force?

“Joanna Kynard of the Lancea Sanctum Library in Rome suggests that the plague is in fact a mechanism of vampire survival. According to an as-yet-unpublished paper, the plague allows for a rapid decrease of Kindred populations facing Malthusian pressures on their food supplies in proportion to their overall numbers. She argues that GS outbreaks were originally a way of eradicating local populations in danger of exposing themselves to living eyes, thus averting a worldwide pogrom. If true, this theory raises additional questions. Who installed this fail-safe mechanism in our undead psychologies? Now that the mass media era has rendered it a greater threat than the issue it was meant to address, how do we remove it?

## Storytelling

The most obvious frenzy plague storyline is one in which the coterie investigates the remains of a Sevier-type vampire community destroyed by a GS outbreak. As the characters search for its cause (or some other fact or MacGuffin located in the complex), they grow increasingly worried by the prospect of a sympathetic outbreak.

A GS plague can serve as the complicating twist in an otherwise straightforward story. The characters must rescue a kidnap victim, destroy the lair of an antagonist cadre or recover a lost artifact — as a frenzy plague threatens to claim both them and their enemies.

Clever but ruthless hunters might attempt to destroy their quarry at a remove, by loosing a sufferer into a tightly-knit Kindred community. The characters might lay the groundwork by first heightening awareness of GS, spreading rumors and raising the hysteria level to a fever pitch.

For one-off and chronicle-ending storylines, an all-out frenzy plague might prove an appropriately creepy and specifically vampire-themed apocalypse.

A worldwide GS plague could provide a segue into an unconventional post-apocalyptic chronicle, in which the player characters are among the last few sane vampires, having proven themselves immune to the disorder. They ride through a devastated landscape in which the entire Kindred population ran amuck, Embracing with abandon, until nearly everyone on earth was felled by the self-destructive symptoms of frenzy plague.

“WAY I HEARD IT, NEW BREMEN’S WHOLE COURT IS GONE. WIPED OUT. THE PLAGUE.”



## Game Mechanics

Do not require your players to check for Guidry syndrome on a regular basis. It's too harsh to join the usual litany of risks vampires confront. Instead, use it only as a central component of a story of apocalypse or disaster.

Characters must be aware of GS to be at risk for it. When they first hear of an outbreak, they must make reflexive Resolve + Composure rolls.

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The character immediately suffers a GS episode; see below.

**Failure:** The character is at greater risk if later exposed to GS. All subsequent rolls to avoid a GS episode suffer a two-die penalty.

**Success:** The character is at lesser risk if later exposed to GS. All subsequent rolls to avoid a GS episode gain a two-die bonus.

**Exceptional Success:** The character is never at risk for GS, and need not roll to avoid it, even when exposed to a GS sufferer or suffering a drop in his Humanity score.

A character is considered to be exposed to GS when he sees another GS sufferer undergoing a frenzy. Rolls are also required when a character suffers degeneration or fails a standard frenzy roll while believing that a contagious GS epidemic may be in progress. The Storyteller determines when this condition comes into play; this condition definitely applies if the character's player has expressed a fear of GS during the current chapter. The fear need not be well-founded to be deadly.

Roll Composure + Stamina to avoid a GS episode.

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** Character suffers a Stage 2 GS episode; see below for effects.

**Failure:** Character suffers a Stage 1 GS episode; see below for effects.

**Success:** Character does not suffer a GS episode.

**Exceptional Success:** Character does not suffer a GS episode. Any further rolls to resist GS this chapter gain a two-die bonus. This is cumulative with the benefits of any other exceptional successes this chapter.

GS episodes come in two degrees of virulence.

In a Stage 1 episode, the victim suffers the usual effects of a hunger or anger frenzy. The Storyteller decides which of these to apply, based on the circumstances. Unlike a standard frenzy, the effects do not stop of their own accord at the scene's end. Sufferers do not seek out dangers but act as if heedless of them. Sufferers will not, for example, seek shelter as predawn approaches.

In a Stage 2 episode, all of the above apply, except that the Beast behaves rabidly, as if attempting to bring about its own destruction. The sufferer attacks the most dangerous nearby opponent (including objects, such as oncoming



trucks) or engages in self-harming or suicidal acts. A victim may leap from an overpass or run into a burning building. After surviving one dangerous event, the sufferer then seeks out another, hissing and gibbering all the way.

To remain in frenzy for extended periods causes permanent damage through metabolic breakdown. Physically fit individuals outlast sedentary types. For each scene of frenzy after the first, the sufferer rolls Stamina + Athletics.

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** Subject permanently loses one dot of Health, one dot of Stamina and one dot of any of the following (the Storyteller's discretion, based on circumstances): Intelligence, Wits, Resolve, Strength, Dexterity or Composure.

**Failure:** Subject permanently loses one dot of Health and one dot of any of the following (the Storyteller's discretion, based on circumstances): Intelligence, Wits, Resolve, Strength, Dexterity, Stamina or Composure.

**Success:** Subject suffers no ill effects.

**Exceptional Success:** Subject suffers no ill effects, and gains a two-dice bonus if called upon to roll again at the end of the subsequent scene.

Each scene of frenzy after the first also burns one point of Vitae, regardless of the roll results.

A GS episode will not end by itself but can be interrupted. First, the victim must be rendered immobile or unconscious, which, depending on the sufferer, can be extremely dangerous for his interveners. Then he must be forcibly calmed in some way. He might be ordered to "Relax!" with the Dominate power Command, injected with sedative-laced blood, or placed under hypnosis. The last two options require an Intelligence + Medicine roll. The subject is then allowed a roll to recover from the frenzy.

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The victim not only remains in a permanent state of frenzy, but, granted hideous strength by his mounting fury, breaks free of whatever bonds restrain him, and attacks the nearest of the apparent tormentors who immobilized him. All attacks he makes in the ensuing combat are at a two-dice bonus.

**Failure:** The victim becomes agitated again. Those trying to treat him must find a new method to calm him, or he remains in permanent frenzy.

**Success:** The victim snaps out of it.

**Exceptional Success:** The victim recovers, and is immune to further GS episodes for the rest of the chapter.

## *The Black Hounds*

Vampires are accustomed to being casual hunters, luring their victims with seductive words or gestures or plucking them from the streets as a hawk might snatch a rabbit. A more active, primal hunt, chasing down their prey and rending its flesh, isn't usually of interest to the

undead. This kind of behavior endangers the Masquerade, and, to many Kindred trying to hold on to their elusive Humanity, such primal hunting is a gross abandonment of everything they once were.

When the Black Hounds come for the Kindred, though, they finally experience the panicked chase and the bloody hunt, but not from the hunter's perspective. The Black Hounds prey upon the Kindred, baying and snarling until the Hounds' quarry is brought to heel, and then tearing the vampire apart and leaving nothing but ash and perhaps some fragments of clothing.

## *The Hunt*

Kindred legend states that the hunt begins when the Black Hounds take notice of their quarry. The exact criteria that these beasts use to find their prey is unknown, although of course some theories exist. Some say that the Hounds act under direction (see "The Hounds' Master," p. XX), but most assert that the Black Hounds attack Kindred who have abandoned Humanity in some sudden and overt fashion. That is, a vampire who has kept her soul intact for a respectable amount of time but takes sudden leave of her senses, committing brutal murder or betraying those who trusted her, might become fodder for the Hounds' hunt. Degeneration over a long period of time, it is said, does not call to the Black Hounds — but at the end of the slippery slope of murder and depravity, a vampire might find the pack waiting.

Once the Hounds have chosen their target, they set to work tracking the unfortunate vampire. The Kindred might notice the Hounds lurking outside her haven or following her on hunts, but the beasts are careful to avoid being directly spotted or captured. They can apparently come and go as they please, only leaving tracks or other spoor when doing so suits them. A vampire dwelling in a city might simply believe that a pack of stray dogs is roaming the area, while more paranoid Kindred might call to mind stories of werewolves. In any case, use of the Animalism power Call of the Wild does not summon these dogs, and no creatures with which the vampire converses using the Discipline report ever seeing the Hounds. Indeed, even human beings near the marked vampire don't seem able to see the Hounds. They are apparently only visible to their quarry.

The hunt can go on for a single night or the Hounds might drag it out for a month. During this time, the Hounds follow the vampire to her haven (even if she doesn't maintain a single resting place), but they never trouble her while she is with other Kindred. A vampire who stays with a coterie, therefore, is safe, or so the story goes. Sooner or later, however, all Kindred are alone, and the Black Hounds seem content to wait for their quarry to step out of sight of other Kindred. Again, the Hounds ignore human beings completely — a vampire might be in the middle of a crowded street, but as long as no other Kindred are present, the dogs still attack.



When the attack finally comes, the Black Hounds surround their prey and chase her to a somewhat secluded location. The location doesn't need to be isolated, or need to remain unnoticed for more than a few moments. A blind alley in the middle of the city, a clearing in a forest or even the parking lot of a large retail store is acceptable. There, they attack the vampire, tearing at her unliving flesh until they have rent her completely asunder. The Kindred can fight back, of course, but by the time the attack finally comes, the Hounds have usually pushed the vampire into Röttschreck, impairing her ability to fight or flee effectively. Supposedly, no Kindred survives once marked by the Black Hounds.

The Hounds leave behind nothing of their victims but fragments of clothing and a few smears of bloody ash. Their soot-black hair and paw prints are clearly visible at the scene of the slaughter, should the victim's compatriots (or anyone else) come looking for her.

**"THE BLACK HOUNDS ARE OUT! THEY'RE HERE! GO! GO!"**

### *Accounts*

If the Hounds never leave survivors, and are invisible to non-Kindred, then how do the stories spread? As it happens, neither of those two statements is universally true. Accounts from Kindred who claim to have survived the Black Hounds' hunt do exist, and beings other than Kindred (though never normal mortals) have witnessed the final moments of a hunt. Presented here are four different accounts of the Black Hounds' hunt.

### *Kindred Witness*

**The Victim:** Ken Del Mare, Daeva. Ken is believed to have been unaligned, and rumors point to him indulging in diablerie at least once. His mannerisms, haircut and patterns of speech point to a relatively recent Embrace.

**The Witness:** "Hex," Mekhet. Hex is a computer expert and rarely leaves his apartment. He emailed this account to an acquaintance in another city, and the story quickly began making the rounds through the Kindred rumor network. He claims to have never met the victim.

**Witness' Account:** "I was in my apartment, sitting at my table with my computer. Looking out the window, I had a good view of the alley across the street. I mean, I had a good view because I can see well; a breather probably wouldn't have seen anything at all. Anyway, I heard someone yelling. He was pretty much incoherent. I looked out the window and saw this guy — strawberry blond hair, light skin, well-built — run into the alley. Right away I knew he was Kindred, because he was moving too fast to be alive. I didn't recognize him, so I opened the window and stared.

Now, that's a blind alley. There's no way out except the way he went in. I didn't see the dogs run in after him, but there they were. The alley was dark, and I had to squint so hard my eyes almost bled, but I saw those

things. There must have been five or six of them, and they just tore the shit out of this guy. He went down fighting, that's for sure — I heard a gunshot and saw the muzzle flash, and it blinded me for a second. When my vision cleared, there was nothing. He was gone, the dogs were gone. I could smell the cordite from across the street, but I didn't smell dog, which I thought was weird."

### *Auspex Witness*

**The Victim:** Unknown female Kindred. No information on her covenant, clan, age or identity has been discovered.

**The Witness:** Hector Margoyles, Mekhet. Hector is an assistant to the city's Sheriff and skilled in Auspex. He happened across the scene of the attack (a parking garage) and used The Spirit's Touch to read the events that occurred there. Hector reminded his superior that information gained through this ability is often symbolic, although, in this case, the events of the vision seemed to match the physical evidence on most points.

**Witness' Account:** "When I arrived, all I found was scattered ashes, a few streaks of blood and a lot of paw prints. I tasted the blood and realized it was Kindred, so I touched the area with the biggest concentration of paw prints and ash and tried to figure out what happened.

I saw a woman run into the area from the street level of the parking garage. She was obviously Kindred — I could see her fangs and she had blood on her lips. She looked like she was in Röttschreck, but I couldn't see what was chasing her. Then I saw the shadows of the cars rise up and become huge black dogs. They circled her, sniffing, and then they all lunged at once, as though they were waiting for a cue. They bit into her hands and feet, and I saw one chewing on her right wrist. She punched at one of them, but her fist just sank into its flesh, like she was punching smoke. They held her down and chewed her hands off, and then dragged her off, deeper into the lot, where I couldn't see. I still heard her screaming even after I left the garage, though."

### *Ghoul Witness*

**The Victim:** "Steven" (true name unknown), Daeva. Steven was a neonate, given to binding young women with the Vinculum and turning them into ghouls for a few months, and then either killing or abandoning them. He nominally belonged to the Carthian Movement, but wasn't active within the covenant.

**The Witness:** Dawn Bernath, Steven's most recent ghoul. She was not aware of his (or her own) true nature and, at the time of the attack, had only been a ghoul for about eight weeks. Her account is significant, however, insofar as she witnessed the hunt from start to finish.

**Witness's Account:** "Steve had been acting weird all week. He muttered something about some girl named Nadine once, but he never said who she was. I figured she was an ex. Anyway, I picked him up that night and when



he got into the car, he said he saw dog hair on the seat. I don't have a dog, but sure enough there was black hair there. We didn't think anything about it until we got down to the pier. There's always stray dogs down there, but this time it seemed like every one we saw was huge, pitch black and staring right at Steve. We were only down there for about an hour, you know, making out in corners, and I started to get tired again — that seems to happen when I'm with him. So we went back toward the car, but as we walked up, three of those dogs came from behind the car and started snarling at us. Steve stepped forward trying to scare them off, and they ran off.

The next night, I went over to his place, and when I let myself in he was huddled behind his couch staring at his hand. He said he'd gone outside and one of those dogs had jumped up and bit him, but I didn't see a bite on his hand. I told him there was no bite, and he just went crazy, yelling that I didn't get it, that they were after him, and then he punched me in the mouth and grabbed my car keys. He ran out the door and tried to get to my car, but

the dogs were already there. Last I saw Steve, he was running toward the park, three of those dogs on his heels."

### *Survivor Story*

**The Victim:** Saul, Gangrel of the Lancea Sanctum. Saul was Embraced roughly 50 years ago, and joined his covenant almost immediately upon entering the Requiem. He is a highly devout Catholic and steadfast in his refusal to kill, but by his own admission flew into a frenzy and slew four mortals shortly before this took place.

**Victim's Account:** "This was God's warning to me. I had attempted to do penance for what I did to those unfortunate people, but nothing seemed like the right gesture. I know now that my inaction was the whistle that summoned up those demons.

I left my haven six nights after the murders. I had slept uneasily that day, and I remember nightmares of baying hounds. In my arrogance, I thought nothing of them, and I walked down the street to the church where my brother was holding a mass for us Sanctified. I only



reached the sidewalk in front of the church, though, when I saw the paw prints. The grass was wet from a recent rain, and on the pavement were the prints of several large animals. I took a step forward, despite a growing fear in my heart, and then I hear the growls.

I should have run forward into the church, but I ran from God in blind fear. The dogs gave chase, and I looked back but couldn't see them. I heard them, though, the scraping of their nails on the pavement and their bay-ing, just as in my dream. I turned toward my home, but as I approached my front door one of the dogs cut me off. I saw it clearly, a huge, night-black thing with deep red eyes. As it growled and advanced, I heard the rest of the pack catching up. I willed my claws to appear, reasoning that if these demons had come for me they would not take me without a fight, but as they leapt at me and tore my flesh, I found I could not land a blow.

They tore my clothing and my skin, but I felt little pain. Their fangs were icy and sharp, more like razors than teeth. Finally, I gave up and readied myself for Hell. I dropped to my knees and bent my head, surrendering to God's will. But the attack ceased, and I heard someone step in front of me. By the sound of the footstep, I knew it to be human — or at least humanoid. I desperately wanted to raise my head and look at the dogs' master, but I knew that if I looked into his face, I would never see another night. A long moment passed, and the figure placed a finger upon my forehead. I felt a horrible, burning pain, and then the stranger was gone, his dogs with him.

The wounds from the dogs' fangs healed easily enough, but the mark from the Devil's finger (for who else would command this pack?) still mars my skin. I keep it covered, for it is unsightly, yet I am glad it is there. It reminds me that Hell is never far away."

### *Theories*

What are the Black Hounds? Why do they prey upon vampires, and how do they avoid detection? The Kindred of the world have come up with a variety of hypotheses on the subject, but the Hounds' mercurial nature and deadly efficiency makes testing any such hypothesis difficult. Still, where analysis fails, mythology inevitably takes up the slack, and vampires of all covenants have their own stories concerning the Hounds' origins and purpose. A few of the most obvious and prevalent are discussed here.

### *The Hounds Are Werewolves*

The Kindred, in general, know very little about werewolves. Most Kindred don't even know for a fact that werewolves exist, though many vampires have heard rumors and stories. Canine nightmares hunting down and devouring their prey does seem reminiscent of lycanthropes, and yet this is probably the least common theory attached to the Black Hounds. This is because the

Hounds don't act much like the werewolves of legend. The Hounds target vampires exclusively, never feasting on human flesh. There are no reports of these creatures ever assuming human form, which is the defining trait of a werewolf. Some stories about the Black Hounds do mention the moon as a feature (that is, a hunt might last "until the new moon,") but the *full* moon doesn't figure into these stories any more often than any other phase.

Finally, a dog, even a monstrous black one, is not a wolf. When Kindred frantically report seeing the Black Hounds, the Kindred never describe the creatures as wolves. They are "huge black dogs." The distinction is important, both because of the question of werewolf involvement and because a pack of hounds implies someone is controlling them.

### *The Hounds Are the Beast Incarnate*

Every vampire has a monster inside her. That creature is unreasoning hunger, unrelenting anger and inconsolable fear. Kindred call the monster "the Beast," and some assert that the Black Hounds are its literal personifications. How a vampire's Beast comes to prowl the night on four feet and hunt vampires is a matter of debate. Some Kindred feel that when a vampire meets Final Death, there is a slim chance that the Beast can escape that fate and take the form of a Hound. Others assert that when vampires slip into torpor, their Beasts become the Black Hounds (thus, if it were possible to capture a Black Hound, one could theoretically rid a vampire of her Beast — or find and destroy her torpid form).

The careful planning and patience that the Hounds exhibit, however, contrasts sharply with the uncontrolled fury that the Beast displays in Wassail. A similar theory, then, is that the Hounds spring from torpid or destroyed Kindred, but represent the *Man*, not the Beast.

### *The Hounds Are Demons*

The Black Hounds might be creatures from Hell or from some other unknown or unknowable realm, called into our world by design or by accident. A foolish or power-mad mage might have been responsible originally, or perhaps vampire occultists of the Lancea Sanctum, the Circle of the Crone or the Ordo Dracul are to blame. Whatever the original motive, the Black Hounds could be infernal beasts, existing only to spread fear and pain.

A few questions present themselves, however. Why, if these creatures are demons, do they take the forms of dogs? Other legends speak of hellhounds, of course, but cats are also identified as evil creatures in some mythology. Further, if the creatures are born of Hell, why do they hunt only vampires? If their task is to spread pain and fear, why not hunt down humanity? Kindred advancing this theory have answers to this question, though. Some Kindred assert

that the dogs *do* hunt mortals, but just as mortals don't know when the Hounds chase vampires, the Kindred don't see their hunts on mortals (and perhaps they take place during the day). Some Sanctified Kindred believe that vampires have a Divinely ordained purpose, and the Black Hounds are Lucifer's weapon against them. By hunting and killing vampires, the Black Hounds prevent the Kindred from fulfilling their God-given tasks on Earth.

### *The Hounds Are Spirits of the Dead*

The dead don't rest easy, and most vampires with a few decades of life under their belts have seen at least one ghost. The Kindred create a good number of ghosts, both through nightly predation and through the violent movements of the Danse Macabre. As such, legends about the souls of their victims are fairly common, and the Black Hounds are often referred to as "Ghost Hounds." The Hounds, these Kindred say, are the spirits of those people killed by vampiric machinations. Unlike most ghosts, which remain on Earth as ephemeral reflections of their former selves, these spirits chose to take physical form, but in the body of a lesser beast. Just as mortals ignore them, they can't sense mortals, only Kindred (which is what makes the Hounds such superlative trackers of vampires). The Hounds can't tell one vampire from another, but they can tell when a Kindred has murdered someone recently. This is why Kindred who indulge in brutality become the Hounds' prey.

A further refinement of this theory paints the Hounds as the remnants of Kindred destroyed by diablerie, combining the notion of the Hounds as the Beast incarnate with that of the Hounds as departed spirits. This makes a certain degree of sense, given that the Hounds prey on Kindred exclusively. Some vampires narrow the field even further by saying that only Gangrel can become Black Hounds after Final Death.

### *The Hounds Are Hell's Retrievers*

One of the most terrifying stories about the Black Hounds, one that most Kindred don't even feel comfortable repeating, is that the Hounds don't kill their quarry. They retrieve it, dragging the unfortunate vampire into the shadows where a fate worse than Final Death awaits. They tear the vampire's flesh, true, rending her clothes from her frame and chewing off parts of her skin (which accounts for the blood and ash found at the battle site), but the Kindred is still undead and horribly aware of her fate.

Of course, if the Hounds are retrieving still-extant Kindred, the question of who commands them and that controller's goal arises. The notion of the Hounds as the trained beasts of a more-powerful being is discussed anon.

**"THEY'RE THE DRAGONS' DOGS. BEASTS LET SLIP SO THE MAN CAN DO HIS WORK."**

## *The Hounds' Master*

Mortal legend speaks of the Wild Hunt, and of course a witch or wizard might have a great black dog as a familiar or guardian. Hellhounds serve greater demons, and gateways to other realms are often depicted in mythology as having canine protectors (Cerberus, Garm and so on). Therefore, the Black Hounds might act at the behest of a more powerful being. Below are three suggestions for who this master might be:

### *The Devil*

Easily the most grandiose choice of master for the Hounds is Satan himself. This option makes the beasts hellhounds, serving the agenda of the Adversary. The obvious question, then, is *why* Satan is ordering his minions to hunt down and kill Kindred, especially Kindred who are falling from their Humanity. One possible answer is that the Lancea Sanctum is correct — vampires are placed on Earth by God to do a specific task, but that task doesn't involve being completely monstrous. Another possibility is that Satan arrives to collect the souls of the Kindred when they have reached a certain level of sin. If the Black Hounds are personifications of the vampiric Beast, this latter option takes on a chilling cast, as the Kindred can expect to join the pack once the dogs have rent his body asunder.

### *The Dark Sorcerer*

Some being with a measure of magical prowess, either an actual mage or a vampire using Theban Sorcery or Crúac, called the Black Hounds up. Maybe the ritual to call up the Black Hounds is one that can only be invoked in certain situations, or maybe the local Lancea Sanctum or Circle of the Crone calls up the pack whenever the covenant feels a particular vampire needs to be put down. Maybe the ritual magic needed to call these creatures isn't the province of either of those covenants — the Invictus is ostensibly a secular and non-magical sect, but suppose that the Black Hounds are a secret that dates back to the covenant's founding?

If the Hounds' master is a mage, why is she sending her beasts after vampires? Is she interested in revenge for some past slight, or did she simply conjure the beasts and release them to do as they will? Can she actually control the Black Hounds, and to what degree? Do the Hounds kill their quarry or drag the unfortunate vampire back to the mage for dissection and experimentation?

The old adage about summoning magic — "don't call up what you can't put down" — is extremely applicable here. Maybe a coterie could find a way to turn the Hounds against their master, especially if that master is also a vampire. Or, perhaps the coterie could take control of the pack and use it on the characters' enemies



(which, of course, requires that the characters take care to avoid the summoner's fate).

### *The Mysterious Figure*

The master might not be the actual Devil, but he might not be recognizable as a vampire or mage, either. Perhaps the master is a ghost somehow given a body, or a more abstract spirit of death and the hunt. Such a being might be vulnerable to physical attack, but have powers and capabilities beyond anything the characters have seen before. Some of the other beings detailed in this chapter, including the Hunter, could make for ideal masters of the Hounds.

### *Role in Stories*

Viewed from a standpoint of "cautionary tale" rather than literal truth, what does the legend of the Black Hounds say about the Kindred who propagate it? The Hounds only attack victims with some degree of guilt, so clearly the Hounds' main metaphorical function is to remind the Kindred that all accounts eventually come due. Even if a vampire is above human law, Kindred law or even natural law, the world has a way of settling blood debts. The hound has symbolic associations of tenacity, loyalty and retribution, and so it's not hard to see why the animal features in this kind of legend.

Interestingly, the tale of the Black Hounds is somewhat similar to stories of vampires that mortals tell one another. The creatures are invisible unless they wish to be seen, but they typically only show themselves to their chosen victim. The story doesn't require much proof to be true. All that remains of the Hounds' victims is a bit of ash and blood (and sometimes paw prints, but that's a detail that witnesses could easily add), but that's all that remains in any Kindred slaying.

### *Telling the Hounds*

The Hounds can be used as simple combat monsters, pursuing a coterie (even though the Hounds usually target lone Kindred) at the behest of a mage or a vampire-hunting occultist, but that might be selling them short. Consider the following roles for the Black Hounds in your chronicle:

- **Stormcrow:** The coterie knows a vampire who kills while feeding. The vampire is otherwise a decent sort, as Kindred go, he just doesn't bother to leave his victims alive. He doesn't endanger the Masquerade and has a good system down for disposing of bodies. And then one night, he finds the coterie and babbles something about giant dogs, only to take off running away from a threat only he can see. This approach doesn't work as well if the vampire is a depraved monster, because the characters need to be able to say "there but for the Grace of God go we" (and hopefully take the hint).

- **The Stick:** As opposed to the carrot, that is. A character who always goes off alone and doesn't seem to care how low his Humanity rating drops can make for good fodder for the Hounds. In this case, the other characters

need to help the quarry find a way to fend off the Hounds — if the characters are so inclined. In this kind of story, stretch the hunt out as long as possible while still maintaining tension. Try to hint at the reasons that the character is seeing these beasts out of the corner of his eye, and remove the dogs from view entirely if the Kindred is with the coterie (and behaving himself).

- **Second Chance:** The survivor account on p. 132 implies that if a vampire is truly repentant and accepts his fate, the Hounds will spare his unlife. Perhaps one of the characters experiences something similar. Such an event might be a wake-up call that leads to a change in behavior that justifies a rise in Humanity, or even something as drastic a change in covenant. This doesn't necessarily have to happen to one of the players' characters. What if this kind of "conversion" happens to the Prince of the city, or to one of the characters' Mentors?

- **Harbingers of the Hidden World:** Interested in moving your **Vampire** chronicle out of the realm of backstabbing politics and into the realm of supernatural mystery? The Black Hounds provide a good way to do that, especially since they have easy antecedents in human mythology. Likewise, if you feel like doing some crossover, the Hounds can provide a good bridge between **Vampire** and **Mage: The Awakening** (as pets or servants of a spell-caster) or **Werewolf: The Forsaken** (as dangerous spirits).

### *Black Hounds*

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 2, Wits 4, Resolve 3

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

**Social Attributes:** Presence 3, Manipulation 1, Composure 2

**Mental Skills:** None

**Physical Skills:** Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Survival (Tracking) 3

**Social Skills:** Animal Ken 2, Intimidation 4

**Merits:** Fast Reflexes 2, Fleet of Foot 2

**Willpower:** 5

**Health:** 7

**Initiative:** 7 (with Fast Reflexes)

**Defense:** 4

**Speed:** 16 (species factor 8)

**Size:** 4

**Weapons/Attacks:**

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Bite	2 (L)	8

**Supernatural Aspects:**

- **Bloody Minded:** The Black Hounds cannot attack anyone except their chosen quarry. Once they have chosen a target, they cannot break off the hunt unless one of them is killed or the target is destroyed. If the Storyteller has decided that the Hounds have a master, that master can order them to abandon a hunt.

- **Compulsion to Fear:** The Hounds cannot attack their quarry without scaring it first. Fear is largely an

unconscious response, and the sight of a large snarling dog is enough to frighten even the undead, but if the Storyteller wishes to allow the character a chance to resist this effect, he can give the player a Resolve + Composure roll (perhaps with some sort of modifier based on circumstances) to avoid feeling afraid.

- **Fade from Memory:** Although mortals can see the Hounds, mortals don't usually remember them. As soon as the Hounds leave the mortals' field of vision, the Hounds no longer seem important, and, within an hour, the mortals have forgotten the Hounds entirely. A mortal schooled in the occult or who for some reason *wants* to remember the dogs might do so with a successful Resolve + Occult roll. Any character with a supernatural template (werewolves, mages, ghouls) or with the Unseen Sense Merit remembers the Hounds automatically.

- **Flesh of Darkness:** While the Hounds suffer damage from normal attacks, their flesh feels soft, almost insubstantial. The Hounds have an Armor rating of 2. If a Hound is killed, it simply vanishes into nothingness.

- **Immunity to Mental Powers:** The Hounds are impervious to all Disciplines and other supernatural powers that enable communication with or control of animals (except those wielded by their master, if any).

- **Scent of the Prey:** The Hounds can track their prey flawlessly. Apply a +4 modifier on all rolls made for the Hounds to track or find their quarry.

- **Shadow Step:** The Hounds can appear from or disappear into any shadow large enough to cover them completely, provided that shadow is within 10 yards of their quarry.

- **Unearthly:** The Hounds only interact with the material world to the degree that they must. They don't leave footprints, hair, drool or blood behind unless they so desire, usually to facilitate scaring their prey.

## *The Hunter*

**March, 1947, Culver City, California.** The remains of six Kindred are discovered in a bottling factory owned by the city's Prince. Among them are two Primogen and three of their high-ranking operatives. Each has been torn to pieces. Their heads and hearts are missing.

**July 11, 1964, Tampico, Mexico.** A burning ship drifts in from the Gulf of Mexico. Charred remains on board include a dozen of the Damned, including Chavo Tamariz, the Prince of Mexico City.

**December 24, 1999, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.** A nightclub filled with Kindred, their ghouls and blood dolls is blown apart at the stroke of midnight by a series of incendiary devices. Survivors of the initial blast are staked, shot to pieces and torn apart as they attempt to escape. The lone escapee reports an encounter with an eight-foot-tall, male humanoid wearing a tattered leather trench coat, night-black shirt and pants, motorcycle boots and a strange silver gas mask. In the 16 minutes it

takes him to extinguish the existences of more than 200 Damned, their allies and food stock, he variously employs a shotgun, flamethrower, support beams from the club itself, knives, a silver sword, broken bottles and, most notably, his bare hands. The being spares the life of the lone witness, a Vitae-fed mortal named Caroline Golden. He unmasks himself, revealing a bald, bony head covered in a thin layer of flaking, dead flesh. Red eyes burn inside hollowed-out sockets. A rattling voice emanates deep within his throat. He gives Caroline Golden a message: "Tell them. I'm coming for them all."

These and other incidents lie in the wake of the Hunter, among the most feared vampire-slayers of all time. This being, who is undead but not one of us, is credited with the deaths of up to 1,000 Kindred, in at least 100 incidents of mayhem dating back as far as 1720. His blood trail stretches across four continents. He kills the obscure and anonymous along with the most distinguished worthies. No subtle horror, the Hunter attacks frontally and devastatingly, often waiting for occasions when large numbers of our kind have gathered.

Unlike his mortal namesakes, this Hunter does not appear to find us by mundane means. Investigations undertaken in the wake of his attacks have revealed no communication breaches, no treachery, no errors that could have credibly led him to his victims. Throughout the centuries, the texts referring to his depredations repeat a common refrain: he smells us. He comes from nowhere, finds where we are huddled and exterminates us like so many rats.

Some encounters with a being matching the description of the Hunter have ended in our favor. In Clarksville, Maryland, in 1967, he was apparently electrocuted with a severed high-tension wire. In late winter of 1998, bodyguards to a Duke of Atlanta are said to have impaled the Hunter on the tines of a forklift, burned him and dissolved his inanimate remains in a vat of acid. On an airstrip in the Idaho backwoods in 1954, the noted Kindred assassin Ding Benshan maneuvered the Hunter into the propellers of a small aircraft, hacking him to dusty, bloodless pieces. Such victories were fleeting. His electrocutioners systematically disappeared between the spring of 1968 and November of 1972. The Duke's bodyguards were found decapitated and encased in cement six months after they slew the Hunter. Ding Benshan vanished without a trace while en route to his home village in rural China in 1959. If one accepts a set of posthumously discovered journals as authentic, he suffered a series of previous close calls with a vengeful Hunter in 1955, 1957 and 1958.

From these incidents, one must conclude that the Hunter can be killed, but only for a little while. In each case, extraordinary measures were required to achieve even a temporary surcease of his unstoppable fury. He has been seen to shrug off bullets, suffer incineration



with grim equanimity and laugh insanely at impaling sword-thrusts.

His seeming invincibility, and ability to reconstitute himself after being reduced to atoms, raises the inevitable question of his origins. Scholar Frantisek Novotn, after the infamous Prague Massacre of 1760, set the pattern for future treatises on the Hunter when describing him as “a dread amalgam of ghost, revenant and zombie.” Certain later texts swap out one of these three categories, replacing it with “mummy.” Novotn’s theory on the origin of the Hunter, as incoherent as it is, has been repeated as gospel by those writing after:

<quote>Born of a bizarre metaphysical accident, conceived in rage and thwarted passion, thankfully we will see the Hunter’s like only once. The Hunter began existence as Osukonos, a servitor built of clay, bone and feathers, then infused with stolen souls. Milada Kutalek created him, that famous witch. He was not meant to love her, but did. When he came upon the cannibal Prince Rehorek as he ravished and slew Milada, her fury and his intertwined, and a new being sprang from the dull clay of the old. Osukonos slew Rehorek, and Milada — for now she was defiled — and vowed to forever walk the earth, destroying all who resembled them. And on the date of their deaths each year, which is the vernal equinox, he sheds seething tears, and contact with even a droplet of such a tear can send one of our kind scorching into grave-dust.

Little in this account can be corroborated. The Prince of Prague in 1720 was not Rehorek, and was not known for cannibalism. No Prince Rehorek or Witch Milada (whom later writers assume to be a Crone) can be found in earlier records, which are unsurprisingly fragmentary. Those who believe that the secret to the Hunter’s permanent destruction must lie within the story of his origin confront a daunting task of historical reconstruction. One of those who fought him during the Clarksville Incident performed such research even as the creature tracked him down. He called out Milada’s name as the reborn Hunter broke his back; the creature scarcely paused at its mention.

However old this ancient spirit might be, he has thoroughly adapted to modern circumstances. He has shown terrifying mastery of contemporary weaponry. On one notable occasion, he drove an 18-wheeler into the side of an Invictus stronghold in upstate New York.

Lengthy periods of inactivity appear to punctuate the Hunter’s rampages. Some have theorized that he drops periodically into a torpor-like state. Whether he does so to recharge the supernatural energies that sustain him, or for some other reason, cannot be explained with the evidence at hand. His disappearances do not correlate to his supposed deaths, which, if anything, increase the frequency of his appearances, as he tracks and slays all contributors to his most recent demise. How he reconstitutes himself after death is also unknown.



Also unclear is the exact criteria he uses to target his victims. Large gatherings of the Damned definitely attract his attention. Clearly, he takes an interest in high-status victims. In other accounts, the vampire he targets has recently committed an act of special cruelty and malice. Perhaps the Hunter can smell our very loss of humanity as we are dragged deeper into the pit of amorality.

One near-victim, quoted on conditions of strict anonymity, claims to have shaken the Hunter by leading him to more appealing quarry. The informant, who had been feeding in a maternity ward in a small southern town, was chased by a figure matching the Hunter's description shortly after leaving the hospital. A vehicle pursuit ensued, terminating when the informant slammed his panel truck into a roadside diner known to him as a hangout for a Kindred biker gang. The Hunter spent 20 minutes slaughtering the bikers, during which time the informant was able to creep off into the woods. The Hunter, his rage apparently sated, declined to track him further.

### *The Hunter*

**Attributes:** Intelligence 2, Wits 4, Resolve 5, Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5, Presence 4, Composure 5

**Skills:** Athletics 4, Brawl 5, Drive 3, Firearms 5, Weaponry 4, Intimidation 4

**Merits:** Danger Sense, Direction Sense, Disarm 2, Giant, Iron Stamina 3, Stunt Driver

**Willpower:** 10

**Initiative:** 9

**Defense:** 4 (13 against unarmed, weapon and ranged weapon attacks)

**Speed:** 14

**Size:** 6

#### **Weapons/Attacks:**

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Punch	3(A)	10
Shotgun	4(A)	9
Machete	3(A)	9
Found Object (Large)	4(A)	9
Found Object (Small)	2(A)	9

**Health:** 11

All damage dealt by the Hunter, by any means whatsoever, is aggravated.

A victim killed by unarmed attack is dismembered or mutilated in spectacular fashion: heart torn from chest, limbs ripped off, head twisted backwards and so on.

Note also the differential Defense rating; as suggested by the accounts of his various demises above, the Hunter is far more vulnerable to indirect harm from the general environment than from standard combat attacks. Plowing into him with a truck, throwing him over a cliff or electrocuting him is more effective than going at him with fists, guns or blades.

The Hunter is immune to damage from fire and heat.

### *Dreadful Night of the City*

*That City's atmosphere is dark and dense,  
Although not many exiles wander there,  
With many a potent evil influence,  
Each adding poison to the poisoned air;  
Infections of unutterable sadness,  
Infections of incalculable madness,  
Infections of incurable despair.*

— James Thomson, "City of Dreadful Night"

Sidewalks crack. Garbage piles up uncollected, breeding rats by the battalion. Blank-eyed girls shuffle up to furtive men, getting their next fix any way they can. Schools shuffle papers, and teachers pray for the bell; churches close up or preach a gospel of selfishness. Much of the World of Darkness knows the grim touch of urban rot, rank weeds growing in burned-out housing projects, feral gangs smashing shop windows, the rich walling themselves off in hideous towers with trophy wives and obese children to ignore it all until it goes away.

But sometimes it doesn't go away. Sometimes, it's here for a reason. The urbiphage, or city eater, is a kind of cosmic vampire that sucks the very life from the city where the urbiphage nests. Miles across, it looms invisibly across human and Kindred consciousness alike. And nervous Kindred sometimes glance at each other when they see that telltale gray smudge in the skyline that signals the city eater's approach. Because the urbiphage is drawn to vampires. Specifically, it seeps into cities with excess vampires. Just what the magic number is, nobody seems to know. It might be 169, 13 13s of Kindred. It could be 333 vampires, or 500. It might vary with the city's population, or with the number of Kindred on the earth. But when a city holds too many vampires, something comes to prey upon them.

That is, assuming it exists at all. The primary source for the urbiphage legend is the so-called *Devotions of St. Hugues*. This 15th-century hymnal is the record of a Lancea Sanctum Saint who, apparently in the grip of religious mania, composed 666 hymns, each concerning the defeat of a different monster or demon by the Sanctified Arm of Longinus. Said Arm apparently worked through a vast panoply of wandering Kindred knights, human mercenary soldiers, werewolves and simple common folk armed only with true faith and holy water. Cryptoteratologists, as students of unknown monsters refer to themselves, consider the *Devotions* alternately a researcher's paradise and a farrago of utterly deranged nonsense. The only other even remotely complete work on the urbiphage is the *Book of Zhar*, which is the diary of Mattheus Dunmor, a London wizard writing about his campaign against two urbiphage infestations in 1665 and 1666. His notes are meticulous, but modern occultists tend to discount the work since midway through, Dunmor converted to urbiphage worship, and, by his own



account, spent most of 1666 trying to bring about the complete destruction of Britain. Hence the reluctance to rely on his “well-temper’d Methods for Redirecting Ye Flowe of Siluer to Deprive Ye Daemon of its Meat” or on his scheme to “Erect such Buildings as to Form a Particular Effigy, as with the Hod-Mawkin set in Ye Fields to Scare Ye Crowes.”

### *Many Dooms*

*After the banquet, the ceiling collapses.*

— graffito found in a vampire crypt in Pompeii

According to these and other fragmentary accounts, an urbiphage that nests in a city will sooner or later undergo a kind of metaphysical spasm. The urbiphage expands mightily along its whole axis, unleashing a shockwave of psychic force through the spirit world, slamming into all supernatural beings in the city simultaneously. This spasm may be the urbiphage giving birth to its young, or its dying throes or both. Some Kindred scholars have suggested that the jolt is a massive orgasm as the urbiphage pollinates, or merely the equivalent of a rattlesnake’s rattle.

The expanding entity now somehow triggers the city’s doom. Crones mutter darkly about the “thread of the Fates snapping tight,” while Dragons prefer to say the urbiphage somehow “lays its finger on the weak keystone in the arch.” The fire jumps the river, the fault slips, the gate is unlocked, the levee washes out, the rats die, the bombers redirect their target. Whatever the proximate cause, whatever metaphysical metaphor is appropriate, the result is the same, a wave of physical destruction. In some cases, the city is left completely devastated; in others, it is merely gutted. When the smoke clears, or the water recedes, the city eater is gone. For the time being, anyway.

Kindred eschatologists have classified the Seven Dooms — Fire, Flood, Earthquake, Storm, Plague, Conquest, Drought — most often warned against by auguries or divinations; they track reasonably well with many of the alleged cases of urbiphage infestation known. The mechanism by which the urbiphage causes, for example, the Chicago Fire of 1871, to say nothing of inciting a German mercenary army to go berserk and sack Rome in 1527, remains completely unknown. Opportunistic demons or elementals may rush into the supernatural vacuum created by the urbiphage’s spasm, or the urbiphage may use magics completely imperceptible to Earthly supernaturals.

Leonata van Treskow, the preeminent cryptoteratologist in the Ordo Dracul, has proposed a wildly radical theory with, admittedly, no proof whatsoever. She believes that an urbiphage actually arrives at the moment of disaster and then exists backward in time until that point in history when the vampire population was too low to support it. Having reached that moment, the urbiphage dissipates. The urbiphage’s arrival, she speculates, causes the “spasm,” which is actually an impact shock as the monstrosity enters our cosmos. Neat, simple and entirely counterintuitive.

### *Desperate Measures*

Unfortunately, van Treskow’s theory also squarely contradicts the other body of lore concerning urbiphages, namely the two traditional methods of driving off an urbiphage before it spasms. By her hypothesis, those methods are mere folk panic, superstitions invented by hedge magicians and astrologer-vampires desperate for any straw of hope. But since her theory gives no hope whatsoever, the Prince of a city facing an urbiphage infestation may still consider old-fashioned solutions.

The first of the two methods is simple, at least in theory: thinning the pack. If too many vampires attracted the urbiphage, once their numbers drop back below the unknown threshold, the creature should depart as it came. The trouble with this policy is that it immediately sets all the vampires in the city at each others’ throats, temporarily escalating the very bestiality and ferocity that attracted the urbiphage in the first place. Worse, the precise number of Kindred to be purged is never clear, and many Kindred simply retreat into torpor and havens, which, likewise, does nothing to reduce the number of vampires attracting the monster. Finally, a Prince who orders a wholesale slaughter of vampires, or even of a significant portion of the city’s Kindred, has instantly given a large, deadly faction a powerful, immediate motive to overthrow and kill him instead of submitting to the cull.

From the *Golden Legend of St. George*, by Jacobus de Voragine:

*And when the dragon came nigh the city he envenomed the people with his breath . . . Then was an ordinance made in the town that there should be taken the children and young people of them of the town by lot, and every each one as it fell, were he gentle or poor, should be delivered to the dragon when the lot fell on him or her. So it happed that many of them of the town were then delivered, insomuch that the lot fell upon the King’s daughter, whereof the King was sorry . . .*

The second method is still more dubious, especially from the perspective of the Prince. According to legend, if the True Prince is sacrificed to the urbiphage (or to the Sun, as accounts vary) by being chained to the highest point in the city at dawn, the abomination will accept this promise of reform and remove itself. Although one or two Princes have historically accepted exile rather than wage civil war, it would be hard to name one who sacrificed himself to True Death for his city. But what a number of Princes have found to work, after a fashion, is crowning another vampire Prince, ceremonially, allowing him to rule for a night and then sacrificing him instead. Unlike the True Princely sacrifice, this scapegoat strategy has been tried, at least in the pages of the *Devotions of St. Hugues*. However, rather than inducing the urbiphage to withdraw, a scapegoat merely postpones the

spasm. For how long? Nobody knows, of course; tradition says seven years, or three. Rumor has it that the Prince of Detroit takes no chances and chains a scapegoat to the top of the RenCen every Walpurgisnacht, just in case.

But even the scapegoat method has serious drawbacks. There are very few Kindred with no political connections in any city. Deciding to offer the wrong goat can result in a “ceremonial” Prince keeping the throne for rather more than a day. The coming of an urbiphage puts the Prince of the city in an increasingly dangerous position. As the parasite settles in and leeches away the city’s economic life, the Prince and Primogen have less to offer their allies. Enemies begin maneuvering for position, feuds start to break out and showing compromise or weakness is an excellent way to get measured for ceremonial chains. The only thing the Prince still has in abundance to offer restive Kindred is, of course, increased feeding privileges among the kine. And that raises the urbiphage further out of slumber, which begets another round of the same vicious cycle.

### *Unwholesome Truths*

All monster stories begin as cautionary tales. “Don’t go into the woods alone.” “Don’t offend the gods.” “Don’t help foreign aristocrats buy London real estate.” Sometimes the monsters they caution against are real, and sometimes they aren’t. But if you act as if none of them are real, you *will* get eaten.

The story of the urbiphage is a cautionary tale for vampires: “Don’t mess where you eat.” If vampires let the cities the Kindred rule collapse, if they indiscriminately suck the meat from the urban marrow, they will awake one night to find themselves rulers of rubble piles, no better than rats or feral dogs. The urbiphage adds another caution to the first, a warning based in basic ecology. If there are too many predators and not enough prey, the system breaks down. Every ecosystem has its limits. Vampires, similar to humans, are not particularly adept at staying within those limits. Allowing too many vampires to hunt in a city may not summon a nightmarish hyper-vampire from the abyss, but certainly wrecks things just as thoroughly as if it did.

### *Tales of the City-Killer*

But more importantly, it’s a nightmarish hyper-vampire from the abyss! The urbiphage presents a threat simply too big to chop up with a katana or drive away with Nightmare. The urbiphage is a cosmic threat, scaled far away from the personal concerns that predominate in **Vampire**. In the World of Darkness, the urbiphage is the kind of lingering existential fear that real-world urbanites have lived with since 1945, and still live with today: nuclear destruction during the Cold War, race war in the 1960s and 1970s, terrorist slaughter on 9/11 and 7/7 and unknown dates in the uncertain future. The urbiphage is hurricanes and bird flu and global warming all wrapped up in a Lovecraftian package.

So how does a game of personal horror respond to the existential cosmic threat? There is the response of West Berlin in the 1960s, or of New York in the 1970s or of Manchester in the 1980s — crank up the noise and party in the shadow. If even the Kindred feel they could die tomorrow, don’t the seductions and the betrayals and the struggles feel all the sweeter? Wouldn’t the Kindred gladly kill to keep them going even for one more day? When the game is this good, it’s always worth the candle.

Many Kindred will doubt the urbiphage exists, even as the city strangles in its own filth around them. If the Storyteller wants to keep the urbiphage invisible, then the theme of the chronicle can become paranoia and suspicion. Is the Prince merely claiming an urbiphage infestation to give him an excuse to purge a hated opponent? Are fractious Kindred just jumping at any excuse to sink their talons into an enemy, and find an imaginary legend convenient? And if so, then why is the city dying?

Of course, there’s also rage — of Paris 1968, of Watts and Chicago, and of Thatcher’s London during the poll tax riots. Raise the red flag! Die for your joy and take your enemies with you! A staccato storyline of short, angry rhythms, with combat flaring on every street corner and everyone in the coterie back to back against the Prince, flares up brightest when the city is black and gray.

On a more intimate scale, perhaps a cosmic terror frees the characters to focus on winning small victories. Keep one block from crumbling, keep the Beast at bay one more full moon, keep the greedy and the vacant in the Primogen from scraping the last meat from the city’s bones. Such stories focus on the other side of personal horror, personal triumph. Rationed out amidst a vista of urban erosion, this story will bring the background horrors into high relief.

Not every vampire’s response will be so noble. The Prince and Primogen will come to terms with the new reality, selecting scapegoats to keep the doom away with cold cynicism, looting the ruins before they fall, encouraging inter-Kindred feuding to keep the urbiphage just barely quiescent. Coldly calculating Hierophants of the Crone will try their hands at dark bargains with this new god, tapping its unearthly power to scourge their enemies rather than freeing the city. The powers that be will collaborate under the sleeping shadow, and the poisonous rituals of Kindred politics, and of political chronicles, can blossom in their full corruption.

And if you just can’t resist going cosmic, well, imagine a chronicle in which the characters actually find the Ritual Implacable in the ruins of Lagash, or sacrifice Dracula himself on the top of the CN Tower or unite every vampire in the city to fast the creature to death. That will be something worth unliving another day for.

“HE DOESN’T TALK ANYMORE. SAYS THE CITY HEARS HIM. IT’S BEEN EIGHT YEARS NOW.”



## *The Urbiphage*

**Background:** The urbiphage comes from Outside, as alien to the World of Darkness as the Kindred are to the cozy, sun-dappled suburbs they left behind with the Embrace. Whether the urbiphage is a giant alien lattice genetically grown along hyper-advanced superstrings, a demon from before the cooling of the Earth, the Beast Rahab from the Book of Job or the psionic race-memory of a vanished species of giant sentient jellyfish matters not.

**Description:** In normal vision, the urbiphage resembles only an oily, gritty gray light reflected off the sides of the main downtown building cluster. At sundown and sunrise, the urbiphage might resemble an exceptionally grimy patch of inversion layer smog, or just a peculiar absence of colors in the gold and green wavelengths of the spectrum.

To Auspex (and other supernatural vision powers), the urbiphage looks like two-thirds of a polypous, swollen bat corpse, partially melted and suspended across the city center. The urbiphage's trailing "wing" extends up from the city at an unpleasantly skew angle to the street grid and sort of sublimates away in midair, twisting away to join the invisible bulk of the thing. Although nothing more is visible, a user of Auspex senses that this entire monstrosity is just the tip of some immense gluey feather, or perhaps one visible

segment of a flatworm-like creature tens of miles across. Even using Auspex, the urbiphage is only visible out of the corners of a viewer's eye; looking straight ahead at the monstrosity produces nothing much more than a sick headache.

If the Storyteller wishes to keep the question of the urbiphage's existence open, she can simply decide that the urbiphage is invisible even to Auspex; the only announcement of the urbiphage's presence is the murky sheen on the buildings and a lowering sense of oppression and misery. And the slow strangulation of the city, of course.

**Storytelling Hints:** The urbiphage has no motivations, or, if it does, they are simply impenetrable from our perspective. A vampire or a human can no more understand the urbiphage's thought — if it thinks at all — than an ant can understand Chartres Cathedral. The urbiphage is here, and it will slumber and destroy the city slowly, or spasm and destroy it quickly. The urbiphage may leave promptly after the vampire population diminishes, or still be here when the glaciers return.

As a quasi-material entity, the urbiphage's statistics are partially based on the rules for ghosts from the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, pp. 208–216. The statistics represent only that tiny portion of the urbiphage that exists in the perceptible universe. Whether a pinprick in this part suffices to shift the whole is up to the Storyteller. Storytellers can raise these values to whatever



unimaginable levels they wish, or lower the values to merely “very frightening demon” level, depending on the Storytellers’ vision for the chronicle.

**Attributes:** Power 13, Finesse 4, Resistance 22

**Willpower:** 35

**Morality:** N/A

**Virtue:** N/A

**Vice:** N/A

**Initiative:** 26

**Defense:** 15

**Speed:** 27 (species factor 10)

**Size:** City-sized, unimaginable; manifestations range from 8 to 30

**Corpus:** 20–52

**Essence:** 50

**Numina:** Ghost Sign (dice pool 17), Magnetic Disruption (no roll required), Telekinesis (dice pool 17), Terrify (dice pool 17)

**Supernatural Powers: Urban Decay** — Life drains out of the city where the urbiphage nests. Investments don’t pay off, crime escalates, food is overpriced or ill-prepared or both, and the damned street lights don’t stay lit. Mechanically, this can be represented by a –1 modifier to any roll affected by the social cohesion or economic strength of the city, be it an Empathy roll between two residents, an Investigation roll into a crime committed against a minority or a Crafts roll to design an attractive or functional skyscraper. The Storyteller may also impose a one-dot penalty on any Merit “native” to the city; Contacts are less forthcoming, junkies are more likely to break into a haven, Resources don’t go as far as they might and so forth.

**Death of the City** — At some mysterious juncture, the urbiphage might spasm, laying its weight against the city’s weak link and snapping it, bringing on a doom. This apocalyptic event begins with a simultaneous Telekinesis attack (dice pool 17) against every supernatural being in the city, but soon goes beyond die rolls.

(Footnotes)

<sup>1</sup> Hector, “Toward a Polling Baseline for the Damned.” *Journal of Sanguinary Studies* 11.5 (1985): 156–189.

<sup>2</sup> Mufaz al-Hariri, “Application of Jungian Methodology to the Kindred Psyche.” *Journal of Sanguinary Studies* 26.8 (2000): 214–229.

<sup>3</sup> (New York: Viking, 2004)

<sup>4</sup> Cantafio, “Nonsense, Both Dangerous and Extravagant.” *Proceedings of the Exanimis Sapientia Society* March 2003, pp. 12–18.



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Who shall  
conceive the  
**HORRORS**  
of my secret toil as I  
dabbled among the  
unhallowed damp of the  
grave or tortured the  
living animal to animate the  
lifeless clay?

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