

Cleveland By Night

*An Introductory
Sandbox Campaign*



Cleveland By Night

An Introductory Campaign and Setting for Vampire: the Masquerade
20th Anniversary Edition

Text and uncredited illustrations by Gregor Schwartzwald

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Chapter 0 - What to Expect From the Chronicle

Chapter 0 is our text version of Session 0. This is what this setting is about and why you'd want to play in it. In the same way players and STs should talk about expectations and rough plans for an upcoming game and set up any necessary in-character details before play starts, this book covers what it expects from the players and STs, what it provides to them, and why you would pick this book to help run this setting.

Players

Cleveland By Night is a setting that's intended to help new players warm up to some of the less-obvious details in Vampire: the Masquerade. If you've never played VtM before, this is a good chronicle to learn how the game differs from other, combat-focused RPGs. You might see a lot of terms that don't have any context or meaning to you right now, but by the end of the campaign you'll know exactly what "Larry the Toreador Primogen" means. This setting is intended to let you learn how everything works in play, though you'll find a lot of benefit if you've read the core book's descriptions of the clans and sects before gameplay starts. Having a rough idea of a character

Experienced players can also have fun by ramping up some of the more ridiculous aspects of the setting and playing as the less commonly seen bloodlines. CBN is also a setting that understands some of the idiosyncrasies between the world described in the setting and the world as experienced in play, and fully engages those differences to benefit the player. VtM can be many different things at once, and this book wants to get everyone playing or storytelling it to be on the same page.

All the PCs should be lying about some part of their identity. Clan, Faction, obvious Merits or Flaws, or other core parts of the character. All of the NPCs will be too. It's not impossible for a vampire in Cleveland to see how far being honest in a city full of liars will get them, but this won't get them very far outside of the city, and somewhat defeats the intent of this book.

All of the PCs should present themselves as different clans and sects. Overlap is allowable, but the player's coterie should be varied as possible. The core 4 sects (Camarilla, Anarch, Sabbat, Independent clans) are expected to be present, and the more obscure sects, like the Inconnu or Tal'Mahe'Ra, should only be brought in for players familiar with the majority of the VtM setting and history.

Storytellers

Cleveland By Night doesn't expect or require the Storyteller to be experienced. It certainly helps if you've played some tabletop RPGs before, but if you're new to Vampire: the Masquerade there are tools and suggestions to help you out. The only things expected from the ST are an understanding of the stereotypes for the base clans and sects, and a willingness to make up details as they go along and stick with them. Experienced STs may still have a lot of fun in the sandbox presented in this book, and might learn some new tricks if they haven't seen things like the conspiracy web before. This book should be a great guide for new storytellers on how to integrate all the clans and sects the book presents, and long time storytellers should find it to be an interesting take on the setting they may not have considered before.

This is a setting about intrigue, identity, and lying, amped up to the maximum. The main reason you'd want to run this setting is because you want a game about hidden identities and infiltrators, taken to the absolute limit, and attempting to do it with a straight face. Every vampire in Cleveland, when others are watching, will act as expected of their known rank and place in the city. In private, everyone will be setting up others for a fall by forcing them to act as expected in public, and determining how to weasel out of the setups they knowingly need to walk into. The great hook that makes this new player friendly, is that most NPCs will just go along with whatever gets announced in public, knowing that it's a sham and that they'll need to go along with it to learn the truth. For example, if Larry the Toreador Primogen suddenly declares himself to be a rogue Nagaraja working for the Sabbat, the local Sabbat will take him in and praise their infiltrator for getting so far in their work against the Camarilla while the Prince denounces Larry and anyone that supported him. This is a generous, forgiving setting...as long as there are witnesses.

This is also a book that wants to make running the game as easy as possible for the ST. The ST wants to do as little prep work as possible, to rely on the players to move the plot forward as much as possible, and to improvise details and connections with minimum effort on integrating them into the plot. This isn't as hard as it sounds, and a little practice goes a long way towards learning to this approach.

Changes

CBN touches on 2 core ideas in VtM, and exaggerates them in the name of fun. You can play the game as silly, or straight faced, but you know OOC what we're doing and why.

- 1) Nature and Demeanor have their focus changed from 'personality' to 'identity', and allow for practice of the subtle blending between them. It's great to watch players RP a character and skillfully blend their Bravo nature and Bon Vivant demeanor when they bully around those giving judgemental looks at their gluttonous excesses, but it's also a lot of fun to take the idea and apply it to bigger, more obvious parts of a character's identity. Newer players often stick to stereotypes for their clan and sect as their PC's personality instead of Nature and Demeanor, so embracing that trend will help new players practice blending, shifting, and hiding their PC's behavior to make the change to using them as written easier.
- 2) The coterie is assumed in VtM to be the PCs actual core loyalty with some room for backstabbing for political gain. The CBN setting requires that the coterie always, honestly cooperates and only does any back-stabbing performatively. In public, the PCs will take different sides and may possibly be petitioning for each other's death for various reasons, but in private they've already rehearsed that plan and they all know the escape route that someone (conveniently) forgot to cover. A player that legitimately wants to impede the other player's progress for their own fun should reconsider participating in a CBN campaign.

The base assumption is true in most games, but here there's much more public display of antagonism and private discussion on how to look like you're not in a coterie with members of an opposing faction. Also note that in Cleveland, ridiculous plans or obvious flaws are often allowed to go through. NPCs are usually much less interested in outright killing PCs as they are getting info on *who they are* and *who their real friends are*, and using that against them later. Many NPCs that should have noticed a thing or stopped an enemy from escaping often don't, to report out to their allies the info they found.

The Setting

Cleveland By Night is intended to be a low-power, time-limited, sandbox campaign. The setting and campaign are self-contained, and you won't need to deal with bigger players in the global vampire conspiracy. No character will have a title greater than Prince or its non-Camarilla equivalents, and no metaplot agents of unspeakable power will show up to stomp your plans flat. As written, the book details a campaign to run for about 18 games. You can run more or fewer sessions to fit your schedules and patience for the story's resolution, but expect a final, climactic session where the PCs escape Cleveland or die trying. Beyond that, the PCs will work towards their own outlandish goals, and the ST will be scattering plot hooks around to tempt the PCs. There shouldn't be one single plot that the players show up and listen to, there should be a plot made by each PC that they're always working on through their actions and other short, interconnected events that remind them things still happen in Cleveland outside of their haven.

Cleveland By Night is a full-genre setting. All clans and sects are present, though numbers vary frequently and dramatically. Most of the bloodlines in the book can also be found, though they may be hiding in a different sect or disguised as a different clan. Players and their ST should determine how the rules on rarity, limiting origins, or unusual memberships limits do or do not apply in Cleveland. You may find Sons of Discord here, if you agree that you could, and more Salubri have passed through Cleveland than are thought to exist on the planet. These rules are not ignored because we want a superpowered campaign, they are ignored because this campaign is about hiding your identity and getting away with it. One way you might choose to do is to present yourself as something rare and useful to everyone, or to be something rare trying to pass as a commoner.

Cleveland, the city itself, is a tertiary detail to the setting compared to the plans listed above. The city's primary purpose is to provide a little bit of everything in one spot, and a lakefront Rust Belt metropolis is able to manage that spectacularly. Cleveland has anything you would want out of a city, but everything feels slightly smaller than you might expect compared to New York or London. What Cleveland has in volume is empty spaces to hide and act without being caught, especially when you expand your sights to the county hosting all the suburbs that prop up the downtown area. You will get a list and location of many interesting places in Cleveland, but this is a game supplement, not a travel guide.

If these elements aren't things that you have played with heavily before, or are new to the game and want bigger, easier to see examples of what complicated politics looks like in Vampire, this is the setting for you. If you want to play in a setting with infiltration and intrigue dialed to GONZO, this is the setting for you. If you want a setting where you don't need to master half a dozen Disciplines to make an impact, this is the setting for you.

Chapter 1 - Cleveland from the Outside

Very few Kindred can explain the political status of Cleveland beyond “It’s bullshit and lies”. Fewer may actually care. There’s a limited number of stories from before or during the Industrial Revolution about then-important Kindred doing then-important things, but you’ll be hard-pressed to find a Harpy that can report status or titles for the city in the last hundred-something years. After all, there’s so many big players across the world, and doing the math says that Cleveland can support 4 Kindred at most. That’s not even a Sabbat pack’s worth of vampires to bother looking out for.

The Camarilla doesn’t acknowledge Cleveland as it’s domain, and assume any report of a Prince there is a prank or a trap to bait some investigator into a Sabbat ambush. The Sabbat doesn’t bother tracing any reports of packs in the city, so any Sabbat presence there is always treated as past-tense. The Anarchs aren’t interested in enforcing any sort of hierarchy across cities, so whatever someone wants to say is fine, keeping it true is their own problem.

The Independents don’t communicate secrets outside of their own clans, but somewhere in each of their separate hierarchies they’ve gathered enough info to understand what’s going on and why it stands out. They also know that they can send clan member to Cleveland to learn a certain skill set, but they can’t trust anyone that says they’re from the city for the same reason. Despite this, some consistent facts about the city’s kindred population and their behavior have come to their attention.

Cleveland is surprisingly welcoming. It’s where any Kindred can go to hide. Reasons vary, but no one is in Cleveland to be found. Some have hiding from big, possibly lethal past mistakes, some are mastering how to stay unnoticed in a crowd, and some simply want to establish ties to make a new family where old contacts or enemies won’t look. If you walk in and say who you are, or who you want to be, you’ll be believed. Everyone has a common enemy in the end, and it’s not you. Yet.

Cleveland is diverse and tolerant. Anyone can come to Cleveland and will be shown some basic hospitality. And once you realize that the county surrounding the city can easily handle 40 or more Kindred living there, there’s room for everyone that wants to be there. There’s a general understanding held by the Kindred of the Sixth City, that you don’t mess with anyone except the big dog. If you are the most powerful Kindred in Cleveland, you find yourself suddenly held to a much higher standard of behavior. In that case, you are everyone else’s common enemy, and you will be eliminated if you attempt to start acting like you control the city. It’s the chaos and change that are ever-present which makes Cleveland hospitable to anyone and everyone.

Many Kindred prepare for infiltrators from other sects or clans coming to spy on them, learning how to protect themselves and defend their secrets. Cleveland is where the infiltrators learn how to get through those defenses and not get caught. If you walk in claiming to be in a sect and clan, you'll be introduced to fellow kindred claiming the same for at least one of those. They are lying about something, but in public they're your allies for the time being.

Those that willingly traveled to Cleveland never share how they discovered the city as their ideal destination. The most common reason for being forcibly sent to Cleveland is that a troublesome new embrace has had their life spared by someone that promised their sire to take them off their hands (at significant expense to their sire), and that the relocated childer is expected to repay this boon sometime in the future.

It isn't clear to anyone, in town or not, how Cleveland got this way. The only solidly established fact is that Cleveland has been in this state long enough for elders to have dismissed the city entirely. Kindred that old do not take any news about Cleveland seriously. Younger kindred often simply don't know or care about Cleveland, believing it to be irrelevant. Anyone that shares info about Cleveland is setting themselves up to be disciplined by those that know better in their sect.

If you go to Cleveland, everyone else there implicitly understands that you're trying to hide. Tell them where you want to hide. They'll bring you there, no questions asked. They'll still perform politics in public after you've gotten settled in. You can't learn how to infiltrate if you can't pass as a legit member, after all, and inquiring into someone else's past starts inviting those questions back at you.

The down side to this understanding of deceit: No sects or clans acknowledge members from Cleveland. No Archons or Archbishops will rush to your aid. No family higher-up from foreign countries will bail you out. If they do, remember the single rule of Cleveland: they're lying about who they are, just like everyone else. If you leave Cleveland, you'll need a different backstory to re-integrate into Kindred society. Telling an experienced elder Harpy or Bishop "I just moved here from Cleveland" is the same as saying "I have walked out of a hellstorm of chaos and deceit and absolutely cannot be trusted." Conveniently, you'll have mastered lying about yourself to get what you want if you managed to escape.

Chapter 2 - Playing Cleveland from the Inside

Players should read through this section to get some idea of what's expected for a Cleveland By Night campaign. Much of it is general advice that translates out to many games or chronicles that may already be known by experienced players, though there are setting-specific bits that shouldn't be skipped.

How to Play A Cleveland Resident

Most characters in a CBN chronicle will be newly embraced members of various clans and sects sent here from out of town to learn some extreme subterfuge skills. The players and ST should collaborate on how this motley crew came to be before entering Cleveland. Sires or sect leaders trading favors or cashing in debts to an Independent clan is the simplest explanation if you find yourself struggling for motives.

If you want to play a native Cleveland human turned Kindred, make a 1 sentence description of your sire to be an NPC and ask your ST about taking the skill Area Lore(Cleveland). This skill gives your PC a good reason to know the city and for you to give answers about the location instead of or in addition to deferring to the ST. Use the skill to say that your PC already has this knowledge and knows who/where/how to do something in the county. Don't feel obligated to buy the skill as you play to represent the things you already learned during play, simply refer to facts the group has already established.

While you might want to write a backstory that's dozen of pages long, you will only need 4 solid, short ideas for a Cleveland By Night game

- Identity - This is what your character is, and probably how you'd describe them to another vampire player. "Camarilla Brujah", "Willingly Blind Tzimisce", "Buddhist Monk Toreador Antitribu" etc. Covers clan, sect, major merits/flaws or extremely general personality descriptions. No character outside of your coterie should know the truth about this in a Cleveland by Night chronicle.
- Disguise - Who your character is pretending to be in Cleveland. Looks very similar to Identity when written out, but will be how your characters acts and portrays themselves
- Goal - A thing your character wants to do in Cleveland, beyond getting out with your identity a secret. This should be outlandish, complicated, and exciting, but also shouldn't take up more resources than an American county has, nor should it require leaving the county.
- Quirk - You can put lots of thought and research into your character's behavior, but you only need one good mannerism to define them. A style of talking, a

subject they love deferring to, a two or three word catch phrase, a signature odd use of a discipline. Any of these can work to help break out of the wall of Ventre in suits and Brujah in biker leather.

If you are a new player, and feel a bit daunted at the idea of playing an infiltrator or untangling the complicated politics web a city full of infiltrators will create, you'll find it's pretty easy. For the Disguise part of your character, you can simply run with the stereotype you're trying to present. It's basically what the rest of the city will be doing, presenting themselves as believable stereotypes of the clan and sect they want to be. Procedures and rituals will be run by the book, partly to keep up appearances, and partly because infiltrators don't always have perfect knowledge and are running on stereotypes themselves. If you find that after a session or two, that you don't like the stereotype you're playing as, you can pick a new one, drop some clues that the new disguise is your real identity, and jump over in-game, and the NPCs will continue believing you, but they will remember when you jumped ship and who you were working with.

Finally, your character should have 1 tangible goal. It doesn't matter if your goal is publicly known or a secret, part of your Identity or not. It should be something that you can work towards with lots of small, measurable steps. If you want to learn every Discipline's first dot, that works, as you have to find who knows what and barter to learn them. If you want to be the Trash King of Cleveland and bury the city in refuse, this is also acceptable, you'll have a lot of work ahead to get the garbage and get it to stay where you want and lots of angry people to work against. If you want to kill one specific character in town, that's not particularly good for this chronicle, since you can do it in a lucky roll and then you're out of your own central plot hook.

The Sects

Each of the sects have a fairly steady presence in Cleveland. The numbers wax and wane, but rarely does a sect completely vanish.

How the Camarilla play

The Camarilla always wants to keep it's core structure of Prince, Seneschal, and Primogen Council in place. Titles will get doubled or tripled up as necessary to do this. The presence of a Prince marks whether the Camarilla claims control of the city. If the Camarilla acknowledge that some other sect runs the show, the Seneschal runs internal business and orders other Camarilla members around. The Primogen Court is happy to allow clans that aren't normally part of the Camarilla in if it's necessary to give them the membership to enforce the Prince's will.

11 is the break-even point between the Camarilla court running as expected and making some compromises to keep the general structure in place. There's simply too many titles that need to go around and not enough people subject to them if there's fewer members. Under 7 is when the Primogen Court is mostly made of Kindred that already have a position in the Camarilla and no one to delegate tasks to.

The Camarilla's general goals are to enforce the traditions, root out and stop the Sabbat's plans, and give and revoke status in accordance to how members act in line with those goals. When Cleveland is majority Camarilla, expect at least 1 status to be granted to someone nightly, at least 1 removed from someone at the same time, and a title of some kind to change hands when major actions happen.

How the Sabbat play

The Sabbat measure their strength by the number of packs in Cleveland. When they claim control, they tend to view the position of who runs the sect as an internal affair, with the Bishop's decrees more like suggestions. The presence of a Bishop emboldens the Sabbat to come out of hiding and start acting more like the lords over cattle they often talk about being, instead of hiding in the shadows waiting to make power plays against the Camarilla.

3 full packs of 4 or 5 members each establishes that the Sabbat is strong enough to run its internal structure and rituals correctly. This is also where packs have enough power and numbers to enforce the Sabbat's rules on outsiders and start 'encouraging' them to join and participate in their bigger rituals. Fewer packs in town stick to their own internal rituals and generally stay in hiding and plan on taking down the bigger sects in town instead of taking their place as the rulers over mortals they want to be.

By the nature of Cleveland, the Sabbat leaders are Loyalists or Moderates because these factions are against the middle-management layers in the Sabbat and in favor of packs or city leaders being the core of the Sabbat leadership. The Ultra-Conservatives or Orthodox factions rely too heavily on higher-up that will ignore or rebuke any information from Cleveland to be effective city leaders.

A Bishop's orders to packs are usually taken as either aspirational goals or suggestions. The packs in town tend to operate as their members see fit, though this usually falls into one of three groups. Some will attack any that seek to restrict their freedom to display their vampiric nature, some will insist on converting other kindred into Sabbat members, and some engage very heavily on the ritualist and religious side of the sect. Splitting these tasks across 3 packs works very nicely, though each pack will do each of those behaviors if necessary, even if they're not good at it.

How the Anarchs play

The Anarchs, appropriately, view running Cleveland as a joke. The other sects play it straight, but the Anarchs act like they're very aware of how nonsensical the flow of power is in the city. When a Baron claims control, their decrees tend to mock the other sects or the idea of trying to govern this chaotic mess of a city. This doesn't happen very often, but when Anarch support swells (or every other sect feels a need to avoid controlling town for some reason) some gutsy Anarch will go for it.

The Anarchs don't care how many members they have. Their point is to do what they want, undisturbed by the rules of others, and to throw that feeling of subjugation back at the other sects when they can. Positions and duties are made up on the spot and handed out as the Baron feels like it. Even to non-Anarchs. Especially to non-Anarchs for the purposes of mocking them. If the Anarchs attempt to create a functional city-wide governing body, they usually have some kind of enforcer position operating and a no-fighting "Elysium Lite" location to talk out issues instead of fighting in the street where all Kindred are welcome to go.

Any plans being executed by the Anarchs is less likely to be a sect-wide plot than it is to be 3 Kindred that happen to be Anarchs doing something together. Members that want to avoid being punished for the actions of others (which is most of them) tend to rat out fellow Anarchs to the other sects without some kind of kick-back or blackmail info being used as protection. On the opposite note, taking credit for a big move in town tends to get you noticed as a useful covert agent for the other sects, and can be quite lucrative for getting what you want as payment.

How the Independents play

Most of the independents and bloodlines don't have a strong internal structure. They can wander around town freely for the most part, as long as they don't interfere with others sect's plans. This means that they often act as free agents to interfere with others or offer unique help. Sometimes they trade their specific disciplines to gain political power in a sect, which is a bargain usually taken when offered. Both because these powers are useful themselves, and also because learning a clan specific discipline from someone is a great way to hide the fact you already have it and needed cover for why you had it.

The one exception to the lack of internal structure is the Giovanni, whose family structure puts a leader at the top, usually called the Don, and anyone else sits somewhere below them. The Don will send retainers, allies, or ghosts to you to relay meeting requests. The Don will never visit you directly, no matter who you are or what your title is. The Don establishes his power by forcing Princes and Bishops to fit his

schedule and demands. While the Giovanni are hard to infiltrate, there's several bloodlines with necromancy or similar disciplines that can pose as Giovanni, and sub-families with less interest in the dead that can be cover stories for other kindred sneaking in. The Giovanni are also banned from interfering in Camarilla politics, so when there's a Giovanni Primogen in town, it's because the Giovanni forced the Camarilla to break their own rules, not because the Giovanni are in breach of a promise or contract.

The Ravnos are supposed to be a fallen clan with very few members left in the world. You wouldn't know this in Cleveland. There may not be very many public Ravnos, but it's very easy for them to use Chimerstry to disguise themselves or their abilities. The smarter Ravnos start staging elaborate, nonsensical scenarios to discourage and confuse the Kindred that insist that anything weird is an illusion without confirming it, and also to demonstrate to those that use Auspex all the time that sometimes *weird shit is real no matter how much you want it not to be*.

Setites are known everywhere else for being sneaky, dangerous infiltrators. This is the status quo in Cleveland, and Setites often take the opportunity to make their clan public info, and use the attention towards it to distract from other, harder to find secrets about themselves. They're still playing the same game as the other Kindred in town, but what they're hiding, and why that's more important to hide than their clan, is often buried in layers of false details and red herrings. Blatant use of Serpentis in front of other Kindred is usually enough to cement a belief that you're a real Setite, though it's the ability to deliver on fulfilling someone's secret vices that proves your claim as a Setite to the rest of the city.

The Assamites in Cleveland are 100% mercenaries. They don't hide their clan, they don't pretend they aren't here to kill other vampires, and they only take payments in kindred blood. They simply make their services known and wait for clients to pay for them. Very few clients pay so well as to avoid giving the assassination target a counter-offer for revenge, but the price for your life when you're a moment from death is usually too high to pay to stop the work from being finished. It's very easy for most given Kindred to act like a murderer-for-hire, but the use of Quietus is the hard-to-fake part to hide your true clan.

The Bloodlines

There's 17 major bloodlines covered in V20, with 15 unique Disciplines among them that nearly confirm which one you are. The most common plan for one of these in Cleveland is to simply not use their unique Discipline, and pose as a clan that shares the other 2 in-clan Disciplines. Teaching others their unique discipline in secret is often a way to gain favors, titles, or cover stories from bigger political players, as they can use

the Discipline in public to confuse or mislead others in town. It does expose you secrets to one person, so you should attempt to get something equally dangerous to them back as payment.

Several of those bloodlines are considered extinct. Several also have fairly strong limitations on membership that would also immediately expose them or render them impractical for the players. Neither of these are necessarily true in Cleveland. Claiming membership in a dead clan is easy but difficult to confirm or prove. Claiming membership in an exclusive bloodline is just as easy but proving it usually requires leaving Cleveland for outside confirmation, but that's not supposed to happen in this campaign.

For a campaign with new players, I would suggest making the extinct bloodlines (All the entries in V20 from Ahriman to Noiad, inclusive) out-of-play, so that no PC or NPC will be one or claim to be one, and their Disciplines will not be used in-game.

Experienced players might enjoy the freedom of having extinct and exclusive bloodlines be available as options, and makes the web of deceit harder to unfurl. In this case, the players and ST should discuss which limitations are in-tact and which ones are not enforced in this campaign. Don't be concerned on deciding *how* a member of a long-dead bloodline survived and got to Cleveland, but do establish out which limitations on which ones are not going to be ignored.

How Does This Help Me Learn To Play Vampire?

If you've looked through the 20th Anniversary edition book, you can see that there's a lot of stuff going on in the Vampire setting. This chronicle helps bolt it down to a reasonable scope: a single major city. There's still almost everything from the book inside that city, but you don't need to manage anything on a global scale. It's enough that they exist, and they can be used when needed and ignored if not.

Once you're used to a whole city posturing to hide the truth, it's very easy to run or play in a bigger game with more subtle hidden motives. In CBN terms, remove Disguise from your backstory notes, and hide your Goal instead. That's all the conceptual changes needed to adapt your experience playing CBN to other Vampire campaigns or LARPs.

If you've gotten used to the stereotypes presented in Vampire, you can start bending and defying them in future games. Each clan's core idea and inspiration are clear in most other writing, and it's refreshing to see someone take the core and bend it farther than expected.

Suggestions on Playing in a Streamed Campaign

If you're playing for viewer's entertainment, ensure that your characters entertain. Your coterie is the only legit help you can expect in Cleveland, so you should be working together toward each other's goals and playing off each other in enjoyable ways.

One thing you should decide on as a group before play, is whether the viewers will know your PCs Identities, or if they'll be watching trying to figure it out along with the NPCs in Cleveland before the end. Either way, make a choice, be up front and consistent about it. If you're keeping secrets, don't discuss secrets on-camera and do that planning during downtime.

Have a camera and be engaged with the game. Viewers will notice if you're playing with your phone or browsing the net in another tab. However, it's more helpful for a streamed game to have everyone with a camera and distracted than 1 or 2 players with a camera and a bunch of faceless voices. If you have a tiny minority of players with cameras (or a majority that refuse to show their face online), you might be better off recording audio, and editing your game as a podcast. Making an edited podcast will make it easier to run a game where the listeners are working on figuring out the party's secrets, since you can cut out bits that shouldn't have been said out loud.

Remember to share the spotlight when playing on stream. Coordinate things during downtime to make sure everyone gets parts to shine in. This can rely on both the PCs asking for help, and the ST making sure there are challenges that rely on the coterie to cooperate. Expect less than an hour per game of spotlight for you and your PC. Working on plans and schemes as a group off-screen will help you stay interested and engaged in the other player's actions while they have the focus.

Don't mix science and magic. Don't do calculations on your Disciplines. If you want to do something that requires calculations, accept a yes or no answer without precise math from the ST in game. If your plan absolutely needs a specific result number, do your math during downtime and ask the ST if you can perform the effect for those results in the next game.

Keep the overlay clean. Don't make it too confusing, distracting, or cluttered. The focus should be on the game and the players, not trying to read a dozen notes in tiny text or waiting for a slideshow to get to the right frame. Any ancillary data that's really necessary should be available as a link elsewhere.

Chapter 3 - StoryTelling in Cleveland

Overview of the Campaign

This is meant to be a low power campaign. Starting with baseline PCs at creation, you should probably earn about 120 XP before the final scene. This will let players max out 2 In-Clan Disciplines if you buy nothing else, or give them the stats and skills to handle just about anything except some supernatural tricks. The end goal is to give the players enough points to be good at what they want to be, and to have the options to survive most 1 on 1 conflicts, but not to be unstoppable combat beasts against the hoard that will be coming for them at the end.

If you hand out XP generously (7 per session is generous by VtM standards), a campaign will last about 18 sessions before the players are the biggest targets in town and the final scene should occur. No characters in town will actually exceed 8th generation, though they may claim otherwise.

Most NPCs that need detailed character sheets should have ~75xp, which is enough to max out a discipline and have a surprise or two beyond that one 5-dot power. This makes all of the detailed NPCs unique in what they can provide, and forces them to work together against others. Other NPCs should have their stats written in simple explanations on a notecard, detailing their roll on their specialty, rolls on everything else, and which disciplines they have access to.

You will not need to have 40 NPCs made up at all times. You will probably have 2 or 3 full sheets for specific NPCs that have a lot defined about them, and a small stack of notecards with important details on the identity and witnessed abilities of other recurring NPCs. Any other NPC is an extra that could be upgraded on demand. Having all of town in the same spot does not require 40 NPC cards or sheets. Make one up if someone goes looking specifically for someone new, otherwise the body count is just a narrative detail.

Campaign Outline

The First Session

The first game should be an introduction to the city. The PCs arrive together, with how they were made into a coterie established as backstory. In the first game, they should find (or be given) their Haven, and then get into the city in the middle of some big event.

This event is the core of the Conspiracy Web that's been mentioned around before. It's not a bad idea to make this event some inter-sect political issue (Camarilla interfering with Sabbat rituals, or the Giovanni bribing Anarchs into anti-Camarilla behaviors, for example) but it should be a good example of what the ST expects to be important to their campaign. This should also be when the PCs can get introduced to their sects and/or clanmates, and gives those groups a potential goal to recruit their new member into working towards. A lot of NPCs might get introduced, but only a few of them will be recurring and important. Which ones will be determined by the player's choices.

Foreshadowing

There should be at least 2 games where the city comes together to kill and expose the strongest vampire in town. This involves everyone from all factions getting that character to appear somewhere, and having everyone explain out their theories and evidence on that character's real identity. Odds are, this will result in an attempt to kill that character. Keep in mind that the target in these scenes should be able to overpower or evade pretty much any single vampire in Cleveland at this point, and probably has 2 Disciplines maxed out or several at the 3-dot mark. One of these games should have them be killed, and one should show them escaping. These games will let players know how this may go for them later.

Breaking the Status Quo

There should be at least 1 leadership sect change in down during the campaign. Whichever sect was leading at the start of the campaign should not be at the end. During whichever session that power transfer occurs (possibly in a peaceful, "we acknowledge you outnumber us greatly and rescind our claim of praxis over Cleveland" way, or possibly in a "We have killed all of our foes, and now we are in charge" way) is a good time for members of the waning faction to jump ship to another. This is also a good time to drop lots of hints on which characters might actually be which clan/sect/etc in the chaos, as well as an opportunity for the PCs to throw out some false clues.

Player-Driven Plot

Most other 14-ish sessions will be free-form, where the PCs will work towards personal goals, things will happen in town that may or may not entangle the PCs, sect politics and smaller conflicts happen. Ideally, each session should end with a notable shift in power among sects from where they were at the start. If nothing else, some NPC is attempting to gather intel on one of the PCs to root out their secrets. Recurring elements in these sessions help these feel like a coherent campaign.

Assuming that players are split among multiple sects, each one should get a few minutes of spotlight interacting with their sect, discussing that sect's procedures and

schemes for the city. Share information freely during this time for that player. Once everyone's had their share of solo time, suggest that they all meet up and discuss their coterie's plans to advance their own goals, share details on which sects are doing what, and decide which ones to help or hinder for their own benefit. This shared time is where a lot of conspiring will occur, and conspiring to manipulate the city is the core of how the players drive the plot.

When playing, take notes on when the players expose part of their real identity and who saw it. This will be brought back later in their final scene. Give credit to the players if they can plant fake or misleading evidence during the campaign to use later to discredit attackers in that scene.

The Promised End

Eventually, the final session will come, where all of town gathers up the coterie (or at least, the most publically aggressive member of the coterie), calls them out, and reveals the evidence they've been stockpiling to reveal who the PCs really are and who they've been working with. This scene's occurring should be obvious to the players and their characters, having witnessed and likely participated in this sort of accusing and attacking twice before (or more). This scene will have you using your notes you've taken on the PCs slipping up on their identity, times where they were careless, factors they may have overlooked making secure plans, etc. This cumulates into one grand finale chase/combat encounter, where your players get to fight or flee against an entire city in unison against them. If they win, they escape with enough skills to be anyone they want anywhere else. If they don't, they should at least feel pretty badass fighting off most of a city until their one weakness was found.

Low-Prep Vampire ST Plans

For most Vampire books, you've seen the backs with a half-dozen or more fully-detailed NPCs that have good reasons to live in the setting described, and you might feel that your Cleveland By Night campaign needs the same. This isn't true. You'll want to know the important things a few key NPCs can do, and some numbers you can make up on the spot for most everything else.

The best way to create a central hook for your campaign, which the players may or may not interfere with in game, is to make a conspiracy web of the available elements. Pick a person, a place, and an item to be the initial core plot of what's going on in the city. On a sheet of paper, draw a circle for each, and connect them. When new elements are added in, draw a circle for them and connect them to an existing element. This allows you to improv new plot elements as necessary and bring in PCs supporting details while still having hooks into what's going on in the city around them. It also allows you to see

where the center of the game's plot is at any time, as you may find one of the added elements becomes the hook for everything else going on in town rather than your originally chosen ones. This is good, because it shows you that the players have a lot invested in that particular element. You should also cross off or remove items that no longer have any connection to the plot, get fully resolved, or become unavailable as a connection to the plot. See Appendix A for a more detailed write-up with examples of this technique.

If you need to make up an NPC on the spot, don't bother worrying about filling in a full sheet. Use a notecard with the summary of what they can do instead. If you really need more than 4 lines to determine what an NPC can do, they might be a major player, or you might be overthinking what you need out of that NPC.

Example NPC Templates

The Generalist

5 dice to all skill rolls, 3 dice for all attributes.

Has 3 disciplines at 3. Note what they are when they're used.

The Specialist

7 dice to the one skill they're good at, 4 dice to tangential skills, 3 dice to everything else.

Has one discipline at 5, in the same category (physical, mental, social) as their good skill. One other discipline at 1. Write them down when they get used.

The Indirect Conflict Character

4 dice to all rolls. 2 in all attributes and any skills they need.

Has 2 disciplines at 2. Write them down as they get used.

Has 6 dice when using the Influence background and 3 in Allies to use towards inconveniencing their opponents or aiding their allies during downtime or time-skip sequences, and will do so frequently. Their Allies will use The Mook stats, below.

The Mook

The Mook is a PC's (or NPC's) Allies, Contacts, Retainer, Influence, etc merit when represented as a character in play.

They have $X+1$ dice in X rolls, where X is the dots in Allies, Contacts, or Retainers they represent. Multiple Mooks from the same source split X across themselves (*Allies 5 could be 1 Mook with 6 dice to everything, or 5 Mooks with 2 dice to everything*).

Usually does not have Disciplines. Ghoul Retainers have 1 Discipline at 1.

Specific Guidance

Exposing Lies (and Lying About Them)

There's a few powers that have some potential to break through lies very, very quickly. Experienced players may feel that immediately and constantly resorting to using these is a cheap move that's against the spirit of the campaign (even if in any other VtM game, such behavior is fair game). Here are some ways to 'use' some of those dangerous powers in ways that enforce the spirit of Cleveland

All of the Auspex powers, as well as Mytherceria 1, are going to hurt people keeping secrets. One simple solution when faced with a lie detector power like Aura Perception is to only answer questions with opinions or questions (neither of which are lies). Additionally, Dominate can be used to plant false memories, and those can serve as useful misinformation against Telepathy (as long as someone else can tell you which ones are real and which are fake when it matters).

Dementation has Eyes of Chaos, which gives the user some facts about a situation with only the barest of information about it. This is a balancing act, as if this never gives useful info, the player using it feels like they wasted their XP. Conversely, if it always tells an NPC exactly what they need to know, it's a terrifying weapon against the players who can (and will) take it to find out everything they want. The best use for Eyes of Chaos, in a CBN game, is to point out details that were missed earlier that make a connection, or to point out where to go to get the missing information. On the conspiracy web, you may want to let the player using this power sometimes be able to define a new connection between 2 nodes that wasn't known before, or define a new node with a connection to something already on the web. Directly manipulating out-of-character documents shouldn't happen often, but this is a case where the mechanics should be working with the story, not against them.

Dominate is another Discipline that shouldn't be used too blatantly by an ST for gathering information. A 2-dot power that makes "Answer My Questions Honestly" mandatory immediately ruins the spirit of the campaign. If you must do this, make sure it's with only 1 NPC doing this, and then have them use the facts gained as leverage to extort the PCs into their bidding to keep those secrets secret. If the players have ensured that their PCs don't actually know the information being asked, this makes them immune to compromising themselves from this power, but then they have to trust someone else to fill them in with the correct information later.

Obfuscate provides a very easy way to walk into a private conversation and discover all sorts of secrets. Several Thaumaturgy effects and Astral Projection are similarly

effective for this task. If detected, usually by Auspex or the Awareness skill, the clever trick to use here is for those conversing to make a subtle gesture that indicates they're being spied on, and then to have them all immediately start spewing outlandish lies and distractions. When someone brings up these facts, that exposes them (and their abilities) as the spy in public.

Thaumaturgy - Path of Blood 1 (Taste of Blood) is another power that sounds like it's going to immediately wreck someone's disguise. Bartering with the target to have the user announce a specific result is a good way to trade favors. Or, for the most clever use as an ST, have the NPC LIE about having this power, do the bartering, then announce the results as paid for. No one knows the results of the power but the user, and Thaumaturgy is usually a rare ability in Cleveland. Awareness is the skill that would let you know something magical did (or didn't) happen as the blood was tasted, and knowing that a blood magician doesn't have Thaumaturgy at all is valuable information to have.

General Guidance

Sandboxing

The most important part of a sandbox campaign is **player agency**. The game isn't a linear story told to the players in attendance, it's a scoped-in view of the world for them to mess with. You can certainly help guide your players into a coherent sense of the world, but what they want to do is more important than making them jump through hoops to read your novel. If you already decided on what's going to happen ahead of time, there's no reason for the players to bother trying to make a difference.

If someone's personal goal ends up being "I want to learn 1 dot in every Discipline" or "I will be the Trash King, burying Cleveland in garbage", run with it. Embrace their plans and work with them to make them fun. Big and complicated beats small and simple every time. Encourage goals that require making deals and upsets lots of NPCs. Have NPCs that are willing to help for favors to advance their own ulterior motives.

Your goal, as a sandbox ST, is to make sure your players have fun working towards their goal and getting sidetracked along the way. Make lots of threats, deliver on some of them. Remember the flaws and clan weaknesses of the players, and use them against them when things slow down. That Tzimisce being too secretive? His new Retainer vacuums up that dirt that was lying in his coffin. Run the city, not the story.

You may want to write some large, overarching plots going on in Cleveland. This is not the correct approach to a sandbox game. You want to leave out lots of plot hooks the players can choose to investigate, and avoid filling in the details until they matter. Plots

that PCs don't investigate simply don't matter, and writing plots that no one sees is a waste of your time.

When you start filling in those details, the best way to keep a coherent story going is to have everything connected together in a conspiracy web. (See Appendix A for full details) The short version is that anything can be introduced into the game gets connected to a plot point from earlier, and gets a new connection to a different plot point each time it shows up. This makes recurring NPCs, places, and items feel important and unique as details on them fill in from actual gameplay events.

Game Balance

Don't worry about balancing rules or characters for combat. Balance them for sharing the spotlight. If all of the characters are getting roughly the same amount of attention as the key player in scenes, your group is well balanced. If one character continually hogs the spotlight, give them challenges that they cannot solve alone. Make them turn to others in the coterie for help. If a character continually gets overshadowed, provide a targeted adversary that's focused on them to provide more time for them to be the center of attention, or more challenges that use their unique traits or skills.

On that note, don't make combat too intense most of the time. If every session is a fight for your life, players tend to buy up combat skills, and having every player with the same stuff on their character sheets results in a less interesting coterie with fewer tools at their disposal. Make sure social and mental powers are proven just as useful as the physical Disciplines in combat.

Don't kill the players. At least, not immediately. If they continue pissing off NPCs and not adapting, then ramp up the threats until there's no choice. Until then, their enemies will be more than happy to expose a PC's weakness and uselessness to their sect, clan or known allies. There may be several interrupted meetings where a staked Kindred is dropped on a table as a public notice that "Your guys fucked up". PC death can be fun, but only when the player is expecting it.

Gameplay Expectations

This is not a campaign about personal horror, at least in its typical sense. Feeding scenes are expected to be short or skipped unless they're important or exciting, or that the players have enough Herd dots to justify staying full. CBN also tends to be unconcerned with the concept of breaching the masquerade. The world will not discover the true nature of vampires from events in Cleveland, though individuals trying to expose Kindred society or being excessively careless will find themselves marked by the rest of the city for immediate disposal (after enough Influence is spent to cover up the incident). Players should fix their own mistakes, but it shouldn't take much more

than a couple phone calls or some personal intervention to save the masquerade in this game.

Remember that NPCs are more interested in exposing others and hiding their secrets than killing the PCs. They will monologue, over-plan, taunt, and leave the PCs unattended and alive merely after making a point that they messed up or proving their superiority. This is your chance to have everyone be a Bond villain, and it's a great campaign that lets you get revenge against the opponent that's been beating you for the last 15 sessions.

Don't have scenes that take place outside of Cuyahoga County, or bring in NPCs from outside. The setting has been designed as much as possible to minimize the need to do this. There's no supernatural effects that blocks the ability of a PC to drive to Pittsburgh, Detroit, or Chicago, but there can be a run of bad luck when a car breaks down and there's no cell signal in the rural areas outside the county. If a PC wants to leave the campaign early, it would be better to give them their final scene early and let the rest of the coterie keep playing until the end. If you have the coterie escape to another city, you're no longer running Cleveland, and that's the end of the specific resources this book has for you.

Chapter 4: Feels Like Cleveland

Missing: Most of the History of Cleveland

You didn't buy this book to read about 200 years of real life history punctuated with supernatural figures taking actions you will have no influence on. You wanted to know the cool things that make Cleveland a distinct place and not a generic setting. If you need some historical info, there's Wikipedia. If you need some more specific details or want some historical photos, look for the Cleveland Memory Project (clevelandmemory.org) or the Encyclopedia of Cleveland History (case.edu/ech). If you think those are cool resources, odds are good your city has its own similar project.

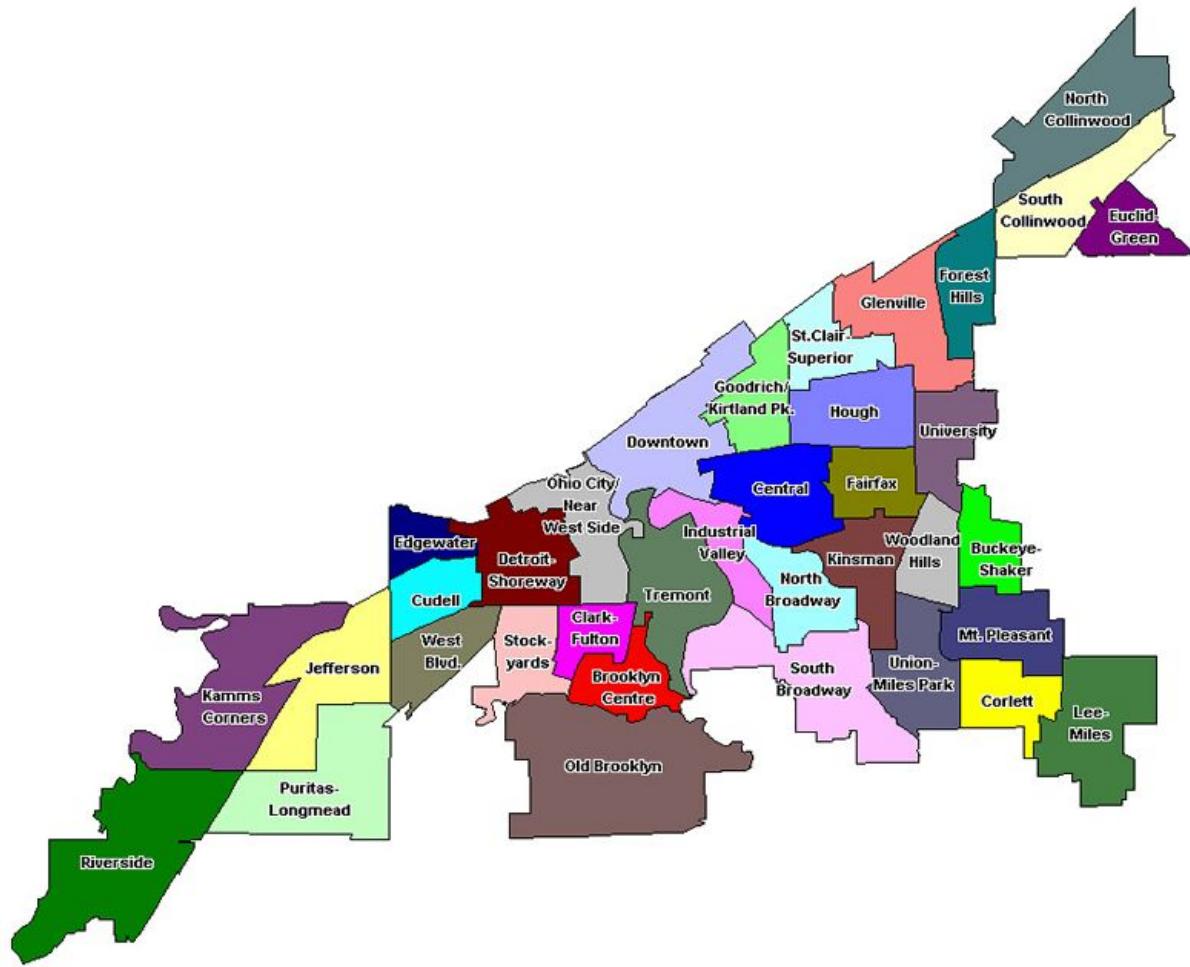
Present: Themes and Places

Before getting into specific locales, I want to go over the theme you can use to make Cleveland feel like Cleveland. As the 51st biggest city in the United States, Cleveland itself is not terribly large but still contains the 'Big City feel' while you're in the center of it. Some of this is because, unlike other major metropolitan areas, Cleveland never annexed the surrounding suburbs as it grew. 'Cleveland' can mean both the City's downtown district, or it can mean most of Cuyahoga county, as all of the suburbs within county lines generally claim Cleveland as part of their identity.

However, downtown Cleveland still has lots of luxury and spectacle. They're just not endless, either in number or size. "Cleveland's top 10 attractions can compete with any other cities top 10, but it doesn't have an 11th" covers the right attitude to take when going over options for places. There's one of everything, and then a much smaller, less impressive alternative somewhere in the county.

Keeping the theme going at these locations, you should think about how to express the idea that each venue is small, compared to a similar one at a bigger city. Escape scenes in the urban areas should be short, places to hide are tight, and everything runs out just when you need a little bit more. The counterpoint to this is the suburbs, which can run on forever and are easy to hide or get lost in if you're not resident to that side of the county. Most of the Kindred residents live or hide in the dozens of suburbs, and travel to downtown for politics and interactions.

Cleveland Neighborhoods



The maps are used to both provide common names for regions, relative locations, and a sense of scale for the setting. The only details that matter are the ones that help you run a better game. Feel free to fudge what you need to and customize the city to your needs.

Points of Interest

Downtown

Downtown is rich with places for vampires to work into their schemes. There's an airport, stadiums for major league football, baseball, and basketball, the Midwest's equivalent of Broadway in Playhouse Square, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, a new casino, the most upscale clubs in the county, and a state college crammed into a little under 2 square miles. A statue to Moses Cleaveland, the city's founder, can be found in the city square. No, the name's not misspelled.

Central & Fairfax

The Central neighborhood is busy with hospitals and research centers for them. On the outskirts is the city's community college and the Agora, the theater where bands that won't fill one of downtown's stadiums (and the ones you probably actually want to see) prefer to play.

Ohio City & Tremont

The primary draw to Ohio City is the local food scene, while Tremont flexes its artistic appeal. Beyond multiple restaurants, galleries, and breweries, the key draw is the West Side Market for the freshest food and the largest variety in the city. The city's Aquarium is here as well, and a yacht club sits on the lake by Edgewater. The house from *A Christmas Story* sits here, converted into a museum for itself. A sub-area by the Cuyahoga River called The Flats is home to the seedier side of city nightlife.

Hope Memorial Bridge

Connecting Tremont and Industrial Valley is this photogenic bridge, with 4 art-deco pylon sculptures called Guardians of Traffic visible from large parts of the city center. They appear on large amounts of city merchandise when there's no all-star sports player to use for marketing.

Industrial Valley

Home to the oil refineries and steel mills that made Cleveland an economic center long ago, Industrial Valley continues to be the manufacturing center of town, even as most of the biggest players from the last century sit empty. Several steel mills still run, though they often shut down when demand is lacking. The Cuyahoga River, most famous for bursting into flames and creating the EPA, runs from the lake through Downtown to here. The water pollution becomes the most concentrated here, though a treatment plant sits on the river a mile or two downstream.

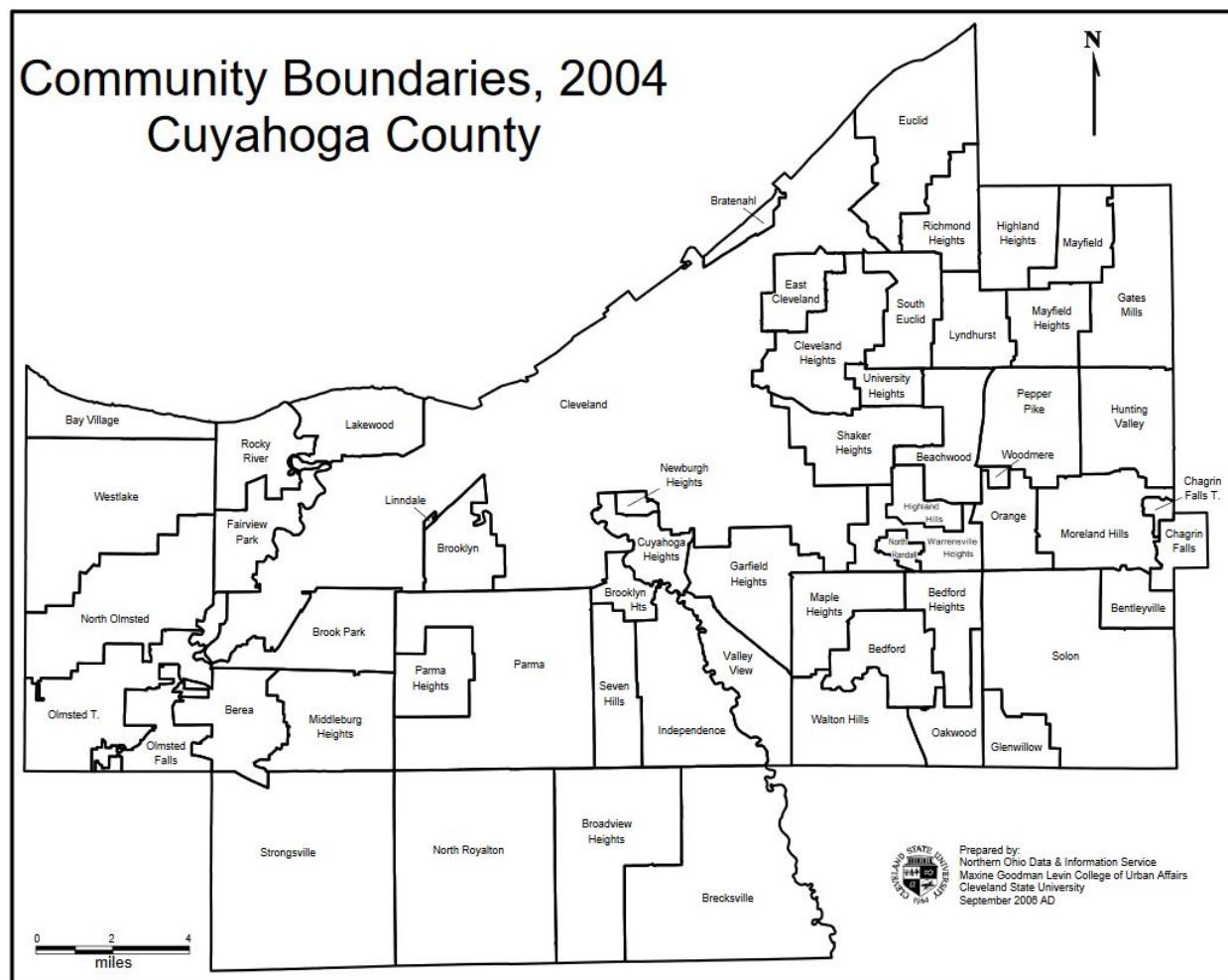
Brooklyn Center & Old Brooklyn

These districts are heavily residential, but are also home to the Cleveland Zoo. A zoo should certainly justify this neighborhood being a bullet point on a list of things vampires might be interested in. Animalism was always an underrated Discipline.

University Circle

Home to a research-heavy, highly exclusive private university, a public art university, the Cleveland Orchestra and its concert hall, 2 museums for art (classic and modern), and another for natural history, University Circle is far quieter than its neighboring districts but certainly not less interesting.

Cuyahoga County Communities



The first inset map covers the area here marked 'Cleveland', and the rest of the county provides 9 times more people and acreage for vampires to hide in. If nothing else, punctuating every scene transition with a 30 minute drive to the new location, regardless of distance, is extremely realistic.

Points of Interest

The Metroparks

There's 18 different parks in the county taking up 23,000 acres. A full 3% of the land on the map above is publicly managed greenspace, scattered across the whole county. There are tons of places to hide and do things without getting caught easily. Take advantage of them.

Lake Erie

Everything north of the boundaries on the maps is Lake Erie. It's the shallowest of the Great Lakes, which makes its surface surprisingly dangerous to navigate and weather patterns in the county unpredictable. Water pollution is beginning to get under control, partly thanks to the invasive zebra mussel taking over the lake bottom, and partly from big industrial players shutting down or moving away.

Lakeview Cemetery

Between East Cleveland and Cleveland Heights, the biggest cemetery in the county predates the city. Eliot Ness and James Garfield are the most famous people interred, but not the wealthiest. The Cemetery also hosts lots of public events such as marathons and encourages people to visit during the day.

East Suburbs

The farther east you go from Cleveland, the richer and roomier the suburbs get. A coterie looking to share one very large house out where neighbors won't notice anything suspicious would do well with a base of operations on the east edge of the map. There are dozens of metroparks scattered around, each managed by the county. Going farther east brings you to farmland and Amish Country.

Squire's Castle

A metropark on the far east side, where an 1800s oil baron planned on building a 'castle' inside a heavily forested lot. The actual structure was not much bigger than a two story house, but was entirely made of local stone and had no utilities connected to it. It was sold when his wife made it clear she completely hated it. After changing hands a half-dozen times to various failed entrepreneurs it was made into a metropark, and is one of the busiest in the county today.

West Suburbs

Unlike the east side, the west suburbs closest to Cleveland are generally better off than those farther out. Waterfront property looking over Lake Erie tends to be the highest priced, with gentrified areas appealing to hipsters being far more common and accessible. Farther west brings you to exurban areas mostly connected to a very small Rust Belt city instead of Cleveland proper.

South Suburbs

Going south of Cleveland brings you to a solid block of 'middle-class' areas. Shopping malls and commercial strips dominate areas separated by lightly forested fields between them. There is one national park that sprawls through the southern suburbs for about 20 miles. Farther south brings you only farms upon farms and tiny towns between them.

Appendix A: VtM 20th/4e Conspiracy Web

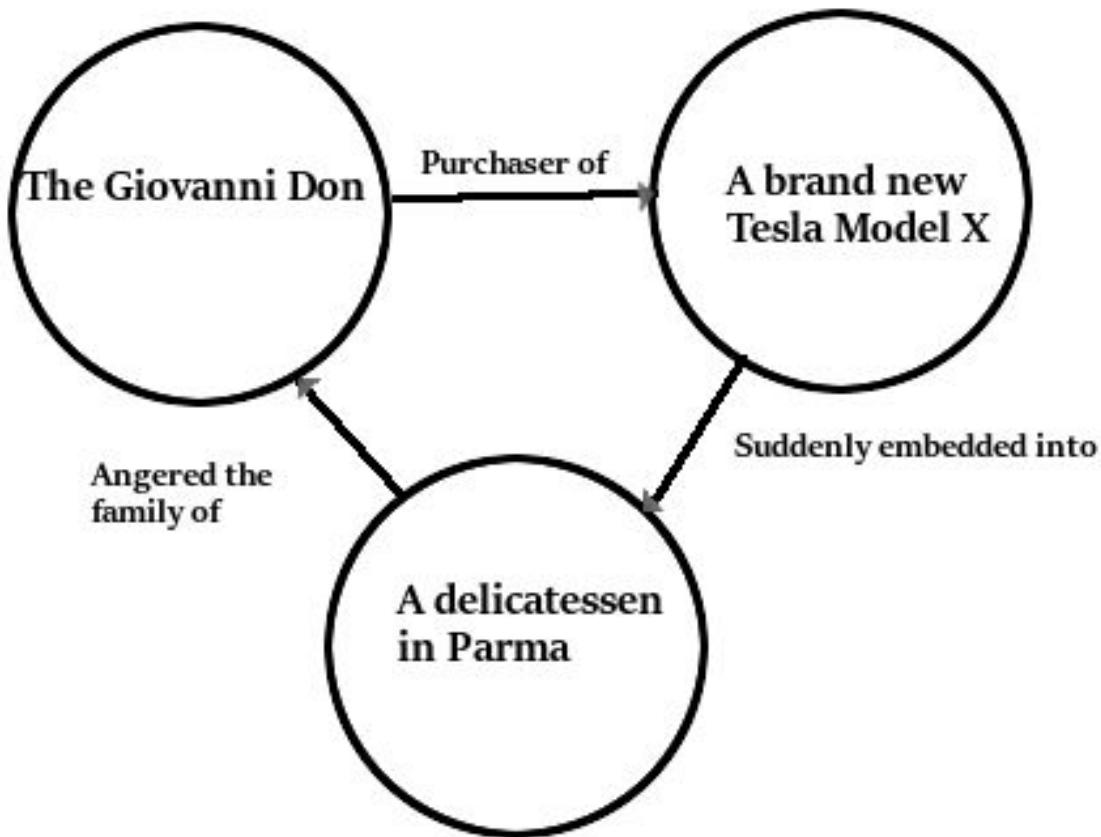
(Alternate: How to manage a city of 30 vampires without writing a novel)

How to use:

You will need a blank piece of paper and a pencil, or the digital equivalent.

To start your CBN chronicle, draw 3 circles, and connect them to each other with lines. Write the name of a place in one, a person or group of people in the second, and some physical thing or tangible event in the third. These are the plot nodes at the center of the current plot when the PCs walk into town. The center of a node should usually be a noun.

Decide how these 3 nodes are connected to each other and draw lines between them. You can write down the relationship on the map to help remember this connection. You can include arrows if you want to remember how a relationship applies between 2 nodes, or if the nodes have multiple connections. The connection should either be adjectives or verbs, as appropriate. A sample initial map might look like this:

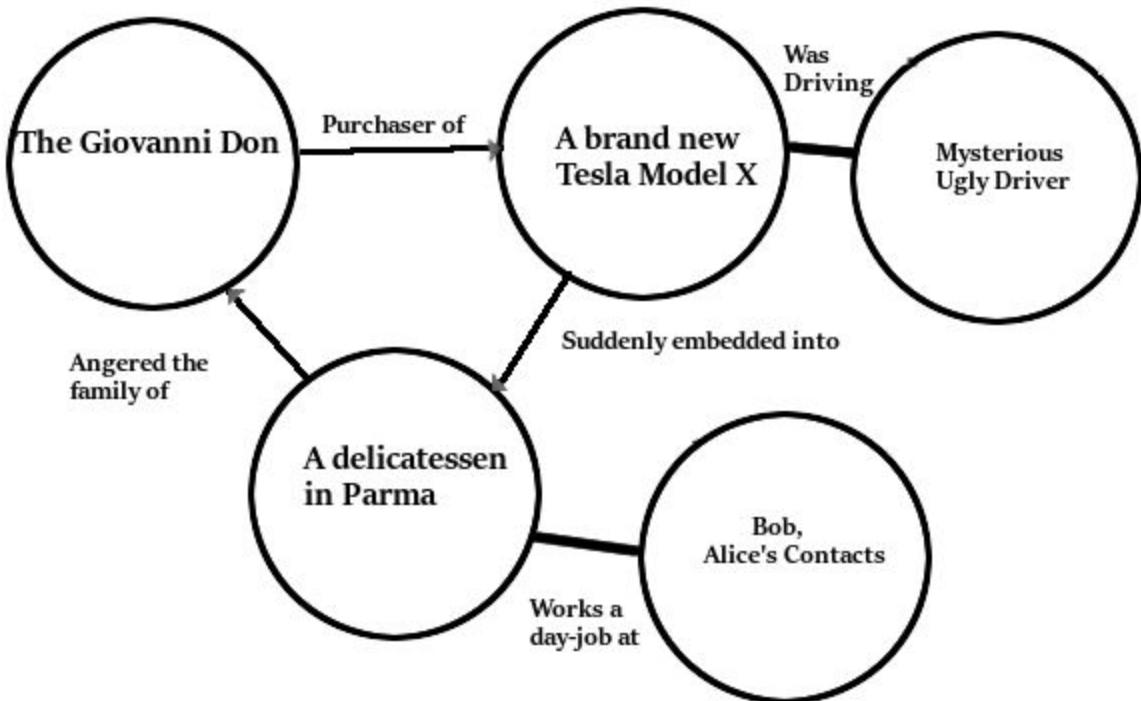


This example setup looks straight-forward. The Don's new, expensive car was found smashed into a deli that had previously upset someone under him. This gives us a state where something is going to happen by one of the parties involved. How that starts to develop out depends on who and what gets introduced by the players and the ST.

The first time the players try to call in some sort of connection (Allies, Contacts, other NPCs, specific resources, favors, debts, anything else that can appear multiple times), or the ST introduces something new, write that down as a plot node somewhere on the map and connect it to an existing node. The second time that connection is called in, draw a line connecting it to another plot node and decide on the relationship between those nodes. Do this every time a character, place, or item reappears and the web will quickly grow, and you'll see what keeps getting called in and watch that become a central fixture of the game.

Don't spend too much time making up the details on the connection. You don't have to craft a Hollywood perfect narrative hook out of everything that comes up in game. Your job at ST here is mostly to declare a fact about the world and stick with it. Players are really good at taking the stated details and making connections on their side, and you should embrace this and run with it.

Let's say that upon hearing this news, PC Alice wants to bring in her Contacts (named Bob) to get some info on the situation. We will add a node for Bob and tie him directly into things. In this case, he was working at the deli in question at the time of the accident. Bob saw the driver of the car get away from the scene, and remembered the driver was hideously mangled and disfigured but very mobile. We'll add another node for the Mysterious Ugly Driver, and attach him to the car. Already, one action into our game, the web has grown to:



And we can see some deeper potential plot unfolding already. Why are the Giovanni going after Alice's contacts on her first night in town? How involved in angering the Giovanni was Bob? Who was driving the car, and did the Giovanni know about it? Was the ugly driver a Nosferatu, just pretending to be one, or some other type of ugly?

These questions arise because of the connections that haven't yet been defined. Note that none of the new nodes connected to The Giovanni Don, and most of the questions are trying to fill in that connection. The simplest way to expand the conspiracy is to keep adding nodes in between to make the connection as long as you want before adding in the connection the question is trying to complete. With those nodes present, you can read the connections through to find out that "The Giovanni Don had blackmailed The Camarilla Sheriff who held a favor over This One Anarch Lasombra who conned The Most Gullible Nosferatu Antitribu(formerly Mysterious Ugly Driver) into driving A Brand New Tesla Model X into A Delicatessen in Parma", entirely during gameplay with the player's actions contributing at least as much to the plot as your decisions did. And you created all these other hooks that future plots can connect to, which helps you identify who's important in your campaign and keeps returning into the plot without needing to write your own book's worth of notes and plans.

Players will inevitably want to do something on their own. The first node they introduce should connect to the existing web, but it is entirely reasonable for someone's personal plot to become its own mini-web with only a tangential connection to what's going on in the rest of Cleveland, as long as that connection is there somewhere. And remember

that the nodes on their side are still fair game for new plot elements to become connected to, if you want to drag them back into the main web.

Eventually, your web will probably need to be pruned back down to a manageable size. As elements of the plot leave play, or stop being able to impact the future plot, remove or scratch out their nodes and quit making new connections to them. If the center of your plot has moved drastically from where it started, consider removing the most distant or least connected nodes to free up visible space, and just note that those are abandoned plot hooks. It happens in movies and TV all the time, it can happen in your tabletop game too. No shame in admitting some plots don't get resolved.

The PCs themselves shouldn't become nodes on the web. This is partly because all of their initial connections are already defined on their character sheet, and partly because they have the freedom to choose and change their own connections to the plot elements. The conspiracy web tracks everything else, and how you chose to have them connected. The players will track what they've done and how they're involved with plot elements on their own.

Above all else, do not let updating the plot web slow down gameplay. This is a tool to help keep track of your player's storyline. If you feel like this will be too much paperwork, skip adding a plot node the FIRST time they get introduced. On their second appearance, write them down and connect them in, as they're now officially a recurring element in the plot. If you must, save updating the web until after the game is complete.

This isn't some new revolutionary tool specific to Cleveland By Night. This is just a visualization of how some STs and authors have worked to write out their plots before. It's entirely optional, but if you're a new ST and need some help on figuring out how to make a plot coherent while letting players have the agency they need to make a sandbox game work, I strongly suggest using this to track things until you get a handle on what's important enough to keep in your head.

Appendix B: 5e Compatibility

There's a very simple primary reason that I didn't attempt to write this book for VtM5: It doesn't have everything. This setting works best when everything is available, because it keeps experience players on the lookout for the edge cases where a rare bloodline might be hiding, and newer players get to pick out all sorts of suspicious things and feel great when they figure something out for themselves.

Another reason is the metaplot changes in VtM5. These changes are entirely reasonable for updating the VtM setting to the current year, but this is not a chronicle about hiding from government funded surveillance or international sect-level power struggles. The new metaplot doesn't add anything to a Cleveland By Night campaign. This setting runs in the modern day, but mostly ignores the broken masquerade as presented in VtM5, and doesn't see a need to justify doing so.

VtM5 also replaces Nature and Demeanor with Ambition, Desire, and Predator for the 'who you are' parts of the character sheet. This doesn't stop you from running a Cleveland By Night campaign, but the metaphors don't quite connect the same. None of the other rules changes prevent you from playing the gonzo-infiltration game presented here with some work on deciding how the obscure Disciplines and bloodlines work in your VtM5 game.

That said, if you don't mind making up house rules for everything currently unavailable in VtM5, there's nothing stopping you from using those rules. I happen to find that the larger variety of choices needed for a mind-boggling web of intrigue is a much stronger core of this campaign than changing the rules for blood and disciplines, and would suggest using 20th Anniversary or Revised edition rules because of it.

The player and GM tips, however, translate over to any edition of VtM where you want to deal with political power plays.