

THE BLOOD

the player's guide
to the requiem

the World of Darkness

a sourcebook for
Vampire
THE REQUIEM

Prologue: The Blood

by Christopher Kobar



It wasn't his usual haunt. Most nights Reyner stayed within a few blocks of 23rd and Army Drive, mingling almost invisibly with the scruffy bohemians and menacing street fixtures with a practiced ease that left him free to ponder things besides how to stay under the radar. That corner of the Rack had become his by common law, though he had never so much as suggested that this was so to another. Still, rare was the occasion when a visitor did not first pay his respects before treading on Reyner's de facto domain. So long as others steered clear of the corner of 24th and Falkland, he had no beef with them. But something was in the air tonight, and for the first time since his Priscus's tawdry little drama four months prior, Reyner felt an oddly pleasant compulsion to venture beyond the security of his traditional hunting grounds.

The Pavillion wasn't more than a 15-minute walk past Pete's Liquors, but the popular nightclub and the boisterous streets around it were no less foreign to the shadowy newcomer than would be the labyrinthine passages of a Damascene bazaar. As was his way, Reyner stayed mostly in the shadows, uncertain of his ability to blend in easily with the roving throngs of

intoxicated partygoers and cigar-smoking Young Turks whose sleek mobile phones and high-limit credit cards contributed to their conviction that they were invincible. Latin music was not something that he had any special affinity for, but there was something about the place, something beyond the exotic rhythms and the lively play of dancers' shadows against the curtains that hung inside the club's full-length windows that drew him nonetheless. A

dozen or more people loitered outside

the glass doors smoking cigarettes and glistening with perspiration, laughing,

firting and ready for

whatever the night

would bring them

while the bouncers

surveyed the vi-

cinity for signs

of trouble and

the law. Rey-

ner hung back

just enough to

avoid scruti-

ny, and then

he unleashed

his senses and

opened him-

self up to the

flood of sights,

sounds, smells

and sensations

that drenched

his surroundings

yet went unnoticed

by most. The pulse

of the salsa band trav-

eled through him along

with the din of the horns

and the daring vocals mak-

ing his skin hum in syncopation.

The cacophony of other voices, the shuffle and clatter of shoes, the clinking



of bottles and glasses and the ambient mourn of traffic, electricity and rustling leaves all poured into his ears and set him afire. Streetlights, the glow of neon and tobacco and the patchwork smear of faces, garments and jewelry and the fleeting flashes and lingering grays of the rest of the night blazed in his gaping eyes like a magical carnival ride before the gaze of a child. Cologne and knock-off perfumes lay like an unpleasant rind over the rich, heady aroma of flesh, sweat, grime and yes, blood, the stink of the street's refuse and decay a mere afterglow in his nostrils.

The silent figure drank this all in, transfixed by the barrage, stealing for himself a few moments of hedonism before attenuating these heightened perceptions and putting them to practical use.

Reyner focused on the bouncers, filtering out all else as much as he could, listening to the words that passed between them and the customers, and then on the tinny voices transmitted through their earpieces until he heard their names. A side door was manned from the inside, and he removed himself to that location, dimming his magnified

senses completely and rapping on the glass that was dripping with condensation from the swelter of the gyrating crowd inside. He spoke the names to the heavyset man inside, whose lack of interest was evident from the faint hue that shimmered around him, visible when Reyner squinted and let his vision blur just so. A moment later, he was inside, the door closing behind him and the cloy-

ing swamp of body heat, moisture, seething flesh, stinging alcohol and maddening sound enveloped him so completely that he required a few seconds to orient himself physically and mentally before he could decide his next action. Somewhere in this place he would find the person or thing that had tugged at his curiosity, and he would not depart until that itch had been fully scratched. If Reyner had an Achilles heel, this was it.

So occupied was he with quenching his thirst for answers that he had actually succeeded for a time in suppressing his own baser needs. As he moved away from the whirling throng and found a spot closer to the long bar, but from where he was still able to command an enviable view of the dance floor, pushing through the mass of hot-blooded bodies to do so, he realized just



how hungry he was. It had been two nights – no, three! – since he had addressed the demands of his ghastly appetite, and now, pressed in on all sides by such a blatant display of ripe flesh, the full measure of that renewed hunger came roaring back with such force that for a moment he feared he might be overcome and fall headlong into the throes of a bloodthirsty frenzy. Yet the moment passed as the rote words of the Dragon came to him and reminded him of what he was, so that with a considerable but quite familiar effort of will he was able to swiftly chastise the surging Beast and lash it into once more into quiescent submission before its tirade posed any mentionable threat to himself and the blissfully ignorant mortals around him.

This danger past, Reyner still recognized that he must sate his hunger before the night was ended, and so he began a methodical search for the source of the irritation that continued to gnaw at him, even stronger now that he was here. His senses swelled as he allowed his eyes to rove from one corner of the place to the next, casting his net as wide as possible, but being sure to miss nothing in doing so. He was quite skilled at this, and with almost scientific precision, he examined

each and every thing that might suggest the source of the distracting sensation.

It was her legs that first captured his attention: long, flawlessly toned and shod in red heels that seemed to be a natural part of her anatomy, so certain was she of her movements. Every step she took was perfectly in time with the complicated rhythm of the blaring salsa music as she spun, kicked her feet and

performed a mesmerizing combination of fast-moving patterns that affected him

so much that he forgot his purpose. He let

his sight quicken to match her foot-

work so that he was able to see

the play of her lithe leg mus-

cles almost in slow motion

and would not miss the sub-

tlest of magic of her feet.

Her skirt was short and loose

and teased his imagination,

serving as a mere decorative

accent to her sublime figure.

Her bare stomach was flat and supple,

and the diamond there gleamed seductively,

while her lean back and graceful chest had drenched

through the olive tank top that completed her outfit, aside from a leather necklace

from which depended a large crescent of beaten silver and that matched the



tribal bracelet on her right wrist. Her thick auburn mane fell halfway down her back when it was not whipping around her in syncopation to her gyrations, and her lips were ruby red to match the shoes and narrow, perfectly suited to her classical Mediterranean features. But it was her eyes, her smoldering earthen eyes, that struck him like a hammer blow and caused him to literally gasp in sudden, tumultuous comprehension: despite their beauty and depth, there was a darkness in her eyes that was not found in the eyes of the living. She was, like him, a vampire.

Later he castigated himself for his blindness. His own world had become so small and his own petty concerns and intellectual masturbations had seemed so large that he hadn't even considered that the nagging feeling that had brought him to the Pavillion had been the presence of another Kindred, one whom he had never yet encountered. So unaccustomed was he, after so many long years of mastering the secrets of the Coils, to the lashing howl of the Beast that now, when the telltale scent of another predator filled his senses the

Beast was too cowed to do more than grumble its displeasure. This, of course, as well as his routine masking of his own Taint, saved both of them from a very ugly situation, but the fact that he had so numbed his own innate instincts that he had not even considered the obvious cause of his unsettling feeling sorely upset him. It was something that would drive him to new investigations in the nights to come, investigations that he hoped might one night lead him to a significant discovery that would serve the Great Work of the Order.

Her gaze met his almost immediately, and her expression froze as she instinctually prepared for the accursed urge to flee or fight to seize her. When it did not, when she realized that her own darker half was not roused by the sight of the strange Kindred in her club, her domain, her features became almost comical in their confusion. She was not moving now, and her partner, a handsome young man now trying to get her attention with words and gestures to understand what was happening, was forgotten, as she was unable to take her eyes off Reynier. It was as if she had stepped out of time: the salsa music played out, dancers swirled around her



and the kine continued their flirtations and foolishness, oblivious to the danger so narrowly averted in their midst. Only her partner had any inkling, but to her, he was now little more than a distant echo. All her attention was on the dark-clad vampire near the bar, and as she stared, she heard his voice in her head telling her that he meant no slight, that he was not aware this place was hers and that he would withdraw if she wished. He said this only after first opening himself to her own most urgent thoughts, learning quickly the basics of the situation so that he could deal with it in the best way possible. She relaxed a bit, though she remained alert, and she abandoned the helpless mortal, who now cursed her in frustrated Spanish, in order to make her way to Reyner.

As she approached, and for the entire duration they shared one another's company, Reyner was keenly aware of the effect she has on the gaggle of kine around them. Few were able to avert their attention from her for more than a few minutes; many were too awestruck to do so for any duration. He, too, felt this entrancing pull, but so uncomfortable was he with the limelight that he braced himself against her magnetism and maintained a

composure that was aloof by comparison to the gawking stares of her admirers. She wore a wicked smile while at his side, and her eyes burned with eagerness to learn about him, now that the threat of real danger lay in their past. Formal introductions were made – her name was Ayla; he had heard of her name before, a minor Harpy or something – and the minute hand on the Modelo Negro clock

above the bar completed nearly two full sweeps before he finally excused himself and slipped unnoticed from the club. During that span, they talked of many things: of her possessive sire, of his wayward childe, of her place in the social stratum and of his transcendent discoveries about their condition. They learned of their shared admiration for certain artists and surprised themselves when they began confiding in each other their preferences for prey and even the manner of their feeding, preferences they seemed to also share in common. In short, from their conversation, their Requiem seemed like two complementary orchestrations, each different and yet capable of being played simultaneously so that



the resultant melody might surpass each on its own.

There is no hurry among the Damned – all eternity awaits them – and more than two years passed before the pair meets again. Despite this, perhaps because of this, neither has forgotten the other. Often, Reyner would find himself standing in a forsaken building or on a bleak rooftop within his neighborhood stretching out his perceptions in the hopes of finding some trace of her carried on the night air. A few times, he thought he might have detected her fragrance, but like a whisper, it was always gone before he could be sure. Although he devoted a considerable time to his academic pursuits, he laid claim to the upper storey of a shuttered storefront, and it became a makeshift art studio for him. Her passion for art had ignited something in him that he had thought long dead, and for the first time since his Embrace, he threw himself into charcoals and oils and canvases and whatever media he could scrounge up. Some nights, he nearly starved himself, and he would unleash the Beast just enough in the hopes that it

would help drive his creative spirit; other times, he did all he could to suppress his restless nature so that he could throw himself open to every miniscule stimulus his heightened senses could identify in order to inform and drive his artistic efforts. But, more than anything, it was his memory of her, of that one night, that he poured into his work, not of how she looked to others but as he saw her, as a dark goddess as haunted by damnation as she is insatiably drawn to the vibrancy of life. The studio filled with the produce of the hours he spent there, but it existed only for him. It was his secret.

The second encounter is in a vast dwelling; it is her sire's haven, on the outskirts of the city, an area utterly foreign to him, and for this reason, an uncomfortable place to be. He is not invited, and he is unaware that she or any of the celebrants even imagined his presence. The Primogen's home is testament to his power as well as his hedonistic nature. His perverse ghouls shepherd fawning kine into prepared areas of the manse to serve the deviant pleasures of the Kindred who gather in the far more luxurious chambers above. The decorations speak volumes about the master of the



house: erotic statuary that would cause the most rehearsed harlots to blush; armories brimming with priceless collections of the cruel weaponry of countless barbaric cultures; obscenely vain carpets, draperies and upholstery and vast paintings and blatant architectural flourishes that would better suit the doge's palace in Venice. All this might distract others, but Reyner had a singular purpose. Since he met Ayla, the bleak loneliness that had filled him since his Beatrice had spurned him and given herself over to the Longinian zealots had come to torment him in a way that all his knowledge of the Damned was helpless against. It ate at his accursed soul, and through his art, he hoped to escape it, to no avail. He finally consigned himself to this, to tonight, to seeing her again and baring to her his agony. It might come to nothing, but unless something changed, his Requiem would become a dirge.

Impelled by the power of his Vitae, his movements are too quick for the watcher's eyes to catch, and so Reyner is inside the cavernous structure and fast at work making his preparations without any noting his arrival. He finds a handsome library, almost an afterthought given its size in com-

parison to most of the property's rooms, and quickly sets to work. He removes a Romantic oil of a storm-tossed battle scene from over the darkened fireplace, and in its place, he hangs his own framed picture: a heavy charcoal portrait of Ayla that took more than a month to complete to his satisfaction. It is a disturbing rendering that would be unfit for most walls, for it expresses a depth of loneliness

that he believes she, too, feels, as well as a sinister suggestion of doom; yet still it retains a sense of beauty that does her justice. It is a work that literally demanded the sacrifice of Blood to speed his deft fingers, to amplify his perceptions and to push himself to his limits in order to wring from his unliving heart the passions he had to put into the picture. After looking one last time at what he had wrought, the guerilla artist summoned his Blood and called the shadows to Obfuscate his masterpiece, to cloud it from others and to reveal it only to her eyes.

But he was not done. There was one more thing. From his satchel, he withdrew the knife, sheathed in its curved



scabbard, and laid it on the mantle. It was more than 1,000 years old, an Arab blade that had likely spilled the blood of more than a few Christians in its time. The blade was inscribed with an ancient curse on the foes of Allah and inlaid with gold, and its edge he ensured was razor sharp. With the knife, he placed a small scroll with a single instruction: do not use this blade . . . yet. On these two objects, he similarly called upon his powers of obfuscation and then he left the room.

Ayla was languishing on a massive velvet couch with the rest of her coterie, smoking a narghile filled with blood instead of water, its smoke pungent and yet also magnificent; a present from her sire's exotic companion from Istanbul. A half dozen kine were in the room to sate the lusts of the Kindred, submitting to their whims by offering up their blood or performing whatever perverse acts might be devised by the clutch of fiends in the room.

The elder vampires hovered around the master of ceremonies, seeking to curry his favor by complimenting his child and his haven, which suited him per-

fectly, his perfumed lover at his side basking in the glow of his majesty. The Prince was not there, nor were the few Kindred likely to spoil Reyner's plans, so he went ahead and completed his mission without further delay, whispering to her a mental message that he was here but would now be gone and for her not to try and find him. Instead, she was to find that library and look above the fireplace, and she would find his gift to her.

From his vantage point in the shadows, he saw her reaction, her eyes widening and the involuntary jerk of her head as she sought to locate him, but she just as quickly understood what his uninvited presence would mean and so she feigned a lack of recognition and returned her attentions to her numerous companions, reveling in the pleasures that eternity offered them. He quickly withdrew and left the premises as he had arrived, without alerting anyone to his visit. He did not

wonder if she would do as he instructed. He had seen her eyes with a clarity that was far beyond human comprehension. And more, he had heard the things in her own mind, heard the passion in her silent words, and knew that she would find her gifts



when a moment of privacy presented itself. And finally, he knew that upon seeing the portrait she would feel all the things that he had felt creating her likeness, and, knife in hand, know what it was he was truly giving her on her special night.

The Requiem may be an enduring song of damnation, but it does not have to be a damnation spent alone. Reyner was sure she would understand this and that she would accept his gift. His childe was lost to him, but even the Damned, it seems, are given second chances.





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*Damning
Next.*

DAMNATION CITY

The definitive guidebook for city design and domain-level play for **Vampire** Storytellers and players alike, including systems for designing and using player-ruled territories in any chronicle, including dozens of distinctive domains to acquire and control.



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Introduction

*"Of all writings I love only that which is written with blood.
Write with blood: and you will discover that blood is spirit."*

— Friedrich Nietzsche

This One's for the Players

No two vampires in the World of Darkness are exactly alike. Why should they be? They are taken from infinitely varied mortal stock and empowered with their own spread of Disciplines and Abilities beyond human capacity, building on, not supplanting, who they were. They are saddled with the Beast, an unconscious tangle of animalistic urges that they all share, but none can be expected to react to the same way. Players should be able to explore and express the unique attributes of their characters in **Vampire: The Requiem**, and this book is all about laying the groundwork for that expression.

This is not a book about covenant structure or clan behavior. It is not about setting or epic histories. This is a visceral, internal study of how it *feels* to be a vampire in the World of Darkness. It's focused tightly on characters, and filled with the questions and answers that players might ask themselves all the time, about almost everything their characters do: How does this feel? How does it look? Am I the only one who has this experience? It's about the in-between moments and the strange quirks that make a character real, and unusual and fun.

How To Use This Book

Each of the concepts presented in this book can find representation with more or less intensity in every vampire experiencing the Requiem. The ideas presented here are meant to be mixed and matched with others as the players in a game choose, pulling together into a cohesive whole that helps to define and distinguish their characters' individual stories, and the contributions they

make to the story as a whole. Personalizing characters in this manner can help add to a powerful atmosphere of mystery and mysticism in a game; if the same power seems to manifest in two (or three or many) different ways, the characters may be inclined to believe that they are entirely different powers — or that things just work differently for different Kindred, in ways that make for a world of strange, rich detail. Meeting new vampires can become an exciting, exotic experience when nobody's sure how *they* display their versions of the curse.

A lot of the subjects discussed are those that are often glossed over in games, or ones that are painted with the same brush across the board. We hope to encourage players to revisit and revitalize many of these concepts and draw story hooks from them to enjoy. We also hope to answer any questions players have about the *how* of those subjects, providing a reference point that everyone in a game can agree on, and making clear the intent behind these aspects of vampire existence, as represented by the straight mechanics of the core rules.

What's Inside

Chapter One: Kindred Characters provides an in-depth exploration of the character creation process, from square one all the way through to the beginning of play, including interpretation of Attributes, Abilities, Merits and Disciplines, co-operation with other players for maximizing group playability and fun, strategizing for great drama as well as tactical strength and advanced techniques for meshing characters with a story.

Chapter Two: Properties of the Blood is a detailed expansion of every sub-heading in "Chapter Three: Special Rules and Systems" from **Vampire: The Re-**

quiem. All of the mechanics are considered in terms of the experience of play: how the powers and capabilities universal to vampires look, sound and feel in the World of Darkness, how they manifest differently for different Kindred and the implications of those manifestations. Players may wish to plumb this section for flavor ideas to better personalize their characters and enhance the stories they take part in.

Chapter Three: Vampire Psychology is a comprehensive examination of the developmental benchmarks in Kindred existence, from the night of Embrace to the long, dark Requiem of millennial elders. A section on the emotional and developmental effects of Discipline use is included, with fully detailed entries for every individual power in the “ordinary” list available to vampires of the five clans. Players can consult these

two sections to aid in fleshing out their characters’ histories or adding dimension to their motives and night-to-night behavior.

The Voices of the Damned

Tucked throughout this book, you’ll find passages of text set off in special text. These are thoughts on the Requiem from the perspective of the Damned themselves. Naturally, these vampires may or may not know what they’re talking about. Take what they say with the skepticism it deserves — would you trust the words of a bloodsucking monster? — but consider whether the Requiem can really be understood from the cold, dry perspective of the outsider.

Again, it doesn’t matter what the Requiem seems to be; what matters how it *feels*.

Developer’s Foreword: The Truth

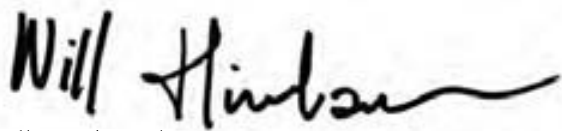
This book, despite its dramatic title, isn’t the final word on the experience of the Requiem. You get the final word.

What this book does is fuel your fire. What we did on this book was hire three of our favorite voices behind our **Vampire: The Requiem** books and let them loose over the familiar aspects of the Requiem. Each of them brings their own unique take to the material, from Chuck Wendig’s frank and enthusiastic dramaturgy, to Chris Kobar’s glorious bloody melodrama, to Ray Fawkes’s fearless and frightening exploration of vampire psychology. Love or hate the particular spin these authors put on our vampires, you’re sure to have some reaction to their words.

And that’s the real point of this book: to help you find out just what it is that you’re after when you play **Vampire**. Vampire folklore is all over the place now, with so many different takes on it from movies to novels to games to breakfast cereal — not everyone expects or desires the same feel from their vampire characters. Whether the balls-out prose in this book draws you into the author’s own vision or pushes you more deeply into your own, it’ll help you take your **Vampire** characters by the throat and make them do what you want.

It’s been almost four years since **Vampire: The Requiem** debuted under red lights, behind cage-dancers, at the White Wolf party in Indianapolis, 2003. In that time, we’ve explored deep into the cultures and histories of the covenants, out into the weird possibilities of VII and Belial’s brood, up into the limitless possibilities of **Vampire** chronicles and down into the buried myths and legends of the Damned. But have we moved too far from the raw, dramatic passion that is **Vampire**’s bloody beating heart?

This book is a return to that. It’s a sip back at the well of blood from which all other **Vampire** books flow. With lessons learned and things to say gathered over our years-long journey from the core book, we come back to reexamine everything that makes **Vampire** a sanguine and macabre game of modern Gothic horror. We take a drink, and live again.



Will Hindmarch
Atlanta, Georgia
February 2007





Chapter One: Kindred Characters

*“You call yourself
what you want,
but I’ve seen
the things
you’ve done.”*

God has given you one face, and you
make yourselves another.
—William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

Painting in Blood

Check the palette. What colors to use? A smudge of fresh claret? A swatch of clotted crimson? A number of techniques await: perhaps you'll tilt the neck toward the canvas, dazzle the white with a mist of arterial spray. Or maybe you pierce the fingertip with a fang and use the finger as your paintbrush and pencil. Slowly, a picture emerges. A character. A *vampire*. Hedged in by shadow. Dark eyes on a pale face. A little patch of blood at the corner of a faintly smirking mouth. As you drag the brush and paint in red, your character gains depth and meaning. You're telling a story for every wink and wrinkle, for every chipped fang and scrollwork tattoo. You've started painting. Now it's time to finish your masterwork.

This Empty Canvas

Tabula rasa. A clean, blank slate. It means a couple things, here. The first is what's already been mentioned: an empty canvas, waiting. The second is an old idea, bounced around in philosophy circles (Aristotle, St. Augustine, John Locke), that suggests humans are born "empty." They come into this world vacant of information, knowledge, wisdom, opinion. Any mental content is gained through experience, exploration and pure sensory input. Life, and the way one moves through it, slowly adds pieces and parts that build up into and eventually define one's character.

And it's character we're talking about. We're not going to debate the reality of the *tabula rasa* concept among real people — a nature versus nurture argument is interesting, but not useful. Hell, we're not even talking about humans, instead speaking of monsters *once* human. This is about your character for **Vampire: The Requiem**, and how the character sheet essentially represents your own blank slate, your own *tabula rasa*. Each dot represents the stroke of a pen or swipe of a brush. Every date in a timeline, every hitch and conflict in the character's history, every Merit and Skill Specialty and Discipline — it all adds up to the character's content, it all becomes the painting that fills a once-blank canvas.

This chapter exists to give a bit more depth to the character creation process. What you'll find in **Vampire: The Requiem**, pp. 90-153, is a cursory set of instructions. They do the job. A character will grow out of those directives. But maybe you're looking for something more. Some new ideas. Some — you'll have to excuse the term — *fresh blood*. This chapter aims to provide. So, get the brushes ready. Pour some new Vitae into the cup by your easel. It's time to paint a character.

POMP AND CIRCUMSTANCE

This all sounds kind of lofty, doesn't it? Lots of theory and technique. Lots of introspection and musing. Does it seem as though we're maybe trying to elevate the seemingly straightforward act of character creation above its station? Inflating it with greater importance than it perhaps has?

Yeah, probably. Just remember, you don't have to read this as if it's some kind of Holy Writ, a Sacred Dissertation on the Ancient and Estimable Act of Storytelling. Peek through it. Use what you want, discard the rest. Some of this stuff may not appeal to you, and that's fine. Other parts may pique your interest for exploring in a particular game. That's cool, too.

The greatest goal above all is for you and your group to have fun. That, in the end, is what we're aiming for: simply to give you more tools — toys, really — to help deepen that fun, particularly during the act of character creation.

Those First Splashes of Red

It's time to envision the character. You've got a empty canvas — or, excuse me, "character sheet" — in front of you, and it's time to start picturing the eventual shape of your vampire. His hungers, his enemies, his shackles. What desire still waits in the chambers of his dry and dusty heart? Is he a puppet, or a puppet master? Content to remain in the shadows, or does he still yearn to stand in the light — even if that light is a searing slash of morning sun?

In other words: it's time to conceptualize.

Morbid Appeal

Before you choose a concept, will you hear a suggestion? Pick something that engages you. You know your heart and mind best, and thus you're aware of what will please you most during play. While a kind of artfulness lives inside the act of Storytelling and game-playing, it's important not to take this process so seriously that you lose sight of the fun factor. If you're the type who likes playing a multifarious array of vampires, do so. A mad politico one game, a cowering abuse victim in another, a brutish corporate thug in the next — do it. Enjoy it. If you instead prefer hewing to one or two concepts, feeling uncomfortable with others, so be it. Take those concepts and swing for the fences.

That said, if you do limit yourself to one or two persistent concepts, remember that you can stretch within your own enjoyable sphere. A single character concept comes replete with nearly infinite variables. Always like to play a combat-oriented character? No problem, let's just rattle off some concepts right here, right now: shell-shocked war veteran now serving as the Prince's bodyguard, dumb bruiser who guards the door at Elysium, gang-tough gunman, lithe contortionist who likes to play with knives, reluctant Gangrel warrior, Sanctified Priest who says the wretched violence he does unto others is noble in the eyes of his Lord (but in his heart believes differently) etcetera. If you prefer something more specific such as a Strength-

based brawler, fine, more quick concepts: thuggish street fighter, muscle-headed slave to a Daeva Harpy, normally gentle but sometimes rage-filled Frankenstein, pipe-hitting record executive with shoulders as broad as a barn and so on, and so forth. Point is, you've got room to wiggle. So wiggle.

Keep in mind, too, that if you're in a game in which the Storyteller and the players have decided on a motif or overarching concept for the game (more on that later in this chapter), be kind enough not to try to create a character outside of those parameters. Even a concept as specific as "we're all going to play a cult of Circle members who worship Ereshkigal, the Sumerian bitch-goddess of the Underworld," you've once again got tons of room in which to wiggle. Wiggle away.

A Single Slash of Paint

Sometimes, a concept hits you right in the face. It will not be ignored. Other times, it's not too easy in the coming. You have to cultivate the idea. Tease an image out of the paint.

One way to do it is to first come up with a single word from which you'll build. This word is *likely* a noun: hacker, hermit, oracle, psychologist, predator, slave, sycophant. Whatever noun speaks most to you, pick it, write it down, examine it. Note, though, that it needn't be a noun. Adjectives, while vague, may be more your style: bitter, bored, catholic, desperate, hateful, restless, zealous.



Got a word? Add another one. If you've got a noun, maybe add an adjective, and if you have an adjective, then add on a noun. From here, a two-word concept grows: restless slave, desperate predator, bored oracle, bitter Catholic and forever on.

The two-word concept is enough to get you going. If you're jazzed about it, push forward. If you're not so sure, either try some more one- and two-word concept combos, or simply add more words to your original (i.e., "hateful slave who seeks liberation from his Nosferatu sire").



THE CUP

If you care to try it and the Storyteller is into it, take two cups. Have every player write a noun on a slip of paper and throw it in one cup, then do the same with an adjective and toss it in the other cup. Shake them up, then have everyone pick randomly — one pick from each cup. Voila, two-word concepts born from chaos. Feeling all the more brave, you can put together rather convoluted character concepts this way: one cup for covenant, another for Virtue and Vice, a third cup for a Discipline spread, etc.

This process can be great for one-shot **Vampire** stories, but where it really comes into its own is as a quick character-inspiring idea for Storytellers looking to populate the chronicle's city or conjure unpredictable combinations for new antagonists or Contacts.



An Indistinct Shape

The concept has provided you with a blurry outline, an indistinct shape to which you will provide focus. It's a good time now to start considering the elements of story that might fit with this character and the story. What covenant appeals to you as a player *and* seems appropriate? Is there a potentially interesting conflict by making your character part of a covenant to which he really shouldn't belong (but perhaps by dint of his sire's membership, he belongs regardless)? If you think you might pick two or three Disciplines for him in the end, think of five right now that seem apropos and interesting. Slowly, the blur will dim, the image sharpening.

Dots as Inkblots

The dots you put on the page are more than just statistical elements meant to skew random chance in your character's favor. They represent a kind of inkblot, a pattern of abstraction that *speaks* something about your character. This confluence of little dots shows you and the Storyteller the vagaries of existence unique to this

vampire and her Requiem. A pattern of high Strength coupled with a strong Empathy could speak to a number of things: a gentle giant, a bruiser with a wounded heart, a hulking Nosferatu who prefers emotion to brute strength when it comes to hurting others. What does it mean if a character has high Science, but low or no Academics? Perhaps that implies that she's self-taught, so intently focused on a single study that all others have fallen by the wayside (which can also infer something about this character: her unswerving concentration and bloody single-mindedness). Some inkblots are simple to read: a promulgation of dots across Presence, Manipulation, Persuasion, Subterfuge and Intimidation tells us that this Kindred is potentially a powerful con- niver. Other random spreads tell a harder-to-read, but potentially more interesting story: high Intelligence, low Mental Skills, strong combative Skills (Brawl in particular) and a few keen Social Traits (above-average Animal Ken and Empathy) perhaps show us a vampire with cunning, feral intellect. He's not book smart. He's not socially apt, for the most part, but he's a survivor. He can *read* people the way a wolf or a dog can. From those dots, a picture emerges.

Just say

Be prepared to justify your initial expenditures. It's easy, too easy, to find yourself with a couple of extra unspent dots floating around toward the end of character creation, and so you just pitch them into a Skill that seems useful or interesting. That's fine, it's not a world-ending problem. That said, you should generally be able to explain why your character possesses the dots that he has in both Skills and Attributes. If the character has four dots in anything, you *definitely* need to explain it, but the same level of justification is useful for even those stats that feature a single dot, as well.

For instance, why only one dot of Strength? Is she weak? Was she once strong, but suffered a debilitating accident in her mortal life that left her physical form ragged and wrecked? Perhaps the character is weak because she cares only to hone her mind to a razor's edge, actively *hoping* to appear physically weak so that others more easily underestimate her. Why four dots in Weaponry? If the answer is, "Because she's been practicing," well, okay, but you didn't really justify it with anything unique to your character. Remember, Skills and Attributes tell a tale, and this tale should be inimitable, totally exclusive to your character — hence, it should be bloody well interesting. Want to explain those Weaponry dots? Maybe she was booted to the streets at a young age by an abusive foster parent, and had to make do in the mean-as-fuck neighborhoods of

the city — living by defending herself with whatever brutal weapon lay handily nearby, be it a lead pipe, a twisty hunk of rebar or a stinking sock filled with lug nuts. That single stat suddenly opens up your character's story: images appear of her scrapping it out in bloody back-alley fights, maybe even ending up on some kind of underground slave-fighting circuit.

So, definitely try to justify any scores that seem out of the norm. If your basic concept is “ex-Mensa member,” then higher Intelligence and Academics aren't particularly strange, is it? Those stats need little justification other than reiteration of concept. But if the character features some unusual dots — and, for the sake of interest and depth, probably should — then you should go the distance to explain them. Why does this one-time Mensa member have dots in Intimidation? Did she purposefully try to humble and humiliate others with her cunning mind? What about those dots in Firearms? Did her uncle take her out hunting, teach her how to shoot that 12-gauge autoloader?

Feel free to go Attribute by Attribute, Skill by Skill, and jot down a minor one- to three- word “tag” explanation to help you flesh out that part of the character's story. This isn't necessary, but if you do it you're likely to find that your character becomes three-dimensional far more quickly than she might have otherwise.

Recipes

This process of putting dots on the page and examining their greater meaning works as a kind of alchemical magic, transmuting lead (the dull action of scribbling in dots) into gold (a fully imagined character with a compelling story). Or, perhaps it's like changing normal mundane blood into the puissant *claret* found clinging to a vampire's withered arteries?

Whatever the case, you can make use of what we're going to term “recipes” when concocting characters. Essentially, a recipe helps you marry concept to stats. Each recipe assumes a small but specific spread of dots intrinsic to that character model. The dots aren't exhaustive, and don't paint the entire picture, but instead provide a jumping-off point. The recipes presented below are composed of only three stats: one stat at four dots, one at three, one at two. In this simple and small formula, the hints of a character concept arise. Moreover, these recipes can be easily tweaked and serve more as guidelines than as anything concrete. The recipes are versatile, more seeds to spur thought than hard-and-fast delineations. Do stats other than these apply? Certainly. They *need* to, because these recipes cannot total the number of dots necessary to create a starting character.

Consider the following several recipes, then make up your own:

- **Elysium Raconteur:** Wits 4, Socialize 3, Brawl 2
- **False Oracle:** Subterfuge 4, Empathy 3, Expression 2
- **Gang Lieutenant:** Presence 4, Streetwise 3, Firearms 2
- **Haunter of Sewers:** Stealth 4, Investigation 3, Animal Ken 2
- **Mad Scholar:** Occult 4, Wits 3, Stealth 2
- **Paranoid Hacker:** Computer 4, Politics 3, Larceny 2
- **Political Firebrand:** Expression 4, Brawl 3, Politics 2
- **Prince's Fist:** Brawl 4, Streetwise 3, Investigation 2
- **Public Face of Covenant:** Socialize 4, Composure 3, Politics 2
- **Regarded Courier:** Athletics 4, Resolve 3, Empathy 2
- **Religious Zealot:** Manipulation 4, Persuasion 3, Academics 2
- **Tempting Harpy:** Presence 4, Persuasion 3, Socialize 2
- **Wheel Man:** Drive 4, Wits 3, Firearms 2

Note, too, that Specialties further enhance these recipes, allowing you to put your own fingerprints upon them.

Skill Specialties

Selecting Skill Specialties is a great way to further define your character as well as provide a statistical advantage through the adding of dice. Below are some elements worth considering when selecting your character's first Specialties.

Sharpening Broad Strokes

Specialties help define your character — yes, they grant a +1 bonus to dice pools, but they also help to hone your character down and give her an added layer of depth. Moreover, Specialties allow you the chance to add some spice and specificity to some of the more expansive Skills. The simplicity of the Storytelling System is the expansive nature of the Skills. They're all somewhat vague, and this is on purpose to keep it streamlined. Just because I have Academics, does that mean I'm as equally versed in British poetry as I am in the Code of Hammurabi? Technically, yes, as the dice provide the same statistical advantage. Specialties represent one way around this, by delimiting your Skill sets more clearly. If your Mekhet knows a little extra something about the Code of Hammurabi, fine, give him an Academics Specialty in Mesopotamia. That gives him added advantage in that area, and also further colors the character's interests and studies.

Again, all Skills are vague. Does Crafts let me cook well *and* fix a bike? Does Animal Ken allow me to soothe

a pissed-off dog *and* know how to scare off a shark? Well, yes, that's essentially true. Specialties such as "Animal Ken (Sharks)" or "Crafts (Motorcycle)" help further define your abilities. (And, if you continue to believe that this is unfair, you merely need to tell your Storyteller. When he asks your motorcycle mechanic character to roll Crafts when baking a cake, tell him your character doesn't know shit about shit when it comes to cooking, and ask for an appropriate dice penalty to reflect that. Remember that the game rules and story are just as reliant on you, the player, as they are the Storyteller.)

Vague vs. Specific

You can be too vague, or too specific, when determining potential Skill Specialties. Consider a Brawl Specialty in "Fighting." Well, that's a foregone conclusion, isn't it? Such an overly broad designation would allow you a +1 to *any* Brawl-related combat situation, which goes well beyond the point of having Skill Specialties in the first place. On the other hand, having a Specialty in, say, "Haymaker" or "Jab" is perhaps too specific. Either you'll see the +1 die come into play rarely, or you'll instead rely on that type of attack during *every* fight, which then ends up the same as having a too-broad Specialty because the die bonus is ever-present. Consider the Academics Skill: it's hard to get too vague ("Research" comes close, but some students do focus on the very act and art of researching, so it's a fair one), but you can easily get too specific. Specialties in "The Novels of James Joyce" or "The Tribes of Namibia" only end up being useful in games that clearly focus upon topics near to those.

Certainly, with Storyteller approval, you can be as vague or specific as you'd like. The recommendation, though, is to find some kind of balance between usefulness and fairness while still *describing* something about your character.

Optional Rule: Repeated Specialties

If your Storyteller allows it, you can take a single Specialty several times in a particular Skill. If your character is so incredibly well-versed in Ethnobotany, having traveled in the jungles during his mortal life to find and study the world's finest natural hallucinogens, so be it. Take Ethnobotany as a Science Specialty up to *three* times, with Storyteller approval. This grants you a +3 bonus to any Science rolls using that particular area of expertise.

Favored Attributes

Clan decides the pair of Attributes from which you get to pick a single favored Attribute — this favored Attribute then gains an added dot, which is a significant advantage. First question is, why does this happen?

Because it occurs, quite literally, at the moment of the Embrace — during that shift from a mortal life to an immortal Requiem — it is a supernatural gain. This does not represent an individual effort where, say, a Daeva practices her sweet moves in an effort to gain that bonus dot of Dexterity. This is something *in the blood*, something deep and part of that clan's heritage of Vitae.

Did this happen over time, a gradual honing of the blood similar to what one finds in smaller bloodlines? Or is it an atavism from a remote ancestor, perhaps even the clan's very founder? Few, if any, have even an inkling of what the right answer might be, but the reality is that each clan has developed its strain of Vitae in a unique fashion. The Blood has manifested particular predatory traits, adaptations that help the members of the clans not just be better vampires, but be better Daeva, or Mekhet or whatever clan to which those Kindred belong.

Need some help picking a Favored Attribute? Wondering what each could mean in a given character of a particular clan? Read on, player, read on.

Daeva

The Daeva's choice is between **Dexterity** and **Manipulation**. Both are Finesse Attributes. Makes sense; these vampires are called Succubi or Incubi for a reason. The way they seduce with both the tongue and the body is unparalleled. With a casual word, a Daeva can convince a human that he wants to be a slave to love. With a casual movement — lithe, writhing, serpentine — she can convince him that he wants to be *destroyed* by love.

Manipulation is fairly straightforward. As seductresses, Harpies, Masters of Elysium, it's important that a Daeva move like a snake in a conversation, twisting out of one's grip, using her ultimate flexibility to come out on top of a social situation (and slowly strangling the life and will out of participants by dint of her social finesse). Does it go deeper than that, though? Are the Daeva incapable of true connections of love, and so they extend themselves the only way their dead hearts know how, through the Manipulation Attribute? Ever see a person so heart-broken or jaded by love that she becomes the heart-breaker, the queen with a heart of ice? This is the Daeva. One could suggest that they manipulate to connect. To be someone who can convince a Daeva to push past that superficial periphery is a rare thing — and it gives one great power over that Succubus, indeed.

Dexterity is a little trickier. On the surface, it's all about sensual movement. A Daeva has the chance to seduce with the body instead of, or in addition to, the

word, and Dexterity is arguably the governing Attribute: the sway of a hip, an inviting walk, a demonstration of later sensual promise. But in that word, “sensual,” lies the other reason why Dexterity is a favored Attribute. Because Dexterity — moving fast, revealing agility — is about *feeling*. It’s about the rush of Vitae when Celerity is active, about basking in the adoration given when a deft spin on a stripper pole offers moves that no human could master. Think of the way a contortionist moves, or a dancer dances. It’s both about the power to provoke, but it’s also about the provocation of the Daeva’s own senses. For that moment, maybe she can feel just a little bit . . . alive.

Gangrel

The Gangrel get to choose between **Composure** and **Stamina**. Both are Resistance traits; easy enough. The Gangrel are survivors. They manage to survive harrowing conditions in the real wilderness and in the unseen wilderness of Kindred politics.

Stamina is straightforward enough. The Savages have long lived at the margins. Places where snowfall makes it hard to find Blood, or where the only other company consists of birds and beasts. When considering Stamina, think tough skin, gritted fangs and muscle that wraps around the bone like rough corded rope. The Gangrel are sturdy fuckers. Is your character physically robust? Then Stamina’s the choice for favored Attribute.

Composure presents a different avenue of opportunity. At its core, Composure is about maintaining a kind of poise in the face of danger and madness. While one doesn’t immediately think of “poise” when one thinks of the Gangrel, you maybe should. Think of a wolf. A wolf has poise. The gentle turn of a head, the fixed predatory stare, the measured step despite the howling wind and crash of thunder. Composure is also a damn fine survival trait when dealing with other vampires. It helps one resist many of the mind-twists that the Kindred are capable of performing. It even helps one navigate and maintain — yes, here’s that word again — *poise* in political situations that are ostensibly more dangerous than swimming in a circle of hungry sharks. Choosing Composure as a favored Attribute makes a Gangrel more useful in the wilderness of Kindred politics.

Mekhet

For the Mekhet, it’s either **Intelligence** or **Wits**. Mental traits, obviously, not from a single axis, but representing both Power and Finesse, respectively. Predominantly, that suggests they’re creatures of the mind, introspective and capable thinkers. That is, for

the most part, true. But it doesn’t mean that one should neglect the possibility of a Mekhet who acts as a social mover or a physical threat. It just indicates that all they do, they do with some measure of deep thought or quick thinking.

By choosing Intelligence, you suggest a Mekhet who is more introspective. A thinker, a scholar, a strategist. The Mekhet who plans his chess game — be it a real chess game, or the metaphorical one that represents the eternal *Danse Macabre* — to its final move is one who has Intelligence as the dominant Attribute. If he’s a brawler, he’s read up on all the pressure points and history of the martial style. If he’s a social shark, he’s potentially studied the art of conversation, coldly viewing it as a kind of combat.

The Wits-favored Mekhet is one who thinks more on his feet. Instead of a strategist poring over maps and books the night before a battle, he’s the general on the ground who interprets and adapts to the real-time war. Instead of seeing the chess match’s endgame, he plays it moment to moment, trusting in his mental instincts to persevere and ultimately dominate. As a fighter, he’s no theorist, and doesn’t rely on his body’s instincts — it’s all about the mind, the adjustment to style, a Zen “no-mind” way of crushing an opponent. As a social beast, the Mekhet is pointed like a rapier, sharp like a razor — he may not know how to seduce, but he knows how to make someone laugh or belittle her so completely that any conversational defense is obliterated.

Nosferatu

Your options as a Nosferatu are between **Composure** and **Strength**. One a Social Resistance Attribute, the other a Physical Power Trait. How do you compare the two? How to choose one over the other?

To choose Strength is to pick a Nosferatu who is proactive in his survival. He doesn’t just take the elements and roll with the punches, adapting in the way the Gangrel do (with their favored Stamina). No, this Nosferatu’s got to make the first move to show his prowess and power. Think about it. The Nosferatu are damned strange. Sometimes ugly, and even when they’re beautiful they’re somehow hideous — like a pretty flower with a bad smell or a prom queen who just died and has that pretty face turned into a rictus of *rigor mortis*. Because you’re so weird and horrific, you’ve got to make sure that the other vampires don’t want to stamp you out like you’re some kind of cockroach. You’ve got to move fast. Exert your dominance. Make yourself either useful, or just break everybody’s arms so he knows not to start shit with you.

Composure comes from a similar place, but represents a different tack. As creatures offering bald-faced monstrosity to the world, the Nosferatu get put upon quite a lot. They horrify others, and themselves face countless horrors and grotesqueries. They can be quite sophisticated, but even the most urbane Haunt has to remain composed when others blanch at his presence. He also has to keep secrets, maintaining the perfect poker face (sometimes difficult when others can't help but *stare* at your face like it's the true visage of medical anomaly). Composure keeps him socially hardy, able to withstand the slings and arrows of being Nosferatu.

Ventrue

Finally, the Ventrue come into the Requiem with either **Presence** or **Resolve**. The Lords are steely-eyed kings and cold-hearted queens, and these two Attributes help paint a picture of a clan whose members know what they want, and have the diligence and personality to achieve it. The question remains, which do you choose for *your* character?

A Ventrue with Presence favored is a vampire who relies more on his bearing, his kingly *charisma* to achieve his goals. The way he moves, the way he stares at someone when he speaks to her (or *at* her, as is more likely), the way his very demeanor suggests the royalty of his blood . . . *that* is your Presence-favored Ventrue. Think of a powerful playboy, a corporate king who's all smiles, a gang leader layered with strata of glittering bling. Presence for the Ventrue is about the appearance of power — others give it to them because it seems to belong with none other.

Resolve as favored Attribute shows us a different Lord. High Resolve shows us a vampire so vigilant, it's scary — her eyes never divert from the goal, be it the position of Prince or the demise of her enemies. Resolve speaks a little to the animal side of the Ventrue; think of the way a predatory cat will track its prey for miles, or how a dog will clamp onto the neck of its prey and *stay* there until the damn thing runs out of steam, blood or breath. Where the Gangrel have Composure, which allows them to be persistent survivors, the Ventrue's Resolve indicates something less passive, more vigorous. The Resolve-based Ventrue isn't content with survival. She needs more. Power. Domination. Wealth. High Resolve allows a kind of tunnel vision, an unyielding devotion that keeps her forever on target. What's interesting about this vampire is that, when she relies on her Resolve above her Presence, it's easier to fly under the radar. She's a snake in the grass instead of a shrieking falcon darting down out of the sun. By the time you realize the potency of this Ventrue, she's already taken everything you have and left your allies as blood-sucked carcasses.

BREAKING STEREOTYPES

A lot of what's said above about favored Attributes relies somewhat on stereotypes. Feel free to shatter those stereotypes with your character, though — remember, player characters are meant to be unique in this game world, moreso than the Storyteller characters. Despite what we indicate above, you can have a Ventrue whose only interest is survival, or a Gangrel who cares only about becoming Prince. It's fun to play into stereotypes and see what depth you can bring out of that, but it's just as much fun to subvert stereotype. Play what works best for you as a player, and for the game at large.

Powers of the Blood

Disciplines, the powers of the Vitae that vampires possess, are for many one of the best parts of character creation. Why is that? Is it merely because Disciplines represent the chance to do something that normal humans can never do? Let's make no bones about it: Disciplines are fun to choose, and fun to use in-game. To harness the ability to move swiftly, read minds, command both mice and men, turn into an eerie mist and float out over the moors — well, that's pretty damn awesome. But is that why choosing Disciplines is fun?

That's certainly part of it, but there may be something deeper, too. Consider that Disciplines are really the largest part of the creature template that screams “undead creature of the night!” They are the most telling characteristic of one's vampiric condition, an earmark of a long and bloody Requiem. Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is scary because of what he's willing to do, not because of his monstrous powers over man and animal — but damn, those certainly are the things we remember, aren't they? Old Vlad turning into a bat, that hypnotic stare, his predatory command of the ladies.

So, we've established that Disciplines are awesome because, first, they're fun to use, but they're also compelling because their choice can indicate other things, as well. Such as?

A's Vampiric Symbol

Mythology and pop culture have given us a number of vampiric “types” and templates from which to build. The high-born Vlad the Impaler, the hopping vampires of Chinese lore, the blood-soaked nomads of *Near Dark* — the vampire is a many-layered symbol. The vampiric concept symbolizes a fear of darkness and night, a fear of death, a loss of control, the potency of sexual allure,



the fear of disease — and so on. In **Vampire: The Requiem**, all of these types are valid.

Disciplines can help give further context to whatever symbolic presence your vampire roughly represents. Not that you need to choose a symbol, and in fact a symbolic presence may grow over the course of a story instead of be conceived at the time of character creation. You may, however, see what you think your character most keenly represents about the vampiric Requiem, and aim to have your Disciplines “tell” that story. A sexual predator could easily have a Discipline spread that involves Majesty or Dominate. Obfuscate could be useful, too (for all that skulking and deception), as could Celerity (the ability to come up fast upon one’s prey is not to be dismissed). Other Disciplines don’t easily speak to that vampiric archetype. Vigor? Well, it’s not completely bizarre, but the strength granted by the Blood isn’t necessarily in line with a suave, sensual Dracula-type, is it? How suave is the monster that must hold down his prey? And Animalism: controlling a pack of feral dogs is a great trick, but it fails to be exactly seductive.

What about a vampire who represents the “monster-of-the-night” symbol, like the original Nosferatu or those weird bifurcated-jaw beasts from *Blade 2*? Nightmare,

sure, that works. Protean is monstrous enough. Obfuscate allows the creature to hide, but many “true monsters” don’t *want* to hide. They put all their grotesqueness out on the line. Resilience makes some sense because, hey, people are always trying to kill these grim, gross creatures, and it helps to be tough like a cockroach.

What about the vampire-punks of such films as *The Lost Boys* or *Near Dark*? They’re tough fuckers, all attitude and presence. So? Maybe a little Majesty, but definitely a lot of the physical Disciplines — Resilience to take bullets and keep on moving, Vigor to throw their prey across the room, Celerity to move with wicked alacrity, cackling all the while.

Consider, too, that you can distill it down even further: vampire as physical, social or mental presence. The Physical Disciplines (as noted, Celerity, Resilience, Vigor) speak to a very active creature of the night, corporeally unstoppable, representing a tangible and obvious threat. Protean, too, is very physical, but more *mystically* so (the transmutation of the body into other forms is more overt than simply moving very fast or being able to hurl a television across the room).

The mind-oriented vampire definitely involves Auspex for all those razor-sharp senses and mind, and

probably some Obfuscate to stay hidden while he listens in on your conversations from a fire escape far above. (Think, too, of a vampiric scholar or a Damned mystic and how Auspex might play into this “occult” side of the vampiric template.)

The social vampire relies upon Dominate and Majesty, and to a lesser extent Nightmare (the “dark” side of social subversion) and Animalism (exerting social power over the beasts of the wild).

What about Disciplines as symbols of Virtue and Vice? Majesty and Pride go hand in hand. Faith speaks to the covenant Disciplines: Coils of the Dragon, Crúac, Theban Sorcery. Fortitude and Resilience are both about toughness and survival. Wrath and Nightmare aren’t so obviously complementary, but think of how ugly Wrath can be, how the vengeful wears his need for bloody satisfaction upon his face, and so his very Vitae grows to reflect that ugliness by developing Nightmare. A Kindred with Lust as prevailing Vice will surely do well by possessing Majesty or Dominate, yes? Alternately, picture a Slothful Kindred, hiding still in the dark, listening to everything around him as if he were nothing more than a shadow on cobblestone: Auspex and Obfuscate.



VENTRUE AND ANIMALISM

It’s been asked before, and remains worthy of answer still — why do the Lords possess Animalism as an in-clan Discipline? Wouldn’t other supernatural abilities make sense, for example, the social glory provided by Majesty or the keen-mindedness of Auspex? The Ventrue, remember, are kings and queens. They see themselves as rulers over all they survey (which is true in some cases, less so in others, but their perception of it remains regardless of the realities). Animalism is another symbol of their dominion. Just as in the Bible, how God gives man the purported dominion over nature? The Ventrue think they have that covered, too. They are the kings of living men, of dead men and of the world of beasts. That is why they possess Animalism, in-clan.



As a Reflection of Character

What is your character like? What *was* he like, as a mortal? Think of what comprises your character’s base traits, backstory, and nature. What Disciplines tell a story? Try to develop a mix of Disciplines that speaks to these elements of your character. If your character was, in life, the survivor of an abusive family, but developed abusive traits himself and has begun to relish the fear he can cause in others, consider a Discipline spread that in-

volves Dominate, Nightmare or Resilience. Maybe your character was that “weird girl” in school, always estranged from the normal cliques but keenly intelligent and aware of things — to her pain and detriment. Her Embrace was an awful affair, and it just makes her mistrust others all the more. From this, we might see Obfuscate (she hides a lot), Auspex (she doesn’t engage in social endeavors, but listens to them from afar) or even Animalism (she rebuffs human or vampire contact in favor of communing with the beasts of the local park). Consider the broad-chested ex-linebacker who got all the ladies with his square jaw, flexed biceps and the exertion of sexual pressure. Now he’s a vampire brute given over to monstrous urges while still trying to appear human. Vigor? Sure, he was strong. Majesty? Absolutely, as it is the reflection of that sexual pressure he brought to bear against all his cheerleader conquests. What else? Consider something interesting such as Protean, thus reflecting the monstrous side coming out of that “golden-boy” veneer, or Nightmare for the same reason.

Your created Kindred is a product of his history in life and his time spent in death. The Disciplines can contribute toward this image, comprising more splashes of bloody paint meant to define further details about this grim Portrait of the Undead as a Young Vampire.

For Fun

Yes, we already mentioned it, but it bears repeating: Disciplines are fun. They just are. Don’t choose Disciplines *only* to reflect character or symbol. At least make sure that you’re going to have fun with them, too. They’re not superpowers, and not meant to be overused, but you also don’t want to be *bored* by them, either. If Auspex simply doesn’t compel you and you can’t really grasp its function for your character, don’t choose it even if it makes some kind of obtuse thematic sense. Choose it because you like it. Choose it because it’ll fun to play in-game.

Deepening the Blood

Blood Potency begins at a single dot for most Kindred, and why shouldn’t it? It represents the burgeoning blood, the first transubstantiation of ordinary blood into damned Vitae. And yet, during character creation, one has the option of increasing Blood Potency by putting unused Merit points toward its purchase. This is the only way to increase it as a neonate, as the experience points gained from dropping Humanity down two dots (10 experience points) isn’t enough to purchase new dots of Blood Potency (going from one to two dots demands 16 total experience points).

What does it mean to *begin play* with an increased Blood Potency? How do you explain this deepening of the Blood, this enrichment of undead Vitae from the first night of one's Requiem?

Explaining Potent Blood

Below are a number of ways to explain an increased Blood Potency at character creation. (Assuming, of course, that your Storyteller hasn't deemed the chronicle's characters to be older and more powerful than neonates, in which case your character's Blood Potency is easily explained.) This list isn't exhaustive, and you're encouraged to come up with your own ideas if the ones below don't quite suit your character.

- **Powerful Sire.** Elder sire? Ancilla sire with an incredible array of Disciplines? Diablerist master? While the potency of a sire's Blood doesn't automatically translate to the childe, if the sire is somehow unique or powerful, then, perhaps, sometimes it does.

- **Diablerie.** It's possible your character, neonate as he is, has performed diablerie on another without understanding the truth of the act. Consider that it could've happened during the first nights of his Requiem, when he is potentially out of control, and also unaware of the social mores surrounding the act — or the resounding spiritual damage that comes with Amaranth.

- **Almost Fifty Years.** Your character may be older than the rest of the troupe's, and still be considered a neonate. The game needn't begin the night of your vampire's Embrace. What if your vampire has been avoiding the Danse Macabre for the last half-century? He's still a neonate, socially. But the Vitae gains puissance, nevertheless.

- **Odd Bloodline.** If your vampire's sire is from a strange bloodline, perhaps one of the results is an automatically increased Blood Potency. Alternately, consider that the sire appears totally "in-clan" in all things *except* that one, inferring that he's not quite a bloodline, but there still remains something slightly shifted there (which is, of course, an increased Blood Potency). Maybe the sire's on the cusp of changing his blood permanently, birthing a new bloodline from within the cauldron of his dead flesh — and the potent blood of his new childe is one sign he seeks.

- **Wretched Beast.** If the Beast seems more out of control for your neonate, or your character's Humanity has dropped a few notches, maybe there's a corresponding increase in Blood Potency.

- **Boon.** Could another vampire "bless" your character in some way with higher Blood Potency? Well, it's your story, so why not? Maybe it came from an ancient

artifact, some weird blood magic ritual (Theban Sorcery, Crúac, Coils, something else?), or something as yet unseen (A literal "blessing" drawn up and given by strange summoned spirits? Or a Crone? Or some Haunt who's been living under the city for 300 years?). If you go this route, your character should owe the vampire a significant favor. Consider that a great plot point.

- **Concentrated Improvement.** A vampire can, with time, change his Vitae. This is best illustrated by the formation of new bloodlines, but is that the only way? It needn't be. Consider that your character has simply put all his effort into deepening his Blood, resulting in a more potent Vitae. This shouldn't be simple, and should go beyond meditation. Ritualize it. Did he need to feed on various types of people, all part of some ceremonial checklist? Did he flagellate himself in his haven every night before morning sunrise? Did he spend all his time away from vampire society, or did he enter the thick of it, putting himself in so much danger and competition that the Blood was *forced* to evolve?

- **Good Soil.** In some souls, the Beast finds good traction. In some bodies, the flower of Damnation sets its roots deep. In some hearts, the first flow of Vitae flows twice as fast, rushing like a bullet rather than trickling like a leak. Is it sin that hastens the thickening of the Blood and the gathering of puissance? Does a mind already pocked with wickedness soak up the Curse? Is it psychological or is it mystical?

Choosing Merits

Merits represent another color, another type of paint, for your palette. Just as with other Traits, you should strive to achieve two things with chosen Merits. First, they should reflect your character concept, and moreover, *add* to the concept (as in the way an extra swipe of paint on the canvas creates a shadow over a figure's brow or reveals broad and powerful shoulders). Second, Merits should be fun and useful. Merits have purpose; they aren't just for flavor. When tying both your character's deeper meaning with the cool mechanical advantages Merits provide, you've selected your dots appropriately.

Shaping Character

This one is pretty easy. When selecting a Merit, ask yourself, does it reflect your character? Is it believable? If your vampire, when alive, grew up in the Midwest and didn't have much worldly experience, then why does he have three dots in Language (French)? Should he really know kung-fu? A prudent Mekhet with a preponderance of Mental Traits might not be likely to have a hell of a lot of Physical Merits, is she? Maybe

she has Direction Sense or Fleet of Foot to represent how easily she flees from combative situations — but Fighting Style: Boxing? Iron Stomach? Strong Back? Do these make sense for her?

They might. The intersection of two unlikely Traits can reveal (or inspire) a lot about a character. How do we even know if two Traits *don't* make sense together without the context of a character concept to tell us? So you *can* take Merits that seem unexpected or out of place. Just be prepared to explain them. Better than that — be eager to explain them. Be excited to reveal what two Traits, together, reveal about your character that neither would reveal alone.

If the aforementioned introspective Mekhet has the Quick Draw Merit, you'd better be ready to have a reason. Did she grow up on a farm in the 1950s, where her daddy (not having a son and all) taught her how to pull a pistol and shoot a penny off a hay bale? Excellent. But if you're just taking it to have it protect your character in the future . . . you might want to reconsider.

If the story of how your character learns the Quick Draw Merit is going to be interesting, why not make it a part of her future in play? Merits, especially, can reveal the growth and change of a character over time. That's half the point of a chronicle: watching your character change over time. Your character should always change more *after* character creation than before, even accounting for the Embrace and the stagnation of undeath.

Merits are cheap to buy with experience points but harder to explain without stories (and Storyteller approval). This is by design. Learning Quick Draw during play may be as simple as spending a few scenes describing the character finding a trainer or practicing the tricks. Finding new Allies may just require the Storyteller to sign off on it in the space between stories. Developing a relationship with a new Mentor may demand a character to seek one out during play, and not just fill in dots on the character sheet. Acquiring these Merits can be cheap with experience points, but they should be tales in their own right — tales worth telling.

Stories are about change, backstory is about establishing what's normal. Normal people don't have the Quick Draw Merit.

Having Fun

The other side of the coin is, try not to take Merits that do nothing but serve the backstory. If they fail to serve the current story, just make a note of it on the character sheet, but don't spend the points. Taking Holistic Awareness in a game where you'll never get the chance to use it . . . well, what's the point? This is supposed to be fun.

Yes, your mortal character may well have had the Strong Lungs Merit, but now that he's one of the undead? Spend those points on something else since, you know, vampires don't breathe. You shouldn't have to waste Merit dots just to make a point if they're not relevant to the game going forward.

Your Merits aren't meant to just be thrown into a dark cellar, never to see the light. Pick Merits that represent your active vampire and his nightly Requiem. Pick Merits that you as a *player* find intriguing and want to see use in play immediately.

Vampiric Merits

Okay, so what about the Merits unique to **Vampire: The Requiem**? While there's something to be said about nomadic Kindred, it's very likely that you possess at least a single dot in the Haven Merit. Haven, being somewhat multi-tiered (Location, Security, Size), allows you to customize your vampire's daily retreat, lending it as much luxury or squalor as you find to be characteristic.

Herd is pretty straightforward, too — it serves the mechanical side of aiding your character's feeding rolls, but it's also a Merit that represents *other* characters in the story. A herd isn't just a nameless, faceless group from which you grab a bite now and again. They're people. A group of stoners in the apartment above you, a passel of giggly club-chicks who find your character "exotic," even a mini-cult of psychologically damaged Gnostics who believe your vampire to be a representative of "higher energies." Give them an identity. Give them purpose in this game.

Finally, Status. Status takes your character away from the swaddling cloth of being a fresh-faced neonate, and gives him some history and context within Kindred society. It's recommended that your character not start with *too* many points of Status for two reasons: the first is that, can you explain it? Can you make sense of why your relatively untested vampire is one of the Prince's most trusted advisors? The second reason is that you should leave some goals for your character. Giving five dots in Status means he'll never go beyond that. Now, maybe if you perceive your arc as having him *lose* that Status, okay, that's at least interesting — but why spend the dots if you're only predicting their loss? You might as well just throw them away. Status tells a story about your up-and-comer neonate. He's a Hound or a Harpy, somewhat special among the other neophytes. It means something. Who did he fuck over to get his position? What grim favors were required to achieve that role?

Merits as Story

It's been hinted at, but let's explicitly state it: each Merit represents a story. A small story, to be sure, but a tale nevertheless.

If your Daeva has a Herd, who are they? How did she get them? Every Merit comes with an unspoken question, so speak those questions aloud and answer them. Who taught her Boxing? Tell a story of when maybe she used it to win — or when she was beaten so bloody that she realized that she had to be better, meaner, faster. Has she always had Eidetic Memory? Did it develop at a young age, or could it have possibly come into being the night she was Embraced as a Mekhet?

Fame? Well, there *has* to be a story in there somewhere. Fame isn't a throwaway Merit, it comes with history — even if it was made overnight, that one night tells a powerful story. Maybe she inadvertently stopped a small town crime in progress (oops, she was hungry), and got in good with the locals (and the fact she refuses to be photographed for it only deepens the mystery). Maybe she's some famous singer-songwriter whose haunting lyricism (and occasional use of Majesty) has earned her quite the reputation and recognition. Point is, Merits mean something about your character, so tell the other players and Storyteller exactly what that “something” is.

Merits as World-Building

This is just an addendum to the above point, but Merits help deepen the game world as well as your own character. In describing your haven or herd, tell the troupe about the neighborhood in which it sits. Paint the picture, and it'll give the Storyteller some help as well as make for a more vivid location when it's described. Having a Mentor, be it your sire or some covenant bigwig, drops another character into the game — a character who means something to your character and is connected to the larger picture. With Merits, you add to the world.

The Sanctity of Merits

One final point about Merits, and something you may want to show to your Storyteller. This isn't a hard-and-fast rule, exactly, but more of a suggestion: if you take Merit dots in something, that something should be considered somewhat sacred in the game. It's a part of your character's identity now.

For example, say you put a handful of dots in Haven Merits. The Storyteller should not lightly take that sanctum away from your character, not even for the purposes of good story. You bought it. It's yours. In the

same way, the Storyteller shouldn't suddenly declare, “Well, you fall down some steps, and you lose a dot of Strength,” you shouldn't automatically find that your haven has burned up one night.

Now, here are some qualifications to that. If you make choices for your character that bring about the destruction of his haven, then its loss is a fair consequence of your character's actions. That's a part of game play. But even there, the Merit dots shouldn't necessarily be entirely *lost* — the Storyteller should compensate. Either you keep the Merit and, eventually, find another haven of similar value, or you reclaim fresh, new Merit dots (or experience points).

It goes the other way, too. Just because your character sleeps somewhere during the day doesn't mean you need to put dots in the Haven Merit. By doing that, you indicate that this “haven” is expendable. It's just as much a contract — by choosing to *not* spend the points when shacking up there, you've signaled the Storyteller that this location's not really a part of your character.

Just because your character finds a bag of money or gets a new job doesn't mean it's automatically a new dot in Resources. It *can* be, should you choose to purchase the dots. But if you don't? Expect that the money can be taken away, or that the job can lead to dismay, poverty or outright horror. Merit dots represent a protective fence — choose *not* to spend them on the things you acquire before or during the game, and they may end up as sacrifices on the altar of good stories.

Withering Humanity

Do you start your vampire with lowered Humanity? (Well, first, ask your Storyteller if she allows the drop. If her preference is to start at the baseline of 7, perhaps that reflects the tenor or mood of the game she's hoping to achieve.) What does it mean to begin play with a Humanity of 6, or even 5?

The Inhuman Human

It could indicate that, as a mortal, your character lived the kind of life where he already began the slide toward iniquity. Whether he's a thief, a cheat, a killer, his moral compass started to lose its direction long before the Embrace. By starting play this way, however, does this play into any eventual goals? Do you hope to see the vampire reclaim some of that moral direction, an interesting irony given the fact that it was the *human* that lost his way, but the undead creature that was able to find it? Or, do you accept that the slow slide began as a human, and will continue to gain momentum as one of the Damned?

Hardening Embrace

The Embrace can be awful, a wretched, mind-rending experience. Imagine waking up, feeling half-dead, half-alive, and wracked with a hunger that feels like ants chewing apart every square inch of your arteries? The things a newly Embraced vampire will do to slake that sudden thirst can be a terrible thing. Hunting in a well-lit park at night, killing a mother taking her restive infant out for the night — then maybe finishing off the feast with a frenzied quaff of baby's blood, to boot? Consider the possibility that Humanity was lost in that first night as one of the Damned.

Embracing the Embrace

It's likely that the game doesn't begin the first night of your character's existence as a vampire — even as a neonate, he's probably had time to adjust somewhat to the notion of an eternity drinking blood. This isn't always . . . healthy for the mind. Some, finding themselves dead but still walking, allow their consciences to start to wither on the vine. They embrace (so to speak) the idea of what they are: a blood-hungry predator, a demon, a nocturnal monster. In coming to terms with that, a vampire starts to crawl away from his Humanity,

and it grows more and more distant as the years go on. He accepts — and fulfills — his nature, performing acts of some awfulness as part of his Requiem.

This Hardening Heart

Remember that lost Humanity doesn't just indicate that the character performed questionable or even abominable acts. It indicates that he hardened his heart against them, and found himself accepting those misdeeds as being somehow “necessary” or otherwise part of his nature. The vampire who goes out during his Embrace and commits acts in the name of his hunger does *not* lose Humanity if he returns from his red fugue crushed by grief and regret. If you feel this is more in line with your character, don't take the lost Humanity — keep it at starting 7, and see if, during play, the character's regret slowly changes or is lost bit by bit.

The War of Virtue and Vice

Virtue and Vice, the war of one's pervading sin against one's struggling salvation, is more than just a way for your **Vampire: The Requiem** character to regain Willpower. Each is a lens — one light, one dark — through which you can view your character in new ways, bringing a new depth to the portrayal.



What They Are

Virtue and Vice are not everything. Certainly you're free to play them as intensely or loosely as you wish, but it's important to remember that they are *intimations* of your character's best and worst urges, representing subtle and often unconscious inclinations. Your Daeva doesn't know she's a creature of Lust. Your Nosferatu fails to recognize how deeply he clings to his Faith. Yes, they may have some idea of this, but they aren't explicitly aware of this Virtue/Vice mechanic.

Point being, use Virtue and Vice, but don't feel that you must rely upon it. Now, if you wish to hone your character's base instincts to the two pure elements that guide him, eschewing all other Virtues and Vices, go for it. Just understand that you don't *have* to. They aren't shackles binding your character to one kind of behavior. They influence a character from within, subverting the vampire from the darkness of his soul (or the space where his soul once was), through animal habits and — this is important — through dramaturgy alone.

A personal anecdote: We had one player who seemed hell-bent on enacting his Virtue and Vice at every turn. He did this not because he required Willpower (he was all full-up, actually), but because he misunderstood the importance of Virtue and Vice. This player assumed that these two elements overrode all else about his character, and thus he dove headlong into his character's Virtue of Charity and Vice of Gluttony as if they were fast going out of style. They aren't the only factors that guide your character. Your Kindred is capable of exhibiting the whole range of sins and values — just because his Vice is Pride doesn't mean he doesn't demonstrate Lust or the other Vices. In fact, consider a character who *appears* on the surface to be a lusty cock-of-the-walk, a monstrous seducer who, on the surface, appears to have Lust as his dominate Vice. So, how would his Vice be Pride? Easy. Because it is his narcissism (i.e., his desire for himself) that drives him to dominate others sexually, not his desire for *them*. Hence, Pride over Lust.

A Basic Conflict

One view of Virtue and Vice is that they operate in a kind of opposition to one another. The character is caught between them, almost as if they act upon him externally (an addict certainly feels this external pull; so does the religious zealot). The character leans one way, then maybe leans the next. Humanity becomes a kind of barometer for which way the character is leaning: higher Humanity implies a greater leaning upon Virtue, while a weakened Humanity indicates a character who

gives more into his Vice. It is a push and pull, ideally balanced, but rarely balanced for long.

In Tandem

Another view is that the two work in tandem — kind of a yin and yang thing, with one never really superseding the other. The character is always in balance, expressing both. Neither one is tied to Humanity in this view, not really. Humanity is given over to a larger moral consciousness, a social gauge measured by the herd, not by the individual. But the Virtue and Vice, working together, affect only the individual. Reliance on one therefore doesn't bump Humanity, because they don't reflect a supreme moral compass.

Man vs. Beast

In **Vampire: The Requiem**, you can take a slightly more specific, Kindred-centric view. Consider this: Virtue represents the human side, and Vice represents a vampire's side — or, more specifically, *the Beast*. This doesn't mean that the Vice wasn't present during the character's life as a human, it only means that the Beast is the embodiment — an *active* participant, if you will — of that particular Vice. It also doesn't mean that the Virtue possessed is sure to wither on the vine because a character is no longer human. While certainly the Beast can push a character down that slippery moral slope, it's not a guarantee that his mortal bearings are entirely lost (and, if they are lost, remember that they can be regained).

Another way to look at this struggle is to view it in light of a vampire's frenzy. Regardless of how virtuous and ethical the Damned aim to be, the Beast acts in opposition to that. The Vice rises to the surface. Urges manifest. The Beast whispers. It tempers the blood with heat. The mouth hungers for the taste. No matter how upstanding a citizen a vampire hopes to be, the Beast rattles its cage door (though some quietly creep in, a shadow under the door). Virtue and Vice can therefore represent that struggle of Man versus Beast, of one's mortal moral compass versus the callous whims of the dead, Damned side.

Complementary Picks

When choosing a Virtue and Vice, one option is to choose a pair that complement one another. While not every Virtue has a direct complement (and even then, it's not something so clearly defined and is left more up to your own predilections and how you wish to play these two elements), some can be said to correspond with others. Justice and Wrath certainly play well together, with the latter being essentially

the dark and passionate side of the former (for some, those two terms could easily be synonymous with one another). While Sloth and Prudence are not quite so synonymous, one who is *over-prudent* may appear — or even be — slothful (too cautious to take any action at all, for instance). Fortitude and Gluttony may not be the same thing, but they can go hand-in-hand — Gluttony assumes that one takes what's necessary to survive (usually food, but any over-consumption of elements is gluttonous) and then goes well beyond what's necessary and into what's *desired*.

What, though, does it actually mean when you choose a Virtue and Vice that complement each other? It indicates that, as noted above, the two work in tandem. The character has found a kind of balance — or, at least, each feeds off the other to elevate the character . . . or cast him further into Damnation.

Oppositional Choices

Alternately, some Virtues and Vices exist in dogged opposition to one another. Charity and Greed are opposite ends of the spectrum. Prudence and Lust are fairly contradictory, as well. Temperance implies moderation, whereas Gluttony suggests a total *lack* of moderation. How is it possible that a character suffers from both? Can one character exist between two wildly divergent urges?

Absolutely, and it can make for a rather compelling struggle. First, if we go with the theory that a Vice represents the Beast's side of the vampire, and the Virtue represents the human half, then it's easy to see how a character who relies so profoundly on his moderation would, when growing hungry, suddenly devolve into a fiend who slakes his thirst by guzzling whatever blood is within arm's reach — and then some.

Also, remember that characters are meant to struggle between their Virtues and Vices. When the choice is clearly one where the character can make the seemingly moral choice or the debauched choice in a given situation, it says something about the character when she finally chooses sin or salvation. If she can give her wayward child some attention by giving him a gift (Charity) or steal the few coins and baubles that the poor bastard actually has (Greed), that's a significant moment. By selecting two opposite elements for your character, you set her up to experience these moments, thus opening her up to greater drama and pathos. To reiterate, we strive for conflict in these stories. An opposing Virtue and Vice help to provide that conflict.

ACCOUNTING OF SIN AND SALVATION

Your Storyteller's possibly overworked. She's juggling chainsaws with one hand, and with her other hand she's spinning plates. Point is, she's busy, so you can't fault her for not remembering every little detail or giving you the credit you so rightfully deserve.

In the case for regaining Willpower from pursuing Virtue or Vice, she may miss that you possibly fulfilled the requirement. So, you need to let her know — actually, it's best to let her know *beforehand*, even asking her, "Hey, if I were to survive this onslaught, praying the whole time to my wayward God, does that earn me a point of Willpower from my reliance upon Faith?" And she'll tell you whether she agrees with that assessment, or not. If you recognize the act after the fact and think, "Oh, hey, maybe that could earn me a Willpower point," don't trust that the Storyteller can look away from her chainsaws and plates to notice. Remind her, gently, that maybe you could get a Willpower point from that?

Bloody Little Trees

It seems odd to reference Bob Ross, the Afro-bearing PBS painter with a penchant for contributing "happy little trees" to his work, but if you've ever seen his show and his art, then you'll relate to this. See, it didn't matter if Bob was going to paint a lake or a barn or some majestic mountain range. Most of the time during the program, you had to believe that this time, Bob would *finally* paint a real piece of shit. For the first 20 minutes of the 30-minute show, his work would look like some oil-smeared aberration, a sketchy façade of meaningless shapes and colors. Like a plane plummeting into a nosedive, it seemed impossible that Bob Ross would be able to pull up on time, that by the close of the show he'd fail to save this painting from the crash of its inevitable artistic demise.

And yet, somehow, he did it. Every damned time that hazy amalgam of impossible images became the splendor of nature, the homespun glory of an old farm, the serenity of a mountain lake.

This is character creation in a nutshell. You've got an empty character sheet and a lot of spare part ideas rattling around in your head. The other players are in the same boat, and the Storyteller's just waiting to see what pattern emerges from the chaos — or, more specifically, if you can pull this plane out of the nosedive and give him a story. Can you?

Your Poor Storyteller

It's possible your Storyteller doesn't know this (and you probably shouldn't tell him), but he's really not that important. Think about it: if you remove him from a game of five players, could you still cobble together a group story? Probably. You might have some trouble arbitrating and balancing the tale, but over time you'd figure it out. Now, instead, remove the *players* from the equation and leave the Storyteller and what do you have? A poor guy with a handful of dice sitting alone in a room.

As a player, you're ultimately more important than the Storyteller. Without you and your cohorts, no game exists. Really, though, it's more than that. As a player, you contribute a character to the story, and that character has a history and a present (and even a future, but we'll get to that later) filled with story-building elements. You're not just important because of your presence, you're important because the story is about *your* characters. You're all Storytellers.

Active Contributions

Your Storyteller might be the brightest fella in the world, but let's assume for a minute that he's completely daft. Couldn't tie his shoelaces with three hands and an instruction manual. This puts the onus upon you during character creation.

Smart Storyteller or not, you must be active in contributing elements to the story. It isn't enough to simply pencil in dots on a page and throw it on the pile, assuming that your Storyteller will make it all fit nice and neatly together. *Maybe* he will. But that's not his job alone — it's yours, too.

What can you contribute? How can you create a network of new ideas — story hooks, really — that branch off your initial character?

World-Building

The game takes place somewhere, a setting integral to the story. Whether a vast metropolitan sprawl, a paranoid suburb or a brutal stretch of backwoods, the setting is key to some of the game's flavor. The flavor is different with different settings — a political game in the decaying city is surely different from a political game out in the rural countryside (the first might be more about the struggle of street gang dominance, while the latter might involve backwoods clan rivalries told with a kind of *Deliverance*-meets-*Macbeth* feel). Presumably, the setting is something that has been decided prior to character creation, and if it hasn't, it probably should be (creating a vampire in Akron is going to be a whole

lot different from creating one out of Bangkok regardless of the universal themes available).

You have the chance to contribute intimately to the setting. The Storyteller has resources at her disposal, to be sure: city guides, maps pulled from the Internet and her own creations put to the page. But it's imperfect and incomplete. It has to be, unless your Storyteller is somehow omniscient (or at least a preternatural multi-tasker). Take some of the burden off the Storyteller. Contribute to the setting. You can tie these to Merit points or other dots on your page, if you want to, but don't feel constrained by this — just because something doesn't provide you with a mechanical advantage doesn't mean it can't be good for the overall story and setting.

How? Define items in the setting that tie to your character.

Example: *Marty creates a character, a neophyte Circle of the Crone member. She's a professor of women's studies at a local Philadelphia college. She's got some interesting Mental Skill Specialties because of this. Is that the sum of the character? Is that all he can contribute to her story and the overall setting? Hardly. Instead, he describes to the Storyteller a place his character used to go on campus — a boiler room, all rusted metal and hissing pipes — where she used to catch a smoke now and again.*

He also paints a picture of a local bar where she would find herself night in and night out, having a drink of wine when she was human . . . and a sip of blood now that she's a vampire. It's an Irish joint, stereotypically so, with Guinness on tap, shamrocks on the walls and drunk blue-collar boys always up for a sodden scuffle. Finally, he talks about a particularly old and gnarly oak tree deep in Fairmount Park. Sometimes, she sees faces in this old tree, and she likes to go to the tree, meditate a little, even drizzle some of her Vitae on its surfacing roots for a reason she can't quite contemplate.

What happened here? Well, Marty gave the setting some extra color by providing some new locations. The campus, the pub and the tree in the park — all places that now might easily figure into the story, and at the bare minimum will help to add a little spice to the setting's already extant flavor. This serves a practical function, as well, because what place are the characters more likely to frequent and make a ready part of the story? Some generic, low-lit nightclub as defined by the Storyteller, or the Irish pub created by one of the players? The pub is tailor-made to fit into this tale. The world is a little richer because of its inclusion, and there's a bias toward using it.

Moreover, these places are now potential story hooks. What happens when a drunken bar fracas breaks out and threatens to include the characters? What about when Marty's character learns that some other vampire

has been coming to her secret boiler room escape, and worse, has been dragging victims there (and in the process, leaving behind all kinds of Masquerade-breaking evidence)? What about that tree? Is it more than it appears? Marty certainly seemed to describe it so. Is it a place holy to a subset of cultists within the Circle? Or do the local Sanctified call it “the Rood” and grow suspicious of why Marty’s neonate Crone member is sniffing around their holy tree?

You can describe anything and make it a part of the game’s world: a back avenue used for brutal street races, a tract of desert featuring a corpse-stuffed van half-covered by sand, an odd series of graffiti tags left behind on bank buildings (some featuring the symbology of the local Ordo Dracul). By creating a place and tying it to your character, you do more than just enhance your character — you enhance the entire story, and your character’s place in it.

Conflict Diamonds

A very wise English professor once said in regard to writing: in life, we avoid conflict, but in fiction, we strive for it. It’s the same with Storytelling games.

The game and the story are not very interesting without conflict. Imagine a football game in which one team simply lies down on the field, or worse, walks off it. What’s the point? Conflict — the crash of team against team, of strategy against strategy — is what makes football worth watching and playing. Again, so, too, with roleplaying.

Imagine a game in which the characters are able to accomplish any goal by simply wishing it or performing the most superficial tasks, and you have a wish fulfillment story that will fast become dreadfully dull.

Once more, do not rely on the Storyteller to create conflict. Yes, she’ll do that if need be, because that’s her role to play. But if you provide her with the seeds of conflict intrinsic to your character, you’re going to have a significantly better time than if she imposed external conflicts. (An example from my own roleplaying: We used to have a player who preferred to create characters with little conflict in his backstory, having most of it resolved by the time the games actually began. Thus, when external conflict ended up being imposed upon him, he felt prejudiced against — meanwhile, others had the conflicts they established at the time of character creation take place in play, which felt more organic and far less as if they were suffering the trials of Job demanded by an impolite God.)

These conflicts (story hooks, by another name) are yours to connect to the larger tale. You can work with what the Storyteller has already provided, or if she’s willing to give you some freedom (and she should be,

seeing as how the players are, as noted, Very Important People), you can conjure conflict and story elements out of thin air that then become a part of the game. Is your character unknowingly despised by a local Ordo Dracul Kogaion? Does your character engage in nightly territorial scuffles with an Invictus street gang? Is she secretly addicted to the Vitae of a mad unaligned elder?

PATIENCE, PATIENCE

One caution: Don’t assume that the story is all about you. Just because you contribute cool elements, conflicts, themes or whatever, it doesn’t mean that your character therefore receives the lion’s share of the attention. You’re part of the whole, so just be patient. The Storyteller should incorporate all elements according to the weave and weft of the story, which means some parts get left behind for a later game session while other elements take a front seat to the action.

Playing with Theme

Theme is another element — part of your painter’s palette — that you can contribute to the overall story. Mood, too. These ephemeral motifs, as recurring elements tied to your character, can subtly alter and enrich the game experience.

Time to repeat that old saw: don’t rely on the Storyteller. Yes, the Storyteller may have her own ideas of what kinds of predominant themes and moods rule the story, and if she tells you what they are, feel free to play with them accordingly. If she says the theme is “innocence lost” and the mood is “defilement,” you can certainly create a character using those ephemeral ideas as guidelines: a Priest of the Lancea Sanctum who has become bound to a Crone elder, perhaps, or a neonate “family man” who must come to terms with the deviant hungers he feels (even those regarding his human wife, *oh*, how he hungers not for her love but for her blood).

That said, you’ve got your own brain, and here you’ve got a shiny new character sheet — so bring some of your own motifs to the table. The Storyteller will incorporate them. You’ll be happier for it. If you want your character’s theme to be “the corruptions of power” and the relevant mood to be “insatiability,” so be it. You can apply it to your character as is (if appropriate), or you can *start* with this theme and mood and build a character from this fertile bed (power-hungry slave broker, overzealous Prince’s Herald with a penchant for “overeating” or even a fat-bellied old-money banker’s son who sees his Requiem as an eternity of constant opportunity).

Do these motifs need to jibe with the ones the Storyteller has in mind, or the ones that the other players have decided upon for their own characters? Not at all. While certainly your motifs shouldn't go against other motifs for the sake of doing so (that can create a story that doesn't seem to be the sum of its parts, thus ensuring a jarring experience from session to session), but they needn't be complementary, either. What it means is that the motifs of individual characters will sometimes rise to the surface for a session or a story, and then fall into the background later in the chronicle. Motifs may also play off one another, giving the story layers. Think of these motifs as different ingredients in a soup or stew: sometimes, the broth is dominant, other times the meat or vegetables. Every bite can be different. All ingredients work together.

Power in the Palette

With this single character, you represent vast dramaturgical power. You influence the story, pushing and pulling on all aspects — and, with the other players (and Storyteller) doing the same, that's where the awesomeness of roleplaying comes into frame. By giving the Storyteller new options to include — by sending him the signals of how your version of the story appears — you deepen the experience for everybody.

Look at it this way: you're contributing your own bloody little trees to the emerging picture. With everybody doing the same, form grows from the formless, order comes slouching out of the chaos to be born.

Someone once asked painter Bob Ross why everything in his world was so happy, and he replied, "That's why I paint. It's because I can create the kind of world that I want." Sure, the World of Darkness isn't exactly a happy one, and is generally soaked in gallons of blood rather than dyed with soothing paints of oil and acrylic, but the idea here is the same: with your character, you can help to create the kind of world *you* want, too.

Part of the Whole

Too many games see vampires who enter into play unconnected. It's not a bad thing, not necessarily; one finds a powerful level of conflict and stress in having a number of Kindred shuffled together for whatever purpose. The Damned are predators, and their Beasts claw and batter the cages upon seeing one another. To say that the Kindred have trust issues is understatement on par with suggesting that a bullet to the head "might be harmful to one's health." So, throwing a number of vampire characters — created independently of one another — into a coterie or group situation is certainly a way to begin the game with

a sudden surge of conflict. Of course, it's possible that such a game will self-destruct. If the Carthian firebrand simply cannot abide the purposefully fence-sitting unaligned vampire in his coterie, the two might clash one too many times in the throes of frenzy.

Sometimes, a story is best served by the troupe creating characters as a group. This generally involves a level of patience in which the players must restrict themselves from jumping whole hog into the character creation process (it's easy to hear your Storyteller say, "I'm running a **Vampire: The Requiem** game," and suddenly get inspiration for your Best Character Ever regardless of what the rest of the group wants to do). Before the characters are fleshed out, some level of group cohesion must first be hammered into shape. It's the nature of this cohesion, and how best to mold it, that this section aims to examine.

The Ties That Bind

Before creating characters, the troupe's players should sit down with the Storyteller and share with her their ideas for what binds them together. It's important to first conceive of the concept before thinking of individual character ideas (though, certainly individual ideas are worth mentioning if they help to focus and guide others who may be having some trouble deciding). Below you'll find a number of elements that can be used to bind characters together. These elements aren't exclusive of one another, and can be used in tandem if so desired.

Established Relationships

Aiming for already-established relationships in your characters is likely the easiest way to bring everybody together. It doesn't assume any kind of high concept other than, "these characters know each other." Moreover, the characters shouldn't loathe one another or be at such polar opposite ends of the political or social spectrum that it's impossible to find common ground. The characters should already possess a level of common ground, which is how they know one another. Did they "come up together" as neonates 10 years back, and even though they've gone their separate ways, they still find time to share a pint of blood or a quiet moment at Elysium? Are they all from the same covenant, or at least come from friendly covenants?

The most obvious one is, of course, "we're already a coterie." By creating a coterie, the group is suggesting an established alliance, and can go on to create Kindred characters who clearly share some level of unity. By helping determine just who the coterie members are and what their basic story suggests, you can then move on to create characters.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

With group creation, there needs to be a transparency to the process. You can't all go off in your little corners and emerge an hour later with characters — what if your buddy creates some deranged feral Gangrel who just won't get along with the rest of the politically minded, cosmopolitan Kindred the troupe has made?

The troupe should have an open dialogue, feeling each other out for basic connections and stumbling blocks: "Would your character have a problem if mine ends up as the My Girl Friday to the Invictus's slave auctioneer?" Certainly some level of compromise exists, and if you hit a snag in this process, the Storyteller is there to help you and the other players negotiate troubled waters.

All that being said, maybe we shouldn't suggest the process be totally transparent. The Damned are monsters with secrets. They have clandestine affairs. They possess hidden items and hide ill-forgotten sins. Their hands drip with literal and metaphorical blood, and so the group creation process should not be so "open book" that all the dark secrets are on the table. A coterie in **Vampire: The Requiem** functions best when there exists a faint-but-perceptible level of tension between characters. These are creatures of the night with uncontrollable hungers, and none should ever be trusted fully.

If the group creation process removes all that tension, it steals some of the thunder from the story. The aim is to ensure that the group works together *most of the time* and has reason to stay together. But secrets — dark secrets — should always be hidden somewhere.

Group Concept

Coming up with a group concept is a little different from suggesting pre-established relationships. Certainly preconceived connections can be a part of it, but what you're doing here is creating a unifying banner under which you'll create all characters. Much as each individual Kindred character has a concept ("Lusty satyr" or "Stoic leg-breaker"), you'll first ascribe an overarching concept to the entire group.

The concept can be anything: Ordo Dracul guardians, Heralds to the Primogen, childer of the Primogen, lackeys to the Sheriff, burgeoning cult in the Circle of the Crone, unaligned punk band, coterie that secretly belongs to VII, and so on and so forth. Whatever the concept the troupe agrees upon is what guides the character creation from that point forward. Obviously, if you're creating a small up-and-coming cult in the Circle, it would be foolish to try to create a Sanctified Priest. Now, an *ex*-Priest with a grudge against his former covenant-mates? That can be a great idea

because not only does it put the character in line with the agreed-upon concept, but it still leaves room for tension and mistrust ("Fuck, you still harbor sympathies for those God-head pricks, don't you?").

Under the single concept, you now have room to play. Some neophyte Chorus member bullied into belonging? Sure. What about some crazy chick who thinks she's the Oracle of Jersey City, or a narcissist who'd gladly sell out his coterie to gain favor with the Hierophant or a husky ex-prison guard who doesn't much care about the Crone but is just plain happy to have a place to call his own? All these can work. The overarching concept isn't meant to limit creation but simply define it in a way that allows the group to work together — and it also sends a signal to the Storyteller about what kind of game the troupe wants to see.

Story Hook

Binding the characters with a story hook doesn't necessitate them knowing one another or having a unifying concept, it simply demands that a single story idea be the thing that these vampires have in common. What's nice about this is it allows the group to create vampires who might not normally work together in any capacity — a good story can certainly come out of what happens when a sycophant to the Prince, a Sanctified agitator and a Carthian moral crusader are forced to work together.

The story hook can be anything: common enemy, mutual goal, a driving mystery. Is the Seneschal hell-bent to bring his wrath against these characters for some reason (be it justified or false)? Is someone going around the city and killing off ghouls — including those that belonged to the characters? Does the Prince and his oppressive Primogen deserve to have their reign overturned in a gore-smeared coup? These questions, asked as part of plot hooks, bring the characters together. Moreover, you're helping the Storyteller — instead of having to create some new storyline out of nothing, you've already told her the basic story, which saves her considerable effort *and* serves to make the story more personal to players.

A caution, though: The hooks should be deep enough to carry a story or chronicle. If the central mystery is answered too fast, or the common enemy dispatched too quickly, the dramatic tension that pushes the story will dissipate.

Motif

Using motif — theme, mood — as the crux of the group creation is somewhat trickier because it's a subtle thing. Instead of saying, "Our characters work together because they're all pursuing the Coils as part of the Ordo Dracul," you're instead suggesting something more ethereal and intangible. The group puts forth a theme, a mood or both,

and then creates characters who in some way speak to that motif. If the theme is “love among the undead,” one person might create a Daeva so incapable of confronting lost loves that she uses and abuses new lovers like horses she hopes to break, while another might create a Nosferatu of the Circle who secretly “loves” one of the Sanctified Priests. If the mood chosen is “paranoia,” then a whole bevy of characters might be born from that motif: conspiracy nuts, spies, assassins, schizophrenics.

Does it guarantee that the characters will all work well together? No. Which is why this can be a little tricky, and requires concerted effort on the part of the players to make it work, ensuring that five wholly incompatible Kindred don’t arise out of the process. For this reason, it’s probably best that this one works in conjunction with some of the other “ties that bind” mentioned in this section. But, when it *does* work, you’re giving yourself over to the sensory, thematic side of **Vampire: The Requiem**, which is both broad and deep. If you allow yourselves to connect to that deeper river (running red), you’ll find that the game can transcend mere politicking and hunting — the characters suddenly become the archetypes of dead passions, blood-thirst, predatory instincts and sensory madness.



PICK A SIDE, ANY SIDE

Here’s an idea: Combine the “story hooks” idea with the notion of connecting motifs, and you’ve just given the characters two ways to connect — one somewhat superficial, one deeper and more visceral.

It should probably look similar to those “versus conflicts” listed in the Storytelling chapter of **Vampire: The Requiem**. In fact, feel free to use them right out of the book. It ends up looking similar to “Freedom versus Oppression,” or “Sanity versus Passion” or even “Beast versus Man.” On one hand, this speaks handily to theme, clarifying the recurring elements that will go through the game. It also creates a vague but potentially simple storyline, too — the Storyteller knows where to go with the story, because it’s laid out right there in the declaration of conflict.



Strategy

One final bit about group creation: you can create characters strategically. Consider, if you will, that this remains a game. While it’s not purely about defeating enemies, collecting mystic artifacts and amassing powerful Disciplines, that stuff is part of the fun.

One way to ensure that a group works well together is therefore to aim to have the characters’ game stats

work together. This is done in a pretty straightforward manner. The players endeavor to keep their own stats unique and to plan not to “double-up” too much on Skills, Merits, Disciplines and other game Traits. If three of the five players all have Allies (Drug Dealers) 4, Auspex 3 and Academics 4, you have a high level of specialty in one area, and a dearth of strength in other areas. By spreading out the stats, you not only maximize the group’s effectiveness, but you get to see a wide array of the game’s “fun toys” in play.

Another thing, too, is to consider how best to maximize the group’s potential — if the group is overly social and political, but all the members are only really qualified to be interrogators (high Manipulation and Intimidation), then what’s the point? Balancing out the stat spread (one character good with reading emotions and lies, one who works best as a kind of shill salesman, another who is more of a social “thinker” than a “doer”) helps conceptualize a group that works literally as a team, highlighting strengths and accommodating weaknesses. This also leads to increased conflict and tension — what happens when the one guy with potent levels of Dominate starts to think he can manipulate his friends? What happens when the “thinker” starts over-thinking, imagining paranoid scenarios about the potential betrayals of his coterie mates? Strategizing a group through stats is playing the game more than it is conceiving the story — but that’s not to say it doesn’t help the story elements lock into place, if done right.

Advanced Techniques

Did you think your work was done? It certainly can be. If you’re happy with the character you’ve created at this stage of the game, then stop reading. Close the book. If you feel you could give the character a little more shading, a deeper perspective, more realism or abstraction, then keep reading.

What follows is a rumination of the base components of *character* — not moral character, but the very fundamentals of characters in fiction. In this case, *your* characters in the fictional World of Darkness. Do you need this stuff to create a good — nay, *great* — character? Hardly. But, upon reading it, you may find that it adds an edge to your creation, gives you just one more angle from which to view your vampire.

Driven

A fact of fiction is that characters have motivation. Without motivation, they’re lifeless . . . and, while vampires are lifeless, dramaturgically they should be alive with grotesque passions, animal fears and desperate needs.





Need

Everybody needs something. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs gives you the basic idea, a pyramid in which one's broader needs wait at the bottom base, and as the pyramid ascends to its peak, the needs become finer, more acute. From base to tip, the needs are: Physiological, Safety, Love/Belonging, Esteem, Self-Actualization.

Thing is, the Kindred are *broken*. They aren't human. They don't ascribe neatly to this pyramid of needs, not as cleanly as mortal characters generally do. The Physiological, well, yes. They need that, and that need is what drives a vampire above all else. It's not really about sleep or sex or procreation. It's all about food. *Blood*. Safety, the next step up, indicates what a vampire needs once he's fed: shelter from the day. Safety in all ways is important, of course — protection from enemies, addiction, the guarding of key assets and rank — but above all else is that vampires need to be sheltered away from the searing rays of the sun.

Fine, but . . . how does this help you create a character? So far, it doesn't give you the motivation to put dots on a page, but it should create a causal relationship in your mind between what the dots and stats represent at their core: a vampire's drive to fulfill his most basic needs. He possesses Stealth because it helps him hunt. He possesses Resources because it helps him keep his haven safe with some high-tech security.

When we move above these needs, we enter into some twisted territory. Humans need Love and Belonging, and, in a way, so do vampires. It's just that, vampires are dead inside. They're broken. Corrupt. Twisted. They can give and receive love, but it's never exactly healthy. It's always "love" as viewed through a circus mirror (spattered with blood). And the need to belong, well, that can drive a vampire to some twisted lengths. Some Kindred will offer themselves up as thralls, or shackle themselves to the eternal servitude of one cruel covenant just to fulfill this sense of "belonging." So, how does this shape the vampire's stats? Consider what it means to need intimacy, friendship, membership, but not be able to gain those things in the old, human way. Does the vampire pursue Empathy, but end up possessing a somewhat twisted Skill Specialty in it (such as Reading Lies or Sense Weakness)? Does her need to belong translate to dots in Fame, Status, Allies? Does she use Intimidation and Brawl to act out against all those who dare not give her their trust and love (which is everybody, since she's unknowingly callous to everyone she encounters)?

Go higher up in the pyramid, and you start seeing the greater subversion of needs as they relate to vampires.

Vampires need esteem and confidence, but that's never going to be a healthy pursuit. Kindred, for all their dead pride and supernatural bluster, are surprisingly unconfident creatures. They worry about their place of power, grow paranoid about enemies, feel weak at Elysium as if all eyes are scrutinizing them (and, because it's Elysium, they probably are). Even a longstanding Prince, appearing kingly and coldhearted, secretly feels weak, meaningless, outmoded, as if he's persistently under siege by enemies both hidden and seen. Once again, how does this translate to stats? The Kindred, largely incapable of truly fulfilling the need of confidence, build walls and fill holes — they gather Disciplines that help them appear strong, they possess Skills that suitably give them the appearance of the beautifully plumed peacock or the vicious, broad-chested stag (when really, many feel like a suckling maggot in the shadow of a descending boot).

At the tip of the pyramid lies Self-Actualization, which is when a character grows comfortable enough with himself to embrace his creativity, his power, his spontaneity. The cruel irony of the Kindred is that they're closest to fulfilling this need when they are young. As neonates, they're the most dynamic, most creative — but time is unkind. As the heart hardens and the blood thickens, a vampire moves away from this need. As Humanity dribbles away, a vampire becomes more staid and uncomfortable in his own skin and mind, relying on the secret creativity of the young more and more. While humans tend to move upward in the pyramid, fulfilling needs as they grow older, the Kindred fall downward until they're inevitably concerned only about one thing: Blood. As far as dots on the page go, it doesn't mean much other than giving you an idea of at what point in the pyramid you're creating your vampire. As a neonate, your character is closer to the top of Maslow's Hierarchy than he'll perhaps ever be — so, feel free to give your character Traits that suit a the dynamism of the young, not the stagnation of the eldest. (But, more on "dynamic versus static" in a few paragraphs.)

Remember, too, that it's not just about the points on the character sheet. How has the vampire's needs affected his story? In unwittingly seeking love in these dark nights, has he made himself ultimately vulnerably to a beautiful Harpy — she who will inevitably play him like a violin before eventually discarding him? To what lengths has he gone to pursue a haven? Would he have killed the occupants of a basement apartment in a frenzy as the sun rose in the sky? Would he have destroyed another neonate to do so? A vampire isn't always directly aware of his need (the Kindred know they need blood and shelter, but ask them if they need love or self-esteem and they'll laugh before pulling the veins out of your neck with a quick pinch), but those needs are present nevertheless.

Want

Here's a basic staple of fiction: a story is ostensibly about a character who wants something, and about how things stand in the way of getting what he wants. At its core, that's what a story is: the conflict of a character pursuing his wants and either overcoming obstacles or being defeated by them.

Therefore, your character wants something. Many things, probably, but maybe one thing above all else. A character's want, unlike his need, is something likely known to him, and is something generally more specific. Your vampire *needs* to belong to something, but his *want* is to become the Hierophant of the Crone.

The first step is obviously to select some goals possessed by your character. Note that these aren't *your* goals for the character; these are the objectives possessed by the vampire himself. The character may see himself as Prince one day, but your eventual goal is to have him one night be a penniless pauper supping blood from a dirty gutter. In selecting the character's own wants, you can indicate a potential spread of points. If he wants to be one of the city's enforcers, he'll start to develop stats to push him toward that goal (Physical Traits, most likely, though his tack may be more mental and social, that's up to how you perceive the character's methods). Don't put all your dots in these Traits though — realize that a new character hasn't yet achieved his goals, and similarly hasn't yet achieved the pinnacle of his abilities. Creating purposeful deficits gives you room to grow both as fictional character and as a collection of stats. You're not going to create a character on the cusp of Golconda. You're going to create a vampire who's just taken his first steps, so his stats and backstory should represent that.

In defining goals, it's also important to work with your Storyteller to help determine just what stands in the way of your goals. If no obstacles stand in his path, then the story is without conflict and becomes a point-less march toward the collection of objectives like fruit plucked easily from a tree. Work with the Storyteller to tailor the barriers that prevent your character from handily fulfilling his wants. He wants to be the leader of his little Crone cult? Fine. Certainly the current leader doesn't care to be deposed and won't step down without a fight. Maybe he loathes the character. Maybe *another* member of the cult secretly works against the character, hissing Iago-like promises and suggestions in his ear. If your vampire wants to make peace with his mortal family, okay, so what will attempt to prevent him from that? Do other Kindred stand in the way of this clearly human endeavor, frowning upon its cloying novelty? Does the

family make it difficult, offering little more than revulsion at the prospect of even *seeing* the character again?

You're orchestrating fiction out of character creation. You need to find both promise and conflict in your character's wants. Vampires are creatures of desire. Build this in from the beginning. It doesn't mean that everything you suggest or seek will come to pass in-game, but in working with the Storyteller you'll find that a more intimate and gratifying story grows out of this character than if you simply created him in a vacuum with few motivations.

Fear

Fears drive a character as much as, if not more than, wants. Fears dog the Kindred. They are creatures of anxiety, and it gnaws at them. A character pursues his wants, but he doesn't pursue his fears. They pursue him. They push him off the track to his goals. They prevent him from fulfilling his needs. They shape his behavior, a negative influence countering the positive formed from his wants.

List a handful — three to five — of fears that haunt your character. Fear of being destroyed by his enemies? The fear of ridicule by Harpies? The fear of addiction and slavery? Think about how these things shape your character's story and the dots on the page. Let's take that middle one as an example, "fear of ridicule." A character who fears ridicule may overcompensate by putting a preponderance of dots into stats such as Intimidation, Politics or Socialize, even if his true goal has nothing to do with the achievement of these qualities. Alternately, maybe his fears drive him entirely from social situations, and so you see a dearth of Social Skills or Merits, and instead see the Traits of a character who spends a lot of time cloistered away in his haven: Academics, Occult, Stealth and so forth. A character who fears slavery may instead become a slave master, even if that's not how he perceives himself. When he obsessively practices his Dominate Discipline and possesses a passel of ill-treated Retainers — even though his goal was to become a scholar among the Ordo Dracul — you can see how fears shape the development of a character from the very beginning.

Dynamic Characters

Vampires are dead. Dead of heart, of love, of soul. Many of them — especially the older they get — become staid, dragged down by the ennui of a never-ending Requiem, forced into predictable patterns changed only by the madness of a crumbling mind.

Your characters are not these vampires.

They can't be. Those vampires are interesting, but only as obstacles, as elements of the game that your characters play off. Your characters are dynamic, changing, unique.

Yes, they're still vampires and are given over to the same kind of ennui, but your character doesn't *stay* beholden to such unchanging, unyielding eternity. He does something about it. He orchestrates a coup against the Prince, forgoes all his worldly possessions in some strange shot at Golconda or helps his coterie hunt down the mysterious assassins of VII that plague the city but nobody seems able — or willing — to do anything about. Make sure to build this into your character. They're dynamic, which is why, incidentally, characters gain experience points and grow their stats at a rate far higher than Storyteller characters do. Because player characters are the active elements in an unchanging circle of the languid undead. Because they are the ones who break the jaws of Ouroboros, forcing him to relinquish his bite on his own tail — thus breaking the chains of eternity. And that leads us into the idea of a character's arc.

The Character Arc

We've talked long and hard about your character's potential past, and how his prior life and Requiem have culminated in the story so far as well as the dots on the page. What about his future? We've glimpsed it by viewing the objectives, but you can go deeper than that, roughly trying to imagine the shape of this character's destiny. This isn't how the character perceives his own future — it's how you, his player, perceive it.

It's important to note that this isn't so much a firm description of exact events as it is a look forward to try to foretell the form of the future if not the exact details. Note, too, that a character arc is different from a story or plot arc. The story arc is the series of events as imagined by the Storyteller that take happen to the city and its characters over a period of time. The character arc is less defined, less about details of plot and more about the internal shifts to a character's fears and motivations. Moreover, a character arc can take place over several stories — in fact, it almost *needs* to, as a character's arc goes from the day he's born to the day he dies (and, in the case of the Kindred, to the day of his Final Death).

Look at it this way: you're trying to predict a possible future for the character. His ups, downs, successes, failures. New fears, old enemies, whatever. You're trying to see the road ahead — not the specifics, no dates, no names — with an eye toward foretelling how it'll all come out in the end. Will you be right? Maybe. Your inclination toward that future may allow the character to move in that direction, fulfilling your assumptions. You might also be wrong — the events of a given story may shift and change your own goals for the character, and that's perfectly okay. Be willing to budge. But having a somewhat hazy "game plan" for your character's

future history can be very rewarding just to see how his Requiem matches up with your expectations . . . or is shattered in the tumult of the story's details.

Beginning

This part is easy. You've created a character. You've already got your beginning, you merely have to imagine it within the context of a larger picture, a longer journey. Try to sum up his "current" existence, his position in the story. Look to current pop culture for examples: Luke Skywalker in *Star Wars* is a restless kid on a nowhere desert planet who wants something bigger than what he *seems* destined to have. Reverend Hess in Shyamalan's *Signs* is a man so scarred by the death of his wife that he's been left faithless. The titular character of Logan from *Logan's Run* decides to go undercover as a Runner to track down those who have rejected their government-mandated Last Day executions.

What is your character's beginning? Not the beginning of his life or the first night of his Requiem (unless that's when the game begins) but the beginning of his story. Is he a powerless fool just trying to scratch out a meager living and a taste of blood, keeping his head low? Is she the favored childe of the city's pre-eminent Harpy, preened over like a porcelain doll? Is he a librarian jostled out of his eremite's existence and thrown into the feeding pit called the Danse Macabre?

Evolution

Characters evolve. It's like evolution in nature — animals and plants evolve, or they slowly or swiftly die off. Characters must evolve, too, not because of a literal death (though that's always a possibility), but because of a figurative "death." This metaphorical death represents your interest in the character. If the character stays the same throughout, then he becomes dull. If you no longer find him intriguing, what's the point? Changes both subtle and drastic keep you interested in him because it paints a more interesting picture.

Try to predict how your character might change over the course of a story. You might be totally wrong, and that's fine — but it's nice to give a little shape to what you believe *could* be the course of his character arc. If you're right, you'll feel empowered by how you set this Kindred into motion. If you're wrong, then you'll be surprised and captivated by the change and will be able to re-imagine his evolution from a different point in his story.

Consider the evolution of the fictional characters noted above. Luke Skywalker leaves his desert planet and gets caught up in the adventure he sought, but is soon embroiled in a galactic battle — a battle to which he is intimately tied because of his father, Darth Vader. Rever-

end Hess from *Signs* finds his faith tested as a much *smaller* cosmic battle is played out on his small Bucks County farm. Logan gains slow sympathy for the Runners, eventually deciding he wants to *help* them, not turn them in.

Imagine how the vampire characters noted above could evolve, too. The powerless fool gains a taste of power, and it moves swiftly to corrupt him. The Harpy's favored childe soon sees the shallowness of her Requiem and breaks out of it, joining one of the more religious covenants to help her fulfill a deeper purpose. The once-eremite librarian is forced to become savvy within the perilous realm of Kindred politics, and he slowly grows into a more-than-capable manipulator. All of these evolutions represent stages of a journey, predictions of a possible future. Again, these predictions might be wrong. But it's useful to *conceive* of a potential arc to give the character more meaning.

Note that a lot of character arcs tend to take the character from one position, then evolve him into something wholly different. A greedy man becomes charitable, or vice versa. A kind family man grows into a cold predator. A lusty Succubus is burned by her own desires and seeks to kill her fiery urges by joining a Sanctified convent. It needn't be the case, though — a character can change simply by fulfilling his own promise. The powerless fool's goal is to gain power, and he does so. The power changes him, and he must grow in his own abilities to navigate this corrupt realm (as well as his own tainted heart), but he doesn't change *away*. He's simply taken the small start and made it into something big. There's no shift — just a steady arc upward.

Both approaches are valid, though some might suggest that the "shift" change is more rewarding because it represents a more interesting story. But in playing the character, whatever suits you and keeps your attention is the direction to take.

End

Okay, so what about the character's end? This doesn't necessarily mean the character's actual Final Death, though that is an end worth conceiving if you care to take this vampire to such an ultimate conclusion. The end you're predicting is the end to his *story*, or at least to the end of where you want to play him.

We know how Luke Skywalker ends — he battles with his own anger while battling with his own father, and is able to turn Darth Vader to good while still helping save the galaxy from oppression. Reverend Hess regains his faith by saving his family and helping them fight off the weird alien presence that's been leaving crop circles in his corn — and, he comes to terms with his wife's death, as well. Logan helps others get to the space colony of Sanctuary, a total shift from where he began in his character arc.

The vampires, well, what about the once-powerless fool? Perhaps in his zeal and greed he bites off more than he can chew — or bites the hands that have been feeding him — and ends up staked to a roof for the sun . . . or he becomes Prince. The Harpy's childe turns against her sire and destroys her, becoming quite popular in her covenant. The ex-librarian perhaps fulfills his destiny as something far different from where he began, and becomes Prince. Or, alternately, he is able to integrate his old life and his Requiem, and he becomes a high-ranking member of the Ordo Dracul, thus allowing him to continue his studies while still remaining a viable political figure.

You can be as vague or as specific as you'd like. Saying, "I think my character perishes in the end," or "I think he becomes a monster only to achieve Golconda" is ambiguous, but still give you a picture of one of your character's futures. Alternately, claiming that he'll potentially "destroy Father Liam of the Lancea Sanctum and take his place at the head of the city's Church while building a tense alliance with the local Circle cult" is just as viable a prediction. It may come to pass. It may not. But at least you know what you'd like to see happen, and that gives context to your character's night-to-night experiences.

Building in Questions

Your character's journey is designed to provoke questions, and have them answered. These questions are both dramatic and thematic, unspoken "What Ifs" that deepen the meaning and mystery of your game. All stories are in some fashion about discovery, and your character's arc should contribute to that discovery.

When considering all the above points — how to begin, how to evolve, how maybe to end — you might be aided by thinking of some questions that you may wish to see answered. These questions needn't ever be spoken in game, and you may not even need to vocalize them to your Storyteller, especially if you create the character with these questions as part of her very DNA. Such a question can be specific to the story that awaits: "What would happen if a female were able to take control of the city's Invictus 'boys' club?" or "To what lengths will my sire go to keep me on a short chain?" Some questions can be larger, about humanity or the Requiem: "How long does it take for a vampire to go truly mad, and can this madness help him?" or "Can God be truly found in the blood-caked chambers of a vampire's heart?" or even, "Is it possible to love as one of the Damned?"

Your character's arc should reflect the questions you want to ask. If you would like to see if love is possible in one's dark Requiem, then it seems foolish to create a cold-hearted executive with no chance to evolve to a point where that question can be answered. Instead

you want to have a character who is that question in some way: a forlorn waif, a brute who secretly longs to be needed, a base and self-hating wretch who begs to crawl out from the shadow and become something better.

Before the Blood Dries . . .

You've done the character. You've put all the pieces together, the dots on the page, you've made sure that your Kindred belongs in this story and that he's an active part of the tale. Now what?

Well, here are a few more ideas, some that lie a little — or a long way — off the beaten track when it comes to creating characters, meaning it's not stuff that's necessarily mentioned in either the **World of Darkness Rulebook** or **Vampire: The Requiem**.

The standard rules apply: use or discard at your leisure. Here then, are some final touches of red.

Timelines

Vampires are creatures of age. While their bodies don't age, their *minds* do — so much so, in fact, that as the blood thickens and deepens over the decades, the mind frays at the edges like a wind-worn tapestry. One could suggest that vampires are not creatures of change, and in some ways, that's true. In other ways, they're all *about* change — the gaining of Disciplines, the shifting and convolution of memories, the climb to power, the slow erosion of sanity. History means something to a vampire, even if she can't remember it as accurately as she'd prefer (her remembrances may in fact be far more interesting than the reality, but that's neither here nor there). Point is, in creating a vampire young or old, history matters. So maybe it's time to create a timeline.

Consult with the Storyteller on what kind of timeline to create. You're the one who'll use it most, so ultimately it can be as curt or convoluted as you care to have it — whatever works best to improve your own grip on the character. That said, the Storyteller will use the timeline, too. He'll weave it into the various plots and sub-stories, and have other Kindred remember the pertinent dates (or misremember them).

So, check with him to see just how in-depth he'd like it. Storytelling isn't exactly a full-time job (though one can certainly dream!), and he may not have time to read your 30-page novella of dates and events. Encapsulate the finer points, if necessary.

Consider picking five or 10 "main" events, and describe them briefly. ("1890, Embraced during the coal mine collapse. 1922, left for ash on the roof of the 1st National Bank Building by the Carthian, Black Marlin. 1945, sired first childe, Gwendolyn Akers," etc.) Even

if you're a neonate, fresh from your first taste of Blood, you certainly have a history in your human life — pick the tent pole items, write them down. It'll help both you and your Storyteller. Trust me.

Equipment

You purchased some points in the Resource Merit, now it's time to figure out what that means translated over into usable items. This is something that needs to be run by the Storyteller, of course. Some Storytellers are going to play loose with what you can have (you ask him sometime in-game, "Hey, I figure I probably have a gun stashed under the couch cushions in my haven, and my Resource supports it," and he says that's fine), while others can be a little more rigorous in their accounting of equipment (if you didn't write it down on your character sheet from the get-go, he tells you that you don't have it).

Ask him what he wants you to do, as far as a list of equipment goes, and then you can write it up from there. This falls to player prerogative as well — I have one player who never writes much of an equipment list, and I have another who keeps an obsessive catalogue of every tiny niggling thing his vampire owns, from 50 feet of rope to every damn pair of socks.

Portraiture

Want everybody to know what your character looks like, and you feel that mere words can't quite grasp it? Okay, fine. So show them. How you show them is up to you. If you or another player have passing art skills beyond, say, the capability to draw stunning stick figures, sketch the character out as hastily or as detailed as you feel is appropriate. Alternately, if you don't want to draw or sculpt the splendor that is your creature of the night, flip through some magazines or hop on the Internet. Maybe check Flickr or another photo-based site. Find a photo that best represents your character. Cut it out. Show it to everybody. Maybe you have some Photoshop skills and can edit the picture to appear more . . . bloodthirsty.

A caution, though: don't take too long at this. This is a game of the spoken word, of visuals relayed through description. If you're holding up the game's beginning because you're still trying to get the shading on your Mekhet's fangs "just right," then you're doing the troupe a disservice. Finish the sketch after the game, or during downtime when the focus is on another player.

Devil in the Details

The prelude answers some big questions, covering all the broad strokes necessary to get you into the wider

mindset of your character's Requiem. Feel free, if you have the inclination, to dig into the *finer* points of your character and her eternal existence.

Really, it can be anything that gets your imagination going. What kind of blood does she like? How does drinking blood make her feel? Ecstatic, repulsed, both? Does she listen to music? Does she have any evening rituals performed upon waking? Are there certain objects she uses almost to the point of obsessive fetishism, such as a particular brand of ballpoint pen, a grandfather's pocket watch, even a dog-eared copy of Elie Wiesel's *Night*? The goal of this is to really dig down into the nitty-gritty. Kick over the log, see what scurries out when the light touches it. Hell, does your character have a favorite color (you know, besides red)? Think about how something as simple as color can define your vampire: a haven cast in eerie blue light? Does she love green because it symbolizes life, that thing she'll never again have (and because of it, perhaps she keeps a small garden out back, carved out of a patch of pale concrete)?

You can pose your own questions, or you can ask the Storyteller to come up with a few. Heck, every player can contribute three questions, with the characters expected to answer all the ones tossed into the communal pool. If you're brave enough, check out some of the crazy questionnaire memes that make the rounds across Internet blogs and journals — while many of these are on the vapid side, even at their silliest they allow you to get into the character's head, even if your character's response is, "These questions are bloody vacuous, and it makes me want to go out and take a nip from some goggle-eyed blonde just to make me feel more alive."

Into the Breach

You're in the game, now. You've smeared the glistening blood across the empty canvas and drawn a face out of knotted clots, a body from swatches of skin and a soul glopped from dollops of gore. From this barest material, a picture has emerged, be it of beauty, horror or most likely something in between.

One last note: You've painted a portrait of a vampire, so when you're in the game and the time comes to describe your character to others, the old rule applies, show, don't tell. Don't just say, "I'm about six-six, black hair, thin, a houndstooth coat." Evoke. Play with words. Get a little purple. Instead, maybe you say, "I tower over you, casting a shadow wherever I stand, and only the barest light is caught in my oily raven-black hair. I've got the body of a scarecrow stuffed in a professor's duds, long, lean and skeletal."

This is no simple list. This is your art. Your masterwork.



C. Wilkins



Chapter Two:

Properties of the Blood

*"It's food, it's gold, it's love,
it's lust, it's life.*

*It's in us, it's all around us,
and we'll never get enough of it.
We are starving kings."*

*"The soul, which is spirit, can not dwell in dust;
it is carried along to dwell in the blood."*

—Saint Aurelius Augustine

Vampire: The Requiem can be described as a game of political and social intrigue, dramatic confrontation and violence, and supernatural entities and powers, all within the context of personal horror. There is great truth in all of this, as vampires do routinely engage in all manner of Machiavellian politics, wicked social maneuvering, tense personal encounters and brutal physical combat. In fact, for most troupes these situations may consume nearly all of the time actually spent playing the game.

There is nothing wrong with this, as this is, more than anything else, what most entertains us and draws us to roleplaying in the first place. We crave the thrill of rolling the dice and not knowing what the outcome might be for our fictional alter egos. We have our characters pursue courses of action that will lead us to these dramatic turning points, savoring the buildup and aftermath as much as the climax itself.

This is the nature of the beast, so to speak — but it is the nature of *our* beast, not the Beast that lurks within the pallid breasts of our characters. That Beast gains no satisfaction from the endless intrigues, stare-downs and personal achievements of the character. Even violence, no matter how exhilarating and merciless, only serves to temporarily distract the Beast from the one thing that has any real meaning: Blood.

A vampire is nothing without Blood. Lacking this vital fluid, even the most powerful Kindred is unable to rise at sunset, doomed to lie still as a corpse through the ages, utterly helpless against any threat that should find his torpid form. Without Blood, the mystic Disciplines he is able to command fail, and the once-supreme predator unpleasantly discovers he is no more suited for the hunt than the very kine he preys upon. Most frightening of all, without Blood a vampire is unable to keep the Beast in check.

As the hunger for Blood grows, the Beast becomes increasingly restless, and its struggle to win control over the Man becomes too great for the vampire. Eventually, when the lack of Blood becomes too much to bear any longer, the Beast is unleashed upon the world and the

Man is forced into silence, powerless to stop the worst excesses of its counterpart. Worst of all, the Kindred finds himself one step closer to that inevitable night when his crimes against the last lingering shred of his own battered humanity push him over the proverbial edge and the person he once was, as a mortal and later as a Kindred, finally surrenders to the Beast.

Vampire: The Requiem can certainly be played without spending much in-character time exploring the nature, power, utility and importance of Blood. A Storyteller might even prefer to have each character's hunt for blood resolved with a simple roll of the dice, or entirely glossed over by just apportioning additional Vitae to the players on some agreed-upon schedule. But to ignore the role that Blood plays in the Requiem of a vampire except as a game mechanic to fuel Disciplines and to stave off certain undesirable penalties is to miss the opportunity to truly understand what it might be like to actually be one of the Damned.

The vampire's inner conflict with his darker side and, ultimately, his relationship with Blood define the Kindred and, backed up by a number of carefully considered game mechanics, force the player to confront all manner of difficult practical, ethical and ultimately moral questions. This, far more than anything else, is what distinguishes **Vampire: The Requiem** from other games.

This chapter aims to help players better understand what blood is to a vampire, not merely as abstract points of Vitae. The latter will be clarified so that there is no confusion as to the intent of the mechanics, but the fundamental meaning of blood to the Kindred will be explored here in order to inspire more immersive, meaningful and satisfying roleplaying. This is just as important to the Storyteller, who can borrow ideas from this book to step beyond the printed rules and systems and weave a more evocative, unique, personal and pleasurable story for the troupe. While the mechanics are set, how they are introduced in the chronicle and experienced by your character is left to you.

This chapter contains many ideas and illustrations intended to help players and Storytellers create their own

conceptions of what it is like to be a vampire and, more specifically, what it is like to want, need, acquire, use and lose that most precious of all commodities: blood.

Blood and Vitae

Mortal life is often defined in terms of blood. There are many parts and elements of our body that we can do without, maybe not comfortably, but blood is absolutely essential to our continued survival. The role of blood has been recognized since time immemorial, and every culture, from the most primitive to the most advanced, has granted blood a special place in its mythology and social fabric, attributing to it all kinds of ordinary and extraordinary properties and powers.

Blood can bestow life and just as easily steal it away. It can bring luck and yet also horrible misfortune. It can be the cause for shame or great honor. It is able to reveal hidden things, and it creates lasting, even unbreakable bonds between individuals. The heart and the blood that it pumps are the physical manifestation of love, of power, of personality and even of the soul. It marks some as unclean and others as regal. Blood determines who is feeble and who is strong, and it can be a blessing or a terrifying curse.

Blood is worshipped as much as it is feared and it is consumed — symbolically and literally — just as it is surrendered. Blood is lost as often as it is taken, and it is forever being studied, tested and manipulated in the hope that our understanding of it increases so that we may find new ways to prolong and improve the quality of our lives. Clearly, even though we might rarely consider our own blood as it races through our vascular system, flushes our skin at times of embarrassment, excitement or strain, swells our flesh, empowers our muscles and exits our bodies through accident, illness, donation or natural purpose, it is vital to everything we do and ultimately to who we are as humans.

Luckily, even as we lose blood, our bodies are able to generate enough to make up for the loss, except in dire circumstances. We effortlessly convert the energy stored in natural and even unnaturally occurring substances into more blood, and so we do not need to directly ingest it in order to sustain ourselves. In fact, actual consumption of blood offers us little reward and can actually make us quite sick, given our susceptibility to the kinds of bacteria and other imperfections foreign blood usually contains. No, we don't need to dwell on blood very often. In fact, for the most part, it has no influence whatsoever over our thoughts, our desires, our plans or our actions.

Vampires cannot make the same claim. Vitae it is the single most important thing in their universe, and the

acquisition of Vitae always comes first, no matter how pressing other concerns might be. This is the case because of the extraordinary nature of a vampire's relationship to blood. Once a person slips free of the mortal coil and crosses over into the world of the Damned, nearly all her biological processes cease and her body is no longer able to produce blood. And yet, still she needs it, even as its particular role has fundamentally changed.

This leaves the fledgling with only one choice: she must find and consume blood, lots of it, regularly, if she wants her Requiem to be anything more than an eternity in helpless torpor. Night after night, she stalks the urban hunting grounds for her prey, kine she can manipulate, persuade or outright force into parting with some portion of their still-hot lifeblood in order to temporarily diminish the distracting complaint of her Hunger. When she finds her mark, she plays her hand and, because she has done this so often, achieves her sanguine purpose. Her victim's blood is hers for the taking, and she does not hesitate. She parts her lips, latches on to the kine, breaks his flesh with her teeth and lets the rich, coppery liquid spill into her mouth and flow down her parched throat.

Blood is to the Kindred as food and drink is to a mortal. This certainly does not stop a vampire from obsessing over blood the way a junkie does over his next fix of heroin or crack, and it does not stop her from gaining tremendous pleasure from drinking, as a mortal might from dining on a exquisitely prepared dish or savoring a splendid glass of Bordeaux. But blood has no other real use for a vampire. Again, technically speaking, blood cannot be used to rise each night, it cannot be used to enact a blood ritual, it cannot be used to create a Vinculum and it cannot be used to augment a vampire's innate capabilities. All these things require not blood but Vitae.

Vitae is not merely a more colorful or fitting word for blood favored by the Kindred to publicly obscure their conversations or to add a patina of refinement to the discourse of the Requiem. The use of the word *Vitae* does accomplish that to a certain degree, but semantics is the least of the differences between the terms.

Blood is blood, but Vitae is something more.

To be sure, one cannot have Vitae without blood, for it is blood that becomes Vitae upon consumption by a vampire, of course. And, when Vitae is separated from a vampire's body, voluntarily or otherwise, after a few moments it reverts back to ordinary blood once again, albeit of an undefined origin — human blood, yes, but of no singular type — and *depleted* of its original integrity, with a unexplainable breakdown of cells apparent to any skilled

observer who should make the effort to examine it closely enough. But Vitae in the strictest sense is not just blood.

Moments after a vampire ingests blood, the fluid is transformed into Vitae and remains so as long as it remains within the vampire's body. There is a precise distinction between the two substances, both in the game mechanics and from the perspective of most Kindred, despite how often they might use the words *blood* and *Vitae* interchangeably.

Blood can be thought of as a medium or host for that mythic thing that is vampirism, and is the only substance suitable for this role. Whether it is referred to as the Curse, the Beast or by some other, perhaps more scientific appellation, blood provides the means by which vampirism may be passed on to others and is the only thing that allows a Kindred to use the vital essence of the Damned for its own purposes. Without blood, this essence is neutered.

Many members of the Ordo Dracul adopt this explanation and, therefore, view vampirism as a sort of parasite or virus within the Kindred body that needs blood in order to survive and function, ever hungry for more so that it can sustain itself and propagate. In their understanding, the Beast is just a popular name for this parasite and their Great Work is aimed at finding a way to exploit this symbiotic relationship, rather than suffer from it.

More religious-minded Kindred see it a bit differently. To many of them, the relationship between blood and Vitae is more akin to the Christian conception of the relationship between wine and the Blood of Christ. Upon consumption, blood is mystically transubstantiated into an entirely different substance that is imbued with divine power and only loses this power when it no longer is part of the Kindred, in order that others not meant for this dark gift are unable to receive it. For them, Vitae is not a mere carrier of something more, it truly is that something more.

"There is nothing so unusual or mystical about this. The blood we drink is merely a useful tool that we take from the hapless kine and subjugate to our will. It is put to wretched purpose sustaining the kine, wasted on their miniscule efforts and short-sighted ambitions. We elevate blood from its squalid place in the order of things and bestow upon it a far greater meaning. As Vitae, it serves us and is not wasted or corrupted. As we rightfully dominate the herd and all life, so, too, do we dominate that very fluid that makes them mortal. When our hunt is over and our predation ended, our will is imposed upon the blood as it was upon its previous owner. Vitae transcends its lowly origins and becomes for us our bread and our sword. There is no

ambiguity in this; even if we use it only to rise again as the last rays of the sun dip below the horizon and dare not ever draw upon its power to repair our inert flesh or to ignite our Disciplines, we still demonstrate our mastery over the living by wresting from mere blood a power that no kine could have imagined."

DEFINITION OF VITAE

Whatever the in-character conception of Vitae may be as separate from blood, mechanically speaking, the distinction between the two substances is clear. Once ingested, blood becomes Vitae until expelled. The Latin *vita* means life, from whence comes the word *vital*, which, of course, also gave rise to the Kindred's preferred term for this most essential thing. Vitae (or sometimes "the Blood," with a capital B) then, can be defined as the vital substance that is unique to and sustains a vampire, and that possesses both a passive (liquid blood) and active or controlling (a mystical force, i.e., the Beast) property. Again, this may not be how the Kindred would choose to define it, but Storytellers might find this helpful when trying to resolve certain nagging questions about Vitae and what it is exactly.

Because of the unusual nature of Vitae as opposed to ordinary blood, Vitae does not *act* as that less controversial fluid does, either. In short, once blood becomes Vitae, it no longer obeys the dictates of biology or physics. Before the blood heeds such things, if it does at all, it first takes its cue from its true master, the vampire. As mortals, we have only an infinitesimal degree of conscious control over our blood as compared to the extraordinary degree a vampire has over her Vitae. We might be able to cause our blood to flow faster and to concentrate it in certain areas where it is not ordinarily concentrated, but aside from these things, we can do nothing else. We are bound by a multitude of physiological restrictions that put tremendous limits on what we can and cannot do. Our blood must only travel through our bodies via our extensive vascular system; should our blood leave this conduit we can become ill and die. Technically, we really have no control over our blood at all. We can only control certain muscles and, consequently, affect the way our heart and its tributaries respond: pumping the blood faster and changing the amount of blood that travels through each artery, vein and capillary.

Vampires are nothing like the mortals they once were in this regard. The moment blood is swallowed it is immediately transformed into Vitae. It does not sit in the vampire's stomach, but is instead absorbed into all parts

of the corpus with similar ease: bone, muscle, sinew and other tissues. This occurs automatically, with no effort on the part of the Kindred. Even a vampire lying in bloodless torpor for a century will respond this way if fed a supply of blood. This supply of Vitae infuses the vampire and acts as a restorative, providing some color to the otherwise pale complexion of the drinker and filling out the flesh in a way that causes the outward manifestations of death and decay to recede, at least for a time. But these are the least astonishing properties of Vitae.

In addition to providing for a vampire's basic unconscious needs, Vitae faithfully obeys its master in a host of ways that this chapter addresses in detail below. What is most important to understand is that Vitae is more than a passive liquid that nourishes its owner. On the contrary, it is an unimaginably useful substance that can be intentionally put to work for the benefit of a vampire. In fact, Vitae is so obedient that even when a vampire is injured in a fashion that would cause a mortal's blood to spurt forth, Vitae hesitates, seemingly defying the very laws of physics, unwilling to do anything without a direct order from the vampire to do so. What's more, for the few moments after Vitae exits a vampire's body — prior to reverting back to ordinary blood — the fluid remains under the authority of the vampire. A severed finger can literally be summoned back to the hand from which it came by the mere will of the injured party. A demonstration of these properties to the kine would pose a clear threat to the Masquerade, of course, so it is not only in the interest of the Kindred to avoid killing mortals, but it is equally important to not suffer what should be a graphic wound in front of them, lest they witness the convincingly supernatural nature of a vampire in action.

Using the Blood

Spending Vitae is always a reflexive action. The action for which a vampire is spending the Vitae may not be (such as activating a Discipline), but spending the Vitae remains reflexive. A player may spend Vitae and Willpower in the same turn, if he wishes. (See *Vampire: The Requiem*, p. 156.)

A vampire's ability to not only use Vitae to satisfy his gnawing hunger and sustain his Requiem for one more night but to also effortlessly command his Vitae to obey his every monstrous desire and need makes him not only a fearsome foe, but a predator without equal. The kinds of things he might do with his Vitae are many — some instinctual or learned with a small effort, others requiring very specific knowledge and extraordinary practice — and are limited only by his mastery of such feats and the potency and reserves of his own Vitae.

To actively use Vitae, a Kindred need only will it to happen; there is no uncertainty that the Vitae will be spent as desired. For this reason, the expenditure of Vitae is always considered a *reflexive* action, even if the Vitae is being used to empower some other, *non-reflexive* action, such as the use of a Discipline or a Physical action such as climbing a fence.

For the same reason, a character is able to spend Vitae and a point of Willpower simultaneously — i.e., during the same turn. It doesn't matter if the player spends only one Vitae or three Vitae or more while spending a Willpower point, so long as the character is able to expend that much Vitae during a single turn (as determined by his Blood Potency). This mechanic is intended to simulate how seemingly *natural* it is for a vampire to use his Vitae, despite how completely unnatural it really is. This does not make the expenditure of Vitae automatic, but it does mean that a vampire need give little conscious thought to the act.

So, what is it like? What is it like for a vampire to command his Vitae to obey him? Hell, what is it like to be infused with Vitae, to have it move through one's body as desired rather than as dictated by biology? Does it even produce a feeling, even when it is not being actively put to use?

Our own blood makes us warm, even if we are usually oblivious to the sensation, keeping our body temperature from fluctuating and permitting us to feel the same degree of energy regardless of the climatic extremes around us. Sometimes we are made very aware of this, especially when we experience an emotion or feeling that causes us to become flushed or aroused. When we are ill, we may feel overly warm as our temperature rises, and when we recover from the cold, we can feel the heat return to our extremities, sometimes painfully. We can become light-headed and sweaty as our blood moves through in response to our own actions or reactions to external stimuli. All these things we can feel, and they can influence our perceptions and consequent actions in small, but sometimes significant, ways.

Except for the first few minutes after entering a Kindred's throat, Vitae does not normally convey warmth. Vitae cools to the temperature of the host, which is usually the temperature of the surrounding environment. However, for those first few moments, a Kindred does perceive the heat of the blood, assuming it is fresh or artificially warmed, and does enjoy the sensation. Because Vitae suffuses the entire body, that heat is transferred to every part of the vampire, bringing with it a very pleasurable flush that restores some semblance of the vampire's mortal complexion. This occurs without any intent on behalf of the vampire.

Soon, though, this echo of mortality vanishes in tandem with the loss of heat, and though fortified by this infusion of Vitae, the vampire no longer displays or perceives any signs of the fleeting experience. This “blush of life” can be revisited whenever a Kindred wishes to pretend at being human or whenever he might simply crave the sensation that comes with it, but it is not without cost (see **Counterfeiting Life**, p. 51).

Waking Up

A vampire expends one Vitae to awaken from sleep. Should she fall asleep with no remaining Vitae, she slips into torpor. (See *Vampire: The Requiem*, p. 156.)

Normally, a vampire rises from slumber every evening, always after sunset, unless in torpor. This is the start of a vampire’s “day,” as it were, which typically ends prior to the sun’s return above the opposite horizon. Although awakening is routine, it does take some small effort on the part of the vampire to awaken. Certainly it is no monumental feat, at least not when the sky is dark, but effecting the awakening does require the expenditure of a single point of Vitae.

It is important to note that this expenditure of Vitae is *not* to suggest that throughout the entire evening (or

however long the vampire remains awake) the vampire is slowly burning through tiny amounts of Vitae that, in total, are equivalent to a single Vitae. The Damned do not require Vitae to simply exist and move about, at least not during the hours of darkness. (Keep in mind that this is the game mechanic — some Kindred may see things differently.)

Rather, each morning as the sun rises, the vampire is again forced by the nature of his Curse back into a state not unlike actual death. To rouse himself from this “little” torpor, a vampire must call upon the inherent power of his Vitae, spending a small portion. The Vitae spent in waking up every evening is not insignificant, however. Even if the vampire is completely gorged on blood and is able to refrain from using any Vitae for any other purpose other than his nightly awakening, it is only a matter of days, depending on his Blood Potency, before his supply of Vitae is entirely exhausted. This simple fact, more than any other, underscores the absolute importance of the hunt and the regular replenishment of a Kindred’s blood supply.

Many players and Storytellers forget that spending Vitae to awaken is, in a sense, voluntary. If a character wishes, he may resist the temptation to rise from slum-



ber and effectively allow himself to fall into a voluntary torpor. There are certainly times when this might be the best course of action, but in all senses of the word, the character truly is in torpor, not simply slumbering.

To shake off this much deeper somnambulism, the effort requires more than the simple loss of a point of Vitae. See *Torpor* on p. 90 for more information about this option.

The Evening Breath

I can't even recall anymore what it was like to get up every friggin' day to the sound of the wife's alarm clock, drag my ugly ass out of bed and into the bathroom and face myself in the mirror as I had ever other morning. Plain and simple, I looked like shit. Beauty rest, my ass. Hell, she didn't look much better, actually, especially during those last years. I looked like death warmed over, which is funny given what I am now. Serious dark circles under the eyes, the worst case of bedhead imaginable and a growth of beard that would have been perfect on a homeless guy. My body smelled sour, and my breath was worse. To top it off, my allergies were so bad that most every morning my sinuses felt like they were filled with cement, which usually left me with a pounding headache. Yeah, what a great fucking way to start the day.

But that was then. Now, every night I wake to silence, no need for an alarm. Body's on autopilot, no matter what happens the night before. And I ain't tired, either. Once I open my eyes, I'm up. I don't even think about lying there longer or trying to catch a few more winks. Fact is, even after all this time I'm still sorta creeped out when I wake up, and the last thing I want to do is lie around thinking about it. Better to just get up and think about something else, like where I'm going to score a little, you know? I don't even waste time screwing around with the mirror or anything. Seems pretty pointless.

Every night, it's the same thing. Same mostly neat hair, same one o'clock shadow, same weird lack of odor. Saves on deodorant, heh. I used to put on some cologne, but really, what's the point anymore? No zits, no crusties in the eyes and no more shiny forehead. And it's a good thing I checked out mid-afternoon instead of in the middle of the night. Sinuses are clear. Then again, I guess it really wouldn't matter much now. I don't even wash up anymore, either. Why should I? Same ol', same ol'.

Damn, the only thing I give a rat's ass about is my getup, but that's usually just a matter of making sure I don't wear the same thing to the same places too often. The attention, you know? Don't need it. I'll bet it takes me less time from pillow to street than it used to take me to just get to the bathroom. Weird, seeing as now I've got all the time I'll ever want to do my thing. No job, no nagging wife, no needy kids, no chores, nothing. And unless I really mess up, I'll probably still be kickin' when they finally do get around to making those flying cars. Yeah, won't that be something.

Counterfeiting Life

A player may spend one Vitae as a reflexive action to make her vampire character seem like a living person — warm and flush skin, forced breathing, blinking — for one scene. A player may also spend one Vitae to allow her character to eat and drink normal food for one scene. (See *Vampire: The Requiem*, pp. 156–157.)

The Embrace robs an individual of mortality and with it all the telltale signs of life. On the surface, this seems a small loss, but for creatures who are forced by necessity to spend much of their Requiem interacting with the living in order to locate prey and feed, to maintain their worldly affairs, to gain information, to safeguard their havens and to simply pass the time, it is anything but. We all know from experience how uncomfortable and uncooperative we become when we are confronted or even just in close proximity to someone who is notably unkempt, sickly, odd or downright sinister.

Now, imagine how you might react if you were approached in a bar or club one evening by a strange man and from the first moment you had the overwhelming sense that something was wrong. As the man smiled and attempted to engage you in friendly conversation, you slowly grow aware of just how dead his flesh looked and even felt when he offered his hand in greeting. The eyes lack a certain sparkle, and he seems oddly still, despite the lively tone of his conversation, with no stop for breath, no clearing of his throat, barely even a blink of the eyes. His nostrils don't move at all, and perhaps not as recognizable as the other things, he is devoid of any natural odor whatsoever. And, maybe strangest of all, he never touches his drink. As these observations start to add up, the guy's entire demeanor begins to take on a distinctly malevolent cast, and that smile no longer suggests friendliness but rather appears to be a mask hiding the character's true, and wholly unsavory, intentions. You might not even

be able to put your finger on just what it is that sets off the alarms, but the living know the living, and we know when something is not.

Because the Kindred spend much of their Requiems in the company of other Kindred or trusted ghouls and Retainers, this is not always a problem. But when a vampire needs to interact closely with the kine, looking as if she had died the day before can be a formidable obstacle. Luckily, it is no great feat to overcome this, so long as the vampire is willing to part with a little Vitae to do it. With perhaps no more effort than it takes us to fake a foreign accent or to pretend a limp, a Kindred can simulate the so-called blush of life for a full scene.

The rules don't require anything beyond the expenditure of the necessary Vitae, and this may be fine for most troupes. However, some Storytellers and particularly dedicated players may wish to go beyond the published requirement and consider what it might actually be like for a vampire to do this — and what it might take to pull it off successfully.

That feeling of sudden warmth flooding my body, the softening of my normally taut skin, the sensation of air filling my throat and the accompanying expansion of my lungs and, most of all, the still always startling first few beats of my long-dead heart: these have become almost an addiction.

Maybe it seems absurd, but I swear I do almost feel alive again, and that is what makes it so hard to resist doing all night long, even more than the toll it exacts upon me. Sometimes I'm tempted to let the Beast run amok, if in return it means I can hold onto these sensations for a few precious minutes longer before succumbing to frenzy. My whole body feels wet, hot and supple, as if I were a dry sponge allowed to soak for a time in a basin of heated oil. It is hard to not laugh out loud from the experience and even more difficult to resist exploring my own body with my hands, caressing flesh and curves newly pliant and damp with the trace sheen of perspiration, even if it is only the product of my Vitae.

The scent that I give off in this state is intoxicating and is nearly as satisfying as that of the kine, and my hair seems to possess a body that I cannot otherwise reproduce regardless of the products I use.

More than all this, however, the thing that makes the "blush" the most irresistible of all, is the way they react — the living. Unconsciously they welcome me, they accept me into their herd as one of their own, making

no effort to keep me at a distance. I am showered with smiles and inviting words and even small touches that go beyond simple etiquette. They want me, they love me and they have no idea that this sheep is really the Big Bad Wolf. It is so easy this way. Too easy.

It wasn't always so. I didn't first try this for a few years. By the time I began to add this to my bag of tricks, I discovered just how much I had forgotten. Laughing on cue, playing with my hair, catching my breath, sneezing, making my nipples hard, wiping the sweat off my brow as if it were the most natural thing. All this took time and lots of practice. It was like learning to be an actor. Honestly, I actually picked up a copy of Stanislavski and used some of his tricks. There were a few times I really blew it. But all the work paid off, and I rarely make a serious misstep anymore. I can down a martini as if it were my drink of choice, and if things end up in the bedroom, I can keep up the act more than long enough to take what I need and leave a clueless lover behind.

Of all the things I've learned, though, the one I'm proudest of is my "little friend." I've figured out how to use my Vitae to actually simulate the metallic scent of menstruation. I don't actually make myself bleed, though I suppose I could, but that trace aroma, buried under the smell of sweat and perfume, does not go unnoticed by the unconscious mind of the kine. Nothing says "alive" more than this, and that's the point.

Physical Augmentation

As a reflexive action, a player may spend Vitae to boost a single Strength, Dexterity or Stamina-based dice pool by two dice per Vitae spent. (See *Vampire: The Requiem*, p. 157.)

Using Vitae this way is the proverbial adrenalin rush that vampires can summon at will (assuming they have some Vitae to spare) to pull off some seriously insane shit, such as ripping fire hydrants out of the sidewalk, outrunning cars, laughing off a hail of bullets, running along power lines and leaping from building to building. Vitae can also be used for less dramatic but still just as important purposes, such as picking a lock, breaking free from a pair of handcuffs or ignoring pain. However a vampire wishes to amplify his physical potential, his Vitae is his to command.

Remember that the additional dice gained through this reflexive action do not actually increase the character's Physical Attributes but only augment a dice

pool based on one of these Attributes. The mechanism is designed to enable vampires to engage in all the kinds of cinematic stunts above without burdening the players with extraneous math.

But this is not the only reason it is written as is. In addition to ease of play, a vampire's innate strength, agility and endurance really are *not* being amplified by using Vitae in this manner. On the contrary, what a Kindred is actually doing when he concentrates his *vita essentia* on augmenting his physical capabilities is far more mystical than biological. For a few moments, as long as there is Vitae to spare for this, the vampire experiences a supernatural boost to aid his actions that is more akin to a Discipline than the mere exertion of will, hence the use of Vitae rather than an expenditure of Willpower. No, this augmentation is something that seems to tap directly into the hellish power of the Beast itself. In a way, that vampire is relying on its assistance for an instant in order to accomplish some otherwise improbable feat.

A Kindred is always aware that this extraordinary power is at his beck and call. Knowing he can, with no real effort, suddenly do something that ordinarily is beyond comprehension, such as flipping over an automobile, is quite a thing to know. Neonates frequently feel the itch to spend Vitae in this fashion, to make a point, to entertain or just to stroke their own egos. Ancillae rarely do this for such short-sighted reasons, however. They understand the value of power and are far more careful in using only as much as they must to accomplish their purposes. They, and the elders they may one night become, know that Vitae is not something to be wasted foolishly, but is to be hoarded for those times when it is the best or only solution to a problem. Still, the urge to pull out all the stops and remind oneself and others just what one is capable never ceases entirely.

What's more, as with most expenditures of Vitae, the experience itself is a tremendous rush. Some Kindred feel light-headed as their body is suddenly supercharged and speak of the experience in terms not unlike those used by a speed freak or other drug abuser jacked up on amphetamines. Others find it less of a physical high and more of a psychological one. These vampires simply find it hard not to view those around them as lesser, weaker creatures, and along with the momentary physical boost, their entire demeanor becomes more . . . bestial.

She is not herself when she does it. I worry about her more than ever, even though she assures me there is no need. I know she hunts far more now, also, to support her new thing, as if she were an addict or worse. She

usually never shows that side of herself, to anyone, anywhere, but things are different now.

I think she is losing control. When she wrenched that door open last week, she actually snarled at me, and for an instant, I swear I saw someone else in her raw eyes, something that would have stopped my heart were it still beating. And again on Tuesday I saw that other again. There wasn't even a need for what she did, but she did it anyway, and I think she liked it, too much; not being able to make the shot, but letting her other out of its cage. And with the kine all around, too.

Healing Wounds

A player may spend Vitae to heal wounds as a reflexive action. (See *Vampire: The Requiem*, p. 157.)

One of the most astonishing things about vampires from a mortal's perspective is their damnable inability to just plain die.

Contributing to the myth that they are invincible, of course, is their utterly astonishing ability to restore their bone, flesh and other tissue after most any injury, not only without any lingering ill effects but also at a rate that defies the natural order. Because vampires are not alive, they don't actually heal at all. Ever. They possess no living tissue to work on repairing the damage and creating new tissue as needed. However, they are quite capable of effecting a similar outcome, not through a biological process but simply by dedicating some of their Vitae to the task.

Some Kindred believe the Vitae is literally transformed into new tissue, similar to how they hypothesize it works to restore them each night to the condition they were the moment of their Embrace. Others are not so sure, yet few are able to elucidate their own thoughts on the matter with any more authority. Most don't dwell on the matter. Perhaps it's God or the Devil or something worse. Whatever the cause, healing wounds is one of the most important uses of Vitae.

This subject is discussed at much greater length under **Damage, Wounds and Healing** on p. 85.

Activating Disciplines

Some Disciplines require an expenditure of Vitae, though each has its own rules for the cost and manner of doing so. (See *Vampire: The Requiem*, p. 157.)

Beyond using their Vitae to mimic, even if tremendously augmented or perverted, those capabilities possessed by mortals, the Kindred have other uses for Vitae.

Throughout a Kindred's Requiem, he discovers that, with some knowledge and a great deal of dedication, he is able to learn a number of Disciplines, Devotions and possibly even some blood sorcery. Some require nothing of the practitioner beyond time and understanding, and an effort of will. However, the most dramatic of these supernatural powers can demand a sacrifice of Vitae. How much depends on the particular Discipline being used.

Whether the cost is a single Vitae or a much more significant loss, the experience becomes as second nature to a vampire as does using Vitae to heal a wound or to pump up his Strength. For a Kindred who has mastered Nightmare, for example, the distinction between casting an ordinary albeit malevolent gaze at someone and using Eye of the Beast is negligible. It is similar to a man just saying "Boo" to someone and a man screaming the same thing while jumping out of a dark corner. The latter is merely a more dedicated effort but no less natural. The requirement of Vitae does not change this, though it does add an adrenaline-like rush to the experience for most vampires and can, as with other uses of Vitae, lead weak-willed Kindred to abuse this ability to enjoy the sensation.

For much more on this topic, including a look at the specifics of the various Disciplines, Crúac and Devotions, see pp. 126-140.

Blood Addiction

Each time a vampire who has previously tasted Vitae is in a position to do so again, a single success on a Resolve + Composure roll is necessary to resist the temptation. Failure, and the subsequent drink, increases the character's addiction, making future resistance more difficult, while success can decrease and eventually eliminate the Vitae addiction. (See *Vampire: The Requiem*, p. 158.)

For vampires, blood is a nearly intoxicating substance, providing a psychological as well as physical pleasure when consumed. However, the thrill of blood cannot compare to the exhilarating rush experienced by a vampire — or anyone, for that matter — when she allows Vitae to pass her lips. This sensation goes beyond nearly anything else a vampire can know and consequently is one of the most agonizingly difficult things for her to resist, once she has tasted the forbidden fruit, as it were.

From the very first drop, Vitae has the power to literally enslave the character, warping her mind so that the pursuit of more Vitae quickly overtakes and eventually makes irrelevant all other concerns, including self-preservation. An addict will risk anything to sate her all-consuming hunger for the Blood of her own kind, even going so far as

to open her own flesh and lap at her own precious Vitae in a perverse form of sanguine autoeroticism. The Traditions, the Prince's writ and common sense go out the window if they stand between a Vitae addict and her supply.

Unfortunately, a Kindred this far gone has little, if any, hope of pulling back from the brink and, more often than not, soon discovers that her Requiem is cut dramatically short, either by her own disastrous actions or by the actions of other Kindred who seek to rid their community of the danger the fiend poses.

There are only a few instances when drinking Vitae does not pose a serious danger to the character's physical and psychological state. One is the Embrace, of course, which is so far beyond anything else that the vampire will ever experience that it blots out the comparatively insignificant lure of the Vitae used to transform the character from kine to Kindred. Aside from this, only the final moments of diablerie can provide a vampire with a greater degree of pleasure, as if drinking the victim's Vitae were the sex act and the final moment of diablerie were the orgasm that the drinker desperately hopes to achieve.

All else pales compared to the ecstasy a vampire can have by quaffing another's Vitae. This makes attempts to resist Vitae once a character has become intimately familiar with its reward so onerous that a dramatic failure doing so permanently scars the vampire's mind, leaving her with a very real derangement. On the other hand, giving in to the urge has its own horrid consequences, from the creation of a Vinculum capable of subjugating the addict's will to that of her regnant to causing the addict to risk anything and everything for one small taste, including destroying another vampire.

Storytellers should not overlook the tremendous opportunities for excellent roleplaying offered by this aspect of the Requiem. Characters who have supped on Vitae post-Embrace are ever vulnerable to its siren song, barring a tremendous force of will and luck on behalf of the character to overcome the addiction, which is a great story in and of itself. Anytime the Storyteller wishes, he can present the characters with a chance to once more sample another's Vitae, pushing the story in a direction suddenly fraught with all manner of danger for the characters. This is the essence of the mechanic: to provide a great tool for creating even greater tales. However, without care this idea can easily be abused and a good chronicle destroyed as a result. Storytellers must understand how to use this as a way to enhance the experience of the players, not to destroy it.

An addicted vampire does not feel a sudden urge to attack any other Kindred simply because they can provide a supply of Vitae any more than a crack whore would at-

tack a drug kingpin to get at the rocks in his coat pocket. No, the rule is not meant to force characters into such absurd situations, which would inevitably lead to the character's demise. On the other hand, it is an addiction, and the rule does exist to encourage players to face the tragic consequences of their characters' actions. There is no strict line to draw in the sand that can succinctly determine whether a Resolve + Composure roll is warranted, but, as with most of the rules, the Storyteller must decide with an eye always on what best suits the flavor of the chronicle and of the scene in particular.

So what might necessitate an actual roll? Surely, any direct offer of Vitae to the Kindred would qualify. If an ancilla wishes to intentionally force a character into a blood oath and suspects that the individual may have already acquired a taste for Vitae, it would be a simple matter for the ancilla to slash open a wrist and extend it to the character, vulgar and utterly immoral though it may be. Presented with such an offer, the Vitae addict would be very hard-pressed to "just say no," and the player should expect to have to make a roll to resist, if that's what she wishes her character to attempt to do. On the other hand, that same ancilla merely suggesting that he might allow the character to taste his Vitae should probably not require a roll. Still, the Storyteller

might wish to have the player make a similar roll if her character wishes to leave the vicinity knowing that she *might* be offered Vitae. Failing the roll would not actually affect future rolls to resist drinking, but it would mean she sticks around longer and just may have to make that more important roll if the ancilla eventually chooses to do more than merely tease the drooling addict.

The struggle to resist drinking Vitae — even if it does not involve the risk of violence — is still very real and very traumatic for a Kindred, and this should not be overlooked or undervalued by players. Addiction is one of the most private, shameful, horrific and damning weaknesses of all the things we can suffer, destroying not only ourselves but those around us. This should be amplified and explored in **Vampire** chronicles, not simply seen as a limitation of vampires. As Storytellers and players, we should relish this concept of Vitae addiction as a chance to safely explore, through our characters, tales of the tragedies and drama of addiction, and what it is like to give in and ride the dark spiral down into the lowest depths of personal Hell or to resist with every last ounce of will and overcome this terrible affliction.

Why do you do this to me? Why? You keep telling me that you love me, but then you do this, again and again and again, and you know I can't stop myself. It's you, your blood, your soul, and nothing is the same. Nothing. You know I'm yours. Now. Forever. So why do you keep doing this?

I hate you. I hate me. I hate what I do, even while I do it and love it.



Even now, alone, all I can think of is the sweet pain of your Vitae, the way it burns my lips and scorches my throat and shakes me uncontrollably, for a moment truly one with you as you stream into my cold flesh like molten ecstasy, making me actually feel alive. No, even more than alive.

My mind is swept away by your essence, your Vitae, like a wave washing away everything else, and I become you in a way, yours, always. You know this. You keep giving me this, night after night, and I know you laugh at me even as you love me, because I am weak and you are strong and I will do anything for you, give you anything, just for one more sip. Just a glance from you that says, "Here, would you like some?" and my knees buckle, my skin seethes and my own Vitae races, making me crazy. And when you are not there, when you cruelly refuse me and shut me out, as you do more and more these past months, even as I know you love me, the anticipation of our next time together devours me and all I can think of is that moment when you smile and drag the blade across your wrist and your beautiful blood awaits me, hot and thick and yours, and mine. Ours.

Please don't stop, please. I need you. Where are you? I hate this, but please don't abandon me any longer. Please, my love. Please, I will do anything for another glimpse of you, just a few moments with you, for just one more taste of you to see me through another dark night.

Elders, Addiction and Diablerie

The addictive power of Vitae is not eternal. A neonate who would kill her own sire for just a few drops of his Vitae would hardly feel the same compulsion 50 or 100 years later. Indeed, as a vampire's Requiem continues, the power that Vitae has over her — the intense sensation derived from drinking it and the related hold it has over her physically and psychologically — is diminished, as are all sensations, pleasurable or otherwise. Even the masochist is denied her pleasures eventually.

When a vampire has survived long enough to be called an elder and she is unable to any longer sustain her Requiem on the blood of mortals, only the unholy Vitae of the Damned will suffice. At this point, because it is a necessity rather than a forbidden luxury, Vitae loses its power to enslave the Kindred and serves only to provide nourishment and be used to the elder's ad-

vantage. However, should the elder dare to descend to the depths of diablerie, a fate similar to Vitae addiction awaits her. As powerful as any addiction to drinking Vitae, diablerie demands its own price from those who make it their practice. Diablerie addiction, of course, requires the destruction of another vampire, forcing the hoary addict to pit herself against the other Kindred in order to satisfy her infernal cravings. Obviously, this situation is rife with opportunity for Storytellers to introduce a whole new level of conflict into a chronicle. Every failed attempt to resist the temptation to overpower and diablerize another vampire who makes the mistake of crossing the diablerist's path at the wrong time brings the certainty of violence and the likely close to one or more characters' Requiems.

Simply because the rules dictate that an elder has failed in resisting the urge to commit diablerie does not mean the Storyteller should automatically require the character to carry out the act on the spot, however. It might be far more enjoyable, especially in small troupes or one-on-one sessions, to turn that one failed Resolve + Composure roll into an very personal, very tragic one act play. The Storyteller could inform the player who botched the roll that the next session will focus entirely on the consequences of that misfortune. That next session begins with one special twist: by its conclusion, the character must attempt to commit diablerie on another or she will suffer some dire punishment, such as a derangement or the loss of a permanent point of Willpower. This creates a very strong sense of helplessness that the player is incapable of escaping until her character has paid the price and devoured another vampire's soul. It is a ticking clock that will color every moment of that session with a growing dread and inject a very real sense of what it is like to be Damned.

Diablerie

Nothing among the Kindred holds a more reviled place than the act of diablerie or Amaranth, and for very good reason. Diablerie is nothing less than cannibalism and just as that taboo is offensive to all but the most morally bankrupt vampires. However, similar to cannibalism, diablerie is not so cut and dried. Just as certain atavistic human tribes believe the consumption of the flesh of their dead bestows certain powers, rumors regularly circulate among the Kindred of the benefits that can be gained from draining another vampire of his Vitae and then taking that final step and actually feasting on his soul. Remember that characters do not know with any kind of certainty what diablerie can

and cannot provide, unless they have already successfully performed the heinous act themselves. Rules for diablerie certainly exist, but these are for the sake of the Storyteller and players alone and should never be allowed to translate into actual understanding of diablerie by the actual Kindred. Even those vampires who have tasted the fruit of diablerie would be hard-pressed to give a satisfactory explanation of what it was like and what they gained from the experience to others. Amaranth is one of the most mystical, moving and utterly foul of all things a vampire can learn of, either as a diablerist or, worse, as a victim.

Even among troupes where everyone has a copy of **Vampire: The Requiem** and knows full well what the written mechanics are governing the act of diablerie, Storytellers should do their best to never allow that knowledge to spoil the blasphemous value of Amaranth in their chronicle. Let players know that the rules will take a backseat when it comes to diablerie, even more than it usually might. Do not permit players to allow their characters to exploit their knowledge of the mechanics to skirt the misconceptions of this sinful act. In fact, throwing in some red herrings to muddy up the waters a bit can be helpful, and cause the players to doubt what they think they know about diablerie. Maybe the coterie encounters a nomadic Kindred who *thinks* he committed diablerie, but, just as the person who isn't sure if she actually ever had an orgasm because she has nothing to compare it to, isn't really sure. The braggart might make all sorts of wild claims about how easy it was to do, how great it felt, and go on and on about how much stronger he feels now, probably claiming he's on the run from a blood hunt in another domain to bolster his tale. The point here is to keep diablerie as mysterious as possible for as long as possible. Even if the characters themselves decide to do it to find out the truth, don't let it become a simple matter of rolling dice. Leave something for them to wonder about, and to worry about, long after the act is complete.

Committing Diablerie

A vampire succeeds in committing diablerie if the player accumulates a number of successes equal to the victim's Willpower in an extended action using an unmodified Resolve + Stamina dice pool. The player must achieve these successes in a number of rolls less than or equal to the victim's Willpower. (See **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 159.)

Because of the inherent strength of the souls of the Damned, fortified as they are by might the infernal Beast, even the most willful vampire is incapable of forcing an-

other to consciously relinquish his spiritual essence. Only those vampires with no remaining Vitae are vulnerable.

This means that those vampires in a state of torpor are exposed to the danger of diablerie. This is why rumors of a slumbering ancient spread like wildfire among the Kindred, particularly among the neonates who understand that diablerie, however blasphemous, offers tremendous reward, especially if the victim is significantly older. Diablerie serves as the forbidden fruit for the Kindred, the one thing that can guarantee them a shortcut to undeniable power if they are willing to risk very real retribution from their own peers and souls.

Once a character has committed the act and it becomes known, he is immediately marked as a threat to all. His very likely addiction to Vitae alone poses a considerable danger to every Kindred, as well as the (correct) belief that Amaranth strengthens the Beast and brings the diablerist one step closer to becoming a true monster that might endanger the Masquerade itself. Only the most apathetic or insane Kindred would therefore suffer a diablerist in their midst. Characters who wish to ignore all this and set out on the path to diablerie anyway should be allowed to experience fully not only the beneficial consequences of their crime, should they succeed, but just as completely the full scope of all that can and will go wrong.

Players should be very careful to not see diablerie as some neonates do, as a quick way to climb the ladder of Kindred power. **Vampire: The Requiem** is not a game where players compete against each other or against some set mechanic, and they can easily measure how far along they have come using a simple quantifiable value. There is no winning in **Vampire**, just as there is no losing. There is only character and story and the enjoyment that can be found in imagining what it is like to actually be such a character in a situation as set up by the story. Increasing a character's Blood Potency via diablerie is not a shortcut to anything, especially not for the player. Not only does it potentially mean his character's Requiem may come to an end far sooner than expected, but diablerie robs the player of the chance to really examine the Requiem from the perspective of a vampire struggling against more potent Kindred.

This is not to say that players should not consider the act of Amaranth. It exists for the very same purpose as the apple in the Garden of Eden. Will the character snatch at the fruit and risk everything just to taste the one thing forbidden by the Creator or will he forever resist it, even as it hangs in full view? The Beast is like the snake here, though the whispering urge to drink another's Vitae and, if possible, consume her soul is somewhat less blatant.

Still, this most ancient of tales is recreated in **Vampire: The Requiem** by the presence of diablerie. No player, and in particular no Storyteller, should overlook this fact. It is a powerful part of the mythology behind the game. The time may indeed come when the troupe wishes to explore this sin and the blowback that is sure to follow, and that is fine, so long as it is handled appropriately.

Storytellers should make sure that the legends and rumors about diablerie are given a fair chance to cause the characters to ponder their possible foray into this arena long before they seriously lay out plans to accomplish it. Supporting characters who are known diablerists serve as excellent vehicles for these stories, as do the reminiscences and warnings of the elders. In the end, diablerie is something that should occur in a chronicle *when it is time*, and not just because it's a possibility. Once diablerie occurs, the character's Requiem will be forever changed, so tread carefully here.

Limitations

As stated in the rules, diablerie is the domain of vampires and vampires alone. Only a vampire can commit diablerie and receive its benefits and suffer its drawbacks, and only a vampire can be the victim of diablerie. What's more, a vampire who has achieved Golconda cannot be diablerized, and it is certain that a vampire who commits diablerie, if he had achieved Golconda, would surely fall from that exalted state of grace without delay. Even the serious consideration of diablerie should probably be enough to force a Kindred in Golconda to relinquish it, so utterly heinous is the act of Amaranth.

CREATIVE CONSUMPTION

One of the beliefs about diablerie that some Kindred whisper is that the victim's soul is not completely destroyed by the act but is merely consumed. So, while the ghost is not free to roam the Underworld, as it were, it is not really gone. Rather, the victim's soul is in some fashion taken into the soul of the diablerist. Whether the soul is forced into eternal submission, simply rendered mute and helpless, or retains some small spark of will and identity that can influence the diablerist down the road is not something enforced by any rules. This allows Storytellers to inject a very powerful sense of mystery and even greater danger into diablerie no matter what the players think they already know, as mentioned above.

If Steve believes he has a pretty good idea of the risk his character faces if he commits diablerie and then suddenly his character learns of a diablerist who seems to suffer horrible nightmares or worse because of the nature of the

soul he consumed, Steve might take a step back and have to give all new consideration to what he had planned for his character. This is precisely this kind of thing that Storytellers should strive for — creative ways to expand on a rule that adds a whole new potential for drama without breaking the underlying mechanic.

Most vampires know little about the true afterlife, if there is one. Still, tales often float about Elysium of sightings of the ghosts of Kindred whose Requiems have already come to an end. It well-known that no such sightings have ever been reported of the spirits of those who fell victim to a diablerist. Naturally, this only serves to support the most horrible rumors of diablerie, that it is literally the act of devouring the immortal soul of the victim. This is supported by the rules, also; no victim of diablerie leaves behind a ghost.

Benefits of Diablerie

A diablerist gains one dot in one Skill or Discipline that the victim had more dots in than the diablerist has. If the victim's Blood Potency was higher than the diablerist's, the diablerist also gains one dot of Blood Potency. (See *Vampire: The Requiem*, p. 159.)

The primary motivation for players to have their characters consider diablerie is power, and for vampires, that is reflected by their Blood Potency. The players make a quick mental calculation: "My guy diablerizes a more potent vampire, and he gains an immediate and lasting boost to his own vampiric strength or he has to wait at least another half-century for his Blood Potency to become that high on its own." It seems like an easy choice. Find a torpid vampire of greater years (or pound him into torpor, if necessary) and go to town. Easy money, as they say. The benefits of greater Blood Potency are awesome, and the drawbacks seem relatively few: a larger pool of Vitae to tap into and a greater dominance over lesser vampires in a variety of ways, with the slight risk of a derangement.

But there is something missing from this calculation: the feeling. Even the most power-hungry schemer would probably never go through with the act of diablerie if the only benefit were raw power. However, couple that with an experience that is so astonishingly pleasurable that even the ecstasy of the Embrace itself may be forgotten, and you have quite an irresistible thing. Diablerie addicts know this well, of course, and while they understand that each time they indulge in this vice they may very well acquire some actual practical benefit as a result, it is first and foremost the almost unimaginable degree of near-erotic pleasure that plays over and over again in their

feverish minds and drives them to do whatever it takes to once more taste the sweet flower of Amaranth.

Storytellers should play up this benefit of diablerie as much or even more than the simple, albeit important, gain of power. One way is to make sure that the Blood Potency of other vampires is not something that is common knowledge to the players. If they don't know whether a particular ancilla's Blood Potency is higher than their own characters' — perhaps it was diminished as a result of time spent in torpor — then they will be less likely to jump at every chance they find for their characters to commit diablerie on that character. With no guarantee of increased Blood Potency, suddenly the drawbacks loom quite large. However, regardless of how more or less potent the victim is than the would-be diablerist, there always remains the promise of a sensory experience that will never be forgotten. This is what makes diablerie so addictive, and this should play the far more insidious role in the chronicle when it comes to diablerie.

A Kindred who has tasted this forbidden fruit will always struggle with the desire to taste it again, and again and again. For him, nothing is as satisfying and, similar to a heroin fiend, the Kindred will very likely speak of it — to trusted individuals only, of course — as if it were something that everyone should try *at least once*. The diablerist, just as the junkie, does not want to keep the powerful emotions of the experience to himself, but wants to share. He cannot actually share the same victim, but he wants to share the afterglow, talk about it to someone else who understands it in exactly the same way; he wants to confide in another diablerist. This kind of pressure to get the characters to also join the ranks of the diablerists means that they, too, face the same dangers as he does, and so they as they are all in the same proverbial boat together, they *must* look out for his interests as much as their own now.

While this may not seem like much of a benefit, players must remember that from their characters' perspectives, this downside is much more difficult to see. If it were obvious, there would be no diablerists at all.

In addition to a potential increase in Blood Potency, a diablerist also acquires one additional dot in a Skill or Discipline that the victim — regardless of what her Blood Potency was — possessed more dots of than the diablerist. The diablerist's player may see the victim's character sheet and choose which Skill or Discipline he wishes to increase, limited by the rule above. What is most interesting about this is how it supports the idea (see **Creative Consumption**, p. 58) that the victim's soul might not be actually obliterated when it is drawn out and consumed, but rather subsumed or absorbed in

a fashion that may leave some portion of the victim's soul behind. Clearly, the diablerist in a sense is able to permanently acquire some part of the victim's knowledge to bolster his own. Does this mean the character actually has a choice in this or it happens without his input, with the player being allowed the choice because it is only fair reward? Both possibilities are equally valid, actually. The personal examples of diablerie below examine both these options.

Drawbacks of Diablerie

A diablerist suffers an immediate and automatic loss of one dot of Humanity and must make a normal Humanity roll to avoid derangement. The diablerist also risks Vitae addiction. Finally, his aura is streaked with telltale black veins for a number of years equal to the victim's Blood Potency. (See *Vampire: The Requiem*, p. 159.)

For all the allure and the very real benefits that diablerie can provide, it comes with more than its fair share of drawbacks. The loss of a dot of Humanity and the subsequent required Humanity roll to avoid the acquisition of a derangement are just the tip of the iceberg. Devouring the soul of another creature, one of the Damned or not, is undeniably an act of horrific immorality, and is reflected by this system. There is no way around this; if you decide to do the deed, then you have already put your Humanity in the backseat for the sake of pleasure and power.

Vitae addiction is a no-brainer, also, unless the victim had no Vitae at the time she was diablerized. Even if this is the case, however, should the diablerist already be of such power that she can no longer subsist on blood and requires Vitae to sustain her Requiem, diablerie provides such an extraordinary sensation that she risks becoming addicted to the taste of a vampire's soul using the same mechanic for Vitae addiction.

This is not a pretty thing. When the only thing left that will *temporarily* sate your all-consuming craving requires the actual destruction of another vampire, it's time to queue up the movie credits, because things are about to come to a very tragic end sooner rather than later. The only upside to this is that a diablerie addict is not necessarily eyeing every other Kindred as his next victim, at least not in the early stages of addiction. Normally, until things get real bad, the addict will only feel a serious itch to commit diablerie when and if he hears of a Kindred who is currently in torpor. Actually going so far as to attack another vampire in order to force her into torpor so that diablerist can then do the nasty usually only starts becoming a serious plan when the addiction has reached its final stages and the diablerist has little or no chance left to resist the temptation of another Kindred soul.



The last drawback established by the rules is the appearance of black streaks that stain the diablerist's aura. The length of time they remain visible — to those who can see such things — is cumulative, so if the diablerist commits diablerie the first time on a vampire with a Blood Potency of 4 and three years later on a victim with a Blood Potency of 3, the streaks will last four years after the second commission of the crime (four years minus three years between crimes leaves one year, plus three more years for the second act, gets four years again).

For Kindred who keep to themselves and remain on the fringes of Kindred society, this may not seem so terrible a setback. Furthermore, most vampires do not have access to *Auspex* to be able to see the streaks in the first place. However, if the diablerist has any hope to rise among his peers in his covenant or in the city overall, there is the very real chance that his aura will be scrutinized on at least the occasional basis and the telltale marks of diablerie will be noticed. Of course, someone recognizing them and that same individual reporting this discovery to others are two different matters entirely and can lead to all sorts of blackmail and other drama that fit nicely into the themes and flavor of the game. The short of it is, while this drawback is not necessarily something the diablerist will have to suffer from on a nightly basis, once his streaks are discovered the cat is out of the bag and

from that point forward a whole host of other troubles may be visited upon him.

Here's where it gets fun, or terrible, depending on your perspective. Diablerie is so reviled that a character identified as a diablerist is akin to an ordinary guy living in a quiet neighborhood suddenly accused of being a serial killer. All sorts of sordid and horrific associations are made, and the entire community of Kindred will turn on the character, doing whatever is necessary to determine if the accusations are true and to take whatever actions are necessary to safeguard all Kindred from the monster.

Some Princes may be strong enough and of a mind to simply detain the character and undertake their own thorough investigation, particularly if more than a single Kindred has gone missing of late. Other Princes may prefer to simply let the mob handle things and eliminate the threat, even if the accusations are incorrect or misplaced. No matter the outcome, even if the character escapes prosecution, the label of diablerist or at least *possible diablerist* will probably remain for a very, very long time. Most Kindred will remain highly suspicious, and the character's social clout will dry up overnight and probably never again return to its former level, whatever that was. Should the evidence lead those in authority to conclude that the character is indeed a diablerist — and here's where those bothersome black streaks become a serious

bitch — the character had either better have some kind of escape planned or it's the end of his Requiem. All but the most deviant or utterly chaotic domains throw their energy into ridding their city of a known diablerist.

The point here is that even if the diablerist can shrug off some black streaks in his aura, has a strong enough Resolve and Composure to resist the pull of addiction and doesn't worry too much about his declining Humanity, diablerie still comes with a hefty price. But only through good Storytelling can the diablerist be forced to pay this dreadfully high price. Mechanics alone cannot make diablerie what it should be.

Three Examples of Diablerie

Dear Angelo,

It did not have to go this way. But alas, time was your foe and even you would have agreed that my waiting for your return in order for us to be restored to our former position would only doom our prospects and allow those fanatical bastards to cement their newfound status. I know you would be glad to know that your sacrifice has given us a chance, not only in putting things back as they should be, but in avenging your own loss. So, my dearest Angelo, forgive me for what I have done.

Tonight you gave me one last time an experience that I could not have dreamed. First your Kiss, then your impassioned Embrace, and finally this, your Vitae and your very soul. I can still feel you inside me, still hear your thoughts, and still feel the gentle effort of your soul, like an infant blindly seeking an escape from its womb, even now. You are not gone, my sweet creator, but are simply now part of me in a way that goes beyond all we had already experienced together. Your strength is now mine, my skin still electric with the whisper of your blood, my limbs heavier, yet also more capable. My vision seems clearer than ever before, my senses amplified beyond what I have known, and, though quiet, my heart knows your desires as if they were its own. So close we have been this long time that there really was no other way this could have ended. I know you know this, for I can hear you inside, forever now my companion, my light where before there was only darkness.

The things you gave me tonight I can never repay, except to carry out your will as I knew it before tragedy befell you, and as I know it now, even more, as you speak directly to my own soul. We are one now, my beloved Angelo, one with the night. Our Requiem is now the same, and together we shall show them all the folly of their ways. I am no longer the child that you found and gave the gift of immortality, but I am your heir in every sense and as my hand acts, it shall be your name that is remembered, I swear to you. What I have done is no crime, my sire, but the proper conclusion to your own Requiem and the beginning of a new chapter in ours.

With eternal love and devotion,
Martika

Man, this fuckin' feels great. Holy . . . Damn. I should'a done this a long time ago. Fuck the Prince and his pals and those bitch-ass harpies. I don't need none of their crap anymore. I got the power! Yeah! Shit. I'm fuckin' still burnin' up. Whoa! I think I'm actually sweating. Ha!

Hey, what you lookin' at you motherfucker pile-of-bones motherfucker? Yeah, I'm talkin' to you! You look a little pale. Lose something? Maybe some blood? Maybe your fuckin' soul? Yeah! Burn in Hell, bitch. I own you now, or at least what's left of you. Damn, if this isn't the best fuckin' feelin' in the world. Jesus. I don't know why everyone isn't doin' this. Heh. I guess there ain't too many sleepers around. Too bad. Maybe I'll have to start makin' my own, 'cause I don't know how long I can go without this shit now. Seriously. Hey, I said quit lookin' at me, Skeletor! Don'tcha know what it means

when someone kills ya? Well, it's high time you started learnin'! Shieeeeeet . . .! This is so sweet. Jesus, I really am sweatin'. So cool. Man, I wish there were something still left so I could maybe have just one more toke. Just one. Or maybe two. Ha! What the hell, give me another one of these pagan motherfuckers, and I'll double down! Shit, I can't even stand! Ha! Clumsy bastard. It's like I'm drunk or somethin'.

Too cool. Damn, Cherie has got to try this. Really. She'd be so cool with it. We'll find someone, like that prick Diego. Who's gonna stop us? I mean really, who? I'm so fuckin' pumped now. Oh shit, I gotta find Cherie before sunup. Ha! I didn't even realize how late it is. Damn, three hours I've been here. No way! Oh God, I gotta do this again and soon. Yeah, Diego or one of his little buddies. Line up, boys! Time to give this unholy motherfucker his due!



You really want to know what it feels like? Really? All right. It sucks. Oh, that's not good enough for you? Okay, how 'bout this? Imagine you're asleep, but your dreams are all messed up. You know, strange surreal things going on in your head, things that happened, things that didn't, things from before, if you know what I mean. It's like you see your sire having lunch in the park with your mother and little sister, except there's a couple of Nosferatu throwing a Frisbee nearby, and then it's pitch black and you are in the Rack and the Priscus's child is whispering something about your ghoul and then, if that isn't unsettling enough, it gets worse. Suddenly, into this already Dali-esque little movie comes a face. It's that guy you saw at Doby's, that guy with the tattoo of the trident on his hand and that creepy-ass smile who

knew how to put some serious English on a ball. But now he's in my dream and my little sister starts screaming and my mother turns to ashes and the sky turns red and I see my bicycle in the middle of the street, as if I got hit by a car and yet I'm gone or something. Or you are. Whatever. Anyway, his face gets closer and I can smell him like the grave — which is very odd, given that I'm in torpor — and I can see his dead heart and through his dead skin and I can hear him laughing, only he doesn't look like he's laughing, and it's really disturbing and guttural. And he looks hungry, as in even hungrier than I've ever felt, and c'mon, you know I'm no stranger to hunger, right? And his tongue looks so damn long and his fangs, too. And that laughing gets even louder, but I think it's coming from inside him. But, of course, I can't really see any of this, 'cause my eyes are closed and I'm in torpor, right? Remember that thing with the Sheriff and the fire? Yeah, well that's what put me there. So, I'm in torpor and my dreams are already hosed enough without having this guy show up, but he does, and it is the scariest shit I've ever known. Honestly, I would have been happier if Eldon or one of his cronies came along, but they didn't; this guy did. Are you following me?

So there I am, can't move or scream or even open my eyes, and yet I can see this guy plain as can be. And I'm pretty much going nuts in my head, but I can't do anything, and so he just comes at me. I can feel his teeth sink into my skin, feel him start drinking, feel my Vitae start fading as he robs me blind, but I can't do anything. That, maybe more than anything, is the scariest part. Just lying there and being taken like that. I'm hoping now that this is all he wants, but it's not. When I feel empty — I mean *really* empty — he doesn't stop. And now it gets worse. It's like every single part of you, everything that is you, is being pulled out of your body, and not in a nice way. I'm trying to scream, trying to move, trying to do anything possible, but it's really like I'm just dead, watching a movie or something. I start to wonder if this isn't just another part of my fucked-up dreams, but something about it tells me this is the real deal. Nothing to do, I just wait and hope and beg some kind of god to make it stop. I know that if it doesn't, my Requiem really is over. This is the real deal; death, that is.

And then, as suddenly as it all started, it's over. Things go black and it's like time stops, or maybe it shoots forward and backward and jumps all over the place. I really don't know, but that little nightmare is over. When I do finally open my

eyes, it all feels like a really bad dream. Hell, I really thought it was for the longest time, except for one thing. I felt like some part of me was missing, something important. Not Vitae or a memory or something, but something else. It took me a long time to put my finger on it, to finally know for sure what that thing was, and when I did, it all made sense to me. Terrible sense.

The Vinculum

So compelling is the taste of Vitae, and its effects so overpowering, that it is no small wonder that the taste of Vitae is capable of not only leading to a foul addiction to the Vitae itself, but can just as easily lead the addict to form a nearly indestructible bond with the provider that replaces all other loyalties and emotional attachments. A Kindred who drinks thrice from the same vampire seals this blood bond and forever after submits her own will to the coercive power of the Vinculum, becoming in name and in fact thrall to her regnant. While the rare possibility exists that the regnant may meet his end and the Vinculum will be no more or that the thrall will find the extraordinary resolve necessary to break from the supernatural shackles of the Vinculum, it is folly for any Kindred to approach this subject entertaining that likelihood. Should a character permit herself to drink once from another, she treads dangerously. Should she do so a second time, she is flirting with the Devil. Upon accepting a third taste, she has taken an already accursed existence and doubly-damned herself, with no turning back.

Game Mechanics

There are three things to take into account where Vinculums are concerned, rules-wise. The first is the always present possibility of Vitae addiction, as discussed previously. Vinculum or not, every single time a vampire's Vitae is tasted, the drinker risks the possibility of becoming addicted to Vitae in general, or discovering that her already existent addiction has grown more acute. Storytellers should deal with this mechanic first, before addressing the matter of a Vinculum. It should be noted that even when the character is already thrall to a Kindred via a complete Vinculum, her addiction to Vitae does not end with regards to other vampires. On the contrary, her emotional ties to her regnant play no part in diminishing her routine craving for Vitae; should her regnant not provide it regularly enough or should she be exposed to other easily available donors, as a true addict her bond to her one true master will not stop her from indulging in her uncontrollable vice elsewhere. Such is the horror of addiction.

Once the matter of Vitae addiction is resolved, the possibility of whether or not a Vinculum actually takes hold or becomes even stronger than it already is must be dealt with. If this is the first time the character has tasted a particular vampire's Vitae, the player may choose to spend a point of Willpower to give her character a chance to resist the formation of the Vinculum. This "Vinculum resistance" dice pool is equal to the character's Stamina + Composure, but does not get the usual +3 dice bonus for the expenditure of Willpower. However, for each point that the character's Blood Potency is higher than the donor's, a +1 die bonus is awarded, so a character with Stamina 3, Composure 4 and Blood Potency 3 drinking the Vitae of a vampire with Blood Potency 2 would have a dice pool of eight to resist the creation of a Vinculum. If the roll succeeds, no Vinculum forms, and the character may drink from the same vampire again at a future time, and mechanically speaking, it will be treated as if it were still the first drink. Should the roll fail, a Vinculum is formed, though it is only the first step, as it were, toward a full blood bond. There are no mechanics accompanying this, so aside from the feelings the character has toward the donor, nothing else changes and her Requiem continues as usual, with no modification of dice pools or other adjustments.

There is one very important consideration here, however. The "Vinculum resistance" roll mentioned above is only permitted if the character who is drinking the Vitae possesses a Blood Potency that is higher than the donor's. Because of the Predator's Taint, in most cases the drinker will be well aware of whose Vitae is the more potent long before she ever considers drinking the other's Vitae. Consequently, if she knows her Blood Potency is the lower of the two or even equal in power, there is no point in the player spending the Willpower point to attempt to resist the creation of a Vinculum in the first place. The point of Willpower still *can* be spent, but it will be for naught as the roll will not be permitted. Even so, because of the existence of certain Disciplines (such as Animalism) that can hide the Predator's Taint, there might be situations when a potential drinker will not know whether her Blood Potency is greater or less than her donor's. In this case, the player may wish to spend the Willpower anyway, hoping that her character's Blood Potency may be higher, and therefore, she will be allowed the "Vinculum resistance" roll.

When a character drinks from a vampire to whom she is already bound by a first-stage Vinculum — usually the second time she drinks that vampire's Vitae — she runs the very real risk of making that Vinculum much stronger. To avoid this fate, assuming the character drinks the Vitae anyway, again her player may make a "Vinculum resistance" roll as above, with the same cost of a Will-

power point for the opportunity and the requirement that the character's Blood Potency be higher than the donor's. If the roll succeeds, the Vinculum that the character already has does grow stronger, though it also does not diminish. If the roll fails, the character is one step closer to a full blood bond. Once this second step toward thralldom is reached, the character cannot help but see the donor as a central figure in her Requiem. This is supported by the rules such that all the donor's Social dice pools directed at the drinker receive a +1 die bonus. This makes it much easier for the donor to influence the character, even if the character is already the thrall of another. Certainly, her regnant will still come first, but anyone else to whom she has a second-degree blood bond will also maintain a significant amount of sway over her. While not required, at this stage of the Vinculum Storytellers might wish to impose penalties on any attempt by the character to act against her donor. This could mean a success is first required on a Resolve + Composure roll or that a point of Willpower must be spent, depending on the circumstances. The idea here is that even though the relationship between the Kindred at this point is not one of thrall and regnant, and may never be if no more Vitae is proffered and taken, the relationship that does exist is a strong one, even if others cannot perceive it.

The final step of the Vinculum, the one that firmly establishes the thrall-regnant relationship, usually occurs when the third drink of Vitae is accepted by the thrall-to-be, or more precisely, when a character with a second-stage Vinculum to a certain vampire drinks that vampire's Vitae again and fails to resist the formation of the third and final stage of a blood bond. Once more, a point of Willpower may be spent to allow the "Vinculum resistance" roll as above if the character's Blood Potency is higher than the would-be regnant's. If the roll is successful, the character's Vinculum remains incomplete, albeit still only one step away from the full bond. However, if the roll fails or is simply not permitted, *and* the character is not already fully blood bound to another vampire — as a vampire may only have one true master at any time — then the Vinculum is made complete and short of a miracle or Final Death, the character will remain the her regnant's everlasting thrall.

Storytellers and players need to remember that the Vinculum is strictly a one-way bond, at least mechanically. A regnant or lesser donor may feel positively about those vampires who feed on his precious Vitae, but unless he reciprocates and partakes of the drinker's Vitae, these feelings are only as deep as any other; they are not enforced by any supernatural bonds or systems. Of

course, some vampires do share Vitae equally, usually as an expression of eternal devotion or as a very practical if not extreme way to avoid becoming thrall to anyone else. Barring this, however, the donor vampire is free to treat his bloodthirsty adorer as he wishes, with love or cruelty. So long as the shackles of the Vinculum exist, the thrall must suffer her regnant's treatment no matter what forms it takes; the artificial love she feels gives her no room to choose to do otherwise.

For the details on the rules for Vinculums, see pp. 161–162 of *Vampire: The Requiem*.

BREAKING THE CHAINS OF BLOOD

There are really only four ways that a Vinculum may be broken:

Final Death of either Kindred involved in the Vinculum.

The passage of time during which no further Vitae from the same vampire was consumed. This is merely a year for mortals and requires no roll. For the Kindred, a Resolve + Composure roll may be attempted every 50 years to break the blood bond.

Powerful emotional hatred for the donor that goes beyond anything else the bound character has experienced before. No set mechanic exists, as too many variables would be in play and the outcome should ultimately depend on roleplaying instead of the luck of the dice. Still, at least some general system should be devised by the Storyteller to aid in making the dramatic transition from helpless thrall to emancipation both workable and fair.

Finally, certain covenants and bloodlines may know of ways to overcome the might of a Vinculum that don't necessitate any of the above methods. Each such means is subject to its own unique rules for implementation.

The above methods will eliminate the bond entirely and not merely reduce it by degree. However, it might serve the story to explore this alternative, for example in a chronicle that spans the ages in which the thrall slowly breaks free of her Vinculum rather than just waking up one evening to find it completely gone.

What It Feels Like

A single sip of Vitae is usually not enough to create anything more than a pleasant, lasting impression of the experience that will color the character's attitude toward the donor for a time. The character will never again look at that other the same, though this will not actually dictate how the two interact in the future. Still, all things being equal, the drinker may dwell often on that taste of Vitae and often flirt with the idea of what it

might be like to revisit the experience again, likely with the same Kindred. Even if the character is fully bound to a regnant already and, therefore, unable to ever share that kind of real bond with this new donor, she will still discover these kinds of thoughts and fantasies after a single taste and wonder about what could be.

I still can't believe that I did it. I had never given him a second glance before, and why would I? In my six years since my Embrace I made a point of keeping my privacy and staying out of the Danse Macabre as much as possible. So why on earth would I cozy up to him, the Master of Elysium's right-hand man? I can't stand those harpies, but here I am, chatting like a teenager about things I have not talked about to anyone before. About mom's accident, about the time I nearly saw the sunrise and about that woman I killed last winter. OMG! I can't believe I told him that. I don't know what happened, but it just seemed so easy to talk to him. I guess I needed to. So I did and then, just like that, there it was. I didn't even see him do it, but all of a sudden I realize that his neck is bleeding, and he gently pulls my head to him. I really can't believe I did it, I just can't. I've heard so many stories, but it just seemed so right at the time. It was amazing. Really. I mean, I don't think sex was ever that good. His blood made my usual supper seem like a bologna sandwich by comparison. It was so thick, so unbelievably sweet, but it also burned like a shot of 151 or something. I was light-headed for at least a few minutes, 'cause I didn't even notice stopping. He pushed me away, but so gently, and I just focused on his eyes, at how deep and dark they were, and how perfectly clear, like I could see things I never dreamed before. It was like we really knew each other, even though he really didn't say much about himself, but it didn't matter. What happened that night was so incredible, it doesn't seem real. I kept on thinking about him, again and again. It was sort of like when a guy at a bar started talking to me, a guy I really didn't find attractive, but then later, after a few drinks, I realize this guy is so hot on some weird level and the next thing I know I'm making out with him. I don't know why, but it's just one of those things. Now.

The second sip, or, more precisely, the sip that triggers that second degree of the Vinculum, creates a far greater and longer-lasting impression than the first. The character is no longer able to easily dismiss the donor from her

thoughts, but is instead regularly plagued by an infatuation with the individual that can last years, decades and even longer. No artificial sense of love accompanies this stronger bond, but the character nonetheless finds herself drawn to the donor. If the two are in proximity to one another, even if protocol requires them to maintain a physical or social distance, the character will find her attention continually returning to the other. Only a real effort of will can enable her to fully focus her attention elsewhere. Even when the two are apart, she will replay their intimate encounters over and over and entertain detailed fantasies about similar possible future trysts. She does not feel a sense of obedience to her supplier, but she will willingly desire to please him and likely wish to explore greater intimacy.

What am I doing? Am I crazy or what? I really didn't think I'd ever do it again, and certainly not with him, but there you go. I did it. Truth is, it was even more amazing than the first time. I bumped into him in Seraph's club. Okay, I didn't really bump into him. I mean, yeah, I was hoping he might be there. But honestly, I didn't think I'd do anything; just check him out, see who he's with, maybe say "hi" or something. That's it. I figured that even if I did want more he'd just laugh at me anyway, if not openly, at least in a way that made it clear that I was pretty much out of my league. But he didn't. He took me aside and actually surprised me when he asked if I wanted to go somewhere else with him. I don't even remember what I said, but before I knew it we were in his place. I don't know how he manages it, but he's got a view of downtown and the river that I would literally kill for. And the art . . . damn. The guy has taste, I'll give him that. He's no simple poser, that's for sure. Then it happened, without prelude, which I realized later only made it that much more exotic. He leaned against the window and pulled me to him so that as I drank my eyes were fixed on the rain blurring the city lights beyond. It was so surreal, so absolutely perfect, as if he knew my every thought and understood what would move me and enflame my soul. Damn, I'm still trembling just thinking about that moment when the rush of Vitae filled my thirsty mouth, as my tongue swam in his fiery essence, as he fed my soul with his most precious of gifts. Drunk, high, sexually aroused, no, but something far better. He gave himself to me in a way that no one living can, and he did it completely, selflessly, trusting me to take only enough. I didn't even want to wake up the next night because even that seemed like a vulgar waste of his Vitae.



I wanted to keep it all inside, every drop he allowed me to have, and hold onto it forever. What does it mean now? Will he see me again? Will he want my own blood? Are we lovers? Argh! This is so stupid. Stop it, stop it, stop it. I have to let him decide, give him space, see what happens. But it's driving me crazy I don't know if I can wait for him to decide. I don't know.

The third sip of Vitae, or the one that pushes the character over the edge, firmly condemns her to true thralldom. Although the feelings she now experiences toward her regnant are wholly artificial and perverse in nature, they are as strong or stronger than the bonds of true mortal love. Her will is thoroughly dominated by her regnant's, though she rarely is able to see it this way. From her perspective, she loves her blood donor, and any submission on her part is entirely voluntary and founded on that love. This is the kind of love experienced by a prostitute for the pimp who supplies her all the drugs she needs to feed her addictions. Even though he may beat her and treat her like trash, she will defend him with all her will no matter the risk, so warped is her understanding of the reality of their relationship. Anything that threatens to come between thrall and regnant will cause the thrall to experience powerful feelings of anger, jealousy, hatred and vengeance, as well as desperation, helplessness, shame and self-loathing. These latter emotions are usually conveniently buried beneath the others, as the thrall rarely imagines any way to actually get out of her state of enslavement. In fact, she is usually quite convinced that this is exactly what she wants in the first place. Her regnant is *hers*, and this at least gives her something to hold onto as her increasingly bleak Requiem plays on.

I once believed I knew what love was. I thought I knew it with Jason, and later with Alex. God, I was so wrong. Last night I finally realized that. Maybe what I did was stupid, maybe some night I'll regret what happened, but right now it seems like the most perfect thing of all. In some ways it's like seeing the sun rise again, but instead of a burning agony I feel a burning energy that makes even the smallest thing seem better. I stayed away from him for so long. It took every ounce of my will, but I did, I gave him his space and didn't embarrass him in front of his coterie. But after all the shit that happened in the past few days, I didn't know what else to do. If I didn't talk to someone I was going to go mad, and of all the Kindred he knows me best, even if our time together has been so fleeting. I knew he understood me, and I knew

he would see me. He didn't judge my actions or their consequences, but just listened and then calmed me down, saying he'd make sure things would be okay. He made a few quick phone calls and assured me that there would be nothing to worry about. I would have done anything for him then, anything, he so saved my ass. I probably looked like shit and I know he realized how hungry I was, but he didn't pressure me. He just asked me if he could help, and without words he saw the answer in my pleading eyes. I don't really know how to describe it. The taste was the same, but the way he held me, the way he stroked my dirty hair, the way he moaned as I drank long and deep, was more exciting than anything I have ever known or could imagine. I felt things that I will never fully understand, but I know they were real, and still are. Last night he gave himself to me, completely, this ancilla placed his Requiem in my trembling, fragile hands, and showed me the real meaning of love. There is no turning back now. My heart is his as surely as the sun will rise and set. We are bound until the last night as nothing else can bind us, his Vitae nourishing me on every conceivable level and providing a salve against the worst of the Danse Macabre. One night he will wish for my Vitae, too, and he will find no resistance, no hesitation. It is his to take and command, forever, whatever may come. Last night I found love, and tonight and every night forward my love will be my armor, my shield and my sword, the taste of his blood always on my lips. I love you, and I know you love me, too.

Despite the power of an individual Vinculum, Storytellers should remember that even though a character can only be subject to the full power of the Vinculum with a single regnant, that character may simultaneously be under the influence of numerous less-complete blood bonds. There is no actual limit to the number of other, lesser Vinculums that may exist for a given vampire, though certainly the more that do exist the less likely each one will be to influence the character. Still, each holds a very real supernatural power over the Vitae addict, and whenever a donor vampire is in the presence of a vampire who has tasted his Vitae, the drinker will experience various pangs, desires and thoughts about that individual that might otherwise be out of place.

What They Say It Is

The Kindred do not agree on precisely what the Vinculum is. Some believe it is a very real emotional bond,

maybe the only true bond that they can ever experience. Loyalty to one's coterie, covenant, clan, Prince and even god are strong glue, but none of these bonds seem to provide the kind of very real, very emotional and very pleasurable rewards that the Vinculum can bring. For this reason, many equate a Vinculum with real love, seeing the giving and taking of Vitae, the thing most vital to all Kindred, as not simply a conduit for an artificial love but rather as an experience no less powerful than any that inspires mortals to feel deep love for another. To these Kindred, a Vinculum is something that can offer them a semblance of light in an otherwise dark night, allowing them to banish the loneliness that defines most Requiems and to face eternity with another at their side, someone they will never mistrust.

This view of the blood bond has more detractors than adherents, however. Far more Kindred see Vinculums with a somewhat more skeptical view. They believe that Kindred are, despite all their pretensions, more monster than Man, and any durable bond between vampires (or between a mortal and a vampire) is usually only an recipe for disaster. They don't refute the strong feelings of love that accompany the Vinculum, but they believe these feelings are merely the sign of a deep-seated desperation to be loved that is denied the Damned as part and parcel of their curse. When a vampire offers up his Vitae to another, this desperation causes the recipient to blindly perceive the donor's act as if it were one of selfless giving, when indeed it is much more likely to be the furthest thing from it.

The name "blood oath" is most used by those Kindred who see Vinculums as a means of control. Whether they have adopted this view as members of the Invictus or because they have themselves already exploited the power of the Vitae in this fashion, these vampires care little for the philosophical arguments and focus only on the purpose to which a Vinculum can be put. These scheming Kindred do not merely give away their Vitae to feral addicts or admirers, rather they demand that those who wish to most gain their trust and assistance must demonstrate their loyalty and submission by taking a blood oath. The petitioner takes this oath by drinking the other's Vitae, thereby pledging her loyalty in a way that cannot be denied, for each party knows the risks involved in this act.

Certain Kindred scholars, particularly among the Ordo Dracul, spend decades studying and contemplating the precise nature of the Vinculum. While all their findings are certainly not made public, enough of their hypotheses find their way into Elysium to provide other Kindred food for thought. But whether the Vinculum is a purely emotional bond, a type of supernatural enslave-

ment or some fundamental aspect of Vitae itself and, therefore, of what it means to be a Kindred, really is academic. These ideas can be argued night after night with no consensus ever being reached. Yet no Kindred questions the actual power of the blood bond or the purposes to which it can be put.

Can It Be Broken?

Page 162 of **Vampire: The Requiem** sets out a few ways that a Vinculum can be broken. The Final Death of either party will certainly do it, though the psychological effects of the bond may linger long afterwards for a particularly submissive thrall who suddenly finds her regnant gone. Mortals are far less susceptible to Vinculums and so are rid of it completely if they simply go a year without a taste of their regnant's Vitae. Waiting for time alone to wear away and finally loosen the bond enough to allow the thrall to slip free takes much longer for Kindred, with an attempt to do so only permitted every half century or so; that's a mighty long time for a thrall, particularly one who is addicted to Vitae, to go without having even a teensy sip of her regnant's blood. Rumors of certain forms of blood sorcery exist that suggest the Vinculum can be broken much more quickly and without requiring the destruction of the regnant, but few Kindred who find themselves bound will have access to such things. Still, Storytellers should given real consideration to permitting characters to hear about such options. Pursuing some legendary blood ritual that will allow one member of the coterie to throw off his chains of thralldom to an elder can be the stuff of an entire chronicle, or at least an exciting subplot. But is there any other way to end this terrible form of mystical servitude?

Everyone has his limits, even the most weak-willed individuals. Beat a child enough, and one of two things will happen: either the kid will permit the abuse to go on forever and just wait for the punisher to move on or die or the kid can take matters into his own hands. The latter requires a tremendous effort of will. Overcoming the scarring psychological trauma and the perverse bond that is formed between the child and his abuser, not to mention facing the very real possibility of more punishment and pain, may be the most difficult thing any mortal child can ever face. Despite this difficulty, there are those rare individuals who find the courage and resolve to stand up to their attacker and strike back. This can either be an indirect strike — for example, notifying the police and letting them handle it — or it can be direct, and usually lethal for the abuser.

Storytellers might wish to approach thralldom with this analogy in mind. If the thrall is treated well, is



given her space and, for the most part, is rarely exploited, there is very little chance that the character can summon the will to break the Vinculum. There is not enough fire in her gut, so to speak, and fire is exactly what is needed, in spades. However, should the regnant prove to be an abusive bastard, even if this mistreatment does not extend to the physical — and let's be honest, the most painful injuries are not bodily but emotional — then the above example can serve as a template for just how the thrall-regnant relationship might play out. An occasional cruel word or two or the every-so-often slap across the face doesn't cut it. The Vinculum is more than strong enough to cause the victim to rationalize away such abuse. No, for it to count, for it to ignite a fire in the victim, one that will continue to grow and eventually explode, the abuse must be regular, unwarranted and truly harsh. Nightly humiliation in front of other Kindred, violent outbursts directed at the thrall, all manner of restrictive or difficult "rules" being laid out and enforced and an utter disregard for the thrall's own wishes and private affairs are all the kinds of things that can lead a thrall to build up the kind of hatred and passion necessary to overcome the blood bond.

Because players may have experienced similar forms of abuse in their own lives, Storytellers need to handle this carefully. For some players, roleplaying this type of self-reliant victory over an abuser can be cathartic, but others may not be comfortable with the situation. Before going to town on a thrall and having a regnant heap abuse on her, the Storyteller needs to first be sure that the troupe is okay with this. There are no rules for how to do this, but it is essential if these very personal aspects of **Vampire: The Requiem** are to play a role in your game.

Blood Ties

Whenever a character attempts to use **Auspex**, **Dominare**, **Nightmare** or **Majesty** directly against another vampire who is no more than two "steps" removed from the character by blood — his sire, grandsire, childer and grandchilder — the player gains a +2 bonus to his dice pool. (See *Vampire: The Requiem*, p. 162.)

As noted in **Vampire: The Requiem**, there may be certain bloodline signature Disciplines that qualify for this same bonus as well; determining whether they do is a matter left to the Storyteller. If the Discipline is such that it can directly affect another vampire, particularly in an inimical fashion, it probably qualifies. The point is that the closer a Kindred is to another, the stronger the bond that exists between them — on a mystical level. These blood ties do not fade with time, though distance

does cause the familial call of blood to like blood to diminish to a whisper and finally become too faint to hear, so to speak. The rule of thumb given is a 50-mile limit or the furthest reaches of the local metropolitan area, whichever makes more dramatic sense. What is important is that beyond a certain point, blood ties no longer have any effect. This is true even if a certain Discipline may affect a blood relative further away. So, if a Daeva uses Summons to cause his grandchilde to come to his haven and that grandchilde is halfway across the world when he “hears” the Summons, there is no bonus to the dice pool for the summoner’s player, at least not until the grandchilde was within city limits. Vampires who wish to escape the influence of their blood relatives usually relocate to a new city because of these otherwise unshakable ties.

Many Storytellers overlook a character’s blood ties and the dramatic possibilities that can be created by exploiting them. There is just too much going on between the characters themselves, those Kindred movers-and-shakers who directly influence them, their allies and enemies, and all the mortals whom they use and abuse to remember this aspect of the Blood. While entire plotlines can be created around the characters’ blood ties, they should not overshadow more obvious dramas. Instead, use blood ties to remind the players that even when all else seems to be going smoothly, they can never escape the curse of the Blood. It’s not bad enough that the characters might find themselves pulled into the private schemes and crimes of their relatives, either; at all times they are aware that their own activities might be known to their closest blood kin no matter how much they might wish otherwise. This is a very strong inducement for Kindred to try and maintain at least cordial if not trusting relationships with these relatives, *just in case*. It never hurts to get along well with one’s family, but it is a sure thing that one night family discord will rear its ugly head at the worst possible moment.

Canny vampires are ever aware of the power of blood ties, not only of their own, but of those possessed by other Kindred. This is another weapon in their arsenal to be used against their enemies, current and future. Once a vampire knows who is related to whom and by what degree — which, given the small size of most Kindred populations and the social and political nature of their society, is usually a relatively easy task to accomplish — plans can start being laid to befriend certain individuals who can serve as conduits to their less amicable relatives. A Nosferatu might seek out a certain Ventrue neonate because he is the grandchilde of a troublesome

Harpy. By establishing some level of trust with the neonate, probably by means of deception or worse — a Vinculum, for example — the Haunt is now able to use the neonate’s blood ties to his grandsire to the his own advantage. Should the Harpy experience some terrible personal trauma, there is a good chance the neonate will be aware of this because of the blood sympathy the two share, and the Nosferatu can now learn of it and use it against the otherwise unassailable Harpy. Of course, this is a double-edged sword. If the neonate is persuaded to assist the Nosferatu via some method as extreme as a Vinculum, it is very likely the Harpy will become aware of this and he can use this knowledge to either use his grandchilde against the Nosferatu or attack the Haunt directly, perhaps via social assassination.

What should be clear from all this is that there is a very large potential inherent in the concept of blood ties that can be tapped in many ways by a creative Storyteller to enhance the many layers of drama, intrigue and downright horror that already exists in a well-run chronicle. Blood ties should not be abused, but they should also not be ignored and remembered only when all other plot ideas seem to have been exhausted. It might be helpful to intentionally make them part of an early story, especially if the characters have only recently been Embraced, to reinforce their power and coax the characters into the Danse Macabre whether they wish to or not. This is what the Requiem is all about, isn’t it?

The Taste of Family

A single success on an Intelligence + Occult roll enables a character to determine either if the Vitae he is tasting is that of his own clan or, instead, if it comes from his own sire or his childer. Two successes can precisely determine what clan the Vitae comes from or, if preferred, whether the Vitae comes from the character’s grandsire or grandchilde. The use of Heightened Senses provides a +2 dice bonus to this roll. Finally, the same dice pool can be used when tasting mortal blood to learn whether it comes from any close mortal relations.

First and foremost, this requires a Kindred to taste Vitae, which means he is subject to all the rules and dangers inherent in that act. The risk of Vitae addiction is no less real when sampling Vitae for the purpose of identifying its owner than when Vitae is consumed for any other reason. Rarely, then, do Kindred simply go around licking up spots of Vitae as if they were characters on *CSI: Requiem*. Unless there is a very compelling reason to do so, this kind of forensic trick should probably be forsaken, and any necessary investigation

carried out by some other means. However, it is not unheard of for Princes or their Sheriffs to order other Kindred to risk addiction and taste suspicious Vitae, particularly if the official believes the Kindred may be related to the most probable suspect.

Is That Vitae on the Carpet?

Page 156 of **Vampire: The Requiem** clearly states that “Vitae retains its supernatural properties for a few minutes after it leaves a vampire’s body and is exposed to air, and then reverts to ordinary blood. A scientist who examines a sample of former Vitae would find a mixture of blood from many sources, with some of the cells broken down.”

This means that except for a few very brief time immediately after being spilled, there can be no real Vitae to taste; it becomes pretty much ordinary blood, in which case a vampire would be unable to discern anything about who it came from — and would also run no risk of Vitae addiction. This seems to make the ability to recognize the “taste of family” awfully useless. You’re not going to chomp down an active vampire just to find out if he’s so-and-so’s sire when you could just ask him, are you? Doubtful. So, when would this ability actually come into play?

First, sometimes those first few minutes after Vitae is spilled *are* critical. The characters may bust down the door of an apartment only to find they are too late to save a friend from being pulverized into torpor by an unknown vampire. Even though Vitae doesn’t splash around wildly the way mortal blood does as a result of savage injuries, there will still be some traces of Vitae on the scene if it is examined closely enough. What’s more, the injured fellow might have bitten his attacker and so his mouth and throat may still contain a significant amount of the attacker’s Vitae. Arriving too late on the scene renders this evidence unusable, however.

Second, certain blood sorcery enables the practitioner to suspend the process that causes Vitae to revert back to blood when outside a vampire. This Vitae, whether in the form of liquid or perhaps a reliquary of some kind, can easily be sampled and the identity of its owner put to the test.

Third, and actually the most common use of this ability, is when the actual identity of a given Kindred is called into question. The Prince may suspect the vampire is the unclaimed childe of a Kindred who was not been granted permission to sire progeny, and the taste test is a good way to learn the truth. It also allows for a childe, perhaps abandoned by her sire, to petition for recognition in order to secure a better place for herself in Kindred society. Because Vitae can surrender this kind of information without too much effort, sires

often deny their paternalism; lying to the Prince and then having the truth come out later is a sure way to bring all sorts of trouble down on one’s head.

Blood Sympathy

A successful Wits + Occult roll enables a character to gain a degree of knowledge about the current feelings, location and possibly even activities of a close blood relative; using Heightened Senses provides a +2 dice bonus to this roll. If this roll is not called for by the Storyteller, a player may still make it by first spending one point of Willpower, which adds nothing to the roll. A point of Willpower may also be spent to alert a particular blood relative to the character’s goings-on, which allows that character’s player to make the above roll to perceive the transmitted psychic impressions. (See **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 163–164.)

Here, “close blood relatives” refers again only to those Kindred who are directly related up or down the family tree by one or two steps: the character’s grandsire, sire, childer and grandchilder. The 50-mile limit or the bounds of the metropolitan area also applies; blood sympathy is merely another aspect of the overall blood ties that exist between closely related Kindred. An ordinary success on the Wits + Occult roll will provide the character a brief yet strong feeling of what the relative is feeling and a general idea as to the direction and distance of that individual. Note that while unsaid in **Vampire: The Requiem**, this includes knowing the identity of the relative whose emotions are being received. It should be made clear that barring an exceptional success, the character is not made aware of the relative’s actual actions or her perceptions of external stimuli — sights, sounds, etc. Only the emotions of the relative are detected. However, should the character achieve an exceptional success, there is literally nothing the character cannot know. Until the sympathetic connection is broken, he can perceive everything the distant relative is experiencing as it happens almost as if he were that individual.

Regardless of the degree of success on the roll, however, these perceptions last only a few moments. Although no hard-and-fast rule exists to set out the precise duration of this blood sympathy, it usually lasts no more than a few minutes. The real determinant is not the clock, but rather the strength of the emotions experienced by the transmitting character. Most emotions, no matter how intense, spike only briefly before subsiding to a less overwhelming level. This spike rarely lasts long. A sire witnessing the Final Death of a beloved childe is likely to experience a sudden surge of extremely overriding emotions that could include hatred, anger, sorrow, heartbreak, guilt, humiliation, helplessness and so on. However, after a very brief

initial spike, the sire will probably “get over it” at least enough to carry on, as it were. This does not mean the sire will feel any less miserable, but the emotions he now feels won’t have the impact they had the moment they were first experienced and so they will not be broadcast “through the blood” to other relatives any longer.

The point of blood sympathy is for characters to be able to gain enough information about the most dramatic experiences of close blood relatives to use that knowledge in some fashion. Storytellers should not just use it as a cruel tease, only providing a useless glimpse of some passing emotion to the player, such as, “You suddenly feel a fleeting echo of sadness pass through you and then it is gone.” This is especially true if the player spent a point of Willpower to purposefully open himself to his relatives’ emotions. Instead, reserve these impressions for truly intense times. If sadness is being perceived, it should be the result of a seriously traumatic experience, not because the blood relative is just bummed out about his mortal pawn’s loss of a political election. In short, don’t waste this on the small stuff. Use it to add something meaningful to the story, either a possible plot twist or much-needed dollop of atmosphere that reminds players of the power of their blood ties.

Sebastian, we must speak. I understand that my actions have pushed you away and that you no longer wish to share your Requiem with me as we had done for so long. I do not begrudge you this. We must each face damnation in our own way, and I realize now that ours are very different. But I am not writing you to try and convince you to reconsider our relationship and return to my arms. I am asking only that we can meet in order to discuss what happened three nights past. Yes, I know what happened. I know everything, and I fear for your safety now. I have no intention of asking you why you did that thing, why you have chosen this treacherous path, and I shall not judge you for what you have done; I have done that enough already to last an eternity. Rather, I wish to help. I do not offer this to ensnare you in some fashion; you will owe me nothing for this aid, but without my assistance I am sure that your nights are numbered. Rachel is already making her move, and soon your actions will be made public, with all the consequences that will entail. Despite your talents and considerable luck, my child, you cannot stand against her. Truly, without my hand, you will fall and all that you dream will be lost. I know what you feel, I know how hard it was for you to make that choice, and I know how it has changed you.

We are bound in ways you still do not understand and though we are apart your blood sings to mine of your sorrows and joys. If this is all I can ever again have of you, so be it. But for both our sakes, please see me so that we may allow your bittersweet Requiem to continue. As I write this, I open myself to you in the hope that you, too, can feel just how much your safety means to me. Remember this as you read these words and remember that all our differences aside, it was I who chose you to join me in the Danse Macabre. This last time, let me teach you another move to add to your already impressive repertoire, a move that will save you and let your beautiful Requiem play on.

Feeding

The player describes how her character will hunt, and the Storyteller determines the appropriate Attribute and Skill to use for a dice pool, modified by the locale and type of prey sought. Success indicates one or more suitable vessels are found and their blood taken. (See *Vampire: The Requiem*, p. 164.)

CLEARING A DOMAIN

A Vitae-hungry elder could destroy every vampire in his own domain. In most cases, the destruction begins slowly — unaligned stragglers begin to disappear, then the lowest-Status members of the vampire’s own covenant and eventually those of others. Sooner or later, the habits of the elder are discovered, and open conflict erupts — but that conflict doesn’t necessarily end with the Final Death of the elder and the return to normalcy for the city. There are cases of elder victory, wherein every last bit of opposition is wiped out. The victory is bittersweet, since the elder destroys his own food source, and must either continually Embrace to feed himself, eventually running out of Willpower and collapsing into madness, or enter torpor.

Storytellers can use this (admittedly rare) phenomenon to set stories in a modern city with a much lower than normal Kindred population — or even one with no population at all. Since most vampires never travel, it’s possible for a setting like this to exist untouched and unknown for decades or even centuries.

It has already been said, but it can never be said enough: vampires would be nothing without blood. Their unique ability to unconsciously transubstantiate ordinary blood into something else, something wholly unnatural that is able to sustain them in a perpetual state of undeath is

their most defining characteristic and sets them apart from all other creatures. Only blood can quench a vampire's monstrous hunger long enough for him to turn aside from the hunt and bend his mind and body to other purposes. But each day as the sun roars across the heavens, bathing the earth with its cruel heat, a portion of each vampire's precious Vitae, quite literally his *life*, is irretrievably lost in order to fuel his continued existence and permit him to rise once more from his corpse-like slumber. And so, each night the hunt for new blood continues again. Until the intense craving for blood is satisfied, little else can command a vampire's attention; not personal relationships, not politics, certainly not the concerns of the kine and, in many cases, not even his own principles and morality. Vitae is a vampire's greatest need and greatest asset, and so the acquisition of blood always comes first.

The hunt for blood is one of the most identifiable elements in any vampire story, whether it takes place in literature or in **Vampire: The Requiem**. It is a tableau of emotions and actions that quite literally define our conception of what a vampire is. Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is dominated by the Count's seductive pursuit of Lucy and Mina's blood, not by his political or social schemes. Even the most modern tales of the undead that attempt to make the vampire seem much more like ordinary people cannot work without the act of seeking and drinking blood taking center stage. Too much attention placed elsewhere, and the story loses something essential: the characters no longer feel like vampires, but perhaps only sinister figures. The tendency to portray vampires without actual fangs, who are capable of going without blood or at least without taking it from the living, quite literally takes the bite out of the story, and that bite, more than anything else, is what we desire to experience.

Playing a vampire character provides us a way to experience that bite for ourselves, at least in a sense. That's why we play **Vampire: The Requiem** in the first place, right? If we want to just be grim or gothic characters with some slick superpowers we can turn elsewhere. **Vampire: The Requiem** was created to give us the chance to play actual vampires, and this means it was designed to put the hunt and consumption of blood at the center of all things. The Machiavellian Danse Macabre adds a host of great dramatic opportunities to enhance the story and give it much greater depth than a mere hunt for blood, of course, but when it comes right down to it, this is all really window dressing, at least from the perspective of the characters. Blood first, all else a distant second.

Making the hunt work right in a chronicle is a central part of what being a **Vampire: The Requiem** Storyteller

is all about. Too much emphasis on the hunt, and the rest of the story falls to the wayside and the players become bored. Too little, and the "vampire" disappears from the story. So how does a Storyteller find that balance?

The best way is to make sure that every player has been given the opportunity at least once in the chronicle to experience the full thrill of the hunt. This is best saved for a time when either the rest of the players are otherwise occupied or unable to make that game session. On the other hand, some players will want to sit back and watch it all play out, enjoying the scenario for the sake of entertainment alone. Some of the best player "campfire stories" are those of a character's hunt that didn't go as smoothly as planned. It may come as a surprise to hear this, but many players have not actually ever been given this chance. Many Storytellers gloss over the hunt in order to focus on the Danse Macabre. In these chronicles, the hunt often comes down to a brief description by the player of the type of prey her character seeks — a "husky frat boy" or a "heroin chic woman" — the naming of a location she will go to find this kind of person, and maybe a few simple rolls of the dice to determine if she was successful or not. Sometimes Storytellers just have the player make a single roll to take care of everything, maybe even assigning dots of Vitae acquired based on the number of successes rolled. There is nothing inherently wrong with any of this, but to never allow a player to experience what the hunt is like from the character's perspective is to do a disservice to the player and the chronicle. Remember, vampires hunt almost every single night of their Requiems and rarely is it a cut and dried thing. In fact, even when a vampire can arrange for an easy supply of blood, she usually still prefers the thrill of the hunt. Vampires are not scavengers or grazers; they are predators, and that means that nothing satisfies them more than a good hunt as prelude to a good meal.

Once the time is available for this kind of extended personal scenario, don't hold back. The Storyteller should be prepared to allow things to unfold slowly and to inject every moment of the hunt with all the detail possible to make it come alive for the player. The scents, sounds, sights, feelings and, ultimately, the flavors that are available to the character should be described so that the player can savor them in the way her character would. Let the player roll dice to accomplish various tasks, not to impose barriers to her character, but to remind her that the hunt is not a sure thing and that the challenge of the hunt is what makes it so exciting and its reward so worthwhile. Throw in lots of everyday complications that will illustrate the complexity of the hunt. For example, as the vampire is preparing to move in to talk to her prey

for the first time, maybe the intended victim's coworker suddenly shows up to share a drink before taking him to the ballgame. Now the character has to either abandon her prey or come up with a new approach to draw him away from his buddy and his plans to see the game. Again, these should be small complications, for the most part. However, sometimes even a drastic twist of fate is appropriate. Maybe the character has been seductively flirting with a guy across the street and finally the guy decides to act on her suggestive glances, but as he makes his move, he is hit by a taxicab that comes out of nowhere. Use these kind of calamities carefully, though.

Storytellers and players will discover that figuring out the best way to find an appropriate victim and take some of his blood all the while maintaining the Masquerade, avoiding frenzy and heinous immoralities and doing it with enough time left over to take care of other pressing business and to return to her haven before sunrise is not as simple as it may seem. Many players may become frustrated when they actually have to play out the entire hunt, but they need to keep in mind that this is exactly what their characters actually have to do almost every night. For the characters, the hunt is not a frustrating distraction from other matters; it is the very thing that feeds their bodies *and* their souls, making their Requiems exhilarating and very sensual. Players should approach it this way also, at least often enough to make sure they do not forget this essential aspect of the Requiem.

When it is not appropriate to fully play out a character's hunt, there are some other things that can be done to make sure it still gets its due. Storytellers should try never to reduce the hunt to a single roll of the dice, first of all. Yes, a system exists for this on p. 164 of **Vampire: The Requiem**, but that should be used as a last resort. Instead, try to have the players give at least a bit of detail as to where they are going, how they are acting and which kine they are seeking. Dice rolls can certainly be called for, but, more importantly, make the players think about what their vampire characters actually do. In return, the Storyteller should give enough description to supply the characters with answers to the questions: who did I drink from, where did I drink and how did the hunt go? Full disclosure is not necessary, but the characters should be able to relate the basic story of their hunt afterwards to other characters and not just say, "Uh, um . . . I hunted, you know?"

Another way to add meaning to the hunt is to have the character's prey make an unexpected appearance later in the chronicle. This should not happen frequently — cities are large places — and it requires that the character is aware of who she is feeding upon, but



it can make a simple hunt one night long ago suddenly become much more significant. The former victim might turn out to be someone very important or at least someone suddenly important to the vampire's plans. He could turn out to be the Retainer or Contact of another Kindred's, possibly even a ghoul. His recollection of the night he became the character's prey might be hazy or even absent, but it could be quite clear and he might remember the character at first glance and very likely feel all sorts of forgotten emotions as a result. This encounter need not turn into something that turns the story on its head, but even if it leads nowhere, the fact that the consequences of the hunt were not limited to a single, mostly forgotten moment can have a real and enjoyable impact on the player and the game.

The Vampire's Bite

After a successful grapple on a victim, the character may choose to either solely inflict damage with her fangs as a normal attack or to inflict a single point of lethal damage and simultaneously gain one point of Vitae by drinking an equal quantity of the victim's blood. Willing or helpless prey can be bitten without a grapple hold. Once the vampire successfully bites the victim for any purpose, the victim may only resist and retain the ability to fight back if his player makes at least three successes on a Resolve + Composure roll. Vampires can always resist the bite of another vampire. (See *Vampire: The Requiem*, p. 165.)

Rarely do vampires use their fangs for the purpose of merely injuring a mortal, except when they frenzy and the opportunity presents itself. In these cases, it is just like any other attack that first requires the attacker to first get a firm hold on the victim. However, when a vampire finds himself in conflict with another vampire or a Lupine or some other supernatural creature, there is good reason to resort to using his fangs as weapons: they inflict aggravated damage. Wounds caused by fangs used this way cannot be made to disappear with a post-trauma lick by the attacker, either; the damage is simply too great and must be healed by other means available to the victim.

Most of the time, a vampire's bite is reserved for one purpose — drinking blood — which is really the sole reason a vampire has fangs in the first place. They might come in handy in a fight sometimes, but they exist for the purpose of draining prey of their lifeblood. This is why when a vampire is not drinking blood the fangs draw back into the jaw. It certainly makes speaking and hiding in plain sight from the kine easier, but it is really to protect the fangs from injury. Yes, they do usually grow back, but losing a fang is an excruciatingly painful experience and can add no small amount of complication to a vampire's

Requiem until fully healed. Similar to the vampire bat, a Kindred's saliva also possesses an anesthetic quality that makes the bite, when used to drink blood, far less painful than it could be. There is some pain, yes, but this is swiftly obliterated by the shuddering ecstasy that typically accompanies the vampire's actual feeding. The sensation the victim experiences as his blood is being drained away is not unlike an orgasm that begins with the first pull of blood and ends only when the vampire withdraws. Licking the small wounds left by the fangs in order to cause them to immediately heal — something that only works on fresh wounds created by the same vampire — is like that gentle moment after orgasm as the body winds down and basks in the glow of the experience. For these reasons, this act of drinking blood is commonly referred to as the Kiss.

Most victims find that their memory of the experience is somewhat less than perfect. Much of this has to do with the vampire's *modus operandus*, especially when Disciplines are exercised on the victim. Dominate, Majesty, Nightmare and others can dramatically alter the victim's recollection of precisely what happened. Alcohol, drugs and the psychological state of the individual also play an important role in helping to protect the Masquerade. Just as important is the power of the Kiss itself. The sensation is so tremendous for most kine that they are unable to focus on the actual circumstances surrounding the event, such as the appearance of fangs and the feeling of them sinking into flesh. Few are fully aware that they are actually being drained of blood; of those who are, many adopt a form of self-denial that allows them to preserve the pleasant memories without giving them nightmares. Some people actually *want* to remember the experience with all the gory details if possible. For them, the pain and shocking reality of what is going on only heightens their own sense of erotic pleasure. Still, these masochists overwhelmingly tend to imagine their "lover" is merely a dark-minded deviant, not an actual undead creature of the night. I mean, really, there are no such things as vampires. . . .

The Kiss is an entirely different experience for the Damned. Few real pleasures exist in the Requiem, but drinking blood is one that, at least during its commission, possesses the wherewithal to make all the other horrors of the Curse seem worthwhile. Not to wear out the sex analogy, but just as for the vampire's prey, the Kiss is an experience best equated with orgasm. However, for the vampire it goes beyond even that, for it truly is a feeding. Every gulp of the prey's hot blood quenches the almost unbearable hunger that up until that moment consumed the vampire's attention. Each second that passes while drinking further suppresses that painful craving and adds to the already considerable pleasure that the vampire experiences from the taste alone. But the sensation does

not stop there. The predatory brain of the vampire exults in the knowledge that the hunt has once again been a success and that another creature has fallen victim to the vampire's superiority. Whether the victim attempted to resist the vampire or he willingly submitted may color this perception, but both give the vampire a real sense of dominance that dramatically amplifies things even more. Kindred who possess and activate their Heightened Senses are able to get even more out of the Kiss. In fact, these individuals find their experience to be so powerful that they frequently lose track of anything else going on around them, even the presence of a serious threat. For them, only the hedonistic pleasure matters. The anticipation of this pleasure fills a character's mind as she sets out on the hunt, the expectation that before long she will be able to fully enjoy the ecstasy of the Kiss and at the same time eliminate the growing hunger that cries out for blood.

Five nights now I have only watched, sating my dread appetites instead upon other, lesser kine, while allowing him to remain safe from my foul predations. He is too beautiful, too perfect to waste on base hunger alone. Among the herd, only he stands out, proud and noble and deserving of this rare reprieve. For five days now, I have dreamed of the scent of his flesh as he anticipates my Kiss, of the small sound of breaking skin, of the raw eruption of his pulsing blood and the overpowering coppery aroma that it exudes and that I draw into myself. I can almost taste his masculinity, his brutality, his vigor and his confidence as if it were already spilling into my mouth, bathing my quick tongue and pouring down my throat, nourishing that suckling Beast within. I fantasize about his initial resistance, the heavy rope of his muscles as he struggles to fight off my advance, of the roar of his defiant voice like a lion among a herd of antelope. The thought of this wondrous creature's intense effort to live, to defend himself and to believe he can succeed despite the atrocity of my assault, only to become transformed into a trembling helplessness and eventually a complete surrender fills my every waking moment. Five nights I have imagined and played out this fantasy again and again, staving off the inevitable as a kind of masochistic way to increase the power of the moment when it comes. Five nights is enough. Tonight will be his last night on this Earth, for a few drops alone will not be sufficient to sate my almost maddening desire for him. I will treasure every last drop of his precious lifeblood, every last convulsion of his muscles, every last

sound he makes and every last breath in his astonishing mortal body. Tonight his blood is mine.

Blood Supply

Each health level taken from a victim typically provides the vampire with one dot of Vitae; therefore, mortals can provide a maximum of seven dots of Vitae. (See *Vampire: The Requiem*, p. 164.)

The rules make clear that, other supernatural donors aside, only fresh blood taken from a living mortal provides enough sustenance for a Kindred. Although a vampire could feed indefinitely off dogs, cats, rats and other mammals or confine his blood supply to human blood that has been donated and stored, there are two serious problems with this kind of Requiem. First, these sources provide only half, and in some cases as little as one-eighth, the amount of vital force to the Kindred as an equal volume of fresh human blood. This means the character would have to either have easy, regular and explainable access to one or more of these sources — Hey, where are all the neighborhood dogs disappearing? — or she would soon be forced to return to hunting the kine for their much more suitable blood. Some vampires do choose this route for a time, usually in the hopes of regaining a little of their lost Humanity, reasoning that by refraining from preying upon people they can atone for their past crimes. Rarely does this last long, however. Eventually, even if only for logistical reasons, these vampires recognize that this diet is too difficult to continue, and they return to feeding on the kine.

But there is another reason few Kindred forgo mortal blood. Satisfaction. While other blood can quench their hunger if enough is consumed, it can never approach the kind of pleasure that the Kindred experience from the Kiss. Knowing what it is like to drink a mortal's warm blood, hungering for it and then denying one's self that incomparable satiation is just too difficult for most Kindred to do for very long, if at all. Soon after the Embrace, nearly all Kindred, regardless of their mortal upbringing, arrive at the realization that they must find a way to square their parasitic existence with their moral code. This is often a traumatic journey that threatens, and often succeeds, in permanently damaging their Humanity, but almost universally, the fledgling vampire finds some way to accept who she is and what she must do to survive. This is made easier by the considerable pleasure of the experience, of course, which soon banishes any of the character's lingering moral dilemmas and becomes something that is no longer difficult to accept but rather something that the character wants

to experience over and over again. No, vampires are not going to lick their cold lips in anticipation of biting down on another possum the way they will if looking forward to a living person as their next meal.

The complete rules on a character's blood supply, how much damage is sustained from having it drained and how long it takes to recover, as well as the effects that drinking the blood of other supernatural creatures has on a vampire, can be found on pp. 164–166 of **Vampire: The Requiem**.

Ghouls

A mortal who has tasted a character's Vitae becomes a ghoul if a point of Willpower is spent to enable the transformation. This Willpower can come from either the vampire or the mortal. (See *Vampire: The Requiem*, p. 166.)

Like it or not, the Kindred cannot accomplish all things by virtue of their own actions. Forced into slumber from sunrise to sunset, they must turn to the kine to aid in everything from safeguarding their havens and their persons to opening bank accounts and even getting their clothes dry-cleaned. Even in this day and age when so much can be accomplished with only a computer and an Internet connection, so much remains that requires face-to-face resolution during daylight hours. Also, most Kindred are just not that savvy with modern technology. If parents still have trouble understanding how to use text messaging while their kids are doing it almost before they can ride a bike, imagine how it is for most Kindred who grew up in an age when such things just did not exist. And that's just the youngest vampires! Ancillae and elders are not only at a loss when it comes to the products of the Information Age but may still have difficulty understanding things as commonplace as automobiles. Of course, many Kindred do make the effort to learn about these innovations and master them, but players must keep in mind that just because they use and possibly cannot imagine living without the technological marvels of today, this does not have to translate over to their characters. In fact, for the most part, it shouldn't. Unless their characters have a very compelling reason to wish to adopt innovation, few vampires really will. Why? Because it is easy to get the kine to do it for them.

Most mortals who serve the Kindred, voluntarily or otherwise, are not ghouls. Honestly, most tasks don't require a ghoul. But there are times when a vampire realizes that he needs someone he can trust far more than the ordinary retainer, someone whom he is absolutely sure will keep his secret and who even possesses certain supernatural advantages over the rest of the

herd that can be put to use by the vampire. At these times, a ghoul is usually the best option. All it requires of the vampire is a very small sacrifice of Vitae each month along with a similarly regular effort of will, which need not even be the vampire's. Not every Kindred keeps a ghoul, especially in domains where the Prince has placed restrictions on the practice, but certain elders and influential Kindred often sustain two or more ghouls. Of course, this is the exception, not the norm. Yet why? If all there was to keeping a ghoul was giving up a little Vitae and Willpower every month, it seems a no-brainer. But that's only if the hidden costs are ignored.

Creating a ghoul is the easy part; managing her is not. Storytellers and players must keep in mind that a ghoul is not merely an automaton who runs on Vitae. Even a ghoul who is completely addicted to her domitor's Vitae — and after a certain time, that usually includes all ghouls — retains some semblance of free will. More importantly, even these blood slaves are fully aware that when their master is sleeping, there's no Vitae to be had and they are on their own at least until sundown. It's true that the vast majorities are so closely bound to their domitor that they will not intentionally do things to muck up the vampire's Requiem, but that is no guarantee that they won't. Ghouls are still human, and they are fully capable of making mistakes, doing foolish things and misunderstanding what it is they are supposed to do. And that's not counting all the things that can happen regardless of how perfect the ghoul is. Fate can step in any day of the week and wreck everything. A car accident, criminal incarceration or even just pissing off the wrong person can lead to all sorts of headaches for the vampire. The point is that ghouls should be treated as more than supporting characters who, once wound up and set in motion, will perform flawlessly until they run out of power. Quite the opposite, they require constant attention on behalf of the domitor. It doesn't matter if the vampire created the ghoul to serve as his lover, his intellectual companion, his butler, his bodyguard, his errand boy or any combination of these things; without regular time and effort given to the ghoul, the likelihood that something is going to go seriously wrong increases exponentially.

The power of Vitae and its addictive qualities only reinforce this. A ghoul may not require more Vitae for another three weeks, but that doesn't mean she won't want it much sooner. Once addicted, she might do anything to get Vitae, including trying the blood of ordinary mortals or animals to see if it can satisfy her craving even a small bit. If the ghoul is weaned off Vitae and reverts to

a normal mortal once more, her rapid aging is the least of the vampire's problems. The ghoul will still be addicted to Vitae, and she will still possess full knowledge of her existence as a ghoul, two things that can pose a very real danger to the former domitor and the Masquerade itself. For this reason, once ghouls have served their purpose, most vampires do not simply release them into the night trusting that all will be forgiven and forgotten. Most of the time, a far less pleasant parting will occur.

Storytellers can use ghouls many ways. They do not need to play a major role in a chronicle or have to be a source of chronic irritation or trouble, but they should be introduced as people first and servants second. Few domitors simply say, "Hey, ghoul, come here." Ghouls have names, even if all they do is clean their master's haven.

Complete rules for creating ghouls as well as a considerable amount of other information related to the creatures can be found on pp. 166–168 of **Vampire: The Requiem**. The **Ghouls** sourcebook is also recommended, as it takes an even closer look at ghouls and greatly expands on what they are and the roles they can play in a chronicle.

The Predator's Taint

Whenever a vampire character sees another vampire for the first time, the character's player must make an immediate check for frenzy if her character's Blood Potency is equal to or greater than the other vampire's or Rötschreck if it is lower. (See *Vampire: The Requiem*, p. 168.)

Similar to all solitary predators, vampires do not take very kindly to the presence of another predator. This is instinctual as much as rational, and consequently can result in the Kindred losing their cool and letting the Beast out of its cage in the form of a fight-or-flight frenzy. Of course, this reaction is not triggered unless the vampire notices the intruder, which is essentially what the other vampire is perceived to be. This is most often because the first vampire actually sees the other and feels that his proximity is too close for comfort — i.e., he poses a potential threat of competition or worse — but the other vampire might be recognized by sound, smell or touch, also. These situations are far less likely to happen, but it is important to remember that as a side benefit of the Predator's Taint every vampire is able to automatically recognize whether another individual is a vampire or not. Once a Kindred notices the presence of another person, she will immediately realize whether he, too, is one of the Damned. If he is, and if this is the first time they have ever been in each

other's presence, there is a chance that each might lose control and react according to the respective strength of their Blood Potency.

The Predator's Taint is something that can be very difficult for Storytellers to use in a way that enhances their stories rather than disable them. This is why the admonition that the "use of the Predator's Taint should be based on the dramatic potential of the situation" is emphasized in **Vampire: The Requiem** and why a full page is devoted to giving examples of how to accomplish this. The mechanic exists only to give Storytellers a clear method to help resolve confrontations between vampires who meet for the first time, not to dictate how things must play out. In fact, it is plainly stated that the purpose of the Predator's Taint is to in part justify why vampires rarely ever leave the confines of their own city. If a character risks frenzy or Rötschreck every time she meets a new vampire, her Requiem would be far more unpleasant than it already is, and travel virtually guarantees that she will run into many more new Kindred. It also provides one more reason to explain why relations between the Kindred can never really run smoothly. If each vampire instinctually perceives every other vampire as a competitive interloper, then it is no wonder they are always paranoid and seeking to undermine or outright destroy their peers. This makes clear something that might be overlooked by Storytellers: even though there is no need for an actual check against frenzy or Rötschreck by Kindred who have already encountered one another at least once before that does *not* mean that there is no instinctual response between the same vampires in the future. In fact, such a reaction *does* occur every time two vampires come into contact, it's just that it is far less uncontrollable than that first time when each effectively sized the other up and, even if only on a subconscious level, agreed to suffer the other's existence.

This part is key. Whether the vampires go ape-shit or not that first time, each will continue to experience that same fight-or-flight urge every other time they meet. This means that the one with the higher Blood Potency will always perceive herself to be superior to the other vampire and the urge to dominate that weaker vampire will influence all her interactions with the lesser Kindred. Because there is no mechanic to this — it would be a nightmare and entirely destructive to any story — it should be something that the Storyteller *and the players* don't forget. If players begin having their characters act too subservient to vampires whose Blood Potency is less than theirs, the Storyteller should nudge the players a bit to remind them just how superior their characters are. This can be done best not by actually telling the players

this directly, but instead by describing the lesser vampires in a way that actually makes them seem, well, lesser. The same goes for vampires who possess a Blood Potency higher than the characters' own. The characters should instinctively feel a degree of fear in their presence and, likely, even a sense of inferiority. Again, by describing these more potent vampires in a way that heightens their sense of superiority, the players will unconsciously begin to accept their characters' place in this invisible chain of command and will play them appropriately.

For example, a Mekhet who makes his haven beneath a motorcycle repair shop a few blocks from a Ventrue character's own haven and who has little interaction with the character is suddenly encountered in a pool hall.

Both have met on a variety of occasions before, and the Storyteller describes him thusly: *Just after making the shot, you hear a voice from a few tables over, a voice you recognize. Looking up, you see Demetrius, cue stick in hand, a smile fixed on his face. He doesn't notice you yet as his attention is focused on a game between a couple of regulars.*

To remind the player that the Mekhet's Blood Potency is lower than the character's, that same description would be better if it was something like: *Just after making the shot, you hear a voice from a few tables over, a grating voice that you instantly recognize. Looking up, you see that spineless wretch Demetrius, his overpriced cue stick in hand, that mealy-mouthed smile glued to his face. The fool doesn't notice you yet as he seems too impressed with the table antics of a couple of the regulars, giving you a chance to make your move if you wish before he sees it coming.*

Vampires who share an equal measure of Blood Potency are only slightly different to deal with. Both perceive the other to be lesser and feel the urge to dominate that individual. Obviously, as neither is willing to submit and acknowledge the superiority of the other — for, in fact, none exists — each will always feel a bit more on edge than when in the presence of a recognizably superior or inferior vampire. The two are true competitors who will not give way to the other, and so a special tension will always be there, until one's Blood Potency changes, at which point the distinction between the two will become pronounced.

Creative Storytellers will use a change in a vampire's Blood Potency as a chance for some interesting roleplaying. For a character to go out one night and suddenly discover that the irritating Nosferatu from 19th Street seems a bit less her bitchy self and even a little uncomfortable around the character can set the stage for a whole subplot. However, just because the respective difference between the Blood Potency of two characters has changed does not mean that a check for frenzy or Röttschreck is now called

for. Changes in Blood Potency do not change the fact that the vampires have already gotten over that initial hump upon first meeting. Still, the much less powerful urge they feel each time they detect the Predator's Taint of the other is there and can and should be used to add color and drama to the game where appropriate.

I don't know what it is, but I just don't like her. Tate thinks she's cool, Nikeki looks up to her and Devon's been a friend of hers for however long. Hell, I really don't even know what it is. She's nice enough to me, and she even saved me from making a fool of myself at Cam's salon that one time, but I don't know. She just seems . . . pathetic. It's like she's trying to kiss my ass or something, even though I can't really say that's it, 'cause she certainly doesn't idolize me. Hell, who would? I guess I should be glad she'd look up to me, but that's not it. She just seems too strange. Yeah, okay, so things didn't go so hot when we met, but damn, that was so long ago and we've hung out a couple dozen times at least since then, but I still can't shake that feeling. It's like every time I see her or even when I hear her voice on the phone I get this urge to punch her. I guess she picks up on it somehow, and that's why she acts so weird. I wish I could just shake it, though. Seems like she'll be around here a lot more now, and the last thing I want is another thing to constantly irritate the hell out of me, as if I don't have enough already. Shit, maybe I should just go and knock the crap out of her some night just to get it out of my system. Uh, yeah. That will make things better. Sure.

The Stench of Foreigners

As already stated, the Predator's Taint exists in large part to explain why vampires rarely ever travel outside their own domain. The entire Requiem would be a vastly different experience if vampires had no problem zooming to-and-fro from place to place. The power of Princes would be greatly diminished and the idea that the authority of local covenant and clan leaders stops at the city limits would go out the window. In short, **Vampire: The Requiem** would not be the same game at all. Keeping vampires in their gilded cages as it were makes everything local and, therefore, far more personal, which is precisely what a game about personal horror should be. The Predator's Taint does not actually stop Kindred from hopping on a train, a plane or in an automobile and taking off for another destination, but it sure as hell makes their time spent elsewhere that much more dangerous.



Except on the rarest of occasions, vampires encountered in a foreign city will always be strangers to the newcomer, no matter how much the newcomer may already have heard about them. Hearing all about a certain Shadow's sire for years from his childe and then traveling to Lisbon to actually meet him are two very different things. The moment the two do come face-to-face, or even come within close proximity, the Predator's Taint takes center stage even more so than when it plays a role back home. This may seem unsupported by mechanics, but it exists nonetheless. In short, when a vampire is in a foreign city, the native vampires don't just smell like predators, they smell like *foreign* predators, and that's always worse.

Naturally, this is not to imply anything about foreigners in general, but vampires are predators, and thus, they are as territorial as any other predator. This is no less instinctual than the desire to attack or flee from another vampire; in fact, it really is nothing more than an extension of that. Vampires see each other as intruders because in order to successfully hunt they must have territory free from competition. Trespassing predators are a threat to the hunt and, therefore, a threat to the vampire. This is why domain is such a powerful thing to the Kindred and why so many disputes and schemes center around

the acquisition and defense of one's domain, whether it be a few blocks along the docks or a vast swath of the city. Just as with feudal lords, one's place in society — in this case, the quality and size of one's herd of kine — is a direct reflection of the quality and size of one's domain. From the very first nights after the Embrace, a neonate learns this concept and learns what it means to ignore it. If every vampire sticks to his or her own turf, there is no real danger of the Predator's Taint, which greatly reduces the likelihood of frenzy, which means the Masquerade is far less likely to be breached, which means vampires are safe from the threat of being discovered and wiped out by the kine the Kindred need to survive. This is not an academic exercise; it is one of the most essential foundations of Kindred society, and it is perhaps the prime mover in the Danse Macabre itself.

A vampire's own domain feels safe, because when it comes right down to it, it is, or at least it's much safer than a foreign domain. A Kindred knows who most everyone is in her own domain, even if she has not met all of them. She knows the rules, she knows the chain of command and she knows who is okay and who to steer clear of. Most of all, she knows her own place, both socially and in terms of where she can hunt and where she can hide

from the sun. A foreign city, on the other hand, is the complete unknown. It's of little importance to most Kindred upon arriving in a strange domain where things are. A good map and a little time wandering around will answer all her questions about where it might be best to hunt, where she can hole up during the day, etc. However, there is no guidebook to the local Kindred population. No matter what she may already have heard about the locals prior to her arrival, none of it really changes the fact that everything is a mystery, and a particularly dangerous mystery. One wrong step, and things can go downhill very, very quickly.

For these reasons, a character outside her own city will almost always be on edge. When she perceives another vampire, she will have no context into which to place the stranger, so her response to the Predator's Taint will be far more pronounced. Storytellers might wish to impose a penalty on the roll to avoid frenzy or R tschreck, but this is a fix to a problem that doesn't exist. As long as the Storyteller is already using the Predator's Taint in a balanced and appropriate fashion when the characters are in their own city, then the Storyteller should simply require more regular checks to stave off the Beast when in a foreign domain. The players will quickly realize that the Storyteller is not going to "let it slide" now that they have sniffed at the warnings of their elders and decided to go to Vegas for the weekend. Every encounter with a vampire they have will become an entirely new and tense confrontation that can just as easily end in violence as it can amicably. Few players will want to put up with this for long and soon enough will find a way to get their characters back home.

Remember that all this is not meant to get in the way of a good story, so if the Storyteller wants the characters to spend some time in another location, then the above tactics might end up causing more trouble than intended and ruining what should have been an enjoyable tale.

Ever since I got here, I can't stop feeling like I'm being watched, like any second some friggin' nightmare is gonna jump out and scare the wits out of me. That's not something that's gonna make my job any easier. It's not like finding a copy of that apocryphal verse from the Testament is a cake walk as it is; worrying about buggin' out every moment while I'm scrounging around only makes it that much more hellish. I almost lost it the other night, already. The moment that purple-haired girl caught my eye, it took all I had to not knock that look off her face and show her what the words "Wrath of God" really mean. Honestly, I haven't felt that hyped

up in at least a decade, but now it's like I can't turn it off. Maybe it's just a matter of familiarity, but it feels like so much more. It's as if every Kindred here were not only a heretic but were steeped in sulfur and the stench was messing with my brain even though I don't really smell it. I just hope Sister Cleo was right about that book. If I'm lucky, I can get it before Tuesday and be back in my haven for Brother Pere's ordination. All I gotta do is hope and pray that I don't run into any of these heathen parasites before then, at least not any I wasn't already expecting to have to see, not that I think that's gonna go much better. . . .

The Predator's Taint is one of the subtlest and creative ways that players can be reminded of just how much a curse the Requiem truly is. Used well, the Predator's Taint can add just the right flavor to turn a pretty good story into a great one; used improperly, and the Predator's Taint can spoil everything. It should never override the other aspects of relationships between Kindred; it exists merely to add flavor and to provide some starting point when a relationship is not yet present. Two very close members of a coterie may have different Blood Potencies but can still be great friends; they've just learned to mostly ignore that deep gut feeling about their respective place in the pecking order. Most important of all, use of the Predator's Taint must follow from the story, not dictate where the story will go. Stick to this ideal whenever there is doubt about how the Predator's Taint should be used in a chronicle.

The Traditions

A Prince may impose many laws upon the Kindred in her domain and probably has the means to enforce them. But the three most fundamental laws of the Kindred, ones that predate the covenants and possibly even the clans themselves, laws that have never been broadly violated in any domain, have little need of Sheriffs or other vampires to see that they are obeyed. Simply referred to as the Traditions out of respect for their longevity and power, these laws are not mere prohibitions but take the form of actual supernatural restrictions that ensure they are never widely ignored.

Without these Traditions, or even leaving them up to the vampires themselves to defend and enforce, Kindred society would not be what it is. To make sure that they are not simply tossed aside by Storytellers or regularly and blatantly flaunted by the players' characters, the metaphysical effect of each Tradition was introduced to the game. None are so prohibitive that determined

characters cannot breach them when they wish, but each is intentionally crafted in such a way that the spirit of the Traditions is not only sufficiently enforced but also that it adds atmosphere to the game to make it even better than it would be without them.

The Traditions also serve to ensure that no matter what kind of government the Kindred might set up in a given city, there are certain fundamental rules that will be adhered to. One Storyteller might let his city become akin to the Wild West with violent showdowns the order of the night while another might prefer a very philosophical setting with the main form of Kindred activity taking place in the salons of the elders. Which ever it is, the gunslingers and intelligentsia will still recognize and largely obey the Traditions. For players, this is a very good thing. They might change gaming groups regularly, especially if they relocate frequently, but no matter who they play **Vampire: The Requiem** with next, they can count on certain constants that will make them enjoy the game with one troupe as much as they could with another. In short, it's the same game regardless of the unique flavor it may have.

The Masquerade

Reflections of vampires as well as images of them captured by technological means appear distorted so that the vampire's identity is not clearly discernable. This effect can be nullified for a scene by the expenditure of one Willpower point or permanently eliminated for a single image by sacrificing a dot of Willpower. (See *Vampire: The Requiem*, p. 170.)

The Tradition of Secrecy, another name for the Masquerade, is the first and most crucial of all laws known to the Damned. The thinking goes that if the presence of vampires were made public to the mortals all hell would break loose and, despite the individual prowess of each vampire, the frightened herd would eventually trample them all. Given the typical 50,000:1 ratio of kine to Kindred, the fact that mortals may operate 24 hours a day to the vampires' usual 10 or less, and the tremendous technological means the living have at their disposal to detect, hunt down and destroy the undead, there is considerable merit to this conclusion. No more than a miniscule handful of Kindred have ever put this to the test; those who have probably all learned the hard way that the Tradition of Secrecy is a pretty good idea.

The mystical occlusion that distorts the reflection and captured or recorded image of a vampire makes the Masquerade much easier to maintain. Unless a player wishes to spend a dot of Willpower in order to eliminate this effect for the remainder of the scene, there is no

way around the distortion. Camera film, digital images, video recordings, webcam broadcasts . . . none are able to display an image of the character with enough clarity that the character could be identified with any certainty by a witness. The same goes for the character's reflection, which is one of the first things most Kindred notice after the Embrace when they take a look in a mirror to check their hair or see how they have been changed. If the character does wish to have her image recorded permanently with any real clarity, she must use an extraordinary force of will; in game terms, her player needs to bite the bullet and give up a *dot*, not a point, of Willpower. Vanity can be quite expensive.

Players, and Storytellers, too, regularly forget about the prevalence of mirrors and other reflective surfaces in the modern world. Storefront display windows are nearly as revealing as a mirror if the light in front of the window is much stronger than the light behind it. With the adoption of mobile phones with cameras as well as the boom in small, ultra-portable and very high-quality digital cameras, the likelihood that a vampire's image will occasionally be caught by an amateur photographer is very good. A photographer often previews the image immediately after taking it, which can lead to a quick double-take if the mystical distortion stands in stark contrast to the rest of the image. For this reason, as much as the Tradition can help hide the Kindred, more and more it can also cause them to receive unwanted attention. Luckily, there is little most people can do with this information. In fact, most mortals will rationalize away the distortion, blaming it on the camera or their own inability to take a good picture. Certainly the pictures cannot be used by law enforcement or others who might seek out the Kindred, and so the Masquerade is reinforced. Still, a vampire standing in a brightly lit art gallery surrounded by mirrors while in the company of a few dozen mortal guests stands a very strong chance of drawing attention before too long. Someone is going to notice the odd occlusion, and when it does not seem to go away regardless of what the vampire does, suspicion will be aroused. Storytellers should remind players of this once in a while, another little method to clarify just how inhuman the characters are now that they are Damned.

But the Masquerade is more than mere blurry images. A Kindred can leave all sorts of unusual paper trails, criminal evidence and other clues that can cause suspicion and, ultimately, mortals nosing around in his business. Even the most careful vampire with the most hardworking Retainers can leave such a trail that a dedicated investigator can follow. Again, technology is working against the Kindred here. Increasingly inter-

connected databases, instant communication, more and more electronic transactions and documents and greater cooperation between law enforcement and intelligence bureaus can spell doom for a vampire. Even a cell phone number, once almost impossible to trace, can now lead directly to a treasure trove of information about the account holder for the curious with a few keystrokes and a few bucks drawn from an electronic account. None of this will necessarily lead one to conclude the character is a supernatural creature of the night, of course, but the more scrutiny and the more information that can be obtained from careful fact-finding missions, the more likely certain patterns of activity will be uncovered. Most Kindred use mortals to hide their presence, but if Kindred do this unwisely or in any way that can be seen to resemble the methods used by a criminal organization, watch out. To make matters worse, laws have been changing in recent years to permit even greater nosing about into previously private records. Unwarranted searches and wiretaps, surreptitious stakeouts and examination of personal financial and legal records are now almost commonplace should the authorities get a whiff of something not on the up-and-up.

What all this means for players is that a with-it Storyteller has a vast arsenal of weapons to use against the characters to make their Requiems even closer to Hell than they already are. Just knowing that one's picture cannot be adequately taken is no longer enough to protect the Masquerade. Consequently, Princes may impose a number of restrictions on the Kindred that take these dangers into account. Laws forbidding the use of mobile phones or the Internet are not unheard of, but the usually anachronistic Princes who do this rarely understand just how utterly impossible these rules are to enforce. Still, the elders do try and impose what measures of security they can, and smart characters will do their best to obey them. If the Prince declares that no Kindred may use his or her mortal name for any written purpose, the insolent vampire who flouts this law is likely to face very unwelcome consequences.

Progeny

The creation of a childe requires the expenditure of a dot of Willpower by the sire's player. (See *Vampire: The Requiem*, p. 170.)

There is no Tradition or custom of the Kindred that is more frequently ignored than this one. Yes, the creation of a childe does exact a steep price, but hey, look around, where do you think all these vampires came from? They didn't grow on trees. True, but no matter how easy it might be for players to sum up the cost to

sire a childe as a simple sacrifice of a dot of Willpower, it must be remembered that that expenditure is only a *reflection* of what it feels like for a vampire to actually Embrace a mortal and turn a living man into one of the Damned. The cost may be mechanically the same to the player for his character to permanently eliminate the distortion in a photograph taken of him as it is for his character to create progeny, but it certainly does not feel the same to the vampire himself.

Embracing another is one of the most personal, exhausting and Requiem-altering things a Kindred can do. Whatever his reason for siring a childe — loneliness, love, status, protection, power or even a need for adoration — no prospective sire will choose his future childe without a tremendous amount of consideration first. A careful sire will not only contemplate all his own reasons for wanting to Embrace one mortal over another, but he will also consider how his choice will influence other Kindred and possibly have certain undesirable ripple effects. If the sire already has other childer, this kind of forethought is especially necessary, for the relationship between his progeny can either strengthen him or pose a very real threat to his entire Requiem. Childer warring amongst one another for affection or attention can bring down even the most stable house. It is only once a candidate is finally identified, however, that the real drama begins to unfold.

It is a relatively simple feat for a would-be sire to force the Embrace upon his future childe, but there can be complications. A mortal is far more fragile than a vampire, and a terrified prospect can become seriously injured or even killed while struggling to escape the impassioned vampire. No sire wants to have a childe who will spend eternity with an unhealed wound or significant impairment. Even a scar can prove too distasteful to the vampire and cause him to abandon his efforts before completing the transformation. Some vampires become so caught up in the process, however, that they don't always notice such damage until it is too late and the first strains of the childe's Requiem are sounded. The effort to make the childe is nothing compared to the effort it takes to undo this act of creation, even if there is no specific rule that makes it so. A new sire will probably find it next to impossible to cut short the sweet Requiem of his still confused childe, and thus, vampires who still retain injuries and impairments that took place on the night of their Embrace are not uncommon. For this reason, most new sires go to considerable lengths to choose the other route. No, this doesn't mean knocking out the mortal and binding him tightly so he can't move. Any means to force a mortal to accept the Embrace is going to leave

some very serious psychological scars even if no physical ones are present. A childe who despises her sire from the first night of her Requiem is nothing less than a future enemy, and most sires already have more than their fair share of those. No need to waste the rare chance to sire another by just creating someone who one night will seek to destroy that creator.

The other route, the one most vampires employ when Embracing a childe, is to gain the mortal's acquiescence. This does not have to be complete or entirely voluntary — deception and the judicious use of influential Disciplines can and are often employed — but it does mean that when the time comes to drain the mortal and effect the actual Embrace, the individual is aware of what is coming: that she will awaken as one of the Damned. Most of the time, the mortal is given little inkling about what this really means. She may be told only the most basic things concerning immortality, sunlight, the Hunger and maybe a bit about some of the supernatural powers she might command. She is probably told nothing about other Kindred and possibly never even informed that there are other vampires aside from her sire. But immortality alone is a powerful gift, and often this is more than enough to get the mortal to finally accept her fate. Frequently, the new childe will rise and possess all sorts of absurd notions about what the Requiem will be like; most are torn down pretty quickly, and for all its dark beauty, she will see the Requiem for the curse that it is.

Once the person is ready and willing, the sire need only drain her completely of blood and then, before the last whisper of life departs her body, provide her some of his own supernatural Vitae, allowing it to spill into her throat and do its thing. Wrong. As the vampire is feeding the nearly lifeless soon-to-be childe his Vitae, he must further empower his Vitae with every last ounce of his will that he can muster. This is not a physical thing, though the vampire's muscles may clench as a consequence, and he may even perspire blood from the effort, but rather an emotional and even spiritual one. He must truly want this individual who lies on the threshold of death itself to be saved from that finality by the force of his Vitae. He must want this as much or more than he has wanted anything before. His desire must be so overwhelming and complete that he would do anything, sacrifice anything, even his own Requiem, for this mortal to be rescued from the cold grip of death, stolen from the Reaper's very grasp and given instead unto him as his very own childe to shepherd into the endless night. Without this extreme and utterly single-minded desire, the vampire is unable to pass his full power through his Vitae, and the beautiful flower before him will truly die, never to blossom again. This is what it means to sacrifice that dot of Willpower. This is what makes it so difficult for vampires to sire progeny.

Dearest Elizabeth

It has been one year now since I welcomed you into my world in all your beauty adding more to my Requiem than you might ever know. These halls are no longer silent chambers that taunt me with their emptiness but instead gay parlors and boyers that reflect your multifaceted personality and seem more alive than they have a right to. There is so much you have given me but of these things I will speak another time. Tonight I wished you to know what your creation meant to me what those first moments were like so that you might better appreciate what I have done.

You knew so little but still you desired the Embrace. I did not lie to you once but you know now that there was much I kept from you as much for your safety as for any other purpose. I had no desire to deceive but you must understand that if I had revealed more and you had rejected my offer even against my wishes others would have delivered you to Charon without delay. I hope you can forgive me this thing.

To be honest I can recall so little else about that night besides what transpired between us. I do not recall if the moon was visible outside the open windows how the air felt or if there was any light besides the lush glow of your radiant skin and the sheen of your glistening eyes. You had some wine. I remember; you said it would help you go through with your decision. I think it was a Merlot but I am uncertain. I do know it made your blood richer than it had been before however. You seemed sleepy from the wine mostly and you laid across my bed with your head on the pillow and your dark tresses spread out around you framing your exquisite features. It seems like I listened for hours to your breathing watched unblinking the gentle rise and fall of your breast and held your warm hand. I would take these all from you and therefore also from myself so I wanted to drink these last impressions in as deeply as

I could. I gulped at your honey scent and tasted the wetness of your lips, your skin, your womanhood savoring these things too one last time. Yes all this would be gone soon but I knew in my heart, dead as it was, that you would become so much more. Tonight I know that I was not wrong.

You were half asleep it seems when I sank my teeth into you. I do not need to tell you what this was like for you have come to know the ecstasy of the Kiss with nearly as much familiarity. Still I cannot withhold from you this: never before and never since have I ever known it to be so perfect or so all-encompassing. It was meant to be of this I am certain. Any other course your life might have taken would have been an affront to the night, a glaring discord in my Requiem. Your lifeblood emptied from you and you grew pale and more beautiful, and I let it happen slowly, more slowly than even I thought possible until there was no more to take. The lovely vessel was empty of life and yet not quite gone.

It was at that moment that you stood at the brink. I was sure there would be no hesitation but I confess to you now that for one fleeting instant I was not sure if it was my place to deny death its due. As I say, it was only for the briefest of moments and then it passed just as suddenly. Death was coming for you and I would not let him take you from me.

That realization seems small but it was not. As I truly began to understand what might happen if I did not act quickly, a great bear began to well up inside me. I tore at my wrist with my fangs and pressed the wound to your unmoving lips, forcing my Vitae into you. I saw no response and I forced more and my bear became terror. Was I too late? Had I lingered too long? Had death won this hand and stolen you from me? It took all my courage and strength to not allow these terrifying thoughts to overwhelm me. I think I may have actually cried so distraught was I as I willed you to come back to me to drink my Vitae and cheat death. I grew desperate and threw everything I had, everything I was into this willing to do anything to save you. I would have sacrificed my mansion, my entire domain and even my own Requiem if I knew it might make a difference but those choices were not before me. I don't know how long it was that I stayed this way, my arm forced against your mouth, my body shuddering with the strain, my mind gripped by icy terror that I may have destroyed the one thing that meant more to me than all else that my arrogance might have snubbed out the one beautiful thing in my Requiem.

The first flutter of our eyelids, the first quiver of your lips against my wrist and all the agony was vanquished completely. Suddenly you drank ravenously, and my heartbreak and horror was transformed into absolute euphoria. It was with love that I watched you nursed you and held you. It was with love that I clothed you and secreted you away from the sun. And it was with love that I taught you our ways and made you a place among our kind.

My dearest Elizabeth I do not know if you can ever fully comprehend the agony and the ecstasy of your Embrace but know this. It was love that made me lead you through the darkest of places and it was love that enabled me to bring you out again, renewed more resplendent than ever, my eternal child. I cannot know if I can ever again endure the pain of creation for another but for you it was and always will be worth it.

Your loving sire

Phillipe

Amaranth

A diablerist suffers a loss of one Humanity and must make a normal Humanity roll to avoid derangement. In addition, he risks Vitae addiction, and his aura is streaked with black for a number of years

equal to the victim's Blood Potency. (See *Vampire: The Requiem*, pp. 159 and 170.)

The last of the Traditions exhorts the Damned to refrain from consuming each other's Vitae with the express purpose of consuming the victim's immortal soul. This Tradition does not proscribe the drinking of Vitae

for any other reason, though most Kindred avoid that as well given the unpleasant side effects of Vitae addiction and the Vinculum. Only the actual act of diablerie is addressed by the Tradition of Amaranth.

Much has already been said about diablerie elsewhere in this book, but there is one thing that deserves a final bit of attention. Just as the creation of a childe demands a tremendous price from the sire as represented by the loss of a dot of Willpower, the unavoidable decrease in Humanity that accompanies the act of diablerie should also be seen as nothing more than a mechanical representation of the actual moral decline that occurs when a vampire chooses to defy this Tradition. This is not a physical or emotional strain, but is instead a profound and lasting milestone in the character's moral journey, and it is not a positive one. To consciously choose to consume and, in all likelihood, utterly destroy not just a living or unliving creature but that creature's eternal soul is one hell of a line to cross. To turn back after the choice is made and attempt to atone for the sin is nigh but impossible. Instead, the character must come to terms with the fact that he no longer feels any remorse for certain quite inhuman actions. He cannot kid himself any longer that he is the person he was before the Embrace, but must face the truth: he is a monster.

This doesn't have to mean that the character suddenly becomes some slaving revenant; in fact, this won't happen at all until his Humanity completely bottoms out, but it does mean he becomes very aware that he is headed that way. It also means that the moment he actually commits this foul deed the full comprehension of what he has done is made all too clear. The black streaks in his aura are not just decoration: they are the visible sign — to those who can see them — that the character has willingly embraced the most horrific of sins and has little or no remorse. He is revealed as a slayer of Kindred, a cannibal even, an unholy fiend that knows no limitations and that will commit any act of atrocity in order to satisfy his own base bloodlust. There is no avoiding this understanding by the diablerist, and the social ostracism and punishment that might descend upon him by his fellow Kindred pales in comparison to the utter desolation and damnation that he himself feels as a result of his actions. Even the most jaded and cynical vampire, upon actually performing diablerie, will find that he vastly underestimated how he might feel when all is said and done. This is not to suggest that he doesn't enjoy his newfound power and may even wish to do it again, but it does mean that the way he sees himself will be forever changed and he will never fool himself again into thinking that he is anything but a monster.

Damage, Wounds and Healing

Violence is an unavoidable part of the Requiem. Even the most sheltered Kindred cannot deny their predatory urges all the time, and every vampire gets into a scrape now and then. It's inevitable that they will suffer wounds some time in their existence.

Kindred do not experience injury the way living things do. Their bodies aren't really composed of interdependent systems the way mortal bodies are, despite appearances. Kindred don't bleed, for instance, and they don't go into shock (because their tissues don't need oxygen). The mystic force that keeps a vampire moving can be disrupted, but it's just an approximation of life, and doesn't abide by the same rules.

A common question that Kindred ask is this: if vampires don't need most of their organs, tissues or limbs to survive, why do they suffer at all when they sustain injuries? Technically, they *should* be able to lose chunks of flesh, drop limbs and shatter their bones without concern or threat to their continued existence . . . but they *can't*. They can be beaten into torpor. They can actually suffer Final Death from serious enough injury, even if it doesn't strictly affect their critical systems — their hearts, sensory organs and brains.

There are hundreds of theories explaining the phenomenon, ranging from the impenetrably occult to the distressingly mundane. Great volumes of work on the subject gather dust on the shelves of the Ordo Dracul, and constant debates rage in the gatherings of medically-inclined members of the Carthian Movement.

To most vampires, though, the explanation is irrelevant. The fact is all that matters: vampires can still be injured, and injury can still kill them.

Bashing Damage

Anything that inflicts bashing damage on mortals also inflicts bashing damage on Kindred. Ordinary firearms and electricity also inflict bashing damage. In addition, vampires are not knocked unconscious when the rightmost Health box is filled with bashing damage. Further points of bashing damage upgrade the least severe of the Kindred's remaining wounds.

Vampires don't bruise when they take bashing damage, and besides the occasional minor cut or abrasion, they don't show any evidence of the injury at all. This is why the mythical toughness of Kindred has been blown out of proportion by those few mortals who have

encountered vampires and lived to tell the tale — you can wind up and pound one with a baseball bat and his head will snap back with the blow, but there won't be a mark on him. In most cases, bashing wounds just seem to make vampires angrier.

The same is frighteningly true of gunshot wounds. Since the body of a vampire is almost entirely redundant, in terms of sustaining unlife, most bullets just seem to plug into them without doing much harm at all.

There is one exception. Kindred who counterfeit life, expending Vitae to warm their flesh and blush with lively color, will bruise when they are struck (actually, they bruise easier, and more vividly than the living), and gunshot wounds will be surrounded by fierce discolorations. A tiny bit of blood may seep from the point of impact, but not much.

Unfortunately, bashing wounds are just as painful for Kindred as they are for living mortals, even though bashing wounds pose a diminished threat. It may be that the body of the vampire sends a painful impulse on sustaining a bashing wound just to notify her of the injury, or it may be nothing more than a stirring of mortal memory — the mind of the vampire imagines what it would feel if the creature still lived, and approximates the sensation because it doesn't know what else to do. The result, however, is an apparent to over-reaction to bashing injuries. Even those who don't slip into rage frenzies when they are struck may react with fierce emotion, regardless of the lack of visible damage.

One thing I have come to appreciate in this century: mortals have almost completely abandoned blades for pistols. I was visiting with one of my beauties recently, and her husband found us. Mistaking me for her mortal lover, the poor trembling wretch drew a revolver and fired four shaky shots into my leg and gut. The sting was well worth the look on his face when he saw that my smile had not faded, nor my gaze turned. I had him by the throat ere his questions could find voice, and his death swiftly followed. Obviously, since I did not bleed, his sweet young wife thought his shots had swung wild and missed me completely. I saw no need to correct her.

Lethal Damage

Melee weapons that inflict lethal damage on mortals also inflict lethal damage on Kindred. When a vampire character's rightmost Health box is filled with lethal damage, he falls into torpor instead of bleeding

to death. Further points of lethal damage upgrade the least severe of his remaining wounds.

Lethal wounds are, strictly speaking, much more obvious than bashing damage. Deep cuts, piercing injuries, ragged tears, broken bones and dislocated limbs are all lethal injuries. In a living human, any lethal wound will seriously impair function and may require medical attention to prevent the onset of shock and death. In Kindred, lethal damage represents an injury that may not worsen on its own but still presents a threat to function. Limbs are bent at sickening angles, features are crushed or pushed out of place, long furrows are cut into the flesh and bones or internal organs may be exposed.

Any vampire who sustains lethal, flesh-breaking damage near mortal witnesses and doesn't expend at least one point of Vitae, pushing it out into the wound, is risking the Masquerade. The damage dealt would normally be accompanied by copious blood flow, and onlookers will think it strange if a vampire so injured doesn't bleed.

Storytellers may wish to associate penalties to certain Attributes with lethal wounds in order to add realism to play. A vampire whose leg is broken by a fall may suffer a -2 dice penalty to his Dexterity until he heals the representative damage, while another who takes a sword-stroke to the face might suffer a -3 dice penalty to Presence until she regenerates. The severity of the penalty should be dictated by the nature of the injury, and in all cases, the penalty should diminish if the character heals part of the wound, and disappear if she heals it completely.

Vampires know quite well that lethal damage can lead quite quickly to torpor and Final Death. There are few Kindred who don't take lethal wounds seriously, and fewer still who stay ignorant and survive for long. Besides the trauma involved in suffering injuries that would completely debilitate a living mortal, the understanding that an ostensibly immortal creature can be so close to death is more than enough to change a flippant vampire's mind.

Bashing damage that fills up the rightmost Health box on a character's sheet and upgrades to lethal damage is usually represented as injury to bones; repeated hammer-blows may fracture the skull or snap ribs.

I got hit bad that time . . . real bad. The Sanctified crusader hefted his sword, getting ready for another swing, and I was looking down at my own withered guts, spilling out under my torn shirt. I remember thinking I wasn't going to be able to take another hit like that, and that I wished I'd listened when my Sire told me not

to go out that night. The crusader looked at me, back in his stance, and asked me if I was ready to confess and accept the word of the Dark Savior or whatever and become a lawful servant of the Church. There was nothing I could do. I just closed my eyes and nodded.

Aggravated Damage

Fire, sunlight, and certain supernatural effects inflict aggravated damage on Kindred. When a vampire character's rightmost Health box is filled with aggravated damage, he suffers Final Death.

Aggravated damage in vampires is not representative of anything that can happen to normal living humans. All it really signifies is "lethal" damage that actually is *lethal* to Kindred — more so than ordinary force. Mortal humans can suffer aggravated damage from certain mystical attacks, but in those cases, the damage itself is no worse, appearance-wise, than lethal wounds — aggravated damage is just much more difficult to heal.

Since vampires are so much more vulnerable to sources of aggravated damage than any other weapons or circumstances, and since the injuries inflicted are much more likely to result in Final Death, Kindred are prone to panic when they sustain this type of wound. Some succumb to Röttschreck, fleeing in terror as soon as they realize what's happening to them.

Aggravated wounds are disfiguring. Those that are inflicted directly manifest as blackened, ferocious injuries, often looking charred or snaking outwards from the site of injury along the veins and capillaries, as if the wounds themselves are trying to grow into the vampire. They are obvious, and they are horrifying.

Those aggravated wounds that result from "spillover" after a character's lethal Health boxes have been filled are different. They represent demolished flesh — severed limbs, caved-in skulls, torn-out innards — but are not as livid as the accursed injuries described above.

When a vampire character's rightmost Health box is filled with aggravated damage, she suffers Final Death. She collapses immediately (if she was still active before taking the final wound), and begins to rot, dry out and eventually crumble into dust. The process is always accelerated compared to normal human decay, but the actual speed of decomposition depends on the vampire's age.

Final Death breaks the spell of Damnation, reverting the immortal body of the vampire to the state it would be in if it had actually been allowed to rot since the moment of its death — ancient monsters erode into dry and splintering bones, while the newest vampires wrinkle



and bloat and putrefy like month-old corpses. The longer she's been undead, the quicker the dissolution. The end result for the most vampires is the same: a pile of ash and dust, scattered around and within the vampire's clothes and equipment. Obviously, any witness to this speedy decay is a breach of the Masquerade.

STORYTELLER'S OPTION:

DISINTEGRATION

For a more cinematic and brutal depiction of Final Death, have the vampires in your chronicle disintegrate unnaturally:

Kindred Age	Speed of Disintegration
One month	12 hours
One year	Six hours
Five years	One hour
10 years	30 minutes
50 years	Five minutes
100 years	30 seconds
200 years	10 seconds
300 years+	About one second

To most vampires, the sight of another suffering Final Death is a traumatic experience, whether they admit it or not. Any vampire falling apart into ash is a reminder of one's own mortality, and most Kindred are masters of denying their own vulnerabilities. Some vampires will retreat from the sight immediately, averting their eyes and acting as if they've seen nothing at all. Others weep uncontrollably, even if they thoroughly hated the Kindred who has died, and cannot stop the tears for five or 10 minutes. Some fly into a rage and must resist the undirected anger of the Beast or slip into an aimless, destructive frenzy. None will be able to gaze impassively upon a vampire's last moments.

Fire

Flames inflict aggravated damage on Kindred. A fire's size and heat determine how much damage a vampire suffers per turn.

Burning vampire flesh blackens to charcoal instantly in fire. The flesh hardens and cracks, searing with intense pain and becoming completely useless. Impulses may still be transmitted through a crisped limb (for instance, a burned elbow will not prevent operation of the fingers), but the site of the injury will become insensate and immobile. Fire spreads quickly on a vampire's body, moving outwards from the site of initial contact

with startling readiness, no matter how desperately the Kindred attempts to prevent it.

Many vampires actually testify to strange behavior in flames when they are near. They swear that fire seems to turn toward them, as if eager to set them alight. Skeptics claim that these statements are inspired by fear and are not empirically supported — but few are willing to test their veracity. Members of the Ordo Dracul who pursue the Coil of Banes often interact with flame in their training, and some claim that these observations are true. Fire will not turn away from a combustible substance that it is currently in contact with, but the flames will seem to angle toward a passing vampire, as if hoping to leap toward him.

A vampire who is wounded by fire is immediately provoked to Röttschreck, driven to screaming madness by the intense pain and overwhelming fear of Final Death. Unfortunately, the panic that ensues is the most likely cause of a burning vampire's destruction, since the Beast almost always opts to flee mindlessly rather than attempt to put out the flame.

I remember it with stark clarity. The traitor advanced on me, daring to hold a burning taper. He was shaking with fear, but I mistimed my strike, and was rewarded for my error when the flame touched my shoulder. The pain . . . the pain was unlike anything I'd experienced in all my years, living or otherwise. We both stared with horror, my enemy and I, half-blind with the brightness of the fire as it ate its way through the joint, spreading slowly. The fear of the Beast took me then, and the next thing I remember I was rising from the mud of the riverbank, a blackened, crumbling stump where my right arm used to be.

Sunlight

Sunlight burns vampires, inflicting aggravated damage. The intensity of the sunlight and total amount of the vampire's flesh exposed to it determine how much damage the vampire suffers per turn.

As far as a vampire is concerned, the touch of sunlight feels exactly the same — and produces exactly the same result — as naked flame. No flame is ignited, though. The burns just appear in the light, apparently of their own accord. Nothing, absolutely nothing is more terrifying to a vampire, and nothing presents as deadly a threat. Even powerful Kindred exposed to the daylight can burn to death in a matter of seconds. The fear inspired by sunlight is even more intense than that of flame, because

the danger is not confined to a location: if a vampire can see the light at all, he is already in grave danger.

Sunlight seems powerfully bright to vampires, even when it is diffuse. As soon as Kindred is exposed to sunlight, his eyes are burned by it, and his flesh begins to sear. Even thick, heavy drapes and protective clothing will only delay the inevitable, for light has a way of getting into the spaces between threads and finding even the smallest patch of exposed skin.

Kindred who choose to commit suicide most commonly do so by exposing themselves to the sun. The terms “walking into the sun” or “greeting the day” are euphemisms for Final Death in Kindred society, and some take them literally. Stories abound of Kindred who drive out into the middle of exposed terrain, strip off their protective clothing and wait for the dawn, knowing full well that they will not be able to escape to safety even if they try.

A vampire’s vulnerability to sunlight is a potential breach of the Masquerade. Any mortal who sees the wounds being inflicted will probably understand that he’s looking at something abnormal. Those who see the wounds after the fact, though, will just think they are especially intense burns.

Supernatural Sources

Mystical attacks and the claws of supernatural creatures are capable of inflicting aggravated damage on Kindred.

The wounds inflicted by mystical attack bear the distinctive black marks of aggravated damage. They seem to be bounded by burns, and the dark fringes of the wounds bury into the flesh within minutes, causing the whole of the injury to stand out in stark relief against the pale skin of the Kindred. Vampires with Auspex note a very quiet, very slight hissing sound that seems to accompany the infliction of aggravated wounds, a sound that is below the threshold of normal hearing but is noticeable enough to those with Heightened Senses.

To Kindred who are not properly educated, the wounds inflicted by mystical attack are puzzling, startling experiences. There is no logical explanation for their effect; a mortal wolf inflicts lethal damage with its claws but a Gangrel or a Lupine’s attack will cause these horrible injuries instead, even though their claws may not look or feel any different. Worse, the aggravated damage inflicted by some spells or rituals comes without obvious external injury, simply appearing as blackened tracks burning through the flesh of the frightened victim.

Aggravated damage caused by supernatural sources will not trigger Röttschreck the same way fire or sunlight

does. The damage will certainly inspire fear and may necessitate a frenzy check, but doesn’t necessarily provoke the blind panic that those circumstances inspire. Perhaps it’s because the damage, although threatening, is not from a natural source, and thus does not inspire the terror of the accursed Beast in quite the same way. Perhaps it’s just because it’s harder to understand.

I’ve never seen anything like it. It was . . . it was the worst. Donny had the Acolyte by the throat and was lifting her in the air, saying something about the Sheriff’s authority and the edicts of the Prince, I don’t know. All of a sudden, this crazy vampire witch is smiling and whispering something in Gaelic, dribbling blood from her mouth, and Donny drops her, flailing around and whipping his arms back and forth. I’m standing there, watching him scream as these black bands start winding under the skin of his wrists, like buried snakes shooting around in there. He drops to his knees, screaming and rolling his eyes, and I just run for it, fast as I can go. Last thing I saw, one of his hands fell right off, crumbling and turning to ash, and he was just grabbing at it and making this whining sound, not even saying anything. I got a new policy now: never touch an Acolyte of the Crone.

Recovery

Kindred do not heal wounds naturally, as mortals do. Kindred must expend Vitae to repair damage to their bodies.

Healing wounds in Kindred bodies feel and look different, depending on the severity of the damage. In general, the healing seems to require at least a moment of attention, but many have pointed out that vampires often heal in their sleep, and may not need to acknowledge their wounds at all.

Since bashing damage rarely leaves a visible mark on Kindred, there is likewise no visible change when the vampire heals the damage. She feels the barest of ripples passing through the flesh, wiping out pain and returning full sensation to the dulled zones of impact.

Lethal wounds are another story. Flesh and bone must knit and re-set in order to heal lethal wounds, and the effect is quite obvious to onlookers. Generally, Vitae expended moves inward from the edges of an injury, from the threshold to the core, so wounds seem to shrink and then disappear. Bones and joints snap back into place themselves — they don’t need to be set by

hand, although some vampires choose to do so, either because they are ignorant or because they need to feel more human about the whole process. Those more educated or less concerned behave as they will: shaking the injured part out to distract from the healing and give themselves a little shot of motivational pain before moving on, staying absolutely still or behaving as if they bear no injury at all, walking, fighting and talking while the Vitae works its magic.

Kindred can take conscious control of the healing process, directing the “priority” by an act of will. Bones can be joined before the edges of a deep-cutting wound move inward, for instance, or a thin layer of skin can quickly close over a gaping wound while the inside grows together slowly, allowing the vampire to look seem healthy (if hollow) even while still suffering grave injury.



TOUGHNESS AS INTIMIDATION

Mortals facing off against a vampire are rarely prepared to see their carefully aimed strikes vanishing seconds after they've been inflicted. To those who aren't completely familiar with Kindred abilities, quick healing can make a vampire seem impervious, and even those who understand the workings of Vitae may not be too eager to mess with a vampire who's willing to spend his precious Blood in order to shake off their attack.

Storytellers may wish to add a bonus to Intimidation checks when a vampire recovers from injury — especially if that vampire is willing to display his recovery in plain sight. Players may even add an “appearing invulnerable” Specialty to their characters' Intimidation Ability, if the Storyteller deems it appropriate.



Aggravated damage heals much more slowly than lethal or bashing injuries, so the process of repair is more noticeable and more easily studied. In general, as with lethal wounds, aggravated injuries are infused with Vitae from the outside in, first replacing lost tissue, then “reactivating” it, so that nerves and muscles can function again.

Unlike both other wound types, aggravated injuries do not disappear completely when they are healed. The black marks that once indicated an injury's presence fade over time, turning a muddy brown when the wound is first healed, then fading through a beige-gray to the vampire's natural flesh tone. The fade takes three days for each wound level represented by the injury, starting from the moment the wounds are fully healed.

At any time during an injury's healing process (and, in the case of aggravated damage, the fading of the

marks that remain), a vampire may expend a point of Willpower to keep a scar. The wound is healed imperfectly on purpose, resulting in a puckered seam along the injury (or the distinctive scarring patterns of a burn), just as it would if the vampire was a living being.

Wounds can be healed while a vampire sleeps, assuming he has enough Vitae to do so. While not strictly a conscious act, it is one that must be initiated on purpose, as the vampire lies down to sleep. An injury inflicted during a vampire's repose will not automatically heal and reduce a vampire's store of Blood. While a vampire could technically initiate healing in the unconscious state, either in sleep or in torpor, the devotion of Vitae to repairing damaged tissue is still technically a voluntary function, not an involuntary one. Players with wounded characters should always be consulted about whether or not they want their characters to spend the Vitae necessary to heal during sleep.

Torpor

The Eclipse. The Retreat. The Black Sleep, the Long Slumber, the Repose of the Damned. Each vampire seems to have his own name for torpor, and each one seems to experience it differently. For some, torpor seems placid and, if not pleasant, at least some kind of release from the nightly horrors of the Requiem. For others, torpor is a torturous, terrifying ordeal, spooling over centuries and tearing the mind apart.

The characteristics of torpor seem to depend on a few elements: the disposition of the vampire, the circumstances that forced her into sleep, the proximity of Kindred with blood sympathy to the one who slumbers and the environment that she rests in. Not all of them will affect any particular vampire's torpor, but some or all may combine to play a role.

I don't know. Some Kindred say the Black Sleep is gentle and restful. Not for me. I been into it a dozen times, maybe more - for me it comes on like a fast flood of ice, and every goddamn time it happens I'm screaming in my head like a drowning victim. Hours, days, however long it takes, I spend the whole time feeling like I'm floating in frozen tar, itching and burning all over. When I was a fledgling, I thought I might get used to it, what with all the beatings I took. Now I know that's never going to happen, and I have only one way to comfort myself when I wake up again: rise and take vengeance.

Injury

If a vampire's rightmost Health box is filled with a lethal wound, she goes into torpor instead of dying. Alternately, a wooden stake penetrating the heart will immediately induce torpor.

Vampires do not have functioning biological systems in the same sense that living beings do. Vampires don't suffer wounds the same way, they don't go into shock and they don't die like mortals. The accumulation of injuries doesn't lead to a cascade of failed organs and systems, because vampires' organs are not interdependent. Most no longer perform any real function at all, except to store blood.

There are those Kindred who believe that the torpor that results from injury actually has nothing to do with the body's function at all, but is rather a purely psychological event. When confronted with serious physical trauma, they say, the conscious mind of a vampire recalls (or imagines) the shock a living being would logically experience, and approximates it with vampiric collapse. It is often pointed out that vampires with Resilience are often not physically tougher than their counterparts, they are just able to take — or rather, to ignore — much more punishment. Opponents of this theory, however, point out that it takes no more violence to put a frenzied vampire into torpor than an ordinary one . . . and those in frenzy can hardly be called "conscious."

Regardless of cause, a vampire beaten into torpor always immediately collapses like a puppet with cut strings. One moment, the muscles and mind work perfectly, the next: complete shutdown. He may have ample warning, feeling himself getting confused or dazed as the moment approaches (but not weaker — the wound penalties applied to a vampire reflect his ability to function coherently, even though his body is as capable as ever), but when it actually happens it's instantaneous. A vampire at the very edge of torpor won't fall into it until taking another wound, because injuries don't worsen for the undead.

God, I still remember it like it was yesterday. We were all charging at that old bastard, me and my whole coterie, and he was just turning the Nightmare on all of us, one after the other. I looked to my left, and I saw Hiram drop in mid-step, like he just had the world yanked out from under him, and I knew he was gone. Julie ran ahead of me and she fell without a sound, like a toy with the batteries yanked out, her head cracking on the marble floor. I got close enough to lay the axe into him once, maybe twice, and that was it — there was this screaming white noise in my ears, I felt like I was

burning for maybe a second, and then boom, everything went black. Someone must've got through to him in the end, otherwise I would be ash for sure.

A vampire whose heart is pierced with a wooden stake falls immediately into torpor, just as if he had succumbed to injury. Unlike the torpor induced by normal injury, though, this sleep lasts indefinitely, so long as the stake remains in place. The vampire who is staked is immediately rendered insensate, sliding quickly into the warped dreams of torpor. Note that the sleep induced is just as active as any other type of torpor, and just as likely to lead to repetitive, torturous dreams as any violent circumstance. The act of putting a stake into a vampire's heart, just as any other physical attack that pushes him into torpor, is arguably an inhumane one, possibly on par with murder, if not prolonged torture — it is not a mercy by any stretch of the imagination. The vampire who is disposed of in this manner and must endure the sleep that results for an extended period is likely to wake up broken or mad, directly because of the circumstances forced upon him.

Starvation

A Kindred who sleeps during the day and who has no Vitae fails to rise. Each day that passes, he suffers one point of lethal damage until he slips into torpor.

Starving Kindred who cannot awaken rapidly desiccate as they descend into the long sleep. The damage they take manifests as a tightening and hardening of the flesh and joints, and their shriveled skin quickly turns raspy and paper-dry. The vampire is, at best, vaguely aware of what is happening to him, but is completely paralyzed until torpor overtakes him. Even the most beautiful Kindred become withered and ugly in this state — their lips drawn up, exposing their teeth and gums, the flesh on their fingers pulled back from claw-like nails.

While these vampires look as though they're moments away from crumbling into dust, they are actually no more fragile than in their waking state. They are surprisingly heavy (as though they haven't lost any mass at all), and rigid.

Any blood that is dripped into the vampire's mouth while he is in this state will automatically be swallowed into the gullet, per a normal feeding. The vampire cannot refuse to drink the blood — indeed, he won't be aware of it at all until it's already been ingested. The starving vampire will awake immediately, expending the first point of Vitae to do so, and is likely to enter Wassail directly upon rising.

The incidence of starvation is almost always an accident. In the overwhelming majority of cases, starvation occurs when a vampire is injured or otherwise forced to expend a large amount of her Vitae and does not have time to hunt before the dawn. Kindred rarely choose to actually starve themselves into torpor, since they can willfully enter the long sleep any time they want. In a few cases, a vampire will starve into torpor because she has unexpectedly lost Vitae during the day — to interloping Kindred who feed on her, for instance, or to one of many mystic rituals.

Since the vampire who starves into torpor is not exactly awake, she doesn't have much of a chance to panic. A hazy sensation of pain pervades her repose and translates itself into the dreams that follow in torpor, but the vampire does not consciously understand it. Waking from starvation, though, is an exceedingly painful experience. Kindred who manage to resist frenzying from hunger must endure the agony of cracking their dry flesh and stiff joints every time they move.

Age
Potent blood calls out for sleep, so that it may thin over time and return the vampire to a semblance of his younger state.

Vampires with exceedingly potent Blood (a Blood Potency rating of 6 or higher) begin to feel the urge to sleep through their waking nights. At first, the desire is relatively weak, requiring no real effort to resist. Eventually, though, as the vampire's Blood continues to thicken, remaining awake becomes more and more difficult. The Kindred grows sluggish under all but the most threatening circumstances, feeling her thoughts slow and her muscles seize up, and eventually, the effort to stay awake begins to drain her will, tiring her spiritually as well as physically.

The attempt to remain conscious, when the call of sleep becomes powerful enough, is represented by an extended action roll similar to the system of remaining awake in the day. If a character wishes to stay out of torpor for the length of time indicated in the table below, the player rolls a dice pool equal to the character's Humanity. The character resists sleep for one turn per success rolled. Exceptional success allows the character to stay awake for the rest of the scene. If the character accumulates 10 successes, he remains active until the next check is required. A failure at any point during the extended roll means that the character slips into torpor. Characters with the highest Blood Potency ratings must expend a point of Willpower at the beginning of the extended check.

Blood Potency	Frequency of Torpor Check	Willpower Required for Check
6	Once every 10 years	No
7	Once every five years	No
8	Once every two years	No
9	Once every year	Yes
10	Once every six months	Yes

A character who rises in Blood Potency in between torpor checks must make a new check to remain awake if he has already been active for the duration of the new period on the chart — he doesn't start the clock again.

Example: *Francesca of Mekhet is a vampire with a Blood Potency of 6. It has been six years since her last torpor check. She defeats a powerful enemy and commits diablerie, raising her Blood Potency to 7. Because she has already been awake for longer than five years, she must immediately make a check to resist the torpor of age. Her Humanity is 3, so her player rolls three dice. She rolls a 6, 8 and 9 — garnering two successes toward the required five, and remains awake for a turn. She feels extremely sluggish, though, and realizes she should head for home. On the next turn, her player rolls three dice again, getting a 5, 2 and 2 — no successes. Francesca slows to a halt, sliding to the floor and falling into torpor. Had she managed to accumulate eight more successes without failure, she would have been fine for the next five years. As it is, it will be some time before she wakes. . . .*

As the vampire approaches the end of each waking period, he visibly slows. His ability to react quickly to threats and perform tasks is unaffected, but in idle moments he will seem to be pushing against molasses with his every move, and will take an unnaturally long time to respond in conversation. It's almost as if he is slowly grinding to a halt, whether he likes it or not.

The torpor that results from the Blood's need to thin itself can be characterized by a gentle slide into much-needed sleep. Many elders who experience it consider it quite agreeable, and say that giving into it can be intensely pleasurable. Those who fight it, however, describe it quite differently. The powerful lassitude that is forced upon them horrifies those who are bound and determined to stay awake (and powerful), and those who fail to resist it describe an immeasurable panic that overcomes them. No one likes to be helpless, least of all creatures who have accumulated the unimaginable power of the elders.

Voluntary
Kindred can enter torpor deliberately.

Entering voluntary torpor is a unique experience in the Requiem, and, some say, one of the only avenues to prolonged happiness for a vampire. Those who are not aware of the implications of torpor sometimes enter into the sleep as an escape from depression or a retreat from evil circumstances, burrowing into a safe spot and instinctively abandoning themselves to slumber, hoping that they will rise again in better nights. Their preparations are rudimentary, if there are any at all, and they appear, for all intents and purposes, to just lie down for the day and fail to rise at the following sunset. To mortals, the Kindred will appear to be a corpse in repose, laid gently to rest in his surroundings.

On the other hand, vampires who are familiar with torpor engage in delicate, detailed preparations for voluntary sleep. They work to create an atmosphere of peace and pleasure, surrounding themselves with inspiring or relaxing elements. Music, scent and décor are all chosen to maximize the vampire's sense of calm as he slides into slumber, and arrangements are made to attend to his body for the duration and maintain a pleasing environment for his eventual reawakening. A vampire discovered in voluntary torpor under these circumstances won't just look like a natural corpse — he will seem to be an object of veneration, surrounded by valuables and beautiful works of art.

Entering voluntary torpor feels almost exactly like going to sleep for the day, with an added relaxation of the mind. It is as though the vampire is releasing himself from worry and fear, even if only temporarily. No matter how much trepidation he feels about his circumstances, present or future, the actual moment of release is satisfyingly complete.

Dreaming in Death

The dreams of a vampire in torpor reflect his state of mind when he entered sleep.

Outwardly, torpid Kindred are no different from corpses. Those who retain Vitae remain as they were when they first lay down to rest. Those who are empty shrivel and dry out, appearing to mummify even in humid environs. Inwardly, though, their minds are active, if not conscious, and they experience an endless cycle of dreams and visions. Eventually, if a vampire sleeps long enough, these dreams begin to confuse memory and supplant knowledge, leaving the creature with a drastically altered perception of herself and the world that awaits her.

The character of the dreams depends entirely on the circumstances that saw the vampire's entry into torpor. Kindred who are violently beaten into sleep

are cursed to dream of wrath and pain, ripped through the lens of the brutality of their last waking moments. Real memories are woven in with nightmarish fantasy, eventually becoming indistinguishable. The dreams in this state are repetitive and horrifying, often resulting in the vampire's mutilation or death, and they cycle hellishly, forcing him through similar traumatic circumstances again and again. The identities of attackers switch frequently, eventually seeming to be everybody the vampire knew, friend or foe. Understandably, many Kindred go insane in prolonged torpor, subject to the tortures of their own fevered minds, and even those who rise with their faculties intact are usually bewildered by their nightmares. Those who are not so lucky invariably suffer severe derangements: Schizophrenia, Hysteria, Fugue and Multiple Personality Disorder are tragically common results.

A player whose character survives this horrifying process can make a Resolve + Composure roll upon her waking to see what state her memory is in. The Storyteller should apply penalties or bonuses as indicated below:

Violently Induced Torpor: Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
-1	Character in torpor for one week to one month
-2	Character in torpor for one month to one year
-3	Character in torpor for one year to five years
-4	Character in torpor for five years to 10 years
-5	Character in torpor for 10 years or more
-1	For every 100 years spent in torpor beyond the first 10
-2	Character was in frenzy when entering torpor
-1	Character had 5 or fewer Willpower when entering torpor
-1	Character had 5 or fewer Humanity when entering torpor

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The vampire cannot remember any useful details whatsoever. She either believes that she is still dreaming, or she believes that all of her dreams were real experiences and is unaware that she was in torpor. All of her memories are twisted and confused; she is likely to mistake her close friends



for bitter enemies and vice versa. Every memory is tainted by fear and pain — in general, her mistakes will lead her to think the worst of everybody and everything she encounters. She will assume that all of her horrifying memories are true, and there is no way to extract the reality of her past from them. The Storyteller should automatically assign a severe derangement to the character.

Failure: The vampire's memories are confused. She is aware of the inconsistencies in her recall, understanding that all is not as it seems. She can attempt to divide truth from blood-fueled fantasy, but it will take some time to do so. The Storyteller should set a number of successes required on an extended Intelligence + Survival roll to sort the character's memories out, and each roll should represent a week of consideration. It may be impossible to ever know what really happened before the character fell into torpor, but accumulated successes on this roll can represent a measure of confidence achieved with regards to the veracity of the memories that remain.

A derangement roll should be made as usual to see if the character suffers mental damage from the visions of torpor.

Success: The character's memories are damaged, but not entirely unreliable. She can immediately tell that false imagery has been mixed in with the truth, and careful consideration will reveal which is which.

A derangement roll should be made to see if the character suffers mental damage from the visions of torpor. A +2 dice bonus is assigned to this roll.

Exceptional Success: The character's memories are unaffected by torpor. She experiences the nightmares just as any other would, but she shakes off their influence upon waking, clearly remembering the truth.

No derangement roll is made.

Example: *Quintus, elder of Ventrue, was ambushed in his haven in 1690. He fought his mortal enemies valiantly, but was eventually beaten into torpor and left for dead. Quintus had three Willpower by the end of the battle, and his Humanity rating was 4. Quintus has slumbered since the attack, without access to blood for 317 years. His grandchilde recently found him and arranged to feed him, and Quintus now rises.*

The Storyteller checks for Quintus's state of mind, asking Quintus's player to roll Resolve + Composure. Quintus has been sleeping for more than 300 (–3) and 10 (–5) years, and his Humanity and Willpower were both below 5 when he fell into torpor (–2). His Virtue is Fortitude (+2), and his Vice is Greed (no modifier). The total penalty on the roll is –8.

Quintus's player makes the roll, scoring no successes. Quintus is confused, and will need to accumulate a set number of successes (as decided by the Storyteller) on an extended Intelligence + Survival roll to sort his memories out. His player must also make an unmodified derangement roll to see if Quintus has been driven mad by his long sleep.

FEAR OF TORPOR

Vampires who have been through the torment of violently influenced torpor are likely to develop a serious aversion to the experience and work hard to ensure that they never have to repeat it. Characters who are especially careful to avoid violence may be motivated by this entirely rational fear. Violent torpor in a character's history can be used to help explain why a vampire might surround himself with protections or work hard to envelop himself in tradition and politics, ensuring that he is legally as well as physically defended.

Kindred who enter torpor because of slow starvation or the call of age do not experience the same terrors that violently beaten ones do. These Kindred's dreams are no less confused and repetitive, but the themes and images differ wildly. Strangely, most vampires in this state report dreams that seem almost mundane in vampire terms — internal narratives about hunting mortals, political negotiations and other emotional pursuits play themselves out in unending rotation, melting into one another and growing confused over time. The threads of memory and fantasy intertwine, just as they do in other cases; a romance with a childe meshes and overlaps with a political rivalry at Elysium, trading players and details until the two are indistinguishable and equally scrambled. A diplomatic triumph is replayed in conjunction with a botched hunting, creating a misleading association between the two. Cause and effect are completely jumbled, and the vampire loses his capacity to understand the whys and wherefores of his own history.

Vampires experiencing torpor in this manner are, unfortunately, no less likely to go mad than those who suffer nightmares born of violence. Those who do, however, are much more likely to suffer mild derangements: Irrationality, Vocalization, Phobia and Inferiority Complexes are much more frequently reported than more crippling madness.

A player whose character arises from the torpor of starvation or age should still make a Resolve + Composure roll upon her waking to see what state her memory is in. The Storyteller should apply penalties or bonuses as indicated below:

Torpor of Starvation or Age: Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
-1	Character in torpor for one week to one month
-2	Character in torpor for one month to one year
-3	Character in torpor for one year to five years
-4	Character in torpor for five years to 10 years
-5	Character in torpor for 10 years or more
-1	For every 100 years spent in torpor beyond the first 10
-2	Character's torpor came upon her during the day
-1	Character had 5 or fewer Willpower when entering torpor
-1	Character had 5 or fewer Humanity when entering torpor

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The vampire cannot remember any useful details whatsoever. She either believes that she is still dreaming, or she believes that all of her dreams were real experiences and is unaware that she was in torpor. All of her memories are twisted and confused; she is likely to mistake her close friends for bitter enemies and vice versa. Random emotional associations are made to individuals the vampire knows. The Storyteller should automatically assign a mild derangement to the character.

Failure: The vampire's memories are confused. She is aware of the inconsistencies in her recall, understanding that all is not as it seems. She can attempt to divide truth from befuddled fantasy, but it will take some time to do so. The Storyteller should set a number of successes required on an extended Intelligence + Politics roll to sort the character's memories out, and each roll should represent a week of consideration. It may be impossible to ever know what really happened before the character fell into torpor, but accumulated successes on this roll can represent a measure of confidence achieved with regards to the veracity of the memories that remain.

A derangement roll should be made as usual to see if the character suffers mental damage from the visions of torpor.

Success: The character's memories are damaged, but not entirely unreliable. She can immediately tell that false imagery has been mixed in with the truth, and careful consideration will reveal which is which.

A derangement roll should be made to see if the character suffers mental damage from the visions of torpor. A +2 dice bonus is assigned to this roll.

Exceptional Success: The character's memories are unaffected by torpor. She experiences the dreams just as any other would, but she shakes off their influence upon waking, clearly remembering the truth.

No derangement roll is made.

DRAMATIC MISTAKES

Players whose characters are confused after a prolonged torpor may want to take advantage of the mistakes the vampires are likely to make and create interesting new stories for themselves. The players might even wish to go so far as to write down the names of several other characters their associate with and a one-word description of the relationship they share, and then scramble those relationships randomly so that new associations are drawn. Everyone involved may enjoy puzzling out the characters' strange, apparently baseless reactions to their former friends and enemies.

By contrast with all other circumstances, vampires who enter into voluntary torpor usually experience peaceful, even pleasurable dreams in sleep. They are no less confused than others upon waking, but they are somewhat less likely to be deranged by the experience, and much less likely to be averse to the notion of returning to torpor at a later date. The gentle, willing slide into slumber produces a replay of calm moments and even living memories in the dream state, drawing the threads together into a pattern of soothing, rhythmic fantasy. As in all cases, the memories that play out eventually grow together, fusing into an illogical, inseparable mass, but the association between moments of satisfaction doesn't produce much in the way of confusion upon waking. Instead, the threat of damage lies in the mind's concentration on these particular moments to the exclusion of all else, often resulting in the complete erasure of recall with respect to any unpleasant or difficult circumstance in the vampire's history.

A player whose character arises from voluntary torpor should still make a Resolve + Composure roll upon her waking to see what state her memory is in. The Storyteller should apply penalties or bonuses as indicated below:

Voluntary Torpor: Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
-1	Character in torpor for one week to one month
-2	Character in torpor for one month to one year
-3	Character in torpor for one year to five years
-4	Character in torpor for five years to 10 years
-5	Character in torpor for 10 years or more
-1	For every 100 years spent in torpor beyond the first 10
-1	Character had 5 or fewer Willpower when entering torpor
-1	Character had Humanity 5 or lower when entering torpor

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The vampire cannot remember any unpleasant details from her past whatsoever. She awakes believing that the pleasant experiences she dreamt of (real or otherwise) make up the sum total of her history, and does not believe that she ever knew pain, fear or animosity. The reality of the world threatens to crash in on her as soon as she emerges from her haven.

A derangement roll should be made as usual to see if the character suffers mental damage from the visions of torpor.

Failure: The vampire's memories are patchy and confused. She is aware that there was more to her Requiem than the moments of calm she experienced in sleep, but can't be entirely sure what they were. The Storyteller should set a number of successes required on an extended Intelligence + Empathy roll to sort the character's memories out, and each roll should represent a week of consideration. It may be impossible to ever know what really happened before the character slid into torpor, but accumulated successes on this roll can represent a measure of confidence achieved with regards to the veracity of the memories that remain.

A derangement roll should be made to see if the character suffers mental damage from the visions of torpor. A +2 dice bonus is assigned to this roll.

Success: The character's unpleasant memories are painted with a warm brush, but not entirely excluded. She can immediately tell that her interpretation of events is skewed, and careful consideration will reveal that she is being overly kind in her recall (but not necessarily how much so).

No derangement roll is made.

Exceptional Success: The character's memories are unaffected by torpor, but the positive experience actually reaffirms her sense of optimism and her self. Redemption of Humanity could be justified to a certain degree, if there is a diminishment in Blood Potency and the player spends the experience necessary to buy the next point up on the Humanity scale. Whether or not this happens, the character clearly remembers the truth of her waking nights upon rising.

No derangement roll is made.



ADDICTION TO TORPOR

Vampires who benefit from the gentle rest of voluntary torpor may be inclined to enter into it again in the future, especially if they experience trying circumstances. Characters who are lazy and unwilling to rise to a challenge may be motivated to sleep instead, and are likely to have at least two or three bouts of voluntary torpor in their histories. The relatively pleasurable experience of voluntary torpor (in one or more stages) can also be used to help explain an elder vampire's relatively fresh outlook upon rising from a long sleep, as well as a relatively high Humanity score in older Kindred.



Frenzy

There is no manifestation of the vampire curse more visible, more surprising or more traumatic than the state known as "frenzy." The overriding of rational thought with the violent, uncluttered instinct of the Beast is a deeply horrifying experience, and many Kindred have suffered the terrible losses as a result. Degeneration and madness go hand-in-hand with frenzy, as even the most moral vampire is forced to face his own capacity for brutality, and must acknowledge his own responsibility for the depredations of the Beast unleashed. Every vampire has horror stories to tell about his own experiences with the red rage or the foaming wildness of Wassail. Almost every vampire has spilled the blood of innocents while lost to frenzy, and all of them know well the pain of rational understanding when the fog of rage, fear or hunger clears.

Attempts to understand and explain the phenomenon of frenzy are as common as dirt in the world of Kindred. Everybody seems to have his own pet theory about it, and almost everyone is eager to explain his view to others. The need to rationalize its effect (and, perhaps, to absolve one's self of responsibility) is strong in vampires, and may form one of the most universal bonds between all vampires, but many find it difficult to find common ground between their suppositions, vehemently disagreeing about the disparities, great or small.

One of the problems reconciling many of the different views arises from the actual character of frenzy. No two vampires behave exactly the same way when they enter frenzy, even if they all evince identical intent. It seems that the basic personality of a vampire is distilled into its most predatory during the loss of control, eliminating the obstruction of higher mental function, but retaining certain traits. Outgoing, physical Kindred may howl with rage and tear mindlessly at their prey, while more withdrawn intellectual types become chillingly silent, moving with horrifying precision. Vampires maintain (or manifest) characteristic quirks in the throes of their outbursts, making it clear that there is something uniquely *theirs* in the eruption — they aren't giving themselves over to an alien influence, but rather expressing a part of themselves that is normally hidden.

Dark Prophet preserve me, but I have never . . . never . . . forgive me, Your Grace. Please allow me a moment to compose myself.

It was, as you said, not difficult to provoke the child of the Prince to frenzy. The display of her mortal brother's corpse was arranged, as Your Grace suggested, and her descent was most shockingly abrupt. I observed from a safe distance as she began to scream, reaching up to tear at her own hair. She walked quickly toward the body, screaming all the while in a most pitiable and unsettling tone, finally reaching it and tearing it from the wall, heedless of the further damage inflicted by pulling him down from the nails. She then proceeded to beat her fists against the wall, breaking through the plaster and appearing to break several of her fingers.

One of the neighbors, no doubt stirred to friendly concern by her wailing, stepped through the open door to the apartment, and was rewarded for his sympathy when she leapt upon him.

She . . . she tore his heart from his chest with the crooked ruins of her hands and threw it to the floor,

showing surprising strength and efficiency. You were quite correct, Your Grace. Even the most disciplined and peaceful fledgling can be driven to acts of shocking brutality with but a little encouragement. I have never seen such madness in someone so renowned for elegance and compassion.

Anger

Frustration, irritation, provocation and betrayal can lead to rage frenzy, unleashing the Beast in a burst of uncontrollable violence.

The unchecked rage of the vampire is truly a terrifying sight. No witness, mortal or otherwise, can remain impassive in the presence of Kindred caught in the throes of an anger frenzy.

While the image of the howling vampire snarling and spitting as he tears into his foes may be legendary, it hardly covers the varied displays of aggression demonstrated by the varied Kindred of the world. Some become closed-mouthed and blindly resolute, actually biting into their own tongues or lips in the clenched tension of fury. Some weep tears of blood as they whisper hoarse, repetitive, senseless threats.

Kindred often expend Vitae at the start of an anger frenzy (or even before it starts, while they can feel it coming on) to increase Strength or fuel physical Disciplines, and the attendant visuals add to the frightening effect. A vampire's veins may turn black with blood as he calls on his undead Strength, moments before he flies into an uncontrollable rage. Another will begin to tremble as she considers activating Celerity, even as the internal battle against the Beast roils within her. Those with enough knowledge of Protean almost always manifest the Claws of the Wild as they lose themselves to the fury of frenzy.

Vampires who emerge from rage frenzy most commonly describe their last moments before losing control as a "fade into red," their senses dimming and narrowing in focus while the feeling of frustration mounts steadily. Some actually claim to go blind or deaf before losing control, adding to their feeling of panic and aggravation. On the other hand, a minority claim that they feel no warning at all — one moment, they encounter a stress, and then the next they are waking as if from a trance, minutes or hours later, the bloody evidence of their outburst scattered all around them.

The anger frenzy takes precedence over all other types, and a vampire can slide without warning from hunger or fear to rage, turning upon others nearby and attacking them with unbidden fury. Only the bravest or most

powerful Kindred would dare to interfere with a vampire caught up in Wassail or Röttschreck, knowing full well that she may flip into the attack instinct and unleash.

Anger frenzies may serve to further a vampire's needs in combat, but the benefit is hardly worth the price. For every frenzy that results in the defeat of an enemy, there are five or 10 that involve inadvisable, foolishly destructive behavior. A vampire who is annoyed because he can't crack an ancient code might end up tearing the valuable manuscript he studies to pieces. Another who is punched in the face during a botched feeding attempt may end up painting the walls with his intended victim's brains. Even a vampire who ends up destroying a hated foe in the midst of frenzy may turn upon a friend who tries to calm her down afterwards. Nobody in his right mind likes to frenzy, and giving control over to one's basest urges is a gamble that rarely turns up a winning hand.

Wassail

Whenever a hungry vampire encounters blood, she risks entering Wassail, greedily attacking any nearby vessel with wild abandon.

Wassail is a shameful expression of the hunger of the vampire, overriding thought and decorum with a repulsive display of voracious self-indulgence. Kindred caught up in Wassail will feed openly, pushing would-be competitors and dismayed witnesses both aside as he tears, gobbles and slurps at the nearest available source of blood, desperate to drain every last drop.

While the details of the hunger frenzy are unique to each vampire, observers have noted that Kindred who descend into it invariably open their mouths and do not close them until they clamp onto the blood source that excited them in the first place (or the nearest available one, if another is interposed). Some moan and tremble with desire, while others gibber and babble inarticulately, trying to form words without closing their lips or jaws. Tongues push down at lips or snake out and reach toward the blood, as if expressing a hunger all their own. Fingers clutch and scrabble at vessels, seeking purchase so that the animalistic vampire can better hold his victim down.

Kindred entering Wassail rarely expend Vitae to raise Attributes or fuel Disciplines. They are, after all, seeking to replenish themselves — not further deplete their stores of Blood. Once contact with a vessel is made, though, some Kindred will do whatever it takes to maintain their feeding stance, even spending precious Vitae, if necessary, to fend off interference.

The onset of Wassail feels completely different from anger frenzy. Most Vampires report that the pain and weakness of hunger seems to drown out rational thought

well before they lose control, and that the last thing they remember before blanking out is the encounter with the vessel and a paradoxical, momentary sensation of relief. Those who have endured Wassail many times know that this relaxation of stress is nothing more than the release of the Beast, and they take no pleasure in experiencing it.

Since vampires caught in Wassail will feed until they are full, this type of frenzy is the one that most often results in accidental murder. It is by no means less destructive than a rage frenzy, and many Kindred have seen their Humanity washed away in the blood of its innocent victims.

I've seen it once, I've seen it a hundred times. Some young fucker thinks he's going to hold himself back, keep from hurting people. Starves himself for a week, maybe, figuring that he can learn to stop feeding so much. That Carthian Ventrue, for example. This kid's walking along the street, and you can see he's got the thousand-mile stare, trying hard to keep himself together. All of a sudden, these two guys come barreling out of a bar, throwing down. One of them's got a bloody nose, and this poor Ventrue swivels toward him like there's a magnet in his forehead. I'm wondering if I should do something when he gets that relaxed look on his face, going all slack, his mouth hanging open, and I know I better move quick. I'm running across the street full speed at this point, but by the time I get there, the kid's clamped right onto the mortal's bloody nose and is making these grunting noises, hanging on while the other guy is shouting and trying to pull him off. Ended up chewing his victim's face half-off before he came to his senses, then he starts crying and screaming while I'm pulling him away. What a mess.

Rötschreck

Sunlight, fire, and certain Kindred Disciplines may provoke Rötschreck, forcing an otherwise rational vampire to unthinking flight.

A vampire caught in the grip of the red terror is nothing more than an animal, following the fundamental instinct of self-preservation. No thought or moral stricture interferes with Rötschreck; the vampire will push aside or barrel through anything and anybody to get away from the perceived threat. Nothing, absolutely nothing is more important to a frenzied vampire than survival. The direction of flight is not reasonable — the vampire will simply move as quickly as possible to get away from the threat, via the most immediately obvious route. Kindred hoping to trap a foe commonly employ a “herding” flame, set

to provoke a vampire to fear frenzy so that he rushes through the nearest open door, straight into a snare. The tactic is simple and effective.

As with other frenzies, the vampire lost to Rötschreck loses all equanimity as he scrambles madly for safety. Some scream and gibber, rolling their wide eyes and dropping to all fours as they scuttle to safety. Others become wild and clamped, gnashing their teeth and drawing inwards, hiding their eyes from the threat in terror and pushing blindly away. Some quite literally go mad with fear, unleashing a soul-deep shriek as their mind cracks under the pressure of inhuman panic.

Vampires entering fear frenzy almost always spend Vitae to enhance Physical Attributes or Disciplines, if they can. The Beast will empower itself any way it can to ensure survival, even if that means running low on Vitae for the time being. Many a vampire emerges safely from a fear frenzy, only to realize that he is starving and on the verge of Wassail.

Testimony from Kindred who enter fear frenzy seems to indicate that most actually blank out a few seconds before the frenzy becomes obvious, suggesting that they are usually already well into Rötschreck by the time observers realize what's going on. Almost all statements indicate that the vampire is at first distracted by the provocation, then focused completely on it, to the exclusion of all other sensation or thought.

Fear frenzy is a frequent cause of derangement without degeneration in Kindred. A vampire trapped in proximity to fire or sunlight for longer than a few minutes is likely to suffer a mental breakdown even if he is eventually rescued. Phobia, Irrationality or Suspicion is the most common result. Especially cruel vampires may torture a fellow vampire into madness by just locking him in a secure room with an open (but controlled) bonfire or chaining him down before an unblocked window as the sunlight moves slowly toward him.

I must admit, I almost thought I was going to be caught there. The Hounds of the Sheriff were closing in on me, and my attempts to charm them were, admittedly, undermined by the ashes of their brother still dusting my arms and face. Suddenly, I noticed that they both slowed in their advance, staring over my shoulder and wearing expressions of dismay. I dared to glance back for a moment, praying that they were not toying with me. The vision that confronted me was beautiful, I'll admit: Purvis, my manservant, was standing behind me with a burning rag in one hand and an open bottle of vodka in the other. He sprayed a

quantity from his mouth, creating a great ball of flame in the open air. Unfortunately, that's the last thing I remember seeing. The ungodly blue-green fire seemed to fill the whole of my vision, and for a moment I actually began to believe that Durvis intended to set me alight. According to his later report, I broke into mad flight seconds earlier than the Hounds, proving my superiority yet again, but the three of us ran together for some time, pushing each other aside in a howling scramble to reach the open road and go our own ways. I must remember to gift Durvis with extra Vitae this month.

Injury

A frenzied vampire ignores wound penalties to dice pools, until wounds become severe enough to render her torpid.

The power of the Beast is such that its irrational emotion can completely override a vampire's psyche, rendering him oblivious to everything that isn't a feature of the frenzy's target. Injury sustained isn't just insufficient to slow him, it's beneath his notice. He doesn't even flinch when blows are struck. He certainly won't bother to heal the wounds that result.

Almost every vampire has at least one story to tell about a frenzy she witnessed, where the furious (or starving or terrified) Kindred involved literally loses limbs in pursuit of his goal, never breaking stride all the while. It's an image that, once seen, is rarely forgotten.

The perspective is no better from the inside. Many Kindred have stumbled to consciousness after a violent frenzy to find that their midsections are torn and spilling guts, their bodies are riddled with bullets or their limbs hacked and hanging loose. They have to deal with massive body trauma even while they gradually get their bearings, figuring out what happened to them, where they are and what horrors they may have committed on the way there.

Of course, the wounds sustained during frenzy and the vampire's capacity to function unimpeded are a potential threat to the Masquerade. Mortals are liable to talk when they see a crazy man shot six times before tearing his opponent's throat out with his teeth, and, even if they don't know what they're describing, that's exactly the kind of talk that Princes aren't going to want floating around in their cities.

Riding the Wave

A vampire may choose to frenzy on purpose, attempting to consciously guide the conditions of the outburst.

Here it is: the deal with the devil. Every vampire knows that Kindred get stronger in frenzy, that they get more focused, harder to distract and harder to put down. Some might get angry enough, desperate enough or mean enough to decide that they want that in certain situations, regardless of the consequences. Some might be willing to pay any price just to *finally* put an end to an antagonist who's been harassing them. Some feel that they're going to frenzy sooner or later and decide that it'd be better to do so under controlled (or semi-controlled) circumstances, by choice, rather than at the whim of the Beast.

And doing so is a conscious choice to do the evil that the Beast constantly urges them on to. When a vampire who has Ridden the Wave stands with the blood of his enemies all over his hands and face, coming back to himself, he knows perfectly well that he *chose* to become a monster for the short time it took to dispatch them. Everything he did in that particular frenzy was clearly and obviously his fault.

Riding the Wave is a great illustration of the breaking point in a vampire's struggle for Humanity. It can be an incredibly dramatic choice to make in some scenes, and underscores the emotional importance of the events in play for the character in a way that nothing else can — especially if the desperate effort to hold onto Humanity is a central focus of the game. It means so much more for a compassionate vampire to willingly explode than it does for a combat machine to do so.

Kindred working themselves into frenzy are visibly different from those who are being pushed by the internal screams of the Beast. Kindred working themselves into frenzy might provoke themselves with self-inflicted injury, actually inciting a rage by cutting, biting or clawing themselves into a mad release of fury like legendary berserker warriors. They might pace and clench their fists, whispering hoarsely to wind themselves up. They might simply stare with fixed bloody-mindedness at the target of their intended frenzy, letting the anger build as an internal pressure, using their closed-down demeanor as a means to prevent release until the explosive moment.

Those who attempt to Ride the Wave when a frenzy is already coming upon them are not much different. Many will employ the same techniques as a way of goading and directing the Beast, frantically working to distract it from its open-ended fury and trying to channel its energies. If anything, these Kindred just seem more nervous and desperate in their attempts — they are trying to redirect outbursts that they didn't call up, after all, and stand a real chance of losing control in unpleasant circumstances. Many will weep uncontrollably while they attempt to seize

the reins, knowing and understanding what will happen if they fail.

This motherfucking bottom-feedin' dirt-pushin' Gangrel was on us for weeks. Weeks. I don't know what it was, but there was something about Clarisa that really drove him nuts. Maybe because she was so small and so quiet, but so strong at the same time. Maybe just because she was Nosferatu, and he took a dislike to her. Like I say, I don't know. But he was always around, always givin' her a hard time and sayin' we're all bitches for stickin' with her, wrinkling up his fat, dirty nose when he talked like he was smellin' shit. One night she just had enough. He showed up, givin' us the stink-face, only this time Clarisa was standing there, rigid as a board, nails dug into her palms and workin' her mouth, lips tight shut, while he started in on her. He thought it was funny, I guess, all the way until she rammed into him and started nippin' pieces off, screamin' bloody murder and puking blood all over his face outta the holes she'd punched in her own tongue. None of us were all too eager to try and pull her off,

know what I'm sayin'? Besides, he had it comin' to him. Poor Clarisa, though, she was all messed up about it for months afterwards.

Frenzy in Play

A frenzied character ignores all morals or loyalties in her blind compulsion to satisfy the demands of the Beast.

The frenzy of a vampire is brutal and mindless. It almost always causes more trouble than it solves for the character. It definitely feels awful.

So how do you make it fun to play?

There are a couple of options. Players who don't really want to play the balls-out craziness of the Beast can relinquish control of their characters to the Storyteller during frenzy scenes. The blind fury, hunger or terror of the vampire can be further simulated by actually leaving the room and coming back when the scene is over, leaving the behavior of the character a mystery to be solved (if he's alone) or revealed (if other characters are present). This option is easiest, but it can give rise to the feeling that the Beast is "someone else" — not a part of the character himself — and that's not really what Requiem is usually



about. Still, no player should be forced to do something he isn't comfortable with . . . and a character's denial of personal responsibility, if that's how people want to play it out, can easily become part of a story.

Some players prefer to play through the frenzy themselves, and ask for no assistance from the Storyteller. It can be fun to throw caution and conscience to the wind once in a while, within the fictional framework, and cut loose just to see what shakes out. Players should be encouraged to make problems for their characters in the frenzy state, just to make things interesting. They can be their own worst enemy for a scene, making a 10-minute mess that will take their characters weeks to repair. A character's tragedies can be fodder for great drama, and make things much more interesting than a comfortable, untroubled existence. The only caveat to this approach is that all of the players involved in a troupe should be comfortable enough with one another to understand that a character who turns on them in frenzy is just part of play, not anything personal between the players. Kindred behave very badly under the influence of the Beast, but players should do their best to maintain a sense of detachment and, if possible, humor about the situation.

Storyteller assistance is very important in playing frenzy. Isolating the player whose character is caught up in frenzy (even by just getting her to sit a few feet over from the table) and narrating the scene differently for her can make a world of difference in creating a distinct feel for her. Restricting description of objects and people to generic, Beast-filtered terms also goes a long way toward making the scene interesting and engaging for the player, allowing her to know what her character is doing without knowing who or what she's doing it to — for the time being, at least. Friends, enemies and innocent bystanders can all be described as “targets,” “vessels” or “threats” depending on the nature of the frenzy. Witnesses and other features of the landscape are irrelevant and can be left out of descriptions.

Because the battle between Man and Beast is such a powerful theme, and one that is central to **Vampire: The Requiem**, frenzy needs to be dealt with carefully. It's important for all players in a troupe to voice their comfort level with the idea of frenzy and the way their characters may behave, and to establish ground rules before a story begins. Disagreements over the frequency, intensity and character of frenzy can tear a **Vampire** game apart unless they are settled to everyone's satisfaction.

Humanity

There is nothing, absolutely nothing more important to a vampire than her Humanity. It is at once precious,

fragile and, to a certain degree, invisible. Many Kindred don't realize how important Humanity is until they begin to lose it, and some never really understand until it's far too late. Humanity defines the vampire's behavior. It draws the limits of her interaction with the mortal world. It keeps her from complete mental collapse, helping her to hold on to what shreds of human compassion remain in her heart and mind after death. When Humanity is gone, the vampire becomes nothing more than a brutal Beast, operating without moral compunction or capacity for mercy. Every time a vampire moves closer to the Beast, the world around her darkens and suffers, subject as it is to her increasingly callous, violent conduct.

From a player's perspective, Humanity is not just a numeric statistic. It describes the current mental state of his character as well as mechanically demonstrating the balance between Man and Beast in the soul of the vampire. Those whose characters sport a high Humanity score should strive to avoid doing harm whenever possible *because they are humane*, and seek to bolster themselves against the horrible inducements of the Beast. As a rule, most vampires with a very high Humanity rating degenerate only because of the uncontrolled actions of frenzy or the overwhelming temptations of Vice because they will not consciously commit callous deeds. On the other hand, those whose characters have descended on the scale should be colder and more predatory in their deeds *because they are inhumane*, putting precedence on principles of self-preservation before Virtue. Players always have the option to start their character out with a low Humanity score, if they feel that the vampire would not be a compassionate individual — and there are many in-game ways to justify a character's attempt to redeem herself if she has degenerated below a player's preference — reminders of her mortal past, examples of Virtue in her environment or unobstructed views of other vampires' monstrousness could all lead to a bout of conscience-driven attempts at recovery, as could several more complicated or personal circumstances.

Under no circumstances should a player treat his character's Humanity as defense against degeneration for that character's crimes. A Humanity of 8 isn't proof of superior validation when dealing cruelly with more callous vampires, and it doesn't justify violence or insensitivity any more than a Humanity of 3 justifies it. Rather, it indicates that violence or insensitivity *itself* is beneath the character, and resorting to either is a betrayal of one's moral instinct, inviting degeneration.

The tendency of the Beast to draw a vampire toward antisocial, cold-hearted behavior should provide most

Kindred (especially those who haven't fallen far yet) with all the impetus they need to resist degeneration. Losing one's self to the Beast means more frequent frenzy (which means less control over one's actions), less capacity to interact comfortably with mortals (which means a higher likelihood of violence during attempts to hunt) and greater weakness in the daytime (which means diminished safety).

I'm standing there, watching my mother on her bed, struggling to take a breath. She can't see me, of course.

I'm vanished, probably nothing more to her than a vague tingle of fear. Shit, I realize it must be 10, 11 years since I became Kindred and disappeared from her life. Last time I saw her, she was crying over my grave.

Strange thing is, now she's dying, and I can't bring myself to cry for her. All I'm thinking is whether or not I could take a little nip, maybe just a tiny bit of blood, without hurting her any worse than the cancer does. Actually, it'd probably make her feel good. Maybe ease her on nice and quiet . . .

Shit, what's happened to me? I wasn't always like this. Was I?

An Optional Virtue/Vice Mechanic

Here's a simple way to model the impact Humanity has on a vampire's instinctive response to any situation. Whenever the vampire is presented with a decision, take one die and roll it. If the result is equal to or less than her Humanity, she makes the Virtuous choice. If the result is greater than her Humanity, she leans toward her Vice. Of course, if the vampire is one of the Daeva, she will always be tempted to behave badly — even when her instinct says otherwise, and the player may choose to have her do so just to conserve Willpower.

We're not suggesting that players should actually base all of their characters' decisions on the roll of a die, but rather that they may wish to should give it a try once in a while, just to illustrate the power of low or high Humanity to influence the initial, unconscious urge. Every character is always free to overpower that urge with conscious choice, as directed by the player — but the fact that he may be resisting his natural desires when he does so, and how often that resistance comes into play, should be noted.

Example: Lloyd is a Ventruel with Humanity 8, Charity for his Virtue and Pride for his Vice. He is insulted by a drunken beggar on the street on his way to Elysium one night, and Lloyd's player decides to roll the die just to see where Lloyd's

instinct leads. If the player rolls an 8 or less, Lloyd will behave charitably, giving the beggar the benefit of the doubt (and probably want to give him some change, too). If the player rolls a 9 or 10, Lloyd will take umbrage, and his instinct will urge him to put the beggar in his place.

Example: Aurora is a Nosferatu with Humanity 3, Hope for her Virtue and Wrath for her Vice. She sees the beggar insult Lloyd, and watches Lloyd give him a handful of change and walk off. Her player rolls the die to see where her instinct leads. If her player rolls a 3 or less, Aurora will be heartened by Lloyd's charity and want to speak with the beggar, showing him that things aren't as bad as they seem. If her player rolls a 4 or higher, Aurora will be furious with the beggar's disrespect, and her instinct will urge her to punish him for it.

The Beast

The Beast follows a simple plan: Hunt. Kill. Feed. Sleep. Repeat.

The nature of the Beast is a source of great controversy among vampires. Some discuss it as if it is something separate from the conscious Kindred; a literal other that makes demands and attempts, on occasion, to seize control of the body. Others believe that to do so is to deny a more frightening truth: that the Beast is nothing more than the unchecked urges of the vampire himself, constantly seeking expression. Whether the Beast's influence is foreign or fundamental, the fact is that the Beast is part of every vampire, and that the battle to keep it from dominating one's nights is a constant, horrifyingly difficult struggle.

Those Kindred who are closer to the Beast are uniformly more corpse-like in appearance, and they lose the tics, flutters and pulses of the living human body, becoming strangely still. Many manifest other indications of their degeneration, though. Some become raspy or less articulate, while others' eyes seem to cloud over and darken, or they develop muscular jerks and spasms entirely foreign to the living. There are those who even seem to change in bodily dimension — growing taller and more sinuous, or shorter and more crooked as they degenerate. Nobody can be sure why these physical changes take place, since they don't always seem to bear relation to the personality of the vampire in question.

The behavior of the Beast is extremely simple in definition. The four modes of operation listed above: hunt, kill, feed and sleep, are the only causes of the Beast, and the only filters through which it will see every situation. A vampire is walking down a busy street? The Beast is there with him, calling for the hunt, considering every mortal you pass as a potential food source and victim of violence. Another vampire is taking orders from the Prince? The Beast is wondering if she can kill him and take what's his.

A third one is looking for a place to rest in the daytime? If it's light-tight, a box in a sewer pipe is no less comforting to the Beast than a four-poster bed in a luxury apartment — and the Beast will rail against the vampire's decision if he leaves one in search of the other. These urges are pure instinct, and they are no less present in a vampire with a Humanity rating of 10 than they are in one with a Humanity rating of 1. The former is just better able to drown the Beast out and resist its call than the latter.

Staying Awake

The lower a vampire's Humanity Score, the harder it is to stay awake during the day.

The day's slumber isn't like ordinary, living sleep. Vampires don't get drowsy as the dawn approaches, and their bodies and minds don't recharge over the daytime hours. The moment the sun comes up, they sink helplessly into an inert state, somewhere between a corpse and a walking vampire — not completely dead, but not quite awake or aware. The pull to sleep is sudden and powerful, grinding the mind and body to a quick halt, like a car with the brakes slammed down. The closer the vampire is to the Beast, the harder the "brake-stomp" and the faster the drop. That's why experienced Kindred make sure they can tell what time it is, not just because they don't want to be caught outside in the sunrise, but because they don't want to be caught unawares in general, even if they're perfectly safe. Less humane vampires will collapse right in the middle of a task or conversation if they're not careful, and that can result in injury or disruption of the work (not to mention the embarrassing circumstance if one happens to be in the midst of dealing with mortals at the time).

It is possible to fight the urge to sleep or to force oneself awake during the day, but the battle is difficult and unpleasant. The limbs feel heavy and weak. The mind slows. Thought and understanding are diminished to a torturous crawl. Speech is thick and hoarse. Those Kindred who are very close to the Beast are less human, so they are less like the living; they must remain inert in the daytime because the curse of the vampire demands it. While the sun shines, the low-Humanity vampire is more corpse than man. To represent this, all of a vampire's dice pools are limited by her Humanity rating from the moment of dawn's first light to the completion of dusk, when the sun drops below the horizon again. This limit applies to the Wits + Auspex roll to determine whether a sleeping vampire notices a disturbance near his body, as well as any other action the character may wish to take in the daytime.

The dice pool to remain awake during the day (or to wake on purpose) is equal to a character's Humanity

rating. The struggle is extended; so long as successes continue to be rolled, the vampire can act. The whole of this battle is played out as a fight to keep oneself thinking and moving, though. Players should narrate their character's actions during this battle, making the struggle clear by describing the sluggishness of the vampire's motions. Hands may keep curling up and moving instinctively to the chest, where they normally rest during the day's sleep. Eyes close even as the character moves and speaks, snapping open with each successful roll, then drooping shut in the seconds between each turn. Long pauses interrupt speech. Until he is fully awake, everything the character's body does seems to indicate that it ought to be at rest, no matter how dire or energized the situation.

FROM MORALITY TO HUMANITY

The phenomenon of mental backlash during the Embrace can help to explain why some characters start out with less than the average Humanity rating of 7 on creation (and why some might begin with a derangement, if the player desires), and why some who were arguably immoral in life might start out with the standard rating. Even the very worst of mortal criminals can't help but struggle to hold on to their essential Humanity upon death, and many end up appreciating Humanity more keenly when the Beast makes its first demands.

Someone could be so damaged by the Embrace that he arises thoroughly inhumane and insane — in fact, it might make for a great story to play out the after effects of just such a botched Embrace. If a player insists on making one of these unfortunates into a character, the Storyteller might consider allowing the player to drop the character's Humanity below 5, so long as the player is willing to make derangement rolls for each point below the minimum before play begins.

The Descent

Following is an elaborated list of the stages of a vampire's degeneration. While no two vampires are the same in terms of personality or motivation, conscious or otherwise, the character of the Beast is universal, and the influence it has is likewise similar from vampire to vampire. Players may wish to consult the listing that corresponds to their characters' current state to help figure out where the characters' instincts lie (and how powerful they are).

Humanity 10-8

Vampires at this level of Humanity are *rare*. They are *holy*. They are *delicate*. It is incredibly difficult to maintain the existence of a vampire without causing harm to

others — both living and undead — and it is very, very likely that very few of the local Kindred will give them much credit for it. Almost every vampire who maintains a Humanity rating this high does it somewhere far away from the politics of the Danse Macabre, feeding as little as possible and avoiding the temptations of Discipline use and violence. They will, however, seek to interact with mortals as much as possible, enjoying their kinship and reveling in the glow of their lively excitements.

These Kindred cannot help but feel pity when they look at vampires with lower Humanity, and may or may not want to help them redeem themselves. In fact, failing to aid them and help quell the demands of the Beast may lead to a degeneration check (since the vampire cannot tolerate responsibility for pain or injury, and allowing a monster to inflict his urges unimpeded is tantamount to standing by and letting it happen). Those who have a clear understanding of this truth have two choices: retreat completely from society and blind themselves to the ongoing horrors of their own kind, or risk losing everything in their attempts to change the world.

It is almost inconceivable that a Daeva could maintain a Humanity score higher than 7 for longer than a week or two because of the mechanical weakness of the clan. The demands of Vice are constantly pulling at them, and nobody's Willpower lasts forever.

A significant proportion of Kindred with Humanity ratings of 8 or higher eventually commit suicide. Rather than face the degeneration they know awaits them and the attendant harm that they will subsequently inflict on the mortal population, many make what seems like the only moral choice for vampires: to accept that the moment of their Embrace was rightfully the moment of their human death, and to physically acknowledge that fact by walking into the light of the sun.

Humanity 7-6

Most characters start out with a Humanity of 7, but most Kindred who have spent more than a year or two in the Requiem average out at a 4 or 5 Humanity rating.

Kindred at this level of Humanity feel no unusual urge to distance themselves from Kindred politics, and many will believe that they have the capacity to improve the situation in their domain, whether or not they are correct. They still feel alive enough that spending time close to mortals is enjoyable, and they feel dead enough that interacting with other vampires doesn't always seem like shaking hands with the devil.

Vice is occasionally indulged by Kindred with this level of Humanity, but they usually make an effort to do so under controlled circumstances and cause as little actual

harm as possible. A Greedy vampire may ask for more compensation than she deserves, but won't actually break into someone else's house and steal from them. A Wrathful one may take pleasure in hurling insults on a call-in radio show, but won't be eager to pick a fight on the street.

These Kindred regard those with higher Humanity as curiosities deserving admiration or respect. They often describe them as enlightened or saintly, openly admitting that they would aspire to emulate them, but often qualifying that confession with an admission of weakness that prevents the attempt.

Those with lower Humanity seem sick or animalistic to these higher-Humanity vampires. They aren't likely to want to extend a helping hand to lower-Humanity vampires, though, unless they were already friends or acquaintances before their degeneration took hold. It's more likely that Kindred with Humanity 6 or 7 will treat low-Humanity Kindred as predatory beasts, avoiding them whenever possible and maintaining a cautious stance when they have no choice but to meet.

Humanity 5

This is one of the two "stable" Humanity ratings most common to the world of Kindred. Vampires who even out at a rating of 5 are not especially squeamish about violence, especially when responding to provocation, but they won't go out of their way to inflict pain or destruction for any reason. They tend to think that it's always a mistake to kill a human, if not for compassionate reasons, then for simple expediency — to avoid alerting the prey to the presence of a predator. Many Kindred who manage to maintain this level of Humanity do it by maintaining a habitual schedule that minimizes the potential for surprise, taking the time to make amends whenever they do make mistakes and learning to Ride the Wave in frenzy so that they can direct the occasional outbursts of the Beast away from innocent mortals.

Kindred at this level often begin to explore Vice in uncontrolled circumstances, taking risks as a means to increasing the excitement and pleasure derived from the activity. The Greedy vampire might try a little thievery here and there, testing the limits of his skill and intellect and satisfying his urge, while a Wrathful one might deliberately wander into unpredictable situations, welcoming the chance to cut loose if it comes up.

These Kindred tend to think that those with higher Humanity are more likely inexperienced than they are sacred, and that most will eventually lose their naïve outlook and "settle down." Kindred with Humanity 5 are still compassionate enough to be politic with their



own kind, and are not likely to deride or insult their more humane brethren unless roused by aggravation.

Having lost a bit of Humanity themselves, vampires at this level are not likely to judge those lower on the scale. To be comfortable with themselves, they believe that a measure of degeneration is inevitable, and usually accept that different Kindred must operate on different sets of morals and ethics as inherited from their living days. These vampires won't be eager to see those vampires make trouble, but also won't immediately treat them like sad cases or beasts.

Humanity 4

This is the second of the two "stable" Humanity ratings, and it is much more prevalent than Humanity 5, simply because many Kindred eventually kill the occasional mortal, and a rating of 4 tolerates those mistakes (as long as they are truly mistakes). Vampires who even out at a rating of 4 are willing to accept the occasional slip, and even the occasional death that results, so long as those slips are not the result of premeditated acts. Similar to those with a Humanity of 5, vampires at Humanity 4 aren't eager to inflict suffering or cause death. However, these vampires are less likely to go out of their way to prevent those outcomes. They drop to this level of Humanity by absolving themselves of responsibility for accidents (or for the eruptions of the Beast), but they maintain it by making some effort to avoid going completely over the edge.

Kindred at this level develop a real taste for their Vice, and are likely to push things further than those at Humanity 5. A Greedy vampire will plot heists or seek to actively take power away from others in the structure of domain politics, while a Wrathful one will enthusiastically look for reasons to visit his fury on worthy targets. The indulgence of Vice at this level is the most likely cause for degeneration, not frenzy.

By the time a vampire gets to Humanity 4, he is almost certain to have gained at least one derangement. This madness contributes to his motivations and night-to-night activities, whether he likes to admit it or not, and it has a lot to do with how he is perceived by others higher on the scale.

These vampires are less forgiving of those with Humanity ratings at the high end of the scale, and they tend to get irritated by their complaints, accusations and even their expressions of sympathy. As far as Humanity 4 vampires are concerned, those Kindred who maintain their Humanity at high levels are immature or insane or struggling to find a way to justify their weakness.

Not eager to devolve any further and not quite as compassionate as some of those higher on the scale, Kindred at this level are not likely to look kindly upon those with lower Humanity ratings. Instead, Kindred with Humanity 4 are repulsed by the loss of faculty they represent, knowing quite well (even if they're not ready to admit it) that they are poised on the precipice of following suit themselves. Psychologically speaking, it's necessary for many Kindred at this level to draw a line between themselves and those with a lower Humanity rating, if only to maintain Requiems that aren't overwhelmed with worry and guilt. Cruel assumptions about low-Humanity vampires' corruption, lack of intelligence or psychosis are often voiced.

Humanity 3-2

A vampire at this state has gone too far. She is no longer likely to appreciate the need for her Humanity, and actually begins to see mortals as useful tools, simple prey or aggravating nuisances. There is little kindness or mercy left in her, and even vampires with Humanity 4 or 5 will understand that she is well on her way to the shameful state of the draugr. These vampires *do* go out of their way to create pain and sow destruction. They *like* it. It makes them feel *good*.

Vice is an ongoing motive for Kindred who drop so low. Not only will they seek out situations that will allow them to indulge, but they enjoy taking their indulgences to the limit. A Greedy vampire won't just work to rob another of wealth and territory; he'll work to clean her out completely. A Wrathful one won't just beat on a troublemaker; he'll cripple her for life and dare witnesses to try and interfere.

Kindred at Humanity ratings of 3 and 2 usually suffer from at least two derangements, at least one of which is almost always severe or extreme. They cut truly terrifying figures, becoming unpredictable, bizarre and deadly. Even those who once knew and relied upon them can't be sure to trust them once they get to this state.

These vampires don't care enough to have an opinion about those either below or above them on the Humanity scale. As long as nobody interferes with them, they can't be bothered to worry. If someone does interfere, they won't pause to consider the reason before retaliating.

Humanity 1

A vampire with a Humanity rating of 1 retains only the barest thread of conscious morality, only barely able to remember what he once was, or what he could have been. He exists in a hazy, animalistic state at all

times, scarcely able to communicate or concentrate on anything that doesn't satisfy his basest urges.

Indulgence isn't the right term for the satisfaction of Vice that these vampires engage in. Vice is now their normal mode of operation, and Virtue is long forgotten. Their every action seems to be degenerate, self-absorbed and cruel. There is no way to justify their behavior in moral terms.

Other beings, both living and undead, never really come up on the radar enough for a vampire with a Humanity of 1 to have an opinion about them. Everyone a vampire with Humanity of 1 comes across is competition, food or both, plain and simple. What they think or how they feel is irrelevant.

Humanity 0

Hunt. Kill. Feed. Sleep. Repeat.

As stated in **Vampire: The Requiem**, any vampire at this Humanity rating is effectively unplayable. By this point, the vampire is no longer a character — no longer capable of dramatic choice, no longer capable of changing. This vampire's story is over.

Derangements

It almost seems normal for Kindred to go mad. The crushing dissonance of coexistence with the urges with the Beast is difficult enough on a night-to-night basis, and when the Beast explodes into trauma, it's hardly surprising that many vampires go mad. Add in the many ordeals of the Requiem and the potential for serious mental damage arising from prolonged torpor, and it's not surprising that insanity is almost as prevalent in vampires as any other mental or physical feature. Presented here are five new derangements for play in **Vampire: The Requiem**, adding to the list of possible choices for Kindred who do go mad.

Diogenes Syndrome (severe; follows Inferiority Complex)

In Kindred, this derangement often follows a traumatic loss of Humanity. The vampire begins to see herself as something less than human, and either makes a conscious decision to stop grooming herself normally or simply forgets to bother, satisfying the subconscious urge to chastise the self. She stops changing her clothes, makes no attempt to bathe or comb her hair and doesn't bother cleaning spilled blood from her face after feeding. She makes no attempt to clean up her haven, and will readily sleep in filth. She ignores vermin that infest her clothes or hair, and although she may be shamed by the disgust of onlookers, she rarely acknowledges the real reason for their reaction.

Worse, vampires suffering from this derangement often fail to heal wounds in their waking hours, bearing them as if unawares and waiting for them to heal in the day's sleep.

Effect: The character suffers a -3 dice penalty on all Social Ability rolls (except Intimidation and Disciplines) because of her filthy, disheveled state. A Willpower point must be expended if the character attempts to clean herself in any way or pay attention to her injuries. Even crippling pain will fail to compel her to heal herself unless she makes this expenditure. She will, however, expend Vitae to heal her wounds while she sleeps.

Withdrawal (severe; extreme; follows Irrationality)

Some Kindred, overwhelmed by the demands of vampire society and unable to keep up with the complexities of Status, intrigue and predatory warfare, sometimes suffer an overwhelming urge to withdraw completely from the world around them. Severe trauma can lead to the dissolution of rational bounds on this urge, resulting in an absolute abandonment of social interaction and obligation regardless of the detrimental effect on the vampire's own existence.

Vampires suffering from Withdrawal avoid leaving their havens and interacting with others as much as possible. They do not attend any Elysium events, and they allow all friendships and alliances to wither, never bothering to initiate communication. The Requiem of a vampire in Withdrawal is one of solitary nights spent in silent retreat. Some turn to scholarly pursuits, losing themselves in dusty tomes and occult research, but most just take on idle hobbies, accomplishing little of value and waiting until hunger demands that they strike out in search of blood.

Withdrawal is not a derangement for characters in play. It should be restricted to Storyteller characters only, because Withdrawal isolates the vampire and threatens to destroy all of the work he's done to establish himself in Kindred society. A player may wish to add Withdrawal to his character's history, as a cured derangement (or one that awaits him if he drops again to a formerly low Humanity rating) to explain a long absence from Kindred society, but should be aware of its implications if he does so.

Effect: The character must succeed on a Resolve + Composure roll to leave his haven each night. He suffers a -3 dice penalty on all Social Ability rolls (except for resistance on contested ones) because of his extreme unwillingness to speak to others, and his obvious attempts to get away from public dealings as quickly as possible.

Erythema (mild)

This derangement emerges because of a vampire's subconscious wish to deny the truth of her undead state. Without willing it, she spends Vitae to bring warmth and color to her skin whenever in the company of others, draining herself in an effort to maintain the façade of life. Even conscious attempts to prevent the expenditure fail; there is a part of the vampire that is simply broken, forcing her to present the illusion whether she likes it or not.

Vampires suffering from Erythema are often subjected to the derision of their contemporaries, either because they seem to be desperate to pretend that they are still alive or because they are unable to control their own expenditures of Vitae. They also suffer an increased need to feed, since they spend so much blood fueling their pitiful masquerade.

Effect: The vampire automatically spends a point of Vitae to counterfeit life (see p. 51) whenever she is in the company of others. Attempts to prevent this expenditure requires a successful Resolve + Composure roll. This roll carries a -2 dice penalty if the encounter with others is unexpected, and an additional -1 if there are more than three people present at the encounter (in addition to the vampire).

Aphasia (severe; extreme; follows Vocalization)

There are some Kindred who are so shattered by an explosion of the unthinking Beast that they never really seem to return to their fully rational selves. Driven over the threshold of madness by degeneration or torment, they lose the capacity to understand and form speech, seeming more the mute animal than the thinking man. Rising from torpor, frenzy or torture into uncomprehending psychosis, they wander through a world of gibberish, unable to draw meaning from anything they hear.

This is a purely psychological derangement. The vampire can still hear everything that is being said and has all of the physical faculty necessary to form words, but just doesn't understand what comes in and seems to have no control over what comes out. His speech is reduced to meaningless babble or clicks and smacks.

This is a horrifying derangement, especially for Kindred who tend to rely on their wit and charm for survival. Frustration and resulting frenzy always threaten a vampire who suffers from Aphasia, arising whenever he is forced to acknowledge that he can no longer comport himself normally in social situations.

Effect: The vampire is unable to communicate via speech. A Wits + Empathy roll must be made to get the basic emotional gist of conversational dialog, and

cannot be undertaken at all if the speaker is not visible. He cannot speak intelligibly, and must resort to sign language, written text or telepathy to get his meaning across. The expenditure of a Willpower point allows the vampire to comprehend and form speech for one scene, but he descends back into his sorry state within minutes or hours, at the Storyteller's discretion.

Intermetamorphosis (severe; follows Irrationality)

Kindred Intermetamorphosis arises almost exclusively after long periods spent in torpor. The vampire suffering this derangement confuses the identities of mortals and Kindred he has known over the ages, often swapping those that he knew in life (or before his bout of torpor) with those who greet him in the modern world. For example, a vampire arising from a 400-year torpor might mistake his neonate grandchilde for his long-destroyed sire, or a living woman for his centuries-passed mortal wife. Most who observe this derangement in action believe it is caused by the vampire's overpowering nostalgia for nights (and days) long gone, working in conjunction with the befuddlement prevalent in those arising from decades or centuries of torpor.

These Kindred may or may not be aware that the people they are dealing with cannot possibly be who they seem, but they cannot deny the identification. They *feel* as if the target of their derangement is actually

someone else, even if it doesn't make any sense. Some construct elaborate systems of belief to explain the phenomenon, ascribing it to reincarnation, telepathic body-swapping, miraculous "second chances" or more bizarre occult phenomena. They will not accept evidence to the contrary, and may even attempt to "save" a contemporary who denies "the truth."

The mistaken identity will influence and supersede a vampire's opinion of the modern subject. If the vampire believes that a neonate female is really his former lover, he will not accept acts of aggression at face value, always attempting to explain it in terms of his "real" relationship to her. If he can't dismiss her actions out of hand, he will assume that she is acting against her will or is somehow unaware of *his* identity.

Effect: The character suffering from Intermetamorphosis will instantly draw associations between modern individuals and those from long past based on the flimsiest of similarities. Hair color, certain mannerisms, tone of voice or even gender could be enough to set off the Kindred's derangement. Once a mortal or vampire is associated with a figure from the sufferer's past, nothing (short of the actual interference of the figure in question) will convince him otherwise. He may spend Willpower to shake off the delusion for one scene, but must operate under its influence at all other times.







Chapter Three: Vampire Psychology

"She's crazy? We're all fucking crazy.

This shit we do, night after night?

It's sick. We're all sick monsters.

Where you draw the line?"

Not one drop of blood is left inside my veins that does not throb:
I recognize signs of the ancient flame.

—Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*

Landmarks in the Requiem

As Kindred survive the years of the Requiem, all are bound to experience certain landmarks in development. Some of the stages common to all vampires are traumatic, while others are less so but still likely to make a distinct impression on the mind. Following is a list of the most universal milestones in vampire development, and their most common effects.

Players or Storytellers creating characters who are not completely fresh neonates may wish to consult this list and consider how many of these landmarks have already passed in their characters' Requiems, and how the characters were shaped by those milestones that have.

Neonate (0-50 years)

There is no question about it: the first few years of a vampire's Requiem are the most likely to drive her over the edge. In some cases, the first *week* is enough to shatter the mind. The newly Embraced experience a series of traumas in quick succession, and very few do so with any real warning. The lucky ones have a caring sire or sibling close at hand, ready to provide compassionate guidance throughout the ordeal. The unlucky must scramble to maintain their sanity under the relentlessly horrific pressures of vampiric rebirth.

If there is consolation in the pains of neonate existence, it is this: everything a new vampire experiences, all of the anguish and fear, all of the appalling changes and all of the sudden losses, is pervasive in Kindred society. None are spared. Everyone can sympathize.

Yeah, you can tell he just knew. Look at the way he looks at the mortals, like he's going to cry when he just thinks about feeding. Look at the way he keeps the blush on all the time, pretending so hard he's still one of them. I heard he was abandoned by sire, that's why he's all messed up. I say it's crap. I ain't never seen a fledgling who ain't messed up, is what I

say. It's a Goddamn miracle any of us make it at all. Anyway, what you bet me I can take him in less than 30 seconds? Put him right into ash? Come on, man, you always so eager to bet. No? Not gonna take me up this time? Don't matter, I think I'll give him the ol' claw anyway. Put him out of misery.

The Embrace

Every vampire must first die as a mortal before she can rise again. The experience is often painful, often terrifying and always grotesque. Even those few mortals offered the chance to make a conscious, prepared decision must undergo the change itself, feeling the morbid collapse of their living bodies and the incoherent rebellion of a mortal mind on the verge of death. Most are so damaged by the experience that they simply suppress the memory — it's actually rare to find a vampire who can clearly remember the sensation of the Embrace without trained assistance.

Roughly one in every six vampires suffers mental damage of some kind during the process of the Embrace. Some are driven mad by the change, snapping under the pressure of initiation into the Requiem. Many become oddly callous, while some actually seem to grow paradoxically more humane in the process — as if the last moments of life have shown them something of the compassionate creature they could have been, inspiring a melancholy aspiration to redemption.

While some sires go out of their way to cushion the shock of the Embrace, there's very little they can do to protect their childer. Most attempts at kindness have an unintended effect — often directly contrary to the intention. Giving a mortal the choice to accept or reject the Requiem only transfers responsibility for their coming pain from the prospective sire to the childer herself. Embracing those who are near death encourages melancholic fantasies of the natural mortal end that the new vampire so nearly missed. Embracing those who are oppressed, sickly or otherwise unhappy often leads to hollow overcompensa-

tion, not calm acceptance or appreciation. The simple fact of the matter is that there is nothing healthy or natural about the Embrace, and it's impossible to stage it so that it encourages a result without trauma.

In most cases, the Embrace leads to a bout of depression in even the most resolute neonate. Those who can seek escape in the trappings of immortality: great wealth, inhuman power or philosophical indoctrination. It is well documented that neonates brought into the covenants of their sires are at least twice as likely to survive their first few nights as Kindred, simply because they are distracted by the dizzying introduction to the beliefs and practices of their new society. Swept up in immediate and comprehensive programs of education, they become relatively comfortable with the undead state because they haven't got the time to dwell on their losses and the frightening realities of their condition. It's no surprise, then, that many of the Kindred devote themselves zealously to the teachings of their covenants — for a great number of them, those philosophies and practices literally gave them a reason to exist in their earliest nights, whether they know it or not. Neonates abandoned or otherwise excluded by the covenants face dismal chances, not only because they don't enjoy the protection of more powerful vampires but also because they have nothing to do but think about what they have become.

First Feeding

From the very moment of Embrace, a powerful, painful thirst is awakened in every neonate. It throbs and twists in their gut, drowning out coherent thought and rousing the first rumblings of the Beast. Only the act of feeding can temporarily sate it, but that very act represents the second major trauma encountered by all.

If the neonate is guided and a safe source of blood is arranged for him, he will only have to reconcile himself to the abhorrent act of drinking it. The rush of pleasure and relief involved may go far to diminishing the impact of the taboo most human societies place on blood-drinking, but there's no denying that the new vampire will have to face the fact of his need. To many, the defining act of vampirism is this feeding, and it is repugnant. Similar to addicts, neonates are free to rationally examine their activity once the hunger is sated (if at all), but most prefer not to bother. In fact, many neonates become uncomfortable when asked to verbally acknowledge their feeding — most speak of it in agitated euphemism, if at all.

If the first feeding isn't conducted under controlled, guided circumstances, the potential for disaster is vastly increased. Recently Embraced Kindred have no way

of knowing how to safely feed — how much to take without endangering or outright killing a victim, how to close the wound after feeding and how to approach the victim to minimize struggle and lower the risk of frenzy. Even those who don't lose themselves to the Beast during the first feeding may be overwhelmed by the pleasure of the experience, taking too much. Worse yet, most of the Kindred who are Embraced and then left to fend for themselves have a habit of heading for home, so the first mortals to cross their paths are likely to be friends or relatives. Accidentally draining one's mortal kin shortly after rising into the Requiem is more than some Kindred can bear, and often results in suicide. More than a few neonate draugr are nothing more than unfortunate souls who collapsed into the maws of the Beast after feeding on their loved ones.



STAVING OFF IMMEDIATE DEGENERATION

Clearly, neonates without proper guidance aren't built to survive. Every step of their awakening is fraught with potential trauma, and many would spiral out of control very quickly.

Once again, these pitfalls help to explain how some starting characters might begin with a Humanity score lower than 7, but that doesn't necessarily have to be the case. Just as it's conceivable for a player to luck out on roll after roll, avoiding his character's degeneration throughout the process, it's perfectly acceptable to assume that a character may have managed to escape madness and the clutches of the Beast by sheer hardiness of spirit. If a character's backstory requires post-Embrace abandonment, he can still start out with a Humanity rating of 7.



Most vampires remember their first feeding with perfect clarity, unlike the Embrace. Many make a point of remembering their first feeding, seeking, perhaps, to access their relatively innocent selves by bringing to mind their first true act of vampirism. Those unfortunates who accidentally killed their first vessel often enshrine the victim in memoriam, visiting her again and again in memory, seeking mortals who seem similar (to protect or repay for a crime they never suffered) or building an actual, literal altar. This habit is so common among neonates that older Kindred consider it an indication of immaturity. Ancillae are known to mercilessly mock one of their own number if he is discovered maintaining a literal or figurative shrine to his first victim. Elders, on the other hand, usually look upon any vampire so engaged with a vague sense of pity.



First Frenzy

For most vampires, the Beast stirs at the moment of Embrace, making itself known in a surprising, terrifying rush of emotion. But until the fledgling Kindred experiences a true frenzy does she come to understand the deep and abiding horror of her curse. An unexpected encounter with another vampire or an open flame sends her screaming and skidding down the street, caught in the mindless terror of Röttschreck. A flailing victim lands a blow and triggers the red rage of the rage frenzy. Horrified by the act of feeding, a neonate tries to abstain, driving himself unwittingly into Wassail.

Waking from the first frenzy and realizing what has happened is a profoundly disturbing experience, even with the guidance of a sire or guardian. To know that one can lose control so completely, so utterly, and to understand the extent of one's mindless capacity for destruction is more than most can bear. While most manage to come to grips with their behavior in frenzy, very few vampires ever lose the fear of the Beast that frenzy inspires — which is, many point out, a displaced fear of the self. Some vampires experience early-onset confusion, identifying the Beast as a discarnate "other" and blaming their behavior on it. Some who commit horrifying crimes in frenzy go so far as to blow their wishful thinking into full-fledged delusion or even more severe derangement.

In any case, it's not unusual to find young vampires who engage in preventative behavior that verges on ritualism. Working strenuously to avoid crowded or otherwise unpredictable situations, many neonates begin to apply a set of rules to their movements that become more and more complex as aversions are added, often layering them with superstitious practices as well. A vampire who avoids bars, nightclubs and restaurants because of an early frenzy involving a drunk provocateur is perfectly normal. One who avoids victims wearing university jackets may appear less normal, but if the vampire associates the image of one such jacket with the recall of an apparently inexplicable rage, getting close to one might seem like tempting fate. Most Kindred slowly shed these self-imposed prohibitions as they become more familiar with their Beast (or more comfortable with it), but some retain them well into their elder years, losing track of their original purpose and giving way to compulsion.

Learning Disciplines

If a fledgling vampire's mind survives the trauma of Embrace, the revelation of the first feeding and the horror of frenzy, there is yet one more hurdle to clear in the

early nights of the Requiem. On first glance, it seems a boon — something that would help the vampire accept his new existence — and it may yet prove to be. But when the first of the neonate's Disciplines manifests, the vampire must endure another challenging mental trauma: the temptation of new, inhuman power.

For many, the first flexion of Vitae-infused energies is a heady thrill. In contrast to every other feature of the Curse, the Disciplines are almost always welcomed by the new Kindred, and often outright enjoyed. For many, the powers of the Blood are great compensators, balancing out perceived weaknesses and enhancing the vampire's predatory ability.

But the temptation can be too strong for some to bear. Those who felt weak in life can get carried away with their newfound Vigor or Dominate. Those who thrill in manipulating the weak-minded mortals who surround them may throw Majesty and Nightmare around like blunt weapons, crushing wills with wild abandon. Vitae may be spent unnecessarily, radically accelerating a vampire's feeding schedule and drawing the neonate toward risky behavior. Many a fledgling foolishly skirts the Masquerade in her early nights merely because she thrills in using her newfound power, and will do whatever it takes to fuel her activities. Some get too enthused with their Disciplines, imprudently making use of them in public view. These unfortunate souls find themselves targeted by their more careful Kindred and, if these foolish Kindred are poorly defended, may find their Requiems cut short.

DISCIPLINES AS TRIBULATION

The full extent of each common power's influence on the Kindred psyche is explored on pp. 126-140, in the section titled "The Psychology of Vampire Disciplines." While different sires and covenants may express alternate philosophies about the use of Disciplines, the fact that their manifestation represents a major change for new neonates shouldn't be glossed over or ignored. Early power use is bound to be sloppy in comparison to a more experienced vampire's attempts, and many of a fledgling's early mistakes are likely to be tied into it.

Players who want to flesh out their character histories can find great fodder for melodrama in the careless or foolish application of their neonate powers. Don't take the power to make that decision and describe these errors out of players' hands, though — this isn't an invitation for Storytellers to insert blunders into a character's history but rather one to encourage the player to examine the flaws in that character's personality and the mistakes he is likely to make early in the Requiem.

Those who can bring themselves under control and treat their newfound power with respect and caution pass the final and most difficult test of their first nights. Learning the lessons of subtlety and conservation of power is crucial to a vampire's long-term survival, and the form those lessons takes usually plays a role in setting the tone of the whole of his future Requiem.

Accepting Unlife

As the first nights unfold into months, a fledgling vampire becomes a true member of Kindred society, taking the instruction of his sire, guardian or covenant, and beginning to find his place in the Danse Macabre. Those Kindred with a healthy outlook take this time to accept their new existence, slowly and comfortably coming to terms with the cessation of their mortal lives. All of the sounds and twitches of a living body are silenced and stilled, and the vampire begins to truly understand his lifeless state, letting the implications sink in on both a conscious and subconscious level. More often than not, the young vampire dreams often of dying in his daylight hours, cycling through the last moments of life and creating fictional, variegated ends to experience. The experience is distinctly unpleasant, but understood to be common to all Kindred, and considered a discomfort that is endured for a time but eventually forgotten. Popular theory among scholarly vampires supports the notion that these dreams are the struggles of the subconscious mind to accept the death of the body, and that they come to an end when the Kindred has finally settled fully into the Requiem.

There are some who never manage to quell the nightmares, though. For those Kindred somehow incapable of understanding and accepting their deaths, the torment of the early nights pushes on into the long-term strains of undead existence. Each feeding is abhorrent, and each frenzy is terrifying, bringing on cyclic expressions of hunger, anger guilt and fear. Attempts to maintain connections to the living world invite disastrous emotional provocation. Nightmares experienced in daytime slumber worsen and intensify, driving the vampire to the edge of madness and beyond.

Kindred suffering from this denial have a tendency to waste Vitae by forcing themselves to breathe, bringing color to their flesh, and even bleeding just to hold on to a semblance of life, even when nobody else is around to see the effects. They become dangerously addicted to maintaining the illusion, burning through Blood at a staggering rate in hopes of avoiding the truth. Some drain themselves of will by attempting to stay awake every day, fighting the inevitable, crushing demand of the Curse as best they can.

Sooner or later, unless someone can help pull them back from the brink, these souls spiral into degeneration as their feeding increases, their delusions and compulsions take deep root and their will to resist diminishes. Sooner or later, they crack completely, withdrawing into profound Schizophrenia or Catatonia, or surrendering finally and completely to the ravages of the Beast.

Careful Kindred watch closely for signs of this decay in relatively new vampires. Those who are seen to be sliding into unhealthy behavior are almost always intercepted and subjected to one intervention or another — either destroyed outright or forced to confront the realities of their new existence and accept the implications fully, finally and completely.

Abandoning Family

Life and the nightmares of death both come to an end. Every vampire who survives and develops normally accepts, one way or another, that she is what she is, and, while she may find and surpass the limits of her condition some night, she begins the Requiem as an undead thing. But a vampire's friends and family live on, and a painful choice soon arises. Does the vampire attempt to maintain contact with her loved ones, or does she withdraw, maintaining a safe distance?

Those who choose to stay close risk catastrophe. The great burden of secrets the neonate must maintain in order to protect the Masquerade is intensified by the scrutiny of intimate relatives and friends. Only the truly desperate or foolish would consider sharing Vitae with their loved ones to ease this burden; the predatory, obsessive instincts imposed on a ghoul will warp a relationship to the breaking point. Worse yet, the Embrace damns the vampire's beloved to an immortal curse — one they may not appreciate, and one that virtually guarantees prolonged suffering. Kindred Embraced by their close friends or relatives usually end up in bitter conflict with their sires, one way or another.



LIVING ON THE EDGE

In neonates, staying close to family and lovers is the most common motive for purposeful defiance of the Tradition of the Masquerade. A fair number reveal the truth about themselves to those they cared for in life, retreating to them in search of sympathy and understanding. Tragically, most neonates are repaid with fear and recrimination and must then face the reality of their situation: that they have made a target of themselves and their mortal relations.

But those who do appeal to the better instincts in their mortal allies can gain benefits that other



neonates don't enjoy. Assuming they can keep the violation of Tradition from the prying eyes of local Kindred, the lucky undead who evoke the compassion and support of their true friends are shielded, somewhat, from the ravages of Kindred existence.

If a character receives the regular attention of a mortal friend or relative who expresses true love for her, the Storyteller may choose to apply a +2 bonus to the character's attempts to fight off the Beast or avoid degeneration. So long as the character is supported by her friend or lover and knows that she will be returning to him, her spirit is strengthened and her will is supported. Once the attentions of the mortal cease (for any reason), the bonus vanishes.

The pervasive likelihood of accidental frenzy is another factor in maintaining close relations. As horrifying as it is to lose control and injure an innocent, the effect is multiplied immeasurably by releasing the Beast in proximity to one's beloved. A fair number of Kindred have surfaced from frenzy with the blood of their spouses or children on their hands, and many who do are shattered permanently by the experience, collapsing utterly into despair, madness and inhumanity as a result.

Even those who aren't pushed over the edge by an accident of instinct are prone to certain derangements. The constant fear and worry involved in protecting and maintaining close contact with precious mortal relations frequently give way to suspicion and paranoia. Kindred become desperate to protect their beloved, reading signs of doom in every odd statement or apparently significant look from their vampire contemporaries. More and more complicated schemes of secrecy and defense gradually eat up the neonate's waking hours, leading to dereliction of covenant obligation or irregular feeding — both of which pave the road to complete disaster.

There are Kindred who stay close to mortals without making actual contact. More than a few Mekhet keep a shadowy watch over their living relations, working to protect them from a distance. Relatively few Nosferatu do the same — for many, the prospect of accidentally encountering the subject of their attentions is too ugly to consider, and the pain of watching them without being able to approach is too much to bear.

At the other extreme, a great number of vampires obey the traditional advice of their sires and sever all mortal ties as quickly as possible after the Embrace. Some fake their own deaths, and others simply disappear. A program of avoidance is imposed in an effort to prevent accidental encounter and shield the vampire from the emotional and practical difficulties that would result.

Finding Territory

Every vampire needs Blood to survive, and Blood comes with territory. Until they get their hands on legal feeding grounds (or unguarded ones), young vampires are at the mercy of their more established counterparts, depending on them for the very Vitae that allows them to awaken each night. Most Kindred are instructed to strike out and claim a feeding ground as soon as possible — whether by dint of political bargain, stealthy exploration or imposition of might. Only the lucky few are Embraced into a landed “family” that’s willing to carve off a chunk for them.

For many vampires, the quest to secure and defend territory provokes the first meetings with unrelated Kindred. Those seeking a legal nod from the Prince must venture into Elysium halls, and those who choose to take their land by force will certainly clash with street-level vampires eager to do the same.

Many neonates get weeded out during their search for a regular blood supply. Some just can’t stomach the idea of constantly fighting to keep other vampires at bay, eventually falling because they don’t hold on to enough of a feeding stock to survive on their own. Others are knocked out of competition by tougher or greedier Kindred, and some simply choose to go into torpor rather than accept the devilish arithmetic of vampires’ predatory agriculture.

It’s true that many vampires, especially those who are elder and more inhumane, begin to speak of mortal population as “stock” or in other terms that will sicken the average neonate. Often, the negotiations at Elysium involve comparisons of feeding territories in terms of geographic dimension, population density, atmosphere of apathy (which makes it easier to feed without attracting attention) and environmental health factors that may affect the quality of blood. High-status Kindred traffic in territory quite frequently, trading terrain that serves as the home to hundreds or thousands of mortals just as any other commodity.

To a brand-new vampire, the struggle doesn’t make much sense. High-status Kindred often own lands that provide dozens or even hundreds of times more blood than they need, so it doesn’t seem logical that they guard every 10-by-10 space so jealously. The fact is, though, that much of vampire society works most effectively when applied to an economy of scarcity, and the reason young vampires without territory of their own have it so difficult is devilishly simple: without easy access to blood, it is almost impossible for them to rise up against their established counterparts and steal from them.

The appeal of the covenants once again reveals itself during this stage of a neonate’s development. Many vampires can remember the hardscrabble existence of their first nights away from their sires, and the relief that came when a covenant offered them territory in exchange for a pledge of allegiance. Most of the covenants make a practice of presenting new members with a blood supply, and even a meager offering is more than enough to tempt struggling neonates.

Those young Kindred who manage to secure territory, one way or another, are true members of vampire society. Even if they never attend the Elysium gatherings, they can be sure that their name is known to the Kindred of the city, and that the Prince is aware of them. If they are allowed to retain that territory, they may assume that they have the implicit (if not explicit) approval of the powers that be.

THE FIRST OBLIGATION

Even if a player is making a character who is relatively experienced and owns secure territory of his own, it helps to consider the first deals he struck in order to obtain that territory, because those arrangements can add flavor to play and create any number of potential story threads. It can take decades to disentangle oneself from the bargains made in early, desperate nights, and a lot of bad blood can result from the perception that a character was taken advantage of.

Early arrangements can also explain how a vampire originally achieved Status in the city. A pledge to the Prince (or one of the covenants) can be enough to gain a small amount of land and that first point of Status — but it means that the vampire’s promised his service to someone, and that should be noted when the character is first created for play. Other vampires will often make assumptions about a character based on his first means of achieving Status, and those assumptions will influence interaction positively or negatively, depending on their disposition. A Sanctified vampire is likely to react well to a character who first became known to the city when he was blessed by the Bishop and brought before the Prince, even if he is not an active member of the Church. An Acolyte of the Circle of the Crone, on the other hand, is not going to appreciate that introduction, even if it happened years before she meets the character in question.

Ancilla (50-250 years)

Relatively few vampires make it to their 50th year of the Requiem. This statement might seem surprising, considering the potential immortality of the Kindred,

but it's absolutely accurate. Violence, degeneration and madness, combined with the general apathy (or outright competitive malice) that most vampires display for one another, easily explain the high attrition rate among the fledglings.

The ancillae who remain active to their 50th year find themselves ground between the two great divisions of the Danse Macabre. Time and experience strips them of the naiveté and vitality of their neonate years, but they are not yet old enough to gain the respect of the elders. While night-to-night existence eases somewhat, the pressures of age begin to bear down on them, introducing them to a world of new problems and possibilities.

The first generational divide of Kindred begins with the passage to ancilla existence. Neonate vampires are often incapable of understanding the motives and attitudes of the ancillae, seeing them as little different from themselves, except for their growing apathy and their dedication to the dogma of the covenants. The assessment is usually unfair: the neonates fail to see the decades of experience that have led the ancillae to their current circumstance, and they believe that their lack of Humanity is an indication of evil or weakness instead of the inevitable effect of age. On the other hand, ancillae are often irritated by the behavior of neonates and have trouble speaking their language.

There are experiences common to all of the ancillae, just as they are for younger vampires. While they are less likely to find sympathy for their troubles, they can take comfort in one fact: to endure these specific problems is to enter the next stage of Kindred development. Even if they are unpleasant, at least they serve as markers of a sort — indicators that the vampire who suffers them has left his fledgling years behind, and is moving ahead.

Well, here we are. Sixty years ago, you told me that you had what it takes to get ahead, and that you were going to show me a thing or two. I dimly recall the moment. If I remember correctly, I was laughing, and you were on your knees. Still, I'll admit — you've certainly shown me something, and you're certainly still with us. You've cheated, lied and killed to get here, and don't think I don't appreciate how difficult it must have been. So let me tell you what I'm going to do: I'm going to bring you with me to the Elysium tonight, and you're going to mix with the real vampires. I'll introduce you to the vampires who actually make the decisions in this God-forsaken hole of a city. They are unparalleled experts on cheating, lying and killing, I assure you, and I'm absolutely convinced they'll be enraptured by your

creative contributions to the field. Welcome to the arena of real Kindred, my child. I hope you're happy with it.

Witnessing the Passage of a Generation

A vampire who is 50 years undead has survived long enough to see the passing of a full mortal generation — most significantly, the one she once belonged to. All of her friends, living siblings and heroes age naturally, passing into obscurity and death while she remains the same, watching from afar.

Even those Kindred who have successfully severed all ties will take notice when the whole of their mortal generation passes on. Most begin to notice the change when the famous figures of their day begin to die — actors, singers and politicians often make the news, and once noticed, begin to spark thoughts of the other mortals a vampire once knew. All but the most isolated ancillae will take notice of this passage, and their thoughts will once again turn to their living days, and the friends and relatives who populated them.

Some Kindred begin to seek out former allies and relations, and must face the pain of abandoning them all over again. Many remember the first time they left these mortals behind, and must fight back a wave of regret and nostalgia that threatens to overwhelm them. Those who give into it lose sight of their place in the Kindred world, grasping at the remainders of their living days with increasing desperation and flirting with Depression or Obsessive Compulsion as the trappings of those days (living and otherwise) inevitably fade.

Others mark the disappearance of their living compatriots solemnly, conducting some private remembrance or other acknowledgement of a life long gone. These ritual ceremonies are intensely personal, and rarely shared with other Kindred. Some choose to remember their past with a simple, silent annual visit to a former loved one's grave, while others create more elaborate legacies in honor of their lost days: commissioned edifices built in appropriately old style, influences bent toward the preservation of landmarks that bear personal significance or even more complicated work to realize the faded dreams of now-dead friends. Some Kindred go to great lengths to create these memorials, and take risks that seem foolish or unusual to those who don't understand the motive. Elder vampires, remembering their own similar experiences, will often indulge this impulse as long as it does not interfere with their own plans or undermine the smooth function of the city.

Many vampires mark the passage of their mortal generation as the greatest existential crisis in the whole of their

Requiem. Often, it accompanies the first true confrontation with the notion of immortality, and forces a redefinition of purpose. Some resolve to embark on a quest for understanding and enlightenment that drives them to consult with the more spiritual Kindred in the city, while others redouble their devotion to the ideals they have already accepted, discarding the last pretensions to mortal life that held them back and working to lay the foundations for a long and prosperous future in Kindred society.



A GREAT SHIFT

For many characters, their first real confrontation with the notion of immortality is a great impetus for a change of direction. Players who want to explain leaving a covenant for another or even a move between cities don't always have to find the reason in Kindred interaction. The character's change of heart could be as simple as a crisis of purpose brought on by the death of his last mortal friend or relative.



Before this stage of the Requiem is complete, some vampires break down and seek out a mortal they once knew, seeking to Embrace him or make him into a ghoul just so that they can hang onto a piece of their past and keep this one individual around forever. This activity is, predictably, no less ill-advised than it was back in the vampire's fledgling nights — and the difficulties involved are likely to be compounded by the emotional distance or resentment of a mortal who has long since come to terms with the vampire's apparent death. More than one vampire has been driven mad or destroyed by the result.

Settling into Eternity

By the time a vampire becomes an ancilla, she is likely to have dealt with most of the night-to-night threats to her existence, and finds that she is no longer as occupied with basic survival as the average neonate. She has made arrangements for continued feeding, likely has a small territory of her own (or shares territory with the members of her covenant), access to a herd and enjoys some Status among the Kindred of the city. She almost certainly counts a number of allies among the vampire community, and can quite comfortably perform the basic duties her covenant requires of her.

The achievement of these goals represents a watershed in the Requiem. Sooner or later, an ancilla notices that she isn't working as hard as she used to, and that she's actually got a lot of free time on her hands. The relief that comes with this understanding is intense.

Before ancillae start to set new goals, most take a little bit of time to enjoy their new freedom. They relax a bit. They become calmer, more playful in their hunt and (assuming no new pressures arise unbidden) may actually come to terms with their existence in ways that were never available to them before.

This respite usually doesn't last longer than a few months. Still, most Kindred who have experienced it are likely to remember it fondly for as long as they can, and will be pleased to see a younger vampire who is clearly discovering it. Charitable vampires may even proscribe interference with the newly calmed ancilla, hoping to prolong her moment of peace. Envious ones, of course, will make haste to meddle.

Sooner or later, the interval comes to an end — almost always because of the actions of the vampire herself. She begins to feel the need to make a decision. She has all of eternity before her, and only the most slothful Kindred will be satisfied without arranging a purpose for themselves.

This stage in a vampire's development sees the highest incidence of conversion from one covenant to another. The Lancea Sanctum claims many Kindred who feel, despite the material assistance their current covenant has provided, that they need spiritual guidance. The Ordo Dracul attracts a certain number of vampires who feel that they may be trapping themselves into a future of grinding repetition by staying in their current organizations.

Many elders refer to this phenomenon as the "Transition" or "Pausa" in a vampire's Requiem.

Shedding Neonate Trauma

During the Transition, a good number of vampires begin to reflect on their personal histories, weighing their achievements against their losses, and clearly considering (usually for the first time) the effect vampirism has had on them. Many find solace in the words of Sanctified or Acolyte Kindred, and some actually begin to redeem themselves, withdrawing from the Beast and working to shed the collected traumas of their young Requiems.

The choice to clear one's past and deal directly with accumulated guilt is not an easy one to make. Some ancillae never bother, and, in the short term, their impatience or ignorance is rewarded. They tend to gain influence and Status more quickly, embarking on a speedy, ruthless climb up the power structure of Kindred society. In the long term, however, those vampires who don't stop to consider the many injuries to their psyche are much more likely to lose themselves to madness and the overriding instinct of the Beast while their slower, more considerate contemporaries move on.



Those Kindred who do choose the more difficult road must endure the jeers of their more intolerant brethren (and, often, the wary eye of jaded and inhumane elders). Regardless, they accept stalled Status and accusations of laziness, self-absorption or delusion, confronting the mistakes of their pasts and working to make amends. Some choose the way of prayer and asceticism, pleading with the god (or gods) of their faith for guidance, forgiveness and understanding. Some labor anonymously to repay victims of their past indiscretions. Others work steadily to strengthen their will and take honorable oaths of conduct to ensure that the mistakes of youth are never repeated.

Surprisingly, those vampires who do take this route often end up more humane than many of the Kindred inferior to them in both rank and age. If there are enough seekers of redemption (even those who are only somewhat successful) in a city, they can completely change the political face of Elysium. They bring a gentler, more spiritual voice to the tables of diplomacy, and those who can maneuver into influential positions have an opportunity to steer the governing policies of Kindred society away from cruelty and violence.

Their presence, though, is always guaranteed to incite emotional reaction from others. Some vampires treat these dedicated Kindred as guiding beacons, throwing support their way and investing hopes in their success. Others dismiss them as ridiculous and narcissistic, referring to them as “second pass neonates” or brainwashed stooges of religion. Few remain impassive in their company — the very presence of a redemption-seeking ancilla is a polarizing event. Conflict inevitably arises between the two groups, and each side stakes its worldview on the outcome. To the vampire who stands at the center of such a battle, there can be no more distressing circumstance. His goal is never to inspire a war of faith (although there are certainly others who will want to use him as an excuse to do just that), but once it begins, there is little he can do to bring it to a peaceful conclusion.

Rising Within the Covenants

Every vampire, sooner or later, realizes that there are two options for his future: ascend the ranks of Status or forever remain subordinate to those who may have little interest in his preservation. Neonates rarely have a chance to seriously pursue the former — they are so busy trying not to be destroyed that they can’t devote a lot of attention to ladder climbing. Usually, only the onset of ancilla Transition allows them the opportunity to focus their sights upwards.

As soon as a vampire decides to embark on a serious attempt to rise to power, he steps into the core of the

Danse Macabre. Opposition will arise on all sides: from competitors and equals, from envious subordinates and from frightened superiors. A vampire on the move is a threat to anyone who doesn’t stand to benefit personally from every inch he gains.

The effort to rise in society differs in character depending on the covenant the vampire allies himself with, of course. However, all Kindred who choose this course have a few traits in common. They take pains to show their devotion to the philosophy of their respective organizations. They work to befriend at least one top-flight member of their covenant. They make sure to abide by the laws of the Prince and his ruling government, and they do their level best to attend Elysium gatherings and make themselves known to the power elite of the city.

While neonates and fellow ancillae may not recognize a vampire’s upward push immediately, elders will be quick to notice it. In general, the move is respected by older Kindred, because it characterizes the ancilla as a true predator — someone who is interested in self-preservation and not afraid of competition — and one who might make a good ally some night. That’s not to say the elders will go easy on an upwardly mobile vampire. In some cases, the opposite is true. Established Kindred are very protective of their power bases, and ambition represents an eventual, if not immediate, threat.

Those ancillae who are well connected or part of a revered bloodline sometimes need only make their intentions clear to be elevated in Status . . . at the start. The second or even third dot of City or Covenant Status comes easily to these Kindred, but great pressures of expectation accompany it. Those who fail to live up to that expectation fall harder than less fortunate vampires in the same situation, because their Status was given to them rather than earned, and thus it can be more easily taken away.

To those Kindred who take this route, vampires who make the other choice and remain subordinate in the ranks of the city generally seem pathetic. The ambitious Kindred usually fail to sympathize — as far as they’re concerned, they are struggling and risking much to get ahead, and their compatriots are giving up. A rift opens up between these two types, and the ambitious vampire is usually none too eager to heal it.



OLD FRIENDS, NEW ENEMIES

The Transition, and the decision to throw in and fight for power (or not), is the perfect point to introduce a fundamental disagreement between vampires who were staunch allies as neonates.

Those who don't make the same decision will always be separated from one another by their choices, and even those who do may find themselves competing for the same spoils.

Dramatically speaking, a philosophical split introduced during Transition is all the reason vampires may need to become bitter, eternal enemies, and the tragedy of their conflict (and that of its victims, if it's far-reaching enough) becomes all the more poignant when considered in light of their original friendship.

Renewing the Curse

Sooner or later, almost every vampire feels the temptation to Embrace a childe. The most common motive for creating a new vampire is loneliness, followed closely by the urge to preserve a particular mortal and the need for dependable allies to assist in defense of a domain. There are other reasons to Embrace, but they are more personal and rare. All three of the main causes are symptomatic of the varied ancilla trauma, so it's no surprise that the majority of Kindred sire their first fledgling at or around the 60- to 70-year mark in their Requiem.

Despite the many strictures against Embrace, two in five Kindred attempt to create a childe by their 65th year in the requiem, and four in five attempt it before their 100th year. A significant number fail in their attempt, and a portion of those who don't are forced to destroy their own childe within weeks — putting down an uncontrollably deranged fledgling, obeying the orders of an angry Prince or resisting an infuriated fledgling's frenzied attempt to murder them. Only this high rate of failure and the probability of neonate attrition prevent the vampire population from ballooning out of control in most domains. Those who expect that the Tradition of Embrace would be solely responsible for keeping the vampire count low are sorely overestimating the respect for authority in the Kindred world — especially among nomads and the unaligned — and learn the truth sooner or later.

Many who go through the trauma of a failed Embrace are unable to bring themselves to sire again for a long time. To bring a mortal into the world of the undead is difficult enough, but to follow that accursed act by slaying him is too much for most to endure. Some even go mad with sorrow, succumbing to nervous anxieties or withdrawing completely into themselves in hopes of denying the pain of their circumstances.

Even those who succeed and produce a viable neonate face the potential for disappointment and conflict. Few are the vampires who can choose a childe they don't quickly tire of (or begin to despise), and fewer still are the ones who can maintain the affection or allegiance of their

childer without imposing supernatural means of control . . . a dangerous proposition, since it requires a constant tightening of the leash as the childe grows more and more powerful. For many ancillae, the creation of a childe is the first cause for their eventual failure in Kindred politics, whether immediately, due to despair, or decades following, at the hands of their own defiant progeny.

Eliminating Competition

Any vampire trying to move up in the world is almost guaranteed to meet opposition from established Kindred, who will see the ambitious ancilla as an interloper and a potential enemy, if not an immediate threat, and fellow up-and-comers, who will want to push the vampire aside and claim the city's spoils first. The ancilla in question has only one hope of survival and advancement: to identify and neutralize these vampires.

Skillful Kindred will learn quickly that the need to eliminate these threats is both persistent and pressing, and that they're going to have to learn to do so without resorting to violence unless they want to make enemies of every suspicious elder in the city. Those who wish to minimize their conflicts and maximize chances of victory must learn to operate with subtlety and surgical precision, in both the physical arena and the political one — no mean feat. The failure to remove competitors from the board without overstepping bounds is the most common cause of ancilla destruction, and explains the statistical spike in Final Death that occurs shortly after the Transition.

The work to eliminate competition is the most difficult and all-consuming occupation of the ancilla. Some get so caught up in it that they give the whole of their existence over to it and falling into the habit of tactically appraising every relationship, every habit and every hobby — discarding that which does not seem to provide advantage and spotlighting that which seems to advance the cause (even if it may not seem ethical or healthy). To these vampires, friendships and romances give way to alliances, philosophical or artistic pursuits develop into elaborate and provocative snares, and aesthetic taste falls into strategic appraisal.

The stereotypical vampire of the Danse Macabre is the ancilla engaged in this pursuit: provoking enemies, dodging guilt and blame and scheming, constantly scheming. These Kindred seem impossibly cold and vicious to uncomprehending neonates, and they make no apologies.

Rising Humanity

The ancilla who emerges from Transition will face one more great challenge in the decades that follow.

Whichever path she chooses, whether it be pursuit of spiritual understanding or the struggle for political dominance, her Humanity will wane in time, and she will face the specter of madness.

Of all the difficulties in a vampire's existence, this is the most pernicious. Most of the Kindred who survive into their ancilla years are capable of a measure of self-control, else they would not have made it as a neonate. They rarely experience an irreparable loss of restraint, and many come to believe that they have brought their degeneration to a halt. Some even seem to bounce up a bit, achieving partial redemption because of the new spirituality they find as a result of the Transition.

But time erodes that which does not collapse under its own weight. Slowly, the vampire grows more and more distant from human understanding. Mortal generations pass and the vampire remains ever the same, watching them grow and die with encroaching insensitivity, enclosing his heart so as to avoid the pain of loss when the years claim them. They become less precious in his eyes, seeming to arise and die in ever greater numbers, and all just as capable of serving his needs. His mind remains firmly rooted in the ways and means of his living years, whether he admits it or not, and the innovations of the mortals confuse and frustrate him, tempting him to withdraw further into nostalgia and fantasy.

Without even realizing what's happening to him, he is overtaken by these changes. One night, he awakens to find that he is nothing like what he once was. He is colder, crueler and lonelier than ever. The Beast encroaches upon his thoughts, tempting him to vice and casual violence. Behavior that would have horrified him 60 or 100 years earlier now seems normal. Slowly, silently, he has become the monster that he swore, as a young vampire, he would never be.

Most ancillae stabilize at a Humanity of 4 or 5, hovering in a permanent ethical and moral gray area. Some, however, slide gradually and fully into the open maw of the Beast, rising one night as fearsome draugr, with all of their accumulated power and experience.

Many ancillae suffer mental illness as they approach their elder years, paying the price of their degeneration or just growing mad with age. Their erratic behavior becomes first a nuisance, then a threat — and many are put down or shuffled into irrelevance by their compatriots before they have a chance to turn on them or tip the city's balance of power with an ill-advised Discipline-fueled outburst.

A GOOD TIME TO SLEEP

Not every ancilla who heads down this path is unaware of her descent or caught up in denial. Many Kindred, most especially those of Ventruel lineage, know quite well the deranging effect of the Danse Macabre, and are watchful for indication of degeneration in themselves. Those who are self-aware enough to resist rationalizing their behavior may prefer to slip into voluntary torpor (hoping that they will awake revitalized), knowing that they are less likely to lose potency the earlier they respond to degeneration with sleep.

A repentant or otherwise guilt-dogged ancilla character might have one or two bouts of torpor in his history, explained as attempts to avoid further moral decay, or if not, to retreat to safety in hopes that the Kindred who are likely to accuse him of deterioration will all be gone by the time he wakes.

There is a fashion among some ancillae to pretend to a false lofty standard of morality, if only to appear to have something that others have lost, and thus stir up the envy and ire of competitors. These Kindred may be able to fool their equals, but elders are intimately familiar with the true signs of moral decay, and they generally hold a low opinion of these liars, either imagining that they sully the concept of true purity or thinking them weak for bothering to make bogus claims.

Elder (250 years+)

For an elder vampire, the explosive violence and instability of the neonate years is far in the past. Competing ancilla predators and the threat of irrelevance have been conquered. The waking elder is as royalty in her domain, paid respect, grudging or otherwise, by all Kindred. Her power is insurmountable, and her established fortifications are unassailable by all but the most concerted efforts. She is the predator without peer.

The second great divide in Kindred society marks deliverance from the struggles of the ancilla to the relatively comfortable ascension of the elder. While anyone who survives past the middle of her second century is technically an elder, the appellation is rarely given to any vampire who hasn't clearly risen above the others in her domain and moved into an elite sphere of influence that is almost impossible for fledglings to comprehend.

Whether elder Kindred like it or not, those in a city tend to be identified with the whole character of the domain. Younger, more inexperienced vampires will attribute the violent spirit of a city to an elder who is known to be brutally vengeful, as if that elder alone is

somehow able to manipulate the collective disposition of the mortals and Kindred who surround him. While elders may well be responsible for a great number of environmental effects (either directly or through their many servants, influences and vampire underlings), this belief is a gross oversimplification and only the most egomaniacal elder would accept it as truth. It may work wonders for a vampire's reputation to be directly associated with the motives and movement of a million mortals in the eyes of Kindred society, but it quickly grows tiresome. Most older vampires are thoroughly annoyed when they discover that their dark mood is being blamed for a rash of mortal suicides, or that their momentary display of calm pleasure is considered as important to the city's economic welfare as the carefully laid plans of the many mortals they observe.

Because of the frantic competition most Kindred face in their decades as ancillae, the majority of elders are truly the conquerors of vampire society, standing on the bones of their enemies. When they destroy the last of their challengers and stand as undisputed rulers of their territory (be it a vast feeding ground, an actual principality or regency or the leadership of a covenant), they achieve a strange state of peace, suddenly finding that their defenses are well-established and functional, any real threat to their existence is eradicated, and their base of power is unassailable. This state of grace may not be permanent — indeed, the history books are full of destroyed elders who foolishly believed it was — but it is no less real for its transience. Elder Kindred refer to the achievement as the “Second Transition” or “Libero Moderato” period of the Requiem. Traditionally, upon recognizing that a vampire has achieved the Second Transition, his elder compatriots will make some sort of public display of acceptance (inviting him to sit with them at Elysium, for example) that is both meant to elevate him and demonstrate their willingness to seek peace with him. It is, in effect, a statement: “We recognize that you are our equal, and we have no cause to do battle with you.”

This time of recognition is, paradoxically, one of the most dangerous moments in the whole of the Requiem. A vampire must recognize that he is being offered a genuine truce (something that many suspicious Kindred fail to do), and he must realize that all he has to do to honor it is make no aggressive moves against his compatriots. More than a century of strife, struggle and brutal contest must be pushed aside so that the new elder can accept the gift of the Second Transition and move into the ranks of the elite. But once he does, he cannot relax. To do so is to ignore the ambition of those below him and to invite disaster. Finding the middle

ground between an end to aggression among equals and an aggressive defense against inferiors is difficult, and even some of the most experienced predators have trouble with it. Those who cannot reconcile the two needs inevitably fall.

Those who do face the final movement of the Requiem: a time of unparalleled power, unimaginable longevity and incredible burden. They are the elders of the Kindred, and they are creatures so unlike their younger selves that they could almost be considered creatures of another race entirely.

Come in, come in. It has been quite some time since you visited with our blessed Great Mother Phemonoe, hasn't it? Ah, there she sits, still as ever. Does she not inspire you with awe? Is she not the very embodiment of the litany of the Crone? See her regard the world with perfect impassiveness, blind to the pettiness and noise of lesser beings, her heart now tuned to the shifting of the ages, not our wasteful speed. See the ash that surrounds her throne — the remains of heretic Kindred, brought before her terrible judgment. Ah! See! She favors you! She turns her eyes toward you! Do not hesitate to approach and abase yourself before her great blessing!

Monstrous Boredom

The first real challenge that faces elders is the satisfaction of their ambition. Not surprisingly, the achievement of their accumulated goals becomes relatively simple, now that they are both powerful and unchallenged. However, many elders soon (well, within a century or two) reaches a ceiling of accomplishment, completing every realistic project they set out for themselves. Many find that they are faced with two choices: set goals that are obviously unrealistic — several Kindred argue, for instance, that this option was responsible for the acts that ultimately led to the creation of the Ordo Dracul — or face an eternity of boredom.

Every Attribute and Ability that these Kindred valued in life is perfected. Every Discipline that they consider useful or enjoyable is mastered. Even devotions and rituals that take a decade to create seem like the product of relatively little effort when measured against the endless centuries of immortal existence. Craft holds no mystery for the interested elder, and the sum total of his knowledge and experience dwarfs that of all who surround him, making the greatest of his achievements seem petty and irrelevant in comparison.

Many elder Kindred feel that they have, quite literally, nothing left to do, and they continue to exist only because they fought so hard for so long to guarantee their immortality. The sacrifice of countless innocents, the destruction of countless foes and the application of truly monumental accumulated efforts can be justified only by the willful persistence of an aimless, endless Requiem.

The Ball of Sleep

There is an escape from this fierce boredom, and it's one that grows more and more tempting with the passage of tedious years. Elder Kindred know that torpor brings forgetfulness and diminishes power and that those who sleep often wake up to unfamiliar circumstances in a world that has forgotten them. To a younger vampire — one who still has ambition — these might all seem like horrifying possibilities. But to the elder, they represent a tempting refreshment of purpose and wonder: to awake to a true challenge and face a future of unknowns again.

There is another compelling reason for elder Kindred to consider the slumber of ages. As they grow more powerful and their blood thickens, their Beast can no longer be satisfied with the blood of animals or mortals. Eventually, hungering for the Vitae of their own kind, elders must reconcile themselves with the fact that they must destroy their fellow vampires or risk a Vinculum to survive. Even inhuman Kindred will rebel at the notion if they have any tactical sense at all — the two choices are equally untenable for a vampire who wishes to retain his power, as the former

THE ELDER RETURNED

Characters who were once elders and have slept long years may not remember their past, but many do experience a strange *joie de vivre* that comes with the renewed mystery and excitement of a Requiem begun again. The challenge of playing a character who is utterly lost in the modern world can be exciting, too — and a lack of modern skills can provide a restrictive framework that encourages creativity in finding solutions to seemingly ordinary problems.

A player creating a former elder who has slept his potency away may wish to make two character sheets: the powerful vampire the character once was (with the attendant point total assigned by the Storyteller) and the neonate he now seems to be. The information on the first sheet can inform the elder's instincts and inbuilt attitudes, while that on the second represents his current limitations.

will eventually lead to war, while the latter means giving up control over one's self. Legends say, though, that those who sleep for long enough awaken without this irrational, cannibalistic hunger, and are free to continue in the Requiem as they had before the hunger overtook them.



The urge to drink the Blood of other Kindred comes on more gradually than it seems, though. It's true that one night the vampire is simply unable to sustain himself with the blood of mortals and must seek more potent feeding stock — but months or even years of growing “early warning” desires creep up on the elder. All but the most ignorant know exactly what these urges mean, and roughly two in five choose to enter torpor before the craving becomes need. Those who remain become ravagers of the Danse Macabre, ultimately squaring off against their own in a deadly battle for survival.

The Burden of Leadership

With age and influence comes Status, and with that Status comes the power and duty to lead the covenants of Kindred in the Danse Macabre. Many elders take on this duty with relish, because it distracts them from their growing boredom and allows them to accomplish their loftiest goals. These elders are the Princes of the Invictus, the Saints of the Lancea Sanctum and the Visionary Spearheads of the Circle of the Crone and the Ordo Dracul. They direct the law of their domains, and their word can affect the whole of a city's Kindred population. In most cases, elders remain unchallenged for decades at a time, freely shaping the character of their covenant during that time.

The benefits are undeniable: the realization of vision, the fulfillment of purpose and the provision of guidance to dozens of younger Kindred. The burdens are equally powerful: the responsibility for the reality of one's ideals put into practice, the potential disappointment of completion and the accountability for the actions of all those who learn from the elder's example. Those few elders who aren't maddened by the accumulation of sin and age often face one more potential trauma: the strain of leadership. Many are the Princes who survive every challenge only to collapse under their own weight, falling apart because they are finally uncontested, finally free to express themselves and see the result — a result that is wholly and entirely their own making.

Legacy Instinct

Those elders who survive long enough often report a peculiar urge that comes upon them in the fourth or fifth century of their existence: the urge to procreate. Not in mortal terms, certainly, and not even in terms that most Kindred would understand. The desire isn't simply for childer, but rather a more wide-reaching need to create and define an entire bloodline of vampires, molded in the elder's image and set loose in the World of Darkness. Many compare the urge to the mortal compulsion for procreation, but others dispute this claim, noting that

many Kindred Embrace childer out of loneliness or the need for support — something much more analogous to human reproduction. This feeling, and the behavior it inspires, is nothing like that at all.

For some vampires, the so-called legacy instinct is actually a byproduct of the intense self-exploration that many elders undergo. During the process of examining their true natures and the limits of their power, some discover abilities or qualities in themselves that no other vampire seems to share. Feeling that these qualities ought to be disseminated into Kindred society, these elders often instruct the vampires of their line in their ways, seeing if they can will the blood to carry them on even when they are gone.

With others, the urge is more selfish. Knowing full well that they will sleep eventually, and that many a respectable vampire has faded into obscurity with but a few centuries, some elders choose to create a legacy of Vitae, shaping an entire line and (usually) naming it after themselves. The practice is vain, to be sure, but there are many younger vampires who are eager to gain the favor of a powerful elder, and most especially one who is considering retreating into torpor (and thus must be looking for heirs).

Death Wish

At the absolute limits of Kindred longevity, the eldest of vampires all carry a secret urge — one they dare not speak of, and one that they cannot bring themselves to indulge. The so-called millennial vampires, those who approach or exceed 1,000 years of waking, all have a secret hope that they will soon be called to Final Death.

Maybe it's because they carry the accumulated guilt and pain of long centuries, weighed down with the blood of millions of mortals. Maybe it's because they know that somewhere, long, long past, they were slated to die as a human should, and that they have cheated fate for long enough. Maybe they believe that they are abominations, outlasting the sane limit of a Requiem just as they have outlasted the life of a mortal hundreds of times over. No living being can possibly imagine the complicated weave of motive and compulsion in a creature so old and so powerful. All we can do is guess.

The truth is that these elders move through the ranks of the Kindred, waiting for their blessed moment of release. They never bring it about themselves — no creature that had fought so hard for so long can just let go and walk into the sunlight — but they desire the end nonetheless, and their every thought, waking and dreaming, is shot through with that desire. Many are

consciously aware of this secret hope. Some are not, but are affected nonetheless. Neither will they relax their defenses, though, nor will they invite attack. They just . . . wait for the inevitable, and when it comes, though they fight no less fiercely than before, they are willing, and even eager, to accept defeat at the hands of a worthy opponent.

The Psychology of Vampire Disciplines

Power comes with the blood of the Kindred, that much is undeniable. With age and experience, that power grows, making more of them than the mortals they prey on. In time, a vampire can become very like a god: untouchable, irresistible and indomitable.

And that power comes with a terrible price. Fueled by Vitae, the use of Disciplines requires an increase in feeding. Particularly active Kindred may feed twice or three times as much as necessary, just to maintain access to their Disciplines. Taking hold in the minds of their users, often shifting from capacity to habit, from habit to necessity, Disciplines threaten to become tools of dependency, drastically altering the vampire's thought processes and behavior.

Worse yet, every advance in mystic ability takes the vampire further from humankind and closer to . . . something else. Humanity drifts away more easily for those who are no longer bounded by human constraint. And still, in the vicious world of the Danse Macabre, Disciplines are necessary. Without the Disciplines of Vitae, a vampire in competition with others of her kind is sure to perish. The rigors of night-to-night existence and the ongoing struggle to claim and maintain territory draws all of the Kindred into an ever-escalating mystical "arms race," one that none can afford to lose, and none can escape.

Furthermore, every Discipline raises a vampire above the mean and meager humans she stalks. Every power is an exhilarating, heady piece of the Requiem with the potential to fulfill the living dreams of the vampire, and to make her a faster, more effective and precise hunter.

For better or worse, none can make use of the Disciplines of Kindred and remain unchanged. Some learn to integrate their powers, finding a place for them in the strange, unnatural harmonies of the Requiem. Some follow their Disciplines down into a spiral of deepening isolation and madness, and are eventually consumed by the very spark that empowers them. And some simply come to know them for what they are: great gifts and great curses both, inseparably intertwined in the heart of all Kindred.

HOW TO USE THIS SECTION

The following section is not meant to provide a means for Storytellers to punish characters who make use of their Disciplines. Instead, it's meant to give players a fuller picture of the implications of those Disciplines so that they can add flavor to their characters and drama to their story. Not every character who uses *The Spirit's Touch* is going to react to it the same way, but it's much more interesting if she reacts to it in *some* way. Even if a character makes an effort to *ignore* the implications, that in itself may provide a dramatic hook to his story. No doubt, Kindred who never really question or acknowledge the implications of their powers are common — but who wants to play a common vampire?

The entries below may also help to guide Storytellers' decisions when a character fails a degeneration roll (or when creating a degenerate antagonist). Some of the powers listed below are associated with certain derangements. A vampire who makes frequent use of these powers may be vulnerable to specific types of madness, and can be played with the suggested quirks and attitudes.

Animalism

The power over birds and beasts is a strange, subtle one. Many Kindred familiar with it note well that it seems to reflect and amplify the soul of the vampire who uses it. Those who believe that they are (and should aspire to be) part of the natural world seem to find spiritual strength in it, anchoring themselves to the living world, sharing it and speaking with it on its own terms. On the other hand, those who consider themselves separate and superior wield the Discipline as a crushing weapon, distancing themselves further from nature and, paradoxically, drawing closer to the Beast within.

• *Feral Whispers*

The ability to speak with animals and comprehend their language carries with it a number of philosophical and psychological implications. First and foremost, those vampires capable of communicating with the creatures around them must deal with the fact that they can do something completely foreign to their living selves — something that, by all rights, seems insane to outside observers, and may well make the vampire question his own sanity. To walk up to a bird or a squirrel, to ask it questions and to have it respond — who wouldn't pause and wonder if they were going mad?

But that's not all. To many, Kindred and mortal both, the only real distinction between human and animal is

the ability for the human being to communicate. If an animal can likewise make itself understood, the idea that it is soulless or incapable of experiencing a range of emotions (an idea that many Kindred with certain scientific or religious backgrounds hold) is brought into question.

What animals have to say will affect the vampire as well. Most of the so-called lesser creatures are instinctively afraid of the predatory Kindred, and will react with uncomprehending terror when immobilized and confronted eye-to-eye. Many are relatively unintelligent, and will inspire contempt in the vampire who comes to know their limits. Some vampires actually come to prefer the relative simplicity of animals to mortal or Kindred contact, but those who do are relatively few and far between.

Many Kindred with access to animalism come to know that animals of a certain type tend to behave similarly, and think similar thoughts. Some of them with extensive experience begin to categorize habits and instincts by similarity — certain patterns of behavior are “pigeon-like” or “cat-like” — and apply those categories to the mortals and Kindred they know.

● ● *Obedience*

If Feral Whispers brings the vampire into a world of philosophical turmoil, Obedience offers the tempting, insidious solution. The question of animal inferiority is answered indisputably: the vampire gives the orders, the animal obeys.

The insidious nature of the power lies in its ability to provide an end-run around the subject's natural fear of the vampire, and Obedience allows the vampire to secure the animal's cooperation without having to earn its trust. Obedience can easily become a crutch for Kindred who rely on it to smooth their relations with the natural world instead of working to achieve the effect more honestly, or acknowledging that they are not entitled to normal, friendly interaction with it.

● ● ● *Call of the Wild*

By the time a vampire learns Call of the Wild, she is most likely comfortable with animal communication (one way or another) and thinks nothing of calling to the creatures in their own voice. The activity in itself is somewhat inhuman, or at the very least, bizarre, but it isn't actually dehumanizing. To an outsider, though, the vampire looks and sounds like something completely alien. Watching an acquaintance howl or hiss while animals swarm toward him is a disconcerting experience at best — at worst, it will cement the Kindred in the eyes of onlookers as a completely unnatural monster.

For some, the ability to summon animals represents an opportunity to simplify the hunt, allowing them to spend their time turning to more esoteric or political pursuits. It also makes it easier to hunt animals than mortals, changing the habits of many Kindred accordingly.

For others, the Call is another tool of isolation. Many Gangrel or Ventruue use it to surround themselves with a baying, chirping army as a means to keep interlopers at a distance. Some even develop a Power Fetish Obsession (see **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 191) focused on the animal of their choice.

● ● ● ● *Subsume the Lesser Spirit*

To speak with animals and command them is one thing. To seize control of an animal, to *become* it, is something else entirely. If it is true that Animalism reflects the mentality of the vampire, then Subsume the Lesser Spirit is the most powerful mirror within the Discipline. Those who feel a kinship and kindness toward the creatures of the natural world are likely to revel in the experience of living in the animal's flesh, often becoming enamored with the experience and losing themselves in the sensation of “shared spirit.” These Kindred, often taking possession of a favored creature again and again, flirt with a singular and disturbing delusion: that their souls and those of the animals they possess are inextricably intertwined, and that they can no longer discern between human and animal behavior. Technically suffering from a Delusional Obsession, these Kindred blatantly sniff at passersby, hiss and arch when they are threatened or compulsively bat their prey about before delivering an incapacitating blow. There's nothing funny in this — it's horrifying to see someone lose his sense of self this way, and the rationalizations of Kindred so affected can become so frustratingly complex as to isolate him from any humanizing input.

Those who make an effort to maintain distance between themselves and the natural world have a habit of using this power to much more utilitarian ends, rarely spending more time in the animals' bodies than they need to — but these Kindred run the risk of developing similar symptoms with very different results. Since they will not accept that they are “sharing souls” with the animals in question (indeed, many maintain, even at this level of understanding, that animals have no souls at all), the animalistic instincts that threaten to override their intellect are considered alien. There can be no reconciliation when such a vampire finds himself unconsciously displaying animal behavior, and repeated incidences can lead to a collapse of the psyche, paving the road to severe derangements such as Schizophrenia, Multiple Personality Disorder or Fugue.

●●●●● *Leashing the Beast*

A vampire with the power to Leash the Beast is subject to a great moral burden, whether she likes it or not. For relatively little cost — just a bit of extra blood — she has the ability to prop up or demolish another vampire's Humanity. With directed, repeated effort, she may choose to prevent frenzies and save her subject (and his allies) from the mindless violence of the Beast, or she may provoke them, sending him spiraling out of control again and again.

The questions one with the power must deal with are such: If she has the power to prevent frenzy, is she responsible for every one she doesn't put a stop to? And if she has the power to provoke it, does she not hold the fate of a vampire's soul in her hands? Many elder Gangrel cite the implications of this power and their inability to find satisfactory answers to the questions as the prime impetus for their retreat from Kindred society.

Auspex

There is a saying among the Mekhet: "With sight comes understanding, with understanding comes sadness." This sober warning is taught, almost without exception, to the neonates who develop their Auspex, but never truly comprehended until a vampire experiences the extent of its powers for himself. Many Kindred who learn the Discipline have the power to lay bare the world around them, to know every surface and to hear every thought — and many of them come to realize that in so doing, they are forever made separate from it, drawn away into an insidious and painful isolation of their own making.

● *Heightened Senses*

When a vampire first experiences Heightened Senses, she is overwhelmed with information: the subtle variations in sound, color, texture and smell all around her become both conspicuous and distinct. The tiny details in every feature of her surroundings leap out, redefining everything she sees and feels. Nothing escapes her notice. Nothing is bland or vague.

As she learns to better control the power, her focus improves, and the heady symphony of detail moves in and out of her awareness as directed by her will. She learns to pick out single strains — the texture of a leaf, the exact pattern of hues in a mortal's eye — and she learns to make use of the ability. Investigators and scholars find their acumen greatly improved by the ability to pick out minute variations in the environment. Artists feel a growing appreciation for the unique and intricate features of the living world as every facet unfolds before them.

But not every vampire is mentally prepared for the experience. Some are besieged by unwanted information, realizing quickly that there is no beauty that is not flawed, no pleasure that is not spiked with unpleasant surprise. A caress sickens the vampire who can feel every blemish and hair on his mortal lover's body. A masterful painting resolves into sloppy smears and dots, pulling apart and revealing the tremble in the artist's hand, the corrections over a misplaced stroke and the degradation of color in aging pigments. The very slight defect in a single clarinet ruins the whole of a symphony, distracting and maddening the Kindred listener.

Some Kindred so affected seek, sooner or later, to create a place of retreat, hoping to dull the maddening input in a place of austere silence. Many dwell in darkness, shutting out the sight and tamping down the blast of color invoked by the living world. They shut down their gifted senses when walking in the mortal world, buttressing themselves against disappointment and aggravation.

Others become infatuated with these details, tracking them and following their course through every object and sensation. They seek the imperfections, bound by growing madness to categorize or eliminate them. They search endlessly for the unblemished mortal, the faultless song, the flawless gem — all impossible quests, all consuming searches. Fixation and Obsessive Compulsion tug at these souls, tugging at them and demanding their constant attention.

●● *Aura Perception*

With Aura Perception, the lies of conscious men further mar the world of Kindred experience. A perceptive vampire can scan a crowd of mortals and quickly see how many are dissembling — crying for justice when they really want blood, congratulating a friend when they seethe with jealousy or making bold declarations while fear runs riot within them. The motives of all are laid bare, and the vampire's disappointment is inevitable. The world seems a madhouse of deceit and self-ignorance, where no man or woman can be trusted, and where their attempts to mislead all seem petty, commonplace and, eventually, terribly boring.

The longer a vampire has this power, the less likely she is to want to use it. Many become sickened by the understanding that it will show them exactly what they don't want to know: how everyone around them actually feels. Those who do continue to make use of Aura Perception often become obsessed with finding a truly honest person — someone who really is genuine about her emotions, and experiences them fully and openly. The hunt is inevitably tragic. There are so few people

who can really satisfy the vampire who searches thus, and their ability to do so rarely lasts.

●●● *The Spirit's Touch*

With this power, the flesh of the vampire becomes a conduit for emotion and the merest touch can reveal scenes of pleasure, terror and fervor in their many flavors. Many Kindred who develop The Spirit's Touch are captivated by its effects; they surround themselves with objects that have played a part in carefully concocted scenes and imprinted with pleasant emotion, or they seek out new and intense evidence of human passion with every free moment. Some create such a collection of trinkets and scraps as to seem insanely materialistic to observers, memorizing the emotional imprint associated with each one and surrounding themselves with combinations that best comfort or please them. Some objects are visited again and again, caressed and kept close so that a vampire may relive a reflected moment of glory as many times as possible before the imprint fades. Some are so prized for their imprint — a warm moment of deep, selfless love, a fleeting glimpse of true nobility of heart or a momentary flash of undimmed virtue — that they become the most valued, most secure and most adored treasure in a vampire's possession.

But there are those who experience The Spirit's Touch differently. Contact with the unknown can bring unexpected and unpleasant results. A simple vase may reveal its hasty use as the tool of a desperate murder. A discarded tie overwhelms the vampire with the humiliation its mortal wearer wore when he last tore it from his body. The steering wheel of a car unfolds into a scene of near-suicidal frustration. Vampires who endure one too many distasteful revelations tend to become very careful about touching anything (or anybody) without knowing exactly where it's been. They wear gloves at all times, and some develop an Obsessive Compulsion to avoid uninvited touch, or even a phobia of certain objects.

●●●● *Telepathy*

Emotion is only the beginning. Vampires with Telepathy can lay bare the thoughts, dreams and schemes of anyone around them — and many spend countless hours doing just that. While some tire quickly of the repetitive and banal soundtrack of most mortal (and Kindred) thought, others become enamored with single subjects, slowly working their way through the complex ephemera of their thoughts so that they may gain an incomparably intimate understanding of their victims. Many seek out specific types of thought, hoping to hang on to some shred of human joy or peace. Those who find what they are looking for work fiercely to protect and preserve it — much like

the materialist addicts of The Spirit's Touch, these Kindred become obsessed with ensuring that nothing interferes with their chosen prize and that conditions are optimal for his development along lines that please the vampire. Some Kindred raise specially isolated mortals from birth, grooming them to generate thought patterns that present pleasing results. The methods the Kindred employ may be inhumane (and often are), but they occasionally produce a truly enlightened or blissful mortal . . . so the morality of the act is muddy.

It's true that a deep ennui threatens the vampire Telepath. If he listens in on the thoughts of the general populace, he'll hear a sea of different voices treading the same ground over and over again. Selfish, petty fantasies, banal and repetitive worries, and aggravating indications of ignorance, vice and apathy abound. Soon enough, the Kindred sickens of mortal minds, and risks Depression or Megalomania as he loses faith in human virtue, isolating or elevating himself in comparison.

But Telepathy provides a unique balm, as well. If a vampire is strong enough to pierce the minds of other Kindred, and if he is able to assess his own weaknesses and failings honestly, he will realize that he is not alone. There are likely to be Kindred out there who share his fears and doubts — who are brothers and sisters of a kind, whether they know it or not. The Telepath can see this truth, and may take comfort in it. If, of course, he doesn't happen to scan the wrong vampire and end up developing Paranoia or a Phobia from the horrors he witnesses within.

●●●●● *Twilight Projection*

This power is the ultimate expression of Auspex. All of the world's secrets are laid bare to the vampire who understands the secret of Twilight Projection; just as the thoughts, feelings and memories of the living are as open books to the Kindred, so now the physical world unfolds, its barriers and hidden corners melting away before the ethereal gaze of the vampire. So long as he is willing to leave his body behind, gravity is annulled, and rock, steel and bone are as thin and passable as air.

But so long as he leaves his body, the vampire cannot touch what he sees. The isolation of Auspex reaches its pinnacle in Twilight Projection, making an impartial observer of the vampire. He cannot help but stand by and watch what unfolds before him. The information he receives may be invaluable, but the sensation of the occurrences witnessed are lost on him — unless they are perceived through the filter of another mind.

How can a vampire who makes frequent use of this power hang on to his Humanity? He is less his mortal

self than he is a ghost, a spirit of knowledge, gleaning truths and floating airily, blithely untouched by all. Some Kindred, in the interest of personal safety, develop a habit of projecting quite often, leaving their bodies in secure, sheltered conditions, while they move unseen through the world. Sooner or later, they demonstrate strange behavior — Paranoia centered on the protection of their mortal form, Vocalization (simply because they are not used to being heard, and may begin to mutter to themselves) or Delusional Obsessions (often focused on the state of projection versus physical being, and a dangerous confusion that arises between the two).

Celerity

The unnatural speed of Kindred is both one of the most practical and most costly of Disciplines. It vastly improves a vampire's capacity to hunt, guaranteeing that she can act more quickly and decisively than any mortal quarry, and it also gives her the speed to avoid incoming attacks with relative ease. As one of the common physical Disciplines, Celerity often manifests unconsciously, seeming no more unnatural than a burst of speed would to any sprinting mortal.

But Celerity is not a natural burst of speed. Every turn, Celerity is fueled by a full point of Vitae. A vampire who gets himself into trouble can burn through a whole human body's worth of blood in less than half a minute if he keeps his speed up. Even sporadic use of this Discipline can easily quadruple a vampire's feeding requirements, and habitual, frequent use can impose a need for truly staggering amounts of blood. Unfortunately, it's precisely the unconscious use of the Discipline that entraps many Kindred — they don't quite realize that their speed is not necessary, and that they shouldn't always be as hungry as they are.

On consideration, it may not be surprising to note that vampires with Celerity are more likely to degenerate quickly than those without . . . but to most Kindred, the notion is ridiculous. Comparing the power to the upper levels of Dominate or Nightmare, for instance, Celerity seems relatively innocuous, so long as one does not consider the hidden cost.

In addition to the supreme overconfidence that a vampire who makes frequent use of Celerity is likely to develop (as the notion that he is literally untouchable takes root), the real potential for mental damage lies in the Discipline's insidious, self-necessitating aspect. What begins as an occasional, luxurious burst becomes, eventually, an ingrained strategy, as he throws himself into situations that cannot be survived without the rapidity he has come to rely on — something the vampire literally cannot live without.

The expansion of Celerity from sporadic indulgence to absolute necessity is always paid for in human life.

Dominate

The Ventrue know well that the power to bend others to one's will is very much a double-edged sword. As the Discipline develops, only those Kindred capable of restraint can avoid the lure of tyranny, for Dominate allows them to crush opposition every time they face the slightest dispute. Those who give into temptation soon learn that an oppressor's existence is a lonely, fearful one, and many slide into a spiral of irrational behavior and Discipline-fueled enforcement, knowing that sooner or later the whole network of carefully constructed falsehood they've raised is bound to come crashing down around them.

● *Command*

When a vampire first realizes that she can override a listener's natural impulse with a single utterance, she is bound to be exhilarated. The feel of another's resolve crumbling before a forceful statement is incomparable, some say, and it's all a prideful or lustful vampire needs to embark on a campaign of indulgence that would horrify all but the most jaded observer. Experimentation is natural for the first flexing of this power; a vampire will want to understand the limits of her power and figure out what does and doesn't work. Most Kindred, however, find a handful of commands that work for them and stick with them for years, if not centuries, keeping to those that seem most natural or logical.

Those who get too caught up in exploration of this power tend toward Obsessive Compulsion, trying the same commands over and over, wording them differently, testing nuances and accents to see if they are more or less effective. Some intellectual Ventrue spend weeks trying to distill complex commands into single words, hoping to understand how the power is fueled and how it is, exactly, that one's will can be folded into a word.

●● *Mesmerize*

And with this power, the trouble really begins. Mesmerize offers a vampire the startling capacity to make an unwitting servant of any mortal or vampire, provided the Kindred is both subtle and intelligent enough. If the temptation to experiment with the first level of Dominate is strong, then it is multiplied tenfold with Mesmerize, for the Kindred involved is no longer limited to single word commands, and can now craft detailed instructions designed to satisfy her whims. Victims can easily become playthings to the skilled vampire, and a world of diversions is made available to one sufficiently self-indulgent.

The threat of Narcissism runs strong in the Requiem of Kindred who can mesmerize their victims, for they need only implant a successful suggestion to prove their superior strength of intellect. Kindred tending toward insanity rationalize thus: if a victim is weak enough to be mesmerized, then he deserves to be dominated by the vampire, and, by extension, if the vampire is strong enough to mesmerize a victim, he deserves to be served.

Those who manage to keep a steady grip can see the flaw in this logic, for it transforms an effective predatory tool into a universal test of intellectual worth: those who fail the test are proven inferior, and may be mistreated without guilt. Down that path of logic lies the maw of the Beast.

• • • *The Forgetful Mind*

Kindred who make use of The Forgetful Mind need never fear accident or accusation — so long as they are willing to edit the memories of those who see witness them. For this reason, the power is intensely practical. Careful vampires can feed (or commit other, even more heinous crimes) with impunity, erasing the victim's memories of the act and moving on. They learn, most often after a couple of disastrous missteps, to sculpt believable falsities so that the mortal subject does not trouble himself with puzzling disparity or blank spots.

But as the vampire learns, a host of possibilities for insidious, potentially untraceable manipulation makes itself apparent. Mortals can be programmed with memories that change how they feel about each other. They can be programmed, with repeated applications, to behave completely against type. They can be torn apart, mentally speaking, and left believing they are mad or diseased. If a vampire so chooses, he can build such an elaborate maze of memories that the victim becomes something of a work of art — totally deluded, operating on artificial input that he mistakes for real experience, and intimately understood only by his programmer.

Some artful, perfectionist Ventrue use The Forgetful Mind to construct “honey-trap” mortals for the Telepathic Mekhet — humans whose memories are sculpted to produce exactly the sort of thoughts that will appeal to the target, drawing him unwittingly into a relationship with a false creature of the Dominating Lord.

But this kind of exploitation is risky. If the work isn't exact enough, the mortal will quickly unravel, losing faith in his own thoughts and obsessively investigating his past in hopes of locating the influence that undermined him. Worse, it furthers the vampire's unhealthy attitude toward living people — that they are clay to be



molded, not human beings worthy of respect. Kindred who involve themselves in intense reconstruction of memories, whether for personal or political gain, often flirt with Obsessive Compulsions. They dwell on the details of the “program,” returning to the subject again and again to tweak or build it further. Some end up spending the majority of their waking hours on a single mortal victim, keeping him immobile and insensate every night for weeks, editing and re-editing their works.

● ● ● ● *Conditioning*

At this level of understanding, the vampire gains the ability to guarantee the obedience and loyalty of all but the most strong-willed subjects. She may, if she chooses, surround herself with mortals who have no aim in life but to serve, and no urge to stray, regardless of circumstance. Why wouldn't she do so?

The answer lies in the price. After most Ventrue Condition one subject, they realize what's sacrificed. The mortal victim loses all personal motivation but that which is dictated to him. Most actually lose the ability to think creatively or clearly, grinding to a mental halt when not in the midst of carrying out orders. Their true personalities are utterly destroyed.

To all but the most inhumane Kindred, this is a staggering violation. The human subject is slowly murdered in all but the bodily sense, and is not even allowed the dignity of death. Instead, his shell remains, serving the vampire with unquestioning, unthinking loyalty. The only mercy is that his consciousness is so suppressed (unto destruction, in many cases), that the poor slave doesn't understand what's happened to him, and can never feel the sadness or rage his loss ought to bring on. He can be saved and returned to his previous state, but not without great risk and suffering on his part.

Many of the humane Kindred who make use of Conditioning are haunted by the result. They understand the implications of their act, and are sickened by the walking parodies their subjects become. Some Kindred are driven into severe derangement by their deeds, breaking apart under the pressure of guilt. Others manage to hold on and rehabilitate their victims, working to reinvigorate them and release them.

Most, sadly, simply lose their grip on the moral compass, drawing closer to the Beast amidst justification and rationalizing self-assurances.

● ● ● ● ● *Possession*

Set aside all of the tactical possibilities Possession presents — in truth, they do not occur to most of the Kindred who learn this power. The overwhelming,

heady reality of Possession is that it allows a vampire to experience a semblance of life again — to breathe, to feel the warmth of the sun and see its light, and to feel her heart race unbidden.

Some are crushed by the reminder of life's many glories, pains and fears, knowing their own night-to-night existence as Kindred to be nothing more than a shallow burlesque in comparison — a puppet's crude attempt at emulating vitality. In a sudden, howling instant, all that they have lost crashes back into their thoughts, and they once again understand the value of each and every human life. Those who have diminished over the years, gradually losing themselves to the Beast, find little comfort in this understanding, and some are completely shattered by the experience. All manner of derangements result for these unlucky souls, running the gamut as they review the catalog of sins they have accumulated over their Requiems, counting the many hurts they have paid out to helpless victims along the way.

Others, though, are not so unhappy with Possession. On the contrary, they enjoy it immensely, and often risk becoming addicted to the experience. Some begin to see every mortal they meet as a potential vessel — not only to feed from but to “wear” for indulgence in the sensual world. They choose favorites, based on beauty, similarity (or deliberate difference) to their own appearance or any number of highly personalized criteria. They step out into the world as living beings for entertainment, subjecting their victims' bodies to any number of pleasures and indignities just so that the Kindred within may feel the result. These vampires flirt with Narcissism and Fixation in their indulgence, and may suffer worse if forced to confront the damage done to the souls and minds of the mortals they use so selfishly.

Majesty

“Majesty is the great expression of the soul of the Daeva,” some Kindred say. “It is in equal parts alluring, awe-inspiring and toxic.” This Discipline eases the hunt, quells opposition and soothes doubts even as it destroys empathy, encourages decadence and undermines honesty. Is it any wonder that Majesty often proves as addictive to the user as the victim — and equally damaging to both?

● *Awe*

Most of the Daeva don't believe that Awe is a power at all. It's more like a posture, they say, a way of holding one's self and speaking that best expresses the natural

charisma of the vampire in question. It's completely normal: a passive reflex, requiring no real effort. Kindred who describe the effects of Awe are merely paying heed to the great appeal of the Daeva, the most beautiful and attractive of all vampires.

This statement is categorically false. Worse yet, almost all of the vampires who speak this way are as much victims of the lie as they are perpetrators. They believe it wholeheartedly. It's hard to blame them — it must be mind-bogglingly tempting to accept that they are more striking, more likable and more disarming than others. Who wouldn't want to think so?

The problem is that Awe isn't just a reflex, and Kindred who delude themselves into thinking it is must make a choice: make constant use of the Discipline or face the crippling truth — that they are faking their star power, and that they will be discovered.

Not surprisingly, many of the vampires who rely on Awe risk developing inferiority complexes and nervous anxiety, becoming emotionally fragile as their Discipline becomes an essential crutch in public dealings.

Others note the bumbling, tongue-tied behavior their power inspires in "ordinary" people, who only want to get closer to the vampire who throws it around. Growing first annoyed, then hateful whenever the mortals around them display interest, these vampires withdraw into a strange public isolation, often falling prey to Narcissistic or Megalomaniac Delusion. It's still in their best interest to use the power, especially to ease feeding, but they can't handle the attention it attracts, and often lose sight of themselves in the process.

A fair number of neonates who learn Awe are thrilled by the results, and throw everything they can into developing their understanding of Majesty in response, often ignoring or deferring other pursuits. Many become lazy in terms of satisfying covenant obligations and promises, and believe that they can rely on their newfound power to worm their way out of the repercussions. Only the luckiest or most skillful can manage to do so for long.

● ● *Revelation*

A vampire who makes use of Revelation is taking a significant step in the development of Majesty. The first time a vampire applies this power, she is making undeniably manipulative use of her supernatural attractiveness. She draws her victim into spilling secrets, confessing sins and exposing his innermost feelings without first establishing real trust — thereby taking an end run around genuine human relation and jumping straight to the payoff.

Empathy plays no part in Revelation. The power is purely a persuasive one, and the result, often, is some-

thing that the vampire cares little about unless it proves useful. Unfortunately, sooner or later, the Kindred who makes casual use of this power has heard it all, and her ability to be shocked (or to empathize) diminishes quickly. When the eighth or ninth victim confesses his urge to betray or kill his loved ones, to indulge his vice or to commit suicide, the Daeva is already rolling her eyes. Dozens or hundreds more confessions will only inure her to the real pain and sorrow expressed in these confessions, and from real emotion in general. The deepest, darkest admissions are ho-hum to her . . . and that's ugly.

Kindred whose degeneration is linked to the use of Revelation often develop avoidance disorders, refusing to take responsibility for their victim (and, by extension, any emotional situation that seems similar to theirs). They begin to seem frivolous and callous, dismissing their compatriots' emotional needs out of a silent, compulsive necessity to distance themselves.

● ● ● *Entrancement*

The poisonous seed takes root with Awe. It pushes outward with Revelation. And with Entrancement, it opens into full flower. A vampire who can Entrance his onlookers need no longer concern himself with honest interaction and the work required building genuine relationships. He can bypass the true feelings of his onlookers, forcing them to like him, no matter how ugly his behavior is . . . for a time.

And when that time passes and the effect fades, he has two choices: face the consequences of his impatience and unwillingness to earn friendship or just use the power again. And again. And again. Even as he does, though, the difficulty of affecting a single subject increases until she proves surprisingly unmoved — always an inconvenience, at best.

Prideful or Slothful Kindred face powerful temptation in Entrancement; the former to reinforce their self-image and quell defiance, the latter just to ease relationships and prevent annoying difficulties. Unfortunately, those who succumb to the temptation overmuch risk developing Inferiority Complexes and Paranoia, and often begin to fire the Discipline off with a hair-trigger whenever they are approached by a mortal, familiar or otherwise.

● ● ● ● *Summoning*

Summoning is the great boon and bane of the Slothful or Lusty vampire. It almost completely eliminates the need to hunt — especially if the vampire is willing to follow the summons with other powers of Majesty. She simply calls her prey to her, and seduces them when they approach.

For some, the temptation to ease all of their interpersonal endeavors expands outwards. Mortals and Kindred both are called whenever the vampire wishes to address them, and they drop everything to come to her. She need not even speak with them — just the merest wish and a small expenditure of Blood brings them rushing to her side, usually none the wiser. Some vampires become positively sedentary once they learn Summoning, traveling out into their feeding grounds only to meet new victims so that they can be called later.

Almost every vampire capable of Summoning becomes addicted to it, in some sense. They use it to supplant (or replace) the hunt. They use it when they are denied a visit that they desire. They use it when they expect to be denied. They use it when they are angry with someone and wish to interrupt his endeavors. They use it relentlessly when they don't want someone to speak to anybody but them. Pity the mortal who becomes the focus of a powerful Daeva's affections, for he cannot stay away from her even if he wants to.

And for the Daeva who becomes so entranced with her own power? She slides inevitably into narcissistic self-indulgence. She knows, deep in her heart, that she cannot be denied, and sooner or later she convinces herself that she possesses some unique quality that makes it so, not a common parlor trick of a Discipline. Only another Daeva can think to correct her, and few will honestly bother.

• • • • • *Sovereignty*

There are Daeva who say that Sovereignty is an outward expression of the noble blood of the clan — proof positive that its Kindred are the true elite of vampire society, and that they deserve the admiration and respect it inspires. There are even some who believe it is so.

Then there are those who know the truth. That Sovereignty is the great pinnacle of a Discipline that is, in truth, nothing more than a form of gaudy adornment to benefit a predator in her hunt. Sovereignty is the hypnotizing wave of a serpent's head. Sovereignty is the fleshy lure of a deep sea fish. Nobility and entitlement have nothing to do with it.

Appropriately, Sovereignty presents horrifyingly powerful, inhumane temptation for every vice. None of the Daeva are immune to its dark appeal. The Envious and Proud use it to prove their superiority. The Greedy, Gluttonous, and Lustful use it to get what they want. The Wrathful use it to cow and turn their enemies. The Slothful use it to avoid conflict and delegate duty.

Sovereignty protects their bodies. It facilitates their

sin. It shields them from recrimination. It forces a simulation of love and loyalty, even where there is none. It slowly and surely drives them mad, as they spiral further and further into indulgence, unfettered, unopposed, unpunished. It paves the way to the maw of the Beast more surely and more speedily than anything else in the arsenal of the Daeva.

Nightmare

"You aren't a monster if you inspire fear," the Nosferatu often say. "You are a monster if you revel in it." The Discipline of Nightmare is perhaps the most honest expression of a vampire's nature, the raw, undimmed view of the terrifying Beast within. Kindred who understand must face a very painful truth: that when artifice is stripped away, the natural reaction to a vampire's essence is revulsion and horror. Even when the power is used with noble intentions, the barb of self-awareness twists in the heart of the vampire, confronted as he is by the helpless trembling of the living world in his presence.

• *Monstrous Countenance*

All Nosferatu are taught that the Monstrous Countenance is the "true" face of a vampire. It is triggered by an approximation of the expression worn in the red fury of the rage frenzy, and is instantly recognizable as a naked threat by both the living and the undead.

The psychological effect of learning and using this power cannot be underestimated. To learn that this terrifying face is the true expression of one's undead self is a profoundly traumatic experience. Most Kindred try to shrug it off as a pantomime — a simple trick meant to frighten off interlopers — but they instinctively recognize it as less an effort and more a relaxation. It's like opening a window that one has been holding shut, and allowing the Beast to look through, if only for a moment.

Those who make frequent use of the Monstrous Countenance tend to accept their grotesque nature, even wearing it as a badge of defiant (and misplaced) honor. They tend to assume that all onlookers will treat them as a monster, whether or not they show their "true" face, so there's little reason to keep it hidden. Kindred who operate along these lines run the risk of Suspicion and even Paranoia, assuming the worst of everyone they encounter because they so frequently display the worst of themselves.

• • *Dread*

This is a subtle power that many Kindred never know (or admit) they possess. It seems to be coincidental — when the vampire is in a dark mood, Dread mani-

fects, and everyone nearby reacts appropriately. Even a vampire who makes conscious use of it often displaces responsibility from herself to the victims, rationalizing that those who react with fear are somehow prejudiced or predisposed against her.

Dread is not exactly foreign to the living. It's arguable that Dread is nothing more than a supernatural extension augmenting a creature's natural capacity for intimidation, just as Celerity multiplies speed and Vigor supplements strength. There are even mortals who seem just as intimidating as a young Nosferatu.

It is, as the common warning states, not the existence of Dread that is a problem, but rather the attitude the vampire holds toward it. If Dread is used when necessary, serving a purpose, then it may well be no more dangerous to the mind than ordinary intimidation. It's when a vampire begins to enjoy its application — when the envious Kindred takes pleasure in terrifying his prey or when the prideful uses it to cow opposition — that the seed of sickness takes root. The sense of power can be addictive, and those Kindred who were oppressed or otherwise suffered in life have a tendency to unleash Dread on undeserving mortals just so that they can watch the helpless victims crumble. There is a great potential for vengeance embedded in Dread, and inexperienced or unwise vampires are extremely vulnerable to its allure.

••• *Eye of the Beast*

No mortal (and few Kindred) can ever represent a real threat to the vampire who develops this power — not as long as she's willing to wield it. It's a powerful shield, and often saves Nosferatu the trouble of wasting time with troublesome conflict. The trouble is, it can get too easy. Surprised by an unexpected guard while trespassing on someone else's territory? Freeze him in place and escape. Having trouble subduing resistant prey? Paralyze her and introduce the power of the Kiss. Eye of the Beast is a "fire and forget" power — once it's successful, there's nothing a mortal victim can do about it and the vampire is free to act as he pleases.

But how many consider the effect on the victim? The hapless mortal is frozen in place with overwhelming, mind-numbing fear. The experience is torturous — truly nightmarish — and the vampire responsible need only look into his eyes to realize what he's experiencing.

Humane Kindred who make use of the Eye of the Beast cannot deny that they are tormenting their victims, and may have to make degeneration rolls (certainly if their Humanity is 8 or higher) simply for using it. Even less humane vampires must admit that

it can be unnecessarily cruel, like a cat toying with its prey instead of killing it quickly and painlessly.

•••• *Shatter the Mind*

If the Eye of the Beast is cruel, Shatter the Mind is absolute brutality. To take a victim, living or dead, and force him to endure a fear so deep, so powerful, that it saps his will and drives him mad — the viciousness of it is unparalleled. Who can make use of a power like this and think herself anything other than a monster? Who can watch a victim disintegrate under the force of this assault, and feel anything but guilt and horror?

The power to invoke such fear is nothing short of inhumane. There is no way to reconcile Shatter the Mind with a normal human mindset. Those Kindred who make frequent use of this power are flirting with the Beast every time, no matter how noble their intentions or how deserving their victims. If one such vampire could be made to understand the anguish his victims suffer, he would surely risk descending into a most severe madness of his own.

Strangely, those vampires are precisely the ones who understand how fragile the mind can be, and often let their own fears run away with them. They often attempt to live without fear in hopes of protecting themselves from this power and others — but in seeking to shut down a natural part of their minds they only segregate and empower it. It's common for Kindred who degenerate because of this power to develop Phobia or Hysteria of their own . . . an eventuality that is as tragic as it is ironic, for it infects the vampire with true sympathy for his many victims.

••••• *Mortal Fear*

If the Eye of the Beast is the shield of the Nosferatu, then Mortal Fear is the terrible weapon that accompanies it. Often wielded in anger, this horrifying power caps the signature of the Nosferatu in a most diabolical manner: it allows them to injure and kill their targets mercilessly, quietly, and with a minimum of fuss. Justification comes in many forms, but in truth, there is no benevolent use for this power.

What must it mean to wield the Mortal Fear? To know that just by displaying one's self to a victim, one can choke the heart, crack the spine or rupture the brain? To hold the power of torturous death in one's hands so completely that it takes little more than the attention of the victim and an expenditure of will?

No vampire who has ever made use of Mortal Fear can honestly consider himself anything other than a fiend. Those who make frequent use of it often shatter

themselves in the process, bringing on Schizophrenia or intense Fugues as the last of their Humanity collapses in a riot of self-denial and hopeless rebellion.

Obfuscate

There is no power more directly advantageous to the hunt than the power of camouflage. With the Discipline of Obfuscate, a vampire may stalk his prey with relative ease, slipping in and out of the mortal milieu invisibly. He may take his time, choosing the moment of his attack with conscious, precise calculation, timing his strike to maximize ease and minimize the chance of interruption or witness. By extension, Obfuscate is the perfect power of espionage and assassination, allowing the vampire to watch without being seen, approach without being heard and strike without being known. But the power of invisibility has an unseen price all its own — and one that vampires never really come to understand until it is already paid.

• *Touch of Shadow*

At first, a vampire can only conceal small objects with a touch, palming or pocketing them without fear of notice. The extension of this power to larger objects (or even negative spaces) doesn't usually occur to most

Kindred on their own — it must either be demonstrated by a more experienced teacher or discovered by accident. More than one neonate has attempted to conceal a doorknob or a lock and succeeded powerfully, finding that observers react as though the entire portal has vanished from sight.

This power is, of course, incredibly tempting to Greedy or Envious vampires. It makes perfect petty thieves of them, and they are quick to make use of it. Valuables, weapons and even trinkets vanish as they pass, disappearing into the folds of their clothing for later sorting. Greedy Kindred especially risk compulsive thievery to the point of derangement.

Cruel vampires find that the Touch of Shadow has another use. They corner their victims, using their power to obscure his means of escape and watch coldly as panic and fear overwhelm him, bringing him to the point of collapse. This inhumane entertainment is known among the Nosferatu as “mousing,” because its malicious sport brings to mind the behavior of a cat with its prey.

•• *Mask of Tranquility*

Kindred who wear the Mask of Tranquility become invisible to one of the most crucial senses in the vampire's repertoire: the instinctive ability to identify another of



their kind. This power is more than a convenient way to avoid the dangers of the Predator's Taint. It allows a vampire to masquerade as a mortal in Kindred company, and its use in conjunction with more mundane concealments make it the perfect tool of surprise. Stories of a vampire who disguised herself and tempted an unwitting rival to feed on her during his nightly hunt, thus bringing him to his knees, are well-known to the Mekhet, and the tactic of hiding within a mortal crowd in order to launch an unexpected attack is so common to the Nosferatu that many Kindred who earn their ire are driven to distraction every time they find themselves near a crowd, scanning it frantically for mundane signs of a vampire's presence.

But while the vampire who uses this power may remain invisible to the instinct of his compatriots, he himself is unaffected. He must beat down the rage or fear of the Beast every time he nears unfamiliar Kindred, and he understands that the result, if he fails to resist frenzy, will be one-sided. The target of his anger or fear will not react with frenzy — at least not until they are injured.

Many vampires who degenerate after a reaction like this become suspicious creatures, always watching to make sure they can avoid repeating their mistake. Some actually become phobic of vampires, withdrawing completely from Kindred society in payment for their gross miscalculation.

● ● ● *Cloak of Night*

Already invisible to instinct, the vampire who learns the Cloak of Night now becomes truly unseen. With the ability to move undetectably through mortal and vampire ranks, temptation to behave without restraint becomes strong, and vice-ridden Kindred are sure to indulge it. In fact, the urge to misconduct is so powerful that many will hesitate to teach this power to young vampires, and most make a point never to instruct the sinful Daeva in its workings.

Along with the temptation to behave crudely, there is another price to pay for the Cloak of Night. People conduct themselves very differently when they think they are unobserved, and many really only hold their uglier urges in check in public because they fear the judgment of others, not because they are truly moral people. Invisible Kindred have the opportunity to bear witness to this side of humanity. They see the relaxation of façade and the unrestrained squalor, the weird habits and disgusting tics that many mortals hide from each other. Illusions are shattered, and distasteful truths reveal themselves: the graceful supermodel who picks her nose, the pious priest who masturbates compulsively

or the charity spokesman who kicks his cat. All the hypocrisy and weakness of humanity unfolds before the unseen vampire, and all but the most humane and sympathetic Kindred quickly grow disgusted with the display and, by extension, the mortals who reveal it.

Vampires who witness the unshrouded truth of mortal weakness risk Depression as they search hopelessly for a truly honest human, or Megalomania as they imagine themselves (inevitably falsely) to be better than all they see. Some become obsessed with their own faults, trying desperately to eliminate them and demonstrate that superiority to themselves, if not others.

● ● ● ● *The Familiar Stranger*

While the power to appear as someone else is extremely useful, tactically speaking, there is an emotional component to it that is ignored at the vampire's peril. Mortals react appropriately to the person they think the vampire is, and sometimes surprise him with expressions of love, desire or pity — attentions that lonely Kindred crave deeply. A careless vampire can be entrapped by this display, hesitating to strike or remaining longer than necessary just so he can bask in the glow of affection. He fools himself, pretending, if only for a moment, that the fondness expressed is truly meant for him — a crude, self-inflicted illusion that is bound to collapse relatively quickly. Some who are drawn into this small game of make-believe flirt with Depression when the reality of their situation comes crashing in, and the mortal who caresses them recoils in uncomprehending horror.

Because this power carries no cost, some vampires make nearly constant use of it. They flicker through the world of the living, greeted with familiar waves and smiles by all, knowing quite well that they are never who they seem. These Kindred begin to neglect their own personalities, satisfying themselves with the false conviviality of strangers and pretending to be so many people that they are never really anybody at all. Eventually, they risk slipping into a sort of delusional amnesia, in which they forget themselves completely, and become strange, nearly autonomous Kindred with no discernible personalities of their own.

● ● ● ● ● *Cloak the Gathering*

Strangely, while most of the Disciplines of the Kindred tend to be present a greater threat to the psyche the further they develop, the final power of Obfuscate is one that actually presents an avenue of relief. Many Kindred who learn it suffer the effects of isolation and disillusionment that the lower powers of the Discipline bring on, and many of those effects can be mitigated

by *sharing* the experiences that brought them on. The vampire need only take a friend or ally into his world of invisible observation to see that all he has come to know has just the same effect on others as it does on him. He can commiserate, sharing the exact same experience with another and understanding that she reacts just as he does. He reassures himself: he is not alone.

Of course, most Kindred won't want him to render them invisible just so that they can spy on ordinary mortals with him and justify his reasoning. They will want to use the power tactically, to surprise their foes or invade territory. They will want him to cloak them so that they can commit violence undiscovered. If they do not indulge his urge (and he will almost certainly hope they do) to share his knowledge, he will only be disappointed more deeply than ever before.

Protean

There is a common tone to the teachings of Gangrel sires. No matter how they choose to say it, all deliver a similar message: "We are not what our bodies seem to suggest." While the vampires of other clans may take pains to merge with human society and identify with their prey, many of the Gangrel understand that the animalistic nature of the Kindred places them more firmly in the milieu of beasts, not men. Protean is an expression of this philosophy, and all of its powers underscore the point, to the betterment or detriment of the vampire who uses them.

• Aspect of the Predator

The vampire with this power has an aura of predatory viciousness about her at all times. Kindred will be given pause when they meet her, since she displays no fear in their presence. Even vampires who are vastly more powerful may mistake her for an equal or better, considering her response when they meet unexpected.

But how does this make the vampire feel? To her, all Kindred seem equal or lesser threats. She feels no instinctive fear when crossing paths with a strange predator, no urge to run. The Beast always responds with rage.

Even those few Kindred who understand that this feeling may be false, that it is a feature of the Gangrel — even they are cut loose from the single most reliable measure of relative power Kindred have for each other. They may be able to fool interloping enemies, but they must know that they, too, cannot measure the true power of those foes.

Most Gangrel are taught to assume that every vampire is potentially greater in power than they. Paradoxically,

most are also taught to respond with maximum fierceness when encountering strange vampires, relying upon the Aspect of the Predator and their apparent confidence to aid them in driving off enemies who would otherwise choose to fight.

For Kindred neonates who were unassuming or weak in life, this power can prove too heady to handle. They mistake its effect for a true measure of relative strength, and often push confrontations too far, for too little gain. Most who do so are lucky if they survive longer than a month as Kindred.

•• Haven of Soil

Haven of Soil is probably the single most dominant shaping influence on the Gangrel psyche. Vampires who possess this power are no longer tied to a haven in the traditional, material sense — they need not seek shelter from the sun. The earth itself (or stone, or wood or water) provides safe retreat, and the vampire is free to roam as is his wont, so long as he remains close to the natural material he needs to survive. Because of this, Gangrel wander openly and without fear, while other Kindred are tied to their carefully assembled dens.

Because of this, also, vampires with this power tend not to grow attached to any particular haven, or to the goods that often adorn those homes. It is easy for them to withdraw from the world of materialism, and to refrain from basing their judgment on the quality of one's possessions. This psychological release is responsible, in part, for the stereotypical "enlightened" Gangrel, moving easily through his Requiem, unbound by property.

Without attachment, however, there is the danger of aimlessness. Some Kindred with this power move too much, failing to establish themselves in a reliable feeding ground and remaining at the fringe of Kindred society. Some become unmoored, silent and withdrawn. In their isolation, they have no support in their battle against the Beast — and many, ultimately too weak to wage a solitary campaign, fall without ever reaching out for the hands that could save them.

••• Claws of the Wild

This power affords a vampire immediate access to hidden weapons so deadly that they inflict aggravated damage on Kindred victims. These claws are always concealed within the flesh of the Gangrel, always ready to unsheathe in response to the Beast's call. Knowing that they walk with the capacity to kill their own kind as easily as the mortals around them, vampires with Claws of the Wild must be even more careful to

avoid unnecessary conflict and the risk of frenzy than other Kindred.

Unfortunately, this capacity marks vampires who possess it as killers of their own kind, and others usually react appropriately: avoiding them completely or putting them to use as foot soldiers and assassins. None of these options is exactly healthy, mentally speaking, and all can lead to rapid degeneration.

Meanwhile, the claws themselves are an overt indication of the vampire's growing distance from the human being she once was. There is no denying that they are features more animal than man, and that there is little practical use for them except in stalking and killing one's prey.

●●●● *Shape of the Beast*

If a vampire is a Beast clothed in the flesh of a man, should it not be just as simple (or logical) to clothe itself in the flesh of any animal? For Kindred who learn to take on the Shape of the Beast, the answer is yes. There is little operative difference between their two (or three or many) forms, even though the human one is what they were born and Embraced with.

The first animal form that Gangrel learn is very important to them. Whether or not it expresses some inner predilection (or, as some say, spirit connection) is a matter of constant debate, but the fact is that it remains the favored form of the vampire for the rest of her existence. Some spend more time in the animal flesh than human, even accepting the extra cost of Vitae to sleep as the beast.

It is said that there are Gangrel who come to believe that they are truly the animal, and that the human form they take is the false one, adopted only to ease the hunt and relate more comfortably to other Kindred. For some, this is an affectation based on disgust with mortal and Kindred behavior, or indicating an aspiration to greater harmony with the natural world. For others, though, it becomes a delusional obsession, and cannot be questioned without raising the irrational ire of the vampire.

●●●●● *Body of Spirit*

Body of Spirit represents the ultimate release from the boundaries of the flesh. Whereas the lower powers of Protean grant a vampire increased mobility, utility and multiple forms, this one allows him to abandon form altogether, drifting through the material world as an incorporeal mist.

The freedom Body of Spirit affords a vampire is incredible. Barriers must be completely impermeable

to keep a vampire at bay. Warrior Kindred can use Body of Spirit to avoid injury and baffle foes, flying apart and coalescing in the middle of a battle, choosing the time and place of their strike while leaving their opponent incapable of landing a blow until the selected moment.

There is nothing of the human in the Body of Spirit, either physically or psychologically. A vampire who assumes this form knows, subconsciously (if not consciously) that he is completely untethered from his mortal form, and can freely flow from one shape to the next, or, as with this mist, into no shape at all. For some vampires, this understanding has profound impact, whether they admit it or not. Some give way to melancholia without knowing the source of their sadness. Others become delusional, believing that they are more ghost or god than vampire, or a natural phenomenon masquerading as a man, or something even more alien.

Resilience

Bravery and foolhardiness are both the hallmarks of the Resilient vampire, for though she may suffer the pain of injury, she recovers from all but the most destructive assault with relative ease. What lesson is taught, then, to young Kindred who can rise after being riddled with bullets, run down by speeding vehicles or even touched by flame? Many begin to imagine that they are truly indestructible, and serious errors in judgment can result. Most have no idea where to draw the limit of their hardiness, and few get the chance to test it more than once.

Young Gangrel are less prone to overestimating their Resilience — perhaps they tend to suffer more injury than other Kindred early in their Requiem because they have no supernatural means of calming, cowering, or hiding from mortals. Even they give way to brashness though, assuming that they can take more damage than anyone is capable of dealing them.

You may have a perfect understanding of the exact mechanical advantage provided by Resilience, but that doesn't mean your character does. Players are advised to amp up their Resilient characters' confidence in physical scenes, and Storytellers should help create that effect by underplaying threats to characters who tend to rely on the Discipline — if they don't usually have a problem with bullets, then describe guns in diminutive terms whenever they encounter them. A threatening mortal doesn't hold a .45 caliber pistol, for example, he holds a "little gun." A sword-wielding enemy brandishes a "flimsy-looking blade." Mortals

don't exactly treat envelopes with caution because they know they might get a paper cut. Likewise, most weapons will strike many Resilient Kindred as mere annoyances . . . until they prove otherwise.

That's not to say that Resilience makes a character stupid. If she knows something can actually hurt her, she won't ignore it. Weapons that have failed to do much serious damage in the past, however, will be dismissed — and ones that have never been encountered before probably won't come up on the radar until they demonstrate a real capacity to harm.

There's another common psychological effect of Resilience. Contrary to the assumption of Kindred without the power, Resilient vampires suffer punishment just as everyone else. They can just take a whole lot more of it. Do keep in mind that a character with a lot of Resilience is going to be just as unhappy with being injured as any normal individual — but will likely receive less sympathy from onlookers. If vampires know that a certain Ventrue can take ridiculous amounts of damage before falling, they aren't likely to listen when he cries out in pain . . . and that leads to resentment. It's not unusual for a vampire with incredible physical toughness to be surprisingly sensitive to a lack of concern on the part of their friends and allies. Some even take on an Inferiority Complex, becoming convinced that nobody cares for them because they're worthless, not because they're tougher than most.

Vigor

While no Discipline is natural, Vigor often seems most comfortable to vampires who develop it. To most, it is nothing more than a refinement of the "flex," pushing Vitae into the muscles to increase one's strength. Many Kindred never realize that their increased strength is a Discipline at all — it certainly doesn't involve the same conscious effort as Dominate or Protean, and it doesn't tire the user as obviously as Nightmare or Majesty.

It is this misunderstanding, willful or otherwise, that leads the way to Vigor's most dangerous quality. Since it so greatly enhances a vampire's physical acumen, many become dependent on it, feeling weak when they fight, hunt or even meet with other Kindred without the infusion of its power. That infusion costs Vitae, though, and those who come to rely upon it must feed much more frequently than those who learn to exist without it. A vampire who does not understand that Vigor is a Discipline, and a costly one at that, risks becoming a voracious hunter, constantly running low and risking

Wassail. It is believed that some Vigor-fueled Kindred feed as much as four or five times more frequently than their weaker contemporaries — a risky proposition in the best of circumstances.

To many, Vigor involves another hidden danger. The discipline is base, say Kindred, because it is nearly unconscious in application. It's well-known that a vampire in frenzy will often make use of Vigor to the exclusion of other powers. This phenomenon has encouraged certain Daeva to create another name for the Discipline: "The Beast's favor." Characters with this Discipline should make use of it whenever frenzy takes them over to ensure maximum destruction and illustrate the power that boils beneath the veneer of conscious restraint. The theme of Man versus Beast is underscored very neatly by the overwhelming result.

Storytellers should make every effort to describe the devastating effect of a Vigor-empowered frenzy. Victims should be literally torn apart, their bones shattered and their flesh in tatters. Inanimate objects should likewise be ripped to pieces — glass, stone and wood left in ragged splinters, plastics pulled out of shape and metals bent or snapped apart.

Kindred who were physically weak in life are even more vulnerable to the lure of Vigor. Some become enamored with their newfound strength, developing a variation of Narcissism or even full-blown Megalomania. These vampires feel the need to demonstrate their power unnecessarily, pushing through the fragile world around them like so much tissue, mesmerizing themselves with mad pleasure at the result. In every domain, astute Kindred watch for the telltale marks of a vampire so captivated by her own strength — bent girders, blasted stone and the like — because they provide an early hint that a local vampire is in the process of losing his mind.

To stave off madness, a great majority of the Kindred teach some means of restraint to their childer. Many practice rigid, endlessly repetitive martial arts exercises, making sure that the fledgling learn a complete awareness of her body and an understanding of her strength — both with and without the application of Vigor. Others engage in meditative instruction or other mental exercise meant to bolster one's will and encourage resistance to the temptations of the flesh. Some simply maintain a practice of restraint, working to avoid physical confrontation as much as is possible. Elder Kindred often pity those neonates who choose none of these options, for they are not expected to survive long.

Epilogue: The Blood (Reprise)

IF the time between their first encounter and their second was difficult for Reyner, the time that passed between the second and the third was maddening. He occasionally heard Ayla's name from others, but he never pressed for details; he had no desire for his connection to her to be known. He was too familiar with the *Danse Macabre* that swept up only the most vigilant and determined hold-outs - like himself - and knew that even the smallest confession could be used against him one night no matter how unlikely it seemed. He avoided the Pavillion also, not daring to risk a chance encounter with one of her many companions and, even more importantly, not wishing to see her. He had put things in motion - slow motion though it may be - and the only chance his plan had of working was if it was left to do so without interference. She knew his intent, she knew his reasons, and unless he was utterly mad, she would eventually answer his subtle summons.

OF course, being convinced of this did not make the wait any easier. His masterpiece completed, all his passions expended on that one portrait, he did not return to his studio, so he did not have art to take his mind off the crawling time.

He tried to throw himself into his studies, to grasp the final tier of the Coil of the Beast, but it eluded him. His concentration was not what it once was. For a time, he tried to battle the creeping angst by sampling the night as she did, turning up the volume and doubling the tempo of his own Requiem. He frequented establishments within the bounds of his territory that previously he had bypassed, but now he forced himself to wallow in the celebratory spirit of the short-lived kine and their frivolous ways in the hopes that it might somehow infect him and stave off the depression that threatened to further darken

his already shadowy existence. He even went so far as to seek out Mitch and Audrine and even Gallo, his own coterie at one time, before he dedicated himself to the oaths of the *Ordo Dracul*.



However, neither Mitch nor Audrine was very interested in reestablishing their old ties. Surprisingly, it was Gallo who enthusiastically welcomed Reyner back into his Requiem. The old Haunt introduced him to his new coterie and pressed Reyner to throw in with this new bunch, but despite the satisfaction he got from spending time with Gallo again, Reyner had changed too much to feel comfortable with these Kindred. He rarely saw Gallo much after that. Reading literature, exploring other parts of the city and honing some of his own Disciplines filled his nights, but none could fully banish the pangs he felt whenever he thought of Ayla whirling like a dervish to the salsa rhythm, reveling in her immortality so brazenly and so honestly. He envied this, and it made him only want her that much more.

The hunt was his greatest escape from himself during this time. He took his time even more than he usually did, almost teasing himself in order to draw out the pleasure when he finally could resist no more. Like a monk, he purposefully denied himself Blood, not only because it would enlarge his understanding of the Coils that were so fundamental to his Order, but just as much to simply blot out the

relentless expectation that ate away at his mind night after night. He worried that he might actually become deranged if it continued unabated for too much longer, and so he indulged in his bloodlust far more than he was accustomed to. Although he had murdered before, and though it did not become routine for him by any stretch, he grew less concerned with it when it did happen, examining the expiration of his prey from a very detached place, wondering if he might gain any further insight into the Great Work from the experiences. He also

volunteered his time to certain Dragons whom he knew would welcome the offer, whether they merely needed his assistance cataloguing old tomes or for something far more pressing, such as discerning the location of a new Dragon's Nest. His volunteerism provided him with small but very beneficial rewards, but none could make time go by any faster.

One particularly warm evening when the city seemed almost on fire and the moon was almost too bright and Reyner could feel his skin painfully crawl under its unreal illumination, he made an excursion



to the neighborhood in the suburbs where he had lived in his parents' home before moving out for college and eventually his own apartment downtown. He hired a limousine, allowing him the privacy to watch the familiar landmarks pass by, speeding up his vision so that no detail escaped his reminiscing eyes. He expected to feel something – remorse, love, happiness, pain – when he pulled up in front of the house, but he had nothing left to feel. The people who lived there now had repainted it an ugly yellow and there was a basketball hoop in the driveway now, but otherwise it looked much as he remembered it. Still, it roused no emotion, and instead of getting out and maybe walking around his old neighborhood for a while as he had envisioned doing, he merely told the driver to continue on back to the city. There was no going back, not even in this small way; at least not for Reyner. Whoever he had been, whatever he had been, was no more. It was as alien to him now as anything could be.

She showed up unannounced shortly after midnight on an evening of no other importance. He didn't ask her how she found his haven, and he honestly didn't care; at least not then. Reyner was occupied by a novel

about the sea, about its depths and a man who discovers more about himself by his exploration of the sea, only a single candle illuminating his unimposing apartment. His distaste for light had caused him to remove all light bulbs long before, and so gloom reigned here at all times. His furnishings were sparse, but handsome. His windows were wide so that the lush pollen scented air was allowed to fill his space. The knock surprised him and for a moment put him on high alert. Don never let anyone up on the sixth floor, and so Reyner's first thought was that something had happened to Don, or worse. Almost reflexively, Reyner cast open his senses to learn more, and it was because of this that his nerves were calmed, though other thoughts and feelings suddenly raced through his still

unprepared mind. He heard her voice, nothing more than a barely audible whisper, actually, slowly repeating, "It's me, Ayla," which to him was as loud and clear as if she were announcing it on a loudspeaker. He hurriedly comforted himself, put down his book and answered the door.

Ayla stood there, patient, a faint smile on her face, radiant as ever, her pale flesh glowing in the stygian hallway; *Persephone in Hades*, he thought. Without too much awk-

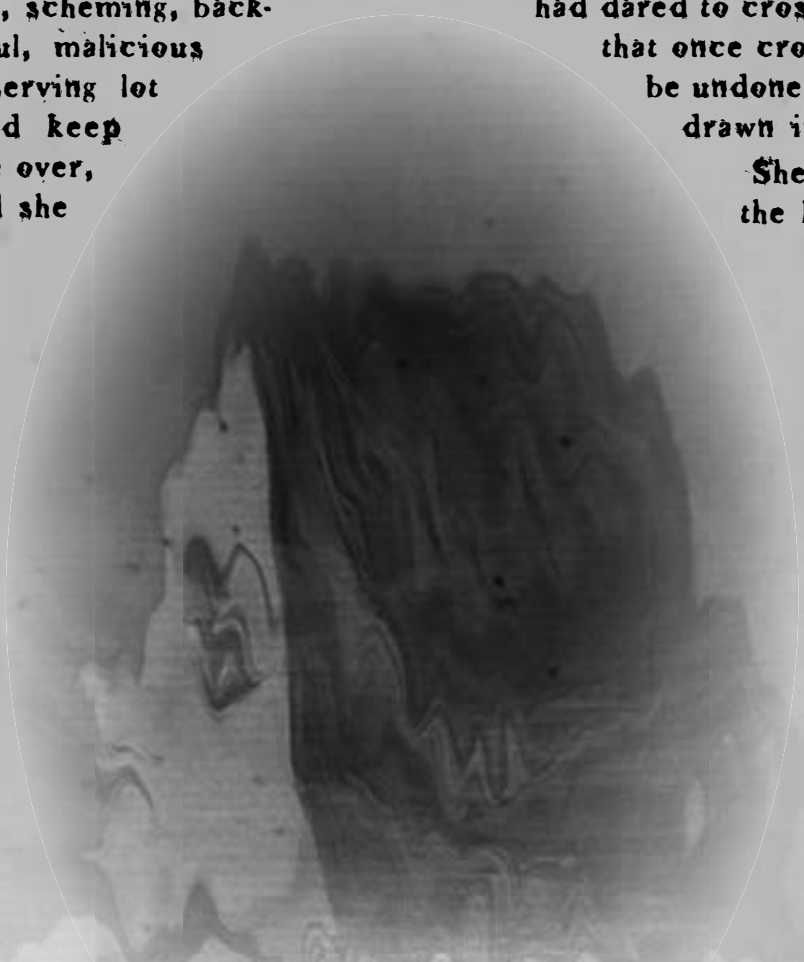
wardness he welcomed her in, noting all too well that she held the sheathed knife in her right hand as if it were only a paperback or maybe sunglasses and not a 100-year-old Muslim dagger. She sat on his sofa without complaint, though it was likely less luxurious than she was used to, and looked him in the eye. There was no fear, no instability, only determination and, yes, excitement. He had been correct about everything. Without even realizing he was doing it, he spoke this to her without words, and he heard her psychic response: yes.

There was no need to ask for assurances or to patronize her with warnings or promises. No, she had come here because she knew what he was offering her, and while she had always wanted it before, no matter how forbidden or terrifying it might be, she had never dared to trust herself to anyone else the way she believed she could with him. He, of all the Kindred she knew - the entire gossiping, sniping, scheming, backstabbing, deceitful, malicious and utterly self-serving lot of them - would keep their secret. More over, of all the Kindred she

had met since her own Embrace, she felt he did understand her and that this thing they would share would be something that would bring a meaning to both their Requiems in a way that nothing else could.

Here eyes glowed like a cat about to eat the canary, her lips quivered and her nostrils flared in anticipation of what he was about to give her. Even as she sat, her posture was that of an animal, a sleek, lethal panther waiting for the moment when it would be permitted to strike and take its bloody fill. Reyner felt his own Vitae churn with a similar anticipation. Tonight, a bond would be formed between them, a secret bond that no one else need ever know about, one that would weave their Requiems together and heighten all their experiences going forward. Tonight, they would dance their own private dance, a silent Danse Macabre that would change everything. Tonight, they would both cross a line that neither had dared to cross before, a line that once crossed could not be undone, a line that was drawn in blood.

She unsheathed
the knife





"I hear you talking.

I recognize your voice.

I feel you, your skin.

I see you looking at me.

I know you're saying something.

But all I hear, all I see,

all I smell is

blood,

blood,

blood."

— Sapphë, the Shadow of Glasgow

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