

# VAMPIRE

## PLAYERS GUIDE



A player and character resource for vampire: the masquerade®



## children of caine ...

Since Biblical times, the get of Caine have prowled the world, hiding from mortals and resigning themselves to the shadows. Throughout the ages, their plans have unfolded and their treacheries have come to fruition. Welcome to the Final Nights — welcome to unlife as a vampire. A collection of essays, character-building options, chronicle suggestions and methods of play, the Vampire Players Guide offers a wealth of information to players and Storytellers on a conversational level. Presented as an aside to Vampire® players, this book offers a variety of options and advice to better enhance the Storytelling experience. Hardcover.

## the vampire players guide includes:

- A wealth of advice for developing a character from dots on a page into a meaningful personality
- Essays and “face to face” advice from the writers and creators of the game
- Options for expanding character origins, streamlining stories, troupe play and more















# VAMPIRE

---

## PLAYERS GUIDE



BY KRAIG BLACKWELDER, CARL BOWEN, ANN BRAIDWOOD,  
JACQUELINE BRASFIELD, CHRISTOPHER GUNNING, CONRAD  
HUBBARD, EVAN JAMIESON, JIM KILEY, CHRISTOPHER KOBAR,  
RHIANNON LOUVE, ARI MARMELL, MATT MCFARLAND,  
PATRICK O'DUFFY, CHIP QUINN, AARON ROSENBERG,  
MYRANDA SARRO, DEAN SHOMSHAK,







*Once the game is over, the king and  
the pawn go back in the same box.*

*— Italian Proverb*



## CREDITS

**Written by:** Kraig Blackwelder, Carl Bowen, Ann Braidwood, Jacqueline Brasfield, Christopher Gunning, Conrad Hubbard, Evan Jamieson, Jim Kiley, Christopher Kobar, Rhiannon Louve, Ari Marmell, Matt McFarland, Patrick O'Duffy, Chip Quinn, Aaron Rosenberg, Myranda Sarro, Dean Shomshak, Greg Stolze, Adam Tinworth and Janet Trautvetter. Vampire and the World of Darkness created by Mark Rein•Hagen.

**Storyteller Game System Design:**

Mark Rein•Hagen

**Additional Material:** Justin Achilli

**Developed by:** Justin Achilli

**Editor:** Janice M. Sellers

**Art Director:** Richard Thomas

**Layout & Typesetting:** Mike Chaney

**Interior Art:** Mike Gaydos, Leif Jones, Vince Locke, Rik Martin, and Christopher Shy.

**Front Cover Art:** Mike Danza

**Front & Back Cover Design:** Mike Chaney



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

© 2003 White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction without the written permission of the publisher is expressly forbidden, except for the purposes of reviews, and for blank character sheets, which may be reproduced for personal use only. White Wolf, Vampire, Vampire the Masquerade, Vampire the Dark Ages, Mage the Ascension, Hunter the Reckoning, World of Darkness and Aberrant are registered trademarks of White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Werewolf the Apocalypse, Wraith the Oblivion, Changeling the Dreaming, Werewolf the Wild West, Mage the Sorcerers Crusade, Wraith the

Great War, Trinity and Vampire Players Guide are trademarks of White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. All characters, names, places and text herein are copyrighted by White Wolf Publishing, Inc.

The mention of or reference to any company or product in these pages is not a challenge to the trademark or copyright concerned.

This book uses the supernatural for settings, characters and themes. All mystical and supernatural elements are fiction and intended for entertainment purposes only. This book contains mature content. Reader discretion is advised.

For a free White Wolf catalog call 1-800-454-WOLF.

Check out White Wolf online at

<http://www.white-wolf.com>; [alt.games.whitewolf](http://alt.games.whitewolf) and [rec.games.frp.storyteller](http://rec.games.frp.storyteller)

PRINTED ON DEMAND





# VAMPIRE

---

## PLAYERS GUIDE

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	6
SECTION ONE: THE CHARACTER	14
SECTION TWO: THE TROUPE	78
SECTION THREE: ESSAYS	144









# INTRODUCTION

*My work is a game, a very serious game.*  
— M. C. Escher

## WHY A PLAYER'S GUIDE?

If you're one of the hard-core, old-school **Vampire** fans, you'll see that this iteration of the player's guide is significantly different from its distant predecessor. If you weren't around for the first and second edition player's guides, you may be wondering what's left to explore in this format. We've covered all the clans, explored some minor bloodlines, dealt with the Secondary Abilities and handled more Disciplines than any mere mortal should shake a stick at.

What we're seeking to do here, however, is break the contents of the book a little bit away from the game proper. This book is a metagaming resource, a chance to look at **Vampire** chronicles from the outside in. It's a true *player's* guide — a guide for the player to use and enhance his storytelling ex-

perience. More so than the old book of the same title, this book speaks directly to players (including Storytellers). It's set up somewhat unconventionally as well, not broken into chapters but instead subdivided by topics.

You'll find a few rules systems in here: rules for creating mortal characters, experience point spending suggestions and the like. For the most part, though, what you'll find is a collection of commentary. The writers for this book were told, "Imagine yourself, as a writer, seated behind a panel discussion table at a convention, imparting your wisdom to the assembled players who have come to hear you speak." We're here to discuss **Vampire**, hoping to stoke some new ideas and look at how we've played the game this far.

Unquestionably, when we go to play a storytelling game, we gather around the table with our friends, as we've done a thousand other times. We anticipate a night of entertainment, rivals to contend with,



gambits to uncover and schemes to unravel. The point is that we come to the table with expectations. That's not necessarily a bad thing — we *expect* to have a good time, which is why we gather to tell these types of stories. We do have a little bit of room to change those expectations, however, and that's what this book is about. Herein you'll find numerous options for styles of play, chronicles to undertake, characters to portray and aspects of those characters to explore. That's really what this book is: a collection of options designed to change expectations of the game and the methods of playing it.

## THE POINT OF IT ALL

Over the years of working on **Vampire**, we've come to recognize three distinct groups with regard to players. The first group is the one that's been with us all along, through many supplements and editions. The second group is made up of people who are experienced with the game but haven't been in it so long that they know all the mysteries and can quote page numbers or complete Kindred "family trees." The third group consists of the fresh faces, those individuals who have just picked up a book or two and see the entire malignant majesty of the World of Darkness spread out before them. (These groups are respectively like metasetting versions of the elders, ancillae and neonates. Then again, maybe we're just being geeky when we think of it that way.) This book is designed to appeal to all three groups.

### NEW TO THE HORROR

Without a doubt, the best time to play **Vampire** is when you're new to it. The world sprawling before you has a cast of unknown horrors. The society of the Damned looms tremendously above you, with tiers of vampiric conspiracy hiding terrible secrets. Even the shadows could be a threat, looming longer and possibly concealing secrets the likes of which you have only learned about.

Unfortunately, sometimes being a new player means that you don't take full advantage of the situation. Too many of us have wasted so much of that formative time focusing on, "Whoah! And then I can *turn invisible* and then I can *throw fireballs!*" While that's all fine and good if that's all you want to do, this book presents a wealth of information on building character from a perspective that people

new to the system don't always consider. You may wish to create your character using the mortal rules (from Section One) first and play through her Embrace later, or you may take inspiration from a unique interpretation of your character's Traits. Whatever your tastes, you'll surely find information useful toward making your first several stories a more enriching experience.

### INTERMEDIATE ENTHUSIASTS

You're driven by your thirst for more. Some people know more of the secret world than you, but you have a general sense of how things work in the World of Darkness. You can distinguish between the clues that suggest a Nosferatu blackmail operation and a Brujah extortion ring — and you're clever enough to see that the Ventrue truly behind the racket is trying to misdirect everyone with the ruse. The only downside to this level of familiarity with **Vampire** is that it often ceases to be personal. Clans become organizations rather than lineages. Horror takes a back seat to complication, as Storytellers add layer upon layer of red herring to otherwise straightforward plots with a "more is better" philosophy. Players automatically assume some nefarious cabal of supernatural creatures is responsible for every development in the world — a slaying with occult overtones is obviously a Tremere issue, while the opening of a new art gallery no doubt has a list of patrons from Clan Toreador as long as one's arm.

In this player's guide's pages you'll find techniques that free you from this stagnating mindset, and tips and suggestions that can help you bring it back to the visceral level of personal horror again.

### THE HOARY EXPERTS

Eventually, we all get to the point at which we feel like it's not new anymore. We've seen all the primogen meetings we care to, outfoxed every archbishop who'd let us and claimed principedoms out from under the noses of Kindred centuries older than us. Let's face it: Sometimes the sense of wonder just isn't there anymore because we've been so steeped in it for so long. We know all the secrets because we've either read them through or played them in a chronicle.

That doesn't mean we can't still enjoy **Vampire**, however. Sometimes the best way to renew your enthusiasm for the game is simply to take a break, to come back once your sense of having done it all recedes a bit. On the other hand, you may just need a change of pace. Several articles in this book look





at some new ways to experience the game, and one of the essays even talks about burnout and how to remedy it.

## GENERAL SUGGESTIONS

Of course, we all know how to play storytelling games. We know, as players, that we describe our actions to the Storyteller and we know, as Storytellers, that we are the five senses (and sometimes the sixth sense!) of the players' characters as well as the general plot director.

How do we make the experience uniquely **Vampire**, however? How do we make our in-character efforts more immersive? How can we speak and evoke a secret society rather than making the specialized vocabulary awkward or artificial?

Consider, before going any more deeply into this book, some of the fundamentals of the game and also as part of the setting. We incorporate these ideas on a design level, so we hope our setting them plainly before you will help you see exactly where we want to go when we assemble books. Don't think

of these ideas as gospel — use them as guidelines if you wish or ignore them completely. They exist as part of the effort to make **Vampire** consistent throughout its publication, and we hope they'll be able to provide a basis of understanding for what it is we do and why.

## SPECIALIZED VOCABULARY

The Kindred use many words that either have additional meaning to them or acquire a distinctly different meaning among their ilk. This isn't truly a lexicon, as the following list consists of words that you already know, but it is a little cheat sheet that will allow you to take some of the metagame aspects out of your chronicle's context. In some cases, they're common considerations of the undead condition, while in others they're simply observances from a design point of view.

**Life, lived, etc.:** Vampires are undead. They *lead unlives*. They *exist*. They *make their havens* in certain places. They don't *live* anywhere and they don't see what *life* has to offer.

**Daytime:** Your vampire escapes to fight another *night*, not *day*. She awakens three *nights* from now. Daytime applies only to literal daytime, like when

the ghouls do their thing and the banks are open.

**Control:** Vampires *influence* — they are manipulators, not dictators. Fundamentally, control indicates a complete power over something. You control your car or a character in a video game. Could anyone truly *control* a police force or local media? Unlikely, but it's possible to have significant sway over those institutions. Influence — that's a better word, and also carries connotations of degree.

**Manipulate:** That word doesn't mean anything unless you inform us as to just what "manipulation" took place. If you use *manipulate* without qualifying or quantifying it, you might want to turn a little more attention to the matter of what the character in question is actually doing.

**Corrupt, Corruption:** Long associated with the Setites, the word *corrupt* means ... well, nothing. It should always suggest something vague and sinister, but the lack of concrete symptoms or causes of corruption makes it an empty descriptor. A corrupt politician is on the take; a corrupt banker embezzles. If you wish to use this word, as with manipulation, make sure it has context. Generic corruption lacks any emotional impact.

**Serves, serving:** This should apply only to literal minions: people such as Retainers and others who do exactly what you tell them. A waiter serves you. Minions with more free will may unknowingly serve *an agenda*, but they're rarely at the beck and call of ancient vampires, who are far more subtle than military generals, and typically unlikely to be moving their slavish ghouls around Chicago to see who *controls* the city.

**Dark:** Talk about overused! Once a time existed when this word could be used to describe unwholesomeness and unsettling, intangible evil. Now, however, the word has been robbed of all meaning by ubiquity. Better descriptors exist for those other things — "dark" means a lack of light.

**Garou:** Vampires shouldn't know this word unless you're working with crossover. They likewise are largely unaware of tribes, Traditions, kiths, guilds, Federation Directives and other stuff not directly a part of **Vampire**. They don't know the Umbra from a hole in the ground. Some vampires familiar with necromancy are privy to the existence of the Shroud, Shadowlands and Underworld, but they won't be able to discuss it intelligently or with relation to things like Stygia, renegades, etc.

**Kindred vs. Cainite:** The Camarilla says *Kindred*, as do most vampires. Sabbat vampires, however, use

the word *Cainite*, as Kindred sounds all nancy-fancy to them. Particularly old elders also prefer Cainite because they may have predated the formation of the sects. Most actual vampires avoid the term *vampire* as it's shamefully vulgar.

**Ghoul:** Avoid the use of the word ghoul as a verb. It's awkward and metagamey and just plain odd in a weird, vaguely unsettling way. Kinda like using *Shatner* as a verb. Just say no.

**... Serve the clan ...:** What's your last name? Do you serve your family? What's your nationality? Do you serve your nation? No, you're just a person. That's what your clan is — it's just another characteristic. Note that this phrase is applicable in *a select few cases*, such as justicars serving the Camarilla, templars occasionally serving their bishops, etc., but you do not (generally) serve your clan unless you have attained some sort of rank within it that demands an according service. It happens a little in the Assamites. Somewhat in the Giovanni. Most often in the Tremere, but even that is a relative statement. On that note ....

**... Loyal clan member ...:** Bear in mind that your clan is not your employer. The vast majority of the time it's not your military commander. Relying on notions like these strips the individuality out of Kindred and forces them into rigid roles. Granted, many elders want the neonates to think such things, but unless you're using this in that propagandist context, you may be taking free will away from your character.

## PRINCIPLES

The following ideas are directives and themes the writers and developers use to keep **Vampire** on a consistent track. Think about them as players and Storytellers and perhaps even discuss them with your troupe. Decide which you like and which should be suspended to maximize your group's enjoyment of the game.

- Remember that being a vampire is a curse. Vampires feed on the living, burn in the light of the sun and contain a turgid Beast. No one is "rewarded" with the Embrace unless it's a backhanded reward, intended to be as much punishment as prize. Only the most bizarre or twisted individual actually *wants* the Embrace — unless that character has an imperfect understanding of what being a vampire is.

- Remember that Disciplines are just that, not superpowers. They're the supernatural abilities of a predator race, not laser blasts from a superhero's electro-fists.



- Think through your characters' motivations. Characters need to be ... well, characters, and not cardboard cutouts or plot devices. Trickster characters, for example, don't just hop around and "cause chaos," they need to have purpose for the actions they undertake.

- Bear in mind that survival is issue number one. Vampires need blood. Vampires need to hide from a mortal world that would destroy them if it knew they existed. Vampires need contact with others of their kind, for they are egotistical creatures and need to feel that they are vital to the unives of others. Everything else is a creature comfort.

- Go ahead and be a drama queen. It's the end of the world when a Ventrue slights a Toreador, or when a Nosferatu dares to steal a Tremere's magic trinket. For all their glamorous veneers, most vampires are little more than arrested adolescents. As vampirism "freezes" one's physical development, so does it freeze her emotional development as well. Vampires don't (usually) become any more "mature" than they are when they're Embraced. Revisit your high-school years.

- Be stylish. Survival may be issue number one, but looking cool while doing it is issue number two. If you don't look cool, no one will respect you, and if no one respects you, you're going to have a hard time at Elysium or the esbat.

- On the other hand, don't be florid. Stylish is one thing, but overwrought ruins the effect. It's not cool if we know you're trying to be cool.

- Storytellers: Provide noncombat conflicts and methods by which noncombative characters can be *more* effective than the brawlers. Combat results in getting hurt or getting killed — most people go out of their way *not* to get punched in the mouth. Vampires potentially have forever laid out before them. Are they going to want to risk it by getting in gunfights and sword duels? Combat should be singular and dramatic, not yet another panel of this month's action comic. Players: There's always something bigger and badder than you out there, and vampires who constantly pick fights are going to encounter that bigger, badder thing far more quickly than the vampires who don't go knocking on death's door.

- When designing a character (or situation, Storytellers), be accessible. You want to appeal to as many people as possible and enable everyone else in the troupe and coterie to "get" your character. Even if you don't want them to "get" your charac-



ters, they should know that the point is for them to misunderstand you. If you're too obtuse, wonkish or esoteric, your idea won't resonate with people. You can be exotic, of course, but as with the rest of these principles, exotic should remain exotic or it's commonplace (at best) or misses the audience entirely (at worst).

- Unless you have a compelling reason not to, speak in a modern idiom, both as a character and as a neutral narrator. Don't overburden your speech with fantasy or faux-medieval inflections, even though the setting draws a lot from it. For example, a cryptic character would be more likely to say, "I have seen ill omens regarding your fate" than she would, "Know this: Secrets I possess regarding your fate." Yoda is from the *Star Wars* universe, not **Vampire**. Obviously, characters who are anachronisms may have different patterns of speech, as well they should, but not everyone who receives the Embraces talks like the guy working the turkey-leg booth at the Renaissance Faire.

- Vampires ride history, they don't guide it. It's okay to have a vampire profiteering from the Industrial Revolution, but your Ventrue did not *cause* the Industrial Revolution.

- To that end, heed the mortals. Six billion of them are out there, after all. Remember the Masquerade, as well.

- Do use brand-name flash, but don't let it substitute for actual substance. A detail is cool, but too much occludes the point of having a character instead of an equipment list.

- Keep your schemes on the local level. No vampire — well, none we know about — is cool enough to affect global or even national issues. You can make as many Machiavellian schemes as you want, but they need to stay local to remain plausible. "I want to rule the world!" is better suited to action movies and comics than it is to a brooding environment of horror.

- Know when drama becomes more important than maintaining the hidden world. You may feel limited by much of this, but that's to make it all the more dramatic when something comes down the pipe that really needs to be dramatic. We're not saying you can't have a gunfight, we're saying that if every night is a pitched battle through the streets of Chicago with SWAT teams and helicopters, you lose much of the sublime nature of **Vampire**.

- Don't resort to cute or pithy comedy. Being a person who subsists on the warm blood of his former

fellows is a terrifying realization and condition. Don't have your characters joke about their fate. It's not funny, it's horrific.

- Don't make your characters Tom Clancy protagonists. So a given character can use a rifle — there's no need to make him a Navy SEAL. **Vampire** is scary because it casts the mundane in a sinister light. Your neighbor could be a vampire, and fear comes from the fact that you wouldn't know and his proximity. Exploding ninja Bruce Willis vampires spouting one-liners before decapitating a dozen IRA loons with their three-bladed katanas are out of place in the World of Darkness.

- Don't overestimate the use of supernatural power. Given his druthers, a vampire would prefer to enact his schemes without drawing attention to the fact that something otherworldly is at work. If you Dominate a person into giving you money, that's going to attract attention if handing you money is out of character for that individual. If you blackmail him, well, that at least won't be creating any Masquerade breaches. Remember, also, that most Disciplines require a roll to work — they're not guaranteed effective.

- Don't mine the occult too deeply. Work primarily with vampire myth and the world we've built for the Kindred. Leave the rest for **Mage**, **Werewolf** and the other titles that explore other ideas about the supernatural.

- Don't be too WAHOO! Action is thrilling, but use it to punctuate a scene or illustrate a theme instead of "throwing in" some combat for its own sake. You may wish to use some WAHOO! because monotony is boring, but make it worthwhile. This is not a modern dungeon crawl or wuxia film.

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The **Vampire Players Guide** is broken down by topical sections rather than the chapters by which we divide other books in the line. For such a large book, we have only three sections, whereas people familiar with **Vampire** supplements might have expected more.

**Section One** discusses character — individual characters, that is. Whether you're building a vampire from the ground up or creating a mortal through whom you want to contend with the World of Darkness, the individual is the focus of the first

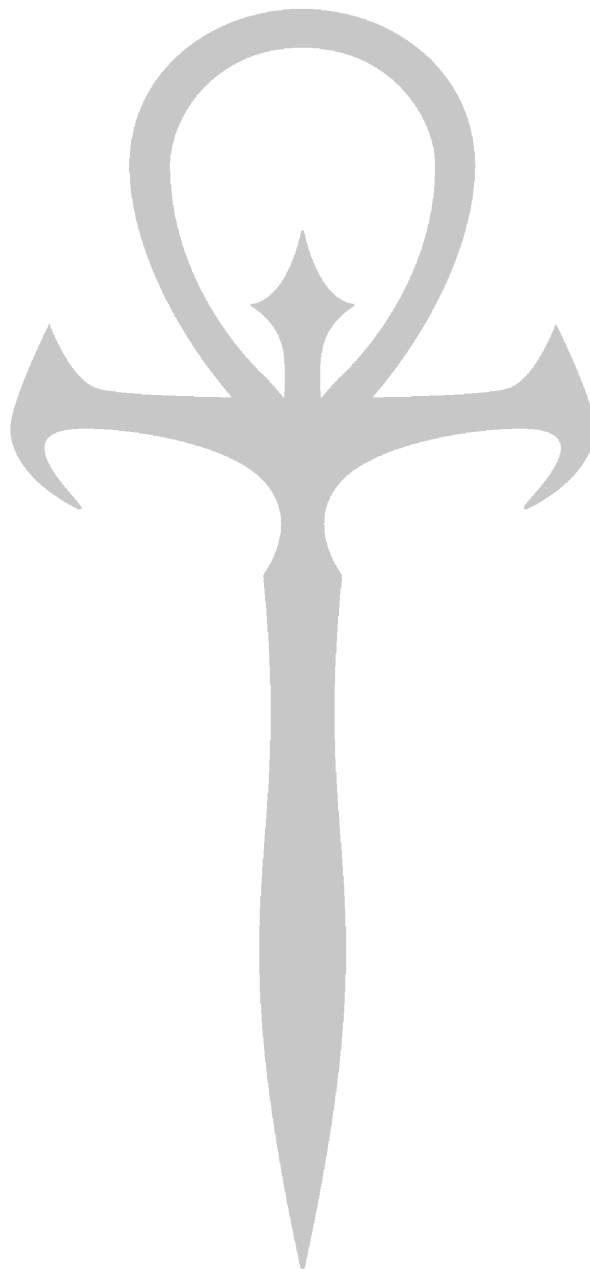


section. As a player, you're going to focus on an individual character at a time. Even if you're playing a troupe-style game (see Section Two), you're still portraying those characters singularly. That's why we've chosen to open the book with the character section. As a player, the character is your single most fundamental piece of game equipment, so we explore their interface thoroughly.

Groups of players and characters comprise the focus of **Section Two**. This section covers both the troupe and the pack or coterie. Building upon the information in Section One, this section makes provisions for having different players' characters work

together, or new suggestions for player interaction with the game itself.

Essays make up **Section Three**. Many players have remarked that they have enjoyed essays over the years, and this book was the perfect place to include them. The essays themselves cover a number of topics — writers were asked to choose a topic that aroused their interest and flesh it out as regards **Vampire**. The results are interesting, and the chapter contains discussions on everything from giving careful consideration to what a character thinks about feeding upon blood to helping players recover from game burnout.









# SECTION ONE: CHARACTER

*Man's main task in life is to give birth to himself, to become what he potentially is. The most important product of his effort is his own personality.*

— Erich Fromm, *Man for Himself*

What is a storytelling game without characters? Well, nothing, really. A tableau. A simple setting. Behind the Storyteller's screen, it's a bunch of cribbed notes and set-to-happen events with no one to enact those schemes.

A character, however, is more than just an alternate persona. It's the vehicle by which your troupe's stories are told. What is a character without a story, to consider the opposite side of the coin?

Somewhere, the balance must be met. With no characters, the story goes nowhere. With no story, the characters might as well be standing around in a featureless room.

This chapter explores characters. From mortals just brought into cognizance of the World of Darkness to extant characters finding new ways to involve themselves in the troupe's escapades, it's all in here. Use your character to help your troupe find its ideal balance of storytelling technique.

## MORTAL CHARACTERS

Vampires, those power-mad monsters of the Final Nights, are terrified of one enemy above all others. They structure their very society around that fear. It pervades every level of their midnight society.

The nemesis they fear so much?

Mortals.

Obviously, it's not individual mortals they fear, typically, but mortals working cooperatively. Human society is the most potentially dangerous foe the Cainites know. The princes have a reason to enforce the Masquerade (and even the Sabbat observes something similar — in its own way, of course): The widespread realization that vampires exist would trigger a full-scale pogrom that would eclipse even that of the Inquisition. Mortals have grown increasingly shrewd over the course

of centuries, and the technology they now wield only increases the threat they could pose were the sleeping giant awakened.

That said, what role do mortals play in your chronicle? Are they puppets? Prey? Irritants? Ignored? If that's all mortals do in your chronicle, then you're not giving the Devil his due.

Far too often, mortals are overlooked entirely. They may not have much of a chance against vampires in a one-on-one conflict, but that's the weakest of all possible ways mortals might figure into a chronicle. Mortals are dynamic, creative and alive — all things that vampires are not. A vampire may be able to snap a mortal's neck without giving it a second thought, but the fact remains that vampires are squatters dwelling in cultures, in a world, created by the mortals they prey upon. Vampires do not survive long without bearing in mind that mortals are all around them and outnumber them thousands to one, if not greatly more so.

Cainites do not exist in a vacuum. Their contacts, cultists, informants, spies and groupies are probably all drawn from the mortal population around them. A wise vampire is unlikely to turn all of his pawns into ghouls, nor does it make sense for the Cainite to use the blood bond on every pawn in her stable. Habitues of the vampiric milieu — the nighttime streets, dance clubs and warehouses in the dodgy parts of town — aren't stupid. Mortals see what's happening on a night-to-night basis. They may not communicate enough to put their separate puzzle pieces together, but they see things. They know things. And, when they believe that it might further their self-interest, some mortals approach vampires and make themselves available for ... whatever. Vampires with any street smarts at all learn quickly to make use of the tools at hand, and they rarely have a shortage of mortals seeking to curry favor with power brokers, dead or undead, by whoring themselves out in one fashion or another.

These mortals, the few who know about — or serve — vampires, and have enough sense to keep their knowledge to themselves, may work for separate masters, but they see enough to put pieces together, to note each other's faces. They may see each other at nightclubs or on the same street by the docks night after night in the company of the same masters. They recognize something in the other's face, a thinly veiled "I know a secret" cockiness. They may meet, talk, have drinks. They may date each other. They compare notes. They may talk with ghouls, who are often willing to talk about what they've seen in hopes of parlaying their second-rate damnation into some meager kind of esteem — or at least free drinks in exchange for showing off the

strength they derive from their masters' vitae. Some of these mortals are dim-witted dupes. Others are savvy predators in their own right, living and possibly thriving in the margins of vampiric society, like the remoras that safely swim in and out of a shark's mouth, benefiting from the crumbs of mayhem and corruption.

These mortals have stories that can be told through roleplaying. They are not throw-away characters. They are not fools. They are not naïve. They are not blind to the world unfolding around them. Most especially, they are not harmless.

Vampires who work with these mortals would be wise to treat such individuals well. Not only is good help hard to find, but even a powerful vampire can learn that it's dangerous to cop a cavalier attitude with his "support staff." It's not as though mortals can't piece together puzzles, after all — puzzles such as haven locations, the identity of a vampire's greatest foe and what one outcome of a conflict a Cainite most wants to avoid is.

Some mortals need to be dominated (or Dominated), while others do their best work when they are treated as equals, however much that might gall the vampire involved. Other mortals are simply in "the night business" for the money. A lot of cash changes hands after the sun goes down, and knowing how to put yourself in the way of its flow is never a bad thing.

#### THE STORYTELLER AND MORTAL CHARACTERS

The Storyteller is free to encourage or prohibit players from taking mortal characters as she sees fit. The presence of mortal characters changes the tone of the game markedly, and that may or may not jibe with the Storyteller's concept for the chronicle. Don't get upset if the Storyteller isn't excited about letting you play a mortal character. In all likelihood, if she's disallowing mortals, it's probably because they wouldn't last long enough or, at the very least, wouldn't fit in with the tone she's hoping for in her particular chronicle. If not this chronicle, ask her again next time.

If a player is determined to play a mortal, the Storyteller should talk with her to find out why. What is the player hoping to get out of the game by playing a mortal that she would not get playing a vampire or a ghoul? What are the player's strategies for not being killed or Embraced? If the player can't answer such questions easily, then the Storyteller might want to disallow the mortal character in favor of one that fits the chronicle better. On the bright side, even if the player decides halfway through the game that she really *doesn't* want to play a mortal character, it's a very simple problem to fix, the only remaining question being who will Embrace the character.



## PLAYING HUMAN

The rules presented here allow you to create a mortal character. Outside of being capable of walking in the sun, mortal characters do not have any personal advantages over vampires. They have fewer Attribute and Ability points. They do not have access to Disciplines. They cannot make thralls to serve them. It's not a role for those who are into roleplaying for the sense of power.

Why, you might ask, would you want to play a mortal character when you can take the role of a ghoul or a vampire and have the benefit of vampiric Disciplines? A player might opt to take on the challenge of a mortal character for any number of reasons, but variety is right up there at the top of the list. It's also worth doing for the sheer challenge of keeping a mortal character alive (and un-Embraced) for the course of an entire chronicle. Playing a mortal in a vampire story also gives the mood of the entire chronicle an infusion of nervousness and edge that an all-vampire story simply doesn't have. Whether you're friend or foe of the Kindred, it's not hard to come up with some way of working a mortal character into a story. Vampires, after all, don't use ghouls for all of their dabbling in the mortal world. On the contrary, with the arrival of the new breed of hunters (who, disturbingly, appear to be able to tell when a person has been turned into a ghoul) on the scene, it makes increasingly more sense to avoid ghouls, and even the blood bond, entirely (unless absolutely necessary).

Mortals can be very useful. The rules presented here give mortals fewer Attribute and Ability points than a starting vampire character, but some of that disparity is balanced by their greater number of freebie points at character creation. Mortals, then, can specialize in a field that could, potentially, make them very useful to a Cainite benefactor. A clever vampire can take advantage of the skills of almost any pawn. Some are obvious — detectives, hackers and lawyers can almost always be made useful — others are just as

useful (if not more so), but less obviously. In the course of her night-to-night business, a vampire frequently might need the services of translators, financiers or private detectives just as much, if not more, than those folks who leap immediately to mind.

A player opting to run a mortal character brings a whole new level of drama to a chronicle. The fragility of life is highlighted, as are the ethical dilemmas of serving a master who would just as readily drink the character dry as talk to her. What are her motives for doing so? Curiosity? Love? Misanthropy? Obsession? Addiction? Familial piety? The list of potential reasons for serving (or merely working in tandem with) a vampire is a lengthy one. If it seems far-fetched or unbelievable, think again. People do some weird, *weird* shit in real life — smoking, having unsafe sex, joining cults — and often make choices that are inexplicable to those around them, so coming up with an explanation for why a mortal character keeps company with vampires isn't really all that taxing.

Alternatively, you can have mortals take an adversarial role in your chronicle. Toe to toe, a mortal doesn't stand much of a chance against a vampire. Then again, that's what strategy and well connected allies are for. When a small group of mortals learns of the existence of vampires, it must become a slow and careful game of strategy if the mortals are to have any chance of success. Stalking predators is dangerous business, but it can make for an exciting story.

A dedicated Storyteller might run two games at a time — one with vampires and one with mortals discovering the existence of vampires — and at some climactic point could bring both groups together for a little mayhem. If the mortals actually wind up closing in combat with the vampires, it will be a short evening and plenty of time will exist to create characters for a new game. Otherwise, the vampires could find that they're up against serious antagonists.

If the Storyteller sees the chronicle ultimately becoming a high-intensity vampire vs. vampire epic, it might be better to disallow mortal characters. Any chronicle that's strongly based around action and violence is going to be hard for a mortal character to survive. If a mortal does bite the dust, the Embrace may be an option for keeping the player in the game.

On the other hand, if the Storyteller intends to run a film-noir style game, or one based around Kindred

political machinations, the presence of mortals can heighten the sense of grittiness in the game by acting as a kind of counterpoint to the jaded vampire characters or illustrating first-hand what the Kindred have lost in becoming what they are.

Mixed games comprising vampire, mortal and perhaps ghoul characters are great for games focusing on politics or mystery. Mortals also work well in games with vampires of high generation.

Another option that a Storyteller might consider is a game wherein mortals outnumber vampires. The vampire characters in such a game, used to being the masters of the night, might gain a better feeling for just why the Children of Caine bother with the Masquerade at all if the mortals work together to keep the Kindred in line.

Regardless of the kind of chronicle the Storyteller has in mind, if the power level of the game is too high for a mortal character, the Storyteller should be up front with the player about that fact. Character death is rarely a fun time for the player, and even if the character is Embraced, it undermines the player's choice to play a mortal (though if the player simply wants to play a mortal for a while as a form of extended prelude, that's a different story, obviously).

That said, fragility is one of the myriad disadvantages a player takes on when he opts to play a mortal. The Storyteller has done her duty by warning the player of that fact up front, and whatever the player opts to do is then no one's business but his own.

## STEP ONE:

## CHARACTER CONCEPT

At this point, you need have only a general idea of your character — sex, age, overall approach to life, that sort of thing. Paint her with broad brushstrokes now and refine her later. The more time you spend creating and playing your mortal, the more fully fleshed out she'll be.

Even here, however, important differences remain. More so than normal, it's important to have a solid concept for a mortal character. Have a strong sense of what your character is about and why that character has to be a mortal rather than a vampire or a ghoul. It's okay to go against the grain of the game a little as long as you have a reason for doing so. What kind of mortal is it who's running around with the undead all night long? Did your character begin as part of a powerful Ventrue's herd who eventually rebelled? Was she a blood doll who learned about Kindred by eavesdropping on the vampires who, thinking her harmless, fed on her? Has the mortal somehow proven himself in some significant way to a city's prince? Is he a traitor to the human race, wanting so badly to become a Kindred himself that he functions as his master's proxy during the daylight hours? On the other hand, is he an experienced and devoted vampire hunter, cleverly insinuating himself into the vampire's





### SAMPLE CONCEPTS

In addition to the sample concepts mentioned in the **Vampire** core book, some additional concepts are more appropriate for mortal characters.

- **Bureaucrat** — judge, public official, councilor, aide, speech writer, intern
- **Thrall** — blood doll, groupie, addict, toady, sycophant, secret admirer
- **Witch-hunter** — Inquisitor, member of the Arcanum, paranormal investigator, revenger, NSA agent

milieu in preparation for a massive onslaught against the parasites of humanity?

If you're the Storyteller and you're making a mortal a significant character in your chronicle, you want to be able to play him to the hilt and distinguish him from other mortals in your game who may simply be there as props or food for the vampire characters. Whether he's a good guy or a bad guy, the key thing is that he be interesting. In fiction, a compelling character is one who captures the readers' attention. In a **Vampire** story, it's one who captures the interest of the other players.

If you're a player and your character happens to be mortal, you'll want to think very carefully about the disadvantages of playing such a fragile character in a game centered around the Machiavellian tactics of undead bloodsuckers. Players with vampire characters may assume that you're there to be ordered around, tapped for blood or Embraced (if not brutalized outright). It is your job to come up with a character who is too good, too skilled or too clever for such a prosaic fate. The assumption made by many players is that a mortal character would be boring. If you're actually going to play a mortal, you'd best be able to portray an interesting one.

When generating a mortal character, you have to ask yourself why the character spends time with vampires and how he manages to do so without becoming a victim. What's his system? Is he using complex tactics to insinuate himself into vampire society, or has he wound up there simply by virtue of his natural charisma? Once you can answer both of those questions, then you can seriously start to think about playing a mortal character.

### OVERALL CONCEPT

If you're playing a mortal character, chances are it's not for the abundance of powers that character provides you. With the exception of a handful of extremely rare

abilities, mortal characters don't typically have much raw power. Walking downtown on a sunny day may be nice, but power it ain't. If you simply want to be more human than a vampire, you might want to play a ghoul, but ghouls are not mortals, and they have a whole different set of character creation rules. If you're playing a mortal character, then, you need to be very clear who that character is, what his motives are and what got him to the place where the story takes off. Playing a mortal character in a game of **Vampire** is a roleplaying challenge of the most difficult kind. You have no powers to play with, not even the basic Attributes and Abilities that vampire characters start with. The only pay-off, then, is the satisfaction of top-notch roleplaying. Whatever your character concept, if you've chosen to play a mortal, you'd best be ready to play it all the way.

### ARCHETYPE: NATURE AND Demeanor

Mortals, like vampires, have two sides to their personalities: who they really are at heart (their Nature) and the persona they project to others (their Demeanor). While the years of vampiric existence and prestation-playing often heighten the disparity between a Cainite's Nature and Demeanor, a mortal's Nature and Demeanor are a little more likely to be similar. While a vampire might easily stretch a Bon Vivant façade over a Monster Nature, mortals tend not to have Demeanors that are 180 degrees off of their Natures unless they're true sociopaths. By way of example: For a character with the Visionary nature, Architect, Autocrat, Deviant, Fanatic, Perfectionist and Rebel are all highly likely Demeanors, whereas Child, Conformist or Traditionalist are not.

### SAMPLE ARCHETYPES

While the **Vampire** core book has a prodigious list of sample Archetypes, not all of those are suitable for mortals (though the specifics are left up to the Storyteller). Likewise, some Archetypes are much more prevalent in mortals than in vampires.

- **Addict** — You're hooked on something. Or someone. Regain Willpower every time you gain access to the substance or individual you're addicted to.
- **Dreamer** — You live in your head half the time. Regain Willpower any time you escape a stressful situation through your imagination.
- **Vigilante** — You take the law into your own hands. Regain Willpower any time you punish a criminal the law couldn't (or wouldn't).
- **Voyeur** — Other people's lives fascinate you. Regain Willpower any time you catch a particularly interesting glimpse of another person's life while watching him from afar without his knowledge.

## STEP TWO: SELECT ATTRIBUTES

With the assigning of Attribute points, your mortal stops being pure concept and begins to take shape in the World of Darkness, and her strengths — and weaknesses — reveal themselves.

Lacking the blood of the Damned, mortals lack vampires' inherent Attribute advantages and do not receive the same number of beginning Attribute points. As with vampire characters, mortal characters have one free dot in every Attribute. To build upon that foundation, a mortal character receives six points to put into her primary category, four to put into her secondary category and three to put into her tertiary category. That makes a weak starting character compared to a beginning vampire, but that's how things work. Some, though by no means all, of this inequity can be smoothed out later on with freebie points (though it should be pointed out that even if you spend all your freebie points on Attributes, you will still only have a one Attribute-point advantage over a vampire who doesn't enhance her Attributes at all, so it might be worth designing your character and then assigning freebie points in such a way that your character's strength lies in some form of specialization, rather than any sort of general superiority).

## STEP THREE: SELECT ABILITIES

Mortals have not had the decades to study and learn that vampires have and, furthermore, what time they do have is often spent in pastimes of no consequence (such as playing video games or watching television). Consequently, they do not have the same number of points to start with that vampires do.

Mortal characters begin with 11 points in their primary category, seven in their secondary and four in their tertiary.

As with Cainites, mortals do not begin with any starting dots in Talents, Skills or Knowledges, nor may they buy Abilities above 3 at this stage of character creation.

## STEP FOUR: SELECT ADVANTAGES

If you were hoping that the inequity between mortals and vampires might be mitigated here, forget it. Mortals receive only Backgrounds (a subset of those available to Cainites, in fact) and Virtues (the same ones used by Kindred).

### BACKGROUNDS

Mortal characters can have Backgrounds just as Kindred do. Mortals, obviously, cannot take the Generation or Herd Backgrounds, but everything else is open to them,

though not necessarily to the same degree enjoyed by Kindred. Mortals have limits on some Backgrounds (e.g., Status) that vampires do not. Strategic use of Background points can really make a mortal character. Many Vampire players emphasize Disciplines because it's the most obvious way in which vampires have the advantage over mortals. To do that, they often ignore Backgrounds entirely, even to the extent of overlooking their free Background points. Backgrounds, then, can be one of those rare areas where a mortal character can really shine. If you put some thought into Backgrounds, choose them strategically and spend some freebies to increase them, you can create an incredibly well connected and influential mortal character, and such a character is far more capable of holding his own against a vampire antagonist than one who was pumped up with two more dots of Stamina and two more points of Strength. Best of all, the roleplaying experience of the player behind that character is often better as well.

### Allies

A mortal dealing with Cainites needs all the allies he can find. A mortal in a one-on-one conflict situation with a vampire is almost always on the losing end of the equation, but if powerful or influential allies can be brought in, the mortal might feasibly hold his own and perhaps even prevail.

### Contacts

This Background is the same for mortals as for Cainites. Well connected is well connected, whether you breathe or drink blood.

### Fame

Fame is a double-edged sword when dealing with the Kindred world. Some Cainites shun fame and the famous as they do sunlight, and a mortal who becomes famous over the course of a chronicle may find his Kindred contacts drying up faster than a Death Valley rain puddle. On the other hand, others among the undead are drawn to the parties and the lifestyle of the famous. Presence, after all, is more than a Discipline, and Fame often grants a measure of it to mortals. Some mortals parlay Fame into an entrée into all sorts of places they shouldn't go.

### Influence

One of the many ways that a mortal's inclusion into a Vampire chronicle can be explained, the Influence Background suggests that the mortal might be a key nexus in a particular vampire's network of influences. If that's the case, the mortal character is likely to have a lot of influence in some area, and if he's valuable to one vampire, he can potentially be valuable to others.

### Mentor

The Mentor Background for mortals is one of the most versatile. It can indicate that the mortal is protected by a vampire (such as an old patron of the family), a

powerful mortal or almost any older, wiser individual. Moreover, the field really opens up if the Storyteller is crossover friendly. Beyond concern for the character's well-being, good connections are a key characteristic of a Mentor, as is wisdom. She will know people and have knowledge that the character doesn't. She may be able to provide answers, protection, guidance or other forms of help, but the player and the Storyteller should discuss the exact nature of a character's Mentor at character creation to keep the player from trying to use this Background like a storytelling version of a Swiss Army knife.

### Resources

A character with available Resources can make things happen more easily. Money makes one formidable; it puts one on the radar. A rich character can use his wealth to even the odds in a conflict with a vampire. Better connections, more professional bodyguards and the like don't automatically make a mortal the equal of a powerful vampire, but they definitely put him on equal (or even superior) footing with most newly Embraced Licks. Furthermore, since more questions are asked when wealthy people die than when poor people die, it might also provides a modicum of protection for mortals who find themselves moving in Kindred circles. This makes a good pairing with Influence and even Fame, as well.

### Retainers

Mortals, lacking Disciplines or the ability to blood bond others, do not have quite the same kinds of retainers as Kindred, if for no other reason than money is the only leverage most mortals have over each other. That said, mortals with sufficient Resources may hire all manner of help, including bodyguards, servants, researchers, private detectives or whatever else the player and Storyteller agree upon. A character can never have more than (Resources - 1) dots in the Retainer Background (that is, a character with 4 dots of Resources can't have more than 3 dots in Retainers).

### Status

This is, perhaps, the rarest Background a mortal character can take and certainly the most limited. A mortal character may take no more than one dot of Status (which is still more than can be said of certain Caitiff), and that only with good explanation; any other status he gains in the Cainite's social milieu must be obtained over the course of the chronicle. Vampires can be quite arrogant, all but certain that the world revolves only because of them. Many (if not most) vampires would find the notion of extending status to a mortal a repellent one. Any Kindred who grants status to a mortal might be courting a serious political backlash

if not a wholesale schism of vampire society. It would almost certainly set in motion a great number of plots to be rid of the mortal in question. Any player availing herself of the Status Background for her character is essentially giving the Storyteller carte blanche to play up the political aspects of **Vampire**.

### VIRTUES

Virtues are the internal resources a character has to draw on in times of crisis. Mortal characters start with the same three Virtues as most vampire characters: Conscience, Self-Control and Courage. A mortal character has seven points to spend on Virtues, and freebie points can be used to buy Virtues on a two-for-one basis. As with vampire characters, a character's Virtue rating doesn't necessarily dictate how a player should or should not portray his character, though the Virtues do provide a convenient heuristic if a player isn't entirely certain how his character is likely to respond to a given situation. They do come with general benefits and drawbacks. Virtues play a different role for the living than they do for the undead. Mortals do not have Beasts; they do not enter frenzy, nor are they prone to Röttschreck. Consequently, the game mechanics of the Virtues may not come into play as frequently as they might for a Kindred, but good Storytellers are adept at bringing the Virtues into play in a concrete way. High Virtue ratings typically help a character, though sometimes being too virtuous might be a hindrance, particularly when maneuvering through the corrupt and underhanded world inhabited by vampires.

#### Conscience

More than anything else, Conscience is the ability to act ethically in the face of strong pressure, internal or external, to do otherwise. It represents the character's ability to do things like refuse bribes, defend an absent ally against persuasive detractors and avoid cruel, unethical or malevolent behavior. A high Conscience rating, especially in a setting like the World of Darkness, may require a character to take positions that are likely to have unpleasant consequences. After all, if doing the right thing were easy, no such thing as an ethical dilemma would exist.

As with vampires, Conscience affects a character's resilience to degeneration (see the **Vampire** core book, page 221). At the Storyteller's discretion, a player may add her Conscience rating to any Willpower roll made to avoid doing something that runs counter to the character's moral or ethical code. Although a character already cannot be forced via Dominate to act against her Nature, this approach can also provide extra dice against attempts to intimidate, seduce or bribe the



character into behaviors that the character considers wrong. A character's Nature impacts how this can be used. A Traditionalist would likely be able to add her Conscience to her dice pool to resist a seduction attempt, but a Bon Vivant probably would not.

### **Self-Control**

A more useful (for mortals) term for Self-Control might be impulse control. Characters with low impulse control are more inclined to act on knee-jerk responses without thinking. In an argument they may blurt out the first angry retort that comes into their heads or may take a swing at anyone who pisses them off without giving so much as a thought to the potential consequences. These individuals are likely to earn reputations for having short fuses or hair-trigger tempers. Individuals with high Self-Control, however, can smile and nod at even the most provocative insults or behavior.

Players may roll their Self-Control when their characters are pushed into positions where it takes a great deal of self-discipline to keep from acting out. Rolling Self-Control is usually a last-ditch effort to keep from behaving in a manner likely to have grave consequences, like cursing at an obnoxious Brujah. The standard difficulty of this roll is 6, but it may go up depending on the intensity of the provocation.

### **Courage**

In mortals, Courage is the ability to act even in the face of overwhelming fear. It doesn't mean that the character doesn't feel fear — on the contrary, in the absence of fear no courage can exist — but, rather, that the character is able to accept the fear and function normally anyway and not run away or collapse to the ground weeping in abject terror. As a game mechanic, Courage represents stoicism and bravery combined. It helps a character stand his ground when confronted with something that is truly terrifying to him and helps him keep from cracking when tortured.

The player may roll Courage by itself when confronted by something that would make the average person run away in terror (a particularly repulsive Nosferatu, for example). At the Storyteller's discretion, it may also be added to Willpower in the face of particularly horrible circumstances — while being tortured by a Tzimisce interrogator, for example.

## **HUMANITY**

The Humanity rating reflects largely the same thing for mortals as it does for vampires: humankind's better, more humane and caring aspect. A mortal's Humanity score, like a vampire's, is the sum of the character's Conscience and Self-Control scores. Either of these can be raised using freebie points if you want a

higher starting Humanity rating. The average person's Humanity is between 6 and 8. If your starting Humanity is 5 or lower, you may want either to ask yourself why that is, or raise it to a point that you think is in keeping with your concept of the character's attitudes and behavior. It's possible to raise Humanity by itself (with freebie points), but that's the inefficient way of going about it.

### **LOW-HUMANITY MORTALS**

It's important to note that mortals, unlike vampires, have no Beast. As a mortal's Humanity erodes away, she simply becomes colder, less humane and increasingly more jaded. Mortals are not, as vampires are, actively driven to acts of atrocity, they simply grow increasingly numb to it — and to the feelings, needs and rights of others, which cease to have any relevance to their view of the world.

Furthermore, moral decay does not affect everyone the same way. Not every mortal with a Humanity of 2 or less is going to become a Charles Manson, Adolf Hitler or Josef Stalin. Moral bankruptcy wears many faces, and not all of them coincide with the more simplistic expressions with which we may be familiar.

Consider the following:

A mother's Humanity might slowly be worn down by the news, by her own stunted life and by the pressures of being a parent. One petty act leads to another, and little cruelties become games to her. As her Humanity drops ever lower, she might push her daughter relentlessly to be the woman she never was, to prepare her for "the grim world she's going to have to live in." Her low Humanity manifests as a complete lack of empathy for her daughter, total disregard for her daughter's wishes and a notable enthusiasm for brutality when punishing her daughter for even miniscule infractions of rules. She might look to all the world like a kind and attentive mother, but only her daughter would realize what a monster she had really become.

A priest might grow so accustomed to focusing only on the evil in men's hearts that he ceases to be capable of seeing, or feeling, anything that is good or healthy. His own behavior at that point is likely to slide as he begins rationalizing increasingly immoral behavior, either by convincing himself that "everybody does it, so I'm no worse than the rest of these sinners" or perhaps by using Biblical precedents to make his behavior palatable to him. Basing his actions on the story of Lot he might impregnate his daughters, he might decide that Jehovah demands a sacrifice as in the story of Jacob and Isaac, or he might murder an acquaintance for any number of infractions of the code of Leviticus.

The hypocrisy of the preacher's life might go entirely unnoticed, and he might even be seen as a saintly man by his parishioners, but all of that would unravel if the truth of the situation were to come to light and others could see just how enormous a gap existed between his words and his deeds.

These are just two examples of low-Humanity mortals, but they give an idea of the events that might lead to such a situation, how people rationalize monstrous behaviors and the broad range of ways in which low Humanity manifests itself.

Obviously, mortals vary wildly in their personalities, and those with 0 Humanity lack none of that variety. Zero Humanity looks different depending on the Nature it's being filtered through. A coward, a party-animal and an over-achiever may all have a Humanity of 1, but they will all manifest their jadedness, their callousness and their baser natures differently. While sadism, rape and murder can be the outcome of a low Humanity, they remain only the tip of the iceberg with regard to the ways in which conscience-free individuals comport themselves in the world.

#### REGAINING HUMANITY

The static nature of vampires combined with the constant nudging of the Beast eventually leads many (if not most) of the Kindred into the slow downward spiral of degeneration.

Mortals, on the other hand, have three distinct advantages where Humanity is concerned: They have no Beast, they don't feed on blood and they are dynamic by nature.

Among other things, the absence of the Beast means that mortals are not prone to frenzy and all the horror it entails. They do not have a constant voice in the back of their heads pushing them to kill or commit other acts of atrocity.

Killing, in fact, is much further removed from the thoughts of the average mortal than it is from the minds of vampires. Kindred risk killing a person every time they feed, and after a while they grow inured to the possibility. Few mortals are in the position to kill another so easily or on such a regular basis.

Most importantly, however, mortals have a much greater penchant for change and growth than vampires. As living things, they are free to change their courses at any time. Mortals can "turn over a new leaf," while vampires don't really have that option. To reflect this, mortal characters regain Humanity via experience at a different rate than Kindred. Mortal characters can buy up their Humanity at a cost of  $2 \times [11 - \text{Current Humanity Rating}]$ . A character with 3 Humanity, therefore, would

have to spend 16 experience points to reach Humanity 4 while a character with Humanity 8 need spend only six experience points to reach 9. This represents the difficulty even dynamic characters have pulling out of the downward spiral as well as the ability of a motivated ethical individual to become a better person.

The Storyteller should allow a character to buy up Humanity *if and only if* the character's behavior warrants it. If a player running a cold, steely tough guy, whose greatest manifestation of Humanity is not kicking his opponents in the face when they're down, wants to buy his character's Humanity up from 7 to 8, the Storyteller is free to laugh. On the other hand, a character who shows concern, kindness and a high degree of ethical behavior in his dealings with others should have no problem at all. The Storyteller might even be inclined to give him a cost break on the deal for good roleplaying.

## STEP FIVE: FINISHING TOUCHES

At this point you have the framework of a character. You have some Traits and a general sense of who your character might be. This is where you can flesh out that framework. This is where you make the leap from seeing your character as a collection of numbers and begin to view him as a full-fledged living, breathing individual, like a character from a book or a movie.

As you spend your 21 freebie points, you may now raise some of your Abilities above 3, but as you do, think about what part of your character's backstory accounts for such remarkable levels of expertise. Does he have five dots in Medicine because he was on a famous surgeon or because he was a medic in the army? Don't make the Storyteller wince by tying together all kinds of unlikely events that led to your 20-year-old character having epic potential with several Abilities.

If you're the Storyteller for your chronicle, this is the section where you ask *why*. *Why* does this perky 20-year-old have five dots in Dodge? *Why* does the disenfranchised college dropout have four dots in both Medicine *and* Computers? On one hand, the mortals in this game are going to be a cut above the ruck and run of humanity — that's their right as protagonists — but that's still no reason to toss all credibility out the window. If the Storyteller doesn't demand a certain basic degree of realism from the game — enough that players can suspend their disbelief and immerse themselves in their characters — then the game will never take on a feel of a shared world and will always feel like a bunch of people sitting around a table rolling dice. If the player can come up with a credible reason for having four or five dots in an Ability, especially if it

makes the character more real, then by all means allow it. If, on the other hand, it's sheer goofiness and numbers engineering in the name of twinkery, feel free to send the player back to the drawing board again and again if necessary until he brings you a believable character and not just a well chosen collection of numbers and dots engineered for maximum kill power.

### WILLPOWER

It takes a lot of Willpower to swim with the sharks. Is your character browbeaten by the undead? Has your will nearly been broken? Or have your dealings with vampires pissed you off and given you an unshakable sense of purpose? As a mortal, you obviously don't need Willpower to ward off frenzy or for use in Disciplines, but your strength of will might be the only thing between you and falling prey to the mental tricks of the undead, so it's well worth spending the Freebies necessary to raise it beyond its starting value (which, for mortals, is 3).

### FREEBIE POINTS

As with vampires, mortal characters receive freebie points to spend as they will at character creation. Mortals receive 21 freebies, but that's not because they're stronger than vampires, it's to help offset the gulf between beginning mortal and vampire characters. The additional six points aren't even enough to give a mortal the same start-

ing Attributes as a vampire, but they don't hurt. It's not a bad idea to spend a few freebie points defensively; a mortal character can always use an extra point of Stamina, Dodge or Willpower when he thinks he might come into conflict with the violent and scheming undead. Remember that in addition to Attributes and Abilities freebies can also go toward Willpower, Virtues, Backgrounds and Merits. Taking Flaws can also provide up to an extra seven freebie points while giving your character more depth and complexity.

## THE SPARK OF LIFE

Once you've assigned all your points, you have a construct, a puppet, a dynamic game mechanic. To turn this mental construct into a character, you have to account realistically for how the dots and numbers interact to create a character. *Why* is she so strong? *When* did he learn to speak fluent Russian? *How* did he obtain his expertise in computer security? The more vibrant your character, the more engrossing the chronicle can be. Taking the character's Nature and Demeanor into consideration, come up with a realistic personality that you can stretch over the framework of numbers and dots. Based on the history you've created for him, what are his motivations? What does he hope for? Why does he risk his life, and very possibly his soul, to interact with vampires? How does your character differ from you? Once





you can imagine what your character thinks and feels at any given time, then you know that you've transformed the construct into a real character. Then and only then will you have a mortal character real enough to care about and play seriously. Here's one way to gauge whether you've succeeded: If you feel something for your character — respect, affection, dislike, even disdain — then you know that you've succeeded in transforming the construct into a real character.

## THE PRELUDE

In many, if not most, **Vampire** chronicles, the prelude illustrates the character's life before the Embrace. For a mortal character it makes more sense to focus on the character's life before she discovered the existence of vampires. The crux of such a prelude necessarily focuses on where the character lives, what she did differently the night she learned that vampires are real and, especially, the identity of the first vampire she ever met (and why he didn't kill or Dominate her or otherwise take care of what is otherwise a clear violation of the Masquerade).

Playing a mortal in a **Vampire** story is, ironically enough, best left to experienced players. Many of the prelude's common uses, therefore — letting a player become accustomed to the World of Darkness and the Storyteller system, for example — are probably unnecessary.

The prelude is also a good opportunity to play up the themes that will become familiar to anyone playing a mortal character: the precipitous razor's edge walked by mortals who insist on playing in the world of the vampires despite their lesser ability to survive in that world, the fragility of life and the possibility of utter corruption. The Storyteller has a better chance to highlight these themes in the prelude than she will have later in the game when she's juggling more players, so it's a good idea to make a strong point now that she can allude to or touch on from time to time later in the chronicle.

The goal of the prelude is to account for the difference between the day-to-day reality of the average, unenlightened day-dwelling mortal in the World of Darkness ("There's no such thing as vampires.") and the chronicle's initial status quo ("Not only do vampires exist, but it looks like I'm about to spend a lot of time with them — provided they don't kill me first."). Since preludes generally last for one game session (or even fractions thereof), it has to do it quickly. Key to the success of the prelude is the mechanism by which the mortal makes her way into the vampires' world. While

the Storyteller has no shortage of ways to arrive at this situation, it still warrants thought so that whatever device he comes up with doesn't feel contrived.

### QUESTIONS

#### •What was your life like before you discovered the existence of vampires?

What did you do before you discovered the truth? How did you live your life from day to day? Obviously, the field is wide open here, but following are a few options:

**Cop** — Maybe one too many inexplicable incidents caused you to look a little more closely into your city's nightlife (against your commissioner's orders). What you found when you went looking has changed everything.

**Criminal** — Maybe you had a time when you thought you were the worst thing roaming the streets at night. You learned otherwise.

**Disestablishmentarian** — You lived to subvert the system any way you could. One night you found others who shared your interest in keeping "the authorities" from becoming too powerful, and when you fell in with them, you discovered that your fellows had dark secrets ....

**Drifter** — You never put down roots. You wandered from town to town, city to city, and after a while you discovered that some cities seemed to devour your kind. In time, you learned how accurate that metaphor was, and what lay behind that disturbing fact ....

**Politician** — Some well dressed gentlemen approached you one night with an offer you couldn't refuse. While investigating these individuals, you found out more about the nightlife in your city than you really wanted to know.

**Punk** — Some things a well connected rebel living on the streets just can't help finding out. Once you learned about the Kindred, you couldn't go back.

**True Believer** — Your faith sustains you and your conviction urges you into situations that others would rather avoid. It was while performing the work of your god that you discovered the work of the Evil One going on under the noses of all the decent people of your city. Now your fascination with the machinations of the undead lures you, night after night, like a siren song calling you to your own damnation.

**Victim** — You don't act, but react. Life just happens to you and through some quirk of fate, you're the victim who survived.

#### •How did you discover the existence of vampires?

Vampires expend a lot of effort to keep their shadowy little demimonde a dark secret. How were you able

to learn of their existence and live? Have you always known? Were you in the wrong place at the wrong time? Did you see a grievous breach of the Masquerade and live to tell about it?

•**How have you survived with this knowledge?**

You are a walking breach of the Masquerade. You know what mortals aren't supposed to, and yet, somehow, you're still alive and walking around. How did this state of affairs come to be? Do you have powerful connections in the society of the undead? If so, how did such an odd state of affairs come about? Have you simply not shown up (yet) on their radar? Do members of your family have some sort of "agreement" with the city's nighttime denizens? Do they think you've been somehow neutralized as a threat? Are you being hunted even now? Did you somehow talk your way out of the situation? What did you have to promise before they agreed to let you live?

•**Who knows about your nocturnal lifestyle and the strange company you keep?**

It's unlikely that *all* of the people with whom you keep company are vampires (and if they are, how did such a strange set of circumstances come to be?). Who are your mortal friends? Have you confided in anyone? How would the vampires you hang with (or oppose) react if they knew that? Do you have a boyfriend? A girlfriend? Does she think you're crazy? Does she believe you (and if so, does she relate the stories you tell to others, inviting others to poke their noses in where they don't belong)?

•**Why do you persist in keeping the company of the undead?**

Most people who see the night-to-night behavior of vampires would flee and hope never to draw the attention of the undead. Not you. You choose to spend your time moving among them, to one degree or another. Whether you're ally or enemy of the walking dead, you have, for whatever reason, made vampires a significant part of your life. Instead of running as fast as you can in the other direction, you seem to keep vampiric company more nights than not. Why do you so frequently put yourself in harm's way to associate with monsters? Are you enthralled by a particularly charismatic vampire? Is your dealer/informant/pimp one of the undead? Have you somehow gained status within the society of the Damned, and if so, how? Does it give you a thrill? Do you work for them? Have circumstances forced you to this? Are you on a mission from God? Does keeping the company of the undead make you feel somehow special or important? To what lengths must you go to rationalize your behavior?

A number of reasons might explain why you remain in the presence of the undead. Below are some, but by no means all, of the reasons that your mortal might keep returning to the vampires' midnight milieu:

**Addiction** — Whether it's a vampire's vitae or the adrenaline rush you feel by tempting fate on a nightly basis, you've developed a full-fledged jones for the vampiric nightlife that you can't imagine giving up.

**Apathy** — Maybe you're depressed. Maybe you're jaded. Maybe you've never cared about anything. Regardless, you've fallen in with the undead and you just can't seem to care. Now you lead your life from night to night, risking death or worse and the city's dark streets, and still you feel nothing but numb.

**Blackmail** — Someone has the goods on you, and if you try to escape now, your past deeds will be used against you.

**Failure** — You've tried to return to the normal world, but you screw it up every single time and you just can't stay away.

**Guilt** — You've wronged one of the Kindred, and until you can expiate your guilt, you're stuck in the uncomfortable position of wanting to make amends to a monster.

**Legacy** — You've "inherited" your place among the undead from someone who passed the mantle on to you and now you're obligated to stay — at least until you can pass your responsibilities on to another.

**Love** — Love really is blind, and as unlikely as it seems, you have fallen for a Kindred and you can't seem to reclaim your heart.

**Revenge** — You have a target lock on one particular vampire you need to exact vengeance upon, and you'll continue to interact with the undead until you find her and make her pay.

**Unfinished Business** — Like revenge, but more general: You have business of some sort that keeps you coming back, but once it's taken care of, you'll return to the respectable life you once led. Or at least that's what you tell yourself.

•**What lies do you tell yourself to make your behavior palatable?**

Everyone tells themselves little lies to make life's less pleasant tasks a tad more bearable. Little lies like "It's just for a little while," "It's okay because I'm only following orders," "I'll make up for it later" and "This will help me get to Heaven." have allowed people to do some truly shocking things. Do you rely on one of these conceits to get you through the night, or have you come up with something all your own (and maybe even better)?

•**How do you explain your nocturnal schedule to your friends and family?**

Lying to yourself is one thing, but it's likely that you've had to explain your late-night antics to others as well. It's one thing to go to bed a little late, but rising at dusk and going to bed at dawn is a difficult thing to cover up. It raises eyebrows. It becomes a barrier between you and those who keep normal schedules. It's the sort of thing that breaks up relationships, causes parents to look askance at their children and gets employees fired. Unless you're a complete pariah from society, someone is bound to want to know what you're up to at all hours of the night.

•**How do you support yourself?**

Even in a world with vampires, a normal guy has to eat and pay bills. Supporting oneself in the constantly worsening economy of the World of Darkness is hard enough without limiting yourself to jobs with night hours that allow you to keep up with your Kindred allies and foes. Did you give up med school to be a night watchman? Do you sell G, K and E to club-goers to support your upside-down schedule? Do you live off the generosity of a vampiric master? Or were you blessed with a trust fund that just won't quit?

•**What do you expect from the future?**

Do you really hope that you'll be able to extricate yourself from the world of the undead once you've wormed your way so far into it? Have you simply resigned yourself to dying ignominiously of blood loss in a rat-filled alley that reeks of stale piss? Do you expect to be made into one of them, and, if so, what makes you think you're so valuable to them that they'll bring you into their dark society?

## MERITS AND FLAWS

Many of the Merits and Flaws in the **Vampire** rule book are clearly not appropriate for mortal characters, at least not at first glance. Maybe some (Smell of the Grave) *could* be adapted if the player and the Storyteller can agree on why that Merit or Flaw would be appropriate for a mortal character. The Supernatural Merits, in particular, are good for mortal characters to take because they provide one more reason for the character to know about and be involved in the twilight world inhabited by the World of Darkness's supernatural denizens.

The Merits provided here are especially appropriate for a mortal character in a **Vampire** game, but other World of Darkness games may provide Merits and Flaws that work better for your particular character or chronicle.

### MERITS

**Bitter Blood (1-pt. Physical Merit)**

### CHARACTER CREATION CHEAT SHEET

This is a quick-and-dirty version of the mortal character creation rules that appear in various incarnations among other World of Darkness titles. Rather than page through this chapter every time you want to create a mortal character, you may simply refer to this sidebar for convenience.

**Step One: Character Concept**

Choose concept, Nature and Demeanor.

**Step Two: Select Attributes**

Prioritize primary, secondary and tertiary Attribute categories (6/4/3).

**Step Three: Select Abilities**

Prioritize primary, secondary and tertiary Ability categories (11/7/4).

**Step Four: Select Advantages**

Select Backgrounds (5) and Virtues (7).

**Step Five: Last Touches**

Note your character's Humanity (Conscience + Self-Control) and Willpower (3), then spend freebie points (21).

Something in your genes or your diet makes your blood taste foul to vampires. Nothing is preventing a bloodsucker from bleeding you just for the fun of it, of course, but you're the last vessel a vampire would willingly choose to drink from.

**Night Vision (2-pt. Physical Merit)**

You can see just fine at night and you've never understood why people have so much difficulty seeing just because it's a little dark. You suffer no penalty to dice pools as long as you have at least light equivalent to moderate starlight. When going from brightly lit conditions to low-light conditions, it may take a turn or two for your eyes to adapt.

**Vigorous (5-pt. Physical Merit)**

You don't need sleep. Your body may need to be still and rest for an hour or two every day, but you can't "sleep" and don't need to. The advantages to this are many, but primary among them is the ability to lead both a normal life during the day and a full and uncompromising nightlife.

**Vampiric Recognition (3-pt. Supernatural Merit)**

You can spot a vampire at 10 paces. You've learned to recognize some aspect of their undead nature — something that others seem oblivious to. Maybe it's a slight metallic odor, or a learned ten-



dency to look at a person's neck to see if he has a pulse in his carotids. Whatever the case, you can tell a vampire from a mortal without difficulty. Certain complicated cases (such as vampires with the Blush of Health Merit) may require a Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 6) for you to be sure.

#### FLAWS

##### **Criminal Record (2-pt. Social Flaw)**

You're a convicted felon. You've done hard time in prison. You cannot legally buy firearms, and all social rolls with those who know your history are at +2 difficulty. Cops, in particular, are especially eager to screw you over, and you can totally kiss good-bye ever getting the benefit of any doubt from those who know you.

##### **Gullible (2-pt. Social Flaw)**

You're not necessarily stupid, but you are definitely far too trusting for the world you live in. Even obvious lies sound plausible to you. Increase by 2 the difficulty of all rolls to detect lies or chicanery.

##### **Insomniac (2-pt. Physical Flaw)**

Getting to sleep is hard. Staying asleep is harder. You toss and turn and can't sleep at night. Any amount of time you spend trying to sleep actually yields about half the normal amount of rest, leaving you bleary-eyed and mentally fuzzy. Increase by 2 the difficulty of all Perception rolls.

##### **Low Pain Tolerance (2-pt. Physical Flaw)**

Your pain threshold is extremely low. What others consider a minor pain debilitates you. Although you soak damage normally, you suffer an additional -1 die-pool penalty whenever you're injured.

##### **Deluded (2-pt. Mental Flaw)**

You're pretty savvy when it comes to the supernatural. Or so you think. Most of what you think you know is egregiously wrong. When you find out, for example, that silver bullets *don't* in fact kill vampires (assuming you survive the experience), you're likely to assume that it was something weird about that particular vampire, not that your "knowledge" was wrong.

##### **Unlucky Supernatural (4-pt. Flaw)**

Things just don't go your way. Every time an opportunity comes along that might let you shine, something comes along to ruin it. Once per game session, the Storyteller may increase the difficulty of a critical roll you make by 2 *and not tell you about it in advance*. If you fail the roll, it's due to some random element of bad luck (your knee buckling right before you pull the trigger, for example ...).

## CHARACTER CONCEPT AND PERSONAL STORYLINE

"Hello. My name is Inigo Montoya. You killed my father. Prepare to die."

—William Goldman, *The Princess Bride*

Everyone wants his character to be someone special.

It's true. We don't play storytelling games to be ordinary characters; we want to be the extraordinary ones. But being extraordinary requires a lot more than playing a rare bloodline, departing drastically from a clan stereotype or even having an improbable spread of Disciplines or exceptionally low generation. What really differentiates your character from all the others and makes him special and unique isn't conveyed by the number of dots on his character sheet.

It's who he really is, what he's trying to accomplish, why it's important to him and just how he manages to do it. A character truly comes to life only when he's involved in a story. A character's personality is defined by how he acts and reacts to the other characters, events and situations around him. The initial character concept is only the beginning, the tip of the iceberg. Characters should be dynamic creations, ever changing as their story continues, whose personalities are shaped by their goals, dreams, rivalries and feuds, and built on past experiences.

A lot of those past experiences occur before you begin to play, some even before the character's Embrace. The most interesting ones should occur afterward, during the chronicle itself. The character concept is the blueprint, the idea that first makes you interested in that particular character. Whether your initial concept is a street kid, police detective, runway model or con artist, that's only really a first impression. In developing your character's prelude, you have the opportunity to create not only a character concept but also the beginnings of a personal storyline that establishes your character's past as well as where his past will lead him in the future.

## THE PERSONAL STORYLINE AND CHARACTER CONCEPT

In its simplest form, a personal storyline is telling the ongoing chronicle from your character's own point of view, where certain things take on greater or lesser

significance based on how important they are to your character's agenda. A chronicle has as many personal storylines as it has characters, since every character (even those played by the Storyteller) has his own unique perspective on events that happen as the story unfolds. A difference exists, however, between a personal storyline that necessarily arises out of troupe-focused play and a storyline that is deliberately crafted to give an individual character depth, interest and player enjoyment. A troupe-focused plotline usually serves more to advance the overall chronicle plotline even though it may also develop characters; a personality-focused plotline serves more to develop a character even though it may advance the chronicle plot.

Sometimes a personal storyline really centers on one character, and the rest of the troupe becomes like a supporting cast for the duration of that particular story. Sometimes a personal storyline involves the whole troupe but somehow manages to have intense and unique personal significance for each character. Your character may be motivated by political ideology, where another might be motivated to achieve the same goal by personal revenge, and a third might be coming along to support you but secretly wonders if your adversary really deserves to die, because that adversary once did his sire a great favor.

Combining the character concept with a personal storyline has a number of advantages. You're giving your character a backstory and a direction and goal to pursue in the chronicle, which make roleplaying the character easier, as you have a far clearer picture of where she's coming from and why she acts the way she does. These story hooks also give the Storyteller a way to draw your character into a storyline that is of personal interest to her. The story is tailored to your character's particular history, goals or desires; the motivation for her to become involved, perhaps even take risks, is built right in. While the story should involve the rest of the player troupe, it is still your character's personal story.

Story hooks also give you, as a player, a personal stake in the story. This is part of your contribution to the storytelling process. By including these hooks in your character's background, you're telling the Storyteller what kinds of stories you would like your character to be involved in.

Where do those stories come from?

## STORY ARCHETYPES AND CHARACTER ROLES

Only a limited number of real plot patterns exist in the world (36, according to one source I've read, and that includes a few only the ancient Greeks would

consider to be good drama). The best plots are used over and over again, but in the hands of a good Storyteller always seem new, because of the way the details are put together. The characters who take part in these classic plots are kind of classic themselves; they are defined by their roles in the story, the positions from which start out and what they seek to achieve. These characters and their associated storyline are archetypes that are used again and again in storytelling, from fairytales to paperback novels to television and movies.

Archetypes are painted with a broad brush: no names, no details. They're the bare bones on which character and story are built. Because they're so basic in structure, they're almost infinite in potential; you can create a huge variety of stories starting with a single short concept. Here is a collection of classic character and story archetypes:

The disregarded younger child or orphan whom seeks to prove himself or make his fortune (almost any fairy tale)

The child called upon to avenge his father's murder (Hamlet, Batman)

The young or inexperienced character who has inherited a great responsibility or power (Frodo Baggins, Luke Skywalker, Harry Potter)

The veteran called unwillingly back into service (Deckard in *Blade Runner*)

The ambitious usurper seeking revenge against all who thwart him (Shakespeare's *Richard III*, just about any comic book villain)

The snitch or former turncoat hiding from the ones he betrayed

The deposed rightful heir struggling against the usurper who robbed him of his inheritance

The reformed bad-ass or repentant monster trying to redeem himself with good deeds (Robert McCall from *The Equalizer*, Angel from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Julian Luna from *Kindred: The Embraced*)

The falsely accused character seeking to prove his innocence while evading justice (*The Fugitive*, Tom Cruise's Ethan Hunt from *Mission: Impossible*, and of course, Robin Hood)

The weary ex-con, trying to go straight but tempted by former companions

The now-wiser character attempting to overcome, atone for or do penance for a terrible mistake made in his past

As widely varied as these character archetypes are (and many more like them exist), you'll notice they all have a few things in common, which are important to remember when translating one of these into a character for **Vampire**.

**Story carries both a sense of the past and the future.** Because of something in the character's background—a past deed, event or situation—he now has a personal goal for the future. This goal shapes how he approaches things that happen to him or the stories he pursues. Past events may also trigger related encounters or events in the future. Because your character's packmate vanished mysteriously during the last siege, you can guess that some clue will eventually come up as to the packmate's fate or whereabouts. Because your character once screwed up while hunting, she now owes the scourge a significant boon after he covered for her in front of the prince, and you know that some night the scourge will call that boon in. Because your character once inadvertently killed her loyal ghoul, she now feels a personal responsibility toward the dead man's mortal family; you can be sure that she will need to become involved when one of them runs into supernatural trouble.

What this involves is cooperation between you and the Storyteller in setting up enjoyable dramatic inevitabilities for your character in the chronicle, inevitabilities that you both understand are there for the express purpose of providing challenges for the character to face and overcome. The reason characters have secrets is so that they can suffer through barely escaping having them exposed, and through actually having them exposed. They have innocent protégés so that the protégés can get in trouble. They make mistakes so the mistakes can come back to haunt them. In real life, things don't always have notable consequences, but in a story—whether it's an epic myth, novel, movie or tale told around a campfire—such mistakes almost always lead to consequences, because that is what the story is all about.

**Story is of personal significance to the character.** It has to be important to the character, something he'll strive to attain or accomplish at any opportunity, and do whatever it takes to convince his coterie to join him on, or a Storyteller character to help him with. It's integral to the character concept itself; it gives the character a purpose for which to exist, a reason to struggle onward despite the obstacles the Storyteller throws in his way, or the sacrifices he must make to get there. No price is too high to gain revenge on the rival who made him look like a fool in front of the entire primogen council; no risk is too great if it might gain the attention of the Black Hand recruiters.

If the Storyteller gives your character a clue that could lead to her missing sire, or allows her a chance to repay the favor she owes the mysterious elder who once saved her unlife, your character should be ready to take it. Make it something you as the player are interested

in taking a risk on as well; it's worth it if you have a storyline that really draws you in as much as it does your character. This kind of story can be rewarding, but it also requires a certain degree of trust between player and Storyteller. You as the player must be able to view the story hook as an opportunity to go deeper into a story, not merely the bait for a Storyteller trap. The Storyteller must trust you to play the character true to her inner motivations, including taking what might appear to be tremendous risks even if you don't know that doing so will move your character another step closer to her final goal.

**Story is unfinished.** The character has an unfulfilled goal, desire or quest. His backstory contains plot threads that can be continued, or loose ends in the past that can come back to haunt him in new ways. This gives the Storyteller something to work into the chronicle that is targeted specifically for your character. While your character may have had goals in the past that were achieved, you should always leave something of significance not only incomplete, but make sure your character is determined to do something about it should the opportunity arise. That means you need to leave those hooks out there for the Storyteller to use, those loose ends that can be used to pull your character into a storyline. The hook can be as simple as a favor owed to another Cainite from a past encounter, or a long-running, if intermittent, correspondence with a mortal friend or relative. It could be an old grudge against a bullying templar, a rivalry with a broodmate or an unrequited love for the prince's childe. It could be something more complex, such as the determination to find the traitor who betrayed her sire to his Final Death.

**Story is not as simple as it first appears.** The character's problem or goal should not be something that is easily achieved. This isn't your just go-to-the-store-and-get-it kind of quest. This is not something that you should be able to accomplish in a single game session, or even necessarily in a single storyline. Sometimes it's because the antagonist or adversary is too powerful for the character to overcome on her own. She must build up a coalition of allies, develop her own strengths and resources or uncover the evidence that will reveal who her true adversary really is. Sometimes it's because the underlying conflict isn't as clear-cut as it first appears either; what seems to be a simple matter of finding the character's missing sire may develop over time into a mystery that can influence the fate of an entire city, or uncover a dark secret left buried for hundreds of years. Even if the first stage of the character's quest seems to be resolved, that resolution should only open new avenues for the character to pursue, uncover further questions



that need answering, even if it takes the story in an entirely different direction.

**Story involves relationships with other characters**, usually Storyteller characters, who become the antagonists, allies, contacts, mentors and other individuals with whom the character must interact in order to achieve her goals.

These relationships can also be with other players' characters. In fact, it's better if it involves the other players' characters, because it allows everyone to play a part. (This also makes it easier for the Storyteller to provide motivation for all the characters in the pack or coterie to work together toward a mutual goal.) When you're creating a character, it never hurts to conspire — er, talk — with your fellow players about possible character concepts or storylines that might appeal to you as a troupe and see if your characters' storylines can be entwined from the very beginning (further discussion on player troupes can be found elsewhere in this book).

Notice what we haven't discussed yet?

## CLAN IS NOT A CHARACTER CONCEPT

Usually it's what you think of first — I'd like to play a Tremere, a Malkavian, a Lasombra. That's okay. But you don't have to start with clan. Even if you know what clan you want to play, don't start your character concept with "He's a Tremere" or "She's a Toreador." I wouldn't go so far as to say clan is irrelevant — okay, maybe, for the sake of this discussion, I will. *Clan is irrelevant to character concept*. Why? Because any character concept and storyline can work with just about any clan. So even if you know you're going to play a Gangrel or Assamite *antitribu*, put that thought aside for a while and look at the character concept and storyline just as they are, without the clan label.

Better yet, let's look at one such story and character archetype and see how we can use the same basic concept as a beginning point for a character of a number of very different clans.

### The deposed heir struggling against the usurper who robbed him of his inheritance

The underlying plotline of many a classic fantasy novel or film, from *Snow White* to *Man in the Iron Mask*, the crux of this story revolves around the identities of the heir and the usurper, and the exact nature of the contested inheritance. The inheritance may be a kingdom, the love of the heir's betrothed, wealth or even an individual object (a family heirloom, possibly an enchanted artifact, a strategic castle or other real estate, or otherwise an item of considerable monetary

or symbolic value). It can also be something less substantial, especially since your characters are vampires: the loyalty of ghouls, powers of the blood, status or a position of rank in Kindred society.

Since vampires can potentially survive forever, they do not have heirs or inheritances in the usual mortal sense. Therefore the whole matter of an inheritance comes down to something that the character, for whatever plausible reason, believes he is owed, or has the right to possess now that its former owner has no more need for it. The usurper likewise believes she has some right — a better right, in fact — to this inheritance. Although this claim is clearly contested by the heir, the usurper has gained control of the prize through guile, treachery, blackmail, murder or another devious method, and now the story centers on the heir's attempts to regain it again.

The rest of the story comes from filling in the generalities with more specific details: What was the relationship between the heir and her mentor? What was the "inheritance" around which the conflict centers and why is it valuable? Who is the usurper who claims it, and why? To what extent will the heir go to get it back again?

**Ventru** — You were not your sire's only childe, but you were the only one to remain loyal in times of trouble. He called you the childe of his heart as well as his blood and trusted you with much of the running of his business interests and charities. Then he was murdered, his ashes found in the wreckage of his limousine. Despite your efforts afterward, you soon found his businesses failing, subjected to hostile takeovers by rival firms; his charities were exposed as fraudulent fronts for organized crime; and you yourself were set upon by Sabbat and very nearly killed. You returned to find your older broodmate now sitting in your sire's place on the Board of Directors, enjoying the regard of the prince and at full command of your sire's assets, including the firms that had forced your own out of business. Without sufficient resources of your own, you cannot challenge him. Even your sire's ghouls now serve your rival and look upon you as the ruin of their late master's fortunes, and you are too proud to beg succor from the one who ruined you.

**Nosferatu** — You were the odd one in the warren, the only one who listened to the old bat. She was old, all right — nobody knew how old — and she was more than a little crazy, but she taught you quite a bit. She even let you see her journals — she must have had more than a hundred of them, all hand-written, bound in leather, hidden in a secret cache deep underground. You'd seen enough of them, at least the more recent



volumes, to realize what they were: detailed accounts of her eavesdropping, ranging from idle gossip to dark secrets of many kinds, such as would topple a prince or turn childer against their sire. She told you if she were ever lost, the books were yours — to study and to complete. Unfortunately, when you found her staked and decomposing corpse, you wasted precious time in grieving. When you went to her cache, the precious books were gone. Now the prince seems to have developed a keen sense for knowing who is conspiring against him, and his enemies, even those in other cities, mysteriously vanish from the night. Clearly someone has the journals and is making use of their contents, but is it the prince himself, or is he merely the highest bidder for the secrets they contain?

**Tzimisce** — Your vengeance was long in the planning. Twenty years ago, the bishop had caused the destruction of almost your entire pack through his spite. Only now, after building up your strength in the blood and your fighting skills honed to a fine edge from many war parties, did you feel ready to challenge him

to Monomacy and claim your revenge. Better yet, to taunt him into challenging you, for he still saw you as a skinny neonate, not the warrior who could call on the armor and strength of the *zulo*. You looked forward to surprising him before you claimed his blood for your own. But you were too late. Another challenged him first and so stole your victory, and the bishop's potent blood. Perhaps you could have let it rest had it been anyone else who robbed you of your vengeance, but he had been your packmate and confidant. He had known what you were planning, had known what this meant to you. How dare the bastard tell you, when you confronted him afterward, "You could not win. He would have destroyed you"? Only the Vinculum between you — and the crescent moon tattoo on his right hand — kept you from attacking him then. He has gone on some mission now for the Black Hand, but when he returns, his betrayal must be paid for, if for no other reason than to assuage your own wounded pride.

**Tremere** — You were nothing if not ambitious; that is why she chose you out of all the others in the cult to receive the Embrace and assist her in her true

work. You have worked hard to strengthen the position of house and clan in this city, to gain the trust of several key Kindred, including the prince's own childe; to encourage the development of little New Age "covens" that served Tremere interests and willingly gave of their blood; and to guide the chantry's investments so as to increase its financial resources tenfold over the past four years. You've not neglected your personal development either. You passed your Seventh Circle initiation only a half-dozen years ago and were the senior apprentice of your home chantry. When your sire was sent to manage a highly prestigious but troubled chantry on the East Coast, she promised that she would recommend you to succeed her. Your efforts were for naught. The pontifex sent his own protégé up as regent, leaving you in limbo. As merely the senior apprentice in the chantry you had all but built with your own hands, you were forced to watch as the pontifex's pet enjoyed all the rewards and recognition from your work. Unfortunately, you made the error of telling one of the younger apprentices just what you thought of this situation. She went and told the regent what you'd said. You realize now that you're going to be an apprentice of the Seventh Circle for a long, long, long time to come ... unless you become a tragic casualty first.

**Malkavian** — She was your love, the light that guided you in the darkness, the soft voice that could silence all the others that clamored in your mind. You would visit her at night, in her bedroom at her parents' house. She would cut her arm with a razor blade for you to drink, and you would sing to keep away the nightmares for her while she slept in your arms. You knew you were destined to be together in eternity. On her 18th birthday, you promised her, you would take her away with you, and you would never be parted again. When the appointed night came, however, you came into her room and found it empty, and the sheets of her bed stained with her blood. Frantic with worry, you tore through the house, but no one was home, no one to tell you where your beloved had been taken. It was nearly dawn before you pieced together what had happened. Impatient with waiting, she had begun to rid herself of her mortal blood too soon. Her parents had discovered her and rushed her to the hospital. From there she was taken to a psychiatric ward for further tests, and there — oh, it was there that it happened, the worst disaster of all. Her doctor, the pawn of another of your kind, reported her talk of blood and sleeping with the dead to his master. His master, seeing such a frail and delicate beauty all but aching for the Embrace, took her as his own. By the time you found where her parents had sent her, it was too late ... she was lost to you forever.

Now you pine with a broken heart, watching as she reaches one pale white arm out between the bars of the hospital window, calling for you, for she loves you still. But she cannot ever be yours again. Tainted with his blood, ravaged by his lustful thirst, she is no longer pure, no longer able to protect you from the darkness. You know she is not to blame, but some night, he will answer for his crime. What punishment is fitting for the one who plucks the wings from an angel, drains the sanctity from a saint? Yes. Yes, that will do ... that will do very well ....

So you can see in this story archetype that the character's clan may influence the *details* of the plot — exactly what resource or inheritance has been lost, who exactly the "usurper" is, or by what means the character seeks to reclaim what she feels is rightfully hers — but the underlying storyline remains fundamentally the same.

## FLESHING OUT THE BONES

Archetypes give us just the bare bones of a character and story. What makes that character and his storyline unique, so that they stand out from every other character whose storyline is based on the same archetype, are the details. The details provide answers to all the little questions that arise when you look at the archetype more closely. If the character hides from something in his past, what is it, and why does he conceal it? If she seeks the truth about her sire's death, who was her sire, and what does she know so far? What was their relationship, and why is finding the answers to his mysterious Final Death so important to her? This is where the character's sect — and yes, clan — start to play a part in how the story is constructed and where it might possibly go. Even so, a lot of more important questions must be answered first.

The following examples take some of the story archetypes listed previously and show a few approaches to developing them into different individual characters. In some of them, the character's clan is apparent because that's one of the factors worked into the concept. In others, it's intentionally left undefined. Story archetypes can be inspired by characters you've seen in books, movies or a provocative illustration in a **Vampire** sourcebook. Some of these are characters I've actually played, or have seen played — and these are only a few of many possibilities open to you, limited only by your imagination.

The veteran called unwillingly back into service

As personified by the character Deckard in *Blade Runner*, this character has a lot of experience — but it's not good experience. He was good at his job, but for whatever reason,

he's had enough. He wants to quit, turn his back on it all, maybe even start a new existence somewhere. Unfortunately, his past employers aren't ready to let him go. Something comes up, and they lure, persuade or outright drag him back to do his duty, one last time. Or so they promise. He knows how much their promises are worth now, however. Whether he does exactly what they expect of him, or does something else entirely, is where the story lies.

- You once served as a sect official (either an archon of the Camarilla, or a Sabbat templar), but your idealism turned sour as you saw the hypocrisy of the elders and their willingness to sacrifice anyone, even their most loyal servants — even you — to preserve their own power and illusions of justice. During your term of office, however, you were successful in maintaining a double identity as a member of the other sect, and potentially could still slip into that role if you were motivated to do so. Unfortunately, in order to persuade you to take on the dangerous role of double-agent once again, the method of motivation your elders have chosen to use infuriates you nearly to the point of frenzy, but it also guarantees you cannot refuse.

- What really makes this character unique is not his clan or even his sect allegiance, but the hold that the elders (or justicar, prince, bishop, etc.) have over the character so as to force him to do what they demand. Do they hold a child or mortal relation hostage? If it's blackmail, what do they know about him that he cannot bear to have revealed? Is the character now bound by blood oath or trapped by a thaumaturgical ritual? Or is it merely his honor that will not allow him to refuse when even a superior he doesn't like calls in a prestation debt? Once you've thought of that (and discussed the possibilities with your Storyteller), you have a real handle on what this character really cares about, despite his apparent cynicism. What the character cares about provides the foundation for all his motivations.

- You were once entrusted with a great responsibility: guarding the unlife of one you respected highly, a bishop of great vision and wisdom whose success also made her many enemies. You failed. You held her body as it crumbled to ash, surrounded by the remains of those who had killed her, even though your aid had come too late. For years you wandered the world, autarkis and outcast, neither Sabbat nor Camarilla — for how could you continue to serve a sect when even its most noble leaders can be cut down by pack of rabble and call it "survival of the fittest?" Now a Camarilla prince has learned your identity and your former duties, and calls on you to take them up once again in his service — or face the consequences of being recognized for who you are. Bound in blood, your loyalty is supposedly assured. But you are not certain if what holds you there is your honor, your growing, grudging respect for the prince

himself or the determination deep in your soul that you will not fail again ....

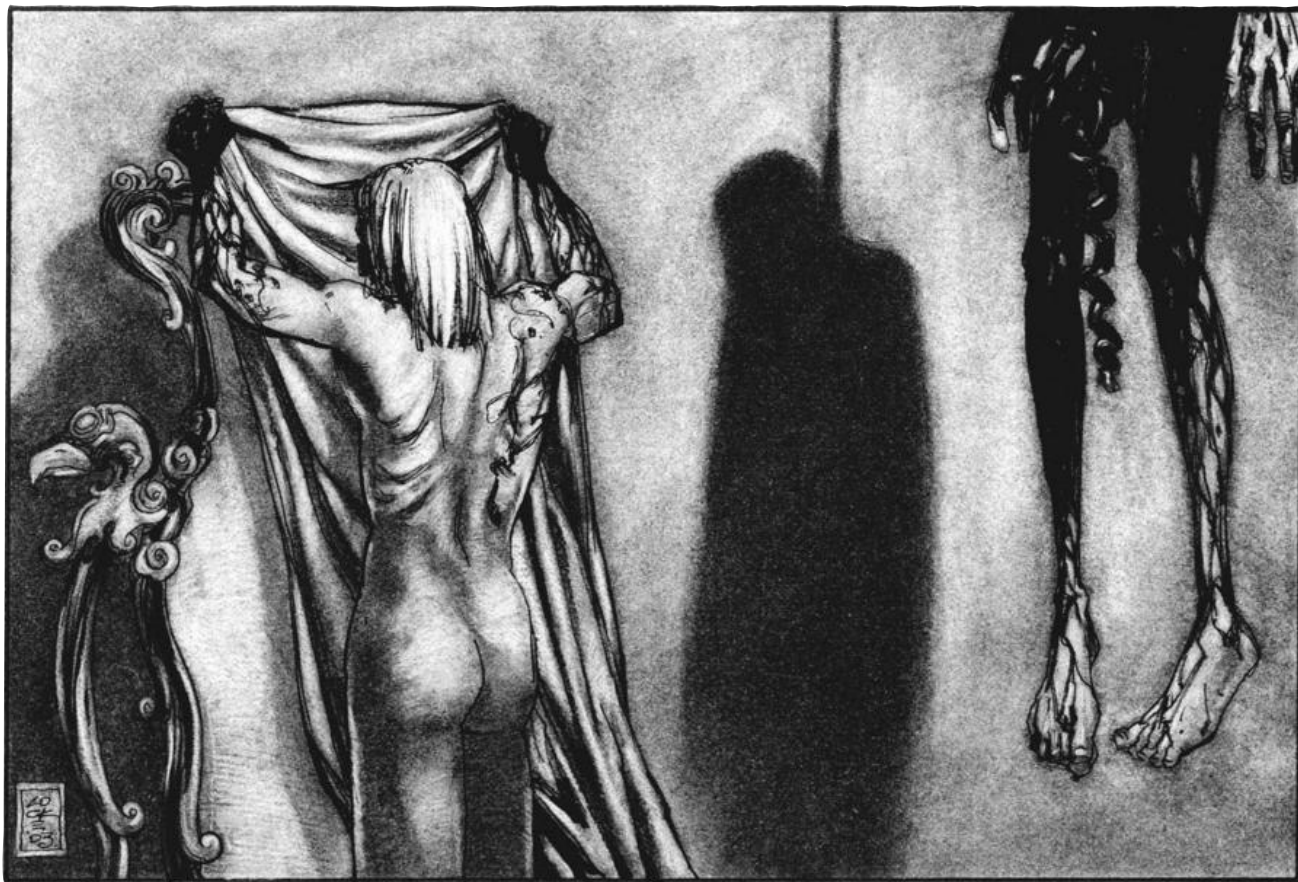
### **The child called upon to avenge his father's murder**

We all know this character archetype. Hamlet, who receives his quest directly from his father's ghost; Batman, whose crime-fighting career was inspired by witnessing his parents' murders as a boy; Zoë of Constantinople in *Dark Ages: Ravnos*, who searches all over medieval France for the Inquisitor who killed her sire. Like Inigo Montoya's search for the Six-Fingered Man, it's not always the easiest quest in the world. In particular, often the character is not sure exactly who the murderer is or how to find the bastard again; often she is also not powerful enough to face the culprit on her own and hope to succeed. Of course, the reason why her mentor, sire, pack ductus or ally was killed is often not as simple as it first appears. Since this story may be based around a mystery, your Storyteller will need to develop it further, but the more clues you can provide as to the nature of your character's relationship with the deceased was, and why your character is so driven to avenge her death, the easier it will be for the Storyteller to fill in the blanks and provide you with a storyline you'll be eager to pursue.

- Your sire, the regent of a chantry in a city under siege by the Sabbat, was killed a year ago when the entire chantry was burned to the ground with no survivors. The Sabbat seemed the most likely culprit, but the chantry had potent magical defenses and had withstood many such attacks in the past. You arranged to have yourself transferred to the re-established chantry but find your own investigations into what happened that night thwarted at every turn, even by your superiors in the clan. You begin to suspect that maybe it wasn't the Sabbat after all — though if your worst suspicions prove to be correct, discovering the truth may cost you your unlife as well ....

- Abandoned after your Embrace, you never knew your sire; only the sponsorship of a respected elder saved you from destruction. She taught you to survive, to use your gifts, and helped you earn a place in Kindred society. That she also bound you in blood seemed no great thing, so great was your admiration and gratitude for the one who had saved you from despair over your undead state. She always kept things from you, of course, but you never questioned it until the night you felt her Final Death. The blood bond snapped, leaving an aching sense of loss in your soul where your regnant had once been; you swore then to find her murderers and avenge her. All you have to go on are the impressions you received just as the blood bond was broken — recognition ... and astonishment.





### **The snitch or former turncoat hiding from the ones he betrayed**

Usually in a movie, this character is portrayed as a minor villain — after all, nobody likes a snitch. The more righteous and honorable versions of this character are known as “whistle-blowers” or “undercover cops.” The difference between scummy villain and the hero who makes the hard but right choice seems to come from the character’s motivation: Why did he betray his fellows? Was it for selfish reasons of gain or because the person had no sense of honor in the first place? Or was it because he realized that in order to serve some greater good or to prevent some great evil, his allies, master or companions must be stopped?

Unfortunately, on the matter of personal betrayal, vampires have very long memories and can be incredibly persistent — and patient — when it comes to wreaking revenge. The most obvious storyline here would be to have a character who originally belonged to either the Camarilla or the Sabbat now having turned her back on her former allegiance, and fearing retribution due to whatever betrayals of former comrades she had to do in order to prove the sincerity of her conversion. But betrayal can come in many different forms ....

- Your ambition made you careless; your perfect plan to destroy a hated rival did not go off quite as perfectly as you’d hoped, and the Tremere warlock had all the evidence needed to condemn you. To protect your secret, you agreed to do this little “job” for him, substituting your sire’s prized Renaissance-era portrait by Titian with a thaumaturgically altered forgery. Unfortunately, that plan didn’t go off perfectly either, and while your Tremere accomplice at least did not expose your greater crime when you were both dragged before the prince’s justice, the lesser was more than enough to destroy your reputation throughout the entire clan. Banished from your home city, stripped of most of your resources, you find yourself now unwelcome as one of the clanless once your past becomes known. Your former partner in crime was merely transferred to a chantry in another city, but while he still holds your unlife in his hand, he also may be the only ally you have left; if he asks your aid, dare you refuse him now?

- She doesn’t understand; she calls you bastard, and worse — traitor. She doesn’t realize you saved her unlife; she only sees her dream of vengeance shattered. She had nursed her vendetta for so long, worked so hard to master the ferocious combat-form of her clan,

prepared for the duel that would avenge the packmates she had lost. Her fierce loyalty had aided you and the Hand more than once, and the blood you shared burned in your veins. You simply could not let her destroy herself. Despite the bishop's lack of participation in more recent sieges, you had seen him fight before; his strength, ferocity and command of the shadows made him no easy mark, no matter what she thought. But if you had tried to explain, you might have skirted too close to revealing Hand secrets — and not even your packmate's unlife was worth that. So you challenged the bishop yourself, defying Hand policy of never openly challenging Sabbat leadership, a Black Hand remover against an unapproved target. You weren't even sure you'd win, but you did. Now the dominion wants to talk to you about your priorities, and the packmate you risked your unlife and status in the Hand to save is threatening to challenge you herself if she ever sees you again. And you know she can hold a grudge for a very, very long time ....

- You didn't really betray anyone, not even the pack that Embraced you off the streets to serve as the "leading edge" of an upcoming war; against exactly whom wasn't very clear at the time. Then you and your new buddies had a close encounter with a big black guy who could rip steel apart with his bare hands, was armed with the biggest damned handgun you'd ever seen and had a couple of friends just like him. Well, you knew a losing situation when you saw one. You fled into the night and managed to avoid all other vampires ... for a while. Now you have a better idea of how things stand, and you're hanging out in Camarilla country because they're less crazy than the other guys. You lie and claim you know nothing of your sire or clan; better to be thought a Caitiff than let them realize the truth. You still look over your shoulder all the time, though, because you're not sure that all your former packmates are dead — and in the Sabbat, the penalty for desertion and cowardice is a slow and excruciating Final Death.

**The young or inexperienced character who has inherited a great responsibility or power**

A classic beginning to a traditional "quest" story, but this archetype can be overused — even abused — if you concentrate too much on the "great power" part of the story and overlook the "young or inexperienced" and "responsibility" part. In a traditional quest story, such great gifts always come paired with equally great responsibilities, or sometimes even sacrifices, they inevitably end up in the hands of a character who least wants them. That is where the crux of the story is, the balance between the power or gift, and paying the price

that comes with it. This legacy is not a blessing; it's a burden, sometimes a curse, but for whatever reason, your character must bear it as best she can. If this character archetype appeals to you, talk with your Storyteller about exactly what this legacy is, how it came to you and what the price, responsibility or burden is your character must also bear in addition to the goodies. This "gift" should be more than just a unique power or cool artifact; ideally it should be woven into the fabric of the chronicle's history and be significant in many ways that will draw your character into stories that are meaningful not only for her but for her companions as well. This kind of storyline also lends itself well to chronicles that deal heavily in the World of Darkness metaplot, the coming of Gehenna or Noddist mysteries.

- Your family served a Kindred master for three generations, but only you were deemed worthy of the Embrace, to share not only in his power but also in his most sacred duty — the destruction of all others in your cursed bloodline. Five years ago, he left on such a hunting trip, leaving you in charge of his estates and business interests, but you never heard from him again. Now you hide your true blood and its curse as best you can and keep up respectable appearances and clan social ties in your sire's unexplained absence. You also study the books he left behind and wonder about the value of fighting fire with fire ... and when it will be time for you to take up the hunt where your sire left off.

- She chose you before you were even born: your genes shaped by four centuries of careful breeding, the date of your conception and birth determined by ancient auguries. Your parents laid out the plan for your education and career, never realizing what ancient mind really framed their advice or ensured that the right opportunities came your way. Yet you were a rebel from the start, stubbornly refusing to follow in the path they had laid down for you, fighting the destiny she had decreed for you even before you knew what it was. Not that your rebellion did you any good. She Embraced you precisely on the night she had planned it. Now you fear your sire more than anything in the night. Even the powerful blood that now runs in your veins is of little good when she calls your name. You know just enough to realize that whatever plans she has for your eternal future, your chances of escaping them grow slimmer with each passing night.

- Your sire was its guardian for more than 50 years, an antique floor mirror set in a frame of solid mahogany; he kept it in his most private chambers, always covered with a velvet cloth. You never even knew it was there until after his Final Death. When you uncovered it at

last, you were awed at what you saw in its depths. A voice spoke to you, offering you a way to see behind closed doors, to see what your enemies were doing or who the prince was having for dinner, as long as a mirror was in the room. You can look into the mirror and in doing so look out of any mirror anywhere, and not be seen. The mirror's resident spirit demands that you provide things for it to see in return, however. While the places it allows you to see give you literal insight into the doings of others, the things it wants to see performed before its silvery face grow more and more degrading and perverse. You begin to realize why your sire kept it covered at all times, and only used its tantalizing power when he was in great need.

**The reformed badass or repentant monster trying to redeem himself with good deeds**

Okay, before you get too excited, remember that with this archetype the emphasis is on the words "reformed" and "repentant," not "badass." Like a number of other archetypes, this character has a past he's greatly ashamed of, sometimes to the point of hiding it even from his closest comrades. He's not necessarily a combat monster; that's only one variant of the type. As a mortal, he could have been a mobster, drug dealer, corrupt evangelist, con artist or petty thief; or he could have been a leg-breaker, cop on the take or soldier in wartime. Whatever his past was, the Embrace opened his eyes to the darkness in his own soul. Perhaps he sees his new condition as the judgment of God; perhaps in his passage from life to undeath, he suddenly realized his soul had been judged and found wanting, and, like Scrooge, he now hopes for a second chance. Perhaps he made a desperate promise to God as his sire bent over him with fangs bared — *Lord, get me out of this and I'll do anything, anything at all* — which he now feels obliged to keep, in hopes of escaping Hell.

The character could also be seeking redemption from things she did after she was dead. It's harder to climb up out of the well of violence and despair that way, but not impossible. Perhaps she was a scourge who finally realized she was merely doing the prince's dirty work, not really making a difference in Kindred society at all. Maybe she suddenly realized that what the Sabbat called freedom was little more than surrendering to the most base and violent urges of the Beast, and resolved never again to forget what being *human* meant. Or maybe she killed a loved one in hunger or rage and has resolved never, ever to allow herself to do so again.

The questions to answer for this character archetype involve what it was the character did in his past that has so appalled him that he has determined to turn his unlife totally around to redeem himself from it, and

how he plans to overcome the difficulties that such a change creates for him.

- You were just doing your job. As an attorney, your duty was to your clients, and you served them well. That class-action lawsuit was a tough one, though: lots of media coverage, pictures of crippled children with big puppy-dog eyes, incomprehensible biochemical analyses. It was your job to prove that runoff from your client's chemical plant could not be conclusively established as the cause of the children's ailments, and you did it admirably ... and pocketed a multimillion dollar fee to boot. Of course the first thing you did when the masked men grabbed you off the street and dragged you into the van was to threaten them with a lawsuit, but that didn't matter. They beat you nearly to death and then tossed your body into the same wastewater dump you had recently been defending. You awoke to darkness and excruciating pain, and when your transformation was complete, you realized that you had a lot more in common with those children now, and you could sue no one for damages but yourself. Crippled, deformed and forever smelling of chemical waste, you wage a one-vampire war on your former clients — and their Kindred sponsors — who dare poison the air or water. You keep your former identity a close secret and reserve a special hatred in your heart for the corporate lawyers who defend such men in business ... and hate yourself most of all.

- You served because you had no choice, but even that does not assuage your guilt. Your sire used the blood bond and skillful psychological manipulation of your own insecurities to make you eager to please her and afraid of her anger, but that does not absolve you from the torments you inflicted on the innocent, or the deceit you practiced among your broodmates in order to keep yourself first in her favor. You hated her with all your unbeating heart but would kill and maim at her command because it thrilled you to see her smile, and because you were too afraid to resist the hold she had over your soul. When her enemies destroyed her, you survived only because you were too far away to return to her side in time. You felt the blood bond snap, and for the first time since you first laid eyes on her, you were free — free of her cruel jests, her merciless vendettas and boundless ambitions satisfied through your talons, obedience and blood. You're not entirely sure what you want to do with yourself now, but you are resolved; never again will you kill at another's command or give yourself over to the power of another's will. Instead you search desperately for hope, for some sign that even a monster like you have been can make some recompense and penance for the sins that stain your soul.

## GETTING THE MOST FROM TRAITS

As a player or Storyteller, you may sometimes wonder if the rules for Traits cover a situation. For instance, does your Camarilla character know her city's prince? No Trait specifically says whether a character does or doesn't.

In some cases, lack of a game mechanic might not matter. If you say that your character merely knows the prince socially and casually, and gains no benefit compared to other Kindred, your Storyteller most likely will not demand anything more than that statement. You need a Trait only if something has a noticeable effect on play.

Suppose the prince likes your character but not enough to help her as a Mentor. The two characters merely share a taste for, say, Italian cinema. They talk about Italian movies at Elysium, but the prince won't necessarily defend your character or help with her problems. Your character still gains minor benefits, though. Other Kindred respect her more than they would otherwise. Although the character might be a child of no achievement, she has the prince's ear. Maybe she could put in a good word for some other character? That sounds like a dot of Status. Nothing in the rules for that Background says characters can gain Status by sharing a hobby with an influential Kindred, but nothing says they can't.

**Vampire** keeps Trait descriptions simple and a bit loose so they can cover more situations. The systems for "vampiric" stuff — the Disciplines, blood pools and the like — are narrow and definite because they are just made up. They don't have to represent the endless diversity of real people. You could never hope to list every skill that people can learn or every way they connect to other people — so **Vampire** doesn't try. Instead, the game distills human variation into a set of Traits small enough to manage in play. The variations still exist: The dots on a character sheet merely give a shorthand version of the *real* character who exists in your imagination.

When you design a character, give thought to what the Traits describe. Don't let your character have an abstract "Charisma" or "Politics" or "Allies." What makes your character charismatic, or not? How did she become an expert in politics, and why? What binds your allies to you and you to them? As you define the meanings behind the Traits, your character becomes more detailed and more interesting to play.

Sometimes, as in the example above, you may find that no Trait obviously describes what you want for your character. Don't throw out the character concept! If real, everyday people could know, own or be what you imagine for your character, stretch the rules until they fit. They can stretch a long way ....

## ATTRIBUTES

Let's begin with the Attributes. At first glance, these seem quite rigidly defined. **Vampire** even gives real-life equivalents for some Attributes, such as how much you can lift with a given Strength or an IQ rating for Intelligence.

Specialties put the lie to this simplistic view. Two characters with Strengths of 4 do *not* have the same Trait. They both lift 400 pounds, but one has Fists Like Anvils — he hits harder than other people who receive the same Strength rating. The other might have an Iron Grip — she's especially good at holding on and squeezing. A third character might possess a specialty of Weightlifting, to indicate that actually he can lift more than 400 pounds, though not enough to justify another dot of Strength.

Even for Attribute ratings of 2 or 3, you might want to think about what sort of "specialties" you could use to describe a character. For instance, a character with Intelligence 2 has a merely average IQ, but that average conceals enormous diversity in how people think. Does the character have, say, pretty good spatial reasoning but does not know a great deal? Does she read a lot, but uncritically? These differences may not matter in terms of dice rolling but can give you a more complete image of your character.

Attributes rated at 1 cry out for explanation as much as Attributes at 4 or 5. Why is a character so unusually weak, or lacking in charm, or clueless? Just as with high ratings and proclivities, low ratings can represent a range of debilities or incompetence.

**Strength:** A character with Strength 1 possesses very little muscle power. This could represent a child or a feeble oldster as well as a mature weakling. Such a wimp might be skinny or fat — the rating doesn't say.

**Dexterity:** This Trait encompasses speed, agility, precision and several other aptitudes. A severe deficiency in any of them might justify a rating of 1. A character with Dexterity 1 might be so clumsy that he can hardly cross a room without knocking something over. She might move slowly because she needs a cane or walker to get around. Such a slow or graceless character might suffer from the palsy of age or arthritic stiffness or be weighed down by obesity.



**Stamina:** Once again, youth or age can justify a very low Trait rating. Stamina 1 might also represent asthma or some other chronic condition that limits exertion (though these matter for mortals more than for Cainites).

**Charisma:** A character with Charisma 1 barely impinges on other characters' consciousness and possesses little resistance to psychological pressure (since Charisma-based dice pools are often opposed to Manipulation-based pools). Such a low rating could represent a very shy character, someone beaten down by life or some more serious neurosis.

**Manipulation:** A very low Manipulation rating suggests someone almost devoid of persuasive skills. Manipulation 1 could represent anything from a severe stammer to compulsive rudeness.

**Appearance:** While one usually thinks of Appearance 1 as physical ugliness, it could also represent body odor, dirty, ragged clothing or other failures of basic hygiene. Very bad manners or repulsive habits could also generate a low Appearance rating, such as a person who compulsively picks his nose.

**Perception:** People can suffer from a low Perception for many reasons. Perception 1 could represent a physical defect in a person's senses, such as partial deafness or extreme nearsightedness. Poor Perception can also result from sheer inattention to one's surroundings, like the clichéd absent-minded professor distracted by the wonderful thoughts in his head.

**Intelligence:** A low Intelligence rating can indicate actual mental retardation, but Intelligence 1 could also represent extreme ignorance — your mind works fine but lacks material to work on or to place new information in context. It could also suggest a person who actively refuses to think, such as a fanatical True Believer or a sullen teenager who thinks that nothing deserves his attention but girls, music, sports and cars.

**Wits:** People with Wits 1 may live in perpetual confusion or simply think in a slow, methodical way. This Trait also plays a role in detecting deception, so Wits 1 could also indicate extreme naïveté or gullibility. Drug abuse or other forms of brain damage could cause low ratings in any Mental Trait. So can various forms of mental illness.

You can use combinations of high and low Attribute ratings to portray many aspects of character that fall beyond the scope of explicit rules. For instance, **Vampire** mentions schizophrenia as a derangement with certain penalties to Willpower rolls and rolls to resist frenzy, but that barely scratches the surface of this disability. A schizophrenic also hears constant roars, whines and voices, sees things that don't exist and cannot ascribe

correct meanings to the actions and events around him. A schizophrenic character, therefore, might have very low Perception and Wits ratings — at least when she's off her medication — to represent her problems in telling what's real in the maelstrom of hallucinations.

In less drastic ways, combinations of Attributes can show a character's personality. A brilliant but arrogant character might possess high Mental Traits but low Social Traits. No game mechanic exists for "arrogant intellectual," but the combination of Trait ratings helps you translate a roleplayed persona into dice rolls.

## ABILITIES

Of all the "hard" Traits, Abilities limit you the least when you design characters. That's because you can invent whatever Abilities you want: The 30 described in the **Vampire** rulebook and the others in the **Vampire Storytellers Companion** merely provide especially useful examples.

Before you invent new Talents, Skills and Knowledges, though, see if you can't fit a character's aptitude into one that already exists. As with Attributes, many Abilities encompass a diverse array of possible aptitudes. (It's what we try to do here at the Game Studio so as to keep the systems streamlined.)

Consider Brawl as an example. That Talent means you're good at hitting people; it doesn't say why. A high Brawl rating could represent anything from years of martial arts study to furious, untrained street-fighting. In the same manner, Academics could indicate a great memory for trivia as easily as a college degree (though high ratings do suggest a higher education, or at least intensive self-study). Don't forget that some Abilities are "envelopes" for Abilities that are more specific. Crafts, for example, covers everything from auto maintenance to oil painting. You don't have to invent new Abilities to make your character a martial artist, a trivia wizard or a mechanic.

A single field of training might suggest several different Abilities, too. If you have trouble thinking of Knowledges, Skills and Talents for your character, delve into her concept and examine it from all angles.

For a simple example, consider Joe KarateGuy, an idiotically simple character concept. His sire Embraced Joe KarateGuy to have a bodyguard child. Joe's player has already given him plenty of Athletics, Brawl and Dodge and needs help finding more Abilities.

What goes into martial arts training besides fighting? Eastern philosophy, breath control and "centering" exercises, for one thing — that's Meditation, a Secondary Skill. Martial artists also learn sports medicine and possibly some traditional Asian healing arts — give Joe

a dot of Medicine. If Joe wants to learn karate straight from the source, he might learn Japanese — a dot of Linguistics, if you please. Each of these new Abilities, in turn, can suggest new interests and personality notions for Joe. Keep this up, and this one-dimensional concept might turn into a real character.

A character's Abilities may also suggest various possessions. For instance, a character with two or more dots in Science probably owns the tools to apply that Knowledge — or at least knows where to get them. Resources may provide a clue to the character's lab facilities, but don't restrict yourself to that Background as a guideline. The character could also borrow equipment from a Contact or Ally. You do not need to invent a new Merit called "Laboratory" — the Science Trait implies it.

## BACKGROUNDS

Backgrounds present a vast range of options. Only Generation represents anything fixed and intrinsically vampiric. You can interpret all the other Backgrounds in many different ways, to indicate virtually any sort of social connection.

### ALLIES

"Come on," Beckett said, "You don't speak Romanian and I know this is your first time outside the U.S. You know someone in Bucharest who can help us?"

Harley did not even look up as she paged through the phone book. "Wanna bet?"

Her fellow Gangrel smiled skeptically. "You're on. A hundred bucks, or something else?"

Harley tapped the phone book with her finger and picked up the hotel's phone. "Money's fine. And I don't need Romanian with these people." She dialed, waited, then spoke in a language Beckett did not know. It sounded like a Romance tongue, though.

Harley talked — no, chatted — for about five minutes before she hung up the phone. She turned to the Gangrel explorer and grinned. "They'll be here in 15 minutes, and you owe me a hundred bucks." She turned the phone book to him and pointed to an entry.

"There are Esperanto clubs all over the world," Harley said. "The Bucharest club is glad to help a fellow speaker who's in a spot of trouble." Her grin turned malicious. "Sorry, oh great explorer. I'm afraid this time you'll need me as a translator."

This Background covers any mortal person or organization that can help you in some way. As such it overlaps with many other Backgrounds: Whether you represent your character's connections as Allies, Contacts, Influence or some other Background often depends on shades of meaning and the sort of assistance you want.

### SUPERNATURAL ALLIES?

Vampire and the other World of Darkness games generally discourage the idea of Allies, Contacts or Influence with different supernatural "species." The subject is just too *complicated*. Learning one game's rules and setting is burden enough; we don't demand that you learn them all just so Joe Neonate can list "Lupine Ally" on his character sheet.

Ties to a radically different culture, with different interests, also imply that you move beyond the prejudices and habits of your own supernatural kind. Many creatures in the World of Darkness would consider such ties treasonous or blasphemous. You don't *just happen* to have a friend who's a werewolf, ghost, mage or demon. Supernatural Contacts and Allies can form the focus of an entire story arc and probably deserve that much attention. If you possess the ambition to tell such a story, more power to you.

If you *do* wish to permit supernatural Allies, Contacts or other non-vampiric Backgrounds in your chronicle, we recommend that you increase their cost by at least one dot. Thus, your dead mortal brother who became a ghost is at least a two-dot Ally. We also recommend that you keep supernatural ties separate from mortal or Kindred-related Backgrounds, to reflect how extraordinary they are.

Standard Allies are individual mortals such as friends, relatives, business partners and people who owe you favors. You can generalize this Background, however, to include groups such as street gangs, businesses or local newspapers. A character who plays his cards right can expand a relationship with one person to a relationship with that person's entire group. For instance, you may start with a close connection to the night editor at the local newspaper but become known to all the reporters as that editor's go-to guy and a reliable source in certain matters. You shouldn't have to buy a dot of Allies for every reporter you know; you just take two (or more) dots in this Background and list "Daily Herald staffers" as one of the groups you know.

Allies do not necessarily include Kindred acquaintances and associates. For that, you may wish to use Mentor (no matter who has more power in the relationship), Contacts or even Retainers.

### CONTACTS

Dear Ms. Sturbridge:

Thank you once again for your generous support of our investigation. Thanks to the special cameras you provided, we caught the crop circle makers in the act and filmed their

entire performance from nearly a mile away. As the video shows, they wear robes while laying out their design. First, they press out one moderately complex set of arcs and circles. After a dance lasting nearly half an hour — and a bit of drinking, it looks like — they seem to hold some sort of orgy. The camera angle is unfortunately too shallow to be definite on this point. Then they put on their robes again and press down more of the crops to obscure the original design.

I am not sure whether we have a cult or just some college students combining a party with an elaborate prank. As usual, though, the apparent “crop circle mystery” turns out to have an entirely mundane explanation.

Sincerely,

Alan Fellowes

New York Skeptic’s Association

Remember that dots in this Background represent your character’s *major* Contacts — the ones who receive names and personalities as characters in their own right. Give thought, however, to what sort of minor Contacts your character also possesses. What sort of people does he associate with, in life and undeath? Look at your character concept and Abilities for clues to possible Contacts. An Embraced guitarist probably knows other musicians, as well

as the owners of bars where he played (or still plays), managers, agents and other people in the music business. A doctor knows other doctors, nurses, pharmacists and health care workers, as well as insurance agents, drug company salesmen, lawyers and former patients. You can also assume that both characters know who’s who and what’s happening in their industries without the need for Knowledges like “Music Lore” or “Medical Industry Current Events.”

Although a character’s mortal profession and main interests provide useful guidelines when selecting Contacts, do not feel limited by them. Feel free to surprise the other characters with some unexpected Contact, like a physics professor who knows a local semi-pro wrestler, or a carjacker with a wealthy father.

If the Storyteller permits, you can also stretch Contacts to include groups and institutions. For instance, a clipping service, a subscription to a private library and a security clearance all provide information, even though they are not individuals, or even people at all.

#### FAME

*“Oh, wow, sir! I’ve read, like, all your books! Except for Blood Tales of Brazil. I can’t find that one. It’s such an honor to meet you! I’ve got all the newspaper clippings*



about the Slashed Wrist Killer, just like I said in my letter. My friend Maribeth is very psychic and she's sure some supernatural power did the killings. What do you think, Mr. Quinn?"

"I think I need to see coroner's reports, Mr. ... Walsh, was it? And I need to see the places where the bodies were found. I'm sure that you and Maribeth can be a great help in my investigation." Victor Quinn smiled in grim determination. Perhaps this time he would find the proof to convince the scoffers. The proof that vampires walked among men.

This Background normally refers to general celebrity, the sort that rap stars, actors and pro athletes enjoy. At the Storyteller's option, however, you can stretch Fame to cover reputations that are more specialized. In brief, Fame means that other people want *you* as a Contact. That may include other Kindred. Alternate forms of Fame generally do not help a Cainite hunt, but they may grant analogous benefits in other social venues. For instance:

**"Top Man":** You are a world-renowned expert in some specialized field, such as quantum physics, Middle Eastern studies or early Chinese epigraphy. Other experts consult you, which can lead you to intriguing mysteries. Depending on your field, government officials may take your advice and trust you with sensitive information. For each dot of Fame, you have -1 difficulty in interacting with other people in your field. Since "Top Man" typically involves fields obscure to most people, however, this form of Fame maxes out at three dots.

**Rep:** Early in your unlife, you did something amazing and all the other local Kindred know about it and respect you for it. Exactly how this benefits you depends on your deed. If you gained a Rep as a badass by killing a Lupine, you might receive -2 difficulty on Intimidation rolls against local Kindred. If you ran through sunlight to save your sire's unlife, the Storyteller might grant a bonus when dealing with elders, who appreciate such devotion in childer. Rep tops out at two dots, at least for starting characters, because word travels slowly among the Kindred.

**Elysium Regular:** You diligently attend every Elysium and take care to impress your elders with your good manners and discreet flattery. This minor form of Fame does not grant any benefits in terms of game mechanics. When you want to talk to an elder, however, he's more likely to hear you out instead of slamming the door in your face. Elysium Regular never exceeds one dot, since it is a strictly local form of Fame. The Sabbath version is called *Ritae Regular*.

#### HERD

Bill Polotski looked down at the unshaven, gray-haired man huddled under the thin, ragged blanket and his own

stained and torn coat. Polotski's day manager Carl stood beside him. Together, they nearly filled the cubicle. Above them the lights buzzed and flickered through the chicken-wire roof of the cubicle. Rows and columns of identical cubicles filled this floor of the Happy Home Hotel. Sounds of snoring rose from several cubicles; in one, a cheap transistor radio droned.

"I think it's pneumonia, sir," the day manager said softly. "He won't last long anyway, if you wish to drink him dry."

Polotski shook his head. "No, Carl," he said. "Jackson has lived here for many years. He has fed me several times. We do not abandon our guests in their hour of need." He pondered a moment, then hoisted the grizzled alcoholic in his arms. "We shall take him to the clinic. The doctor owes me a favor."

A Herd has two elements: You can feed on these vessels with relative ease, and they may perform very minor services for you. Herds usually combine these functions in the same people, but that doesn't always have to be the case. The actual numbers of people in a Herd can also vary from the standard listings. A Herd could contain more vessels than its rating suggests if the mortals are less convenient for feeding or less useful as minions.

Don't forget that the vessels in a Herd possess abilities, property and connections of their own. A Herd can justify many other Backgrounds, such as Allies, Contacts, Influence, Resources and Retainers. For instance, you can probably pick a few people from your Herd to serve you as Retainers.

**Vampire**, p. 131, lists the blood cult and the circle of kinky clubbers as typical Herds. Here are some other possibilities to start you thinking:

**Nightclub:** Go beyond the blood doll sycophants to own the nightclub yourself. People come, people go, people pass out and are carried off the floor ... feed all you want; as long as you don't leave corpses, no one will notice. In addition to Resources and ties to the entertainment industry, you might develop your nightclub into a regular Rack for your fellow Kindred and so build some modest Status.

**Butcher Shop:** Owning a butcher shop guarantees that you may feed copiously, if not well. Cultivate the daytime employees for the service aspect of your Herd, or go all the way and make them Retainers.

**Company:** You own a small business and use its employees as your Herd. Of course, you need to make sure that plenty of employees work nights. Give thought to how you justify feeding from them, too: Even in the World of Darkness, few people feel so desperate for a job that they let their boss chew on their neck. "Do you want to keep this job?" may help you browbeat employees into doing little favors for you, though. Owning a



company means a lot of work but brings Resources and perhaps other Backgrounds as well.

**Hospital/Blood Bank/Plasma Center:** People give blood; you drink it. This requires creative record-keeping to hide the discrepancies between blood acquired and dispensed. You can parlay any of these institutions into broader ties to the health care industry. Keep in mind, though, that managing a hospital is a full-time job. You may prefer merely to suborn a few key personnel as Retainers and feed on the patients.

For a variation, run a nursing home. If an oldster babbles about blood-drinkers in the night, other people put it down to senility. If you lose control and someone dies ... well, they were old, anyway.

**Gang:** A few well considered displays of supernatural strength and toughness can secure the submission of a street gang. Snapping the neck of the previous leader is usually a good place to start. Unless or until you want to blood bond or condition the gang members, you should probably avoid feeding directly from these vessels. You might command your gang-bangers to bleed into a cup for you to drink, though, and pass it off as a macho ritual of fealty. Drug-dealing and other crimes can bring Resources as well as ties to the rest of the city's criminal and street cultures.

**Slum:** You don't have to own a public housing project, flophouse or other slum edifice to effectively rule it and prey upon it. Most of the rest of the world considers these people a nuisance and would rather forget about them. A large transient population makes your predation even easier to hide. Don't expect much in the way of service from your terrified or despairing vessels, but you might develop street ties through a slum.

Variations include youth hostels and cheap motels.

**Gated Community:** At the other social extreme, consider one of those very nice housing developments with a high wall and a guard at the gate. The upper-middle-class people who hide behind the walls may fear the world more than they fear you. As long as they give regularly at whatever you set up as your "altar," you'll keep the criminals away and the property values high. This is a *major* Herd. You can parlay a gated community into extensive Contacts, Allies, Influence or Resources as well — but it takes a lot of work to establish.

## INFLUENCE

Cyprian Bond slapped the reports down onto his desk and glared at Mackelroy. "The cancer center is weeks behind schedule," he said. "I find that ... unacceptable. The work slowdown must cease."

Mackelroy leaned back in his chair. "Okay. Fine. Sure. What am I supposed to do about it?"

Cyprian stood and leaned over his desk. "No games, Brujah. I know your connections. I know you ordered this slowdown and I know what you think you'll extort from me." He let his fangs lengthen and the fury of the Beast shine in his eyes, a mere hint of the full, dreadful wrath he could project. The Brujah, no stranger to emotional tricks himself, still shrank back in his seat. "You get nothing except to survive another night. Tell the subcontractors to speed up. And Mackelroy ... don't challenge me again."

Players most often use this Background to measure political power, such as your ability to quash investigations or use the authorities to harass your enemies. That's certainly a valuable form of Influence, but characters can acquire power within other sorts of institutions. The Lasombra, for instance, wield potent Church Influence in Spain and Latin America. In such devoutly Roman Catholic countries, a priest can mobilize a village and an archbishop can shake a government (though the government may shake back).

If you and your fellow players enjoy games filled with intrigue, look in the sidebar nearby for other avenues of social manipulation. Criminal and Street ties give a chance to collect secrets and blackmail the authorities. Media and Charity connections enable you to appeal directly to popular sentiment. Rally the business community to your cause and you just might buy whatever Influence you need. Even small, odd groups such as occult societies may provide indirect routes to power if you cultivate them correctly: For instance, convince the senator that your pet astrologer can guide his re-election campaign, or entice the governor's wife into your spiritualist group. The "mad monk" Rasputin showed how far a fringe-religion figure can go as a power behind the throne.

As always, Storytellers should try not to leave Influence as a purely systemic game mechanic. Ask each player to explain what sort of Influence his character commands, how he gained it and what he does to maintain it. The more you know about a character's Influence, the more easily you can give him a chance to wield it ... or defend it against his enemies.

## MENTOR

Jerry asked, "Did you have any trouble getting here?"

"Not a bit," his brother Jeff replied. "I met a pack at the gas station on 39th, but the passwords you gave me worked just fine. They thought I was from a roving pack. And I finally got your face-shifting trick down, so they'll never see me twice." The two brothers grinned in fraternal conspiracy.

"Great. That's great. Now what can you tell me about the Leeches in your town? I'd like to visit without anyone staking me as a Sabbat spy ...."

**Vampire** usually assumes that a character's Mentor is an older Cainite who provides advice and possibly some contact with the higher reaches of Camarilla or Sabbat society. You can generalize this Background to cover all sorts of Kindred connections, though. For instance, a one-dot "Mentor" could be a friend from your mortal days who was also Embraced — and, remarkably, remains a trustworthy comrade. Higher ratings in this Trait can indicate a Mentor in a more valuable position, regardless of his age or Status; for example, a neonate "mole" who passes information from within a rival sect could be worth as much as a bishop, archon or other midrange officer within your own sect. If both characters pass information to each other, each one could claim the other as a Mentor (assuming you didn't merely wish to classify each other as Contacts).

At the Storyteller's option, Mentors do not have to be Kindred. A mortal in a position of power, or even an organization that backs you, could count as a Mentor. Such cases overlap with Allies or Influence. In general, though, characters accept Mentors as superior to them. If the mortal individual or organization works your will and expects favors in return, it's an Ally. If you work the mortal's will and receive privileges in return, it's a Mentor. With mortal or institutional Mentors, of course, the question arises how you hide the fact that you're a vampire. If you don't, and trust your Mentor to keep the secret ... well, that's a dangerous game indeed.

## RESOURCES

*"I wish to collect on my boon," Ahmose said. "Ten thousand dollars, cash."*

*The primogen's eyebrows rose. "A Setite, asking for money? Why don't you just sell some heroin, or kill one of your cultists and collect the insurance?"*

*Ahmose's eyes narrowed and his hands tightened on the serpentine arms of his chair, but his voice remained cool and calm. "What a strange picture you have of my clan. I do not deal drugs, and my followers are dearer to me than my own childer. I repaired your reputation after that unfortunate incident at the Metroplex. This is my fee. The first part of my fee." The Setite smiled. "Or would you rather I ... undid my work?"*

Give thought to how your character acquires and maintains her Resources. Those little dots on a page can conceal entire worlds of social connection, effort — and story hooks. What forms do your character's Resources take? Cash in the bank, investments, real estate, blackmail victims, donations from your herd?

Remember that Resources measure liquid assets more than total property. Your Nosferatu might claim an entire derelict, long-forgotten subway station as his haven, but if he can't take out a mortgage on it, does it

really count as a Resource? It's an *asset*, certainly, but not a financial one.

For another example, consider a Kindred from a once-rich family now sunk into genteel poverty. She inherits a run-down mansion ... and all the expense it carries. The house and land would fetch a good price if sold, but as it stands, they consume wealth. The Resources entry in **Vampire: The Masquerade** suggests Resources 4 as the minimum for a character to own a mansion. In this case, however, Resources 1 could be appropriate, to reflect how utility bills, property taxes and general upkeep leave the character with little income for other purposes.

On the other hand, a character might own very little but collect wealth by unconventional means. A Malkavian restaurateur with a knack for guessing "the next big trend in dining out" could write off or borrow whatever money he needs, at least in the short term. An Osiris can tithe her blood cult to cover her expenses. Such forms of Resources are less useful, in some ways, than a stock portfolio and money in the bank, but they carry their own advantages too (such as creatively losing profit to avoid taxes and relative immunity from business shake-ups).

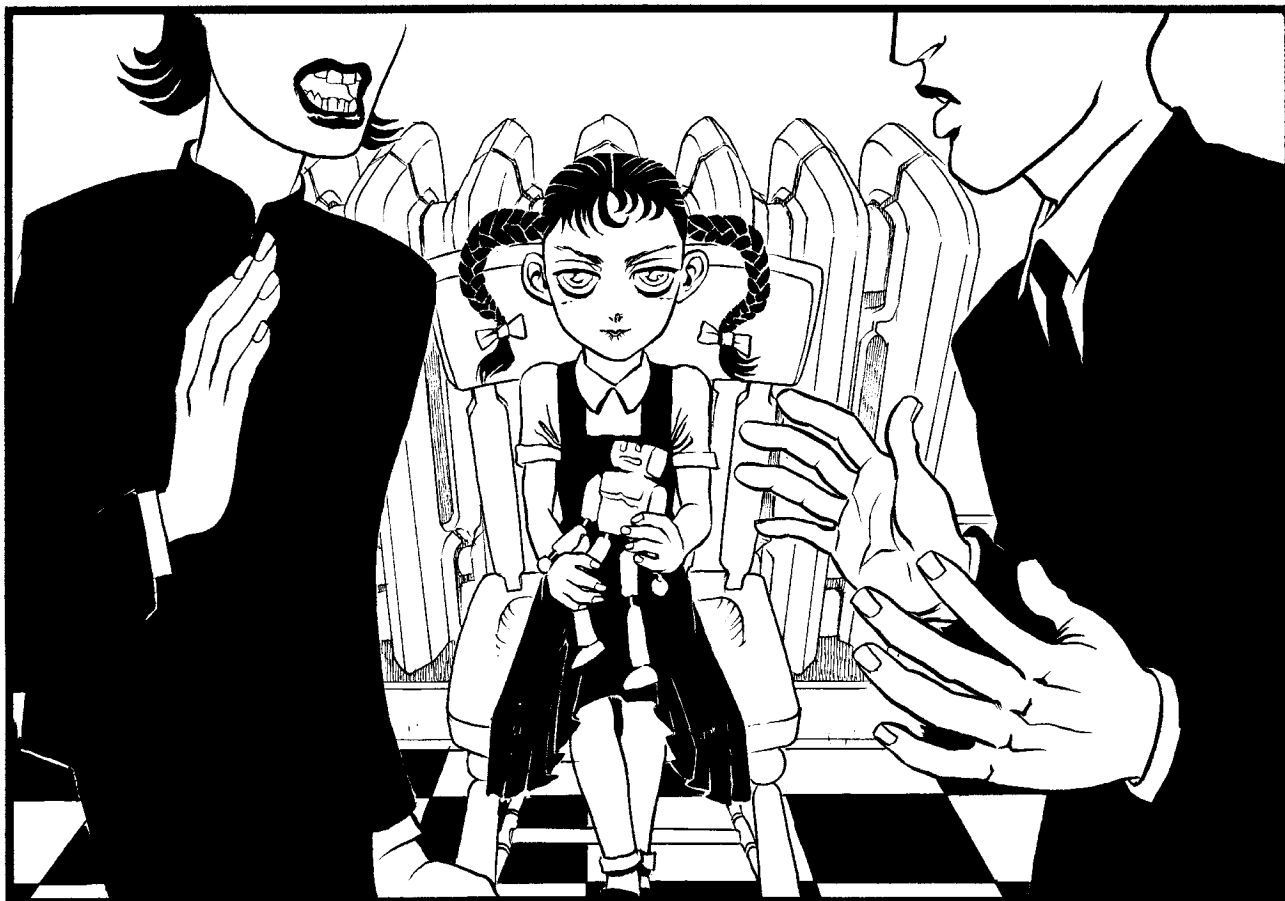
Here, especially, let character concept and common sense trump dots on a page. Give your character the possessions that make sense for her interests and her background. You don't need to spend character points to justify every detail. If you want your character to have a cool car and a sweet condo, come up with a story reason for them — and worry about Resource ratings later.

## RETAINERS

*Jenny climbed the steps from the basement to the kitchen and found her mother pulling the roast from the oven. "Just in time, dear," her mother said. "We're just about to eat. Oh — and your father says he's almost finished with your tax returns. He'll explain them to you after dinner." Jenny's mother moved to the refrigerator, pulled out a jar full of a dark red, congealed mass and popped it in the microwave. It looked far less appetizing than the roast nestled amid the carrots and potatoes. Jenny regretted her lost mortality yet again. Her mother prattled on. "You've done so much work for the prince lately, you ought to invite him over for dinner some evening. It'd be a great honor, I'm sure, and your father and I like to know all about the people who are so important in your new, well, life."*

*"Mom! You can't offer the prince reheated pig's blood!"*

*"I know, dear. I can't say I like the thought of your boss biting us, but if it helps your career we'll all be brave about it."*



This Background can overlap with Herd. The differences lie in the degree and value of service. Three ignorant dupes who help run your business are a Herd. Three blood bound ghouls who help run your business, maintain your haven and dispose of your victims are Retainers. When in doubt, ask if the character values a minion individually or treats the flunky as a disposable and anonymous member of a group. If a minion is worth giving a name, he's a Retainer. Because of the investment in vitae they require, human and animal ghouls almost always count as Retainers.

Retainers do not all serve for the same reasons. The "Renfield" enslaved by his master's vitae forms the standard, but don't ignore other possibilities. A Kindred businessman might employ a secretary or work with a mortal partner without even revealing he's undead. A mortal friend or relative who knows a Cainite's secret might help her due to loyalty and affection, without wanting any supernatural investment on his own part in return. Less wholesome ties include blackmail, extortion and sheer terror; the Tzimisce are notorious for deforming hapless mortals and promising to restore their human appearances after suitable periods of flawless service.

## STATUS

*Colonel Washam leaned out the car window and proffered his ID badge. The gate guard looked at the badge and drew in his breath sharply.*

*"Sir! We thought you were dead!"*

*"I am, Private. As far as the United States Army is concerned, I'm missing and presumed dead. And you never saw me or had this conversation. Do you understand?"*

*The guard swallowed hard and saluted. "Yes, sir. Perfectly, sir." A moment later, the gate lifted and Colonel Washam drove onto the Army base.*

Status indicates membership and rank within a social hierarchy. In **Vampire**, it specifically refers to a character's place in the Camarilla or Sabbat. You can broaden its meaning to any institution, though. Some clans establish their own status hierarchies in the form of Clan Prestige: For instance, the Followers of Set grant prestige based on age and achievements within their dark faith. Mortals receive Status based on their institutions, too. You can give characters Status based on military rank, political office, ordination as a priest or even membership in a crime syndicate. Status can also represent a professional license, such as a lawyer's bar accreditation, or any other special privilege such as a security clearance.

## EXAMPLES OF STATUS

- **Bounty Hunter's License:** While in pursuit of bail-jumping fugitives, you may break into homes, carry weapons and ignore many aspects of due process.
- **Doctor's License:** You can legally practice medicine.
- **Made Man:** You belong to a crime syndicate and receive a certain degree of trust from the leadership.
- **Non-Commissioned Officer:** You hold a position of local responsibility within a military.
- **Ordination:** You are a priest of a significant religion, which grants certain privileges such as confidentiality (the "seal of the confessional") and tax exemptions.
- **Security Clearance:** You can access certain classes of secret government information (though you must explain why you want it).
- **Selectman:** You hold a place on a city council.
- **Tenured Professor:** As long as you teach or publish, you can call on a university's resources.
- **Abbot:** The head of a religious community, such as a Roman Catholic or Buddhist monastery.
- **Bishop:** The mortal variety. You receive authority over the priests, nuns, lay workers and other people in holy orders within your diocese, and control Church funds.
- **Commissioned Officer:** You hold a rank of some authority within a military, such as a lieutenancy or captaincy.
- **Judge:** You oversee civil and criminal cases within a county or city jurisdiction.
- **Mayor:** You lead a city government.
- **Appellate or State Supreme Court Judge:** You review the decisions of other judges or hear cases involving state government.
- **Archbishop:** The mortal variety. You wield authority over the bishops, priests and other people in holy orders within your archdiocese, subject to no one except the Pope. You administer hundreds of millions of dollars in Church funds and receive wide political access.
- **Brass:** You hold a command rank within a nation's military, such as major, colonel or commodore.
- **Corporate CEO:** You run a major company. In addition to the Resources of the company, you wield some power over your employees.
- **Mob Boss:** You lead a crime syndicate whose reach extends through at least one city.
- **State Congressman:** You are elected to a state or provincial legislature.
- **University President:** In addition to some social prominence, you can mobilize nearly unlimited academic resources.
- **Ayatollah:** You hold a position of religious authority in Islam, and political authority in Iran.
- **Congressman:** You are elected to a national legislature. Depending on your committee memberships, nearly all government information is open to you.
- **General/Admiral:** You hold one of the highest ranks in a national military.
- **Governor:** You lead a state or provincial government.
- **National President/Prime Minister:** You lead the government of a nation.
- **Pope:** You lead the Roman Catholic Church. Few religions ordain analogous positions, but the Aga Khan (head of the Ismaili sect of Islam) might qualify.
- **Secretary/Minister:** You lead a major national bureaucracy, such as the Department of Health and Human Services or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- **Supreme Court Justice:** You belong to the highest court of a nation. As such, the law is what you say it is.

One dot of Status adequately represents most such licenses and privileges. Only the largest and most powerful institutions can provide four or five dots of Status. For instance, a corporation would have to be very rich and far-flung indeed

for its CEO to receive Status equal to a Camarilla justicar or a national president. The hierarchies of universities, minor religions, smaller corporations or other institutions generally provide no more than three dots of Status.



Note that some of these will require significant explanation on the part of the player, while others should be ruled out entirely, as far as the Kindred are concerned. A mortal character may well end up as mayor, but a vampire? Let's not test the limits of the Masquerade ....

#### EXAMPLES OF ALLIES, CONTACTS OR INFLUENCE

The more dots you have in a particular Background, the more information or assistance you can obtain and the more power you can wield over all the people you know.

Many of these forms of Allies, Contacts and Influence have also seen publication as Merits. They are more efficiently bought as Backgrounds, since a character gains general advantages from high Ally, Contact or Influence Traits as well as ties to specific groups.

**Bureaucratic:** Depending on the bureaucracy, Contacts give you information about property records, tax filings and other bits of the paper trail all modern people leave behind them. Bureaucratic Allies or Influence help you obtain permits, bypass regulations or legally harass your enemies.

**Business:** Even if you do not own a business yourself, at least one local businessman knows you. Depending on the nature and extent of your business ties, you can learn the plans of local companies, lobby governments or raise money in the form of loans ... that you must repay if you want to keep your corporate friends.

**Charity:** You know and are known to at least one humanitarian group. Your charity ties could range from a local homeless shelter to a major NGO such as Doctors Without Borders. Charitable Contacts may supply donor lists or information about poor areas in your city or abroad. Globe-trotting Kindred are well advised to seek NGO Contacts or Allies, since these charitable groups often know more about Third World countries, and enjoy better relationships with their people, than those nations' governments do. Locally, you can Influence charity groups to stage protests and so wield indirect power over social and political issues.

**Church:** One dot means you know a priest or minister. Five dots mean you gather information, recruit help and influence policy for a major denomination. You can use church ties to create rallies, raise funds (though at risk of scandal if the project veers too blatantly from the church's legitimate interests) and nudge social agendas. You may also affect those clergy within your reach.

**Criminal:** Allies, Contacts or Influence in the underworld can range from a lone cat burglar to an entire Mafia family. Depending on the nature and extent of

your criminal ties, they can help you steal things, raise or launder money, gather information, hide bodies or obtain contraband. Some criminal ties can kill people for you, but they demand equally formidable favors in return.

**Extremist Group:** Some paramilitary kooks think you're one of them, or at least sympathetic to their cause. Extremists require careful exploitation: You need to convince them that a particular action fits within their particular obsession. The authorities also tend to clamp down hard after a spasm of violence, and shielding terrorists from the law takes a lot of work. These nuts are best cultivated as a source of information and weapons and held in reserve as a threat against rivals. If you actually make good on that threat, you tend to lose your pet extremists.

**Health:** Doctors and hospitals can supply medical records and coroner reports — or alter them, an important consideration for upholding the Masquerade. Health-care Allies can also perform medical or forensic tests. Really good health Allies can order involuntary commitments or quarantines.

**High Society:** You hang out with the rich and famous and they consider you worth knowing. Through Contacts with the glitterati, you gain access to events closed to the public and may be able to influence the media. Influence within high society makes you a social gatekeeper yourself, able to promote or crush careers through your favor or disdain.

**Judicial/Legal:** One dot means you know a judge or lawyer who may supply minor legal help and advice. Five dots suggest ties so strong and diverse that you virtually own a city's judicial system and can arrange trials to turn out however you choose. As always, give careful thought to how you attained such far-ranging power and how you maintain it.

**Labor and Industry:** Contacts within trade unions can provide advance notice of strikes or industrial projects, so you know where to put your money. Blue-collar Allies and Influence can help you raise money, sabotage businesses, speed or delay construction projects or "lend" heavy equipment — for those occasions when you need dynamite and a backhoe on short notice, no questions asked. Allies in the construction industry become especially useful if you want to build a secure haven ... or demolish someone else's.

**Media:** Whether she wants it or not, anyone with Contacts, Allies or Influence in the news media usually finds herself charged with prime responsibility for upholding the Masquerade. Ties to local newspapers, radio and TV stations also let you gather information through the news staff, suppress unwanted stories or

create hoaxes and panics. Entertainment media are less valuable since they affect public opinion less directly, but a clever Kindred can harvest some prestige as the Lick who arranges concerts and other events that bring in out-of-town juicebags.

**Occult:** Few mortal occult societies possess significant numbers. Even fewer wield real magical power — and any sane Kindred stays away from those groups. A small cult or group of New Age believers may provide useful services, though. Most importantly, occult Contacts serve as a canary in the coal mine: If the mortal occultists start talking about vampires, blood sorcery, werewolves or other aspects of the *real* supernatural, you know that someone has slipped up in the Masquerade. “Alternative” religious groups, fortune-tellers, fake channelers and assorted wackos also provide easy money. Thaumaturges may use them as proxies when searching for arcane lore. (See also Herd.)

**Police:** Associates among the cops provide another gauge of the Masquerade’s success. If the cops start noticing bodies drained of blood, some Kindred needs a smackdown. Police Allies and Influence enable you to steer the law away from yourself and your associates and have them pay more attention to your enemies. Actual fraudulent arrests, however, may ruin your police ties: Wrongful arrest, police brutality or harassment lawsuits can crush careers and, what’s worse, attract attention to an accused cop’s associates (i.e., your precious self).

**Political:** You can’t really acquire enough political Influence to control the legislative process; too many hands and interests shape each bill. Ties to city selectmen, mayors, Congressmen or other public officials place you in a position to lobby for or against laws, though. Political Contacts also let you know what’s really going on among the mortal power elite — which is no small matter in itself.

**Street:** You have ties to beggars, buskers, homeless people, slum-dwellers, street gangs, prostitutes and various other petty criminals. Street Contacts see a great deal that higher social strata ignore ... or wish to keep hidden, such as the sex industry’s demimonde. They may also assist in finding drugs, weapons or other illegal goods and services. Street Allies and Influence can provide occasional riots or other spasms of local violence as well as access to higher criminal circles.

**Transportation:** Friends within port districts, airlines, truck companies and the like become very important for Cainites who want to travel safely. Transportation ties also help characters keep an eye on which Kindred enter and leave town. Transportation Allies enable reasonably safe smuggling, too.

**University:** Academic ties matter most for scholarly Kindred. When that shifty anarch says he has a Noddist manuscript for sale, it helps to consult someone who reads the language. A major university provides experts in every conceivable field, as well as lab facilities and some social prestige: The Board of Regents generally consists of wealthy community leaders. Students also make a convenient buffet, but that’s another matter.

## VIRTUES

Virtues do not exist as pure, abstract game mechanics. They represent the aspects of personality that help a Kindred resist the mindless instincts of the Beast. Losing a dot of a Virtue means losing a bit of yourself. Players should consider what each Virtue means for their characters and what a decline in a Virtue means.

Normally, only Conscience (or Conviction) can decline, through a botched Humanity or Path check. Under some circumstances, however, Storytellers might impose a penalty to Self-Control/ Instinct or Courage instead, if the character’s crime dealt more with that particular Virtue. For instance, the Path of Blood considers succumbing to frenzy an automatic violation of its ethics (rated 6 on its Hierarchy of Sins). A Cainite with a 6 or higher rating in this Path who did not even try to resist frenzy, or who deliberately attempted to frenzy for the advantage it offered in combat, has violated principles of both Conviction and Self-Control. If the player botched the resulting Conviction roll, the Storyteller could rule that this knowing, willing surrender to the Beast permanently impaired the character’s power to resist it. Likewise, the Path of Honorable Accord treats any cowardice as a sin. A character who did not at least try to fight Röttschreck would sin against Courage as well as Conviction. A Storyteller should never deduct dots from more than one Virtue, though, except for the most wanton and egregious of transgressions.

## CONSCIENCE/CONVICTION

Vampires must commit awful deeds, whether from frenzy, to survive in a dangerous world or to protect the Masquerade. These two Virtues represent a character’s capacity to recognize an immoral act — whatever the character regards as immoral — and either feel remorse or justify the act as necessary to uphold some other ethical standard.

**Vampire** usually associates Conscience with remorse and Conviction with the alternate justifications of Path morality, but this line is not as hard and fast as it may seem. Humanity-following Kindred may sometimes console themselves that a violent deed served some alternative good.

Consider, for instance, a Kindred who tries to stop a spree killer (not as freakish an event in the World of Darkness as in the real world). He ends up killing the madman himself. The character may feel more relief at saving innocent bystanders than remorse at the death. Although he would still have to face a Humanity roll for the act of killing, he did what he thought was right.

For another example, a Kindred might face a crusading reporter who wants to overthrow the Masquerade. Bribery, memory alteration and threats have already failed, so the character kills the reporter. Immoral, yes, but how many people would die in a war between mortals and Cainites? A dedicated utilitarian might accept the reporter's death as the lesser evil.

Then one has holy war. A devoutly Christian Kindred might not hesitate to kill to destroy a Satanic cult and might regard this as a fully righteous act. "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live," the Bible says, and you don't feel sorry for obeying God's specific command.

This case in particular shows where Conscience, as a game mechanic, can overlap with Conviction. The character doesn't actually follow a Path of Enlightenment, but he certainly doesn't consider not hurting people the supreme or only virtue.

When designing a character, think about her standards of Conscience. What does the character regard as exemplary behavior? What is unpleasant but necessary? What moral ideals does the character hold in addition to respect for human life?

Conviction may seem more forgiving than Conscience; just look at the diversity of the Paths of Enlightenment. Remember, however, that Conviction means *your dedication to the ideals of that particular Path*. Conviction, as a generalized Virtue, does not exist. Instead, characters have Conviction toward the Path of Night, or Conviction toward the Path of Metamorphosis, and so on. The various Convictions have nothing in common. Since Paths espouse more narrow and rigid codes of behavior than Humanity (more on this below), their versions of Conviction are correspondingly more focused.

#### SELF-CONTROL/INSTINCT

These Virtues represent a Cainite's capacity to beat back frenzy or direct it to some useful goal. Vampires with Self-Control try to resist the Beast; vampires with Instinct try to negotiate, allowing the Beast its fury in return for concessions about the targets of that rage and bloodlust.

Unlike Conviction, Instinct stays the same throughout all Paths of Enlightenment that use the Virtue. The

differences in what a Cainite considers acceptable goals for frenzy come from the Path's form of Conviction.

Self-Control, on the other hand, takes many forms. Kindred pit many ideas and emotions against the Beast. At the very least, a Cainite can fear losing his identity and endangering the Masquerade, and so restrain the Beast out of rational self-protection. Highly ethical characters might loathe the murderous deeds of an unrestrained Beast and pit their sense of moral duty against its rage. Other sorts of duty can provide a bulwark against the Beast as well. For instance, a follower of the Path of Honorable Accord follows a code of courage, honesty and service to one's leader and the Sabbat. Religious Kindred fight the Beast with faith and prayer... whether to Jehovah, Set, Haqim or some other god matters little. Other undead, such as those who follow the Path of the Scorched Heart, repress their emotions and so hope to deny the Beast any access to their souls. Paths of Enlightenment provide inspiration for all characters, however. One can follow Humanity while also seeking strength through honor, emotional repression, scientific detachment or faith.

#### COURAGE

As the one Virtue common to all systems of morality, Courage is the simplest Virtue in many ways. Even here, however, characters may differ in the sources or essences of their resistance to fear. For instance, a character might fight Röttschreck and other terrors from revulsion at the Beast's blind drives. Another character could fear displaying cowardice and pit that shame against other fears. In cases when doing good means facing fire, sunlight or other instinctive sources of fear, a highly moral Kindred can pit that sense of duty and altruism against the baser urges of the Beast.

#### VIRTUES AND NATURE

All this discussion of personalities, and the ways in which they might help a character resist the Beast, should have you thinking about Natures. This is a "soft" Trait, in the sense that dots do not measure it and it does not contribute to dice pools. Nevertheless, Storytellers may want to consider a Cainite's Nature when the player must roll Virtue-based dice pools. You could reduce the difficulty of a Virtue roll in circumstances that work with or against a character's Nature. For instance, an Architect might struggle especially hard against the Beast when a frenzy could ruin all her hard work and careful plans, while a Bravo could make a special effort to resist public Röttschreck if he fears losing his reputation as a tough guy. In such cases, the Storyteller could reduce the Virtue roll's difficulty by one. Never use Nature as a reason to increase

the difficulty, though. Some Archetypes are intrinsically more amoral, self-indulgent or cowardly than others, and it isn't fair to penalize a player for exploring characters who aren't "nice."

## HUMANITY

The discussion above should also show that Humanity is the broadest and most forgiving of all moral systems open to Cainites. The Paths of Enlightenment offer greater compromises with a vampire's predatory nature, but they are brittle: A character receives less latitude in her moral choices, especially at the higher levels of each Path. Humanity, on the other hand, offers many different strategies to fight the Beast and a range of self-serving rationalizations when the Beast occasionally wins. A character may face great difficulty in keeping her Humanity high, but it's certainly easier to maintain this Trait in the 3 to 5 range than it is to keep the same stance on a Path of Enlightenment. Of course, "easier" doesn't mean "easy" — it's relative.

In fact, a Cainite might manage to follow a Path's ethics to some degree while retaining Humanity as the relevant game mechanic. The ideals of the Path supply the rationale to justify at least some crimes and brutalities: "I didn't want to kill him, but he threatened the Children of Haqim." "No, seducing her wasn't very nice, but her boyfriend should know her weakness before he commits more strongly." "That I could destroy the prince shows he was not up to the job. Really, I've done a favor for the Camarilla and the Masquerade."

Storytellers should take care, however, not to let players use the diversity hidden in Virtues as a sneaky way to replace Humanity with the ever-popular Path of What I Wanted To Do Anyway. These rationalizations and justifications enable a character to follow Humanity *badly*. A high Humanity rating still demands great respect for mortal life (and Cainite unlife). Without that basic compassion, a character merely negotiates a stalemate with the Beast. In the long run, however, a stalemate is all a Kindred can achieve — and the undead must always think of the long run.

The only alternative, after all, is Final Death.

## WILLPOWER AND ARCHETYPE

**Vampire** already makes the connection between Willpower and Nature explicit. A character who acts according to her Nature regains Willpower more readily than someone who denies the essence of his personality. Fighting yourself weakens yourself, and Willpower recovery reflects this.

If your character has a notably high or low Willpower rating, however, consider incorporating that in how you

play him. The chart for Willpower describes low ratings as "Diffident," "Unassertive" or even "Spineless," while it describes high ratings as "Determined" or "Iron-willed." This suggests some interesting possibilities. Consider, for instance, a Child Archetype with a high Willpower: Such a character may seem like a wide-eyed innocent or spoiled brat, but the high Willpower suggests a formidable drive to have others provide for him, whether through temper tantrums or displays of apparent helplessness. Add in a Demeanor that conceals the Child Nature, such as Martyr or Visionary, and you have a character who plays some very complicated head games with the people around him. In the same manner, a person who has a domineering Nature such as Director or Architect, but lacks self-confidence (reflected by a low Willpower), might show a Demeanor such as Conniver or Caregiver as she tries to wheedle, charm, nag or otherwise finesse people into doing what she wants.

## MERITS AND FLAWS

All too often, players try to build supercharacters using Merits and Flaws, or try to make their characters unique by piling on these special Traits instead of by their roleplaying. Please keep in mind that Merits and Flaws represent strange or truly exceptional aspects of a character's mind, body or connections.

Minor Merits and Flaws often represent very narrow aspects of character. The 1-point physical Merit Acute Sense, for instance, provides only marginally more benefit than a specialty to a character's Perception; in fact, you can think of this Merit as a way to give a specialty to a character without raising the Perception Trait overall to a high rating. On the flip side, Flaws such as Hard of Hearing offer "negative specialties" without reducing a character's overall Perception. When building a character, ask yourself if you really need the Merit or Flaw, or whether you can adequately represent the character through normal Attributes, Abilities and other Traits.

This point is especially true for social Merits. Consider a situation in which a senior Cainite feels special gratitude to a neonate for some great service that the character or his sire did for her. Is this a Debt of Gratitude, a 1–3 point Merit, or simply a backstory to explain a Mentor? Many of the social Merits easily convert into Backgrounds, though as shown above, you might need to stretch the Background's meaning a little bit. As for social Flaws such as Infamous Sire or Mistaken Identity, you may want to leave them as a matter for roleplaying.

Supernatural Merits and Flaws deserve special mention. You and your Storyteller should not let the character become blasé about supernatural matters.



These Flaws and Merits may inspire awe or fear in other Cainites because they understand the implications: The Curse of Caine has taken a new twist in you, or perhaps some other power blesses or taints you. Either way, you present an unknown quantity ... and among the Damned, the unknown always implies danger.

For more subtle Merits and Flaws, such as Unbondable or Dark Fate, you should also ask if the character knows about his special condition. If so, how did he find out? This presents another factor to work into a character's backstory. A character could receive a supernatural Merit or Flaw from the actions of some other entity such as a sorcerer or ghost, or the Trait's origin might be as mysterious to the character as to everyone else.

## "SOFT" TRAITS

**Vampire** includes a few Traits that have no effect on game mechanics at all. Nevertheless, they describe crucial aspects of the character and can produce real effects in play.

Concept is one such "soft" Trait. A capsule description such as "Hacker Geek" or "King of the Barrio" implies certain details about the character's interests,

knowledge and possessions that might not find direct expression in "harder" Traits. For instance, a Storyteller can safely assume that a Hacker Geek owns a bleeding-edge home computer, unless the player says, "No, he still uses an old 386 and does everything in UNIX." The Hacker Geek doesn't need a special Lore Ability to know the names of other top-notch hackers and recognize their handiwork. The concept and the existing Computer Knowledge imply it. Likewise, the King of the Barrio probably drives a hot low-rider even if he barely has the Resources to pay for gas. He also knows who's who in the 'hood and the details of gang etiquette, as facets of his Contacts and Streetwise. We have discussed this use of Concept in regard to other Traits, but it bears repeating here.

Embrace is another "soft" Trait. When did the character actually become a vampire? This particularly affects the common knowledge that isn't usually reflected in Abilities. A character Embraced as a young woman in 1959 probably knows details of 1950s popular culture that only elderly mortals still remember. A character Embraced in the 1850s has a store of knowledge that would set historians drooling. Her player might not need a dice roll for the character to recognize references to





common knowledge of the nineteenth century, whereas a younger character would need an Intelligence + Academics roll (and perhaps a stint in a research library), if he even realized that a reference mattered. Two ancillae who pepper their conversation with nineteenth-century cultural references might as well speak Anglo-Saxon for what the neonates around them understand.

## FINAL WORD

You don't need to make *every* Trait a unique, quirky interpretation or extension of the rules. As you create your character, however, give a moment's thought to what each Trait represents so you can connect it to something real. This exercise helps you turn a possibly vague, sketchy or simplistic concept into a fully rounded character.

## THE LONE WOLF

You know the type. The badass with a perpetual scowl. No friends, no family. Plenty of past, perhaps — probably a bizarre and convoluted past to justify how the character became the deadliest mofo on the planet. Don't count on the player to give you anyone the character actually cares about, though. At most, the player might supply a few old enemies. And Mr. Death Machine is not a team player. No matter what the other characters want to do, it's no concern of his, unless he has someone to kill.

In this case, the character is also a vampire. If you game long enough, though, you will encounter the Lone Wolf in any roleplaying or storytelling game. Setting, genre or rules system don't matter a great deal. The Lone Wolf can turn up anywhere.

It's not hard to see where the Lone Wolf comes from or why some players feel drawn to the concept. Plenty of action movies and TV shows present lone badass heroes. How many maverick cops, rogue supersoldiers and secret agents on the run from their governments have you seen?

The Lone Wolf also comes from a desire to win. Leaving aside whether **Vampire: The Masquerade** can or should be run like an action movie, characters do sometimes face lethal danger. The Lone Wolf, with his maxed-out combat Traits, can usually get away with fighting instead of negotiating or running away.

Some players also hate leaving Storytellers any hook that can drag their character into a situation the player doesn't like. By definition, the Lone Wolf has no hooks, no chinks in his emotional armor — because he exists as a purely tactical exercise.

Some players might see this isolated predator as the truest expression of the Cainite condition, but he's a real drag on a game.

## WHY HE'S USELESS

For **Vampire**, at least, the Lone Wolf is remarkably useless. Let's see why.

### NO MOTIVATION

The Lone Wolf has no real reason to associate with the other characters and, by cracky, often doesn't. When the other characters bring up their plans to rescue their mortal daughter from an abusive boyfriend, maneuver the priscus into granting a boon or solve the mystery of the vanished harpy, the Lone Wolf shrugs and says, "It's got nothing to do with me." Then he goes off to pursue his vendetta against Lupine ninjas, or something like that.

As Storyteller, you'd better provide plenty of Lupine ninjas, marauding Sabbat or stuff of that nature, too, because nothing else moves the Lone Wolf off his duff. He might be tolerable if he actually worked toward some goal ... but often he does not. After all, if he wanted to achieve something beyond a body count, he'd have to deal with other people.

This lack of motivation — or any personality beyond a scowl — separates a Lone Wolf from a character who simply happens to fight very well. Nothing is wrong with a character being good at combat. Something is inherently wrong with a character not actually being a character, however.

### NO NONCOMBAT ABILITIES

Unfortunately, the Lone Wolf is no good at anything except combat. **Vampire** assumes that characters face a wide variety of challenges beyond physical danger. Characters solve puzzles and mysteries, seek power and prestige in their clan and sect, encounter treachery and betrayal, try to make money, fall in love and do all the other things that people do in interesting stories. These diverse challenges demand equally diverse Abilities — especially Talents, Skills and Knowledges about dealing with other people.

Take a look at the primary Abilities list. Three Abilities — Brawling, Firearms and Melee — enable characters to attack each other. Eight Abilities — Empathy, Etiquette, Expression, Intimidation, Leadership, Performance, Streetwise and Subterfuge — deal specifically with interpersonal relationships. You can take that as a rough guide to the relative importance of fighting and social skills in a hypothetical **Vampire** chronicle. This goes for the Sabbat as well as the Camarilla and independent clans: The political infighting within the

sect demands social skills as highly developed as any Camarilla conclave or Elysium.

A **Vampire** character also needs a variety of social connections, represented by Backgrounds. No one is good at everything, knows everything or owns everything he needs. How will a character find out what's going on without Contacts? How will she protect her haven during the day without Retainers? How will he acquire the tools he needs without Resources? You can't steal everything; what you want may not exist in town, or at all. Even Sabbat, who boast of their independence from the kine, learn how to exploit the mortal world to a limited degree.

A classic Lone Wolf never spends a point on anything but combat Traits if he can help it. Athletics, Brawl, Dodge, Drive, Firearms and Melee — that's what a Lone Wolf wants, the Abilities to get to a fight and win it. The player might accept a few other Abilities such as Intimidation or Streetwise, but a Lone Wolf's player often regards the obligatory Knowledges and Backgrounds as points wasted and subsequently ignored.

That means a Lone Wolf can't solve a mystery, because he lacks the Traits to gather and interpret information. He can't deal with a social challenge, because he can't persuade other Cainites to take his side. He really has no way to get anything done except threaten mayhem.

### DISADVANTAGES OF COMBAT

Unfortunately for the Lone Wolf, the modern world — even the World of Darkness — presents a wide range of problems that you cannot resolve by lopping off heads with your silver-bladed twin katanas. In fact, the developed world imposes drastic sanctions on blatant use of lethal force. Even the Sabbat shows some discretion in its murders, while the Assamites won their deadly reputation for their stealth and secrecy as much as for their lethality.

Most Kindred would rather not fight to the Final Death for their goals. They have eternity to pursue their objectives if nobody destroys them, and Cainite existence as a predator tends to burn away altruism and other idealistic notions. Princes, archbishops, elders and other leading Kindred may also discourage rampant homicide among their charges, for fear that someone will learn of the undead's existence. If an elder sees a younger Cainite racking up a body count for reasons that do not serve the elder's purposes, the elder has every reason to arrange a murder of his own ... and even the greatest killer cannot guard against everything, every second. Those Kindred who exist under perpetual, worldwide blood hunt from the Camarilla survive through

exceptional guile, constant flight and hiding. They also tend to be old and powerful, and became that way by knowing how to pick their battles.

If anything, the mortal world is even worse for a Cainite death machine. Slain Kindred conveniently rot to dust, but mortal corpses require careful disposal. Cainites kill; they cannot deny this fundamental truth of their existence. Many vampires revel in killing mortals. The Sabbat even turns predation into a point of ideology. The most jaded elder or bloodthirsty Sabbat, however, still takes care to hide the bodies. The cops ask questions when too many bullet-riddled or beheaded corpses start piling up. The developed world has a lot of cops to seek a Lone Wolf.

“So I’ll just kill any cop who gets in my way!” Maybe, for a while. The police *never, ever* stop chasing a cop-killer. While chasing a Cainite, they might discover certain facts and deeds that endanger the Masquerade. Camarilla princes, Sabbat archbishops and independent Kindred alike try to destroy a known cop-killer before he blows the Masquerade and dooms them all ... and hunters willing to keep the big secret, like the Society of Leopold, stand ready to act on any anonymous tips that come their way.

All in all, deadly force causes at least as many problems as it solves. A character with no other method to deal with problems is not long for the World of Darkness.

## OTHER PLAYERS AND CHARACTERS

Worst of all, a Lone Wolf interferes with the other players’ enjoyment of the game. Maybe the Lone Wolf’s player likes an endless string of fight scenes. The other players might not. What’s more, if the Storyteller indulges a Lone Wolf’s player, that means a series of fights in which any less combat-optimized character has little chance to survive. If the other characters cannot keep up with Mr. Death Machine, the players probably leave him to his latest battle and wander away from the gaming table. One of these nights, they might not return.

## ”STEALTH” LONE WOLVES

So far we’ve described the really blatant, extreme sort of Lone Wolf. As a Storyteller, you may also encounter a variety of “stealth” Lone Wolves. You can just say “No” if a player presents you with an obvious monster. Some Lone Wolves, though, may look at first like more reasonable characters. As a player, you might even create a Stealth Lone Wolf without meaning to.

### THE MAN OF MYSTERY

The Man of Mystery is one such Stealth Loner. This character has a past, but it’s all hidden from the other

characters. He has motives and goals but conceals them. Now, deception, dark secrets and hidden agendas form the heart and soul of the World of Darkness — but the Man of Mystery goes way too far, in a clumsy and obvious fashion. He won’t tell the other characters anything and won’t participate in their unives unless it suits his own agenda. If your character won’t give anyone the time of day for fear of revealing that he owns a watch, you’re playing a Stealth Loner.

Even if the player wants her Man of Mystery to work with the other characters, they probably don’t trust him unless they need his help for their agendas. You do not build successful coterie on such a basis. A character with secrets can enliven (pardon the pun) a **Vampire** game, but handle this archetype with caution.

### THE CLOSET AUTARKIS

Then one has the character who simply doesn’t need the other characters. She might not possess a true Lone Wolf’s death-machine Abilities and Disciplines, but she does not want or require anyone else’s aid. She has the social connections she needs for her chosen unlife and the Disciplines to protect herself, yet lacks any property or connections that might tie her down. An Embraced street person who spends every day in a new haven and just wants to survive another night might seem like a suitably grim, gritty character for the World of Darkness, but how do the other characters find her? And why does she involve herself in their problems instead of running away?

### THE MONOMANIAC

This character pursues one overriding goal and shows no interest in anything except that objective. The nature of the goal doesn’t really matter; it could be anything from destroying the secret order of assassins that killed his mortal father to finding lost passages from the *Book of Nod*. Nothing the other characters do concerns him. It’s good for characters to pursue long-term projects, but bad for the story and the troupe dynamic if one player tries to hijack the chronicle for his single character.

### THE MALFUNCTIONING MALKAVIAN

Extreme Malkavians who simply cannot understand what other characters want present their own problems. Sure, playing a character with severe paranoid delusions and fugue episodes might seem like a great roleplaying challenge at first, but he might not work very well in any story not centered on him.

### THE ASSAMITE KILLER

The Assamite clan unfortunately seems tailor-made for Lone Wolf characters. At first glance, the stereotypical Assamite hired killer seems as pure a Lone Wolf as



you'd ever hope to see. Aside from the fact that *not all Assamites are hired killers*, please remember that a really professional assassin needs a great many abilities that have nothing to do with dealing death. A hired killer needs to find clients, negotiate fees, track down victims who might be well hidden and then conceal evidence of the crime from the mortal authorities. An assassin can be just as complex and socially and intellectually adept as any other character — and should be.

## FIXING THE PROBLEM

So, granted, Lone Wolf types can make Storytellers tear out their hair in frustration, and other players don't much like them either. What can you do about them?

If you think your character might be a Lone Wolf or a Stealth Loner, congratulations. Recognizing the problem brings you halfway to the solution. You don't have to tear up your character and start over from the beginning, though. As you'll see, you can do a lot to refurbish your character.

Your Storyteller may say you've produced a Lone Wolf, or your character otherwise poses a problem for the coterie. Ask your Storyteller to explain the problem.

If another player produced the Lone Wolf, talk to him about it. You and your fellow players can do a lot to turn a Lone Wolf into a more interesting and involved character.

Be warned that some tactics lie beyond the reach of players. Only your Storyteller can initiate some of these corrective measures. As players, however, you can recognize a stratagem to humanize a Lone Wolf and play along. Don't underestimate the power of peer pressure.

### ASK FOR GUIDELINES

The best way to deal with Lone Wolves is to prevent them. You should always discuss character concepts with your Storyteller before the game even begins. Ask what sort of characters won't work in the chronicle. A character who works perfectly well in a combat-intensive Black Hand kamut might not fit into a chronicle centered on Toreador socials, and vice-versa (though some players view "Won't Work" statements as a challenge and design characters that break the Storyteller's guidelines but *do* work, God bless 'em).

You might want the Storyteller to hold this discussion with all the players, as a group, so no one feels singled out for criticism. Some players are sensitive that way.

If you still feel a deep yearning to play socially isolated death machines, you may want to reconsider your choice in play habits. Talk to your Storyteller about maybe trying a one-on-one chronicle for a while.

## SELF-CRITICISM FOR STORYTELLERS

Before we go any further ....

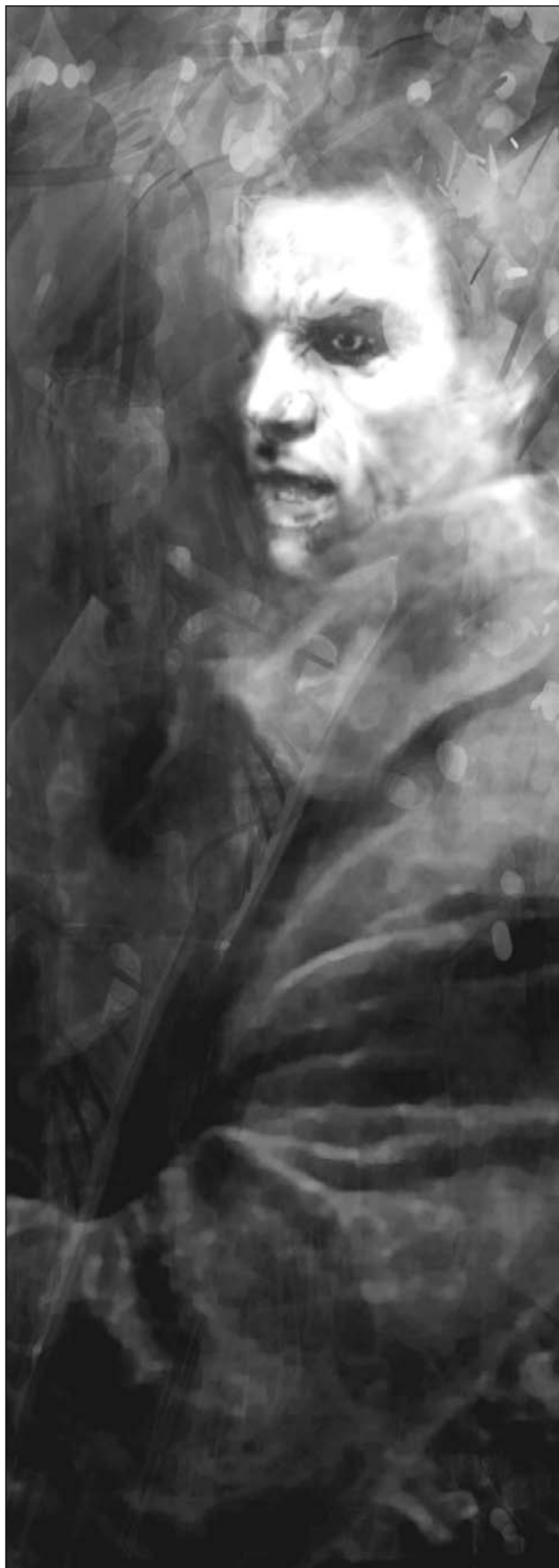
If your players try to create invulnerable characters, examine your own Storytelling style. Lone Wolf characters may appear because the Storyteller turns every social connection against the characters. A Mentor must offer help as well as make demands; that's why she's a Mentor and not a taskmaster. If every Contact or Ally eventually turns on the character, and loved ones serve no function except to die or be held hostage by the character's enemies, players preemptively cut off these avenues of attack, because then you are attacking the characters, instead of acting as an impartial arbiter and partner in a shared story. Never forget that your job is to provide entertaining challenges for the characters, not to screw them over just to show them how shitty unlife is in the World of Darkness — or, even worse, to show you can.

If a player persists in running characters as Lone Wolves, and you're pretty sure it's not from anything you do, talk to him about his past game experiences. Possibly, he suffered from an adversarial Storyteller in the past and learned bad habits from the experience. Assure the player that you don't run games that way. Then prove it.

## DRAG OUT THOSE SOCIAL CONNECTIONS!

If you find that you created a Stealth Loner by accident, work on connecting your character to the other characters and to the world around them. Writing down a list of five people the character knows can help you clarify your own idea of your character and provide inspiration for stories. These people don't have to be Contacts or Allies (though that's a good place to start). Invite all the players to make a list like this. Then pass the lists around and look for ways that your characters' acquaintances might interact with each other. If two acquaintances resemble each other, combine them into one person who knows both characters. Hey presto, you have a social network for your coterie. Your Storyteller will thank you.

If you need inspiration, look at the tough-guy archetypes that inspire Lone Wolves. These characters usually have some connections to the rest of the world or gain them in the course of the story. For instance, what's a maverick cop without an angry precinct captain to yell at him for breaking regulations? Examine every aspect of a Lone Wolf's background and unlife for oc-



casions when he must deal with another person — and bring those people into the game.

### **The Arms Dealer**

Where does a Lone Wolf acquire those specialty firearm accessories and ammunition that he loves so much? Specialty shotgun shells and negative-sound silencers ain't exactly available by mail order, even in the World of Darkness. A gun-bunny character needs a dealer to supply all that high-powered, and highly illegal, hardware.

If the Lone Wolf's player won't introduce this character, the Storyteller or other players can force the issue. Don't hand-wave a Lone Wolf's ability to re-arm. Demand a visit to the black-market arms dealer. Maybe *your* character suddenly wants some ordinance, too. Your Storyteller can turn that visit into an encounter with an interesting character.

A Storyteller can easily build plots around that arms dealer. For instance, the dealer expected to have the C4 in this week, but his own supplier has problems. Maybe his good customer, and his good friends in the coterie, could find out what's the matter? In return for a suitable price reduction on his next purchase, of course ....

Is another character a social climber? The arms dealer can show up at her favorite trendy night spot. Does the arms dealer have a daughter? She gets a crush on the Lone Wolf or (less satisfying) another member of the coterie. Once several characters have some connection to the arms dealer, the whole coterie has a reason to look for him if something goes foul, not just the Lone Wolf.

### **The Sensei**

People don't casually become one of the world's best martial artists or marksmen. They need trainers. Invent a few. Don't bother trying to cut away these loose ends by saying someone murdered your character's old sensei. A Storyteller can create loose ends any time she wants. If the sensei is dead, the Storyteller can bring in the sensei's closest colleague, his son, his other star pupil ....

The sensei (colleague/son/pupil) does not walk into the character's unlife merely to pay a social call. The usual story runs like this: The sensei has a problem and he wants the Lone Wolf's help in solving it. Of course, the point of introducing this character is to draw the Lone Wolf into social interaction, so a wise Storyteller does *not* present a problem that violence can solve. Threatening the old dojo with Lupine ninjas produces just another bloodbath. If a bank threatens to foreclose on the dojo for missing mortgage payments, the Lone Wolf has a problem that he cannot solve by combat alone. He needs help from the rest of the coterie, even if his plan involves bank robbery. As a fellow player, view these situations

as chances to broaden the Lone Wolf's horizons — and maybe your own character's, as well.

It may happen that the Lone Wolf lacks gratitude and tells his old sensei to piss off. In this case, he not only annoys the Storyteller and all the other players, he breaks the Action Hero Code, which says you always help out a mentor in trouble. The Lone Wolf just lost the last feeble rationale for his continued existence. The sensei might punish the rebuff by destroying the ungrateful swine, or at least giving him a good thrashing. Remember, the sensei is better than his student ....

### **Adventures in Babysitting**

A Lone Wolf may find himself in a situation in which he must take care of another person. A Storyteller can have a powerful character — say, the city's prince or some other elder Kindred — demand that the Lone Wolf protect a certain mortal. This worthy would do it himself, but other commitments take him away for a few months. Surely, Mr. Death Machine can protect one mortal from anything less deadly than the elder himself? The elder promises lethal displeasure if the Lone Wolf refuses or fails to protect the mortal. On the other hand, the elder also promises the Lone Wolf a rich reward if he can fulfill this task. Maybe he knows where the Lupine ninjas hide out (or at least says he does).

A fellow player can try to set up a similar situation, using peer pressure instead of death threats and bribes. One of the characters needs a mortal protected and recruits the entire coterie for help. Mr. Death Machine looks cowardly if he refuses when all the other characters agree.

Work with the Storyteller to define the mortal whom the Lone Wolf protects. The mortal might be anyone from a character's kid sister to a child of destiny with rare mystical gifts.

In this kind of story, the Lone Wolf's new charge is typically either a child or a beautiful young woman. She is also a bundle of trouble. She tends to wander off at inconvenient times, mouth off to troublesome antagonists, etc. If the Lone Wolf decides to "protect" her by locking her up, she does her best to escape. She frequently bickers with the character.

The mortal also needs some positive qualities, however, that render her care less burdensome. She might possess useful skills that can help her protector, such as the archetypal child prodigy; mystical talents, such as a medium or psychic, are another option.

The Lone Wolf faces the challenge of keeping his charge safe from some suitably persistent danger, such as the minions of his patron's archenemy or a cult that wants to sacrifice the "Chosen One." This lets the

Lone Wolf engage in some of his beloved combat ... but another character can point out that protecting his charge would become much easier if the mortal got along with him. Fortunately for all concerned, the Lone Wolf can try to make amends using pure roleplaying, without the need for the player to roll dice. Other characters in a coterie can help with the "babysitting" and take advantage of the charge's talents.

After the Lone Wolf rescues the character from an attack, his charge becomes more amicable if given a chance. At this point, a child might idolize the Lone Wolf and tag along with her new "father figure" or "big brother figure," while young women traditionally feel attracted to their strong-but-surlly protector.

If the Lone Wolf manages to protect his charge and form some sort of relationship, he might gain a permanent Mentor in the person of his patron elder, and a Contact or Ally in his charge. The character now has at least two connections to Kindred and kine society that the Storyteller can exploit from then on. It's not much, but it's a start.

A Storyteller might also have a character simply attach herself to the Lone Wolf and demand protection. A dedicated Lone Wolf may brush her off, but it's a hard player who can make his character turn down a wide-eyed orphan with a teddy bear. The movies provide plenty of examples of hard-bitten loners and badasses softened by unasked-for dependents. *Terminator 2*, for instance, presents a literal death machine humanized by the need to protect a boy and his mother. Be warned, you can go overboard: In *The Outlaw Josey Wales*, Clint Eastwood's vengeance-obsessed one-man army becomes responsible for, in order, a wounded kid, an elderly Indian, a mangy redbone hound, an enslaved Indian woman, a settler family (including a tetchy old lady) and then the remaining inhabitants of a ghost town. Although the latter example is clearly excessive, remind a Lone Wolf's player of such movies. They show that caring for other people doesn't make you any less a tough guy.

### **TAKE AWAY THE WEAPONS**

Lone Wolf players may feel they don't need social connections because their characters are such badasses, they can do what they want and kill anyone who tries to stop them. So ... what happens if a character can't use his weapons? He has to explore other avenues.

For instance, Mr. Death Machine cannot take his katanas and Uzi onto an airplane (a night flight, obviously). If he tries, he faces a thrilling fight with airport security that ends with him still on the ground (and probably in jail or detained for some vigorous question-



ing) and more reasonable characters flying off to the next scene. As the player, do you want that?

For another option, the coterie may need some sort of help from an influential elder (or mortal) who will not meet armed characters. If the Lone Wolf does not check his weapons at the door, the elder will never talk to him. It does no good to cut down the doorman or the bouncer — the elder just steps out a side door to leave an empty office. Other characters can remind the Lone Wolf of these basic social graces — peer pressure, again.

#### ENFORCE THE MASQUERADE

Fine, the Lone Wolf killed the latest Lupine ninja who came after him. What did he do with the corpse?

Just left it as a mystery for the cops? The body becomes headline news. The cops want to know who this person was, who he fought, who killed him and why. A clever reporter acquires the medical examiner's report and publishes everything the cops know about the fracas: "The unknown man was beheaded by some sort of very sharp blade. The medical examiner found traces of silver in the wound ..." — which sets everyone in the city looking for people carrying, oh, say, twin silver-bladed katanas? Of course, you adjust the scenario to fit the

Lone Wolf's favored weapons and the circumstances of the fight. Exsanguinated bodies left lying around provoke all manner of lurid speculations in the press, with corresponding tizzies among other Kindred fretting about the Masquerade. That's where the other members of the coterie come in.

Other characters can advise the Lone Wolf that disposing of the body is the better part of valor. That's not as easy as it may sound, depending on the city. Where do you hide a corpse so that no one finds it for a long time? How do you carry it to the disposal site without anyone seeing you?

If necessary, someone — such as your own character — can supply a delicate hint that transporting, hiding or destroying bodies becomes much easier with confederates, or that other Kindred must know how to do it. That gives the Lone Wolf an added incentive to work with the other members of the coterie and take an interest in their problems: As the saying goes, a friend helps you move, but only a true friend helps you move a body.

#### ACHIEVE THE GOAL

If a Lone Wolf is also a Monomaniac who brushes off any story hook that doesn't concern his particular

crusade or vendetta, a Storyteller can achieve interesting results by having the character succeed. Whaddaya know, the World of Darkness doesn't have an endless supply of Lupine ninjas, and the Lone Wolf just killed the last one. He has his revenge, or whatever.

This leaves three options for the player. He can retire the character. Problem solved. No more Lone Wolf. He can leave the character sitting around like a lump saying "No" to every story lead that comes along, until the other characters (and players) simply ignore him, which becomes very dull for the Lone Wolf's player. Or ... he can develop a new interest like, say, what the other characters are doing. The other players can encourage this.

### KILL THE CHARACTER

Let's make one thing clear: This is the next-to-last resort, second only to throwing a player out of the gaming group — and you do not take either course lightly. They cause *very* bad feelings, whether the Storyteller or another player's character does it. Before you deliberately set out to kill a Lone Wolf, ask yourself if you are willing to risk a friendship for the sake of a game. If the player has rebuffed every other attempt to reform a Lone Wolf, you may prefer just to end the chronicle and begin a new one — with new characters.

If you decide that the Lone Wolf absolutely must die before the player can move on and create a new character, you can still minimize the shock somewhat. If you're the Storyteller, absolutely do not kill the character by fiat. Let him go down fighting, no matter how ridiculously you stack the odds. The player does not feel as cheated if his Lone Wolf takes some of his killers with him.

A really clever Storyteller can even make the character's death help the rest of the coterie. For instance, a "Horatio at the bridge" scene lets a Lone Wolf go out in a blaze of glory. Here's the set-up: The coterie achieves some goal but its enemies pursue it. Fortunately, the characters pass through a highly defensible chokepoint such as a bridge or tunnel. It's the best possible place for a stand. The initial estimate of the enemy's strength suggests that Mr. Death Machine can hold the chokepoint by himself and win. Perhaps the coterie has a time limit, so the other characters have a reason to leave the Lone Wolf behind.

Once the other characters clear out, the enemies turn out to be more formidable than expected. It's a gallant fight; maybe Mr. Death Machine can even destroy the enemy leader before someone shoots him in the head or chops him to sushi with *four* katanas. Everyone wins, at least in part: The other characters succeed in their mission, the Storyteller gets the Lone

Wolf out of her chronicle, and the Lone Wolf's player has a story about his character's glorious demise.

## A FINAL WORD

Remember that the Lone Wolf is a problem of play style rather than of Traits. A good player can take an apparently hopeless combat monster and turn him into a war-weary soldier whose undeath taught him the need to get a life, a dark knight struggling to redeem his cursed state through valor or numerous other possibilities.

This is no hoity-toity, high-art pretension. A richer personality makes a character more fun to play. The stories that linger in players' memories, the ones they recount years later, do not concern the number of mooks they blew away or cut down. They are about the brilliant strategies and appalling blunders, the allies and enemies made, the great challenges faced, the tragedies suffered, the mysteries solved, the tests of conscience and judgment, the romances and the occasional ridiculous farces — yes, even in "a storytelling game of personal horror." By trying to turn **Vampire** (and every other game) into nothing but fight scenes, a Lone Wolf's player does not merely cheat the Storyteller and the other players of their enjoyment. He also cheats himself.

## FILING OFF THE SERIAL NUMBERS

To some degree or another, many of us are guilty of the following crime:

Enthused by a character we see in a movie, book, comic or video game, we are tempted to design it as our next **Vampire** character. You've had conversations of this nature with your friends, haven't you? They go something like: "Man, did you see that how that guy went nuts when he was attacking those bikers in that one scene? He'd be the perfect Brujah!" "No way dude, he'd totally be a Gangrel. Didn't you see his wild, feral eyes?" This initial fascination and appreciation for whatever "cool" the character possesses starts you on the path of trying to identify what clan he would belong to, what abilities he had and what Disciplines he displayed. Soon, you're grabbing a blank character sheet and poring over stats and merits and flaws in a rush of inspired character creation. If the character is already cool to begin with, it all but guarantees that it'll make a fantastic vampire character, right? Well ... not always.

Unfortunately, the tendency for many people is to try to come up with a line-by-line copy of the character they're inspired by, without attempting to adapt or modify it enough to make it a unique or appropriate **Vampire** character. Even if a player were to base his



vampire off a seemingly appropriate character, such as the vampire Lestat, an attempt to make an exact copy is going to come across as a cheap imitation at best. Sure, some might say Lestat possesses a great deal of desirable qualities for a World of Darkness vampire, but most likely a third-party presentation of Lestat is going to lack the nuances and particulars that make him compelling. Besides, if we want to see Lestat, we'll go straight to the source.

Most members of a troupe have had one of these knock-off characters in their chronicles at least once, and generally when players discuss these obvious rip-offs the conversation brings more rolled eyes than accolades. If you're one of the lucky few who haven't experienced this first-hand, count your blessings. You are lucky enough to have been spared the embarrassment of watching a member of your troupe present his vampire named "The Raven" who wears white face paint, or her willowy albino Tzimisce named "El Rock" who carries a bonecrafted sword with an insatiable thirst for blood. Don't laugh — you know those knock-offs exist. Maybe you've even been guilty of making one yourself.

It goes without saying that presenting a carbon-copy of an existing well known character with little modification other than labeling him a vampire and changing

his name is not the right way to go about using source material and inspiration effectively. Doing something as simple as giving *The Terminator* fangs and calling him a Brujah is never going to qualify as good character creation. It is possible to use a well known character as your starting point and end up with a truly unique creation you can confidently call your own, as long as you're aware of the inherent risks and considerations that come with choosing to create a character this way.

You might be asking why you should bother bringing these additional worries to your character creation process. Why not start from scratch each and every time and avoid these hassles altogether? Well, even the most creative of us sometimes come up against a bit of a block when it comes to creating a new character. Alternatively, perhaps you're a Storyteller who has to come up with a few Storyteller characters in a hurry and don't have the time or feel the necessity to create a handful of completely unique character concepts on the fly. Sometimes ... well, nothing is wrong with really liking an existing character so much that you genuinely want to base your next Kindred upon them. For example, say a person owns all the Superman comics and a Superman lunchbox and sleeps on Superman sheets and wouldn't dream of leaving the house without his



lucky Superman underwear. If someone is that drawn to a character, it wouldn't be too much of a stretch to imagine that he would try to incorporate Superman into his story as well, would it?

Now, you might say that the idea of turning Superman into a vampire is one that seems like a disaster from the start. Sure, simply making Superman vulnerable to sunlight rather than kryptonite and calling him a vampire would be astoundingly dumb as well as just plain uncreative. Using elements of Superman's personality or concept as raw source material for a compelling vampire character isn't a bad idea at all. In fact, this is the correct approach to take whenever a particular character you admire inspires you to base your next vampire off of it. To make it work will take a great deal of insight and creativity, but the resulting character can be quite playable and unique if created with care.

When faced with the challenge of creating a new character, all of us draw inspiration and impressions from a source of one sort or another. We integrate a wide range of experiences drawn from movies, television, books, music and our own lives into the characters we create. Sometimes we may not even be aware of all of our sources. Perhaps you remember that you've based your character's roguish smile on that of the man you saw in a club last Friday night, or perhaps that little memory will slip out of your mind almost unconsciously as you begin creating the mental image of your vampire. Whether you remember the source at the time of character creation or not, elements from the sources you draw inspiration from will shape and color your characters to one degree or another.

If you're aware of the source of your inspiration — particularly if that source is a popular character that other people are going to recognize or be familiar with — your challenge is to create a character who reflects only the particular traits of the source that you find most compelling. If you go for a straight carbon copy you'll be spending an awful lot of time and energy reinventing the wheel, not to mention ending up with a vampire that is potentially ill-suited for the game and just begs for your troupe members to give you a good ribbing for bringing something so blatant to the table.

Admittedly, coming up with an initial concept on your own can be hard at times. Starting with a blank character sheet is somewhat akin to an artist standing before a blank canvas — the endless possibilities can sometimes seem paralyzing. This is when you might find yourself wanting to default to one of your favorite comic-book heroes or movie characters to get you started. Again, this can be a perfectly acceptable starting point if you develop it further with your ideas of your own. If

you come up with a character whose background and personality are little more than "He's like Wolverine, but a Gangrel," you've just ripped off someone else's idea — and not necessarily one that's good for **Vampire**. No, Marvel Comics probably isn't going to send someone to knock on your door and deliver a "Cease and Desist" letter, but chances are your fellow troupe members won't be as enthralled with the idea of having a comic-book character in their game of **Vampire: The Masquerade**. Of course, not all characters based on existing characters are going to be so obvious, but they certainly could be if you rely too much on their pre-existing history, background and personality rather than developing those elements on your own.

If the other players in your troupe can tell who you based your character on the very first time you introduce it into the game, it means you've relied too heavily on your source material to define that character. It also means that you've either taken a lot of shortcuts in your character creation process, or you've naively thought that no one is going to be able to tell that your red-haired Toreador chanteuse is based upon Tori Amos. Taking shortcuts when creating a character is similar to taking shortcuts when making a car; at first glance the car might look perfectly acceptable, maybe even flashy, but as soon as you need to use the brakes you'll wish you'd taken the time to install more than just the pedal. For anything to fully function you need to have all the necessary pieces assembled, not just the most visible ones.

## OBJECTIVES OF CHARACTER CREATION

To help you get the most from your source material, think about some of the higher goals of character creation. Believe it or not, the number-one goal of is not to produce the most beautiful or impressive-looking vampire. Consider the following ideas when designing your character:

You want a character whose struggles, history, challenges and passions are intriguing, compelling and complex. You want a character who has the potential for growth and change and evolution. The World of Darkness is far from static; your character shouldn't be static, either.

Your character should have enough of her own personality that she surprises you and continues to intrigue you and members of your troupe as she faces the challenges and basks in the triumphs of your chronicle. If you've made a character your own, you'll see the World of Darkness through her eyes all that much more clearly, as well as get much more depth and satisfaction out of the story.

You also want a character who isn't invincible. Yes, you really do, and sometimes choosing an existing character from popular culture can make this a bit of a challenge — see the discussion of the Lone Wolf, above. Movies, books and comics are often epic in their sweep, featuring protagonists who can destroy entire cities, countries and even planets without a thought. While power and its repercussions are an important part of the issues addressed in **Vampire**, only the wildest of elder campaigns will approach this level of power. Good characters require good roleplaying, but it's hard to roleplay with other players' characters or Storyteller characters when you can obliterate them with a blink of an eye, or when none of their actions can possibly affect you.

Don't make the mistake of thinking that all you'll need to do to make the character unique is reduce his power just a little. If you've based your character on Wolverine and you've given him metal claws on one hand instead of two, you still have Wolverine. Be mindful of the whole character and not just his power level. Being drawn to a source exclusively because it's a badass and then slightly reducing its powers in some way to avoid being called a copycat defeats the point of using that character for inspiration in the first place. Consider the source material's life and personality rather than the power level as the heart and soul of your character concept. Focus on the character as a whole and you'll give yourself a better chance of successfully using those traits to build a fully realized creation that is uniquely your own.

## MAKING IT WORK

Let's look at some of the key points you should address to adapt a well known character into your own creation.

### CHOOSE A SOURCE THAT MAKES SENSE

When creating a character for a story or chronicle it's important to remember that the focus of the game is very specific in nature. **Vampire** is a game about self-exploration and humanity's dark side, and the characters should be receptive to these themes. Not every potential source is going to work well with these themes. It's difficult to see how you could base a character off of Ronald McDonald, for example.

Be aware that what works in one medium doesn't always translate well to another. Die-hard fans of the *Dune* books who loathe the film version will certainly attest to this. This goes for characters as well as storylines. A character can be interesting and well rounded in a novel but fall flat when brought into the medium of a storytelling game.

Consider how well known your source is going to be to other players. If your fellow players are immediately able to identify certain traits about your character, they

might ignore all of the hard work you've done to customize him and make him a seemingly unique vampire. They'll stop seeing him as your newest Ventrue because they'll recognize that you cribbed him from Val Kilmer's Doc Holliday.

Identify the bigger themes behind what you consider cool about your inspiration. Good characters are good because they invoke a spark of identification and sympathy in those who read, watch or hear about their deeds. If your character can replicate that spark in your friends and Storyteller then they'll enjoy the game, and your character's part in it, all the more. This isn't to say that your friends will love your Wolverine-based character the same way they love Wolverine. But they may see part of what they love about Wolverine in your character, while also appreciating him for his own qualities.

Weigh the benefits of using an obscure source versus a famous source. Playing a character based on Batman is quite a different experience from playing a character based on, say, Tom Waits. Obscure characters aren't stereotyped as easily and don't seem as clichéd to other players. On the other hand, they can have a narrower story scope and therefore feel more constricting to play. Then again, more famous characters have a greater range of experience, but they can also be the most prone to being clichéd when it comes to actually playing them.

### BE HONEST

As much as you like your source, and as much as you think you can change it so other people won't recognize it, ask yourself if this character is really and truly appropriate source material for a **Vampire** character who needs to function in the World of Darkness. It doesn't matter how creative you are, no amount of tweaking the numbers is going to make Ace Ventura, Pet Detective a worthwhile **Vampire** character.

It's easy to come out of a movie or comic store or away from a television filled with enthusiasm and adulation for a potential source. Then, when faced with a blank character sheet, it becomes even easier to decide that your next character will be based on that source. If the source material you've chosen isn't a good fit for the World of Darkness or **Vampire: The Masquerade**, it will soon become obvious and it will detract from the enjoyment you and your troupe members will get out of the campaign. Your inspiration may be too comical, too overwrought for serious storytelling, too hackneyed to expect any surprises from or too flimsy to merit being called a character.

Take a good, long look at your source material and ask yourself some basic but by no means insignificant



questions. On the most basic levels, is he going to work in the World of Darkness? Does he have enough of the right kind of potential to allow you to create a vampire that is appropriate for the game? Are you going to put so much effort into remaking this character as a vampire that you'd be better off starting from scratch?

### DIG DEEP

All players are aware that creating character involves asking yourself questions. Everyone is familiar with the most basic of these: "What sex is my character?" "Which clan does he belong to?" "What generation is he?" "What does he think of the anarchs?" These are questions whose answers form the most basic building blocks of a character.

A good character goes beyond these questions. It is questions like "What does he think of death?" "Did she believe in God?" "How does he see freedom?" "Has he ever been in love?" that shape a character's personality and make him truly memorable and fun to play.

Creating a character based on an existing source gives you many ready-made answers to a myriad of questions. The answers to these questions are what can unlock a character's potential. Take some of the outstanding characteristics of your source and consider what that character would be if those details were removed or changed. Would Wolverine be less prone to

getting into fights if he didn't have his healing factor? How would Batman cope with an insatiable bloodlust? Would Renton Embrace Sick Boy or just make him his ghoul? By answering these questions, you can create characters that tap into the potential of the original source but are different, and yet no less interesting.

### IDENTIFY THE INSPIRATION

Once you've determined that the source material is appropriate for adaptation and you've fully explored the potential by asking yourself the requisite questions, try to identify what it is about the character that has compelled you to use her as an inspiration for your next vampire. If you're bound and determined to base your next Gangrel on Wolverine, do you think he'd make a good vampire because he's a moody loner forced to deal with the world on its own terms instead of his? Do you like him purely because he's a tough guy with cool claws and amazing healing abilities? Are you drawn to him because he's a short Canadian guy with elaborate sideburns and a crazy accent? The more specific details you can pinpoint and identify, the easier it will be for you to develop a unique character from your source material.

Break it down into raw, basic elements. As you define just what it is about a certain personality that sings to your soul, define those traits with the core of

their appeal. A few basic examples could include any of the following:

**You like the way the character looks.**

Seemingly superficial, nothing is actually wrong with being drawn to a character simply because of his appearance. In order to use that as a source of inspiration for your vampire, you need to identify what that particular look projects. Even the small step from “cool” to “sexy” or “powerful” or “unconventional” or “frightening” is enough to steer you in the right direction.

**You like the way the character acts.**

While certain styles of clothes wouldn't immediately identify an individual as Kindred, that individual's behavioral traits are often what would make him stand out from a group of kine. Therefore, being drawn to a certain source because of the way he conducts himself opens all kinds of opportunities from which you can take inspiration.

**You like the character's potential.**

He can shoot two guns while sliding down a flight of stairs on his back. She can seduce the most top-level political secrets out of a tight-lipped congressman. He can hack his way into any computer system and get all the information anyone could ever need. In short, your source does cool stuff that you want your character to do as well.

### TAKING OWNERSHIP

Start with the big, obvious elements and see how you can work with them to make them unique to your character.

If you simply describe your character as a guy with claws and sideburns, your players are likely to identify him as Wolverine. If you describe your character as a guy who overcompensates for a physical disadvantage and has rage issues, that makes your source less obvious. Other players will appreciate him for himself, not simply as a tribute to a famous character.

Using those same three examples we discussed earlier, let's consider how we can start to adapt the traits you like about your source without stealing them completely.

**You like the way the character looks.**

So you like Eric Draven as *The Crow* because of his dramatic make-up and natty black duds. You've taken that a step further and have come to understand that you like his look because it's spooky, memorable and theatrical. How do you change this to make it unique to your character? Here's what you don't do: You don't dress him in red leather instead of black, have eyeliner on only one eye and name him “Raven.” Instead, consider other ways you can describe his appearance to evoke

feeling you've described above. Can you find a way to make him look spooky and dramatic without resorting to the obvious? Is the haunt in his eyes and a tendency to wear a cast-off three-piece suit as effective as clown-white make-up and PVC clothing? Do what you can to shift away from the most well known visual tie-ins to your source material and challenge yourself to find other ways to evoke the characteristics they display.

**You like the way the character acts.**

Let's say you have an epiphany while watching Johnny Depp mumble his way through *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. That, right there, is your next Malkavian. Turn to him for clues into how you can play someone whose behavior doesn't remotely conform to the status quo, but certainly resist the urge to have him wear a Hawaiian shirt and run around raving about lizard-people. Does your character portray madness because of his communication style or his body language or his randomness? Maybe his dress is outlandish, or he seems to be attracted to all the wrong situations while managing to skirt through them somehow unfazed.

Perhaps you liked the way Blade drew his sword in a semicircle in front of himself before hacking and slashing the arms and heads off his foes. You're not going to have your character do that, are you? Of course you're not. You're going to come to the conclusion that you like that particular move because it's stylish, graceful and a tad arrogant. Although you endanger giving yourself a “shtick” by looking for a signature gesture, you can give your vampire little nuances, gestures and preferences that will add the desired flair to your character. Flick a Zippo, brush dust off your lapels or reapply your lipstick after splitting some wigs. They'll remember that.

**You like the character's potential.**

Borrowing another character's capabilities doesn't present quite the same challenges as the other two examples. Countless ass-kickers, sharp-shooters, schmoozers, world-class flirts and other characters share the types of talents you might be inspired to have. The need for customization comes when you are drawn to a particular talent that is automatically going to be identified with an existing character.

## KEEP IT GOING

Move on to the smaller details.

By now, you've identified the most obvious traits and decided which ones to modify and which ones to discard. Look at the smaller, less obvious details that you can use for building blocks and inspiration. Focusing on a character's less obvious facets has two advantages. First, you're synthesizing what really makes the source interesting. Second, despite the character being a truer iteration



of the source, the tribute will ironically be less obvious (or less *immediately* obvious, anyway) and will stand up better to interaction with the other players' characters.

The character's personality dictates the way he acts, the way he sees others, his beliefs and his morals. It's this that makes a character truly unique, and defining this makes a character fun to play.

This is the part of the source you'll be playing. Not his claws, not his wizard sidekick, not his stubble and trademark leer. It's the source's personality that drew you to him in the first place, and it's the personality that will give you the most fun when playing him.

Another thing to consider is how your character will affect the troupe's enjoyment of the game. It's easy for a player to tell herself that she's not going against the themes of the game, but when you are playing a character based on a source that wasn't designed to work with those themes and you haven't thought about how to fit the characters into them, it can cause problems very quickly. If you're playing a Tyler Durden homage and you're being true to your character, you'll likely dominate or ruin the game's atmosphere. At the same time, if you don't play your character as you've designed him in order to fit with the game's atmosphere, you'll be breaking your own character concept.

Characters who are loners by nature don't fit well into group-oriented play. Characters who have their own convoluted backstories that they pursue to the exclusion of everything else are difficult for Storytellers and troupes to work with. Characters who rely on mystery and distance for their impact are going to become very tiresome very fast. "Yeah, yeah, yeah; we get the moody mysterious guy bit. Now help us figure out how to get that police chief under our thumb." Again, don't be a Lone Wolf.

Once you've asked yourself these questions, the next step is to ask them of the others they'll affect — that is, the rest of the troupe, including your fellow players and your Storyteller.

One of the most important factors in a storytelling game is allowing all players the opportunity to have their characters shine. A good Storyteller has to have a clear idea of what the characters can do in relation to the antagonists. Even in stories that aren't focused on combat or other activities that test the character's Traits, the chance to contribute is important. If the story is one of intrigue and social maneuvering around the prince, blowing him and his entire entourage into pieces because your character concept is a violent sociopath robs everyone else of the chance to contribute.

## HEY, STORYTELLERS

Players aren't the only people who create characters. In fact, since Storytellers create many characters as both starring and supporting cast while players create only one, in a way, this advice for character creation applies doubly to you.

A Storyteller can employ a few tricks when using a source that players can't. Many Storyteller-created and -run characters are "on screen" for only a short period and thus can be more archetypal, since not as many opportunities will exist to pick out flaws. While this shouldn't apply to the Storyteller's main characters — that is, the characters who make up the primary antagonists or allies of the players' characters and share a lot of screen time with them — Storyteller characters who are around for only a short time needn't be held to the same standards as players' characters, though distance from their source inspirations keeps them from being easily recognizable (and annoying).

It's important that your character concept doesn't violently clash with the other players' expectations of the mood and themes of **Vampire: The Masquerade** or the story as the Storyteller intends to present it. This doesn't mean characters should all get along, but if everyone can tell who your character is based on, and they don't like that particular personality or don't find it appropriate for the **Vampire** setting, it's going to negatively affect everyone's experience. This goes for any character, derived from a source or not, but it's particularly worth noting here since many people have strong reactions to particular sources. After all, playing a character based on The Rock may cause problems if one of your friends hates pro wrestling or didn't enjoy *The Scorpion King*. **Vampire: The Masquerade** is a group experience, and your character has to work in a group context.

Similarly, situations or themes may arise over the course of the chronicle that the Storyteller feels are inappropriate. When you discuss the character with your Storyteller be sure to include the source you'll be drawing from if you're concerned that it could be an issue. Your Storyteller should understand that you don't intend to play a direct clone and will help you make any necessary changes to avoid unnecessary conflict with the storyline or other characters.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

It's tempting to dismiss a player who wants to base her character on a source right off the bat. It may not seem very original, but remember, we all do it to a

certain extent, knowingly or otherwise. Don't dismiss the character out of hand — mull it over as you would any other character.

This isn't to say that all characters based on sources are good, nor are they all bad. They're characters like any others. How good they are depends on how well they're made and how well they're played. You'll have to take a few unique considerations into account, but don't view them as obstacles. Instead, see them as opportunities to further define what will, we hope, be a unique and interesting character who will give you and your troupe many fun storytelling experiences.

You should never be afraid to admit that your character concept just isn't a good idea. If after all this thought and examination you come to the realization that Wolverine will always be Wolverine no matter how many Disciplines you stack on him, you'd be wise to abandon the idea before you bring an ill-fitting character for your next chronicle.

Characters in storytelling games are like characters in films or plays. To enjoy their trials, tribulations and rewards, we have to experience them, and to experience them we need to suspend disbelief, put aside a little bit of our post-modern cynicism for a little while and interact with them as if they are real. This can be hard to do when they're very obviously based on well known characters that other players are likely to have preconceived notions about.

If a character is obviously similar to a source we are familiar with, then we can't treat it as a serious dramatic character. **Vampire: The Masquerade** is a serious and dramatic game, and characters who participate in it should reflect the Gothic-Punk mood and style that influences every aspect of the World of Darkness. To bring in a character that retains too much of the atmosphere and influence of the setting the source material came from will shortchange you and the players in your troupe. Gluing on bits of Gothic-Punk set dressing, on the other hand, simply makes for a manqué.

Creating a truly compelling and unique character isn't easy, and in all honesty, you probably don't want it to be. A good character concept requires significant thought and planning. The more effort you put into your character, the more enjoyable that character will be to play and interact with. It's a rewarding process, and the rewards received tend to be proportional to the effort put in. Playing a character whose creation you poured thought, effort and imagination into is always more satisfying than playing a character you threw together without much consideration. When you've invested your time into developing a fully realized character, you can

expect to have a much more rewarding time as you see the chronicle through your character's eyes.

## BEYOND THE CLANS AND SECTS

Nobody likes a traitor. Treason, betrayal and apostasy are universal crimes and often receive any given culture's harshest punishment. Kindred societies are no different. Crossing party lines and going against one's own always brings motives and integrity into question, and in an environment where appearance and rumors often carry more weight than reality, even a partially credible allegation of treason can be enough to undo centuries of work. Kindred have unusual relationships and affiliations, but meaningful boundaries are still drawn between the various camps reflecting common identity, ideology and agendas. How likely is it for a Sabbat vampire to collaborate with the Camarilla at the expense of her packmates? What sort of circumstances would need to occur for a Cainite to break ranks with her clan and stand with a traditional adversary? What sorts of ties exist within sect and clan to unite vampires sufficiently that make treason as distasteful a crime as it is?

Substantial differences in outlook and spirit exist between the Camarilla and the Sabbat, and each sect accordingly believes the other to be anathema. They have antithetical philosophies of vampiric morality, which in turn influences their relations with mortals. Camarilla Kindred tend to see the Beast as a burden, as an element in their psyches that is wild, unpredictable and best left unprovoked. The Sabbat sees the Beast as an integral part of being a vampire and seeks to cultivate a more intimate relationship with it. This difference of opinion leads to the Camarilla seeing the Sabbat as bestial degenerates, and the Sabbat seeing the Camarilla as spineless hypocrites. Despite the ideological, hierarchical and spiritual differences between the two sects they share some interesting historical details in common. Still, on a larger scale, they are primarily defined by what differentiates them and are unrecognizable to one another as proper vampires.

The Anarch Revolt exploded across the whole of Kindred society and shook the world of the undead to its foundation. The Tremere consolidated their sway over their still-vulnerable domains, the Assamites scrambled after every drop of Cainite vitae they could find, and the Lasombra as well as the Tzimisce were busy diablerizing their elders and liberating their wealth. What's more, the mortal world had woken up and put Cainites to

the torch by the score. Both sects emerged during this period of chaos, and the effects of the revolt remain a relevant influence on the outlook and agendas of both sects. Tonight the Camarilla seeks to contain the Anarch Revolt, while the Sabbat seeks to complete it.

While much of the Kindred world tonight is dominated by either the Camarilla or the Sabbat, this was not always the case. As far as Cainite history is concerned, the Camarilla and Sabbat are only the most recent chapters in an otherwise long and terrible story. Thousands of years of history lie outside the scope of the sects. Among elders who came into their prime prior to the Anarch Revolt are some who remain preoccupied with conflicts and alliances dating back to even before the Middle Ages that have now been complicated, though not resolved, by the redrawing of the political map between the Sabbat and the Camarilla.

The Camarilla's traditions were established to protect vampires as a whole from both themselves and the outside world. These laws are also based on the feudal arrangement of vampire princes prior to the Anarch Revolt, and much of that structure remains. In general, the Camarilla strives to manage the relationship between

vampire and vampire, and vampire and mortal, so that the Kindred may go about their business and pursue their own agendas with as little attention from the mortals around them as possible. Apart from the law and order of the six Traditions, little exists in the way of sectwide doctrine. Princes still retain the right of interpreting the Traditions within their domains — indeed, it's the duty of their very positions.

Camarilla vampires are also distinctive in the way that they value their humanity and tenuously guard those last hazy remnants still clinging to the corners of their souls. As a result, members of the Camarilla are less alien and bestial to mortal sensibilities than most other vampires. This permits the Camarilla's complex relationships between Kindred and mortals. In their drive to preserve their humanity, some Camarilla Kindred, notably among the Brujah and Toreador, have been known to become heavily reliant on and, in a sense, intimate with mortals. For the Camarilla mortals can be prey, tools, companions and occasionally inspirations.

Unlike the Camarilla, which seeks to cultivate its resources and power, the Sabbat looks forward to the realization of its goals: to ensure the individual freedom



of its members and stand against the influence of the Antediluvians as well as survive the impending Gehenna. The Sabbat's rituals, mythology, practices and hierarchy are all dedicated to these purposes, and its members are driven by a zealous eschatological fervor.

The Sabbat Vaulderie and the sect's tradition of individualism are intended to both pragmatically and symbolically subvert the tyranny of the Ancients. The founding documents of the Sabbat, which are viewed by many as religious texts, enshrine the importance of liberty. But while freedom fills the imagination of the Sabbat as a whole, its members interpret and appeal to its authority in countless different ways. This common doctrine has not led to a common vision, and the Sabbat is no less subject to differences of opinion than is the Camarilla. In fact, the disputes and divisions among the Sabbat can be even greater than those among Camarilla vampires, particularly because their doctrine is ritualized and sacred. Members of the Sabbat are ritually indoctrinated with this common mythology and as a result have something of a common identity, though some Sabbat are more reluctant to recognize that status than others. Along with the Vaulderie, this common indoctrination and mythology creates strong bonds among them. These bonds and the sense of common identity are conspicuous when the Sabbat encounters non-Sabbat vampires and the Camarilla in particular.

The Camarilla and the Sabbat are particularly distinguished by their views on Cainite nature, the Beast and the role of mortals. Among Camarilla Kindred, the Beast is something to be restrained. The Beast is a fearsome presence in the vampire's psyche and best left unstimulated. It is the curse of the undead, and their ideologies seek to subjugate it in favor of more humane conduct. For the Sabbat the Beast is a driving engine, Caine's blessing as well as his curse, that needs to be fostered and directed rather than closeted. As a result, the Sabbat does away with the more squeamish aspects of morality and enthusiastically rallies to the reality in which it sees itself: as monsters preying on mortals.

The Sabbat contempt for human values extends to mortals as a whole. Nothing is further from the Sabbat ideal than a mortal: They are weak, ignorant and petty. Mortals are simply sources of sustenance and sometimes serve as sources of amusement. Camarilla Kindred are more deeply involved in mortal affairs, and their success depends largely on their ability to fit in and mingle. Mortal retainers and allies are more than simple objects within the Camarilla. They can be associates and provide vital ties to the waning humanity of their patrons. On the other hand, nothing is more degrading than a career as a Sabbat ghoul. Even the uneasy status

of the Tzimisce revenant families makes for a twisted and perverted existence, and they are tolerated only because they have proven long ago that they understand who their masters are (with the recent exception of the Grimaldi). Even this special relationship with the Sabbat, and the Tzimisce especially, hasn't saved several lines of revenant families from being wiped out in the past.

Despite the polar opposites that the two larger sects have become of one another, some cause still exists for interaction beyond that of naked aggression. The race of Caine is simply far too fractious and scattered, too full of individuals, for each Cainite never to tempt the line between loyalty and treachery. The already antagonistic clans of Kindred society divide themselves into sects; within those sects they're divided further by age and inner-sect faction, orders within their own clans, and so on. Their loyalties often blur even among themselves. The possibilities for individual vampires to cross the established lines in place for them are numerous. To understand how it might occur, it is also important to have an understanding behind why.

## INDOCTRINATION IN CAMARILLA AND SABBAT

The Sabbat and the Camarilla have different ways of ensuring that their neonates conform to the established norms. Vampires in the Camarilla will experience a less elaborate system of education than their Sabbat counterparts. While they are not (necessarily) indoctrinated exactly, members of the Camarilla are nonetheless socialized in a particular manner and have certain important details in common.

The amount of guidance in prevailing custom a Camarilla vampire receives will vary from clan to clan and sire to sire, but will tend to focus primarily on the Traditions, the vampire's clan, proper etiquette within the Camarilla and how to uphold the values of them all (or not get caught failing in those virtues' observance). It is also the responsibility of a neonate's sire to educate him on the complex machinations of Kindred society as well as its history. This instruction is slanted by the biases and agenda of the neonate's sire, and a range of opinions and prejudices exist among neonates.

The Camarilla's structure is based on the six Traditions. By the time neonates are presented to the prince and released into Camarilla society, a given neonate is expected to have sufficiently mastered the culture to navigate through the twists and turns of sect politics without any potentially fatal breaches of etiquette or the Masquerade. Woe to the offending vampire and her sire if that is not the case! Neonates of some clans,

such as the Toreador, Tremere and Ventrue, have more elaborate instruction than others, given the emphasis these clans place on etiquette and well defined lines of authority. Others, such as the Malkavians and the Nosferatu, might not have as formal or ritualized rules. Along with schooling on laws, customs and interests, neonates may also receive instruction on the nature of the Beast and how it is kept in check by maintaining one's ties to his humanity.

The customs of the Camarilla have evolved a code of conduct consistent with the sect's overall, and strictly enforced, agenda of preserving the Masquerade, preserving the status quo and keeping a vampire from losing herself to the Beast. In general very little exists in the way of common sectwide ideology or dogma that a Camarilla neonate is expected to acknowledge beyond that of the Traditions.

The Sabbat is quite different. Unlike the Camarilla, which is open to any vampire who respects the authority of the Traditions and the prince, full membership in the Sabbat is reserved only for those who have proven their worth and their orthodoxy, and been initiated into its secrets. Any vampire is certainly encouraged by the Sabbat to convert to the Sword of Caine's Great Jihad, but those who do find the reception less than welcoming once there. The existence of a Sabbat vampire is visceral, violent, laden with rituals and symbolism, and aroused by the fear of an imminent Gehenna.

The Creation Rite is a vampire's first official step toward admission into the Sabbat. It is presided over by the pack priest, celebrated by the vampire's pack-to-be, and involves regalia symbolic of both the vampire's new sect and pack membership. It is an ornate, ritualized affair that culminates in the Cainite's rebirth. While it is a prerequisite, simply having undergone the Creation Rites doesn't make a vampire a Sabbat. Sabbat vampires are admitted only after demonstrating competence in the field and a wholehearted renunciation of their humanity.

A vampire's Path of Enlightenment, however, can play an equally if not more important role in determining her outlook and interests. Because of the quasireligious nature of most Paths and the anchor they provide for keeping the vampire from succumbing to the Beast, Paths require the vampire to internalize dogma and commit herself to a particular set of beliefs. Paths provide vampires with an ethical compass (to which they are often held to account) and the benefits of centuries of reflection on Cainite nature. Cosmopolitan meetings of vampires following the same Path are common, and some vampires have demonstrated greater affinity among their fellow Path followers than they do among their

brood or clanmates, attesting to the influence of Path indoctrination among the Damned.

The Creation Rite or the Vaulderie is probably the first of countless rituals that the vampire will take part in during her time with the Sabbat. If they are not outright instruments of unification such as the Vaulderie, they affirm the superiority and righteousness of the Sabbat, and solidarity against a common foe. The Sabbat is an association of strong, free, enlightened Cainites. This solidarity is affirmed at every level of the Sabbat organization through the Vaulderie: within and between packs, and throughout their communal havens. But the Sabbat's sense of relative solidarity does not keep them from coming to bitter disagreements and conflicting agendas, or purging their ranks with nigh-totalitarian ferocity.

The Sabbat pack plays a pivotal role in this indoctrination. Relationships among Sabbat packmates differ greatly from those in a Camarilla coterie. Packs have their own rituals and traditions and are bound together by the ties of the mystic Vinculum. This shared blood bond is the hallmark of Sabbat solidarity. The indoctrination of a Sabbat vampire is the collective responsibility of the vampire's pack, though the ductus and priest are likely to have prominent roles. The consequences of any doctrinal gaffes are borne by the offending vampire and the pack's leadership, if not the pack as a whole. It is in a pack's interest to ensure that any would-be Sabbat is sufficiently instructed in the practices and mythology of the sect.

The Sabbat is also aroused by its belief in an epic and imminent danger. Members of the Sword of Caine are embroiled in a great ongoing struggle against the hidden Antediluvians and their puppets, and many feel a sense of cataclysmic urgency around this conflict. Recent signs point ever more clearly to the oncoming of Gehenna, and that has some vampires scrambling to make final preparations. The destruction of the Ravnos founder, the proliferation of thin-blooded and other Noddist prophecies foretelling the end times grip the imagination of many Sabbat. More than merely accepting a particular doctrine, new Sabbat are greeted with whispers of a great looming peril, deliverance from which is found only in their sect, and as a result they are galvanized into urgent action.

This common mythology does not mean that differences of opinion among the Sabbat are any less frequent or bloody than those of their Camarilla counterparts or that they all recognize each other as brothers and sisters. Sabbat vampires are free to pursue their own agendas and interpret the sect's customs and doctrine in a variety of different ways. Not even the Vinculum keeps



members of the Sabbat from trimming their own packs of the weak and the heretical, though it does mitigate some of the more casual dissent. Even the most basic Sabbat indoctrination is rich with symbol and myth, and regularly reaffirmed through *ritae* and the *Vaulderie*. Among the Black Hand, the Inquisition and other Sabbat factions, those bonds are even greater.

## FACTIONS

Whether in a clan or sect, factions and secret societies are smaller groups of politically active Kindred united by a common vision or ideology, often distinguishing themselves from nonmembers. Because membership is voluntary or granted by invitation after a period of observation and subtle testing, factions are among the most ideologically consistent groups that a vampire is likely to encounter.

Factions and societies such as the Black Hand and the Sabbat Inquisition guard their own internal traditions, rites and agendas from the eyes of the uninitiated. Each of these groups is united by a common vision, tradition or project, so ties among their members tend to be quite strong. In many ways, the ties to faction are similar to a vampire's ties to her sect, though much more concentrated and personal.

Factions vary in their views of the greater Kindred population. Some see themselves as repositories of knowledge, expertise and tradition, working to the greater benefit. Others, such as the anarchs, have a more subversive agenda, and one might rightly question their commitment to their sect. Members of factions often find it necessary to work together in secret because their views are at best unpopular. This may be the result of either a simple difference of priorities or the stink of heterodoxy.

While factions provide a Cainite with an array of useful allies and resources, they also win the vampire a host new of enemies. Opponents may work against the interests of a faction for countless reasons: conflicting visions, spite, the belief that the faction poses a genuine danger. The Black Hand and Sabbat Inquisition, the twin pillars of subsects within the Sabbat, frequently come into rancorous dissent over jurisdiction and how best to deal with Sabbat crises. Even among the Camarilla, where factions tend to be more localized than universally represented among the sect's domains, all it takes is a minor question of territory to spark open hostility.

Due to their ambitious and secretive agendas, factions often draw zealous and motivated vampires strongly dedicated to a particular cause. Sect factions open to members of different clans can become a bizarre miscellany of vampires. Gangrel and Tremere, or Brujah and

Venture can find themselves as members of the same society pursuing the faction's goals in a way that turns stereotypes of Cainite society on its ear. Membership in a faction often has an important influence over a vampire's relationship with other members of her clan and sect, and can lead to unconventional arrangements of foes and allies.

## THE BENEFITS OF CONFORMITY

Whether Camarilla or Sabbat, stepping over the line is a sure way to lose your neck. Breaking with custom is a danger not only for the offending vampire, but also puts the sect at large at risk. Regardless of any biases inherent in Camarilla and Sabbat practice, they at least in part include a concern for the security of the sect in question. Both the Camarilla and the Sabbat have an interest in keeping mortals from intruding on Kindred business, and their traditions reserve harsh punishments to those who threaten the sect or throw things into disarray. Given the animosity between the sects, and the antipathy between many of their ideas, both the Sabbat and the Camarilla treat trafficking with the enemy with the same sober ruthlessness. Gruesome public displays make an example to other would-be offenders, and it is not uncommon for proven or suspected traitors and apostates to find themselves quickly subject to a blood hunt or worse.

Elders, especially, have a particular interest in seeing the status quo maintained and enforced. As the vampires who have accumulated respectable power and authority, no doubt by mastering the game of Cainite politics, they have the most to lose from upsetting the system. Princes and archbishops are further empowered by vampiric customs to make discretionary decisions, which they may delegate to their subordinates, to deal with suspected traitors and collaborators. This authority is provided by statute or tradition and relies entirely on a functioning and respected social structure. Additionally, some institutionally minded clans, such as the Lasombra, Tremere, Tzimisce and Ventrue, have made an art of leveraging Kindred customs to their own advantage.

Conformity to the prevailing orthodoxy is closely tied to status and is a prerequisite for the ambitious, unless one is an anarchist, in which case respect for anarchist subversion plays much the same role. Cainite authority is based on a constantly shifting balance of intimidation and respect. Unless they are prepared to defend their authority and extort respect of it solely by their own personal strength or charisma, leaders will take pains to follow the official and unofficial rules determining legitimacy. A bishop who flagrantly ignores a clear directive of the Code of Milan in favor

of his own biased opinion while pursuing an enemy will likely have his decision challenged, perhaps even in the form of Monomacy. Similarly, a rogue prince who has lost the support of an empowered primogen will be unable to enact his decisions effectively. Princes and archbishops might obtain their positions through daring, but not by being iconoclasts, and so the great Cainite political struggles play themselves out. Usurpers and revolutionaries who claim authority without sufficient support or legitimacy will need to extract respect by force, and that has a tendency to create an unmanageable number of enemies.

As pressing and visceral as conflicts and problems in Cainite society are, vampires of dubious intention and motivation make their way to positions of authority and influence. Kindred society is rife with disagreements and conflict, and it is often difficult for vampires to reach a consensus on any given course of action without resorting to threats or elaborate deals. Behind this turmoil of disagreement one often finds a tangle of interests and agendas working against each other. Vampires in authority are rarely committed to their responsibilities out of a sense of altruism or public service and are more often preoccupied with the benefits of power. Elders relish the added status, resources and power enabling them to secure their own positions, maintain their authority and see to the stability and growth of their allies. These vampires bring key assets and intelligence to the Jyhad and, because of their privileged positions and experience, can expect to have to face complex challenges that will test their loyalty to sect, clan and coterie. The Kindred political arena is particularly vicious, and one effective way of doing away with a troublesome opponent, if outright destruction is not an option, is to discredit him or have him branded a traitor or apostate and allow justice to take its course.

## CLAN TIES

The clan is often a vampire's first encounter with undead society. With time and understanding a vampire may have some degree of choice over her sect and faction. Despite their important influences on a vampire's allegiances and interests, times come when they can be changed. If a vampire is prepared to accept the consequences, she may renounce her sect and faction. No such out exists for bloodlines.

Neonates almost universally receive their initial instruction from their sires. In those early nights when a neonate is struggling to control the Beast and come to grips with her new condition, her sire will be the closest thing she has to a voice of reason. Sires leave strong impressions on their childer. While each mortal



goes through her own particular torture as she dies, she finishes the change with the common strengths and weaknesses that accompany the blood from her particular clan. Along with these physical ties to their bloodlines, vampires will be introduced to their world through the biases of their elders and, by extension, others of their clans.

All clans leave their impressions on a vampire's mind and body. Even in cases where those marks are subtle, as in the cases of Toreador and Ventrue, they are nonetheless significant aspects of a vampire's identity and can encourage a certain kinship among clanmates. Many clans, such as the Tremere and the Giovanni, are selective about the mortals they choose to Embrace, and clanmates often have common points of reference from their mortal lives that carry on into their existence as Cainites. Of course, simply because they have a flair for conversational intercourse has not made the Toreador a united clan. Professional similarities among vampires are just as likely to invite competition and jealousy as cooperation. In some cases, in addition to being family, clanmates can also relate to each other as colleagues.

Clans have their own regular meetings, rituals and traditions, about which they are largely tightlipped to outsiders. Clans such as the Gangrel, Nosferatu and Ventrue have distinctive rules of etiquette governing in-clan relations. Not all clans enjoy the same degree of solidarity, but for the most part clan affiliation does draw meaningful lines between vampires. Some clans have been bitter adversaries for centuries, and insofar as any vampire is affected by her clan's history, these perennial conflicts can be expected to come into play at one time or another. Clans have prejudices against other clans whether because of aesthetics, ideology or history; they may also look favorably on other clans for the same reasons.

Clans have agendas and interests that often coincide with their common backgrounds as mortals, or the particular strengths and weaknesses imparted to them by the blood of their founders. Among the independent clans, the roles played by clan and sect become indistinguishable. Gangrel, Setites, Assamites and Giovanni tend not to define themselves by affiliation in the Camarilla or the Sabbat (though no reasons exist why one could not), unlike the Tremere or Tzimisce, where sect membership and clan membership are handed out virtually simultaneously. These clans have histories largely separate from the Camarilla and the Sabbat, and their own unique Paths and Disciplines, further indicating their insularity. Because of their political isolation and particular vision, the independent clans are among the most unified of all Cainites.

On the other hand, clans are no strangers to internecine conflict, and intraclan disputes are just as vicious and underhanded as any other, if the brutality that siblings submit each other to provides any indication. Despite their ties of blood, nothing can ensure that clanmates will all agree with one another, or even like one another, and conflicts arise between clanmates in the same way that they arise between vampires of differing clans. Greed and ambition are common among the Kindred, and clanmates are no exception.

## CLAN FIRST

As a rule, the majority of Kindred and their *antitribu* brethren find each other particularly distasteful. They share the same progenitor's Blood, but sect ideology often means that these vampires see their counterparts as vile demonizations of each other. The common inheritance that they have as a result of being descended from the same clan founder is obvious, but the profound differences between the sects twist those similarities into vulgar mockeries of each other.

Still, some clans have such bonds that they manage to maintain ties to their counterparts. Even in these rare instances, sect ideology continues to play a role in determining the extent to which these vampires are prepared to work together. The result is a guarded and tense collaboration on those few occasions when circumstances demand it. This can lead to complicated tests of loyalty when these Cainites are forced to balance their ties to clan with their ties to sect. The Nosferatu and the Gangrel are two particularly sympathetic (to members of their own line, of course) clans and enjoy a not-antagonistic, though cool, relationship with their *antitribu* fellows.

The Nosferatu are among some of the most clan-conscious of vampires. The Embrace turns them into putrid horrors and they tend to lurk together in filthy hard-to-reach places. The Nosferatu realize that the more extensive their networks, the more valuable the information they will be able to uncover will be, and so are prepared to cross sect lines in pursuit of particularly juicy secrets. They have even been known to provide intelligence and assistance to their *antitribu* counterparts when necessary. On occasion Nosferatu find themselves in the position of squaring off against their *antitribu*, particularly when other clans are present, but they often enjoy less strained relations in private. Given the Machiavellian nature of Kindred politics, whether Camarilla or Sabbat, the Nosferatu find themselves with a tantalizing array of potential clients for any given piece of information, and a relatively benign rumor circulating in one sect could prove vital for the other.

In closed circles some Nosferatu whisper of a mysterious danger stalking only their clan. Not all Nosferatu agree, of course, and some attribute this to superstition. Still, some swear that entire clutches of Nosferatu have been lost under unexplainable circumstances, and that this unknown plague is the culprit. Those who believe the stories agree that Nosferatu from either sect are in equal danger, and they regularly put sect differences aside to share rumors and intelligence. Some even suggest that it further points to the imminence of Gehenna and that as the Final Nights come to a head this menace will grow, putting the entire clan in danger. Believers are found among both Camarilla and Sabbat Nosferatu, and these vampires are tireless in their search to uncover more information.

In a similar fashion to the overall cohesiveness of the Nosferatu, the Gangrel often blur the lines of sect allegiance in their dealings with one another. The rough existence of these vampire nomads and the shared hardships of their nights form a bond that places them on easier terms with other members of the clan. When meeting fellow Gangrel, the rituals and stories that pass between them seldom depend on what banner, if any, they fight under. Be they among the independent Gangrel, those remaining within the Ivory Tower or battling for the Sword of Caine, the issue of sect more often than not becomes secondary to that of clan. It's not uncommon for their bond of clan to allow for the exchange of information or tips on the surrounding area. Areas to avoid and what power holds sway in the nearby cities pass easily among conferring Gangrel. Survival is their primary goal in all things. The difference between sects often matters little to those lone Gangrel when faced with so many difficulties set against them equally.

Other clans have more complicated relationships with their *antitribu* counterparts, not because of clan solidarity but rather because their animosity runs so deeply that it threatens to place the interests of their sect second to their enmity. While this is not as much of a problem for Camarilla-aligned vampires, Sabbat elders take a dim view of this policy. The Lasombra, one of the principal clans of the Sabbat, enjoy the status that they do in large part because they claim to have devoured their clan's founder as well as a majority of their elders and so have set the example for all other Sabbat clans to follow. Yet those elder Lasombra who managed to escape being drawn into the Sabbat remain loyal to what they feel is the true nature of the Lasombra clan. These secretive Lasombra *antitribu* make a point of undermining their counterparts' agendas. Many of these rare Lasombra *antitribu* ally themselves with the

Camarilla and exist as targets for any Sabbat who may hear of their presence. Although no known relations exist between these *antitribu* and the majority of the Sabbat clanmates, those among the *antitribu* still retain their status among the factions of the clan as a whole.

A similar situation exists in the cases of Clan Tzimisce and the schism between the Followers of Set and the Serpents of Light. These interclan conflicts are not so much the result of differences between Camarilla and Sabbat ideology as they are irreconcilable differences within the clans themselves. Because they do not directly involve the Camarilla, the Sabbat is not likely to divert crucial resources to these internal clan matters. Sabbat bishops and archbishops could even conclude that the pursuit of these personal conflicts constitutes a dangerous distraction from the overall agenda of the sect, forcing the Cainites involved to see to the matters on their own. If they cannot count on their sectmates for assistance they might be forced to make strategic alliances with vampires from outside the Sabbat.

## OLD HABITS DIE HARD

A few elders survive in the modern nights who still remember the time before the Camarilla and Sabbat emerged from the Anarch Revolt. These elders often seek to reignite their struggles or continue to wage them covertly from their current lofty positions as princes, *prisci*, justicars and cardinals. Centuries-old allies and adversaries could find themselves in awkward positions as sect affiliation no longer reflects the boundaries that existed when their wars began. Ancient broods still bound together by honor or anachronism must cross sect lines to continue their Jyhad, and invariably younger vampires find themselves caught up in the struggle. Organizing a campaign with vampires in both sects would be a daunting logistical challenge, and elders would need subtle and reliable vampires for assistance and spin-doctoring in the event that their questionable relations came to light. One Cainite might decide to exploit a weakness in her opponent by leaking critical information to their opponents in the opposing sect.

## ANCIENT SECRETS

While not all vampires are terribly interested in their history, some are, and rabidly so. Interest in ancient Cainite prophecies is likely to increase as more and more vampires come to believe that recent events do in fact herald Gehenna. Given the scarcity of ancient Cainite texts and artifacts, scholars are likely to cross paths as they scrounge for vital clues around those few sites associated with Caine, the Methuselahs or the Second City.

Unless carefully planned and executed, such an undertaking would be conspicuous and draw the attention of local Cainite and mortal authorities. Brujah and Tremere might find themselves crossing paths and striking deals with Assamites or Setites for passage or security. Coming to a suitable arrangement with the other parties involved could involve some delicate negotiating, and it is possible that the nature of the revelations that occur when the ancient secrets are finally uncovered could result in a drastic reconsideration of sect or clan loyalties.

## I AM THE SECT

Vampires crave power. Cainites who have enjoyed positions of authority for lengthy periods may come to identify their own interests and welfare with those of their clan or sect. Rather than tending to the goals and security of their charges, they look to cultivate their own power and resources and see any challenges to their own personal ambitions as being tantamount to treason. In cases where their concerns take them into conflict with their peers, these selfish and ambitious elders may find it easier to do away with their rivals by using vampires from outside their group rather than using whatever formal process of impeachment may be available to them.

Similarly, a coterie might decide to take it upon itself to remove such an elder for the common good. These elders would not have achieved and maintained their positions for so long if they were not powerful, well connected and resourceful, perhaps even with outstanding boons that they can call in. Little is more appealing to a Sabbat pack than the opportunity to diablerize a Camarilla elder, and a clever enough coterie might find a way to get a Sabbat pack to do most of the dirty work for them.

## INFERNALISTS

Another piece of common ground between the Camarilla and the Sabbat is their shared abhorrence of infernalists. Demons and their servants pose an obvious threat to Cainites of both sects. For one reason or another, the Sabbat has a more elaborate infrastructure specifically dedicated to rooting out infernalism than the Camarilla does and has considerably more expertise at its disposal. A dedicated member of the Sabbat Inquisition facing a sufficiently dangerous or wily demon might find the trail leading him into Camarilla territory. Either infernalist or Inquisitor might decide that the threat is sufficient to warrant alerting or soliciting assistance from a prince, primogen or enterprising coterie to help uncover information about his target. Similarly, Sabbat

infernalists could find themselves approached by Camarilla Tremere or Nosferatu seeking their expertise.

## THE ANARCHS

As a Camarilla faction, the anarchs are the most likely to encounter Sabbat offering assistance or seeking converts. To many in the Sabbat, anarch calls for freedom from the tyranny of the elders, the tendency to appreciate strength and competency, and their down-and-dirty tactics strike a familiar chord, and anarch leaders might have former allies now numbered among the Sabbat.

Adventurous members of the Sabbat could find themselves working alongside Camarilla anarchs to achieve their common goals of bringing down the Camarilla establishment. Without a target on the horizon, however, such an arrangement is likely to be short-lived and could quickly and violently disintegrate. The differences in outlook between the sects would likely cause tension, particularly among anarchs who have a desire to actually rebuild as opposed to simply tear down. The Sabbat would be stupefied by the anarchs' desires to cling to the "good parts" of Camarilla doctrine, and any talk of vampires treating mortals as anything other than the laughable juice bags that they are would draw ridicule, if not contempt. It would be difficult to keep a coalition of Sabbat and anarchs together after their target has been eliminated. The Sabbat might have few qualms doing away with their former Camarilla allies, if they were unwilling to undergo the Creation Rites and wholeheartedly join in their struggle against the elders.

## THE LOSS OF HOUSE GORATRIX

The animosity between House Goratrix and House Tremere was as brutal as between any Camarilla and Sabbat clans. This division goes back to early nights of Clan Tremere and a dispute between the former Hermetic mage and one of his most prominent lieutenants and a powerful wizard in his own right. Recently, however, House Goratrix came to a spectacular end, and in one step all known Sabbat Warlocks were apparently destroyed. The cause and reason for the disaster remain a mystery, and both the Sabbat and many Camarilla Kindred (especially the Tremere) are curious to find out what happened and how it can best be exploited.

With House Goratrix destroyed, the Sabbat faces a great loss of scholarship and knowledge. House Goratrix also leaves behind centuries' worth of thaumaturgical research, libraries and laboratories of considerable value to Tremere and mystically oriented Sabbat. Tremere,



eager revenants, *koldun* sorcerers or Black Hand scholars might wish to reclaim some of that sudden loss by exploring House Goratrix's library documents. Their discovery might in turn lead them to some interesting questions involving the bizarre relationship between the Tremere, the Tzimisce, the Salubri and the Assamites, whetting their appetites and inviting them to probe more and more deeply.

## LOOKING OUT FOR NUMBER ONE

To hell with everybody. Genuine, long-lasting relationships are rare, if not impossible, among the Kindred, and deception and manipulation are the closest things Cainites have to a common currency. Dangers lurk around every corner in the World of Darkness, and the Jyhad means that tonight's allies may be tomorrow's enemies. With the great seething society that they are expected to make their way through, it is easy to see how vampires become cynical and selfish. You can't count on anyone as much as you can count on yourself, and some vampires put their own self-interest above any and all ideological affiliations. These vampires are content to make deals with anyone to get ahead and have no qualms bringing an end to their enemies by any means possible, including treason. Clan and sect continue to have some influence on these vampires, but at the end of the night, they have to make sure that they have moved themselves ahead and that they occupy a better position than they did before.

## BLOOD BONDS, TEMPTATION AND COERCION

Vampires can also be fooled or manipulated into working against their clan, sect and even coterie or pack. Disciplines and thaumaturgical rituals can supernaturally rewrite a Kindred's loyalties and the ways in which she perceives her relationships with those around her. Other means, just as intrusive on a Cainite's free will, can have much the same result, such as the blood bond and careful manipulation.

Blood bonds create powerful and subtle ties between vampires and do not at all respect clan or sect allegiances. Those Kindred subject to the blood bond find their chosen loyalties and allegiances taking secondary place, and in cases where a regnant is a member of a different sect, it places a vampire in a difficult position. While a vampire under the influence of a blood bond might not go so far as to offer up her packmates to a Camarilla sheriff, that bond might place the vampire in a vulnerable position that could bring her into conflict with her loyalties and better judgment.

Certain clans, such as the Followers of Set, have similarly powerful tools at their disposal. They are masters of deceit, temptation and corruption, promising intoxicating wisdom and delights, and make a sport of pulling a vampire from his path and isolating him from any potential allies.

## GEHENNA

What if the modern nights' omens truly foretell the arrival of Gehenna? Few things would have as unsettling an impact on Cainites as the awakening of the Antediluvians and the reclaiming of their wayward childer. Vampires might dig in, consolidating their alliances and organizing their defenses. The Sabbat, finding themselves vindicated, would redouble their assaults against the Camarilla and other foot soldiers of the Antediluvians. The Camarilla, beset by a torch-wielding mob of Sabbat, must come together in face of the combined threat of the Sword of Caine's Crusades and the Ancients it can no longer ignore.

For all its uncertainties Gehenna will be a time of chaos and despair, and only then will the Kindred discover who is, and who is not, in the service of the Antediluvians. Rather than affirming the divisions between the sects, it is equally likely that Gehenna will throw both the Sabbat and the Camarilla into disarray as the ancient agendas come to the fore, without any concern for sect. The Sabbat might find that it is not as insulated from the influence of these vampires as it had thought, forcing its Cainites to make desperate alliances with any vampire they can. The Camarilla, not having as rigorous or systematic an interest in Gehenna as the Sabbat, could find its members fleeing to their former foes for any scrap of information that could save them.

## STEREOTYPES

While the above scenarios are some of the more obvious ways in which Sabbat and Camarilla vampires could justify assisting or working with their enemies, the Byzantine nature of Kindred conflicts and the multilayered demands of sect, faction and clan can pull a vampire in any number of unpredictable directions. Any vampire, given sufficient guile and motivation, could find herself among unorthodox allies. Vampires from clans other than the Gangrel and Nosferatu could find themselves working with their *antitribu* counterparts given the right circumstances. A sufficiently ambitious Ventrue with a grandiose vision of her clan's preeminence could get it into her head that reuniting her clan and placing all vampires in fealty to it is a worthwhile project; and who knows what voices and visions are compelling a Malkavian to seek an audience with a



*Tzimisce voivode*. The customs and organizations of Cainite society do not take away a vampire's free will or individualism. Sect and clan customs do not dictate a vampire's behavior, but they need to be taken into consideration if a vampire decides to break ranks, and such vampires should realize that they are pursuing a very dangerous course indeed.

Among a vampire's clan, faction and sect, numerous complex layers of interest, motivation and prejudice are woven together that influence a vampire's agenda. They establish customs, common ground and rules of behavior and provide neonates with a number of masters who may demand their attention and resources. They also include agents who are actively on the lookout for traitors, spies and collaborators. With these seemingly unavoidable obligations and influences, one might wonder how any vampire could even ponder going against the grain.

Ultimately, vampires are individuals, not mindless partisans, and are greater than the sum of their influences. They engage other individuals with similarly complex agendas, not abstractions of sect or clan orthodoxy. Clan and sect traditions provide vampires with a distinct, though vague, orientation, and plenty of opportunities exist for a wide range of opinion

between any two members of a common clan or sect. Just as important as a vampire's sect and clan are a vampire's attitudes and understanding of her sect and clan. A well schooled Brujah could be an expert on the Anarch Revolt, know every last relevant detail about the fall of Carthage, have a well documented list of the humiliations her clan has suffered at the hands of the Ventrue, and in a fit of self-loathing come to believe that her clan's destiny is best served by working with the Blue Bloods. Does a Ventrue find the Camarilla to be a stale and ponderous organization, outdated and in dire need of reform and efficiency? Has a Lasombra neonate become disenchanted by the grip Sabbat elders have over the sect and feel tormented by the inherent hypocrisy? Does an ambitious Tremere feel indignant over constantly being passed over for promotion and choose to seek a way to pay her superiors back for their lack of foresight?

In addition to deciding on clan and sect details, it is also useful to reflect upon the character's opinions of her associations. How does she feel about her clan? What vision does she hold for it? What role does she see herself playing in it? Does she harbor any unusual prejudices about any other clan as a result of a historical grudge, or something she picked up from her sire? How

does the character feel about the Camarilla? Is she an anarch sympathizer? Does she dream of a new Carthage? Are the Sabbat really the raging cannibals the elders make them out to be, or are they misguided Kindred under the influence of something that poses a distinct threat to the Damned as a whole? It is difficult to tell how any particular vampire will interpret or identify with the history and ideology of her societies, or how she will decide to plot her course in the world.

The clan descriptions involve interclan and intersect prejudices and stereotypes. It's important to remember that like all stereotypes, their accuracy is uncertain; they tend to provide more information about the person holding the stereotype than they do about the object of the stereotype. Whether they are a reflection of a group or the prejudices of an observer, stereotypes provide color and a handy means of organizing the diversity of the World of Darkness. The challenge facing players and Storytellers alike is how to strike a balance between giving the stereotype its due, and at the same time allowing for a meaningful amount of individuality in the characters and the freedom to make up their own minds.

Clan Brujah and Clan Ventrue are traditional adversaries, but how does any particular character understand their hostilities? Players should be encouraged to examine how a particular stereotype affects her character. A player might come up with an interesting reason why her character's opinions are inconsistent with the stereotype. Perhaps an innovative Toreador finds an odd beauty about the Nosferatu and has to come to strike a balance between his own appreciation and the opinions of his clanmates. At the same time, Storytellers should feel free to have the character chastised by members of her clan whose opinions are consistent with the stereotype, and members of the opposing clan might rightly watch this rogue vampire's unusual tolerance with suspicion.

Vampire: The Masquerade provides players with the opportunity to engage in introspective, personal conflicts as well as the more conventional blood-and-guts sort. Crises of Paths and Humanity, the Beast, and the peculiar context of a dead person animated by hunger trying to make her way in a big, dangerous world out to get her provide ample opportunities for players to delve into the complexities of their characters' psyches. Not all troupes will be interested in going down this route, and no reasons exist why they must. The more players and Storytellers can get into the minute workings of any particular stereotype and why it's relevant (or not) to any particular character, though, the more complicated, realistic and interesting the conflicts will be.

Widely held clan and sect biases provide color to a setting and make for an interesting source of conflict. They emphasize that clanmates have certain things in common, whether it's a stereotyped opinion of another clan or whatever it was that gave life to the stereotype. Examining the relevance of these stereotypes and commitments makes for a more in-depth character and keeps players guessing. Stereotypes can also deepen mysteries and the rifts between the clans. Sure, Nosferatu are hideous creatures smelling like a waste treatment plant in August, but why do the Toreador so consistently and vehemently disparage them? Is it simply because they're ugly, or is something else behind it?

Ultimately, it's up to the players and Storyteller to decide the motivations within their characters that would drive them to wrestle internally with personal belief and treachery. Whether for the good of the sect, well-being of the clan or just to increase their own personal agendas, the opportunity to edge toward the line of loyal Kindred and traitor (to whatever notion) is a situation many may have to face. Despite the pressures placed on a character by sect, faction and clan, it is important to remember that every character is an individual, and no more the passive recipient of conventional wisdom than anyone else.





# SECTION TWO: THE TROUPE

*The important thing to recognize is that it takes a team, and the team ought to get credit for the wins and the losses.*

— Philip Caldwell

Groups of players and characters comprise the focus of **Section Two**. This section covers both the troupe and the pack or coterie. Building on the information in Section One, it makes provisions for having different players' characters work together, and new suggestions for player interaction with the game itself.

## WHAT IS TROUPE-STYLE PLAY?

**Vampire** refers to a group of players as a troupe, but what about troupe-style play? That's a phrase frequently bandied about in sourcebooks, but it often isn't described in detail for players and Storytellers. Many players see troupe-style play as having rotating Storytellers, or playing multiple characters. Both of these are elements of troupe-style play, but they aren't the whole story.

Troupe-style play is a style that focuses strongly on story and cooperation within the group, more than

it does on individual characters or players. To gain a better idea of what troupe-style play means, pull back and look at what the troupe itself is. The simplest definition is that a troupe is a group of players that gathers to play **Vampire**.

Now look at what that definition *doesn't* say. It doesn't say "a group of players and a separate Storyteller." It doesn't say "a group of players who get together to play specific characters." It doesn't say "a group that convenes to play a specific set of **Vampire** stories." Those are all spins that can be put on the notion and can produce really satisfying chronicles. At core, though, the troupe is a group of people who want to play **Vampire**. Troupe-style play takes that idea and puts the emphasis on the group, not the individuals in the group. It focuses on what the group as a whole does with a chronicle and how the group develops and moves the stories in the chronicle.

Troupe-directed chronicles are those in which the creation and direction of the chronicle are decided by the whole troupe, not by a single Storyteller. They take



many forms but mostly revolve around a cooperative, collective style of play, one in which the boundary between Storyteller and player is thin or nonexistent, and in which different players take on different roles (and perhaps different characters) over the course of the chronicle. Different players may take the reins of the Storyteller role for different stories or even different chapters; players might run multiple characters; characters might be designed or even played as a group rather than as individuals.

This isn't a style of play that suits everyone, because no style of play does. It has its drawbacks as well as its strengths, its bad points and good. It's unlikely to suit troupes that put a strong emphasis on individual characters or that put most of the chronicle design and management tasks onto the Storyteller. For troupes that want to experiment, want to tell sweeping and broad stories, or just want to give everyone a turn at being in charge, troupe-style play offers unique opportunities.

No single troupe-style approach exists; it's a label that can be applied to many different, compatible approaches to cooperative storytelling. Some of the ideas and techniques discussed below apply primarily to Storytellers, others to players. In some chronicles, little or no division may exist between player and Storyteller. Other ideas focus less on the players and more on the characters, and how characters can be played and approached in a more cooperative style. Some ideas transcend all concerns of players and characters and focus instead on the direction and style of the chronicle itself.

## CHRONICLE

Before you can start playing in a troupe-directed chronicle, you have to *create* a troupe-directed chronicle. It's possible to convert an existing chronicle into a troupe-directed style, but it's not easy, as you end up changing so much of the existing chronicle that you may as well have started from scratch. Troupe-directed chronicles tend to have a very different design and structure from other chronicles, coming from a different place and going somewhere different to boot. Let's assume you're starting from the beginning and go from there.

### GROUP DYNAMICS

The first step is to assemble a troupe of players and discuss the ways in which this chronicle will be different from others. The most important difference is the primacy of the group over any one player or Storyteller. This chronicle doesn't belong to one person, it belongs to all of you; all of the players are equally important, but none is as important as the chronicle itself. The point

of the game is to tell the chronicle's story, comprised by smaller character-based stories.

While all the players are equal in the troupe, it's still useful to have one or two people in managerial or facilitating roles, to make sure things get done with minimum problems. This is usually the Storyteller's job, but with no single Storyteller in the troupe, you need to pick a couple of people to take care of the logistics. This can mean deciding where the game will be played and who brings what snacks, as well as game-related tasks like keeping character sheets and maintaining records and files. These "chronicle administrators" aren't more important than the other troupe members, of course. The decisions are still made by the whole troupe. The administrators just put those decisions into effect.

### THE CHRONICLE'S FOCUS

With the troupe assembled, you need to decide what kind of stories, overall themes, and kinds of characters will be featured in the game. Again, this is usually the province of the Storyteller, who comes up with the core idea for a chronicle and invites players to join. With no Storyteller, it's up to the troupe to decide what kind of chronicle they want to play.

Most chronicles have a "high concept," a simple description of what the chronicle will be about. In many cases, this is "the story of a coterie of vampires," but that's usually too vague for a troupe-directed chronicle that showcases bigger, more expansive stories. Such chronicles are usually better served by focusing on a setting, an event (or events) or a style of story.

Setting-focused chronicles look at stories set in a particular place, be that a neighborhood, a city or a country. Your chronicle's high concept might be "the story of the Kindred of Chicago" or "vampires and supernatural forces in the town of Twin Peaks." Event-focused chronicles present stories that revolve around specific major events or chains of events; example high concepts are "the story of the overthrow of the Prince of Chicago," "the story of the war between the Sabbat and the Camarilla" and "the story of Gehenna and the rise of the Antediluvians." Style-based chronicles are a bit different; they focus on presenting stories with a specific tone or flavor, regardless of where the stories are set or what characters are involved. The high concept might be "stories of personal horror," "stories focusing on Kindred politics and intrigue" or "action-based stories."

In practice, these aren't hard-and-fast divisions. Most chronicles combine two or all three focuses to come up with a final direction — something like "Chicago-based vampires are involved in intrigue and action stories as the Sabbat launches a Crusade in the city."



All of the players should have some input into deciding on this direction. It's quite possible that you might want different concepts and directions than the focus agreed on by the other players. Take everyone's opinions into account and determine a chronicle focus that has some appeal to everyone; other kinds of stories can still be run, but those stories won't contribute as much to the overall arc of the chronicle.

This is also a time to talk about the major themes, moods and flavor of the chronicle. Every individual story within the chronicle will have its own theme and mood, of course, but you may want to have an overall theme or mood for the entire collective. Again, it's very important to reach a consensus with the other players on this, because it will have a major effect on the stories that they run. You'll have players coming up with very different story ideas in a hopelessness-based chronicle, for example, than in one with the theme of redemption.

#### THE CHRONICLE'S SETTING

When you have the chronicle's direction in mind, the next step is to develop the setting in which the stories are set. Setting is more than just deciding what city or area the chronicle takes place in. It's all of the places, locations and props that you can find in that area.

Once you decide on a city, country or area (which might be included in the chronicle's high concept), consider what kinds of locations would be interesting, useful or appropriate for that area. These are places that fulfill story functions. They can be used as locations in a story and they can provide story hooks and angles. Get everyone talking about those ideas and generate a long list of locations; you can cut them down to size after the brainstorming.

Just to get things rolling: Where are the havens of the prince and primogen? Feeding grounds and the Rack? Neutral territory where negotiations can take place, or contested places that are the focus of arguments and gunfights? Formal Elysiums? What's the local political scene like, or the cultural and entertainment scene? How heavily armed are the police? Where are the rich neighborhoods, and where are the poor ones? Does a river run through the city? Or a highway? Do the Kindred have a bar where they like to hang out? An underground market in blood or firearms? Museums containing ancient holy relics?

This kind of thing is what the Storyteller normally comes up with to flesh out her chronicle. This time, though, it's the job of the troupe. Once you have a list of suggestions and ideas, discuss them with the rest of

the troupe, keeping the ones that seem to have the most story potential and appeal for players. If a particular player finds a location very appealing or interesting, maybe that location should be included in that player's Storyteller territory (more on that later). Storyteller characters are also part of the chronicle's setting, and you can find more ideas about them in the Storytellers' section below.

### COMING BACK

The job of chronicle creation and management doesn't end after one meeting. It's an ongoing process that you'll all need to return to for as long as the game lasts. It's a good idea to assemble the troupe on a regular basis to discuss where the chronicle is going, what ramifications might be caused by recent stories and whether any changes need to be made to keep the chronicle fresh and interesting. A good benchmark is to have a quick discussion after the conclusion of every story, nailing down any changes or ideas before the next story starts. You might also want to have a more lengthy, detailed meeting after a particularly important or meaningful story, one that could have major effects in the chronicle, to discuss major changes in direction, style or setting that might be required.

## STORYTELLERS

That plural in the header is deliberate. One of the key elements of the troupe-style attitude is that the Storyteller isn't a person who sits apart from the rest of the troupe. The Storyteller is a player, and every player can be Storyteller if she chooses. Much of the Storyteller's role in a troupe-directed chronicle is shared with the other players, who take part in creating stories, determining the chronicle's focus and portraying Storyteller characters.

Perhaps the most commonly seen take on troupe-style play is the idea of having rotating Storytellers. In most chronicles, the Storyteller is separate from the rest of the troupe, designing the chronicle's major elements, coming up with storylines and portraying Storyteller characters. He's a player, yes, but with a clearly separate role, and the other players don't infringe on that role.

Many troupe-directed chronicles, however, allow for multiple Storytellers, or for players to take over Storytelling duties when they wish. In this sort of troupe, each story or chapter might be handled by a different Storyteller who puts her own stamp on the chronicle's direction. When she's finished, she goes back to playing as normal and another player takes the Storyteller's chair.

It sounds simple when described that briefly. In practice, though, potential pitfalls exist in this process. Who decides on the chronicle's focus? How can you run

an intrigue-based story when every player knows the truth about every Storyteller character? What if you kill off a character vital to another player's story plans? How do you make a cohesive story when the focus of the chronicle changes every chapter? These things can easily derail a chronicle — but they can also, with a bit of planning and discussion, be easily resolved. They can even be of benefit to the chronicle, because they give Storytellers ideas and plot concepts that they may not have noticed before. The following tips and ideas may help players design a Storytelling dynamic for the troupe.

### COVERING THE BASICS

So you and the other players have decided to rotate Storyteller duties. Now you need to sit down as a group and decide the absolute practical basics of what that's going to mean. Is every player going to take the Storyteller role on a regular basis, or do some of the players want to skip this and just focus on their characters? Will you be rotating Storyteller duties for each new story, or for different chapters within the same story? Can one person stay in the role until she feels she's had enough, or will you have a strict rotation? These are all basic considerations, but they need to be hammered out before you go any further. This puts everyone involved on the same page and ensures that everyone has the same idea on how often he takes over as Storyteller.

A good starting point is to say that each player runs a full story consisting of one or more chapters before handing the reins over to the next player who wishes to serve as Storyteller. If no one wants to take over, the outgoing player can run another story, or the chronicle can be paused until another player feels the urge. If a player really wants to run two stories back to back, the other players must agree. This is a pretty straightforward arrangement with few problems and should be a good beginning for most troupes.

### STAKING YOUR TERRITORY

Simply having each new Storyteller run any old story she wants can pose problems, since elements of the chronicle (characters, locations, themes) are bound to appear in various stories, and one Storyteller's use of some elements might render them unsuitable for the plans of another player.

The easiest way to distribute Storyteller duties without stepping on other people's toes is to allocate each Storyteller a territory, or an area of the chronicle that he deals with. This division might be thematic (romance stories, intrigue stories), geographic (stories in a particular city or location), social (stories involving a particular set of characters), conceptual (stories about the Mafia, involvement with Lupines) or any other division that makes sense to all the players.

As Storyteller, you have the primary (but not sole) control over your particular territory. If you're the Storyteller in charge of stories involving the Sabbat, and another Storyteller wants to run a Sabbat-based story, she needs to ask your permission first and perhaps discuss her story ideas with you to make sure she doesn't disrupt the storylines you already have planned.

This shouldn't be an utterly exclusive division of territory, especially since almost every story has the potential for touching on various separate areas. Almost any story can include political or mystical story elements, for example, and those stories shouldn't be shut down or paused just because you're not the "intrigue" or "mysticism" Storyteller. A difference exists between a story that *involves*, say, the Mafia, and a story that *revolves around* the Mafia. For the latter story, you should get permission from the Mafia Storyteller before you start.

If one of the players wants to run a story in your conceptual territory, think it over before saying yes or no. Will the story significantly alter your vision of that territory, such as by killing off a major Mafia don or introducing a powerful mystic artifact into the chronicle? If so, talk it over carefully with the other player, so she understands your concerns and can change her story to suit (or come up with a different story idea). Conversely, don't be too quick to shoot down any new idea or story involving your territory. Changes from outside can kick off a whole pile of new ideas and possibilities that you can play with. It's all a question of give and take, and being too protective (or too uncaring) of your conceptual territory defeats the cooperative purpose of troupe-style play.

### STORYTELLER CHARACTERS

Along with story territory, you may also want to claim several Storyteller characters as being your property, while every other player does the same. These characters are your primary Storyteller characters, those who play major roles in the stories you plan to run. As with your story territory, other players must come to you and ask permission if they want to use one or more of these characters in a major role for their stories.

You can decide on these characters on your own, defining them with the usual **Vampire** rules, or you can come up with them through consulting with the other players. It's worth discussing at least a few characters with the other players, especially major antagonists and very powerful characters. The chronicle's not going to make a lot of sense if four completely different Malkavian puppetmasters are hiding in the sewers. Other, less pivotal characters can probably be made as you see fit.

Try to develop a wide range of characters for your own use, ones who will fit well into a variety of stories. It's not much use making a dozen powerful Tremere warlocks as your stable of characters, as that pretty much guarantees that you'll only be able to run Tremere or magic-focused stories and won't have any characters to bring into another kind of story. Put together minor characters and major ones, powerful primogen and weak neonates, mortals and Kindred and ghouls.

You may also find it useful to come up with a set of common characters, in conjunction with the other players, who can be used in any story without permission being necessary. These should be characters who could crop up in a number of different stories, from the garrulous ghoul who deals in stolen blood to the aloof prince and her Brujah enforcers. No one has a stake in these characters; they can be used, changed or killed off whenever an individual Storyteller wishes.

### KEEPING SECRETS

A big part of most **Vampire** chronicles is the revelation or discovery of secrets. Plots twist, alliances shift, and characters die as conspiracies, artifacts and horrific truths are uncovered.

This can be somewhat of a problem in a troupe-directed chronicle, though, due to all (or almost all) of the players knowing the details of the chronicle and characters beforehand. You've seen the prince's character sheet and details, since you used her in your last story, so you know that she's actually a puppet of the empowered primogen, and so does every other player who used her in a story. The revelation of this should be a massive event, but everyone knows it's coming and it just fizzles out. Well, that's the worst-case scenario, anyway. In practice, it's possible to maintain secrets in a troupe-style game.

First, remember that player knowledge isn't character knowledge. So you know the prince dances on the primogen's strings. So what? Your character doesn't know, and that revelation is still going to matter to him. In fact, you can even help the Storyteller pull off the big revelation, putting your character into situations that lead to the unveiling of the secret in the coolest and most appropriate way. This isn't, of course, an attitude that works for everyone, especially players who prefer a more natural style of play or who want to be surprised themselves. But in a troupe-oriented chronicle that places the larger story over any single player or character, it's a very useful approach.

The other option, perhaps more pleasing to most players, is for you to separate the secret details of your Storyteller characters from the public details. Don't

write “secretly indebted to the primogen” in the character’s background and personality notes. Record any secret Traits or rules on a separate character sheet. Now the character has a public version that can be seen by any player who uses her in a story, and a private version that only you know about and are able to use. You might also do the same for any noncharacter-based secrets relevant to your story territory. If your territory relates to the Nosferatu, you might decide that a forgotten mystic library, archived somewhere in the sewers, can be found in one of your stories.

This approach lets you keep secrets, but it has one major problem. If other players don’t know your secrets, they can’t work around them in their stories. You might know about the secret library in the sewers, but the other players don’t, and so they may have that section of the sewers destroyed in one of their stories, wiping out your secret. Similarly, if the others don’t know the true nature of your Storyteller character who’s blood bound to the anarch leader, they may have her persecute the anarchs and autarkis of the city. The only way to avoid this happening is to take the player into your confidence (which defeats the purpose of keeping the secret) or not to allow that character or element to be used in other players’ stories (which defeats the purpose of troupe-style play). You just have to accept this limitation and be prepared to think on your feet so you can change the details of any secret to match the events of the chronicle. Perhaps that sewer library was never located in the (now-destroyed) sewer after all ....

### **SIMULTANEOUS STORYTELLING**

Simple rotation of Storytelling duties is a core element of troupe-style play. Another possibility is having two or more Storytellers running a story or chapter at the same time. This isn’t generally the way you’d want to run every story, but it can be a useful and fun way to run specific scenes or chapters. Usually one player is the lead Storyteller, while the others act as assistants or back-up Storytellers. Here are a couple of examples of simultaneous storytelling; you might think of others that suit the chronicle.

#### **Splitting Up the Group**

Established wisdom has it that you should never split up the player group in a chapter, because the Storyteller can handle only one subgroup at a time. With multiple Storytellers, each subgroup can play at the same time, possibly in different rooms. This could suit a story where the coterie must split up to achieve a goal or where different groups of characters engage in parallel stories.

### **Two Territories at Work**

If the story involves two different story territories, you could ask the player responsible for the second territory to act as an assistant Storyteller. She can handle any elements or characters relating to her territory, leaving you to focus on your area of expertise. This also allows the second Storyteller wiggle room to make sure the characters or story elements of her territory aren’t misappropriated during your story.

#### **Flashbacks**

If the action in a story flashes back to an earlier period, a different Storyteller can run that scene or chapter, possibly the Storyteller who handles that story territory. You could also use a second Storyteller to run parallel stories, dream sequences or other events that take place outside the flow of the main story.

#### **Controlling Storyteller Characters**

In a story with significant Storyteller character involvement, it can be useful to have a second Storyteller who controls some or even all these characters, leaving you to focus on other things. It’s especially good if the story involves a significant interaction between two Storyteller characters. You and your assistant can carry out the conversation or interaction, rather than you just talking to yourself in different voices.

Whenever you work with a second Storyteller, you need to spend time beforehand working out the way you will work together. If you’re not on the same page, things will quickly fall apart as you start working at cross-purposes. Talk to the other player about the focus of the chapter or scene, what events should happen and the end result (if any) you desire.

## **PLAYERS**

In a troupe-directed chronicle, everyone’s a player, no matter if you’re also a Storyteller, assistant Storyteller or the guy in whose living room the troupe is playing. Everyone has something to contribute, and everyone is involved in running or developing the chronicle. In this section, though, we’re talking about the traditional player role, for when you’re not being the Storyteller. Plenty of options exist for a non-Storytelling player in the chronicle, from playing a character to designing the chronicle’s setting to introducing your own plot elements and concepts.

### **PLAYERS’ CHARACTERS**

As a player, you of course have a character. (In some chronicles you might have multiple characters, but let’s discuss that a bit later.) In most chronicles, you create a character who has some kind of appeal to you and who exists within the parameters of the



chronicle. You crunch the numbers, double check with your Storyteller, and you're good to go.

In a troupe-directed chronicle, though, the emphasis is different, and so should be your approach to creating a character. The most important thing is that you shouldn't create your character in a vacuum, but in conjunction with the other players (just as they create theirs with your help). The reason for this is that the primary focus is the chronicle, not the character. You're not aiming just to have a fun time playing your character and telling his story. You also want to create a larger story, one that takes into account all the characters and elements of the chronicle.

What kind of character should you make? For one, he should be active, not reactive. Don't make a character who sits around waiting for the story to show up, but one who can and will go out and make things happen. As a player, you need to be supplying Storytellers with hooks and plot ideas as you play (more on that later), and nothing does that like a character who gets involved in new stories.

Secondly, you need to make a character who complements the other characters being created. That means not creating a character with the same basic concept as that of another player, and not creating a character who directly and universally works against another player's character. If two characters have the same concept, they can become very similar in what they do and what role they play in the story, and what the chronicle needs is a wide variety of roles to kick off stories. Nothing is wrong with creating a character of the same clan or coterie or even with the same sire as another character, but you should try to build your character's role and personality in a very different direction from the other character's.

(Of course, *same* doesn't mean *similar*. It's fine to have two or more characters based around similar concepts, as long as the characters have their own individual styles. If one character is a former Marine and the other a gangster from 1920s Chicago, they might have similar abilities, but the way they act and think will be very different.)

Similarly, if your character is directly opposed to another character's concept or role (for instance, playing an infernalist in the same coterie as a Venetian *antitribu* Inquisitor), then that conflict can disrupt the story and derail the chronicle. Conflict can be good for stories, but it can also be destructive; save those kinds of characters for Storyteller or occasional use.



Finally, you need to think about any hidden aspects of your character, such as dark secrets or old enemies. Many **Vampire** characters have such secrets, and they can be interesting, but like the secrets of Storyteller characters they can be a problem within the troupe. If you state the secret up front, none of the other players will be surprised when the truth is finally revealed; keep it secret, and the others can't work those secrets into the stories they run. It's really a personal call whether or not you want to give your character secrets, and if you want to let the other players in on them. A good compromise might be to tell the others that a secret exists but not what that secret is. That way, when coming up with a story, the player can come to you and get just enough details to add an element of mystery into the plot, while leaving you to supply further details through roleplaying the character.

### STORY CREATION

As a player in a troupe-directed chronicle, you're probably also a Storyteller. When you take the Storyteller mantle, it's your responsibility to come up with story ideas and to run those stories for the troupe. That responsibility spills over into your role as a player as well. When you're playing your character, you also need to be devoting part of your attention to the story and thinking about ways to create stories for both the other Storytellers and for yourself. Your character can create story hooks, you can interject story ideas out of character, and you can accept story offers from other players and their characters.

#### In-Character Hooks

A story hook is something your character creates. It's an event or set-up that can be used as the germ of a story concept or that can take an existing story in a new direction if desired. On a very simple level, if your character leaves an important document in her lover's apartment, that's a hook. Now the document can be stolen, the lover can be kidnapped, the lover might use it for other purposes, and so on. That's pretty basic and boils down to the Storyteller paying attention to the things your character does. More important are the things you decide to do with the character, the larger hooks you deliberately give the Storyteller so that she can use them as a major part of stories.

When you have a proactive character with an agenda and a personal style who generates plot activity, story hooks almost take care of themselves. Almost, but not quite. You want to give big hooks to the Storyteller, ideas that can kick off an entire story rather than just complicate an existing one, and that requires some deliberate thinking on your part. When you're playing,

look at each scene your character finds herself in and think, "What can my character do at this point that could bring about something new?" This doesn't have to be anchored exclusively in the current scene, of course. You can develop a hook over several scenes, or it can even be something entirely new, but each new scene is a chance for your character to develop a hook.

What constitutes this kind of important hook? Generally, it should be something that can affect multiple parts of the chronicle or be involved in multiple stories. Your character selling a gun to another vampire isn't likely to be enough; selling a shipment of assault rifles to an anarch cell almost certainly will be. Similarly, recruiting a journalist as a contact doesn't open up a lot of story potential, but making the editor and publisher of a major newspaper into your blood bound ghouls does. This kind of grand scale is one way to make a hook useful; another is to direct your attention toward significant ends. Making a gambit to wrest power from a minor functionary doesn't have as much story potential as wresting the same amount of power from a vindictive Tremere primogen, because that character's capacity for retribution, and ability to play a part in future stories, is much greater.

One possibility is to use hooks that tie into your Storyteller territory. In doing so, you're letting the Storyteller know that you've thought of possible repercussions and story events that can spin from that hook (since, after all, you're always considering stories for your territory). She knows you can follow up on the hook as need be in your own stories and that you'll cooperate with her if she develops a story that uses your territory to develop that hook (which you certainly should).

It's also worth noting that your Storyteller is capable of increasing the story potential of a hook just by changing his own story to fit. For instance, if your character sold a pistol to an angry young neonate, that doesn't necessarily kick off new stories. Not until the Storyteller has the neonate use it to murder a vice detective who's been uncovering the truth about the Kindred. Now his notes have been sent to journalists, and the prince is blaming your character for giving the neonate the murder weapon, and the police are tracking down the pistol's owner .... The Storyteller can do a lot even with a small hook. If you can see serious story potential in your character's action, your Storyteller probably can too.

#### Out-of-Character Plot Ideas

As well as putting together hooks in-character, you should never hesitate to suggest plot ideas directly to your Storyteller. Don't blurt out, "Hey, I've got a great idea!" in the middle of a tense in-character dialogue,

but bring it up during a break, a lull in the action, via e-mail or between scenes or chapters. In general, you should probably share the idea with all the players, since they're also all Storytellers.

The plot ideas you bring up here can be the same as the sort you'd develop as an in-character hook (especially if you want to develop that hook with the Storyteller's help), but you can also talk about ideas that can't be addressed in-character. Generally, that means discussing things that could happen to your character, rather than things that she does herself. This is the time to talk about attacks that can be made on her, romantic advances from Storyteller characters or a mystical curse that strikes down her sire's bloodline.

You can also bring up plot ideas that don't directly focus on your character, of course. If it occurs to you while playing that having a clan schism erupt would be a great source of stories, tell the Storyteller. Better yet, bring it up with all the players and see what everyone thinks. This is the perfect time to mention concepts that everyone could use when running games and to discuss whether those ideas take the chronicle in a direction everyone will enjoy.

When coming up with plot ideas, whether they directly or indirectly affect your character, the first place to be looking is your Storyteller territory. This is the area you know best in the chronicle, after all, and a place where you can make changes as you see fit. Don't ever be afraid to suggest plot ideas from your territory to the other players, even if it seems like it's putting your wishes ahead of the others'. The troupe needs a constant influx of new story notions and ideas, and it's part of your role as a player to come up with things. Suggesting things that relate to your territory is also good because it comes with preapproval, and you don't need to convince another player to allow you access to elements of her territory. When you're focusing on a plot idea that primarily affects your character, tying it to your territory is equivalent to giving the relevant Storyteller permission to use material from your territory. The chance to play with new plot toys and options goes a long way toward convincing another player to go along with the idea.

### Accepting Story Offers

You're a player, but you're a Storyteller as well in a troupe-directed chronicle, and you need to retain the Storyteller mindset even when you're just playing your own character. Like you, the other players are going to be developing story hooks and suggesting plot ideas, and though you're not the Storyteller at the time you should pay attention.

When another player develops a story hook, think about what you can do with that hook as a Storyteller and what your character can do with that hook as a player. Can your character help develop that hook into a full-blown story? Can you attach a hook of your own to it to make it stronger and more interesting? Can you use it when you're the Storyteller, if the current Storyteller isn't interested in using it? It's almost always worth playing along with a new hook and seeing how it develops; most hooks can be taken in lots of different ways, and your input can make it more useful.

When another player suggests a plot idea, don't sit on the sidelines while she discusses it with the Storyteller. Unless the two of them want to keep it private, join in the discussion and offer ideas. This is especially true when the idea is one that can have chroniclewide effects or make significant changes to the game, but it's also worth doing for smaller, more single-character-focused ideas. The aim is still, after all, to tell good stories about all the characters of the chronicle, not just one player's. Your input can help the others tie in other characters or setting elements to make the idea more meaningful for everyone. This is a good place to offer access to your story territory as well, if you like the idea. Such access allows the Storyteller to make a more complex, multifaceted story using multiple story territories and ideas.

It's easy to sum this up. As a player, it's your job to *listen*. Listen to the Storyteller, pick up the hooks and story possibilities she puts into her story, and take advantage of them. Listen to the other players, pick up the offers and suggestions they make, and incorporate them into your own playing and Storytelling. And listen to your own instincts and ideas about what makes a good story and go with those instincts, because it's as much your responsibility to make the story and the chronicle work as it is everyone else's.

## CHARACTERS

The above section on players talked about some of the ways to approach creating and playing characters in a troupe-directed game. While these ideas tinker with the standard model, they don't move too far from the norm. You still have a single character, and you still play him whenever you're not in the Storyteller role.

If you're looking to try something different, though, troupe-style play offers a few alternative approaches to characters. The following concepts all focus on different ways for players to come up with characters for the game, by putting the emphasis on the entire chronicle rather than on the individual character.

## DIFFERING POWER LEVELS

In most **Vampire** chronicles, player characters are all of roughly equal power level (inasmuch as that phrase means anything). They're all created the same way, with the same number of dots and freebie points, and they all have roughly the same level of competence. Different characters have different abilities, but each has generally the same degree of expertise or influence in his primary area of development.

Keeping everyone on the same footing makes sense for most chronicles. It gives characters a reason to work together and helps balance spotlight time for the players. In a troupe-directed chronicle, though, these things aren't as important, because no individual character is as important as the chronicle, and every player has a turn in the spotlight. So why not mix up the power levels and let players have characters of widely different abilities?

In this sort of chronicle, some players' characters might be mortals, ghouls or thin-blooded vampires, while others are neonate Kindred and others are more powerful ancillae, primogen or even elders. You need to consult with the other players to decide what characters are being developed and to determine how many dots and freebie points more powerful characters can be built with.

A group of this kind is certainly unbalanced from a simple power perspective. The elder is stronger, more experienced and more mystically powerful than the neonates, and a veritable demigod when compared to the mortals. But the troupe-directed chronicle isn't about power, it's about story, and this kind of arrangement allows for a wide variety of stories to be told. The neonate characters can be involved in almost any typical **Vampire** story; mortals and ghouls can be involved in their own intrigues, as well as act as agents for their masters during daylight hours; elders and primogen appear in stories about high-level politics and ancient, powerful mystic forces.

With this kind of character spread, you need a chronicle premise that will fit such a group. The characters could be a powerful vampire, her childer and servants; or perhaps a powerful vampire could be the mentor to a group of neonates and ancillae, all of whom work to further his goals. They could even be a blood cult, with a charismatic high priest, her Kindred followers and a smattering of mortal dupes and cultists. Chew over a few ideas when coming up with the chronicle's premise and see what you come up with.

## THE CHARACTER FOLIO

Where troupe-directed play can become really interesting, from a player's point of view, is with the

possibility of playing more than one character — not simultaneously, but playing different characters in different stories. Again, this takes the focus off any individual character and places it on the chronicle, allowing for epic stories with a cast of dozens or more.

In this kind of chronicle, every player creates a folio of characters with a variety of different personalities and purposes. When you decide to run a story, the other players each select a character to play from their folios, depending on a basic outline of the story from the new Storyteller. When that story finishes, the character goes back in the folio, and another one is selected for the next story.

When you create characters for your folio, it's usually best for each player to create the same number of characters and to make a wide variety of characters — not just different clans and personalities, but different types of characters, from mortals to elders. If you have half a dozen characters in your folio (not a bad number), that might be a mortal or ghoul, three neonates, a more experienced and influential vampire, and an elder. This kind of approach gives the same story flexibility as a chronicle with characters of differing power levels (see above), with the advantage that every player can be involved in every level of the story. You can all play mortals, or elders, or whatever, in one story and then play characters of a completely different type next story.

The characters in your folio might be unrelated, or they might be members of a specific group. Maybe each player controls a small coterie, which has alliances with the coteries of other players, thus allowing members of different groups to combine resources when necessary. Alternatively, for a folio of characters with differing power levels, each character of equivalent power in each folio might be related. Perhaps the neonates are the members of an anarchy cell, while the elders are sympathetic Kindred working politically to pave the way for revolution. Or perhaps one character in each folio is in the Camarilla, another in the Sabbat, and each mortal is a vampire hunter out to destroy the Kindred.

Another advantage of this approach is that you can play characters who might not fit well into a standard coterie or work well with specific other characters. Now you can create that Nosferatu diablerist or Setite agitator and play her occasionally, but not so often that the tensions between her and the Ventrue archon disrupt the chronicle.

The obvious drawback of this approach is that it doesn't give you the same depth of roleplaying that a one-player-one-character approach does. You have

plenty of roleplaying opportunities, but you don't usually have enough time with one character to really get into her head and develop her personality to the fullest. If that's the kind of roleplaying you really like, this may not be the best approach for you. For a troupe that wants to tell big stories about lots of different people, though, it can be very satisfying.

### THE CHARACTER POOL

The next step beyond the character folio is to remove the individual ownership of characters completely. In this kind of chronicle, no player controls a single character or even a group of characters. Instead, you have a pool of perhaps two dozen characters shared by the whole troupe. Whenever a new story begins, the players each select a character to play from this communal pool. The character you play today might have been portrayed by one of the other players last week, and could be used as a Storyteller character by another player next week.

With a pool of characters, you can tell stories of truly epic scope within the chronicle. Different stories can involve completely different groups, giving a sense of a busy setting full of characters and events. For this

reason, you want to populate the pool with as many different kinds of characters as possible. Create vampires, elders, ghouls, invading Kuei-jin, mortals and anyone else who could play a role in the chronicle. These characters can be created by all the players, acting as a group and deciding who should appear in the chronicle. Alternatively, you might make a few characters on your own and add them to the pool, allowing for some personal touches to the character line-up.

As with the character folio, the drawback of this method is that you're unlikely to have the opportunity for really deep roleplaying. Some players may have problems adjusting to such a communal style and to not being able to fully own a character. If you create a character with a dark secret, for instance, you need to remember that all the other players will know about it. The other *characters* won't, of course, but you won't be able to surprise the other members of the troupe. Finally, you need to develop a system for determining who picks characters and when, so that conflicts don't develop when two or more players want to take charge of the same character.

For an interesting extension of this notion, you can even do away with the notion of Storyteller characters





## PLAYERS' CHARACTERS AS STORYTELLER CHARACTERS

One thing worth doing, but doing carefully, is using your own character (or one from your personal folio) as a Storyteller character when it's your turn to run a story. This has a lot to recommend it. You know all of your character's foibles, plans and secrets, better than anyone else, and can use the character to best effect in the story you're planning. If your character has a strong connection to your Storytelling territory, that gives you a ready-made hook for making the character relevant in that story, especially if it's a story that ties into your character's recent actions.

Making your character relevant in a story, though, is different from having that story revolve around your character, which is something you want to avoid. The other players are here to explore their character's stories and the story of the chronicle. They aren't here to watch your character become all-important and monopolize the spotlight. When you're the Storyteller, you need to focus on the larger story and the needs of the chronicle, not playing your character and crafting a story around him.

If you want to use your character in a story you're running, go ahead, but don't make it *his* story. It's still the story of the players' characters and that of the wider chronicle. Your character is secondary, even if he plays an important role. When he's done his thing, pull him offstage and put the focus back on the characters being controlled by the other players.

and players' characters. Instead, you just have a pool of characters, *all* of whom can be used by Storytellers or players as appropriate. No privileged, Storyteller-only characters exist; if the character appears in the chronicle, he can be played by any member of the troupe. The Storyteller of a particular story can rule out certain characters appearing if she likes, such as saying that no one can play the city's prince during a story about anarchy politics. She should also choose whichever characters she'll need for the story before the players choose their own.

(If this sounds like too much, think about a compromise position. Put some characters into a pool, while keeping one or more for your own personal use. This way you have your character, whom no one else can play, but also a wealth of other characters you can play or use when Storytelling.)

## POOLING RESOURCES

One advantage of working toward a larger, troupe-oriented story is that players are more likely to cooperate to put that story together. Rivalries and tensions and conflict are bound to come up between players' characters, of course, and this is a good thing. Such conflict is an excellent avenue for storytelling and can give rise to new story hooks. Those minor tensions aside, characters normally work together to reach goals, and their players work together to create the best and most interesting story possible.

To foster that spirit of cooperation, it can be worthwhile to break down some of the separation between characters, in order to emphasize the importance of the group. Things like character pools do this, putting the focus on the chronicle and setting where all these characters interact, not on one or two or 10 particular characters. Another option is *resource pooling*, allowing characters to share their abilities and advantages. In a **Vampire** chronicle, these advantages are normally a character's Backgrounds. Even in a traditional chronicle, characters will often use their Backgrounds to help other characters. In a troupe-directed chronicle, it's possible to go even further and make some Backgrounds the property of the entire troupe. In such a chronicle, characters might be able to work together to achieve greater things or operate as if they had the same Backgrounds as another character, even a character who's not actually being played or appearing in the chronicle at that time.

Not all Backgrounds can be pooled, or be pooled to the same extent. Some Backgrounds combine — if your character has two dots and another character has one dot, they can work together as if they had three dots total. Allies and Contacts are combinable Backgrounds, for instance. Other Backgrounds are complementary, where you gain an advantage by combining two Background ratings, but it's not as great as if the Backgrounds combined. Resources is an excellent example. Five characters with Resources 1 can pool their finances to gain greater purchasing power, but it's still nowhere near the money one character with Resources 5 has. Finally, some Backgrounds stand alone, and characters can't combine their ratings in meaningful ways. Generation is the prime example of such a Background, since hanging out with characters of a higher generation isn't going to make your character any more potent. Combinable Backgrounds are very easy to pool, while complementary ones require a little more work and thought, and stand-alone ones normally aren't pooled.

Different troupes can pool character Backgrounds in many different ways; no hard-and-fast system exists for doing so. Here are a few suggestions for ways you might pool Backgrounds; your troupe might come up with its own ideas as well.

The characters in play can pool their combinable Backgrounds whenever they work together toward a goal, such as combining their Contacts to find information. When two or more characters with a complementary Background work together, the one with the highest rating in that Background gains a small boost, perhaps an extra dot, if the other character has a rating high enough to make a meaningful difference. This is very much the usual way of pooling Backgrounds, and it sees use in many chronicles.

The character group being played has a separate pool of group Backgrounds, derived from the Backgrounds of the characters involved. Add together the ratings for each combinable Background, going over 5 dots if that seems appropriate. Take the highest rating for each complementary Background and add one dot to it for each character with a rating that's equal or only one dot less (to a maximum of five). Stand-alone Backgrounds aren't combined. With permission, you can use the group's rating in a Background, rather than that of your own character, if it seems appropriate. It might be hard to use the group's Resources if you're on your own, but maybe you have a debit card that draws on a joint account.

For a troupe that likes to strongly emphasize the group, you can blur this even further. Maybe players can draw on the group's Backgrounds in all circumstances, without their characters needing permission from their allies. Maybe the group can even have ratings in stand-alone Backgrounds, based simply on the highest rating in that Background for the group. This can break down in some circumstances (how do you share your ally's Generation?), but some troupes may be fine with this.

Individual characters can improve Backgrounds only through roleplaying, not with experience points. A group or coterie, though, may be able to improve group Backgrounds with experience points. This makes the group's rating in a Background a more permanent thing that doesn't rely on which characters are being played at any one time. The experience point cost for improving a group Background is something each troupe should decide on themselves, but a good baseline is the new rating x3. Multiple characters can contribute experience points to pay for this increase.

Alternatively, the group might have group Backgrounds, but they must be bought separately from

scratch, rather than being based on the ratings of the relevant characters. A group might start with five dots in various Backgrounds, just as a character, which characters can draw upon. Again, players can choose to improve the group's Backgrounds with experience points. In this case, the experience cost of improving the group's Backgrounds should be less expensive than above, as players might have to pump many points into a group Background until it becomes greater than that of their own characters. A good baseline is the new rating x2.

If your troupe uses character folios, you could pool the Backgrounds of the entire folio and draw on those combined Backgrounds for any character you choose to play, even though the other characters of the folio aren't appearing in the chronicle at that time. This isn't always going to be appropriate; some folios might have characters that are bitter enemies, for instance, and their Backgrounds probably shouldn't be combined. Folio Backgrounds might also be improved with separate experience points, just as a troupe might improve a group's Background rating, with the same costs as above.

## EXPERIENCE

If you're in a troupe that uses character folios or a character pool, you need to decide how experience is going to be handled for characters. Since players can use many possible characters, handling experience in the normal fashion means that only characters used by players in the current story will grow in their abilities. That can work for many troupes, but other groups might find it leads to awkward differences in experience and skill between characters. Here are a few possible alternatives:

*Broad player experience:* Instead of the experience points being attached to a specific character, they're awarded to each player. The player then gives those points to each of his characters as he sees fit. For a troupe that uses folios, that may mean that each and every character in the folio gains that much experience; in a troupe that uses a character pool, the group might choose five or six characters to improve with those points. This method usually leads to steady, consistent improvement to all characters.

*Narrow player experience:* Just as above, except you must actually spend your experience points to improve a specific character, rather than giving points to all your characters. You can make minor improvements to your characters as time goes on or save up points to make major changes to one character's Traits. This method encourages players to consider character improvement

carefully, but it can lead to a growing gap between the power levels of characters.

*On-screen experience:* Any characters who appear in a story, whether handled by players or the Storyteller, gain experience as normal. This is a very organic way of handling experience; it feels natural that those characters who do the most improve faster. It can lead to favoritism, though, with players wanting to keep using the same characters to keep improving their abilities. It can also result in recurring Storyteller characters becoming increasingly powerful.

*Staggered experience:* Every character in the folio or pool gains some experience points at the end of every story, but those who take a more significant role gain more points. As an example, those characters portrayed by the players during the story gain the usual amount of experience, while all the other characters in the folio or pool gain a single experience point. This alleviates some of the problems of solely giving on-screen experience, while still rewarding players for being involved in stories.

*Universal experience:* Every character in the folio or pool is awarded the same amount of experience at the end of every story. This is consistent and easy to control but can feel artificial, since a character who isn't used for a long time will be notably more competent than before when she finally does appear.

## LEGACY OF DAMNATION

Want to try something different? Maybe you've played more chronicles of **Vampire** than you've watched television shows over the last few years. Maybe you have brought a single character up from the Embrace into the hallowed halls of vampiric power more than a few times. Maybe you just think you have tried it all and done it all with **Vampire**. In that case, a Legacy of Damnation chronicle might be appropriate.

A Legacy of Damnation chronicle focuses on playing a vampire in different eras of play. Specifically, you play a particular character through a plotline, but instead of carrying that character into another era of play, you play that character's childe and then her childe and on down the line. A player may have her original character Embraced in the nights of Enoch, play the childe of that character as she discovers her first real taste of power while walking the wild borders of Rome, and finally play the childe of that childe and lie down for voluntary torpor in the modern nights. The crux

of a Legacy of Damnation chronicle is that the players explore different eras of history or plotlines as different characters from the same lineage of Kindred. In effect, you create a considerable vampiric family tree, exploring the ins and outs of not just one character, but the character's sires and childe. The result is a complex story with multiple personalities and goals all held together by the commonality of the Blood.

A Legacy of Damnation story is also about placing a character in unfamiliar territory and then carrying on the story past that one particular character into the lives of his childe. As exotic a setting as any place on Earth may be, after playing in that region for multiple stories, you and your character learn the ins and outs of that region. Sure, you could have grown up in Kentucky all your life and find yourself playing in a chronicle set in Kuala Lumpur and revel in the novelty of it all, but over time, you and your character will come to know the Storyteller's rendition of Malaysia and come to expect certain things. The Legacy of Damnation allows you and your troupe to shake things up a bit. Why not start in Malaysia of the 17th century, as your Kindred encounters virgin Asian culture and, over time, grows and changes with the region, Embracing a new childe as the ages pass and as new events occur. This carries on his legacy into the future. What about playing a French Kindred during the beginning of the Hundred Years War and the entire "family" line as the war wages and eventually ends? With the passing of time you can rest assured that the physical, political and social landscapes will change and place you into new and intriguing storytelling opportunities, while you create and select new characters to meet those challenges.

## PRIMOGENITURE

A Legacy of Damnation chronicle requires only moderately more time to make work than the basic historic chronicle, though you should keep in mind that this can still mean a good deal more time than a regular story of **Vampire**.

The center of the Legacy of Damnation concept is passing the legacy of one character to another in a different age. In effect, the Legacy of Damnation story is a variant of troupe-style play, in which a player controls multiple characters. In this type of chronicle, however, the player controls only one character at a time, retiring one character in one time period in favor of another character in a later time period. Usually, the two characters the player deals with are sire and childe, with the sire slowly fading into obscurity or torpor as the childe maintains the legacy. The sire's fade from play can be abrupt instead, as in the case of

Final Death, jump-starting the legacy with the childe becoming more active in the earlier era of play.

Most of the extra work in a Legacy of Damnation chronicle will come in the form of detailing your character's first childe. At the point when your character Embraces the childe and you anticipate transferring play from one character to the other, you should create the character as a normal starting vampire. The easiest and most convenient time to perform the transition is between stories when you anticipate moving from one era or plotline to another. In this way, the legacy of one character is transferred to the other while at the same time starting afresh in a new setting.

From sire to childe, a bridge from one plot to the next comes into play while still giving you the opportunity to portray a new character. In fact, the plot does not have to drastically change as you take control of the childe, leaving the Storyteller the ability to maintain contacts and stories despite the change in time periods. The childe should hold some of the goals and plans of her sire to carry on the plot into the next era, but this is more a suggestion and less a rule. Indeed, the childe may resent her sire and actively work against his interests!

Once the transfer of control is finalized you should sit down with your Storyteller and discuss what happens in the interim. What does the sire do in his "retirement"? Is torpor an option, or does he continue to function in Kindred society? What about the childe? Is she prepared for the new era? What facets of the sire's unlife will carry over to the childe? Will any enemies, artifacts or allies cross the generational gap? Is the childe pleased or apprehensive regarding her future?

As the childe becomes the main character (and on down the line), she should grow into her own power, eventually shrugging off the shadow of her sire and forging her own goals. In time she may well become a sire herself, with you prepping the retirement of another character and preparing to embark on a new era and character. In such a chronicle, the cycle can repeat for as long as you have eras to play.

## GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

It is worth mentioning again that a Legacy of Damnation chronicle is not a standard **Vampire** chronicle. Whereas a more traditional **Vampire** chronicle focuses on a particular character's development, a legacy chronicle focuses on the development of multiple characters throughout a diverse amount of settings and times. Make no mistake, a legacy chronicle is not a light-hearted romp through the many centuries of Kindred and kine society, nor is it a story that is geared

for new players or players who invest only a minimal amount of time in their chronicle. In a legacy story, it is no longer the Storyteller's sole responsibility to run the chronicle. Players control a host of characters, and while they probably do not control all those characters at the same time, it is probably a good idea to think of the line in the same way a Storyteller looks at her characters, as coherent parts of a whole.

## HELPING THE STORYTELLER

Playing in a Legacy of Damnation chronicle requires time and dedication. If such a chronicle runs correctly, the players should put in as much time before and after the actual session as the Storyteller. A legacy story requires the players to act as interim Storytellers at times in order to better manage their lineage. The chronicle will certainly require a good deal of creative energy and a considerable investment of time by the Storyteller. The Storyteller is going to need help keeping up with the many plots, personalities, Storyteller characters and settings. The more you, as a player, can do to help alleviate some of that burden, the more the Storyteller can focus on maximizing everyone's enjoyment of each session.

In a legacy story, you are part of a team. Think of it this way: Instead of trying to maximize the play of any one particular character, you may have to juggle two or three or more characters (either in terms of troupe play or ad hoc Storyteller characters). With such a broadening of scope, the focus understandably shifts from a single ambition to more team-oriented goals. Expand that team mentality to encompass all the players and their characters and the Storyteller as well, and the end result is a literal community of players' characters and Storyteller characters all interacting on many levels, not unlike the troupe-style play described at the beginning of this section. The possibilities also expand accordingly, and a whole new style of play and series of rewards become available — if you are willing to put in the time.

Players need to communicate with the Storyteller as much as possible. For a Storyteller to develop interesting and appropriate plots over different eras, he needs to have the maximum amount of preparation. Information is the greatest tool of any Storyteller, and that tool is never more important than in a legacy chronicle. As a player, you must provide every opportunity for the Storyteller to anticipate plot developments, especially when you are preparing to retire one character (the sire) and create a new one (the childe). Relaying your characters' intentions and goals and aiding the Storyteller in developing the chronicle will result in a much smoother and more enjoyable chronicle, plus



the critical transition periods will be that much easier to handle.

The following sections deal with the specific requirements of each style of legacy chronicle. One suggestion, though: As you read through, if you come across one style or another that you particularly like, read through it a second time. During that second read-through, place yourself in your Storyteller's position and analyze all the benefits and pitfalls from that perspective. Will the other players be as excited as you about this particular chronicle? Can one player or another try to abuse the situation? Will everyone pull his own weight? What plotlines and eras are most appropriate for the troupe?

When you have the basic answers to all the above, the final, most important question to ask yourself is, "What can I do to help make this chronicle run as easily as possible?"

#### A LITTLE TRUST

Another major requirement of a Legacy of Damnation story is to have a little faith in the other players. Just as you must constantly ask how you can ease the burden on

the Storyteller, you can also simultaneously ask what you might do to help the other players enjoy the chronicle. Exploration is one of the major themes of a Legacy of Damnation story, and it is a rare roleplayer who can really use the potential of that theme without feeding off other players. So, to explore your own character, you will also have to rely on the other players to give you feedback and help you draw out the full experience.

Similarly, if you trust the other roleplayers and their abilities at helping weave a good tale, they can help you lead the story in directions that may help your character grow. Trusting the other players will also allow you to return the favor. By listening and roleplaying with the other players it will become evident what their characters' goals are, and if you trust them you will oblige those hints by helping push the story along in the direction they would like to see. The end result in either case is a good deal of player control over the story as well as some welcome relief for the Storyteller.

For example, imagine your roleplaying as you take a character in transition from a Dark Ages chronicle



into a Victorian Age chronicle. You would like to emphasize how enamored your character is with the wonders of steam technology and have communicated this with the Storyteller. The Storyteller has to focus on laying the basic groundwork of the setting and the upcoming adventure and is not able to dedicate any extra time to your character's obsession. With good roleplaying you can easily communicate your desires to the other players and, if they trust your roleplaying ability, they may help you create a scene in which you can introduce your character's new fascination. So, instead of constantly having to rely on the Storyteller, who might have to focus on the setting and copious amounts of Storyteller characters, your fellow players act as interim Storytellers and help both you and the story as a whole. (See Conrad Hubbard's essay in Section Three for more information on this technique.)

One thing to remember about trust between players is that this trust does not necessarily translate into the characters getting along. As a Legacy of Damnation chronicle sometimes focuses on the alienation wrought by centuries of static existence, it is easy to have the frustration the character feels transfer to the other characters ... and that is where the trust between players is crucial. Some of the best roleplaying is built from conflict among the characters, and a good deal of trust is required on the part of the associated players to pull such tension off. The ability to advance the overarching plot while also forming an interesting side story about a conflict between two characters is a boon to any story. When you trust the other player's roleplaying ability you are probably more willing to place a little risk in the relationship between the characters. Sure, in some chronicles it is entirely appropriate for all the characters to get along and work toward a common goal, but in those chronicles where the characters may work with competing ambitions the players need to trust one another so as to ensure that the story does not devolve into a bickering match.

Of course, none of this may apply to you if your gaming troupe consists of a bunch of backstabbing fiends who are all about pulling the other guy down.

### KEEPING YOUR OPTIONS OPEN

The final major requirement on the part of a player in a Legacy of Damnation chronicle is also the easiest. You must keep your options open and be willing to modify your character's and the lineage's goals and your own play accordingly. Different times and different areas of the world are going to require different things out of your roleplaying and probably place some severe obstacles in the way of your character's ambitions. The result is that if you refuse to modify

your bloodline's goals, they will eventually become stymied and frustrated into inaction no matter how many characters you have played in that particular line. In a legacy chronicle a Storyteller has a host of options open to her, so many that she can take the story (with your help and approval) into all sorts of unexpected directions.

Expect the unexpected and be willing to react to those new situations. Think of your options in the same light as you might look on a Kindred who refuses to change with the times. Throughout **Vampire** canon those Kindred who are unwilling or unable to react to the flow of time are eventually driven to Final Death or torpor. It is only a matter of time before the world goes in a direction that makes the Kindred a threat to their own existence. The same principle exists for you as a roleplayer. If you refuse to change with the chronicle, you and your character will quickly become a liability rather than an asset to the telling of the story.

## THE BASICS OF THE CHRONICLE

A Legacy of Damnation story is not much more difficult to play than any other **Vampire** chronicle. A few differences make a legacy chronicle stand apart from other **Vampire** chronicles, though, and, in the end, make such a chronicle worth the time and effort.

### STANDING THE SIGHT OF THE OTHER CHARACTERS

A basic Legacy of Damnation story involves your character starting out in the annals of history and working his way into the future through his progeny. Of course, exactly how fast time progresses and which eras your different characters experience is up to the Storyteller. A base line is needed to first develop your character in order to create a common starting point for the troupe. So, just like any other story, you should work with the Storyteller to develop an appropriate character to the setting. At this stage of the chronicle, little is different except for maybe the setting, and you can easily plan accordingly.

From here, play begins as normal. The Storyteller presents plot elements and Storyteller characters as appropriate and you roleplay through the experience. Some subtle differences should become apparent at this point, though the differences from chronicle to chronicle will be quite different. In a standard Legacy of Damnation story some overriding element keeps all the characters together. This element's importance cannot be downplayed. Though it falls mostly on the Storyteller to provide a reason to keep the troupe cohesive over the years, you must be willing to roleplay in order to

support a believable reason for your character to want to spend years and years with the rest of the troupe.

The reason for staying together does not have to be the exclusive providence of the Storyteller, and any suggestions or initiatives on your part will certainly help. Get into your character's mind and figure out a reason she would want to stay with the others. Explore what drives your character and what the other characters bring to the table in terms of advancing those goals. Talk with the other players, see what they are thinking about in terms of troupe cohesiveness and try to work out a common reason for staying together. It can be as simple as agreeing to gain a common vengeance or sharing a common ancestry, or as complicated as wanting to stay close to one's perceived enemies. In the end, though, having a specific reason for your character to stay with the others will help develop into good roleplaying as well as further define your character's personality (always a good thing). Remember to relate all of your decisions and thought processes to the Storyteller so that he can integrate the appropriate information into the story.

A straightforward example of the "sticking together" thought process is if the obstacle or enemy your troupe faces is well beyond your collective power to overcome. In this case, it will take years of scheming and planning to eventually emerge victorious. This is where the Legacy of Damnation story excels, providing you with the opportunity to slowly build your character's power so that he can legitimately face off against the obstacle. In this case, the Storyteller probably has a good idea as to the reason your troupe will stay together over the years, but that idea is fleshed out by the roleplaying and interaction of the players into a believable and interesting situation. To use a metaphor, the Storyteller builds the foundation and your roleplaying finishes the house.

The Storyteller may not come up with a specific reason like an obstacle or powerful enemy. If such happens, then it falls squarely on your shoulders to work with the other players and roleplay a reason for staying together over the eras of play. In either situation, whether your Storyteller provides a reason or you work one up with the other players on your own, the end result must be that you have a troupe that can withstand the progress of time. This rule is one of the few absolutes in a Legacy of Damnation chronicle, and though it may appear commonsensical, it bears note. Any troupe worth its roleplaying salt with a flimsy excuse for sticking together will pull apart at the first major troupe conflict. Thus, it is worth putting a bit

of thought into exactly why your characters all work so closely together.

## VARIATIONS ON A THEME

A few different styles of a Legacy of Damnation chronicle can take form depending on your Storyteller's goals and your enjoyment. Each style offers alternative opportunities and advantages as well as some very interesting and challenging roleplaying situations. Think over the different styles that follow and sit down with your Storyteller and work out a format that meets your desires and her capabilities.

The different styles focus on the various ways you can advance your character into the coming eras. The key to remember when discussing the format of a Legacy of Damnation story is the time investment involved, for both you and the Storyteller. Certain formats will require more time and more work and offer appropriately creative possibilities. At the same time, though, that same format may be inappropriate due to real-life constraints. Take some time to work out the nuances and decide what situation offers the best opportunities for your troupe.

### THE BASIC LEGACY

The most fundamental form of a Legacy of Damnation story is to play a single lineage of Kindred while advancing the timeline significantly between each character. The amount of time can amount to years or decades rather than really large passages of time. The result, though, is that your character experiences a good deal of the world and his unlife in a fairly short amount of chronicle time — sort of a "survey" of a time period. Eventually, it will come time for your character to Embrace a childe and pass on his legacy, creating the opportunity for you to play an entirely new character set in a time period after the period during which you began play with the sire ... and so on and so forth.

This is a simple variation on troupe-style play, but instead of trading arbitrary characters, move to a specific time with a specific character through the occasional character shift. The biggest advantage to this style of story is the simplicity. While still offering some really great roleplaying opportunities and advancing the timeline, you are not forced into anything radically different from more traditional troupe play. The childe of your sire character probably holds a number of similar outlooks and desires, and she's certainly a member of the same clan. Similarly, the setting does change, but not so drastically that you are forced to reevaluate your character's entire personality and worldview.

With the gradual advance of time, new innovations and technological advances will be introduced,

and your character can really focus on the implications of those advances. It is most advantageous to start the chronicle just before some major revelation or change in history, such as the death of Christ, the Fall of the Qing Empire or the English Civil War. In these situations you have the opportunity to play your character for some time and get the feel of the chronicle before any major setting revelations. Then, when the pivotal event occurs, you have some roleplaying history from which to draw as well as a decent background with the other players and their characters to enjoy working through the situation. Wars (such as the fall of the western Roman Empire) and social revolutions (such as the Renaissance) provide wonderful settings in which you may play through the progression of the event from start to finish, taking control of a new character at different pivotal events and discovering the repercussions.

Pick a time period or a particularly interesting point in history. Times change, and in this story style, you have the opportunity to change characters to adapt with the times. Of course, a character who has difficulty adapting can be a satisfying storytelling challenge — just don't overdo it.

Starting out in a basic legacy chronicle, you create a character normally with special emphasis on picking up at least a few Backgrounds that would be a good basis for going forward. Herd dots in this case create the pool of individuals from whom your character will probably draw when the time comes for her to create a childe. Ally dots represent either a specific mortal that may one night become the childe of your character or possibly someone already of your character's mortal lineage, by which a true "vampire family" may come about. Contacts serve strongly here as well, as do those Retainers whose help merits additional attention (and possibly punishment).

The difference between investing characters represented by Backgrounds is the difference between developing your character's childe from the outset or defining her later on as the chronicle progresses. Each approach has its own advantage, with Background characters probably being of more use to your character right from the beginning while deciding as play occurs allows you to define the childe later and more in line with the unfolding of the plot. Do not rely on the dots to drive your character's selection of a childe, though. Backgrounds should serve as convenient starting points, places for you and the Storyteller to start the discussion as to where your character will find her progeny. Backgrounds should not be the beginning and end of the hunt.

## THE HUNT PRELUDE

One key to a Legacy of Damnation story is that you must invest some time in specifically roleplaying the acquisition of a childe. Think of the hunt for the childe as a prelude for a new character. In both a standard prelude and a legacy hunt prelude you work with the Storyteller in order to create the story in which your character selects and meets his potential childe. Reread the prelude section of **Vampire: The Masquerade** (p. 108) to reacquaint yourself with what is suggested. Overall, though, the emphasis should be strong on roleplaying rather than rolling the dice as you try to find the best candidate for a childe.

For the hunt prelude you must have your Storyteller's permission as well as possibly setting aside some one-on-one time to tell the story of the hunt. This session (or sessions) should unfold much like a prelude, with you as the player inputting a good deal of information during the process rather than reacting entirely to the Storyteller. Remember, this is your initiative and you should roleplay appropriately. It is a good idea to give the Storyteller a bit of a heads-up as to your character's goals and desires so that he can plan accordingly. In the end you should have developed a good deal of background information on your childe character as well as set the groundwork for the eventual transition.

Overall, your responsibilities are not altered from those discussed earlier in this section, with a bit of communication, understanding and some research probably doing the trick for filling out your childe's history. Thus you can concentrate on roleplaying and enjoying the chronicle.

## JUMPING VIEWPOINTS

Like the standard Legacy of Damnation story, a jumping viewpoints chronicle requires you to control multiple characters. Unlike a standard legacy chronicle, a jumping viewpoints chronicle has all the characters under your control (more or less) simultaneously. Another major difference between this style and the basic legacy style is that the lineage is defined well in advance of the beginning of the game. In a jumping viewpoints chronicle, the lineage has a strong and constant influence on the creation of the characters of its progression, as opposed to a standard chronicle in which the characters influence the line as much as the line influences them.

Depending on the desires of the Storyteller and the development of the plotline, you take control of the character appropriate to the era. This often means that you may play different characters each session, developing the plotline in each era at the same time.



Your troupe and the Storyteller decide at the beginning of the chronicle which eras you would like to play. You then develop appropriate characters for each era and work into their backgrounds a connection between each, specifically, where the character falls in the family tree. Before a jumping viewpoints chronicle begins, you should build up the family tree of your line. From some base starting point (probably set by the Storyteller) you map out the names, locations and maybe a line or two on the personality of each Kindred in the lineage. You can have multiple branches or none at all, depending on how you choose to represent the lineage. You need to pay particular attention to the years in which the specific vampires are active so that as you change time periods you pick and develop an appropriate character.

Once you have a basic map of the lineage, you should go ahead and jot down a couple of ideas as to what defines the line as whole. A few thoughts or ideas here will suffice, just enough to give the line a bit of personality and direction. With a basic idea of who and what the line is all about you can craft the characters as needed with a convenient common point or trait for all of them.

For example, three characters created from the same family over the ages may well have similar dispositions. Families are known for engendering the same general personalities, preferences and general outlooks. You can expect families over the years will change but that generalities may stay the same. A family from medieval Italy known for being very involved in politics and a bit hotheaded might be described in similarly broad terms four centuries down the line. Certainly not every member of the family will conform to those stereotypes, but for the purposes of playing the chronicle the archetypes may lay the groundwork for full-fledged personalities. The character from the earliest era, in this case medieval Italy, will probably cleave closest to the archetype, with the other two characters diverging the farther in time they are from the Middle Ages.

The character developed after the Middle Ages may decide to break with expectations. Although his family expects him to become a minor political official, he instead opts to join the military or to explore his artistic talents. The family pushes him in one direction while he forges his own path — something carried over into his existence among the undead. He may be

Embraced by his ancestor-sire for his vision and drive to become something more than what was expected, or he may be cursed with undeath as a punishment for not following the ancestor-sire's carefully laid plans for him. Whatever the case, the groundwork is laid for a compelling sire-child relationship.

The character in the latest time period may have nothing to do with mortal politics and be quite level-headed, but through your roleplaying may find a passion for Kindred politics she never expected, quietly fulfilling her family's destiny. This discovery is set into motion because of the link to the family and the other characters. In time the character may discover the existence of the characters from the previous eras and decide to carry on their goals.

It is worth noting that in each of the three cases above a simple connection like a mortal family allows the player to quickly develop distinct personalities and goals while at the same time maintaining a commonality that eases the transition from one character to another. It is relatively easy to remember the notion of the family and apply it accordingly to the character in use at that point. You may switch from one character to another from chronicle to chronicle, or you may not use one character for a number of sessions, making it difficult to remember exactly how you last roleplayed that character. With a common link you avoid having to create entirely new personas and having to remind yourself each chronicle exactly what that character was all about.

As in any other Legacy of Damnation chronicle, the characters can be faced with an obstacle or enemy that transcends a single era. In a jumping viewpoints chronicle, however, you have the opportunity to tackle that obstacle at each time period progressively. The results of one period should have repercussions in the others, lending an immediate gravity to the actions of each era. Perhaps a player's character in the earliest era is able to steal an ancient artifact from a Toreador nemesis. Later, the Storyteller has one of the player's latter-era characters discover that artifact, lost and forgotten in the cellar of his mortal family's estate. Or maybe the untimely death of an early-era character drops the generation of that same Toreador, making the Degenerate that much more difficult to defeat in later time periods.

Make no mistake, a jumping viewpoints is one of the more difficult roleplaying options available to a vampire player, but it is appropriately rewarding, providing you with the ability to simultaneously explore multiple time periods as well as control different types of characters

## GO FORTH AND MULTIPLY

In this style of Legacy of Damnation chronicle, you develop a historical character as normal. As with a standard legacy chronicle, you will control multiple characters at different times, but in this case you activate the different childer of the sire at different times. The key here is that the sire has multiple childer for you to select from. In many ways, this game has the most in common with a standard troupe-play game, with the only major variation being that all the characters are vampires descended from the same sire.

For instance, you create a sire character who eventually Embraces four childer. You create each character both in terms of Traits as well as background. From that point the Storyteller presents you with different eras and you decide which childer to portray during that time period. In effect, you activate whichever character you think would be the most advantageous or interesting for a particular era.

In this way you create a family tree, with the different branches making their impacts on different plotlines or even different eras of history. The big advantage of this style of story is the different types of characters you can play while still retaining a core character, in this case the sire. You have the ability to play a couple of different types of characters while primarily focusing on the advancement of a single core character.

The key roleplaying obstacle, as in so many other legacy stories, is rationalizing why the players' characters all end up in cahoots. A common theme may prove useful, but this more than any other chronicle is going to require some creative explanations. Perhaps all the sires are part of a council or conspiracy, or perhaps they have all sworn a pact to each other. Still, it's your chronicle so maybe other explanations will surface after a few stories ... or not at all.

## FAMILY TIES

The various vampire clans all place a different amount of importance on the process of creating a childer. Thus, different views exist on the relative usefulness of the sire-child relationship and appropriately different situations occur in a Legacy of Damnation chronicle. Some clans take the creation of a childer very seriously, while others see it as nothing more than a staple of the way of unlife of the Kindred. As such, your selection of the clan of your original character will have a great impact on the process and type of childer you play throughout the chronicle. What follows is a quick overview of each clan's views on the Embrace with specific attention to chronicle play and how they go about raising their childer.



## BRUJAH

The nature of the Brujah helps break any preconceptions about the sire-child relationship. Many modern Brujah are rebels and malcontents and use the Embrace as a medium for their rebellion. Not surprisingly, these younger Brujah do not place much stock in raising the childe and do the absolute minimum they can — just enough to keep the elders off their backs. The older Brujah, on the other hand, are an entirely different story. Many of the eldest Brujah place great importance on the role of the lineage and spend copious amounts of time raising their childe, teaching them about the history of the clan, the accomplishments of the sire and what things are expected of the childe.

The Brujah present an interesting clan to play during a Legacy of Damnation game. The noticeable divide between the ages creates characters that are at times quite caring and attentive while at other times brutal and callous. This divide in the sire-child philosophy is rife with roleplaying opportunities, with a good deal of intraclan conflict built right in. One era's iconoclastic Brujah might seem oppressive and hidebound to the next.

## GANGREL

The Gangrel typically place the least amount of time and effort of any clan into raising their childe. The Gangrel scout a potential childe for a considerable amount of time before the actual Embrace, making sure the mortal would handle himself adequately as one of the Outlanders. To most Gangrel, little need exists to spend lots of time indoctrinating their childe, as they have already selected someone who will function well on her own, with or without the sire's constant aid. For the most part, the Gangrel inform their childe as to their new state, give a few hints about how to survive and maybe run with the childe for some time teaching them the basics. The Gangrel are loners, however, and the sire-child relationship is often informal at best. Exceptions exist, of course, and considering the Gangrel's current political insecurities, many are taking more time to train their childe for the inevitable conflicts ahead.

A Gangrel in a Legacy of Damnation chronicle would be most appropriate for a series of stories in which the characters are the most important factor to the story, as opposed to some overriding enemy or obstacle. The inconsistent sire-child approach of most Gangrel ensures that each generation is quite distinct



from the last and may not engender continuing the goals and legacies of the sire.

#### MALKAVIAN

Who can say, really? When have the actions of the Malkavians ever been consistent enough to make reliable generalizations?

Many Malkavian sires will spend time with their childer only if it suits them. Insanity is a difficult thing to deal with, doubly so when you are expected to train and teach a fledgling Kindred. The Malkavians run the gamut of approaches to the sire-childer relationship, some spending years cloistered away with their childer while others do nothing more than a swift Embrace and a few encouraging words.

The Malkavians are quite versatile in a Legacy of Damnation chronicle. Considering the vagaries of the psyche, they can fit into just about any Legacy story, creating appropriate childer as the plot (or their ids) demands.

#### NOSFERATU

Clan Nosferatu's insular nature makes its members very cognizant of the sire-childer relationship. This relationship is especially important because of the physically damaging nature of the Nosferatu Embrace. The sire must choose a childer carefully and be prepared to spend a considerable amount of time bringing her into the Nosferatu community. Few other Kindred spend as much time as the Nosferatu do in the indoctrination process, for a Nosferatu who is unable to cope with his new unlife is a danger to Kindred everywhere. The Nosferatu also place strong importance on the sire's responsibilities to the childer, much more so than the Ventrue or the Toreador. The Nosferatu truly see the Embrace as a curse, and it is the sire's responsibility to ameliorate the pain of that curse as much as possible.

The Nosferatu are wonderful options for a Legacy of Damnation chronicle. Their willingness to spend considerable time and resources on their childer all but ensures the goals of the sire are carried on from generation to generation. Over time and generation the Nosferatu arguably change the least, potentially leaving a strong imprint of the sire across the entire family tree.

#### TOREADOR

The Toreador place great stock on the accomplishments and refinement of previous generations, and accord an appropriate amount of emphasis on the sire-childer relationship. The victories and coups of the childer reflect directly on the sire, and no self-respecting Toreador would Embrace someone who would bring him shame. To make sure their childer

act appropriately in Kindred and kine society, many Toreador sires spend a considerable amount of time on indoctrinating their progeny.

Exceptions do occur, though. Many Toreador are known to Embrace childer on a whim, allowing the heat of the moment or a passing passion to sway them into creating a new vampire. In these situations the childer is often considered a horrible mistake and the sire will do all she can to separate herself from the childer, including all but ignoring the indoctrination process — possibly resulting in Caitiff.

Toreador are best served in Legacy of Damnation stories in which a sire will take time and effort to help his childer with the transition into Kindred society. A Toreador in a legacy chronicle will, however, offer a number of opportunities to break from that standard, leaving you the ability to play the black sheep of the line.

#### TREMERE

Along with the Nosferatu, the Tremere place significant stock in the sire-childer relationship. Also like the Nosferatu, the Tremere are quite insular, with a social make-up very unique to the clan. Because the clan social dynamics are so different from the rest of Kindred or kine society, a Tremere sire must be prepared to place a goodly amount of time and effort into the upbringing of his childer. For the Tremere a childer is someone to carry on the sire's goals, his thaumaturgical accomplishments, and an attempt to form an academic relationship with someone who subscribes to the same philosophies as the sire. Thus, the Tremere see a definite give-and-take in the sire-childer relationship, with the childer providing a vector for the continuation of the studies of the sire and the sire providing security and esoteric knowledge available nowhere else.

The Tremere rarely Embrace on a whim and often select their progeny from mortals already associated with the clan or its pursuits. Thus, if you decide to play a Tremere in a Legacy of Damnation chronicle, you may wish to have the goals and desires of the sire directly carry down throughout the following generations. Deviation and variation are not the hallmarks of the Tremere, and this is doubly so in a legacy chronicle, so think through potential reasons for deviation and make sure they take the lineage where you want it to go.

#### VENTRUE

The Ventrue are similar to the Toreador in the sire-childer relationship. They usually select their childer very carefully and spend no small amount of time conveying the import of the line to their childer. This period of instruction is known as the *agoge* among the more tradition-minded members of the clan. For

the Ventrue, the childe carries the weight of the good name of all her ancestors and should conduct herself in such a way as to bring no shame to her sire or *his* legacy. In this type of sire-childe relationship it is the childe who holds the most responsibility, often with the sire emphasizing that the childe's actions do not reflect just upon herself but on her clan and the line as a whole. Woe betides the foolish childe who horribly embarrasses the line, especially considering that the great-great-grandsire may still be watching.

In a Legacy of Damnation chronicle, the Ventrue are some of the most stringent about the responsibilities of the childe. Through their rigorous indoctrination process the childe is made to realize his station in unlife and exactly what is expected of him. A Ventrue legacy character is often free to make or fail his own fortunes, however, leaving more room for breadth than, say, a particularly overweening Nosferatu or Tremere.

#### LASOMBRA

The Lasombra are much like the Ventrue and Toreador, placing some emphasis on the sire-childe relationship but not as much as the most insular clans. Those Lasombra who place a good deal of importance on their roles as leaders of the Sabbat are the ones most likely to spend copious amounts of time indoctrinating their childer into the ways of the undead. More often than not, though, a Lasombra sire will spend much of the time during indoctrination preparing his childe for navigating the politics of the Sabbat rather than emphasizing the legacy line. For the Lasombra, the sect occasionally takes precedence over the sire-childe relationship, though the impact of the line is still quite important.

A Lasombra legacy character would do wonderfully in a chronicle that follows the growth of the Sabbat throughout the ages. Less strict than many of the politically minded clans, a Lasombra character would excel in stories that focus on the accomplishments of a particular character rather than of the line as a whole.

#### TZIMISCE

The Tzimisce are the Sabbat's equivalent of the Tremere, though in the sire-childe relationship the Tzimisce are often much more open and abusive than the Warlocks. This openness should not be mistaken for kindness or sympathy. Many Tzimisce sires are interested in seeing just how many mistakes their childer will commit before they learn the "correct" ways of doing things. For the Tzimisce, the best way to learn a lesson is through the pain of a mistake. Additionally, a childe is supposed to show the appropriate supplication

to her sire during the indoctrination process and to carry her sire's name with her in her accomplishments. The failure of the childe reflects poorly on the sire, and the indoctrination process provides a wonderful opportunity to weed out the weak impulses of the childe.

Tzimisce characters are best served in Legacy of Damnation chronicles in which the childe can strike out on his own but with a strong continuing relationship with his sire. A Tzimisce sire character is never quite retired, revisiting the childe's unlife whenever she feels her interests might be better served.

#### THE INDEPENDENTS

Of the independent clans, the Giovanni and Assamites spend the most time rearing their childer and making sure they are inducted into the social atmosphere of the clan. These two clans are also the ones to place the most emphasis on the accomplishments of the line, trying to impress the importance of the lineage on the childe. For the Giovanni, this is familial guilt and homage, while it is dedication to a religious purpose for the Assamites.

The Followers of Set usually spend some time on the sire-childe relationship but do not place too much emphasis on imparting the importance of lineage to the childe. The Setites believe their childer will thrive or die of their own accord, and too much investment one way or the other may prove futile. As long as the Setite childe is suitably capable, little need exists for any more training.

The Ravnos have ceased to exist as a coherent entity and Embrace much as the Gangrel do. The surviving Ravnos are often nomadic and are prepared to look after themselves, even to the point of avoiding others of their own clan. To that end the Ravnos do little more in the sire-childe relationship than train the new Kindred in the basics of their new unlives and let the childer make their own ways into the night.

#### THE MECHANICS OF YOUR LEGACY

By now, you have a general idea of what a Legacy of Damnation chronicle entails, as well as a more specific idea of how you would like to go about creating a character that fits such a scheme. With a general plan of attack already outlined and a character concept well in hand, it is probably time to work on putting your ideas for the character onto a character sheet.

**Vampire** is a game that takes an abstract character concept and quantifies those concepts into hard and fast numbers (or dots, or levels, or whatever). While some agreed-upon standards exist for exactly how





much a particular dot on a character sheet is worth, the process of the Embrace is not so clearly defined. Specifically, the effects of the attributes a sire imposes on the Embrace are something largely left unexplored and unqualified. To that end, this section gives you a few hints and suggestions on how to create some mechanical continuity between your sire and childe.

Because of the complexities that surround a Legacy of Damnation chronicle, you and your Storyteller should take some time and work out just how you plan on quantifying your character. We suggest a number of available options beyond simply using the standard character creation rules found in the core rulebook.

One of the first decisions you need to make about mechanics is if you would like to approach it from a “top-down” or a “bottom-up” viewpoint. In the case of a “top-down” approach you place an emphasis on the sire’s Traits and personality as major influences on the childe’s creation. In effect, some of the more prominent strengths and weaknesses of the sire are passed onto the childe, for good or ill. In a “bottom-up” approach you place the emphasis on mechanics of who the childe

was before his Embrace. In this case, who and what the character did while mortal play the most significant roles in deciding her attributes.

Neither approach is superior to the other, and no rule says that once you pick one style that you must keep using that style for each and every childe you create. Similarly, different players in the same troupe may decide with the Storyteller that one approach is more appropriate for a particular character while you take an entirely different route. This is perfectly fine, and even to be encouraged, so that a wide variety of characters enter the story.

### Top-Down

If you believe that the influence of your sire is the most important factor on your chosen legacy, then the top-down approach is probably the most appropriate. Take for example the fact that the social and psychological impact on a childe by her sire is often quite profound. In some instances, sires are apt to take their new progeny into seclusion for some time to help mold their childer into acceptable images. These sires place considerable stock in their ability to mentally and so-

cially influence their childer into something more than they were as mortals. In these cases, the will of the sire is more than the years of experience and memories of the childe. The result is a childe who comes into the World of Darkness very similar to her Sire.

As such, a couple of ways reflect the strong influence of a sire on a character sheet. In each case the considerations for the childe as a mortal take a back seat to other concerns and affect the outcome only in the latter stages of character creation. Who the childe was is not as important as what he has become.

One of the most severe alternatives to regular character creation is to take the sire's statistics and halve them. The childe then starts with those halved stats as her base levels (rounding down), forgoing the standard character creation process. Note that this makes for characters who will probably start significantly dependent upon their sires for aid and protection. For example, a Kindred with four dots in Dexterity would grant her childe two automatic dots in Dexterity. The sire's Traits govern the childe's Attributes, Abilities, Backgrounds, etc. Whatever the sire has, the childe gains half. From this baseline you can modify a few dots up and down to reflect the individuality of the childe. Here the process comes to resemble standard character creation but with significantly reduced numbers.

For the childe's Attributes, add three dots to his primary category, two dots to his secondary and one dot to his tertiary. The childe gains five dots to his primary Abilities, three to his secondary and one to his tertiary. The character gains two dots in Backgrounds and nothing to add to his Disciplines (representing instruction on behalf of the sire). Two dots are added to whichever Virtues you feel appropriate. Humanity is determined as normal, as the sum of the character's Conscience + Self-Control, with possible allowances made for the personality of the character (which should be discussed with the Storyteller). Willpower should not be modified from the original halving of the sire's Willpower and is *not* determined normally by the Courage Virtue. The childe does not have any freebie points to play with (since he gained a good deal of "freebie"-like instruction from his sire). Merits and Flaws may be purchased as normal, if the Storyteller permits them.

Note that these numbers are rough and generally allow you to help customize the childe into something distinct from his sire, transitioning some of his life as a mortal into his new Kindred existence. If you and your Storyteller think that the numbers are inappropriate in a specific case, feel free to modify as you see fit, making sure the character fits your original concept as well as

integrates into the story as smoothly as possible.

A more subtle form of top-down character creation is to use the statistics of the sire as a rough blueprint by which to define the childe instead of using freebie points. First off, the character gains absolutely no freebie points. Instead, she gains extra advantages from her sire (the more potent the sire, the larger the advantage). So, if you want to select a specific benefit you must offset the cost with an appropriate Flaw or combination of Flaws. Another restriction is that a character created in this fashion may select only those Disciplines already developed by the sire. The childe gains a free dot in each Discipline the sire knows. Additionally, any Abilities or Backgrounds of the sire's that exceed three dots grant a bonus dot in that ability to the childe. Attributes remain unaffected by the sire (unless, of course, the Kindred is Nosferatu).

The top-down type of creation process is most appropriate for insular clans and domineering sires. In both cases time is not an issue and the sire is able to remove the childe from Kindred and kine society and grant the childe his accumulated wisdom and potential. A top-down approach is also useful in chronicles where it is important for the legacy to continue the work of its sire. Ongoing plot elements that remain unresolved are a good impetus for a sire to invest the time and effort indoctrinating his childe. Think of the top-down approach being appropriate when the story is greater than the character and the loss of any single character to retirement or Final Death, while difficult, is hardly devastating.

Outside of the above instances it may seem a bit nonintuitive to grant halved Attributes, Backgrounds or Abilities. In those cases, discuss the situation with your Storyteller and come up with an amicable solution. Remember, these rules offer an interesting alternative to the standard character creation process and should be considered optional. If you think your character should have an extra dot in Contacts or maybe an extra two dots in Science, then make the case to your Storyteller and let her decide — or use the traditional method of character creation.

### **BOTTOM-UP**

Much of the same advice about implementation and usefulness regarding a top-down Legacy character creation process also applies to a bottom-up situation. In a bottom-up situation, though, you are often creating a character significantly less powerful (in a vampiric sense) than one created top-down. The bottom-up process places the emphasis of character creation on who the character was while alive. As the



kine are intrinsically less powerful than the Kindred, it should come as no surprise that this process yields a mechanically different type of character. Still, different does not mean “bad” or “inferior,” especially since a premium is placed on developing a compelling back story for the character rather than having the sire’s story simply carried over.

The bottom-up process is best employed in chronicles and with sires when the characters take center stage, creating plots around themselves and driving the development of the chronicle. In these character-centered stories it often becomes difficult to create new and interesting plots for your character continually, and eventually, they will resolve many of the big issues (or simply tire of the recurring hindrances). [[It is unclear what the “they” refers to here.]] In these types of games, the bottom-up approach works wonderfully, since it allows you to play an entirely new character with distinct advantages and disadvantages while still retaining the continuity of the story.

The easiest way to create a bottom-up character is to work with your Storyteller and develop a mortal character using the rules found in Section One of this book. Create the mortal as normal. The only major difference is to add the standard three dots of Disciplines. Unlike the top-down method, you can select Disciplines that your character’s sire does not have as long as you can come up with a good explanation as to why those particular Disciplines are appropriate to the concept of the childe character. Obviously, the more common Disciplines (such as Presence, Dominate, Celerity, Fortitude and Potence) are easier to explain, as they enhance already existing qualities of the Kindred.

Another approach is to allow the Storyteller to create the character. In this case you hand over the mechanics to the Storyteller to do with as she sees fit, employing whichever Storyteller character she determines appropriate. The childe is selected from the host of Storyteller characters introduced during the story. You need to develop and explain the relationship between the sire and potential childe and discuss exactly why the sire is interested in that particular Storyteller character. Once you and the Storyteller agree on the specific character, you turn over the creation process. The Storyteller, not restrained by the standard character creation process, decides what numbers are appropriate for the mortal experiences of the childe as well as the influences of the sire and fills in the sheet to meet those criteria. In many cases, this will already be done, as the Storyteller probably has some notion of what the character is capable of, assuming the character in

question doesn’t already have detailed Traits. In time you get back a completed character sheet. The result is a character once introduced as a plot element who takes on an unlife of his own and who fits nicely into the existing plot.

A final process to consider is to create a mortal or vampire character as normal, with the appropriate considerations to prelude and how you plan to introduce the childe into gameplay. In an attempt to represent the mentoring process of a sire to the childe, you have the option to use any unspent experience earned by the sire immediately on the childe. Thus, a sire with 6 unspent experience points may transfer those points to her childe, giving you the option of immediately spending those points on what you see as appropriate. This is a nice way to quantify the time and effort many sires place into raising their childe while still placing an emphasis on the childe as a distinct character. It also gives a reason for you to save some of your experience points even when you know you are going to retire the character.

#### AND YOU ALWAYS HAVE ...

The old ways are sometimes the best ways. It is certainly possible and appropriate for you and your Storyteller to decide that standard vampire character creation rules are suitable. While such a process does not entail any specific connection between your sire and childe, it offers simplicity and speed. Assuming your first character in the legacy chronicle was created using the standard rules, you are already familiar with the system and can probably work up the statistics for a character in no time. With only a little bit of forethought and a bit of restraint on your part in picking Disciplines and Backgrounds, you can quickly have a new character who is both balanced (in terms of gameplay) and ready to insert into your story.

## THE PHENOMENON OF PACKS AND COTERIES

Whether driven by a desperate attempt at survival or a passionate dedication to a religious cause, vampires of the Camarilla and Sabbat sometimes go against their solitary natures to join with other members of their kind. While the majority of Camarilla vampires find the ideas of these coteries unnatural and crass, the Sabbat values the pack structure as a way of ensuring loyalty to the sect through the bonding of its members to one another.

If you're going to dive into the role of your character, really feel and understand what she is going to have to struggle against on a nightly basis in order to work within a pack or coterie, you have to first realize just how differently the vampire views social interaction than mortals do. It is a little ironic that we have to learn to relate to these creatures' loner mentality while we willingly gather together in social groups to play out the stories of their exploits. Is it even possible for us as well adjusted mortals with our Humanity intact (knock on wood) to appreciate the ever-present tension and strain that would be felt between a band of these predators? Well, we hope you'll be able to develop an understanding of the vampire loner mentality and mindset without actually experiencing it yourself to the supernatural and predatory degree that it affects the undead. If we make ourselves aware of the significance of these unnatural groupings of vampires by examining the psychology behind the vampires themselves, as well as how respective sects perceive coterie and packs, we can expect our characters' involvement and interaction with their respective pack or coterie to be a much more rewarding experience.

## SABBAT PACKS

Before a player can understand the ideology behind the form and function of Sabbat packs, he needs to know some key issues about the Sabbat itself. The Sabbat, and the fanatically holy guerrilla fighter who belongs to it, is the product of conflict. To understand why the Sabbat acts and exists as it does, it makes sense to look into why the Sabbat came to be in the first place.

Unlike the Camarilla, the Sabbat wasn't formed with the signing of treaties and the agreements of clans. The Sabbat began as a violent movement of young Cainites who sought to tear down a rigid structure that they saw as oppressive. Young, like-minded vampires who often crossed clan lines joined together in small groups to better act against their common enemies. In the beginning, these enemies were their clan elders and the scores of mortals who burned them out of hiding. In the struggle to survive these nights and overcome the individual power of the elders and their pawns, the weaker "anarchs" worked together to increase their overall chances of success. This group tactic had not been used previously and seemed somewhat vulgar in the eyes of traditional Cainites who looked on others of their own kind with competitive contempt. While the elders had their individual powers of age at their disposal, the young anarchists who would in time become the founders of the Sabbat had the advantage of sheer numbers — an advantage that often worked in their favor in struggles against the elders.

These disorganized bands of anarchists enjoyed some success in their revolt. In the years of the conflict the younger Cainites managed to upset the balance of power for the first time in the history of their kind. Spitting in the face of convention and tradition, these upstarts fought for an idea side by side with others of the race of Caine. The effects of the Anarch Revolt still guide the actions of the majority of Kindred society even in the modern nights.

It was in part in reaction to these rebel anarchists that the Camarilla itself came into being. The Convention of Thorns put an end to the open warfare among the race of vampires and placed all "Kindred" under an umbrella organization. To some of the war-weary rebels, the idea of the Camarilla and demands of the Convention of Thorns were agreeable. They'd be forgiven of their crimes and accepted back among their fellows, with the protection of their elders, as though little had happened. The war would be all but forgotten. The Anarch Revolt would end in settlement. Under the pretense of a more stable and secure existence, a good number of the anarchists agreed to the terms and joined with the Camarilla.

This didn't sit well with some of those anarchists who had spent years, decades or even a century fighting against their elders. To them, this treaty was nothing but a return to the exact situation against which they'd rebelled in the first place. These anarchists felt that to agree to those terms was to agree to defeat. They remained in defiance of that treaty and were committed to the idea of true freedom. For them the fight wasn't over. As a symbol of their rage, these bands of anarchists destroyed the town of Thorns and pressed forward with their revolution. Over the next half-century these packs eventually agreed on a foundation of principles and formed their own sect, the Sabbat.

Why did the Sabbat come to be? Other than the simple desire to claim victory or snub their noses as the Camarilla's offerings, a number of reasons demanded the formation of a single, unified sect.

For one, the Convention of Thorns offered amnesty to all but the most grievous offenses of the anarchists. The two principle clans of anarchists, the Tzimisce and Lasombra, had destroyed the better part of their clans' elders. They'd both done better in the Anarch Revolt against the prevailing class of Cainites than those of the other participating clans and had more to lose. On top of this, both clans had apparently devoured their Antediluvians, bringing Final Death to the oldest and most powerful vampires of their clans. In joining with the Camarilla, these two clans saw a high possibility that many of the remaining anarchists from the Lasombra and Tzimisce would be held responsible for those acts.

The primary driving force that eventually led to the creation of the Sabbat was the mindset of those rebellious anarchs. They didn't surrender to the Camarilla because they didn't have to. In their packs they had found an existence without the need for dominant elders and they remained willing to fight for that freedom. With the growth of rituals among the packs, such as the Vaulderie, they had removed the shackles of the blood bond and forged a new identity of symbolism and practice. They hadn't been conquered and they had yet to achieve the goals they had been fighting for. The war wasn't over yet and they had shed those weaker vampires within their ranks who had lost the will to fight and joined the Camarilla. Those who remained were battle-hardened Cainites, committed to the idea of freedom and willing to continue the conflict. The formation of these autonomous packs into a sect that worked toward their shared goals and Embraced their common rituals was only a matter of time.

## WHY THE PACK?

Due to Cainites' predatory and solitary nature, close associations with others of their kind are often ruled by mistrust. Suspicion is the rule of thumb when coming in contact with other vampires, who are seen as little more than competition for blood and power even though the Sabbat reveres its communal packs of Cainites.

When the Sabbat acts, it almost always acts in groups. The pack is the foundation of the Sabbat and its entire function is based around these individual cells of holy zealots. Where single Kindred may petition and be granted domain in Camarilla cities, packs of Cainites claim domain in Sabbat cities and fight to hold onto it tooth and nail. What is it that inspires the Cainites of the Sabbat to voluntarily commit themselves to these seemingly unnatural groups and participate in the rituals that bind them to other vampires?

## WAR MENTALITY

When a pack is not participating in a war party or a Crusade to liberate a city they're combating the ambitions of neighboring Sabbat packs. In other words, if you're looking for action and don't want to sit around idle and gather dust, the Sabbat is the unlife for you! The challenge almost never ends, and the struggles a Sabbat pack and its individual members face seem to renew themselves. This conflict-focused war mentality helps hold packs together as much as the Vaulderie does. It is always time to rally the troops and band together to fight the cause of the night.

Within the Sabbat, the opportunity to meet Final Death is almost a nightly affair. The burden of your chance for success and continued survival each night is often spread across the shoulders of your packmates.

You may not particularly like the other Cainites around you, but you know that in this Jyhad they stand to lose or gain as much as you do. This "we're all in it together for the common good" or "us against them" mindset helps form strong bonds on top of those artificially put in place by the Vaulderie. Fellow packmates quickly come to appreciate that their pack is their means of the best chance of surviving the turmoil of the modern nights.

## INDOCTRINATION AND EXECUTION

The purpose of most packs is a martial function. The Sabbat is a religious sect completely devoted to war at all times, and the packs that make up the sect exist to fight the Jyhad in one form or another. Whether a pack is designed as one dedicated to scouting enemy territory, recruiting converts to the Sabbat or simply kicking ass and cracking open heads, the members of that pack work with that specific purpose in mind.

Due to their communal existence it is far easier for Sabbat packs to share various skills and techniques among themselves. Those with experience lead the rest of the pack by example. Packmates skilled with useful Disciplines share this knowledge and mentor the others to strengthen their overall chances of success. Information is exchanged much more easily within a pack structure than within the isolationist organization of the Camarilla. The constant contact with one another provides ample opportunity to go over plans with a fine-toothed comb and work out any rough spots before the pack takes to the battlefield. Over time, many packs develop an unspoken understanding of what each member is supposed to do and when they're supposed to do it. They move like clockwork, refining the pack into a deadly efficient fighting machine.

Along with easier sharing of actual skills and information, the pack serves to spread Sabbat ideology as well. The priest, ductus and more devout members of the rest of the pack proselytize the beliefs and mythology of the Sabbat. The preparation for and participation in conflict never happens without the reasons behind it being made clear to all. Within the Sabbat, violence and indoctrination of belief go hand in hand.

Not everyone within the pack catches on as quickly as everyone else, and some lose their edge over time. Weakness in belief, ability or both is something the Sabbat actively polices itself against all of the time. Failure is not tolerated within the ranks of the Sabbat. The first slip-up or sign of weakness can possibly be the last the Cainite makes before others in the pack turn on her. Monomacy is most often practiced within a single pack, and you can be sure that those who fail find themselves challenged by others who think they can do better.

Every pack is a cell of Cainite guerrillas dedicated to the idea of freedom and armed with zeal or fanaticism. Just how closely packmates work together at times would terrify the minds of traditional Camarilla Kindred.

### STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

In Kindred society, age equals power. The elders who have seen centuries come and go and sleep longer than most Sabbat have been undead carry the strength that age brings with it. They have little more to do than plan, plot and satisfy their own agendas as they become older and stronger. Such age and power are the very foundation of true influence and control within the Camarilla.

Most Sabbat have better things to do with their time than sit around and get old. A Cainite will gladly relieve any elder of all that potent vitae and put it to good use given the chance.

Given the violent nature of the Sabbat and the frequency with which its members meet Final Death, most never reach an advanced age as is more common within the Camarilla. This explains why the pursuit of diablerie is a guiding motivation behind many assaults by the Sword of Caine. Why hide away in the shadows getting older and stronger when some crafty elder has already done that for you? All that potency is worthless when it's hoarded by underserving cowards. You'll use it for something meaningful.

Most elders have grown accustomed to cheating death and aren't really looking to donate their centuries of unlife to a mob of slaving Sabbat diablerists. With that age and command of advanced supernatural abilities of the undead the elders can put up one hell of a fight. A single neonate doesn't have much of a prayer of taking on one of these creatures and winning, no matter how just she believes her purpose to be. The pack evens the playing field against the age and power of the elders with sheer numbers. Sure, the elder will probably take out two or three Licks before she falls, but they can be replaced. You can't say the same for the elder.

The Sabbat's true strength lies in those numbers. Where Camarilla domains are held by single Kindred and perhaps their progeny, Sabbat domains are populated by packs of several vampires. Sabbat have no real need to entrust the protection of their havens and hunting grounds to fallible mortals or pathetic ghouls. The pack protects what's theirs themselves.

This practice of favoring numbers over individual strength or mortal manipulation expresses itself most obviously in the Sabbat tactic of mass Embrace. The Sword of Caine knows that a single vampire, even those just Embraced, is worth a handful of juicebags or even

ghouls in a fight. The advantage given to the Camarilla in age can be countered with waves of disposable and easily replaced undead bodies. Additionally, such mass Embrace fodder obviously hasn't been instructed in the subtleties of unlife, and, oh, how the Camarilla scrambles to shut down these walking Masquerade breaches once it catches word of them.

Not every night for a Sabbat and her pack is filled with burning Camarilla elders out of their mansions, however. She may be loading her shotgun and cursing the name of some bigshot in the Ivory Tower, but she's just as likely to use that weapon blowing a rival Sabbat in half. The exploitation and assaults on typical Cainites within the Sabbat come most often at the hands of other Sabbat members themselves. Unity exists at the pack level and is held in place through ritual. The idea of an all-encompassing brotherhood throughout the entire Sabbat is a fairytale. Those who aren't with you are against you, be they a Camarilla elder or a rival Sabbat pack.

In this environment one comes to rely on his pack for some semblance of protection against other packs. A lone vampire without a pack behind him can expect little sympathy from most other Sabbat he'll encounter. Just as the bulk of Kindred society considers close associations among the undead as obscene, the Sabbat looks with suspicion on those in their ranks without some contacts and allies within their sect.

Don't get the idea that each pack is a get-along gang or happy family of vees. It is far from it. Most of the infighting, bravado and violence that makes up the Sabbat plays itself out within each pack. Many vampires can go years without seeing other vampires even within their own sect, and this is only slightly different among the Sabbat. Outside of specific sectwide rituals, individual packs are about the only other vampires Sabbat may ever meet with any regularity. This makes them about the only connection to larger Sabbat society and how it works. A Cainite receives her crash course on how rough this new society is for her on the very first night of her new existence, and things don't slow down from then on.

Every Sabbat goes through the same trials as the next. The priest who leads you through your Creation Rites or the frenzied maniac who just shattered your jaw experienced the same humanity-shredding torment and abuse you're suffering. They had stronger vampires performing acts that are just as violent and horrific to them during their rebirth into unlife. Think of the pack as the abused children who grow up to continue the cycle of violence. To them, that abuse has a valid, ritualized purpose and everyone is expected to take his fare share of hard knocks.



The pack structure encourages and promotes this cycle of abuse and ritualized torment. It breeds the type of soldier necessary to fight the war the Sabbat exists to wage. To the pack the violent exploitation of its members is a vital and necessary means to ensure that the Sabbat remains as strong and dedicated as possible.

#### RITUAL AND BELIEF

The Sabbat spins on an axis of violence and ritual. The Beast that exists in every childe of Caine has dictated that the entire vampire race is one built around bloodlust and rage. What sets the Sabbat apart from the Camarilla in their attitude toward the Beast is how they rationalize their need for violence with ritual.

Every attack made against an enemy becomes a religious undertaking. Disagreements between Sabbat often become elaborate spectacles to play out with all the pomp of a theater show. Excessive shows of dominance over the mortal world are made into games to improve the Sabbat's combative skills. Even the hunting of traitors doesn't commence until the proper ritual has been observed by those to take part.

Vampires by nature are violent and destructive, but it is the ritualized practices of that violence that make the Sabbat a completely different machine than the Camarilla. The pack promotes this cornerstone of Sabbat society with constant exposure to the sect's

*auctoritas* and *ignoblis ritae*. Within each pack the Sabbat has access to a priest whose primary concern is her spiritual well-being (from Sabbat perspective, of course) and the assurance that the proper respect is paid to those rituals. Packs also participate in weekly esbats that serve as briefing sessions as well as a time that all packmates can share in unifying rituals, such as the Vaulderie.

The importance of ritual is so paramount throughout the entire sect that individual packs create unique practices even among themselves. These "low rituals" can be used to symbolize the importance of meeting other Sabbat packs or even add additional meaning to choosing a new communal haven.

The 13 *auctoritas ritae* that all Sabbat must practice truly establish a fraternal loyalty among the Sabbat. Each and every individual Sabbat and pack participates in these most holy of rituals. Many, such as the Binding and Games of Instinct for example, would be difficult to observe without belonging to a pack. As it is these rituals that make one Sabbat, existing outside of a pack makes it nearly impossible for one to remain truly Sabbat.

#### THE YOUNG HAVE ALWAYS REBELLED

Overall, the average age of the typical Sabbat Cainite is far younger than that of his Camarilla counterpart.



Mostly due to the sect's more cavalier approach to Embrace and the high destruction rate among its members, the ranks of the Sabbat are filled with vampires who have seen fewer nights than those within the Camarilla. A great deal is expected of Sabbat recruits, and many burn out quickly or are lost during acts of war. Luckily, plenty more bodies out there can fill the empty spots, and when all that matters is how many bodies you have in your shock-troop army, the Sabbat can afford not to be choosy about whom it recruits for the job.

Age plays an important role in maintaining the pack as well. The coterie, or the Camarilla answer to the pack, is a relatively new trend having only begun to become popular over the last century or so. The major similarity between the Camarilla coterie and the Sabbat pack is the age of the vampires drawn to them. Just as the elders saw happen at the time of the Anarch Revolt, it is the young among the Kindred who tend to form these working groups of vampires. Though the Camarilla lacks the Vaulderie and war mentality that keeps the Sabbat packs together, it is telling to see the young in the Ivory Tower acting in a manner their enemies have been doing for centuries.

The Camarilla is an organization based on and run by long-standing traditions. Most civilized Camarilla Kindred do not act in a manner similar to mortal gangs, and as the young age they become more solitary and suspicious of those who do. They look to their sires and elders for guidance in their new existence. Eventually the need for belonging to a coterie fades.

The same can't be said for the Sabbat, whose elders honor the packs (though they themselves may not actively belong to any). Sabbat tradition gives little reason for the young to give up on belonging to packs. It is quite the opposite, in fact.

The Camarilla coterie is, in the scope of vampire thinking, a fad. More than likely the sire of a coterie's member is unsupportive of this vulgar collection of vampires. Perhaps the childe learned of the coterie and joined after finding some appeal or benefit too compelling to pass up. If the goal is relatively short-term in nature, then the young vampire might decide that it is no longer worth it to remain in the coterie surrounded by competing Camarilla neonates, though some certainly find longer-term benefits in sticking together despite negative attitudes from their sires and elders up on high.

#### EMBRACE INTO A PACK

You begin your first nights growing accustomed to pack existence. The Camarilla holds sires responsible for creating worthwhile progeny and makes them ac-

countable for the actions of the childer they create. No such rule exists within the Sabbat. A sire doesn't have to do anything she doesn't feel like doing with the fledglings she creates. Where Camarilla sires are required to teach their young the customs of that sect and what the new Kindred needs to survive, Sabbat vampires aren't forced to do anything of the sort if they don't feel the need to. Most Sabbat sires do choose their progeny carefully and many offer them guidance for survival, but you can be assured it is nowhere near as patient as a Camarilla education.

An area where Sabbat vampires may have a slight advantage is a fringe benefit that stems directly from the pack structure itself. With more vampires around, the pack has more than a single potential tutor to learn from in its early nights. Educating a new vampire to become a worthwhile Sabbat is the unspoken responsibility of the entire pack. By going about business as usual, the new recruit learns the internal power structure of the pack, learns what he's become, manages to feed himself, and begins his education in Sabbat ideology. The pack becomes everything to the new recruit — the very center of his world and the most influential aspect of his unlife.

This communal existence from the fledgling's first night strengthens the "us against them" mentality of the Sabbat. Just as soon as the recruit learns that vampires exist, one is probably chaining her to the bumper of his car in anticipation of a little highway joyride. If she manages to survive her initial nights of abuse she'll come to know that it all has a purpose and that far worse things are out there than punishments doled out to you by those in your pack. In a sense, she becomes reliant on the entire pack for education and survival instead of a single sire. Depending on what type of pack she's been drafted into or the situation, she'll probably find out about those others things soon enough. Sure, she'll more than likely hate these Cainites who sleep off the day next to her, but they're far better than the unknown ones who just exsanguinated someone she loved and shot up her haven.

If they survive long enough to become part of another pack, pack fledglings rarely think to question it. Belonging to a pack is just what you do in the Sabbat, and it becomes an extension of who you are or what you've become.

#### ENLIGHTENMENT, ANYONE?

Those individuals recruited into the Sabbat come from the same mortal stock as those brought into the Camarilla. Both sects feed and Embrace from the same massed populations of mortals. So how can it be that

your typical Camarilla Kindred actually works to preserve his Humanity while those of the Sabbat revel in the monsters they've become?

For the Sabbat, it's all in the rituals and peer pressure of the pack.

From their first nights on, those in the Sabbat are forced to shed their ties to humanity. They're now undying, stronger, faster, aware of a broader world and serve an almost divine purpose. What they were when alive, in their opinion, was prey. They're the predators now, so where's the sense in continuing to moo and bleat with the rest of the herd?

The Embrace, Creation Rites, Games of Instinct, the Vaulderie and other rituals do their part to kill what remains of a fledgling's humanity and bind her to the Sabbat. Mortals and their way of existing are weakness. The Sabbat requires soldiers and soldiers require strength. Remember, though, as stated previously, when speaking of Sabbat vampires you're generally speaking of those rather young. It is very likely that those undead maniacs having a demolition derby with a hospital's ambulances to deny a resource to some elder were working regular nine-to-five jobs not too many nights beforehand. The process of losing your humanity is just that: a process that takes time. How do these newer recruits stop the enormous guilt caused by their actions from tearing themselves apart?

Many don't ... and that just adds to the relatively short unlife expectancy of the Sabbat. Burning out fast and brightly in a violent display is typical of those first nights. The success of the mass Embrace tactic relies heavily on that fact.

Those who possess more of a desire to survive are not entirely on their own. That overwhelming guilt is something that just about every Sabbat they'll encounter has gone through, and may still be going through. Those in their pack have suffered that inner turmoil and doubts about what they're doing. Remember that most Sabbat were not serial killers or mass murderers when they were alive. That's what many become, not how they begin.

Just as the practices of the Sword of Caine are designed to strip away that humanity, they also serve to fill the void left behind. You may have just suffered unthinkable agony through your Creation Rite, but now you're truly a Sabbat, with all the benefits that come with it. You question the logic behind using excessive torture to pull information out of a seemingly young woman nabbed from the Camarilla, but the Sermons of Caine explain the absolute evil she truly serves.

Humanity sheds like a snake's skin, but you are given plenty to rationalize the need for it to happen.

Sabbat vampires give themselves over to the beliefs of the sect. They grow stronger with a unified purpose. Everything you and the Sabbat around you do has a reason, and all the rituals you partake in justify that. You eventually see how humanity is weakness. With this eventual realization a stabilizing force is created to offset the guilt. Sure, you just gutted some old lady in record time while your packmates urged you on — but with that death and demonstration of your freedom the Sabbat is one step closer to winning. Or so the Sabbat tells itself.

The pack is also there to guide its members along this trail of indoctrination and growing fanaticism. Responsibility for this purpose falls primarily upon the pack's priest. Ensuring that the pack and its individual members adhere to the rituals, the priest becomes the instrument by which humanity is removed and replaced.

While the pack's members fight the sect's battles and struggle with their own inner turmoil, the priest serves to cast it all in the proper light. For the Sabbat's every act, the priests know the rituals to give it all a holy meaning. With this ordained judgment clearing them of wrongdoing, as well as urging them on, the presence of a priest steels the Sabbat against the guilt of their nightly atrocities.

Being young and new to undeath, the majority of Sabbat vampires still hold to a dwindling Humanity. The pack oversees and encourages this degradation of mortal morals, but to the priest this undertaking defines their purpose. Among the priests, waning Humanity is often replaced by a devotion to one of the Sabbat's Paths of Enlightenment. This practice is still rather uncommon throughout the rank and file Sabbat but it does happen, particularly with those who survive their brutal early nights among the sect and move on to greater things. Falling completely to the Beast is not what the Sabbat intends to happen for its members. The priest exists to ensure that loyalty to the Sword of Caine replaces lost Humanity and that Sabbat are not swallowed whole by the Beast within. They may urge promising Sabbat toward a particular Path of Enlightenment or, depending on the Path they themselves follow, may even mentor the individual on their own. Again, faith in the Sabbat and its purpose steps in to provide a new clarity through the haze of lost mortal ethics. Humanity spins away through Sabbat practice while the cycle of belief, symbolism, ideology and acceptance among peers rebuilds the vampire into something new. That something is the guerrilla holy warrior of the Sabbat who terrifies the whole of Cainite society.

## THE PACK IN THE SABBAT

Without the packs, you don't have a Sabbat. It's a mistake to think of the entire Sword of Caine as a unified brotherhood all dedicated to one cause and one goal. In truth, the Sabbat is a small sect made up of extremists who organize themselves into even smaller groups that spend most of their time competing against one another. Although the Sabbat has some constants, such as violence, ritual and belief in freedom, the ways in which these different groups view and use them normally bring them into conflict. At a glance it would seem as though such a hypocritical society would tear itself apart at the seams, and with three Civil Wars since its inception, the Sabbat almost has. In order to understand how this sect of religious warriors can not only remain a cohesive organization but continue to grow, you have to realize the pack's importance in maintaining the structure of the Sabbat.

### BALANCE OF POWER

The law of the land within the Sabbat is most certainly "might makes right." To the victors go the spoils, and weakness is never rewarded. For the Sword of Caine, those with ambition and strength enough to take what they want deserve it, as long as they can hold onto what they've won. If someone stronger comes along and takes it from you then you probably didn't deserve it anyway.

The pack embodies this belief and forces this reality wherever the Sabbat can be found in the night. Domain in Sabbat cities is not petitioned from princes but taken by the pack with strength enough to hold it. A pack lays claim to an area and defends that territory against anyone who happens to disagree. This, of course, almost always brings them into direct conflict with other Sabbat packs looking to expand their influence and feeding grounds.

What develops is the nightly give-and-take between packs that plays out as unlife within the sect. Rival packs clash violently over prime feeding grounds, underworld trade, areas of influence, politics and anything else they can come up with as an excuse to fight. Often these common feuds arrive at a stalemate and end with an uneasy truce between packs. They almost never blow up into anything larger than the gang violence we see on the news each night. Other times, weaker packs are completely dislodged from an area or robbed of all their worthwhile holdings by a more powerful neighbor. In either situation, the balance within the Sabbat city is maintained and the strong take what they need from those less able, while the weak are removed.

On occasion these struggles within a city flare up to a point where they endanger the Sabbat's presence. In such situations the local diocese steps in via bishops, archbishops or concerned Sword of Caine factions to remind the packs of their loyalties. This often comes as arbitration leading to a truce between the packs. Depending on the situation, though, it may also come as a visit from a paladin who puts an end to the fighting by removing the problem causers. The Sabbat leadership understands the purpose behind such pack conflicts and permits it to a degree — as long as it doesn't endanger the city as a whole, that is.

### ABOVE THE RANK AND FILE

The titled leaders of the Sabbat, the bishops and archbishops, have a more difficult task in front of them to accomplish things than their counterparts in the Camarilla. With such an emphasis placed on personal freedom and the oppressive nature of elders, any given Sabbat is probably rather sensitive to those with titles making demands of him. A bishop who gives an order to a pack is just as likely to be ignored out of spite as he is to be obeyed.

How is it that anything organized ever gets done? How do those title-holding elders avoid being sucked dry by the hordes of diablerie-driven neonates around them?

Those title-holding elders know that the packs are the true strength within the cities and understand how the Sabbat works. No archbishop or bishop maintains his office without the support of the packs. Most once held the title of ductus or priest themselves and learned how to lead by example or coercion. With the experience of years to hone these necessary skills of manipulation, they're able to play the packs and the individuals that make them up like master conductors of a violent orchestra.

The packs are those Cainites who charge into the war parties, defend the city against enemy spies and incursions, police themselves (and, therefore, the sect) for heretics, weed out the weak among them, bring new and creative ideas to the sect and ultimately uphold the principles of the entire Sabbat. Individuals may make the plans, but the packs put them into action. The Sabbat leadership uses its charisma and reputation to win support for its ideas from the packs. In doing so, a bishop not only demonstrates her ability to be an effective leader but also ensures that she maintains her office. If the pack stops supporting the plans of the regional sect or loses faith in a bishop's ability, you can be certain that bishop will be facing challengers who feel they could do the job better before long.

Bishops also have to think of more than just staying in favor with the packs in their cities to remain in office. They also have to remain cautious of any other bishops the city may have. As the packs compete against one another on a nightly basis, bishops, too, often see others as rivals for power. The power plays between these Cainites normally draw the packs into their schemes one way or another. Packs are often loyal to the politics or plans of the bishop of their domain but opposed to any other. As the bishops of a city may each have worked to maintain the support of the packs in their dioceses, each city is often divided against itself. Sabbat cities are often powderkegs with each vampire playing the part of a lit match. In this way a balance of control and freedom is maintained. No one individual holds all the power, though each may wield a great deal of influence. That influence is dependent on the support of the others, however.

Very few elders actively take part in pack functions. Most elders of the Sabbat belong to the sect's leadership or have proven themselves so often that they take on almost honorary titles or offices. They continue to observe Sabbat rituals with the packs and luminaries of esteem (such as cardinals and prisci), though usually at larger sect functions. Many, such as bishops or archbishops once they are appointed, remove themselves from individual packs so that they may serve the sect as a whole. One would find it difficult to divide his loyalties between the long-term needs of the Sabbat and the reactionary desires of a single pack. By removing themselves from the unstable and violent pack, leaders also take themselves away as an easy target of those ambitious Sabbat looking for elder blood.

### THE GREAT JYHAD

The pack is the trained cell of guerrilla warriors that takes the fight to the enemy. The most powerful part the pack plays within the Sabbat as a whole is continuing its existence through the Great Jyhad. Powerful or respected individuals may put together the plans, but the packs actually make things happen.

City Crusades against enemy strongholds are not nightly occurrences for the Sabbat. Most often those necessary battle skills and tactics are honed in altercations with the packs' most common enemies, other Sabbat packs. Certain restraints in these encounters aren't seen by external enemies, but these conflicts are far more common. Remember that it isn't every night that vampires meet members of their own sect, let alone another. The Sabbat needs to find a release for all that aggression somewhere.

These internal fights serve more purposes than just letting off steam. Tactics, communication, plan-

ning and other essential skills are better refined with actual implementation. You certainly learn how well you'll do in a firefight after you've actually been in one. Those who can't handle the stresses and demands of Sabbat existence are exposed early on and dealt with accordingly or meet their own grisly ends. What's left behind in all packs are only the most battle-hardened, tested and proven soldiers who have already shown they're willing to fight.

### STRUCTURE OF THE PACK

Given the solitary nature of most Cainites and the emphasis on individual freedom within the Sabbat, it would seem improbable for packs to be formed at all. The necessities of conflict and the bonds of ritual keep packs together, but how is it they form in the first place? Once formed, who calls the shots and makes the plans?

As with any collection of soldiers dedicated to a fight, a great deal of organization exists within the Sabbat. Woven among the layers of violence, religious conviction, power playing, politics, manipulation and ego is a rigid structure that all Sabbat understand. Not all agree with it, but they're forced to acknowledge its existence.

From the top on down to the rank and file grunt in the street, every Sabbat realizes her place in the sect. Title-holding members of the Sword of Caine have their exploits confirmed with office and ritual. A bishop didn't earn that position sitting around for years on end doing nothing. Neither did a ductus or priest. The Sabbat doesn't reward age for the sake of being old. Unlike any other sect of vampires, the Sabbat is led by those who prove they're capable leaders in one way or another. One's ability is what carries him upward through the ranks of the Sabbat, and the stories of his accomplishments make him known among the packs.

Through the pack structure of the Sword of Caine, titles carry authority. Being named a templar may not win you instant respect with every Sabbat you encounter, but they can all be certain you didn't come by it for being weak. The organization within the Sabbat is clear to all members. Even on the pack level the titles carry meaning and responsibility beyond just honorary.

### FORMATION OF PACKS

Given the nature of the Sabbat and the influence of the Great Jyhad felt everywhere in the sect, each pack serves a purpose for this struggle. In the modern nights more and more packs have become specialized in one form of warfare or another. Individual packs are devoted entirely to single purposes, such as infiltration

of enemy cities, computer hacking, Masquerade breaking, urban combat, assassinations, cultivating mortal connections, sowing dissent among young Kindred and countless other martial functions.

Many of these packs are tailor-made by the Sabbat leadership in a city to fulfill specific tasks. New members are usually hand-picked from the local Sabbat population, often from other packs, and regrouped together. The ductus of a diocese-created pack is most often appointed by the leader putting the group together. A priest is chosen from among the members and the binding ritual of the Vaulderie is shared. A new pack has been born.

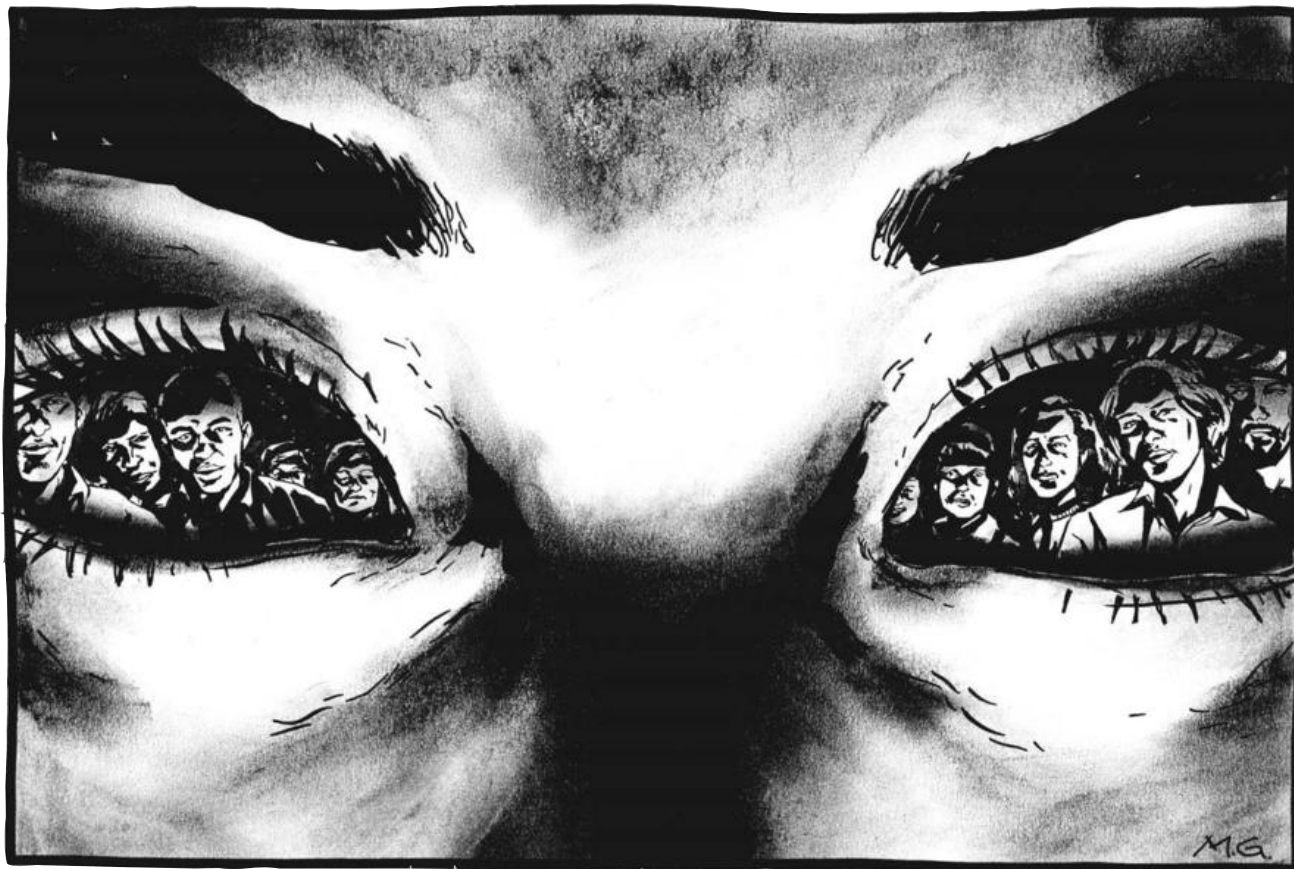
The Sabbat selected for these job-specific packs are chosen based on reputation and past successes. Sabbat leadership looks to put the strengths of the sect to best use. Leaders also look to win themselves support among the packs. You can bet that a Sabbat selected for a specific pack by a bishop not only has proven to be good for the task but probably is a supporter of that bishop. In creating these new packs the leader in question not only adds to the fighting strength of the Sabbat, she also builds up additional support for herself.

Many packs find themselves established by the leadership of the sect. Proven Sabbat who have a

reputation for getting a certain job done may be pooled together to draw on their combined skills by a bishop or archbishop. Of course, not every pack in the sect was formed under the direction of some elder. That would certainly strike one as a bit hypocritical considering the Sabbat's loathing of elder oppression, even among their own kind. In truth, the emergence of these luminary-subsidized, specialized packs are something of a relatively new trend for the sect. Most Sabbat were more resistant to the use of authority by their elders in the past, but as the Final Nights threaten the Sword of Caine, the sect's leaderships must rise to the challenge.

Just as many packs come together around an inspiring Sabbat who draws others to her. She might be an extremely capable warrior or charismatic speaker who wins support through simple cult of personality. Generally these packs are often smaller and have a shelf life dependent on the survival of that central leader. As soon as that individual disappears or dies, the pack tends to disperse.

Some packs draw members to them by name and reputation alone. Packs often survive long after the key figures within them have been destroyed. The exploits of those Sabbat continue on in the pack itself,





adding to that pack's history and reputation. A pack that has survived the centuries intact or has pulled off stunning victories in the Jyhad or even is known to have members promoted into leadership roles may find Sabbat courting them for membership. Belonging to a well known or feared pack is often an easier way to achieve status among other Sabbat than through personal accomplishment. A pack draws on the victories and reputations of all its members, not just one. When meeting others, they may not know who you are, but they're far more likely to have heard of the pack you share blood with.

## TITLES AND DUTIES

With a structure as reliant on strength and personal accomplishment as the Sabbat's, it makes sense that a good number of positions and titles exist. Many of these ranks reflect heavily on the spiritual nature of the sect's crusade. Although the Sword of Caine is made up of colorful individuals, the titles some carry can be wide and varied. We have no way to list and explain every title that every member of the sect may have. Just as each pack creates its own *ignoblis ritae*, many also form titles that matter only to their pack specifically. With that said, though, every pack in the entire sect always has two ranks, and often three.

### DUCTUS

The ductus of any pack stands as the most visible leader of the group. In the pack itself, the ductus is responsible for coordinating everything that the pack undertakes. She may not always be the oldest member of the pack, or the physically strongest, or fastest, or wisest, but without a doubt she is the best at something (or several somethings).

Certainly the rank of ductus is the most dangerous to hold in the pack and the most unstable to be had in the entire Sabbat. More often than any other title, the position of ductus is the most sought after by other Sabbat. It's also the title that changes hands on more nights than any other.

A typical night for a ductus is full of responsibility. It falls on the ductus to maintain sway over the pack's domain, plan the weekly esbat with the priest, defend against external threats to her position and holdings, fight off internal challenges to her leadership, keep the individual members of the pack in line and take part in Sabbat actions to show the higher-up authority figures her pack hasn't gone soft. On top of all that, put the personal plots and agendas and schemes of the individual ductus in the mix and you have yourself one very full schedule. With all

the work involved you'd wonder why anyone would bother to take the spot in the first place.

The answer to that is simple enough: power and prestige. It is no secret that the leadership positions of the Sabbat are filled by accomplished ducti and priests. By making herself a visible target and head of the pack, the ductus stands to receive all the benefits the position brings with it. Any of the credit a pack earns for pulling off a successful mission goes mostly to the ductus who leads it. The reputation a pack wins among the other Sabbat is also disproportionately awarded to the ductus at the time.

Without the experience of being a successful ductus it's unlikely that a Sabbat will move up through the higher ranks of the sect. It does happen, as with priests and members of other positions, but far and away, it is those who first rise to the position of ductus who then move on to greater things.

### PRIEST

The Sabbat could not continue without its holy devotion. For the individual pack the responsibility of maintaining this fanatical loyalty to purpose is the dominion of the priest. Although considered by many to be a secondary leadership role, the importance of the priest is underestimated only by those who fail to understand the strength with which the Beast tears at the souls of individual Sabbat.

Whereas the desire to be ductus can be influenced greatly by ego and a want of control, those who seek to be priests tend to far more devout or spiritually insightful. Priests are charged with the spiritual well-being of those within the pack. The hand that peels away the pack member's Humanity and rebuilds him with dedication to the Sabbat is often that of the priest. More so than the ductus, the priest cements the loyalty of the packmates to one another through adherence to ritual, such as the Vaulderie.

The unique *ignoblis ritae* are most often created by the priest and, in a sense, it is she who forms the traditions that add a sense of self to a pack. Priests' nights are spent preparing rituals for the esbats, planning for any upcoming *auctoritas ritae*, taking time to personally assist a packmate who requires her attention, ensuring those of the pack rise above the temptations of their Beasts and counseling the ductus on matters of pack importance. Priests must be vigilant for the taint of infernalism as well, as it suborns the entire purpose of the Sabbat.

A good portion of a priest's time is spent in concern about others. While a ductus may consider the pack's strength in members, the priest must consider the pack's soul. Those who dedicate themselves to the

position of priest do so mostly out of true conviction in the Sabbat's purpose.

#### ABBOT

The title of abbot isn't always handed out. Being abbot singles the Sabbat out as the one who is stuck with the scut work of the pack: cleaning up messes and maintenance of the pack's communal haven. The abbot is stuck doing it because no one else wants to. That isn't a spot most Sabbat set out to claim.

No one usually has to point out who the weakest link in the pack happens to be. He's normally newest to the Embrace or just not dealing with unlife in the Sabbat especially well. His show of weakness tends to attract the predatory instincts of the pack to him. The abbot is often the most exploited, beaten and dismissed member of any pack. Occasionally a ghoul fills the position — that's how demeaning it is in the eyes of the sect.

In practice, being abbot makes that Sabbat the lowest face on the pack's totem pole. He does the grunt work. He does it because he has to. He most often has the distinction of being the likely target of abuse at the hands of his packmates. A plan doesn't go off right or tempers flare up and steam needs to be released — the abbot tends to catch a good deal of that.

We hope, through this examination of the structure and philosophy behind the creation and continued perceived value of the pack within the Sabbat, that you can appreciate what should be considered when forming a pack of your own or creating a Sabbat vampire who is going to have a place in a pack setting. All of these influences and ideals will be, or will have been imparted to, a Sabbat character soon after her Embrace. Take all of this into account and think about all the different ways it will shape and color the character's actions, beliefs and interactions within the Sabbat pack

#### A SPECIAL NOTE FOR STORYTELLERS

While a Sabbat pack can make a fantastic antagonist for your Camarilla chronicle, try to flesh its members out a little above and beyond the hack-and-slash bloodthirsty baby-killing stereotypes that come to mind so readily. A Sabbat pack is a cunning and provocative antagonist to let loose upon your players. Take advantage of the passion and religious zeal these vampires would have for their cause and let that shape the way you describe and portray their actions and attitudes.

## CAMARILLA COTERIES

A Camarilla vampire is no less a solitary creature than her Sabbat counterpart. As her Humanity fades and she grows old, the want and need to socialize and mingle becomes remote and forgotten. Arrogantly clinging to the notion that sharing strengths and resources to survive is an act for the weak or the unrefined; the majority of Camarilla vampires find little reason to defy their independent natures and adopt a herd mentality.

Times change, though, and the past century has seen a significant increase in the number of coterie within the Camarilla. Younger fledglings and neonates band together in coterie not only to make sure they survive on their own, but also to give themselves a better chance of thriving against the tyranny of their jealous and paranoid elders. Tucked away in their dusty mansions or ostentatious estates, powerful elders consider the desire to form and be a part of a coterie unnatural and reserved for the lowly Sabbat. They maintain that the Kindred are solitary predators; the need to hunt in packs reduces the vampire to a scavenger or lesser animal. The vampire, as blessed as she is with the supernatural powers of her blood, should not need to rely on the support of others, nor should she want to do so.

#### WHY, THEN?

The reasons a vampire would join a coterie are as varied as the types of coterie themselves. Survival, defense, war, education, opportunity — these are but a few of the reasons a Camarilla vampire might join up with others of her kind. Make no mistake that no matter how good the reason is for banding together with another group of vampires, it will always be a tense and unnatural arrangement.

#### WHAT IS A COTERIE?

Starting with the most basic definition of a coterie, a player should examine the different mindsets behind the groups of Kindred who have banded together in this artificial manner. Simply put, a coterie is a group of vampires who work together to support a common goal. Coterie can be both clan-specific and mixed-clan, each with its own motivations and reasons for working together.

A more detailed definition of a coterie develops if you see them through specific sets of eyes. Ask an elder vampire what a coterie is and she might openly sneer that it's a worthless group of weak Kindred who cling to one another in reluctance or inability to survive on their own. If you were to look into that same elder's mind when she's alone, you'll find that her definition

of a coterie also contains a healthy amount of fear and concern over these younger, more modern bands of vampires. An elder may not know how to use a cell phone or operate a fax machine (or even know what that magic box that spits forth printed words is called), but she is certainly not going to give these younger gatherings of vampires respect just because they do. Outwardly she may pass them off as inferior or harmless, but don't be fooled. Behind the scenes she'll be doing what it takes to eliminate these young threats to her security as quickly as she can.

Ask an ancilla to define a coterie and he'll judge it less harshly than the elder, yet he'll be reluctant to join one himself. Forever caught in the middle, the ancillae are loath to agitate the elders whose ranks they have yet to join, while being more appreciative of the usefulness of these coterie. They might employ or join forces with a coterie to satisfy some immediate, temporary goal, but not as full-fledged member unless they're willing to risk the possibility of bearing the brunt of an elder's wrath or derision. If an elder feels a particular coterie is a threat to his safety, and the coterie is composed of neonates and an ancilla, it is obvious which vampire is going to be his first target.

If you ask a member of a coterie for a definition, she's likely to describe the specific coterie to which she belongs. Naturally, the view from inside the collective of vampires is much more detailed than from an outsider's perspective. The simple definition of "we're a group of vampires who work together" is the obvious one. It is the focus of the coterie and the purpose that the vampire will choose to define. This purpose is what makes the hassle and the tension and the frustration worth it all for the vampires within the coterie. The range of particular focuses is unlimited, spanning from the simple "We watch each other's backs and help each other survive" to "we have a lock on the black market import/export businesses at the piers," to "we share the same philosophical and interests and seek to understand the same mysteries" and all points in between.

### VAMPIRES AS LONERS

To understand why the coterie is such an unnatural arrangement for vampires, you need to truly understand the concept of the vampire as loner, which is a lot harder than it sounds. As well adjusted and normal members of society (those of you who don't need the disclaimers at the front of these books), you'll never truly be able to relate to the vampire mindset — something you should be very grateful for. As human beings, nearly every aspect of our lives is touched by our humanity; to play

a creature in the process of losing touch with something that we take for granted presents a challenge.

We're going to have a natural inclination to consider a coterie as a "gang" of vampires who "hang out." After all, we get together with our friends and shoot the breeze out of a desire for friendship and companionship and sociability. When playing **Vampire**, you put that all aside. Only the most newly Embraced vampires are going to have those urges, and most likely if they do it's going to be a façade or a lingering memory as they struggle to come to terms with what they have become. While you and I generally desire some level of friendship or companionship with others, the vampire loses those needs as he ages.

A vampire's relationship with his coterie members rarely settles into a comfortable predictability. It never grows genuinely, nor do the relationships between coterie members replace anything the vampire experienced in his mortal life. Even if a vampire seeks to cling to a memory of the comfort of his mortal relationships, the predatory and solitary nature of the Kindred will always rear its head one way or another. As a player you must always be aware of this natural conflict between working with a group of vampires despite your natural urges for a solitary existence. This constant conflict presents a ripe opportunity for character development and intercharacter relationships. The artificiality of the arrangement will always be obvious to you. Let that color your actions, thoughts and impressions, and understand how that adds a permanent layer of tension between you and your coterie members.

### PURPOSE OF THE COTERIE

For the neonate the answer is quite simple: The purpose of a coterie is to have a bit of support while she learns the tools and the skills to survive on her own and make something of herself. Think about urban gangs. A young, no-name kid is going to be creamed if he starts hanging out on the corner, flashing signs and getting his gangsta lean on [[?]] without any kind of a posse. He doesn't have the skills, the clout or the experience to back up the attitude he's going to try to cop or the lifestyle he's going to try to emulate.

These young vampires need to rely on each other's skills, talents and know-how if they want to do more than simply survive. What they can gain in exchange for putting up with one another makes it worthwhile for the time being. Like a school of fish, Kindred find safety in numbers, as well as the bonus of the collective experiences that can help the vampires gain the clout and accomplishments they'll need to survive on their own.



If a coterie has been created with a particular task in mind, then its reason for existence might well be spelled out for its members. Perhaps a charismatic Toreador who doesn't want to dirty her hands has gathered a group of vampires together to embarrass a long-time rival as part of her own Jyhad. A band of Ventrue might plan on cultivating influence among of a network of area banks and finds it advantageous to join forces to ensure a greater chance of success.

What else arises from this other than shared resources? Do you admit that you like the company? Someone to talk to? Does being in a coterie help you retain your Humanity, or does it just smack you in the face as you realize how empty and alien the desire to be around other people has become?

### COTERIES VERSUS PACKS

One of the major differences between the coterie of the Camarilla and the packs of the Sabbat is that the Sabbat values and bases its entire society around the pack structure, whereas many elder Camarilla would do everything in their power to disrupt the increasingly influential and successful coterie. For the Sabbat, the pack represents an efficient organizational tool that al-

lows it the greatest means of working to achieve its goals and defend itself against the attacks of the Camarilla. Does this speak of the elders' arrogance and betray how out of touch they are with modern nights?

Another major difference is the lack of any ritual blood bond like the Vaulderie to ease the rough edges that arise from banding together in this unnatural way. In part, this is due to the difference in the pace of the two sects. On average, fledgling Camarilla Kindred have been Embraced after careful consideration and preparation. At the very least they'll usually have a nominal tutoring by their sires or some other mentors and thus become acclimated to their new unlives and vampire society a bit more gently.

The Sabbat, on the other hand, is often more immediate in its needs to Embrace, which leaves little time or desire for "nurturing." The strongest, most able Sabbat vampires survive once they've proven themselves, but perhaps without the same allegiance to sire or even clan. The Vaulderie cuts corners by shoe-horning a pack into a common empathy. The pack can then mobilize faster and work together more efficiently. For some, the freedom one loses when bonded to other vampires in this fashion is a worthwhile sacrifice, though certainly

you have no guarantee everyone is going to get along. In fact, it's not so much going to make everyone get along — it will simply force the Cainites to look out for each other.

### THE NECESSITY OF COTERIES FOR A GOOD STORY

On a practical note, it's convenient for a group of players to band together to face a common enemy by way of a coterie. Whether the storyline involves the defense of territory, a usurpation of power or the quest for a supernatural artifact, players are afforded more flexibility by being a part of a coterie, especially if a variety of clans comprise it.

If you're going to be interacting with a group of vampires on a regular basis for your chronicle, the coterie is a natural device and means to do this. Your interactions will be more detailed and more enjoyable than if you all played elders moving your pawns from afar. You can experience things as a group and enjoy a more collective experience.

A mixed-clan coterie is one way to involve a player of an independent clan into your game in a bigger role. Make sure the character has a compelling reason for associating with the Camarilla coterie. Discover how this affects him in terms of how he relates to his fellow coterie members. Does he see himself as superior? Does he actively participate, or stick to the sidelines and secretly use the coterie to pursue his own agenda, unknown to his fellows in the coterie?

On another level, the tension and discomfort that your vampire feels as a result of his unnatural association with other predators will significantly add to the deeper mood and tone of the game. By paying attention to it and actively featuring it in your character's attitudes and expressions, you are going to better portray what it is to be a vampire. You will be more than an undead version of yourself with cool powers. Truly getting into the vampire mindset is exactly what you should be after. You're playing a creature that's not mortal, and here's a fantastic opportunity for you to be reminded of that constantly as you work to continually justify going against your nature for the good of whatever goal keeps your coterie together.

### CREATING A COTERIE

Just as your character concept is a vital part of the character creation process, defining your coterie's focus and purpose is essential for deciding why you've gone against a vampire's reclusive nature.

This will most likely be decided by the Storyteller either at the start of the chronicle or sometime within it. Although the Storyteller will be the one guiding

the circumstances that have brought you together, this doesn't excuse you from coming to understand why your character would be drawn into it.

Yes, you as a player know that if you want to participate in the storyline you'll need to join up with this band of vampires, but why is your character doing it, and how willing of a participant is she? Do not rob yourself of the opportunity for great experiences and opportunities for good intracoterie relationships by jumping in with a bright smile and a gung-ho attitude. The character will never be entirely comfortable in her coterie, and for the most part the initial discomfort is going to be doubly strong. This is going to clash with her lingering mortal instincts, so some kind of payoff had better be coming. Know that going in.

### JOINING A COTERIE

Just how does a vampire join a coterie? This isn't the kind of thing you post an ad for in the local paper. The most obvious and easy road to take would be if a vampire's sire is already in a coterie. The vampire Embraced into this ready-made (albeit dysfunctional) family has the supplemental support of his sire's tutelage as well as whatever strengths the coterie members bring to the group. Of course, this might also bring the disadvantage of the sire's favoritism (or resentment) — an annoyance that may grate on some of the nerves of the other coterie members.

What if the sire isn't in a coterie? If the young neonate yearns to stretch her wings and strike out on her own, she might ask her sire for guidance. This will only work, of course, if the sire doesn't immediately squash her attempts to join a coterie as soon as he hears of the character's desires. If a neonate has grown tired of the monistic existence of undeath and actively wants a part of a coterie, her sire may object quite heavily to the notion, with deadly results. In this case the neonate will either have to think of a creative way to bend her sire's will, or take her leave if she feels the cause and implied support of the coterie is worth risking the wrath of her sire.

If these aren't an option, then what do you do? One thing that can't be featured enough (and one thing that players tend to forget, given that they're all portraying them) is the rarity of vampires in the world. Despite what you experience in your story, the world still belongs to the kine. How do the Damned find each other?

Camarilla vampires have it a little easier. If you're moving to a new town, you can generally find the name of the prince, attend some event in the domain, present yourself and commence networking. As you get to



know the local population, you'll soon find those with the same ideals and challenges you face.

Perhaps you're placed into a coterie with a specific purpose. In times of war or in matters of diplomacy or espionage, the prince may select a few vampires to serve a particular purpose. Are these coterie seen with any more value than one composed of fledglings simply trying to eke out an unlife? Possibly. Explore how that makes your characters feel. Do they feel safe from the wrath of the elders because they have formal sanction? Do they feel like an elite team of Camarilla luminaries? Do they look upon a ragtag bunch of neonates with any more understanding, or has their esteem made them contemptuous?

What if you're an ancilla who's found a need or a desire to join a coterie? How do you approach the group and ingratiate yourself without looking weak? If you fail, do you place yourself in danger of being ratted out to the elders? "Look at Mr. Treacherous ... he asked us to help him get to you so he could strike you down and claim your domain." Even if that's not the case, will it be perceived as such?

## BEING IN A COTERIE

Either by Embrace or by your own efforts, you've found a group of vampires who have banded together and formed a coterie. Lucky you. The experience of being in a coterie is, logically, dependent upon the personalities of the vampires who make up the group. No steadfast rules and regulations exist for being in, or part of, a coterie. When designing a coterie of your own, consider some of the following situations that may arise.

How do you and your coterie-mates police yourselves? Are conflicts and disputes settled by discussion between the aggrieved, brute force, diplomatic votes or taking them to a third party? Given the preternatural rage that can be so quick to rise in a vampire, and the already tense situation within the coterie, it is highly likely that conflicts will arise over issues great and small.

Does your coterie have any sort of hierarchy? Will the most skilled or the oldest vampire be put in charge? Is everyone fair and equal? Has any kind of structure or regularity in practice evolved? How do you enforce any of this? What happens if the de facto leader endangers the coterie or proves to be inefficient?



If the purpose of your coterie is to help each other survive and protect your hunting grounds, what do you do when someone meets another Kindred he'd like to bring into your coterie? If one member turns up with a new Kindred and suggests that she join, how does the rest of the group handle that? How does the new recruit adjust to the situation? How does the existing coterie adjust to the new member?

How does your coterie feel about diablerie? Does everyone share the same opinion? What if one member of your coterie believes that the only way a Lick can ever amount to anything is if he diablerizes his way up the ladder? If he's not killed as a liability for his beliefs, this can be a powerful mini-plot as he tries to convince the other vampires to join him in his crusade.

How well do you trust the other vampires in your coterie? Do you let them know where you sleep? Do you have a communal haven, or do you keep individual ones? Or, say feeding is tough. You have a prime hunting ground and prey is tricky. Do you all work as a team, knowing that you may not have enough blood to go around, or do you hoard your supply to yourself?

How do you treat Disciplines? Do you share them to improve the strength of the coterie, or do you think that if everyone else can do what you can, it might render you obsolete? Do you consider some of your Disciplines personal or clan secrets? How do you react when someone else in the coterie learns them without your instruction?

#### ADVANTAGES OF MEMBERSHIP IN A COTERIE

For an unskilled neonate the advantage of coterie membership is a bit of stability and strength that might help him secure more of a position above and beyond basic survival. It's a big bad world out there, but he'll have someone to watch his back — some of the time, anyway.

A vampire has to spend a considerable amount of time simply surviving. Finding prey, feeding, securing a haven, avoiding the light of day ... the list of basic needs is endless. Imagine if you were homeless and had no resources of any kind. Think of the amount of time you'd have to spend finding food and shelter and keeping yourself safe from harm. Welcome to the world of the Kindred. The actual time you have to spend on pursuing other interests, learning Disciplines, and gaining power and wealth is limited to a few hours each night, if even that. Despite the fact that you conceivably have eternity to spend doing whatever you'd like, it doesn't alleviate the need to pay the rent. Being a member of a coterie allows you to save time and resources, potentially benefiting everyone involved.

Jack maintains the herd, Jill secures the haven, Bob handles the money, etc.

#### DISADVANTAGES OF THE COTERIE

The coterie offers the illusion of stability because the members are like-minded group of individuals who gather together for whatever common purpose (base survival, combining assets, preparing for a Sabbat incursion, etc) but at the same time it engenders fragmented potential conflicts and problems.

Issues of trust are going to plague you at every turn. Sure, you'll be a bit more comfortable than if you struggled through things all on your own. You'll also have a more regular, if less intense, set of concerns. It's a different kind of unease you'll be feeling. At least you'll know your potential enemy.

Remember that you're not relying on people to support you and assist you — you're relying on the Damned. Keep in mind that as unpredictable and fluid as mortal personalities are, vampires are unpredictable and evolve on a tremendously different scale. No one is going to be just like you, nor are they going to experience or relate to things as you will. Each vampire will be holding onto (or losing) her Humanity at different rates, giving everyone a different foundation in what they see and what they do and what they experience.

If most of the group stays fairly conscientious while one devolves, that presents a liability and a problem. Matters of perception are likely to cause conflict in this arena. If your vampire thinks that the resident Nosferatu has grown dangerously depraved to the point of endangering the stability of the coterie, how do you convince everyone else of that? Does it backfire when the majority thinks she's fine and that you're the one with the problem?

#### COTERIE VISIBILITY

Knowing that the elders despise you or see you as a threat might prompt you to keep a low profile. Then again, times are changing. Perhaps your coterie is proud to flaunt that it has overcome its members' natures to band together into an increasingly powerful force. Sure, individual members may not have the wealth and the estate high up in the hills, but they can use a cell phone and a computer. They know how local mortal politics work, how world politics have changed and evolved, and what concerts are going to feature an audience that will make for an easy hunting ground.

It's always worth reminding players that it's not every night you're going to be in the eyes of the other Kindred in your area. You are rare and few and far between. Consider how visible you decide to be at the functions that draw you together or how subtle and invisible you wish to remain.

## COTERIE FUN

Although being in a coterie will never take the place of the weekly poker nights and bowling leagues of a vampire's erstwhile mortal life, certainly times will come up when members of a coterie devote their talents and attentions to things beyond hunting and defending their turf. While perhaps not as destructive and vicious as Sabbath Games of Instinct, Camarilla vampires can come up with their own grim entertainment for their mutual amusement. One could assume that a coterie of Toreador might assemble a recital for their own amusement or the amusement of the sect. A mixed-pack coterie might challenge each other to disturbing games of truth or dare. These pastimes can be effective means to let off a little steam and alleviate some of the tension formed by the need to work together.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR PLAYING

Unlike you, vampires don't necessarily hang out. They don't have "friends" in the sense of the word that you do. They're less likely to tolerate differences among themselves. They're not human. Don't impose upon them your own human desire to have friends and socialize for the hell of it.

Find your purpose. Really, really think about the pros and cons of joining a coterie and ask yourself, "Is it worth it?" Although you're going to be giving yourself a better shot at surviving, you're also putting yourself at considerable risk of bearing the brunt of someone's temper. You're making yourself an enemy of the elders and exposing yourself to young vampires with whom you're ultimately competing for sustenance and other resources — not something to take lightly.

Understand the psychology and the attitudes of the other vampires in your coterie. Pick up on the specific moods, impressions and attitudes that come from seeing the same vampire night after night after night. A coterie is a game within a game, and it offers enormous opportunity for character development.

Remember that your survival will always come first. Just because someone is your coterie-mate doesn't guarantee that you'll always be there to lend a hand or help her out. Likewise, don't ever fully depend on a member of your coterie to bail you out when you're in a tight spot. If the sun were about to rise and you had a chance to run to guaranteed safety, or risk your neck trying to untangle your coterie-mate from the grille of a mangled 1965 Buick, what would you do? Exactly, and you know the other members of your group would be just as quick to run for cover, so don't get misty over some self-destructive notions of loyalty. That loner mentality that you've been pushing down and trying to ignore all this time will make its presence known in full force when it comes to your survival. Exceptions exist, and maybe you're one of them, but we all know that vampires are ultimately selfish creatures.

## NOTES FOR STORYTELLERS

Don't make the mistake of giving up the opportunities to explore the conflicting personalities, backgrounds and behaviors of your coterie. This can be a ripe opportunity for you to throw a monkey wrench in the system and remind your players to deal with what it means to be a vampire. Yes, everyone gathered around the table are friends and get along (at least one would hope), but remind your players that the same comfort is not afforded to your coterie. Don't turn it into a screaming bitch-fest each game, but do keep in mind the beauty of exploring the darkness within.

Also, appreciate the fact that times will occur when the coterie does run smoothly and efficiently. See that the players reflect on that. Does it change the character's attitudes for one another? Do elders actually respect a coterie that does something heroic for the sake of the Camarilla? Does any of this last?

Consider the creation of a coterie of Storyteller characters. How do the two coterie size each other up? What if the Storyteller coterie is clan-specific, and it meets up with the players' mixed-clan coterie? Will a Brujah brood try to convince the player's Brujah to join them?

## THE LONG HAUL

Despite the best efforts and sincere wishes of the elders, coterie are here to stay, and as a player you will reap the benefits of this. Not only does it allow you to form a more functional story with more conflicted characters, it illustrates the rough difference between the generations and the sects. No one will argue that coterie are an indelible facet of the modern nights, despite the frustrations and manipulations of the elders. Whether your vampire sees them as a necessary evil for these modern nights or an unfortunate product of the times, coterie have become too commonplace to dismiss as a passing fad.

As for the Sabbath pack, if it ain't broke, don't fix it. As the Sabbath war machines march forward in a determined religious fervor, they'll continue to count on the comparative stability and loyalty the pact structure brings to the sect.

# POWER VACUUM: WHEN NO SECT STRUCTURE EXISTS

It's common knowledge that unlife isn't easy for young Kindred or Cainites. What being the lackey of a more powerful vampire in an established pack or principality does offer, however, is security, not only for the young vampire, but also the Sabbath and the Camarilla.

## OPTIONAL: NEW FLAW

### DISOWNED (2- TO 4-PT. FLAW)

Your sire left you shortly after your Embrace. At 2 points he gave you a contact outside your home city from whom you can acquire a basic introduction to the Kindred. Four points means you were left with a new existence when you woke up.

Now suppose that security is taken away. Maybe your Embrace is the accident of a powerful ally to a prince, who then arranges for you to be brought a city that isn't the domain of either the Kindred or Cainites. Perhaps a Cainite Embraces you in a city with no dominant sect structure, then leaves you behind to learn what you've become.

It's also common for Kindred sires who strongly dislike their childer to arrange for them to be sent to other cities after completing their education. This popular method is used by many Kindred to rid themselves of potential rivals and troublemakers while at the same time claiming to be helping expand the power of the Camarilla. The growing number of Caitiff and "accidents" makes such claims often ring hollow, however.

While Kindred often have difficulty adjusting to new areas, Cainites usually don't. Most new Sabbat areas are created by Cainite pilgrims and nomads who've decided to stop wandering, so it's not uncommon for Sabbat locating to new areas to be older and a slightly lower generation.

Cainites may have some early advantages, but things are still very difficult for all childer who have to fend for themselves outside the structures of the Sabbat and Camarilla. Not only do they have to survive, they also have to do the best they can to adhere to the traditions and customs of their sect. Those who don't often find their sires have become their most dangerous enemies.

This section includes several ideas about how to survive and even prosper in a difficult environment. How far a player wants to go is up to what she thinks her character is capable of. Numerous options become available to players whose characters reside in unclaimed territory, but with these options come some warnings. Call it the action-reaction principle: In chronicle terms it means that not everyone is going to support what the characters might want to do, and some of those reactions are going to be hazardous to a vampire's health.

What kinds of options are available? It depends on the characters and how much ambition they have. Is it

possible to create one's own principality or bishopric? Sure, if the characters are willing to deal with the hassle it takes to build one from the ground up. Those who don't feel like messing around with justicars and archbishops can look for other goals.

For example, a young Toreador with the assistance of a Ventrue might buy an old industrial building and convert it into artist lofts. For members of the Sabbat it could be as simple as forming a gang and claiming right of domain over a specific territory while beating the hell out of other gangs in the process. In either case, the crux of the matter is that these vampires have created a secure place for themselves and their followers.

### UNLIFE ON THE OUTSIDE

Enterprising Licks might want to have an idea of what unlife is like in an open city before they go out and try to accomplish anything. Dwelling in a domain with no sect structure is very different than what most vampires are used to. In a Sabbat or Camarilla city, vampires at least have someone to answer a question or provide them with guidance. In an open city, the Damned have to depend on themselves and have to create things as they go along. Unlife is cheap on the outside, and rivals seek to add other vampires' vitae to their own while other threats conspire against them from the shadows. Hiding out as a solitary vampire for long is not a good idea, as the odds can rove insurmountable. Not having the protection of clan or pack means that until the Kindred can either form or join a group, she's entirely on her own.

## SAFETY IN NUMBERS

Security is the name of the game. While the Camarilla and Sabbat have very different philosophies about just about everything else, they both value having their own kind of security. Kindred outside a sect structure usually form two types of groups. The first is the coterie, which is the most common type of Kindred group seen inside and outside of sect-claimed cities. Coterie are often mistrusted and despised by elders and accomplished ancillae of the Camarilla, and those who seem too ambitious are often preemptively hunted down by nearby princes. On the outside, coterie are usually made up of groups of relatively high-generation Kindred, so having them killed isn't considered a real problem by those in the Camarilla. They were just troublemakers and undesirables anyway, and likely handled without too much difficulty by a scourge or sheriff.

The other type of group is very rare, but a few are known to exist in divided cities. Often called a clutch, brood or gang, this is a group that has formed around a very powerful Kindred, who most likely was driven

out of her home city. Clutches have been known to form in open cities after a significant political event takes place in a Camarilla domain. Clutch leaders educate new Kindred, who are then able to join and contribute to the clutch's interests. The Camarilla tolerates clutches mainly because their leaders usually at least try to adhere to the Traditions. How closely clutches do follow the Traditions is a matter of debate among Ivory Tower luminaries. One of the drawbacks of clutches is that the organizational leadership is often dominated by Kindred of the founding vampire's clan. Another is that sect officials deal swiftly with those clutch leaders who act like or, worse, demand to be treated like a prince. Without the leader, a clutch's organization quickly breaks down, often falling apart due to infighting and internal power struggles. Once word spreads that a clutch is failing, both Sabbat and other Kindred factions may move in to destroy what's left or pick up the pieces.

Finding Kindred groups is more difficult in an open city than in a city claimed by the Camarilla. The Sabbat and other enemies of the Camarilla often actively hunt Kindred dwelling on the outside. As such, Kindred groups typically make strong efforts to hide their activities and locations if they want to survive for long.

Even after finding a location, Kindred on the outside shouldn't always expect a very warm welcome. Most of these no-man's-land Licks aren't as stuffy as those of established domains, however, and many do let outsiders join them. How things progress depends on how well the Kindred use their social skills. Violence does happen, but as a rule, small and isolated Kindred groups try to avoid it at first, not wanting to risk their struggling existences. Many small groups are actually interested in adding new Kindred to their number. If nothing else they can use recruits as cannon fodder. If an individual possesses skills or knowledge the group needs, the members make their best efforts to convince the new Kindred to join them.

Kindred fleeing to the outside should expect to have grief for finding their new associates' location, and those new associates are going to want to learn everything about their "guests" they can. The Kindred aren't doing this for their new members' benefit either — they are usually more concerned about any problems their new recruits might create by being part of their group. Kindred who decide new members are too dangerous to be around may well try to kill them. If these new recruits do turn out to be more than they can handle, existing outsider groups do their best to drive the interlopers as far away from them as possible.





On occasion, groups have changed their minds after conflict with an unknown Kindred and let him join anyway. In very rare instances groups been taken over by the new arrival, usually after several of the founding members have been put in their place or destroyed.

Joining the Sabbat-aligned outsiders in a city is comparatively easy. In fact, they often come looking for rumored visitors. One of the things gangs frequently do is look for challenges to their domain. Once found, interlopers often face severe tests to determine if they're strong enough to join the pack. These tests don't always involve violence: Like the Kindred, Sabbat vampires also have uses for vampires with new skills. If a vampire has a skill the gang feels it can use, it tests the Lick to ascertain her potential. Other tests include combat against a weak member of the gang, and if the interloper wins he takes that Cainite's place. If the gang doesn't want to risk its own, it might send a vampire to provoke a fight with another pack, an unknown Kindred not unlike himself or even bait something more terrible. The target is usually a loner Kindred, but sometimes gangs send potential recruits to deal with a former gang member or a Cainite who failed trying to join the gang. That kind of test isn't going to happen very often, as those many Cainites who fail a gang's test become that evening's entertainment.

Not wanting to join an existing faction of a divided city is also an option. A vampire can simply go out and try to form his own faction. It's not really that hard, since divided cities almost always have a number of Kindred and Cainites not affiliated with any group. A Kindred who does this should have something to offer in order to interest other vampires in joining his faction, such as access to resources, a secure place for vampires to stay or skills and abilities to help other vampires.

## LOGISTICS

Whether you join a group or create one of your own, it's best not to be a loner for long. **Vampire** is a game about who you know, and being alone on the outside is the most lethal way of demonstrating that. After arriving in a city, or if you've been Embraced by an irresponsible sire in a divided city, you have a small amount of time to learn about the domain and where vampires may dwell. This is the most dangerous time for a loner, not only because of others who might want to kill you, but also because the longer it takes you to start associating with other vampires the more reluctant they become to deal with *you*. Those who don't quickly join another group or announce their presence are often seen by other vampires as having social or other problems.

Finding vampires is only the first step. You then have to be sociable and persuasive enough to be able to make a good impression. Many loners are not, and it's understandable. You might be upset if your prince just booted you from his city, or that your pack told you to get lost. You can't, however, let it take over your existence. Sure it sucks, but being consumed by your oh-so-cruel-world isn't going to help you survive. Everyone has problems, especially the undead, and first encounters are often very tense because the vampires you're dealing with may well have a good idea of what your circumstances are. Forced to exist on the outside, they have run into others in the same situation, and either are willing to deal you or not. What most vampires aren't willing to be are emotional or physical punching bags for your sake.

Kindred fledglings who have been rejected by their princes and ousted anarchs are the most common loners. The next most common are those Kindred or Cainites who were abandoned by their sires. Having these vampires join a group presents special problems, namely that the sire responsible for the neonate could become an enemy of the faction. (Storytellers, consider this when thinking about what is proper for their chronicle. Not only does this create a compelling potential antagonist for you, but the possibilities of several interesting plot directions as well.)

Cainites often handle being a loner a bit better than Kindred. Still, being on one's own is very different than unlife with a pack. A Cainite used to having emotional ties to others via the Vinculum suddenly finds herself cast out and alone, without those others to support her. Many Cainites accept being alone as a test, and those who establish themselves as nomads might be respected by Cainite leaders. A few Sabbat clans actually thrive being outside a sect structure. Those clans that make the most of being alone are Brutes, Hunters and Rogues. Of the three, the Sabbat consider the Hunters (and, to a lesser extent, Furies) to be ideal Cainites for sending to an open city. Once there, many Hunters are known to quickly establish themselves as potent forces in the domain and occasionally even educate those whom they accept in the territory. Furies are sent out to spread the Sabbat faith — and also get them away from Cainites tired of hearing it. Like Hunters, Rogues enjoy going to open cities to seek out Kindred and other enemies and then give the information to local Sabbat groups. As in the Camarilla, Brutes are the intelligent fighters on the outside. Unlike Camarilla Brujah, Brutes don't gain much respect dwelling outside a Sabbat city, though they can become quite effective if they set aside their need for direction. Two clans almost never seen

outside Sabbat-controlled cities are the Frankensteins and Angels of Caine. If an Angel of Caine is on the outside, something serious is about to happen.

Unlife is much harder for vampires who dwell outside the bailiwicks of their sects. To be honest, many vampires can't handle it, and they often move to a city with an established hierarchy. Camarilla Kindred move more than Sabbat. The big difference is that Cainites who return to a Sabbat city are often considered failures or cowards and may lose a great deal of esteem within their packs.

A Kindred's reaction to being on the outside often depends on which clan claims them. While Brujah might be considered little more than bad-tempered thugs in Camarilla domains, on the outside they are respected and depended on for their hardiness and their force of personality. With their well developed social skills and sense of aesthetics, Toreador have the easiest time on the outside. A Toreador's one weakness on the outside is attracting too much attention to herself, and giving in to that weakness means earning such attention from those whose interest might prove dangerous.

Of all the Kindred clans, the Ventrue have the most difficulty on the outside. When not part of a sect, Ventrue often are like babes lost in a concrete jungle. The biggest challenge facing a Ventrue is overcoming a great sense of loss: of position, status and most importantly potential power. Many Ventrue expect one night to be a leader of a company, faction or domain. Inside a sect structure, it's easy to see the paths they need to follow to attain that leadership. Outside are no specific paths, and many Ventrue can't deal with it. As vampires, they lack the ability to be true visionaries, and when forced to create structures of their own, they may founder. The irony is that those who do handle it often become more powerful than they would have if they had stayed in their recognized domains. The flip side is that Ventrue are the Kindred who most often move to other cities in order to rejoin the Camarilla.

Like Ventrue, Tremere also have problems adapting to the outside. Their problems, however, cut both ways. Tremere without their structure are dangerous both to themselves and to other Kindred around them — the pyramid is more than the sum of its individual building blocks. Outside of a sect structure, Tremere often become very paranoid and territorial. Being on the outside plays right in to the suspicion that comes part and parcel with the Tremere hierarchy. Everyone is seen as a possible enemy, and few Tremere fully trust other Kindred even after they join a group. Tremere often remain loners the longest, or try to establish

small areas they can dominate by themselves. If they are successful, Tremere only then consider negotiation with other groups on their own terms.

One other clan that's seldom seen on the outside are Malkavians. Like the Ventrue, however, emancipated Malkavians can be true terrors, remaking their autonomous domains in their own images. Too often, however, Malkavians without the structure of the Camarilla collapse in upon themselves, undone by the burdens of their own insanities.

One Kindred clan often makes itself known to other groups only for its own reasons and at a time of its choosing. That clan is the Nosferatu. Many faction leaders have been unnerved by the unexpected arrival of a Nosferatu, who then details extensive knowledge of various factions and their activities. Most Nosferatu appear in a divided city only after the factions have established their territories or torn each other to ribbons. Faction leaders often take Nosferatu in their city as a sign that the city is now "in play," meaning that outside organizations have taken an interest in things happening in town. Being loyal to the Camarilla for the most part, Nosferatu typically deal with those groups that have not seriously violated the Traditions. Those that aren't following the Traditions often find that other groups have sensitive information about them. Besides following the Traditions, Nosferatu take pleasure in seeing how members of a faction react to their presence, so first introductions are often very stomach-turning affairs.

Finally, a so-called clan that also bears mention is the Caitiff. On the outside, the Caitiff aren't trusted by anyone, mostly due to the vagaries of their Embrace. Kindred groups deal with Caitiff as little as possible. Kindred factions do exchange information with Caitiff, but they are just as likely to hunt Caitiff who've learned anything about them. This attitude arose because on the outside Caitiff have become known as bottom-feeders and rumormongers who gladly pit factions against each other. Caitiff trade any scrape of information or gossip they can find, and if they can't find anything juicy they make things up. Once they start a rumor, Caitiff ensure that it quickly spreads through the streets. A tradition-bound Kindred might think, "Wow that could be a pretty stupid thing to do," but things are different outside the borders of organized domains. The Caitiff on the outside don't care. Many who've been badly treated by the Camarilla consider their activities as revenge for the poor treatment they suffered. Truly inspired Caitiff have even been known to intentionally violate the Traditions in the hopes that an archon will come to the city to investigate. It

is even better if the Caitiff can pin the violations on another Kindred faction.

Panders think they are better off than Cainites, but they really aren't. Sure they now have a voice among the Sabbat, and can even become ducti. What happens more often is that they are whipped into a frenzy and then told to check out what's guarding a known Kindred location by themselves. Sabbat groups let Panders join them in cities with few other Cainites, but the Panders frequently have to defend their positions when other Cainites arrive and want to join.

## JOINING THE GANG

After joining or forming a group, your attention should shift to survival and adjusting to your new situation. The biggest issues facing a vampire dwelling on the outside are security, social concerns and adhering to whatever common customs have been established.

Why would a vampire give a damn about social concerns? Because vampires are social creatures, and contact with others helps keep the Beast at bay. Being outside a sect structure means that, at least at the beginning, you are going to have very limited social options.

When a city's not at war, the level of security a group has directly affects the social barometer of individual vampires in the group. If you have been to the Elysium in just about any Camarilla city, you know that it's not uncommon for a city's most powerful Toreador to arrive at a party dressed in couture that rivals that of top-name designers during runway shows. It's not only a sign of the Camarilla culture's strength, opulence and refinement, but also that those Kindred who live in the city feel secure enough to flaunt it. The same goes for a Sabbat city like Detroit. Just ask anyone who's been to a Devil's Night celebration.

While such displays are common in cities that are the domain of either Kindred or Cainites, they rarely happen in cities that are either contested or not under either sect's direct influence. The main reason for this is that smaller Camarilla and Sabbat groups don't have the resources in place to deal with any attention a grand display of power might bring. The end result is that fewer grand-scale social events take place in cities with no sect structure, and those that do happen are less conspicuous.

The last and perhaps most significant disadvantage to dwelling in a domain without a sect structure is that despite not receiving the benefits, you are still bound by the Traditions and *ritae*. Not being part of a sect structure doesn't mean that you can freely ignore the rules, though if you're careful, you can stretch them

a bit.

What does that mean? That depends on you. If your Kindred faction is under constant attack from Sabbat or other enemies, siring one or two new vampires to help in the fight won't raise much of a fuss, especially given that you're probably not answering to a prince. If by using traditional tactics a gang totally destroys (not damages) an enemy domain, an archbishop could accept the poor tactical choice in return for claiming some of the credit for victory.

Realize that in either case you are going to be in debt to whomever helps cover up your transgressions. While this is convenient at the moment, you won't control when or how your benefactor might ask to be repaid.

Those wanting to stay clear of any entanglements with proximate powers-that-be need to know the kinds of activities that draw their attention. In general, the Camarilla and Sabbat each have specific things they keep an eye out for in areas outside their domain. The biggest attention-getters for the Sabbat are gangs using open warfare tactics in cities with heavy media presence or highly organized mortal authorities. Archbishops quickly deal with these misguided gang leaders and then reorganize the gangs around better leadership.

Justicars and neighboring princes become concerned with Kindred who sire many childer without paying close enough attention to the Masquerade. Unlike the Sabbat, which often deals with a problem only after it becomes a headline, Camarilla officers use their power and aides to investigate matters before they get out of hand. Punishment for a Kindred who's been found guilty of violating the Masquerade or other Traditions is usually a matter of greeting sunrise. With other area Kindred present to get the message, Kindred outsiders are slain more often than Cainites for violating the laws of their sect, even if the sect doesn't have a formal presence.

Many even suspect that some leaders in the Camarilla encourage executions for relatively minor infractions, granting their scourges wide jurisdictions. It's believed to be done out of the fear that establishment of a new and nearby Camarilla order will reduce the power of the existing princes.

Besides doing investigations, archons and templars can also provide other services for vampire communities outside of a sect structure. They often act as messengers, bringing information about various vampire activities back to their leaders. Even more possibilities open up if the Sabbat or Kindred factions in an open city have some degree of kinship or "professional" common interests with the visiting archon or templar. Like a character

who has the habit of getting his fellow coterie members killed, both the Sabbat and the Camarilla view outsiders as potential loose cannons and deal with them severely. Cultivating a relationship with an archon or templar is a good way of trying to mitigate punishments for situations where the crimes aren't that severe.

For those who for one reason or another don't give a damn about the Traditions or *ritae*, enjoy your short unlives while they last. Being outside a sect structure gives you more leeway to cheat sect custom but also ensures that when an accounting comes due, not much talking will be going on.

## THE OUTSIDE AND YOU

Okay, now that you know unlife outside of a sect structure means that you won't be going to many good parties, and that you could easily be killed if you break any rules, you're going to rush out and move to a contested territory or unclaimed domain, right? Didn't think so.

Believe it or not, some benefits exist to dwelling outside a Camarilla or Sabbat domain. How you take advantage of those benefits depends on what type of character you like to play and the kinds of chronicles your Storyteller enjoys running.

Playing in a contested or unclaimed city offers many different types of chronicles. From short or even one-shot stories that involve a specific objective to long story arcs that would confuse a Nosferatu, the whole point of a setting like this is that you can get as much out of it as you want to.

One of the first things you realize when you're an outsider is that you have a chance to judge the teachings of both Camarilla and Sabbat on your own terms. You no longer have to accept a third-party bottom line or the indoctrination of a sire who often won't give answers to questions you might have about why Traditions or *ritae* have been established. You've gained the freedom to more openly question what you do and don't believe about being a Kindred or Cainite.

You've also gained the ability to test yourself in ways that might not have been open to you under a sect structure. In a divided city the leadership of fellow Kindred or Cainites must be earned. Leaders are born from both desire and circumstance. Helping save fellow Kindred from a Sabbat attack or designing tactics that help your Cainite friends against a larger rival gang are signs of leadership. Just remember that leadership can be lost as quickly as it's gained.

Besides being a leader, you are tested in other ways. Things are more fluid (and less sacrosanct) outside a

sect structure, which gives you the chance to explore policies that you might not have considered (or had your sire consider for you) while being part of a sect. Being in a sect structure often means you're expected to do what you are trained to do. Outside you are expected to learn as many new capabilities as you can. The more skills you know and can employ, the more useful you are to your fellow vampires. This has become so important that both Kindred and Cainites who are working together sometimes cross-train each other so more than one vampire has a specific skill.

Another advantage of unlife in a divided city is that you're less likely to be recognized by other vampires. Those being hunted or in bad positions with their sects or clans often take refuge in cities that have no sect structure.

This can quickly change if a sect luminary comes visiting. Those in trouble with their sects or clans can also find themselves being looked for by the Caitiff, who often eke out hardscrabble unlives in unstructured cities and are happy to trade information for any favor that might improve their lot.

Consider one final aspect of living on the outside, which depending on how you play it can be either a blessing or a curse for you when dealing with other Kindred. Many in the Camarilla often complain about the apathy or opposition toward new ideas that characterizes higher echelons of the sect. Many reasons exist for this reluctance, the most powerful being the figureheads of the Camarilla seeing change as a threat to their positions.

Surviving long enough to prosper on the outside means that you've become resourceful and can focus on the here and now. Not everyone in the Camarilla adheres to the idea of just keeping the status quo, and some in the Camarilla are looking for Kindred with the kind of attitude an outsider might have. If you play it right, you could find opportunities to improve your status in other Camarilla areas.

In the beginning it won't be easy. Kindred from the outside are often looked at as being little more than rogues or rustics by those who dwell in sect structured domains. Even using your best manners, you may be treated in a polite but often condescending manner. Expect to be asked questions about your education and various Traditions. Not answering correctly or to the inquiring Kindred's satisfaction means having to deal with both verbal and possible physical recourse. Some more vindictive Kindred intentionally ask difficult questions in the hopes of angering you then using that as justification for attacking you. How well outsiders handle themselves

when visiting a Camarilla city determines how long they can stay, and if they leave the city with their unives intact.

## SECT POLITICS AND THE OUTSIDE

Many divided cities are either ignored by the Camarilla or used by the Sabbat as dumping ground for low-ranked and excess Cainite childer. That's until news starts to spread about how the fortunes of a divided city have taken a turn for the better. Unless you quickly take charge of the situation, you may well find your city slowly being drawn into the ever-expanding web of vampire politics. The Camarilla and Sabbat each have their own ways of trying to find out what's going on and if anything of interest is there.

After getting the latest information about who claims what as domain in a city, the Camarilla prince or justicar sends in agents to check things out. These agents are in the city only long enough to find what they need, so chances are that they won't be detected unless they blow their cover. Because no prince exists, these agents are within their rights not to have to present themselves to anyone or ask for permission to be in the city — such is the price of independence. The agents report anything interesting first to their prince or officer. Since Caitiff are known to dwell in many divided cities, they are often used by agents by both the Sabbat and Camarilla to gain general news about what's going in the city.

Most often, the Sabbat simply sends in a group of scouts, who then go to locales known to host fellow Cainites and ask questions. Autarkis nominally sympathetic to the Sabbat are also spoken with, but most scouts would rather have reports from gang or area leaders.

While politics is always going to be part of the social fabric of vampire society, it doesn't have as much of an initial presence in divided cities for two reasons. First is that various vampire communities are too busy fighting with each other. The second is that being broken up into smaller groups gives competing vampires fewer chances to build a power base.

This doesn't mean that politics doesn't have a role to play in a city without a sect structure. Many would-be princes on poor terms with the Camarilla have tried to seize praxis over a divided city only to be laughed at by the Inner Circle. It's also not coincidence that soon after making their bids, many of these so-called princes end up staked. Things are not very different for Cainites who try to establish a bishopric. In general, faction leaders who fail find little sympathy with those they claim to

lead. This is often because members of a faction have been given promises in return for their support. Once the bid fails those promises are worthless, and their current leader has little left to bargain with.

Unlike a city with a sect structure, a vampire making a bid for domain in a divided or unclaimed city has little margin for error. Kindred or Cainites who claim domain in a city and fail fall the hardest. Vampires in a city dominated by the Sabbat or Camarilla who fail in a bid to become bishop or prince can often fall back to their power bases, even if they've lost status and respect with their fellow vampires.

Vampires outside of a sect structure don't have this luxury. Factions in a divided city are fickle. Chances are that most vampires have already chosen a successor in case their current leader's bid fails. That, or they'd prefer to keep the domain unclaimed for reasons of their own.

The politics of a divided city are often used by the Camarilla as a gauge of how well things are going in that city. Political changes that occur affect the way both the Camarilla and Sabbat look at the city. Factionalized cities with little politics because only small groups of Kindred are there are generally ignored by princes, except as possible dumping grounds for Caitiff and troublemaking Kindred.

Archbishops look at divided cities with small numbers of Cainites as being areas of opportunity. The thinking goes that cities with few Cainites aren't taking full advantage of the situation. Like the Camarilla, they also send in more low-rank and shovelhead Cainites to help the cause. In addition, a templar group or provisional bishop and entourage sometimes accompany the new recruits to question the existing leadership in the city. It's common for a quick leadership change to take place if the Sabbat isn't satisfied with the current one.

Outside interest in a divided city grows as factions establish themselves and expand their territories. With princes, most of this interest centers on how the Kindred factions can be co-opted to serve their purposes. The best way of avoiding having your faction become an unwitting pawn of a prince or archbishop is by demonstrating strong leadership that isn't easy to push around.

## CARROT AND DAGGER

The Camarilla and Sabbat use similar tools when trying to exert influence over outsiders. First come offers of support as long as the faction agrees to certain terms. Factions that agree to these deals are quickly turned into peons and gain no status or respect with

either the Camarilla or Sabbat. Circumstances don't matter, either. On the rare occasions when an outside sect helps a Kindred faction, it's usually either because favors are being called in or the faction has something the Camarilla wants. In neither case is the Camarilla acting only for the faction's own benefit.

Bishops and archbishops are more direct in how they handle independent gangs and packs. If they want something you have, they try to take it. If your gang or pack is successful defending yourselves they allow you to keep it ... for now. Expect to be tested again with a stronger force. If you succeed a second time, the Sabbat often resorts to trade. This is done both as a sign of respect for your pack, and not wanting to waste any more resources on an internal issue. On the other hand, a slighted Sabbat leader may well declare an open Crusade on your domain to salvage her damaged pride.

Items archbishops have been known to barter with include new weapons, recruits, information and drugs. Since Sabbat custom dictates that Disciplines be taught to all Cainites, they don't have as much trade value as in the Camarilla. What does have value are out-of-clan Disciplines that are hard to come by for Cainites operating outside a sect-structured city.

With the Camarilla, rejecting the first deal tells those trying to manipulate your faction that your leadership isn't brain-dead, but then they likely up the ante. Politics become more important in a divided city once outside influences involve themselves in city affairs. Why? Because if those trying to gain access to your city can't exploit you, they are either going to look for someone else who's easier to deal with or find ways to change your leadership. This often happens when a nearby prince or archbishop runs into difficulties trying to exploit different vampire factions in a divided city. Since that individual can't turn your faction into her flunkies, she tries her luck with a rival faction that already doesn't like your group. If that doesn't work, she then looks at discontented members of your group to recruit as new leaders.

Historically, conflicts with either sect seldom reach the second stage and almost never make the third. Both princes and archbishops usually don't bother investing that much time and effort in such a small matter. Other than saving face, bringing your faction into the fold isn't that important unless you possess something they *really* want — and if that's the case, why was the region unclaimed in the first place? (True, sometimes unclaimed domains yield unexpected resources, but these are the exceptions that prove the rule. See below.) Another thing a prince needs to consider is that the Inner Circle rarely approves of princes of one city

meddling with and possibly undermining the affairs of another. On occasion they quietly let it happen, but only as long as the prince involved is circumspect with her dealings and the conflict doesn't unduly weaken the greater strength of the Camarilla.

Two things can change this, and whether or not it's justified is for your Storyteller to decide. The first is that your faction controls a powerful item or owns an important resource. A prince or archbishop who wants what your faction owns is going to spend a greater amount of time and resources trying either to get the item itself, or bring your group to heel.

The second is that you should expect retribution if you or another member of your group does something to really piss off the prince or archbishop who's been messing around with your faction. This doesn't have to mean he is sending someone to kill you. A truly devious leader can find many ways to complicate your unlife. Merely killing you can be very trite, and revenge is a dish best served cold.

Other than fighting with your enemies, successfully preventing your faction from being absorbed by another organization is one of the first true tests of a group and its leadership. It's also one of the earliest and best ways for your group to earn respect from other Camarilla and Sabbat organizations. Surviving the conflict without any real losses or leadership changes shows that your faction has good potential. The prince or archbishop you've been fighting might not agree, but those who hear about your success against that organization are going to be interested in talking with you. The status you've gained will help with the future dealings your faction has with groups outside your city.

Once the Camarilla and Sabbat realize they have to at least deal with your faction, various groups who are interested in what's happening in your city send envoys to speak with you. Other than individual vampires who come to your city, expect visits from clan luminaries, and on very rare occasions functionaries of the prince or archbishop of a nearby city.

## CAVEAT EMPTOR

It's always best to keep the old Roman saying "buyer beware" firmly in mind when making deals with either princes or archbishops. Most princes view dealing with Kindred leaders in divided cities as beneath them, and their representatives often carry this disdain into any negotiations. Some even suspect that negotiators are intentionally chosen from among those Kindred out of favor with their prince.

Princes who send envoys to negotiate are almost always solely looking out for their interests, not yours. It's going to take your best diplomacy to put together any



kind of decent agreement. Typically a prince sends an envoy because something needs to be taken care of.

Most of these kinds of agreements don't involve a specific item or vampire. Instead they are arrangements in which both sides agree to do something for each other. An example of such an agreement is that in return for helping to limit the number of anarchs taking refuge in your domain, a prince might agree not to continue chasing large amounts of insurgents in your domain.

Occasionally these arrangements do involve looking for an individual. An envoy comes asking for permission to search your city for a specific vampire. Your group might even be asked to assist in the search. In these cases a prince usually offers small loans of influence, heirlooms or information in return for your support.

Princes have been known to pay very well when looking for notorious vampires. Past compensation has included blood dolls, new Discipline and Ability instruction and even boons. Making these types of deals is very difficult and dangerous. The vampire being hunted could learn of your giving assistance and become a very powerful enemy.

Cutting deals with clans looking to get a leg up isn't as difficult as with princes. More often than not clans are looking for more traditional diplomatic opportunities. A Ventrue-run business in a nearby city might want access to materials produced in your domain, or perhaps franchise rights. A Tremere art enthusiast might be interested in adding certain pieces of art found in your city to his collection. Clans seldom involve outsiders in their business but do pay for information, sanctuary, feeding rights and occasionally additional muscle when representatives operate outside of their home city.

Unlike the Camarilla, the Sabbat gladly helps out packs in contested cities. Archbishops and bishops routinely devote resources to winnable situations. Resources are given not only to improve the Sabbat's chances of success but also to aid in the ultimate goal of driving their enemies out of the domain. If not able to achieve its ultimate objective, the pack involved makes every effort to inflict as much damage as possible.

## THE ART OF THE DEAL

If a sect titleholder decides that a possibility exists for dealing with you, an envoy is sent, who usually carries a letter of introduction on behalf of that individual. The kind of representative sent to negotiate on the individual's behalf often tells you how important the deal is. Members of a prince's entourage are the most

common envoys. For important negotiations, princes have been known to employ specific Ventrue who in their past lives were high-powered lawyers, while individuals low in esteem might earn the most loathsome of Nosferatu by way of insult.

Most princes use Kindred from specific clans as envoys for different types of assignments. In general Toreador are the most common envoys, but Ventrue also called upon to handle very formal or strategic negotiations. On rare occasions, a prince sends a Tremere envoy to handle arrangements for relics, research materials and information. When dealing with a clan, the envoy is almost always a Kindred of the clan negotiating the agreement.

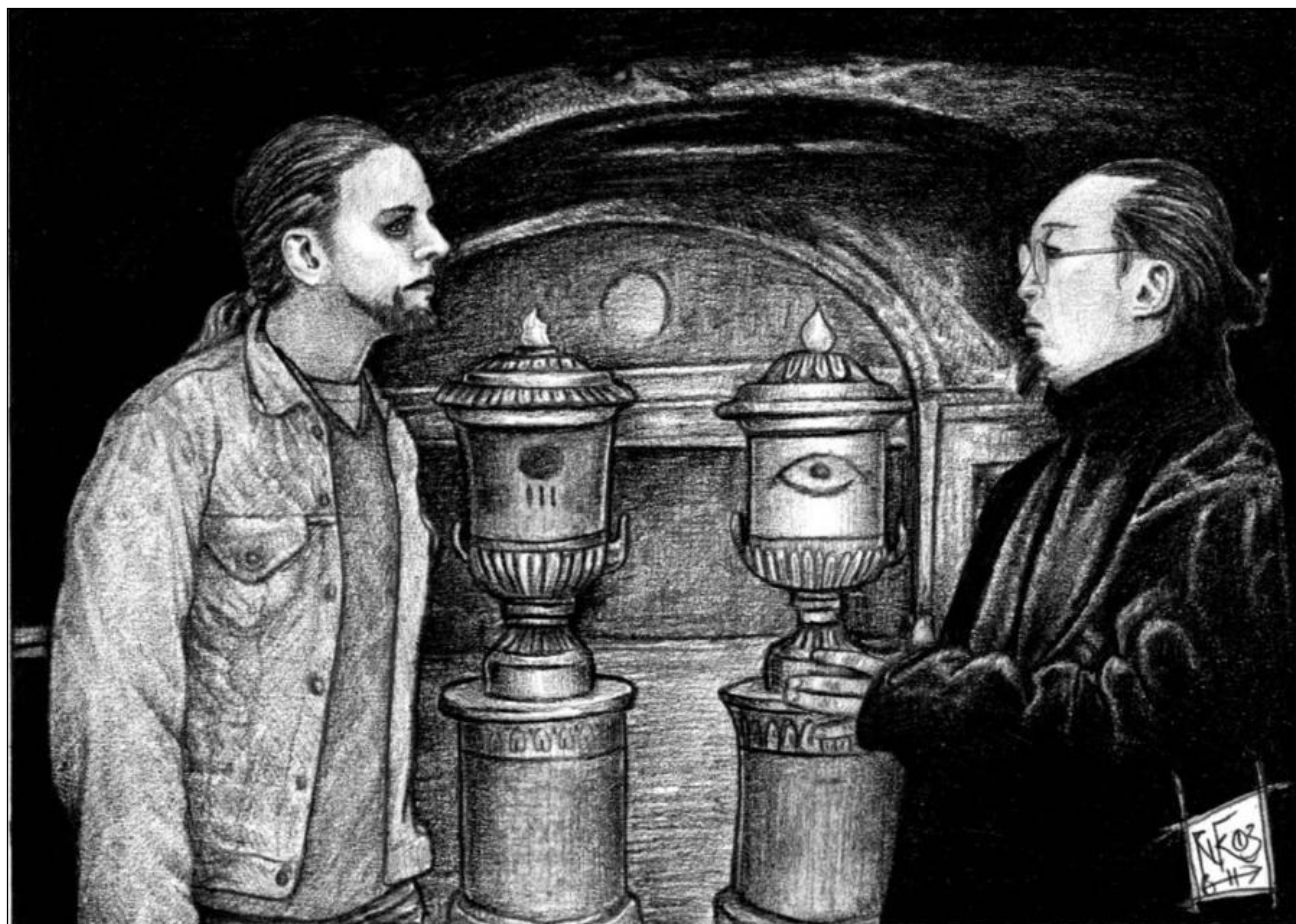
Just about everything that's said and done is going to be reported back. As such, you should treat envoys as the eyes and ears of the organization that sent them. How you conduct yourself during the negotiations affects not only the outcome, but future relations between both parties as well. In most cases negotiating a deal should be seen as a chance to size up the opposition. You are going to be tested by the envoy, who's going to be looking for weaknesses to exploit. You should do the same with the envoy.

Don't be worried that every envoy you deal with is going to be a low-generation powerhouse. Expect that for very important negotiations, but also realize that both Kindred and Cainite leaders and clans send less august vampires on more mundane assignments. These assignments are also tests given to the envoys to see how well they use their skills and abilities.

## GETTING STARTED

Okay, so you now have a basic overview of what things are like in a divided city. Next we're going to cover things from the smallest independent groups to becoming the next prince or archbishop. While we've talked about established factions, smaller groups exist that are more common but less noticed. Cities with very few vampires don't even have clutches, coteries, packs or gangs.

Very small Cainite populations often run in what they call posses. Like the Old West term, Cainite posses are short-term affairs usually lasting only a night or two. A posse forms when a Cainite decides to do something for the evening and then goes around asking other Cainites if they'd like to come along. Unlike gangs or packs, a posse's leadership lasts only for that mission and changes from night to night depending on who has things they want to do, or if the posse even needs to remain intact. Cainites who put together several successful endeavors gain status among their fellow Cainites and often become



gang and even pack leaders. Leaders who are unsuccessful more than once may not have another chance to form a posse and might not even be allowed to take part in posses formed by other Cainites. Not being able to take part in a posse is a bad social sign for Cainites. It means that those who have successfully gained status don't think you're good enough to help them.

By Sabbat standards posses are very small, usually not numbering more than three or four vampires. Depending on the number of Cainites, it's possible for more than one posse to be active each night. Those who form posses have to be careful about what missions they choose. Posses are formed for a variety of reasons, the most common being to hunt for loner Kindred and Cainites, check out locations where Kindred might be hiding, and explore different parts of the city. On occasion a templar calls together a posse to help look for someone or information. These posses are really closer to a gang in number, as few Cainites refuse such a request. Elders and the rare Sabbat ancillae are often nostalgic about their posse nights, remembering less rigid times when it was only themselves and a few comrades kicking ass and taking names. They see tonight's gangs and packs as being too concerned with politics and violence, and often yearn for their simpler times.

To avoid the stigma associated with being a member of a coterie, small groups of Kindred who decide to work together often form what many in the Camarilla call an enclave, consortium or interest group. As with many other things in the Camarilla, forming an enclave is treated in a formal and specific manner. Enclave agreements range from very complex, such as having provisions for who gets what in the city if one of the members becomes prince, to the very simple. Even with different levels of complexity, most enclave agreements include a formal declaration of following the Traditions and a statement that all Kindred who join the enclave are to be given as complete an education as possible about the Camarilla. Beyond that, enclave agreements might detail what locales are the domains of which clans and what penalties are used for those who don't follow the Masquerade.

The Sabbat have another name for enclaves. They call them targets. Nothing whips Cainites into a frenzy more than learning that Kindred have plans to turn an unclaimed domain into a Camarilla holding. Busting up an enclave gains Cainites high status in the Sabbat.

With the Sabbat and other enemies on the lookout for enclaves and other Kindred activities, enclave leaders are careful with how they establish them. The penalty

for revealing an enclave is often a staking or a drubbing, when it's not outright destruction. Most Kindred don't let it come to that by being very selective about whom they let join. Kindred with questionable backgrounds, or who are being hunted, usually aren't allowed to join. Some get around that by trying to hang out with other Kindred who are members, but this seldom works.

Like posses, enclaves usually start out with two or maybe three Kindred, and attempt to grow from there. Posses usually graduate into packs as more Cainites join and an established purpose emerges. Enclaves also grow but often have trouble covering their activities as more Kindred join. As the risk increases, enclaves often either have to move to another location altogether, or individual Kindred move to different parts of the city. Sometimes Kindred from one clan simply break off and move to their own area. Tremere in particular often want their own area if more than two of them are in the enclave. Letting a clan set up its own domain helps deal with the problem as long as its Kindred remain loyal to the enclave. The dangers involved with either moving or allowing a group to separate force the enclave leadership to make difficult decisions. Inaction can be just as dangerous; entire enclaves have been wiped out after their locations were discovered by the Sabbat or a jealous faction of nearby Camarilla Kindred. Often what leads such hostile elements to discover an enclave is many Kindred being seen in the general vicinity. Enclave leaders also have to contend with their Kindred wanting to establish institutions of Kindred society (such as Elysium) well before it's safe to consider it. Not having an Elysium strains the social fabric of most early enclaves, but having one gives them assets that send up red flags when possibly recalcitrant princes catch word of the burgeoning domain.

Once a posse grows into a gang or founded pack, establishing territory becomes the next concern. For Cainites this usually involves finding and taking over a domain already claimed by Kindred or even a mortal gang. Those mortals who fight well enough may become childer, ghouls or contacts, while the others become that evening's dinner. While Cainites might think of displaced mortal rivals as nothing more than ready-to-eat meals, that doesn't mean Cainites don't consider the human factor. Indeed, you might be surprised to know that Cainites can be found among mortals at some activities. Go to any sporting event and Cainites can be found hanging out with mortals — from the way everyone dresses, it would be tough to tell the difference. Biker and leather bars are also places Cainites can be found. Ever been to a real Army surplus store? Chances are, Cainites are good customers. The Sabbat's disrespect for the "cattle" doesn't mean

that they won't deal with powerful individual mortals or groups. As factions grow beyond their humble roots, hiding their activities becomes very important. At some point just hiding won't be enough, and the other options have to be considered.

## HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

One of the first options is to create an ordinary front for the enclave's activities. These fronts can range from exclusive social clubs to complex businesses to simple storefronts. Those who get the hang of doing this call it hiding in plain sight. What type of organization an enclave or club forms depends on the leadership, the strengths of the members and what clans are involved. One big difference starting out is that whatever front is built has to be able to attract mortals as well as other Kindred. Controlling that growth is also an issue. Enclaves don't want to attract a lot of mortal attention right after they form a front. Doing so risks nosy reporters or other information seekers who might learn more than they should. Toreador have the easiest time dealing with this but the hardest time preventing its growth. Adoring crowds and the adulation they bring act as potent drugs for a Toreador's vanity, and they often have a hard time not giving in to the temptation.

Clubs and enclaves have been known to form many different types of fronts to hide their true natures. Some, such as the "nonprofit organization" run by a Toreador or entertainment venues such as bars and nightclubs run from behind the scenes, by a Brujah are popular. Others are less common. Here are some out-of-the-ordinary examples that haven't been talked about. One thing to keep in mind is that enclaves look for business ventures that can "employ" as many Kindred as possible. Fronts that employ one or two Kindred aren't going to be as useful as those that could employ more. Like larger Kindred organizations, enclave fronts employ mortals as well as Kindred. In many cases the first person a customer meets is another mortal, not a vampire.

### Gymnasium, Dojo or Training Center

Run by one or more Brujah, these offer Kindred a place not only for physical training but also for learning new skills. Loners looking to join a group can also be tested to gauge their strengths and weaknesses.

### Restaurant, Bar or Tavern

It's almost ironic serving the meals to your food. Also not so out of the ordinary, until you add the private club in the back for Kindred only. Just don't let the people in front see the menu! While no Kindred attends a restaurant to partake of its repast, in a divided city they offer an informal sort of neutral ground for factions that want to talk to each other. Being in public

offers some protection against overt attack but does leave you open to a “drive by” or other assault with enough deniability of vampiric involvement. Still, few places are better for quietly exchanging information or transacting business. Owning such establishments can also help you keep up on rumors and on new Kindred in town.

#### **Small Movie Theater or Stage**

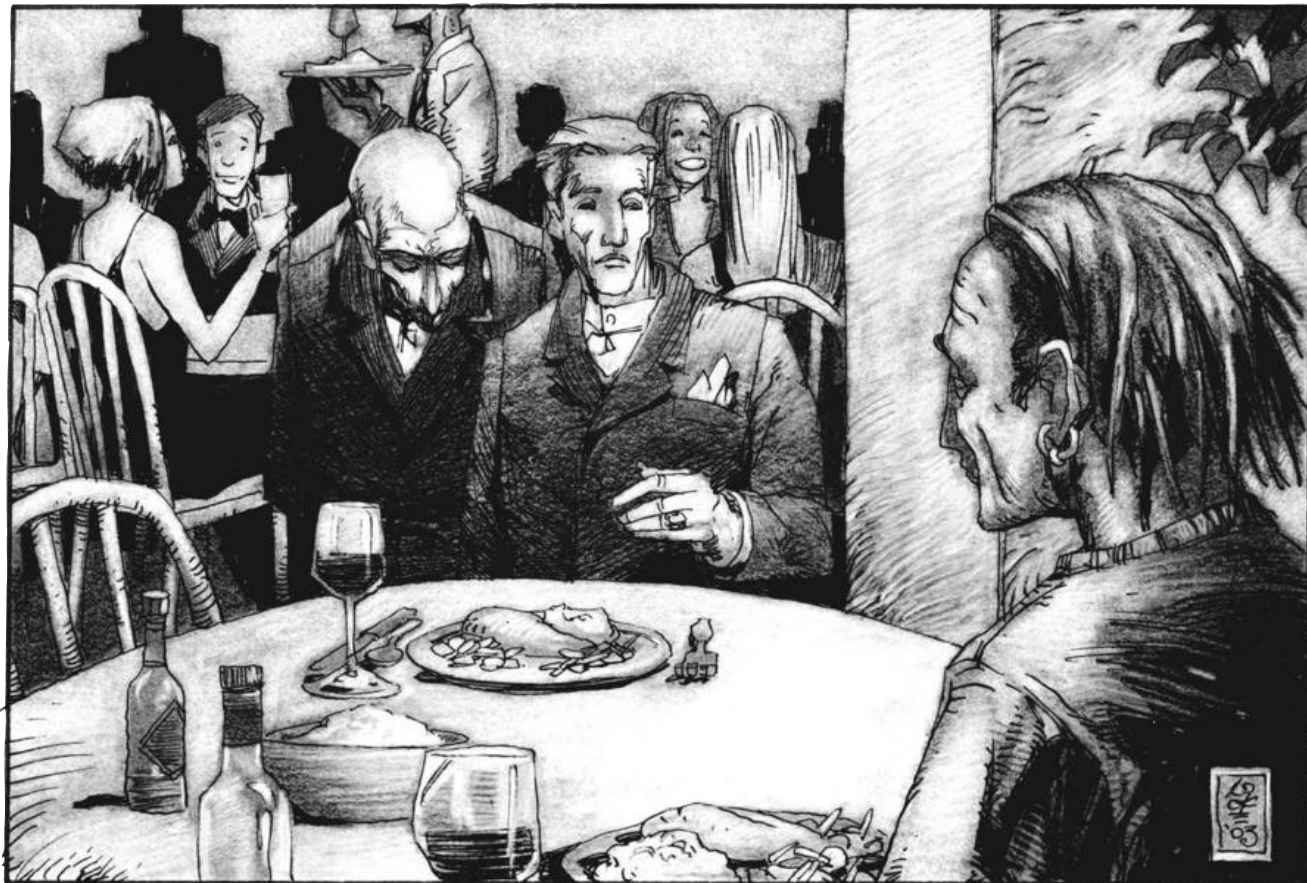
These establishments are run by Toreador or Ventrue who are looking for a unique way to expand their social repertoires. These theaters focus on artistic productions and films instead of commercial ones. As such, the crowds tend to be smaller and more culturally sophisticated. As with other Kindred organizations, vampires associated with these fronts occasionally use their theaters and stages to look for possible candidates for Embracing.

#### **Commercial and Residential Real Estate**

Kindred have ever been involved with holdings and “land wars,” so direct involvement in the real estate business comes as no surprise. Those who do so use their companies not only to look for secure places to purchase but also to keep an eye on rival factions, the Sabbat and other enemies. Kindred deal mostly in

the appraisal and finance aspects, though some go into development as well. It’s not uncommon for a company owned by one faction to disrupt or underwrite a deal with another faction.

Some Kindred think it’s okay to turn a front into an Elysium. Whether or not it’s justified is up to you and your group. Some fronts evolve into very good Elysiums, while others become targets either because they are exposed or difficult to monitor. If you do decide to allow a front to become an Elysium, you also need to establish who’s going to be Keeper. Actual front owners are seldom keepers, as running both the business and the Elysium often requires more time than one Kindred has in a night. What owners are required to do is obtain the supplies requested by a keeper for any function held in the Elysium. Each established Camarilla domain has its own Elysium, and, depending on the domain’s size, some even have more than one. Most early Elysiums are smaller than in established Camarilla cites and don’t have the room to accommodate large functions. It’s also not uncommon for more than one Elysium to be used at the same time. This helps reduce possible detection and makes it easier with security. All Camarilla Kindred respect the Elysiums of other domains. Those who don’t are breaking the Traditions and can



cause strong retaliation against the transgressor and any faction he may belong to. To avoid this, Kindred communities punish their own members who violate the neutrality of another domain's Elysium.

Keepers are one of the first offices created by Camarilla factions in divided cities. A city that doesn't have a prince often has one or even more keepers, even of the self-appointed variety. Being chosen as Keeper is mixed bag. Being offered the job often means that the candidate isn't expected to rise much further in the developing hierarchy. The flip side is that like those in established cities, a keeper can use the power of her position to help or hinder other Kindred who are trying to move up in rank or increase their status. One perk of being a keeper is that it can win you contacts and allies among Brujah and other Kindred who defend the faction's territory. A keeper can't name another Kindred sheriff, but she can request that a specific Kindred or group of vampires be assigned to help protect the Elysium.

Even with the politics involved, the formal dedication of an area as a faction's Elysium is a time of celebration. It means the enclave has survived long odds to establish influence over an area of your city. Your group is no longer an enclave. It's now a faction, which makes your city's economic, political and social scenes all but an established domain.

Like Camarilla factions, packs constantly seek to add new territory to their domain. This is the reason posses often form into gangs and packs very quickly. Pack members in unclaimed or disputed domains are chosen from the different gangs in a territory. While each gang still maintains its own domain, the pack has final say over anything happening in all the territory held by its members. With this structure comes a constant pressure to expand. Packs that aren't trying to expand their areas often have their leadership abilities questioned. Population issues are also a concern. Thriving packs not only require territory for their havens but also need areas where their members can safely feed and account for their unives. It's not uncommon for packs to intentionally take over a specific area because a rival pack wants to move into it.

While any Kindred domains are prime targets for Sabbat expansion, packs also attack enemy packs and other groups they find. How fast a pack expands its territory depends on how capable the members of the pack are. Even being vampires hasn't saved small Cainite packs that have made the mistake of taking on large mortal gangs or organized crime cells. Young ducti have to pick their targets carefully and also have to not try to overextend themselves. Overexpanding can attract the attention of

Kindred and other enemies who sometimes then band together to deal with the issue. Even in divided cities, Kindred often establish connections with law enforcement and other agencies specifically to curtail Sabbat expansion. When Kindred can't pursue Cainites that way, they send their own agents or allies to do the job. Most Cainite packs see having their havens attacked by a Kindred group as a time for a new ductus.

As with factions, once a Sabbat pack has a large enough territory, its focus changes. Pack leadership becomes concerned with various administrative activities happening in its area and making sure that it's collecting the proper kickback. Packs that are unhappy with their current economic situation seek to change things, often by allowing mortal criminals to set up shop in their territories. The types of businesses ducti look for often put them in conflict with other underworld organizations ... and the vampires associated with them. So, like young factions, ducti have to keep a close watch on things going on in their areas.

While ducti don't deal with all the politics that Kindred leaders do, they still have to keep an eye on various pack activities. Rivalries can be strong in Sabbat packs and even among them, as each pack tries to expand its influence over finite areas. Ducti also have to moderate disputes that often happen between gangs, packs and their members, and hand out punishments. Good pack leadership handles these problems with little internal disruption and keeps the pack focused on dealing with their enemies. Young packs with poor leadership have a great deal of infighting among the leaders and often fall apart.

Those packs that do establish themselves in divided cities often announce this to other Sabbat groups by having a Blood Feast, inviting Cainites from the surrounding area to see and enjoy the fruits of the new pack's power. Another more controversial tactic that new packs sometimes employ is to elect a bishop as overall leader of the pack. While a single bishop in a city is not as powerful as an archbishop or council of bishops, electing one does send a message that at least a part of the city is now Sabbat domain. A Cainite elected to be a pack's first bishop usually is a former leader who's been promoted to ductus or even legitimate investiture, or a priest who has proven herself to be a champion of the sect. That is, a bishop or archbishop of a distant city might be declared the bishop of the pack's current domain until such time as that pack can stand on its own. While promoting Sabbat doctrine is important, the first bishop also has to be a skilled administrator and tactician. The problem is that the sect leaders often don't give such provisional bishops the Blood Bath ritual needed to confirm their new status in the sect, so these new bishops aren't recognized by

Sabbat outside their own city until they gain the sect's actual recognition.

#### A BLESSING AND A CURSE

Being part of faction is sort of like being Embraced. You gain the benefit of a more secure environment but still have to deal with various problems. Most of the hassles come from outside your area, like the Sabbat and other groups trying to push you out or destroy your group. Some issues also come from within. Disgruntled Kindred leave their factions often, either to join another group, or they tire of the whole scene and leave the city, perhaps starting the whole process anew. Blaming their former leaders for their problems, some stay to make unlife for their former faction as difficult as possible.

Factions are usually interested in by things happening in their territory, but they do send scouts out to investigate serious rumors or to follow up on information the group has received. Another faction being hit or taken out entirely is big news, and other groups often send vampires to investigate. Be warned, though, "jackal" groups have picked up on this and sometimes spread rumors of a faction being attacked so they can pick off those sent to see what happened.

Unlike Camarilla factions, Sabbat packs often become very involved with what's happening outside their own areas. The Cainites themselves are often the reason things are taking place. Sabbat packs' nightly activities include scouting other parts of the city, stalking lone or refugee Kindred, and hunting for the evening meal. As a rule, Sabbat gangs and packs are limited only by the resistance they run into in different parts of the city. Ducti sometimes become interested in finding out why resistance is so fierce and send in spies to investigate.

Territory outside Cainite and Kindred domains is a lethal no-man's-land, where vampires seldom go unless they really need to evade pursuit. Besides fighting each other, both Kindred factions and Cainite packs have to deal with other enemies like independent clans, rival sects and more mysterious threats. This doesn't even take into account internal sect rivalries and groups that make their own agendas. The point is that playing on the outside is tense, and you're never quite sure what's going to happen next. You can relax a little in your territory, Elysium or haven, but even there you need to keep an eye out.

#### PLAYING BEYOND A FACTION

So now you've done it. It might have taken years, but you and the motley group of Kindred or Cainites who formed the enclave or posse with you have grown into a force to be respected in your city. You have your

#### MORE NOTES TO THE STORYTELLER

From a Storyteller perspective, chronicles on the outside should be fast, maybe even faster than your players can deal with at first. Plot ideas abound on the outside. As this kind of environment gives Storytellers many options for their chronicles, they should be careful of their antagonists' power levels. Except for a rare few exiled wanderers or diablerists, not many vampires are going to be low generation. Unlife in a divided city can be more interesting than in a sect-aligned one for many reasons, the most important being that most factions don't have strong sect infrastructures protecting their areas. In such circumstances, enemy clans, sects and even species can arrive in town and have a chance to establish

territory and can take care of the vampires in your group. Sure, you still have to deal with the myriad threats facing the undead and the social order that's grown from your humble beginnings. You have to make sure no one's breaking any of *your* rules. But now you don't have to hide anymore. When the Sabbat attack, you turn them back. Other Kindred factions sometimes share information with you and invite members of your faction to their Elysiums. You've even had envoys from other Camarilla cities come looking to do business with you.

For Kindred, it's very easy to just keep things as they are, and to be honest many factions do just that. Now that they've "made it," factions sometimes become more concerned with holding on to what they have. They see any further expansion as risky and not worth the effort. The question now is how far do you want to take it? Does your faction have the strength to be able to bring the other Camarilla factions under your leadership? These are important questions that you, the other players and the Storyteller explore next in your chronicle. Trying to bring a city fully under the sway of either the Camarilla or Sabbat is extremely difficult, but a highly rewarding story arc. The first thing you need to realize is that you'll be in for a very long chronicle, and it's possible your Storyteller won't be interested in creating that long of a story arc. The other players also might not want to be involved in such a high-level game, if for no other reason than not wanting to deal with the amount of grief you are going to encounter. These are some of the things players and the Storyteller need to work out before becoming involved in creating a permanent domain. The most important is who's going to get what in terms of position if you succeed.

In that light, has your faction truly made it? Or have you become what you fled in the first place?



## PACKS AND COTERIES OUTSIDE THE NORM

Here is a beguiling little problem that all players of **Vampire: The Masquerade** inherit simply by choosing to play an undead, soulless monster. These creatures, by their very nature, are not inclined to just hang around together in friendly little gangs and go on adventures to pass the time away. You, on the other hand, have your books and your character sheet and your dice and your brand-new vampire that you are itching to bring to your troupe in anticipation of some mighty fine roleplaying action. Is it broken, that this game has such a built-in paradox? A social game meant for showcasing the joint adventures of a group of creatures that really wouldn't be too keen on actually joining a group? Are we crazy?

Of course not! Look, you're already familiar with the well established reasons why vampires would conveniently go against nature for the benefit of your roleplaying experience. Any Storyteller worth her salt has already given this consideration when she's searched for the motivation or philosophy behind the next Camarilla coterie or Sabbat pack she includes in her chronicle.

The Storyteller probably started her decision-making process by choosing from a number of the traditional clan philosophies or sect-specific beliefs that might explain why a number of solitary vampires would choose to band together. These traditional, tried-and-true reasons can and do provide a perfectly good basic framework of ideas both for a Storyteller who is forming the next coterie or pack for her players, or the players themselves trying to understand what would motivate their characters to leave the safety of their havens and face the risks of working with, and perhaps even having to trust, other members of their monstrous, predatory species.

For example, the creation of a clan-based coterie brings with it the benefits of traditional stereotypes and clan-specific philosophies to serve as the underlying foundation of the group. A collection of Brujah brings to mind a coterie of hot-headed toughs claiming a domain and smashing the skulls of anyone who looks at them the wrong way. They come together in the interest of pooling their muscle or their political potency, giving you a very clear sense of how they fit into your story as well as relate to one another. A coterie of any of the other Camarilla clans would most likely be built upon similarly clan-specific agendas and behaviors. It

wouldn't be hard to imagine a group of Toreador working together to spread their influence throughout the local socialites' circles, would it?

From a traditional standpoint, the packs of the Sabbat are almost easier to create if you follow the most obvious path. The concept of urban guerrillas held together through ritual and agreed purpose is a strong and compelling reason for a group of vampires to form a pack and work together to achieve their mutual goals. They come together through Embrace or coercion, stay together through the power of the Vaulderie, and exist in violence against anything that stands in front of them. As a group of vampires composed of a certain clan might have a very clan-specific agenda, a typical Sabbat pack fulfills a purpose set down by the philosophy and beliefs of their sect.

You're going to be pretty accurate if you assume that the bulk of Camarilla coteries are made up of younger Kindred coming together for protection or the pooling of resources so they can stand half a chance in making a name for themselves in a society that remains under the control of the great and powerful elders. Likewise, you're not going to be too off-base by portraying the majority of Sabbat packs as gangs to some degree of religious zealots united through their arcane and stylized rituals.

To base your pack or coterie on these standard motivators certainly provides a quick and easy justification for your troupe's characters to check their solitary natures at the door and get together for some solid action and intrigue. But think of what sort of stories could come from a pack or coterie that exists outside of these norms. Not every Ventrue runs a multinational conglomerate, right? Well, neither would every coterie of Ventrue. Do the Kindred of the Camarilla come together only to defend their domains or fulfill the biddings of powerful elders? Little doubt exists that the typical Sabbat Cainite is a religious soldier first and foremost and the packs that they belong to exist with that in mind, but is that it?

You know how much difference it makes when you painstakingly develop your character concept to make her as unique and interesting to play as you can. Imagine all of the ways that creating a pack or coterie with a unique or unexpected purpose might challenge you and your fellow players to stretch the limits of your roleplaying ability or see the game in a slightly different light. But be smart about it. Don't come up with some wacky idea just for the sake of being different. Consider the characters that you are going to have involved and make the effort to come up with something that is both uncommon and effective for the setting and the game.

## OF METHODS AND MADNESS

What would be the purpose behind the formation of any coterie or pack outside of the norm for vampires? The typical reasons these groups are formed, such as mutual protection or the consolidation of power, are well established because they've proven to be effective and they make sense. Now, keeping in mind just how rare vampires actually are in any given city, it takes effort to find other potential pack or coterie members, let alone ones who have the talents and skills you're looking for. Seeking out other Kindred also brings with it an extra element of risk. The usual reasons vampires have worked together have proven that this risk is generally worth the reward, but might other circumstances bring these solitary creatures together outside of these logical and well proven reasons?

### THEY CAN'T DO IT ALL

When examining a city with any sort of substantial Kindred presence, you can almost bookmark what parts of mortal society they have their hands in. You can bet that some of the police are lining the pockets of the undead. The mayor, or those close to her, is unwittingly aware of the plans of vampires and may count them among her influences. Many gangs carry out the violent assaults of beings far more bloodthirsty than they could ever dream to be. Banks foreclose on properties they hardly remember taking an interest in before. Creditors, lawyers, hospitals, art galleries, occultist groups, gun runners and dope dealers are by default some of the areas that naturally invite Kindred interest and manipulation.

Where do the unestablished vampires in a city go to begin building their accumulation of influences and make their mark? Everywhere they turn it's as if they're trampling across some other Kindred's front lawn. All the obviously worthwhile areas in mortal society already seem to belong to someone else.

At least this is how it may seem through the eyes of the young Kindred struggling to eke out an existence during these unfair times. But remember, no matter how obviously the city may appear to be under the sway of key elders or those vampires who are already established within the city, plenty of unseen opportunities await the right Kindred who is creative enough to recognize them. Somewhere in the city is an unexploited part of the mortal world that's been overlooked. Some forgotten or neglected piece of the daylight society that other undead have yet to consider, or were just never desperate enough to have to, is ripe for the plucking if only someone would take a moment to see it as worthwhile.

The answer depends somewhat on the status of the vampire in question. Why would a centuries-old elder even bother to consider how a junkyard would be of any value to her? She has politicians and police chiefs coming to her parties and an entire street gang only a series of phone calls (and money exchanges) away. Or, if another vampire has access to the millions rolling in from banking, what would ever make him consider becoming involved with the vending machine business? With some maneuvering, elders or established Kindred can call down entire police raids on their adversaries. Clearly they aren't going to be as interested in something that might seem a bit more risky. But what about you and your status-lacking friends? You guys don't have enough influence or clout between yourselves to get the police chief, or even a lowly beat cop, in your pocket just yet! Why not start considering what could be gained if you had a meter maid or two answering to you? It may only yield small change at first, but it's a start, and even the most humble of beginnings can yield some powerful results if you play your cards right.

While it is highly likely that the best parts of mortal society already "belong to" some other members of the city's undead population, starting with a seemingly small or insignificant area of influence could prove to be a way to slip into power unnoticed through the back door. Plenty of regions remain to influence that go unnoticed or are seen as undesirable by Kindred who have set their sights on more impressive and flashy accomplishments. Through their desperation and creativity, younger Licks might be wise to gather together to quietly collect a few favors and exploit such opportunities while they're still available. Once they have a few contacts and a modicum of influence, they'll be able to start building upon that foundation and prepare for more serious moves in the future.

### BACK TO YOUR ROOTS

Many fledglings are brought into the society of the Damned because they possess certain abilities their sires desire. A mortal may have specific knowledge the sire requires or ability with skills that catches the attention of the one who brings him into undeath. For the majority of vampires, choosing their childer is a decision of the most monumental importance.

This is normal practice among the undead, but this careful selection is certainly not a reality all of the time. Mistaken Embraces occur now and then. Some are Embraced during an unwitting sire's state of frenzy — or pang of remorse immediately following one. The Sabbat Embraces masses of mortals who happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. They couldn't care less what the kine do in life or what skills they have to

offer. As a result, a good number of vampires once led fairly routine, unremarkable, 9-to-5 lives.

No matter which end of this spectrum a newly Embraced vampire comes from, they all eventually arrive at a similar situation. Once the haziness of transition recedes and the necessary criteria for accepting this new Kindred are met, these individuals have to come to terms with what has happened. Once that horror subsides and they begin to integrate themselves into vampire society, these childer consider what their next step is going to be. Just because you're out of the daytime rat race doesn't mean you don't have things you need to take care of. Surprise! It really isn't like it was presented in the brochure. You're born, you work, you're dead ... and then you work all over again, though this time you're working for blood and status instead of a paycheck and a 401(k).

For those hand-picked by their sires, figuring out what to do with unlife may be slightly easier to manage. A sire who sees her new childe as an investment (in one way or another) will take an active interest in helping him through these initial troubles. She may explain how she dealt with the first attacks of guilt and lend a supportive shoulder to her progeny. Most sires have some sort of a plan for what purpose their childer will serve, saving the fledglings the confusing task of making these decisions themselves.

By contrast, no such comforts are afforded the hapless victims of unplanned or mass Embraces. If they end up accepted among Kindred society at all, they can't expect a whole lot of help being initiated into their new roles. Their sires, if they know who they are, probably aren't going to be all that willing to look out for them. They can pretty much forget about being involved in the family business or having a sympathetic shoulder to cry on. For the most part they're on their own — a fact most will come to learn the hard way.

When left to their own devices in this new, haunting world many of these young vampires tend to return to what they knew in life. They have little support and no true experience navigating through the world of the undead. Lacking a defined purpose, or perhaps searching for some form of comfort, these fledglings return to what was familiar to them while alive. Most often this comes in the form of a job or business in which they may have been employed during their mortal days.

A Kindred may not walk through the front door of the cab company he drove for and punch the time clock, but he might buy a junker of an old cab and prowl around the night streets picking up passengers on his own. For such Kindred, the old routines will at first simply serve as a means to forget what they've

become. By doing the mundane jobs they had before, they reconnect with who they were for a short time. It may provide them with a temporary escape as well as a small sense of purpose outside of a place they're all too aware that they don't fit in.

For the creative and ambitious young Kindred, this return to their previous jobs doesn't have to remain limited to the role of emotional crutch for long. Entire packs or coteries that are off the beaten path can spring up around the mortal job one member held. Those vampires who return to the tasks of past jobs for solace, or come to the realization that their old stomping grounds could come in handy, know the workings and intricacies of those businesses better than any of their Kindred fellows. With that insider knowledge they know just what can be gained from exploiting them and how can they to make them work in relation to this new world of nocturnal existence. These smaller, odd groups of vampires that spring up around many blue-collar professions tend to baffle elders and more esteemed Kindred. They never would have considered gaining sway over the repair shops, ironworks or city couriers, nor would they have the inside knowledge to understand the prospects anyhow.

The shovelhead cabbie who sees this as an opportunity may Embrace one or two other drivers he knows and form his own pack. The small-time accountant may open up an office and take on clients who appreciate his late hours. Other Kindred of the city may offer to pool their skills with this individual and draw from the little business that's been born. The Kindred who returns to his mechanic upbringing might find willing partners who also see the merit in opening an all-night garage. Hey, even those who can cheat death have car troubles, and it's not like chop-shopping on the side has regular hours.

## NEW TACTICS OF JYHAD

A war of ages is often one of repetition and routine. Tactics rarely change, and innovations are slow to be accepted. This doesn't mean that new ideas are never considered or that new approaches and attack strategies are never looked at. A driven group of Sabbat who have a radical or unconventional idea for a new form of warfare might form an entire pack based around this idea. A coterie of Camarilla Kindred might be drawn together by a shared interest in a radical or unusual way to gain influence and power.

A typical Camarilla approach to getting rid of an adversary is to deal with her from afar. The odd building is unexpectedly rezoned to make way for a construction project that doesn't seem to happen; a haven is



vested a great deal of interest in the company. It also puts him very much in the public eye, a position in which no wise vampire ever truly wants to find himself.

## PREVENTING INFILTRATION OR ATTACK

The paranoia in Kindred society forces many acts to be routine. Vampires in either sect or even outside of party lines can expect a city's police force to have vampire ties to it or the local crime scene to have one of the undead in the shadows somewhere. These plants or participants in organizations often serve as the eyes and the ears of the Kindred to whom they answer, as well as serve as the front lines of defense from time to time. While proven to be effective, it's also become predictable. Vampires wishing to break into these well patrolled spheres of influence will certainly expect the usual types of patrols and moles. To successfully infiltrate enemy territory, the antagonists will have to think outside of the norm if they want a better chance of success. Likewise, vampires who hope to be one step ahead of these creative vampires will do well to have a presence in similarly advantageous yet unconventional organizations and businesses. The various essays and compositions elsewhere in this book are rife with such ideas — vampiric conspiracies among the local libraries, sect turncoats openly appearing as turncoats to serve as double- or even triple-agents. Any unconventional troupe can hide a coterie of Kindred looking to turn back enemies with unexpected tactics.

## BREAKING THE MOLDS

If a player or Storyteller wishes to create an unusual pack or coterie, consider the following elements for a successful creation and experience.

### PURPOSE

What does this group of vampires do? Decide if their goals are ones of finance, influence, territorial defense or straight-out war. Why are they together? Are all of the members in it for the good of the cause, or are they all in it for their individual benefit? How did they get together? Vampires normally do not go out looking to make friends — so what unifies them?

## FUNCTION

Now that you have an idea on what these vampires are planning to do, how do they do it? What job does each one do? How do they strengthen the group? How do they serve their part in all of this? How do they complement the others in the pack or coterie?

## MEMBERS

Packs and coterie outside of the norm may draw the attention of bloodlines that are seldom found elsewhere. As a contrast, some clans may feel comfortable only when working with those of their own kind. Who makes up your group? How does having a Samedi in your infiltration coterie disguised as an after-hours cleaning service work better than having a Nosferatu, or Malkavian? Do particular Disciplines and philosophies lend themselves to different tasks more easily than others?

Outside of clan and bloodline, what types of vampires would work together to maintain the integrity and effectiveness of the coterie in question? Do the skills the vampires held in their mortal lives come into play? How about what social arenas they're able to blend into effectively?

These points are just a few elements to get you started in creating an unconventional pack or coterie. Take a look at these two examples, applied to Camarilla coterie as well as Sabbat packs, to see how these elements can be combined creatively and effectively.

## EXAMPLE ONE: SECURITY FIRM

More than your average group of rent-a-cops, a pack or coterie of vampires gathered together under the guise of a security firm might provide access to all manner of sensitive information or desirable locations with relative ease.

### PURPOSE: INFILTRATION AND ESPIONAGE

As most businesses hire some sort of security to watch over their assets or people, the general public is used to seeing a varying rotation of guards sitting behind a desk and performing general patrols through an office building night and day. They are the nameless, uniformed people who grant employees and visitors access during the day and walk the grounds after hours. A Camarilla coterie operating as a security firm might infiltrate the ground-level operations of their elders and access physical files and computer databases when no one else is around. With access to shipping records and computer files, they could easily keep tabs on the progress of all manner of goods that are filtered through warehouses as well as see the true

worth of their rival's belongings. Of course, if you get deep enough in the files, couldn't you also divert a few funds here or there or find some particularly key bits of information to leak to the media that might affect the stock performance?

In the hands of the Sabbat, a security firm could be used to cause serious mayhem for a city they've set their sites on taking over. Whether they happen to be hired by an unsuspecting mortal or underbid the job from a legitimate company, the Sabbat could slip right into the middle of enemy territory. It would be extremely advantageous to gather information from files and computer databases or from the personal e-mail archives of employees. They can intercept important shipments as they're offloaded at the pier or misroute deliveries at critical times. Contents can be removed or and replaced with anything the Sabbat desires. Can you imagine the last look on the Toreador primogen's face when he uncrates that priceless Picasso statue, only to have a half-dozen Sabbat rush out with Molotov cocktails and stakes?

## FUNCTION

Whether your goals are long- or short-term, a group of vampires setting up shop as a security firm will need office staff as well as the actual agents themselves. The Kindred (or ghouls) manning the office can provide the "face" of the business and negotiate their way into getting contracts within the buildings and organizations that will benefit them the most. The office is also the place to keep the brilliant tactician whose slipping Humanity makes him a less than ideal candidate for working in the public eye. He can guide the action of the field operatives from the relative safety of the office free from the added complication of trying to hide his bestial nature.

As very few organizations would hire a security firm only for night jobs, ghouls or mortal dupes will come in handy to keep up appearances, as well as provide round-the-clock monitoring of the facility in charge.

The vampire or ghoul chosen to work his magic in the public eye needs to have the skill and ability to blend in seamlessly with the environment he'll be placed in. The ability to sift through files and pull out key information is just as important as having the computer skills needed to find evidence to support the pack's or coterie's goals.

## MEMBERS

Members of most clans would be suitable members of a security firm coterie or pack. A familiarity with modern technology and an ability to operate within the corporate environment would be more important

factors than one's bloodline. The fact that security guards are seldom watched over by other employees and have access to almost anywhere they want to go makes this a great idea for various Camarilla Kindred to settle into with long-term goals. They can work within the city and gather information slowly and methodically, attracting no attention and playing their hands long after they've left a particular job site so as not to arouse suspicion or give them away.

What if a group of Sabbat discovers that one of the survivors of a mass Embrace was a security guard? If they realize how his knowledge and prior experience can offer appealing benefits, they might create their own pack of guards to infiltrate Camarilla territory under this seemingly benign and commonplace pretense. A Sabbat pack may be less likely to use this scenario on a longer-term basis, so the types of vampires selected for this purpose would have to be able to sustain the ruse only long enough to get in and get the job done.

## EXAMPLE TWO: TOW TRUCK COMPANY

Sometimes, Kindred need little more reason to band together than to acquire the most basic needs for survival. Something as commonplace and relied upon as a late-night tow truck company could provide a pack or coterie of vampires with a hearty supply of revenue and sustenance.

### PURPOSE

Money can be had in the running of a tow truck company after hours — especially if you happen to have the junkyard and repair shop that go with it. The majority of calls you take are people stranded on the side of the road ready to fork over their credit cards and cash to be rescued. The city also pays top dollar to those independent contractors who can tow cars that need to be impounded. Of course, they don't know you favor the long route to the garage along that unused service road, or that they'll be paying for the tow back into the city with their own blood. Beyond enhancing the survival and lining the pockets of its members, this type of coterie would be seen as an asset to other Kindred in the city. If a feeding has gone horribly wrong and a vampire has a dire need to eliminate the evidence, he'd be mighty glad to have an easy means of disposing the body. A car can be towed and demolished just as easily with a body in the trunk as without.

The Sabbat isn't going to pass up easy meals or easy money either. You mean stranded mortals are willing to call you and sit pretty and wait for you as patiently as a lamb in a pen? Wouldn't it be unfortunate if a gang

of Sabbat hoodlums arrived just a few minutes earlier than the tow truck? Don't forget the amount of money to be made in by towing higher-end cars and delivering them to the network of chop-shops or car-theft rings for a few extra bucks. On the strategic front, if a Sabbat war party is planning a late-night raid on an enemy territory, it can buy itself some time by tying up a key intersection, bridge or freeway. We've all sat in bumper-to-bumper traffic waiting for some Mack truck or multiple-car accident to be cleared from the roadway. Such a tactic could buy a Sabbat pack some much needed time or prevent reinforcements from helping to assist with a counterattack.

### FUNCTION

Gearheads! Calling all gearheads! A tow truck company is going to require a lot of hands-on work suited for mechanically inclined vampires. Not only will they need to repair and maintain the fleet, but the vampires who actually hit the road to "assist" the mortals need to have a working knowledge of the ins and outs of motor vehicles. The less mechanically apt can handle the money, coordinate the pick-up and drop-off of stolen vehicles and work the dispatching. As tow truck drivers aren't usually found among the more ... genteel members of society, a stranded motorist isn't going to balk at the site of a hairy Gangrel or a grease-smudged Brujah showing up on the side of the highway — nor are good social skills necessarily required. Who expects a tow truck driver to want to have a chatty debate about Chaucer on the way back to the garage?

#### Members

We're talking urban. We're talking grubby. We're talking practical, modern, hands-on vampires who will be capable and interested in this type of work. It's doubtful a transplanted Tzimisce lord is going to find much interest in changing the oil on a filthy old truck or have the experience to even begin to tackle that messy job. Leave it to the Brujah greaser or the Malkavian who spent his mortal days as the reclusive inventory parts manager for a small-town auto shop or a Toreador who has found fascination in the glitter and pomp of customizing low-rider cars. Members of this type of a pack may not be the most politically driven. Their focus might steer more toward money, food and less glamorous favors.

#### Final Considerations

These two examples serve only to steer you in the right direction in considering what elements of mortal society could be influenced or infiltrated to further the goals of the dedicated vampire. How oddball is



oddball? That's up to you to decide what's fitting for your game and for the goals of the vampires in your troupe. The concepts can range from the blue-collar mundane to the elegance of high society, to something as surreal as a pack of Sabbat clowns (wouldn't Cirque du Soleil make for a delightfully harrowing carnival of the undead?).

As long as your form suits your purpose and the members within are logical participants in the joint game, let your imagination run wild. Challenge the conventions and push the envelope as far as you can. Who knows—that seemingly crackpot idea or concept might be unexpected enough to put the ball firmly in your character's court and change the balance of power in an astoundingly effective way.







# SECTION THREE: ESSAYS

*There is no conversation more boring than the one where everybody agrees.*

— Michel de Montaigne

Over the years I've spent developing **Vampire**, one of the most rewarding experiences has been getting a firsthand look at the different things the game means to so many different players. For some people it's about catharsis and redemption; for others it's an exploration of the depths of the human psyche through the metaphor of the Kindred. For some people it's about trenchcoats and katanas and shotguns that spew silver slugs hidden in the folds of their capes. You don't have to have high-art ambitions for your chronicle or character, nor do you have to thrill to high-action chopsocky escapism. For many players, it's simple entertainment — no more, no less.

While my job is to present a focused, cogent and consistent shadow culture through which the vampires parade and skulk, I'm not running or playing in your story. To that end, **Vampire: The Masquerade** is a million individual games, each

with as much justification for being as my high-handed dogma set to print.

That's what this chapter aims to expand. It's a chance for some of my writers to take concepts that were near and dear to them regarding the playing of the game itself. I set up an open call for this chapter — I grabbed a bunch of names out of my contact book and said, "Hey! Want some money? Then give me a single idea that speaks to you most profoundly when you think of **Vampire**." The authors responded with one-line synopses of what they wanted to discuss, which you'll find explored far more thoroughly herein. Some writers couldn't avoid going back to the well and couldn't confine themselves to a single idea. I think that's great — these people play games so vigorously that their enthusiasm encouraged them to submit multiple entries.

Essay sections have always been popular portions of our guides. Here, then, is a collection of essays



contributed by writers both tried and neophyte. You'll see some **Vampire** veterans in here as well as a few folk who just made the transition from gamer to contributor. Consider what they have to say — perhaps it'll encourage you to think critically about the elements of the storytelling experience you find fulfilling, too.

## A LITTLE DISCIPLINE GOES A LONG WAY

*By Christopher Kobar*

Watching one's character grow is, of course, one of the most enjoyable parts of playing any storytelling game. Being awarded experience points after a particularly exhilarating story and then realizing all the things you can quite literally "buy" for your character with those points can be more fun than a shopping spree at your favorite store. It goes without saying that a large proportion of those points are spent buying new Disciplines and improving those your character already has, and this is to be expected. Disciplines are the most useful tools that vampires possess, and it is certainly understandable that one would wish to keep adding to this arsenal with more and more Disciplines of more and more potency. Unfortunately, this very pursuit can all too often result in many of the lesser powers, those granted with only one or two dots in a given Discipline, being seen as little more than necessary stepping stones to greater supernatural might. At best, they may be viewed as nifty little tricks that every so often have a use. The problem with this is twofold. First, players are ignoring or not even aware of the extraordinary usefulness of even the simplest Disciplines. Second, players can never truly understand their characters if they cannot begin to appreciate the importance of these powers. Luckily, both these problems can be overcome and the game and one's character can end up being that much better for it.

Let's look at the second problem first. It is one thing to create a new vampire character, assign Traits and then jump into a story, saying that your character has been one of the undead for perhaps as much as a quarter of a century already. It is altogether a very different thing to really understand what it might actually be like to have been a vampire for half a mortal lifetime. To do this, a player needs to recognize that her character did not begin with three dots in Presence and two in Celerity. On the contrary, the vampire may have caught on to the trick of moving at supernatural speed without too much difficulty, but to have learned the art of Entrancement means

by necessity that the vampire has already mastered the ability to successfully Awe people and to use her Dread Gaze whenever it might prove useful. Mastery does not mean just knowing how to use these powers, it means knowing how to use them in every way possible, to understand how to exploit these unholy gifts to aid the vampire in hunting, protecting herself and gaining an advantage over all others. The vampire may not always succeed to the degree she hoped, but she will know every possible application of those powers she has probably been using for decades at the very least. To think that a vampire learned how to use Awe and then hardly ever used it for anything but making a good impression on people is silly, for the Discipline has so much more potential, potential that any vampire worth her salt would have discovered and exploited at every opportunity.

Consider the Protean Discipline. Sure, turning into mist is pretty useful and shifting into the form of a bat is kickass, but what about the Eyes of the Beast, the first thing that many Gangrel learn? Seems pretty straightforward, right? Your character can see in the dark without penalty. Neat, but no big deal. Wrong. Imagine for a moment that you, yes you, the player, woke up tomorrow with this one power, the ability to see in total darkness with gleaming red eyes. What could you and would you now do that you never did or would have been able to do before? Well, aside from not needing a flashlight to get up to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night, here are a few things that jump to my mind. You could drive in the dark, which means you can escape pursuers more easily by turning off your car's lights while making the all-important getaway. Similarly, you can pursue others much more easily, whether in an automobile or on foot, regardless of the terrain. But you could do other fun things. For example, you can scare the bejesus out of almost anyone with those eerie glowing eyes. Might seem silly, but let's forget the game for a moment and think about the real world again. Most people, when confronted with a seemingly normal person whose eyes suddenly flare up with a clearly unnatural crimson glow, are not going to handle it too well. Remember, supernatural and unexplainable things don't exist in the real world; the overwhelming majority of the residents of the World of Darkness are no different and would react the same. This means that you can frighten people, or at least give them serious pause. Whether they think you might be a devil, a freak or a monster of some kind, they'll probably not want to tangle with you. Those assholes at the

bar who corner you outside to show you how easily they can screw up your night will probably get the serious willies when your eyes start shining like some earthbound demon and abandon their plans in a few heartbeats. On the flipside, the same effect can be used to seduce those who have a secret attraction to the strange and dangerous. I'll bet you I could start a very lucrative cult with no other asset than this ability. Hell, I *must* be something blessed or cursed with eyes like that, right?

The "What would you do if you woke up with Discipline X?" test is a useful way to approach most low-level Disciplines. How about Shadow Play, the first dot in Obtenebration? Believe it or not, lighting is one damned powerful influence on how we view perceive things and people. How well lighting is done can make or break a film, and psychologists have known for ages how it can affect mood and productivity. Shadow Play means you can not only manipulate shadows and, thereby, most lighting situations, but these shadows are wholly unnatural and can have temperature and a near-textural component. Being exposed to these kinds of things can, without a doubt, result in anything from stark raving terror to all sorts of perverse sensual abandonment, depending on the wishes and skill of the shadow manipulator. If you woke up with this power tomorrow you could turn every entrance you make into a room into a cinematic opus lacking only a soundtrack, supernaturally heightening every aspect of your persona with the most appropriate shadow effects, making you appear taller, more formidable, more fearsome, more mysterious and more seductive. Actively displaying your control of these Abyssal shadows would mark you as akin to a kind of sorcerer or hellish fiend. What was that name? Oh yeah, Prince of Darkness. Heh.

In one of my most enjoyable chronicles one of the players played a Caitiff who seemed to celebrate mediocrity. He was physically unappealing, socially naïve and book-smart to the point of annoying; in essence, a full-bore nerd. Aside from a dot in Auspex, which he learned moments after his creation, the only other Discipline he learned was a bit of Necromancy from a fellow player's character. I was regularly amazed at the value of Insight, the first dot of the Sepulchre Path. I thought, okay, you can look into a dead man's eyes and see the last few seconds of his existence. Soon the character was seeking out and successfully using this power on dozens of corpses that played surprisingly key roles in the chronicle's ongoing mysteries. Believe it or not, the Caitiff pretty

quickly became an indispensable member of a coterie of relatively skilled Tremere ancillae, Kindred who had thought the clanless fledgling was better off dead. The character — Throckmorton Ulysses Smith, if you can believe it — also found a host of new ways to use his Heightened Senses. This is a power that already seems obvious in its potential, but when the Caitiff (a morgue technician in his mortal life) began using it to aid his forensic investigations he was able to make discoveries that went far beyond what he could ever have learned with training alone.

Nearly any low-level Discipline can be examined all over again to find new uses previously never considered. How about using Command to tell an important mortal to “stutter” only moments before giving a public speech? Or “hiccup” at a eulogy? This may be too much for some, but what about whispering “urinate” or worse to a powerful mob leader while he is entertaining some peers at the city’s five-star restaurant? Malkavians who have been around for any time would recognize that in a world of strong emotions the first dot of Dementation, Passions, is a godsend, enabling them to heighten or suppress anyone’s emotions. With little effort police can be pushed to their limits and may end up beating to death a man during a traffic stop. Similarly, they can be deadened to the point where they put no energy into investigating a missing person who has been “collected” by a certain Kindred. A simple infatuation can be turned into a dangerous obsession and the smallest appreciation of a joke can be changed into uproarious laughter and, probably, friendship. On the other hand, a wife’s pleading forgiveness to her husband for cheating will be for naught if her passions are squashed to almost nothing. Yes, for vampires, it truly is simple to play games with mortals; even for the least skilled of the undead it quickly becomes second nature to tap into their few, but very flexible, Disciplines.

A player should also not underestimate the creativity of other players and the Storyteller in using low-level Disciplines. A case in point is a certain 13th-generation Baali whelp named Big Lil who had only a single dot in her bloodline’s signature Discipline, Daimoinon. She was one of my Storyteller characters and an individual of no real power at all, socially or otherwise. Sense the Sin enabled her to cast her gaze into the heart of her fellow Kindred and recognize their fears, weaknesses and failings. As a Storyteller I had to do nothing but have the bitch (who posed as a Caitiff) drop very unsettling hints to the players’ characters about these

vulnerabilities while coming off as someone who knew much more. This one petty pawn succeeded in insulting the characters, kidnapping and killing their ghouls, burning down one of their havens and threatening them with direct harm — all without suffering their wrath, for the characters ultimately convinced themselves that she *had* to be a vampire of great power merely posing as a neonate. It is important to recognize that it was not her ability to Sense the Sin that gave her the advantage she achieved, but rather her (or my) willingness to use it at every conceivable opportunity, not just now and then. Why wouldn’t she? She had nothing to lose and everything to gain, and gain she did.

Look at your character sheet and check out those one and two-dot Disciplines. Now think of what you could do with them. Don’t be too quick; give it some time. Spend a day thinking about each one, at home, at the office, at school, at the mall, on the bus. Think of all the ways that your day would go differently if only you possessed Passion, or Command, or Awe, or Feral Whispers, or any of the other low-level Disciplines. Once you have done this and (I hope) have come up with a host of heretofore unimagined possibilities, think of whether your character would find similar usefulness using her Disciplines in these ways. Now think about how long your character has been stalking the night and how long she may have been using these Disciplines in these ways. Quite a while, huh? Yes, she would probably have been doing these things for a long time already. Using these Disciplines this way is not something your character probably even has to think about anymore; it’s become second nature, just as natural [*sic*] as spending blood to heal or increase her Physical Traits. The important thing is to understand that this is part of what it means to be a vampire and your character in particular. Use this newfound insight and you will find the reward is immediate.

## **“BUT I WAS CHUST FOLLOWINK MEIN CHARACTER CONCEPT!”:**

**The Gamer Nuremburg Defense and Vampire: The Masquerade**

*By Greg Stolze*

At the end of World War II, some German soldiers argued, at the Nuremburg war crimes trials, that they were not personally responsible for atrocities they had committed. True, they were the ones



who'd pulled the triggers on unarmed civilians, but (they said) it was actually their *officers* who were guilty. The soldiers/triggersmen were innocent because *someone else told them to do it*.

This is the so-called Nuremburg defense: It's not my fault, I was just following orders.

The tribunal didn't buy it.

\*\*\*

"The Nuremburg Defense" has become a punch line. In his novel *Thank You For Smoking*, Christopher Buckley suggests a "Yuppie Nuremburg Defense" for America in the Reagan-Bush era: Not my fault, I was just paying the mortgage.

The Nuremburg Defense for Gamers is: Not my fault, I was just following my character concept.

We've all seen this, right?

"Dr. Saarkov wouldn't give a crap about rescuing those guys. He's a follower of Nietzsche and the Path of Power and the Inner Voice. If they weren't strong enough to avoid capture, he's only coddling them if he helps them escape!"

"Lotus would never go into the woods at night. She's terrified because of her experience with the Lupines. Look, the Phobia flaw is right on my character sheet!"

Your character concept is "keeps a low profile, avoids trouble." Your character concept is "macho loner, sticks his neck out for no one." Your character concept is "devious weasel who would sell out his own grandma for two pints of O negative."

Nothing in the rules stops you from building characters like this — arguably, the Curmudgeon, Bravo and Conniver Natures encourage it. From your perspective, they look fun, cool and interesting. To your Storyteller they are landmines in the lawn of his carefully tended plot, waiting for his riding mower to detonate them in a painful explosion of bad blood and ruined stories.

Rather than blow up your Storyteller's chronicle (which is also your chronicle, and your fellow gamers' chronicle), it's important to understand why some character concepts look sweet on the outside but are actually toxic, not just to your Storyteller's plans but to the other players as well.

### Half for Self, Half for Others

The flaw in the Nuremburg Defense is that it assumes human beings have no basic level of behavior that they owe one another (such as "nonmurdering"). In fact, legal and ethical thought holds that certain decency standards do take precedence over patriotism and authority.

The flaw in the Gamer Nuremburg Defense is that it assumes your character exists only for your gratification when, in fact, she's part of a story that involves everyone else in your gaming group. Gaming is a social activity, and if you want to get in the game, you have to give to the game.

Maybe you want to play Truck the Combat Monster, a Brujah whose response to trouble is "use Potence to follow the path of most resistance." If all the other players have devious schemers whose best attacks are harsh language, it's not going to work. Your character is going to start a lot of fights the other characters can't survive.

Maybe you want to play a snobby rich Toreador and the other characters are bestialized Gangrel and extra-slimy Nosferatu. Maybe you want to play an angst-ridden neonate who can't cope with his murderous hungers while the other players just want to kick some ass and drink some blood. The precise nature of the conflict doesn't matter; what matters is, your character doesn't fit.

I guess what I'm trying to say is that gaming has no place for individuality. Conformity is bliss. Submit to the gestalt! Freedom is a cancer, which must be SUPPRESSED by ANY MEANS NECESSARY!

Wait, no, that's not at all what I'm trying to say.

While your personal preferences aren't necessarily bad, they aren't the holy grail, either. They're not precious and inviolate, and if they need to be sacrificed so that the chronicle can work, well, it's a damned shame, but it's better than sacrificing the game so that you can have your dream character and no story.

When you're coming up with a character, it's fine to start by considering only what you want, what piques your interest and sounds fun. The next step is to ask, "How is this character going to be fun for the other players?" If your character isn't going to contribute, why the hell would they involve their characters with her? Maybe you really want to run a gangsta-mack Five Percenter who hates Whitey, but if the other characters are all honky stockbrokers, what could possibly unify the group?

Traditionally, the answer is, "The Storyteller bends over backward to provide some barely plausible excuse or necessity." Let's face it, though: The Storyteller has enough work without laying 20 miles of road out to your isolated character's Unabomber shack.

Not only is that a lot of extra effort — usually the character concepts that require the Storyteller



to romance them in aren't *worth* the effort. Let's examine some of the most common. The Lone Wolf character (see page 52) is *such* a hackneyed trope that the developer actually budgeted 5,000 words in this book's outline to put it paid. But there are others.

**The Power Broker** — Instead of being a disconnected Lone Wolf, this gal is overconnected. She's the icy manipulator who uses everyone as her pawns, trusting no one and always ready to sell out a "friend" for temporary advantage.

Fine.

The Power Broker is better than the Lone Wolf in the short term — she'll help you out so that you help her out later, or she's setting you up so that she can sell you out. But eventually she'll be faced with a deal where selling out her fellow Kindred is too good to plausibly resist, and after that, why would they have anything to do with her? She can work for a while, but the Power Broker in her pure form has a limited shelf life.

**Mastah Slayah** — A battle-optimized character with little backstory, few social skills and no interest in the political intricacies of vampire society. This character is built to survive fights, which can (again) be very helpful in the short term. But Slayahs tend to survive and not prosper. Without some rudimentary ability (or motivation) to get along, they become obsolete just like the Lone Wolf. You maybe invite this guy along when you're going to shake down a debtor, but you don't want him sitting next to you in Elysium.

**The Creep** — The guy with bumped-up Contacts, Investigation, Computer and Obfuscate, usually Nosferatu, usually has a subterranean lair that would make your standard *D&D* party nostalgic for the *Tomb of Horrors*. The Creep is holed up under the opera house and sees no reason to venture out when he has ghoul pigeons and sewer rats to take care of business. The Creep's patsies and proxies can contribute to the group, but there's a hidden cost. Either the Storyteller has to split her attention between the characters who are running around actually doing stuff and the Creep in his lair, or she has to face the Creep's player's complaints that his character never gets any attention.

The underlying theme to these (and most) toxic character concepts is fear of weakness. The Power Broker doesn't want to be manipulated or coerced. The Slayah doesn't want to get beat up or killed. The Creep doesn't want to venture out where it's risky.

One of the hard lessons of roleplaying is that it is not our characters' strengths that make them interesting and fun. It is their weaknesses.

Good stories are built on conflict, full stop. A character with no weakness can't be conflicted. A character with no fellows can't have a conflict of loyalty. A character who's unbeatable in a fight can't produce real fear. (You did want to play a horror game, right?) A character with no morals can't face a difficult ethical decision, because without morals no decision is difficult.

Cowardly character concepts are limiting. Characters built only to avoid trouble are *boring*. (Besides, dying can be a stone groove — check out Christopher Kobar's essay below this one.) Characters with weaknesses and problems produce good stories because they come complete with issues to explore and trials to overcome.

(Here's a little metagame min-max secret: Storytellers are reluctant to kill interesting characters with good plot hooks. If a character doesn't tie in to the group easily or provide story fodder, I'm not going to lose much sleep over his Final Death. On the other hand, if a guy hands me a neonate who committed diablerie, who's on the run from his sire, who's on the police's shit list for a crime he *didn't* commit as a mortal and whose mom was Embraced by Setites when he was 10 years old ... hell, I'll fudge dice rolls all night to keep *that* guy around. He'll always be in trouble, but the way he oozes plot development every time he blinks saves me weeks of preparation.)

### Purifying Your Concept

The bad news is that characters who never fail at everything are boring. The good news is that characters who are weak at some things and good at others are interesting — and you can turn a toxic character into a team player with fairly little effort if you're willing to think about the needs of the group and the needs of the Storyteller. Here's how.

**Bend.** If your character type doesn't fit, change it. You don't have to throw it away completely, just moderate or mitigate the parts that produce strain. You can still have your homey vampire among the white boys. In fact, the contrast can provide lots of tension. Just tone down the virulent anti-white sentiments.

Or consider our old friend Mastah Slayah. He's far from useless to the group, and the less combative they are, the more his stock rises. Now you need to edit the concept so that *they* aren't useless to *him*. Maybe he's a transplanted hillbilly who doesn't

know dick about politics — but wants to learn. Now, instead of an unplayable fish who sees no reason to get out of water, you have Bram Stoker's *A Makeover Story*. He has a direction in which to develop and the other characters can get him there. Which leads us to ...

**Change.** Even if your character concept is less than helpful to the troupe, it's not graven in stone. How many buddy cop flicks have you seen where the protagonists start out hating one another but, by the time they've filled the screen with 60 minutes of cordite and mayhem, wind up as the best of friends? That dynamic can fix characters who are otherwise doomed for long-term play, like the Power Broker example. Sure, she starts out thinking her coterie-mates are suckers (so to speak) whom she'll gladly pimp out when she can get a good rate. But in the course of play, look for reasons for her to take them more seriously, come to respect them, rely on them or even admire them. It's easy to put a bad interpretation on people's actions (especially vampires' actions), but if you see your fellow characters the way their players want them seen, a Power Broker's change of heart can become surprisingly plausible. "Hey," she realizes, "maybe people *aren't* just tools!" (Or "Maybe violence *doesn't* always work out well." "Maybe some things *are* worth risking my neck for.")

**Defy.** It may be that your character concept is only a pain some of the time. In that case, it may work to simply play against character ... when it really counts. After all, Han Solo is a cynical mercenary for most of *Star Wars*, but in the end, he finds something that's more important. To take a more highbrow example, Hamlet dithers his way through the first four acts before ganking the king. That's fine; it would be a pretty lousy play if the ghost said, "Kill the king!" and Hamlet did it without even pausing to accidentally kill his girlfriend's dad.

Hamlet, like Han, changed over time — and so can your vampire. In the end, stories rely on people who change their world and are changed by it. Remember that your character concept isn't the be-all and end-all: It's only the beginning.

## DEAD AGAIN

**How to Make a Character's Death as Satisfying as His Unlife**

*By Christopher Kobar*

No matter how many times you tell yourself it's just a game, a simple repast of pure fantasy, none of that seems to matter when the dice are cast and, to your utter disbelief and shock, the results indi-

cate that your beloved character, the one you have nurtured like a special child, has undeniably met his Final Death. Of course, this can't possibly be happening. You've been playing this character for ages now, ever since that sunny afternoon almost lost in the mists of time when you first cracked the **Vampire** core book and started allocating your dots to the various Attributes, Abilities and Backgrounds that made your character the vibrant fount of unlife he has become. No way is this happening. You look at the Storyteller, sure beyond a doubt that despite the numbers on the dice no way will she allow your character to expire now, especially when you were so close to that next dot in Protean. And without your character, who's going to be able to reveal the prince's dark secret to the Brujah primogen? I mean really, that would ruin the Storyteller's whole chronicle, wouldn't it? Surely she plans to fudge the results a bit and come up with some last-ditch "saving throw," some cosmic *deus ex machina* that will pull your well worn Kindred out of the proverbial fire once again. Seriously, no one is really going to expect the whole game to stop so you can roll up a new character, right? Um, right?

Wrong. Sometimes characters die. Believe it or not, that's part and parcel of the whole storytelling experience. You create a character, he faces myriad obstacles and dangers that pose fatal risks, and most of the time your character overcomes these hurdles to fight another night. Most of the time. Many times the night (or day) comes when that final bit of luck runs out. The dice aren't being cooperative and no Willpower points are left that can be spent. Now it's up to the Storyteller, and, truth be told, for the Storyteller, allowing the character's predatory unlife to end is often the best of all possible choices. For one thing, the Storyteller doesn't want to set a bad precedent. She also wants to be as fair as possible to all the players, and finding excuses for one character might put her in a tough spot when the next character is hanging by a thread. Never meting out this final justice when called for can also diminish the danger associated with all other threats in the game, reducing the overall level of drama. Finally, it just might be time for the character to go.

I know, this is not fun. But let's stop for a moment and think about this. Would *Braveheart* have been better if William Wallace had not been killed and he just kept fighting the English in sequel after sequel with his painted, woolly hordes? What about Boromir in *The Lord of the Rings*? Or, dare I say it,

how good would the novel *Dracula* have been if the rascally old count had not ultimately been defeated by his hunters? (For a moment, let's forget about the untold number of film sequels that refused to accept this fitting end to a great novel.) The truth is that many great works of drama are great in part because one of the main characters did die, not because death was always outfoxed. This is an essential fact that is used again and again by writers to bring added drama to their work. While the least skilled authors use it as nothing more than a plot device (or worse, because they couldn't think of anything better to do with the character), the best writers turn a character's death into a stirring comment, an unforgettable tribute and even a dramatic climax that changes all the other characters forever. A **Vampire** Storyteller is not necessarily any different, and the best of the lot always strive to craft the most dramatically enjoyable tales. It would be absurd and unfair to deny a talented Storyteller this invaluable dramatic tool just because it is not fun to be on the receiving end.

Death is a powerful presence in any **Vampire** chronicle. The Kindred deal out death so often that for many it loses any moral impact, as reflected by the game's central struggle with Humanity and the Beast. Vampires may kill to feed, to settle scores and to just take care of business, as it were. The consequence is that death almost becomes a character itself, a cloying and somber entity that not only cannot be ignored, but one that haunts the cast of more traditional characters for the duration of their journey, whether physical, emotional or spiritual. A good Storyteller will keep death only a hair's breadth from the players' characters, like an unwanted shadow they can never escape, always ready to claim its next victim courtesy of the hungry player character. But death can be more visceral, too. It can await the vampire like a dark lover, always whispering its charnel siren song as the sun rises each morning, as a Lupine howls in the hills beyond the city and as the Beast rises up inside. Death is everywhere in a **Vampire** chronicle, and it would be foolish for any player to cling to the false hope that the reaper is not also waiting to snatch his character should the opportunity present itself. Very few vampires truly survive forever; they are cursed fiends and every curse comes due in time. Caine's Curse is no different and when the time comes to pay its tithe, no amount of Willpower or begging on the part of the player should suffice to escape the cold hand of fate.

Okay, so what can you, as a player, do about this? The short answer is nothing, really. Just buck up, accept the likelihood of your precious character's demise and start imagining how much cooler your next character will be. Don't bitch and whine to the Storyteller and please, please, do not offer bribes. Just suck it in and move on. Not good enough? Okay, how about the longer answer?

What if your character's destruction is not just a sad fluke with little impact? What if your character's final moments are so memorable and important that they change the entire chronicle? What if the other players are left marveling at the dramatic climax and quite literally want to applaud your character's last scene? What if the event is the one thing that comes to define the entire chronicle more than anything else? No, this won't bring your character back from the grave, but it can turn an unexpected and painful loss into a triumph that will become the stuff of legend, the story that is retold countless times as something worth remembering. As the Kurgan in *Highlander* said, "It's better to burn out than fade away." Truer words could not have been spoken.

The first thing you can do to make your character's potential future destruction epic is to talk to your Storyteller. It may come as a shock, but a good Storyteller doesn't look forward to seeing characters meet their ends, even when it might be part of the planned storyline. Storytellers like to watch characters grow as much as the players do, and the best played characters can provide a Storyteller the kind of entertainment that justifies all the hard work put into creating the chronicle and running the game. Most Storytellers also do their utmost to ensure that if death does come a-calling, the character's fate will not be left solely to a crapshoot. Sure, it might be the dice that finally spell doom, but a good Storyteller makes sure that it does not come to that unless the player was first given a choice, one that might provide a way to avoid destruction. This is the real difference between a chronicle being a purposeful bit of dramatic artistry and little more than barely controlled chaos. Discuss this with your Storyteller to make sure that she is on the same page and aims to create the former kind of chronicle, rather than the latter. Free choice does not mean that terrible things will be avoided, but it does mean that should doom rear its ugly head, you will at least understand that it was a risk you willingly took, and that will help to make it seem fairer, no matter how unfortunate it may be.

The third thing is to remember the old adage that those who have truly lived have no fear of death. In **Vampire** this means that you should always seek to put your character at the forefront of the drama as a real mover and shaker rather than as someone who only reacts to situations. The loss of any character that makes things happen in a story always has a dramatic impact, no matter the circumstances of that loss. If your character is someone who initiates new subplots, seizes opportunities and pushes the story to its limits, then not only will you be helping the Storyteller in making the entire chronicle a more memorable one, your character will become a lightning rod for drama. This might mean that it will be harder to avoid danger as it will actually be drawn to the character, but it also means that each of your character's successes and failures will be that much more powerful for everyone else. Should your character find himself in dire straits and the clock has finally run out, at least it won't be something that goes unnoticed. Plots will be shaken and characters will be left scrambling to deal with the loss. Secrets will be revealed and the domino effect will cause ripples throughout the whole chronicle, in ways that no one, not even the Storyteller, might have predicted. Believe me, this is fun stuff, for the Storyteller as much as for the players. The character who always sat back on her haunches and was more of a follower than a dynamic figure will be unlikely to cause much upheaval upon her own death.

One way to better ensure that your character's death will be impossible to forget is to arrange things ahead of time such that should the worst happen, certain events will be set in motion according to a preconceived plan. A character in one of my chronicles was a certain Samedi who had spent half a century delicately applying his hideous arts to a significant number of corpses in local cemeteries. A few slick deals with certain other Kindred and a couple of forged documents stored in secret were also part of his preparations. Ultimately, if he were destroyed, the event would set in motion a series of personal catastrophes for the city's most powerful Kindred. Worse yet, his Final Death would finally result in the awakening of hundreds of shambling corpses that would rise from their graves and seek the destruction of the local prince, clearly causing enough trouble to keep the city's Kindred hard-pressed to preserve the Masquerade and their own cold hides. This was a bit of overkill, but it illustrates the kinds of things possible. Even a simple arrangement that exposes a few dirty secrets could upset the power balance and

throw the entire city's vampire population into a frenzy of political and physical backstabbing. Sure, the player's character is no more, but c'mon, wouldn't it be fun to watch the mayhem that resulted?

Another way to elevate your character's Final Death is to turn those final moments into a personal triumph that focuses on the game's theme of personal horror. The idea here is to take whatever time is left to the character (if any) and to put everything the character has not into saving his ass or getting a bit of revenge, but into proving to himself, if to no one else, that despite the Curse of Caine he is not a monster. Let the character try in one last-ditch effort to reclaim his humanity, his soul, and die free of damnation. I'm not suggesting that the vampire become mortal again or anything so outrageous, but even a change of heart can speak volumes and add a very noble and meaningful end to an unlife of tragedy and bloodshed. Does the character truly love a mortal? Let him proclaim it now. Does he feel remorse for his many crimes? Let him confess it in the face of death. Has he been holding some Earth-shattering secret? Have him reveal it. It might not achieve anything in game terms, but these kinds of acts can be freeing, allowing you, as a player, to let your character go, knowing that perhaps there may be such a thing as redemption and salvation.

A character's death is an end, of course, but it is also a beginning. Unless that is the last time you will play the game, you will have another character soon, one with all new adventures and tales to tell. But your new character, from the moment of his inception, also faces Final Death. Whether he will be forced to confront it or not may not be left up to you. How he faces it and what it will mean for that character and for the rest of the characters and the whole chronicle can be yours to decide. I suggest not letting that opportunity pass you by.

## THE CALL OF THE BLOOD

*By Aaron Rosenberg*

So you're a vampire. A creature who feeds on the blood of others, who stalks the night, prowling for victims. That's great.

How the hell do you get into character?

In most games, you have something in common with your character. You're a science geek, he's a scientist. You're a gun enthusiast, he's a secret agent. But what do you have in common with a vampire? She doesn't even breathe. So how can you really feel that you're part of this character, how can you make it your own?

Well, you do have something in common, actually. You both eat to survive. Sure, you eat hamburgers and pizza and chow mein and she drinks blood. But it's still food, and without such sustenance both of you will perish.

But you're playing a character who drinks people's blood to survive. How weird is that? It's not like you can call your local blood bank and order a pint of AB negative to go, either. You have to hunt for your food, and then you have to devour it, usually live. Definitely not a character for the squeamish. Having some trouble getting used to the concept, or making it feel real? Try remembering the last time you were really hungry. I mean *really* hungry — not just peckish or nibbly, but that time you forgot to eat for two days and your stomach felt like it was going to rip right through your flesh and start grabbing passers-by. Remember that? The light-headedness, the shaky hands, the sharp pangs that almost doubled you over? The way your tongue felt thick in your mouth, and your saliva flowed at the mere mention of food? The way the smell of bread baking or donuts could make you dizzy? Focus on that hunger. That's what vampires feel every time they need to feed. It's a real physical addiction for them — the blood is what keeps them vital. Without their fix, their bodies will lock up, cease functioning and return to the death they are merely forestalling. But that won't happen easily. It's not like a vampire who hates his existence can simply refuse to drink and die quietly. The instinct to survive is strong, stronger in them than it is in us. After all, they've survived death itself. Even if a vampire consciously decides not to eat, his body will still hunger, and eventually its reflexes will take over. That's something you may have experienced yourself, to a lesser degree. Someone brings a box of donuts to the game and sets them on the table to share. You know you shouldn't have one, but you find your hand reaching out and grabbing one anyway. That's instinct, and the vampire's reflexive attack is much the same thing, just more intense and more dangerous (though perhaps the jelly donut won't agree).

In other words, you can think of your character's appetite in one of two ways. Either your vampire feeds reflexively or does so consciously. If it's the former, you don't have to worry about it too much. The vampire's body takes control when it's hungry and goes after its meals — no thought necessary. The Beast takes over. Whether the vampire blacks out and wakes up afterward to find his mouth bloody





and his hunger sated or stays conscious but passive the entire time like a passenger on a roller coaster is up to you. Of course, you'll need to decide how your character feels about these feeding frenzies. Does he simply accept them as an unavoidable price for continued existence and do his best to ignore them? Does he bemoan them and hate the fact that his body refuses to quit? Or does he keep trying to ameliorate them — placing himself in the middle of a farm, for example, so that he feeds only on cattle, or breaking into a prison so that only criminals die at his hands? It's up to you how much control your character has over his hunger. The longer he waits before feeding, the more likely his system will take control and leave him to reap the consequences. Whatever the case, you'll probably be watching that Self-Control dwindle away, and Humanity will likely follow.

Some vampires don't wait until their bodies react. They take the initiative and feed willingly. If that's what your character is like, you need to think about his thought processes. How can he accept the notion that others must die for him to live? Does he refuse

to kill, and only take a little blood from each victim? That may reduce the guilt, but it takes a lot longer to be sated and increases the risk of being caught or interrupted while feeding, as well as increasing the frequency with which he'll have to feed. Does he feed only on certain types of people, or on animals? Some vampires are picky eaters. They'll take only cops, or redheads, or college students, or whatever their victim of choice is. Others will attack anyone. These creatures may seem more savage, but they're simply being practical. Blood is blood, after all, and the sooner they feed the sooner they can get past the hunger and get on with their other activities.

If your character feeds willingly, ask yourself about his dining habits. Just as some people insist on using a fork and knife, and others will eat only on paper plates, vampires have peculiarities and preferences for their food. Does your vampire need the chase to work up an appetite? Does he prefer to strike suddenly, in the hopes of causing as little fear and pain as possible? Does he feed only upon the homeless and the crazy, people no one will believe when they tell their tale? Does your character have

particular alleys he prefers for his haunts, certain clubs he likes to select food from, certain times of night he is more inclined to dine? Some vampires like to sup early, to avoid the rush. Others prefer to feed later, after they've had time to really get hungry. Some want time and privacy to enjoy their meals, while others like to eat on the run. Does all this sound familiar? Of course it does — you and your friends are just like this, only with real food instead of fresh, hot blood.

That's another issue, of course. When you order food, it's not something you were speaking to an hour ago. Even if you go to a seafood restaurant and order the lobster, and point out which lobster you want from the tank, you didn't have a conversation with it about movies recently or give it directions to the nearest bank. Vampires, except for the truly anguished and moral, feed on human beings. People, just like us. A vampire can carry on a conversation with a person one minute and feast on his vitae the next. That's a bit odd. Think about it — imagine all of your friends, everyone you see, is a Big Mac or a T-bone or a plate of pasta. Every single person you encounter is a potential meal, just waiting to be bitten. That's how vampires are: The people around them are all food sources. Picture having a chat with a sandwich while you're hungry. You're talking, you're laughing, you're telling a joke, and suddenly your teeth are biting into it. It's no wonder some vampires can't bear to be conscious while feeding. They don't want to think about things like that, or remember the look on the waitress' face when the fangs sank into her neck.

How do vampires view people? Are they just Happy Meals with legs? Steaks who come when they're called? Or is there more to it? There's more, of course. Steaks don't talk. They can't root for sports teams, or buy new cars, or go to the museum. They aren't going to pick a fight with you for talking during a film or for insulting their girl, and they can't lend you a dollar to tip the valet. More importantly, steaks can't beg you not to kill and eat them. Some vampires have no problems with that — it's a food chain, and they're on top, so they eat mortals, just as people eat cows. A few even enjoy the irony, as most mortals think they're at the top, that nothing eats them, and the vampires prove that wrong. You strike a little terror into the hearts of men, remind them of their place, teach them humility and the value of survival, and that's not necessarily a bad thing. Even if some of them have to die so the rest can learn it.

Other vampires are less sanguine with the notion and with their own actions. They were once mortal themselves, after all, and now they're feeding on mortals. That's hard to accept. Especially since vampires still look, dress, sound and act basically human. They still speak the same languages, still wear blue jeans or dress pants and sneakers or boots, still watch movies and television. It's almost like cannibalism, though not quite.

So how can you tolerate it? How can you accept what your character does? It's a matter of survival. Cannibals are often so out of necessity, not out of choice — they eat to survive, and if the only source of food is other people then they eat those other people. That's just the way the world works. Vampires need blood to survive, and human blood is the most potent, so they drink from mortals. It's not a question of "Well, I could drink grape juice, orange juice or blood and get the same protein. I think I'll go for blood tonight." Without the blood, your character will cease to exist. And yes, vampires are selfish creatures. People are selfish, and vampires are an extension of us, so of course they're selfish. You have to be at least a little selfish to stay alive. Vampires are just better at it, as they've stripped away a lot of our needs, and so they can concentrate more fully on the handful that remains. Food is one of those, perhaps the primary one, and vampires are well suited to hunt for, find and consume their particular sustenance.

Does that mean you shouldn't feel strange talking to people? No, you probably should. After all, those same people might be your dinner tomorrow, or next week, or even tonight. Of course, some vampires enjoy that. They look for particular people to consume. For some, it's a twisted type of public service — they find annoying, obnoxious people and feed on them. It's the vampire equivalent of the Gene Police; they're thinning the herd anyway, so they might as well take out the undesirables. Others are the opposite. They feed on those they find appealing. This is the way cannibalism works, too. In some situations the first person killed is the one no one likes, since he'll be missed the least. In other places, particularly when cannibalism is performed by warriors after a successful combat, people are killed and eaten so that their traits can be absorbed by the people eating. Thus a mighty warrior (or a powerful animal who led warriors on a difficult hunt) is devoured to gain his strength and skill, while an attractive person might be consumed to gain his charisma and appeal to the opposite sex. Vampires can take after either type. You decide whether your character is more likely to feed on those he admires or those he despises. A large part of that reflects back

to how he views sustenance. Is the act of feeding something he enjoys, something he takes pleasure in, or something he finds abhorrent but necessary? Feeding on the unlikable is a form of penance, really, a type of restitution, rationalized by the notion that "If I have to eat people to survive, the least I can do is kill and eat those who make the world an uglier place." Feeding on the admirable is for those who enjoy their meal and want the most enticing food possible, the vampiric equivalent of gourmets.

Remember, too, that some vampires need more than the blood alone to be fully sated. For some, the blood must be given willingly, by people who know what the vampire is and what he will do to them, and who accept that without reservation. That helps reduce the guilt, of course, in that the food offers itself freely, so you cannot be blamed for accepting. It also makes the meal more palatable, as mentioned above. These people are probably ones your character likes and finds admirable, and so their blood is desirable, plus their generosity makes them (and it) even more appealing. Other vampires are the reverse. They take blood only by force and against the person's will. For these vampires, it's all about the pain and anguish they cause, and the fear in their victim's eyes right before they die. Why is that? Well, some vampires are nasty and vicious and enjoy causing pain. They figure that, if they must devour like beasts, they might as well relish the role and become a beast in full. Others are more self-loathing and use the fear to prove themselves monsters. By killing so cruelly, they are confirming their own worst fears about themselves and can hate themselves more fully. For these vampires, blood freely offered is an insult. It throws them off, forcing them into the role of the welcome guest rather than that of the vicious thief, and prevents them from being in control and at the same time at the mercy of their baser instincts. Vicious dogs react the same way when offered a steak; they don't know how to take that, because they're used to taking things by force and now something is offered to them instead. It's disarming, and that can anger them even more because it throws their perspective off.

How do you decide, then, what your vampire character is like about the blood he needs? Does he love to feed or hate it, sup consciously or reflexively, go after particular people or random ones? Does he look for admirable traits or repulsive ones in his vessels, and does he take by force or only when offered? All of these are up to you, unless something in your character's background requires a particular element and attitude. Think about the type of character you want to play. Is he an enlightened

Kindred, trying to overcome the limitations and needs of his curse? Such a creature might seek to remove all anger and violence from the feeding process, to make it more careful and less painful for all concerned. Perhaps your character delights in his newfound strength and vigor and seeks to terrorize people as revenge for years of humiliation? These vampires generally hunt their prey, letting them feel the fear and hopelessness before they strike. How does your character view people? Are they simply meals on legs, or are they all proto-vampires? Are people painful reminders of the past, or comforting companions who can help the character forget his new nature for a time? Let all of these pieces guide you — combine them and you'll find a feeding method that suits your character, both what he was and what he has become, how he views people and what he thinks of himself. Just remember two things. First, there is no wrong answer. Sometimes characters react in ways you would never expect, because deep down they are hiding insecurities or desires even from themselves. And second, no matter what you decide, feeding is inevitable. The call of the blood cannot be ignored.

## REBELS WITH A CAUSE

*By Christopher Kobar*

*Bear in mind that it's as much the player's responsibility to find a motivation for her character as it is the Storyteller's.*

The Storyteller creates a wonderfully moody chronicle set in an eerie desert town in New Mexico, one with creepy old mission churches and Indian burial grounds in the middle of a nuclear test range. The chronicle, fittingly titled "Whispers of the Anasazi," is driven by one major plotline that begins with an unnerving mystery: the city's Kindred have vanished without a trace. The characters will be neonates who have been asked by their elders to investigate the disappearance and to reclaim and hold the city against any enemies of the Camarilla who might be responsible. The Storyteller feels that the instructions from the elders and the threat of unseen foes are enough to motivate the characters to work together toward a common purpose, and so he gathers his players together and has them create their characters. The players are given a good bit of freedom in doing so, as long as they are all Camarilla neonates. Finally, the chronicle begins and the Storyteller can't help but be excited about the drama ahead. Unfortunately, the excitement is short-lived.

Soon after establishing themselves in town, the characters largely lose interest in their calling and

take to pursuing private agendas that have nothing to do with their greater purpose. The Toreador wants to build a herd among the local club-goers, the Ventrue seeks influence over the mayor and his bank accounts, and the Caitiff spends his time robbing small businesses of petty cash. The Gangrel decides it's more appealing to explore the foothills miles away, and the Malkavian wastes no time being institutionalized. Suddenly, the Storyteller finds himself trying to run a half-dozen mini-chronicles, a task that is not only impossible but wholly undesirable. Hoping to resolve the situation, the Storyteller has the elder Camarilla vampires increase their pressure on the neonates for an answer to the mystery. He also decides to introduce the Sabbat pack and their dreadful leader into the story ahead of schedule, believing that nothing brings people together like a common enemy. To some extent it works, but only partly. In fact, some of the characters choose to let their comrades face danger alone, preferring to use them to wear down their foes and save their own skins. When the Storyteller asks the players why their characters are not working together, they each have an excuse along the lines of, "Well, my character is more interested in X and not Y and it is not in his nature to risk his unlife for the others. It just doesn't make sense for him to do that." In the

end, the Storyteller finally decides to pull the plug. Not only is the chronicle no longer manageable, it is no longer the chronicle that the Storyteller had worked so hard to create. So the chronicle ends and no one is able to enjoy the story at all.

What did the Storyteller do wrong? He created a good chronicle idea, complete with themes and a dramatically compelling storyline. He created inspired and appropriate antagonists, from the powerful elders to the Sabbat war party. And he made sure that the players created characters who *should* be able to work together in a believable fashion, while giving the players enough freedom to create characters they really liked. So where did the Storyteller fail? Was he simply a bad Storyteller, unable to handle the unique challenges of a game like **Vampire**? Or is it possible that the Storyteller did nothing wrong at all, that the fault lies not with him, but with the players for not taking the responsibility to help the Storyteller by finding appropriate motivations for their characters, motivations that would have kept the coterie together instead of seen it fracture into a passel of uninvolved individuals?

It may come as a shock to many players, but no rule, written or otherwise, even begins to suggest that it is the sole responsibility of the Storyteller to



create and maintain appropriate character motivations. On the contrary, the best chronicles are the ones in which the players themselves actively work with the Storyteller to continually ensure that their characters are properly motivated to work together. Certainly, some explanations for why a character is motivated one way or another will require the Storyteller's approval, but what good Storyteller wouldn't welcome a player's help in making her character more viable in a way that strengthens the whole troupe?

The Storyteller System already has its Golden Rule. I'd like to take the opportunity here to add a new rule, the Silver Rule: It is the responsibility of every player to continuously work with her Storyteller to create and maintain appropriate and compelling motivations for her character to actively work in a cooperative fashion with the other characters.

Let's examine this Silver Rule and see what we're talking about here. First, it's every player's responsibility to find motivations. That is, it's not just the responsibility of some of the players or those who are the most inclined to contribute to the story. Every player has a unique character, so every player needs to ensure that her own character has the proper motivations. Especially in larger troupes, this is very important. During character creation or soon afterward, many Storytellers will assign each character one or more such motivations, at least one of which will be aimed at bringing and keeping the characters together. This initial motivation can easily fall by the wayside in favor of other, newer motivations, however. It's the job of every player, then, not to let this happen. If it should, then the players must create a new motivation that will work as well or better at justifying why the characters should work together.

The motivation must be both appropriate and compelling. In part, this means that the Storyteller must approve any such motivation, not only to ensure that it will have the desired result of keeping the coterie together, but also to ensure that it is a good fit for what he has in mind for the character, the story and the chronicle itself. A player whose character is secretly motivated to hustle for the Sabbat in exchange for power might argue that the other characters are the perfect tools to help her diablerist achieve her goal, which in turn means her character will work with them. This is unlikely to be a very good excuse in the eyes of many Storytellers, who can easily see the inherent future problems of such a motivation in a Camarilla chronicle. The moti-

vation should also not be an attempt to gain some free benefit, as in, for example, claiming that the character wants to work with the coterie because he has been ordered to do so by his secret mentor among the Inner Circle. In order for the motivation to be compelling, it should be a powerful enough carrot or stick so that, except in the rarest of instances, it will have a higher priority than most other motivations, personal or otherwise. Certainly, exceptions always occur, but in general the reason for the character to work together with the coterie should be a strong one, the kind that's difficult to argue against. It's not enough to say that your character hangs with the Casino Royale coterie because its members are cool and nobody else likes him. On the other hand, if its members have promised to teach him a new Discipline, have already saved his ass once from an overzealous scourge and let him share their hunting ground in a city with few good feeding prospects, the motivation to join the coterie and stick with it through thick and thin is a powerful one.

The chosen motivation should also compel the character to actively cooperate with the rest of the characters, not just go along for the ride, as it were. What this means is that a player can't simply say, "Okay, sure, my ancilla will help you guys out again." The players should always be able to read into their motivations and see new reasons every night for why their characters are willing to help the rest of the group. This doesn't mean some kind of magical geas (though there could be ...) forcing the characters to be cooperative. Quite the opposite, in fact. Only if the motivation makes sense can it truly work in both the short and the long term. If a player doesn't feel that a motivation is appropriate for her character, she will constantly work against it, trying to find excuses why it isn't as compelling as it was intended to be.

Despite the neatness of this Silver Rule, all the words in the world can't resolve the greatest threat to character cooperation in any storytelling game, which is simply the conception each player has of her character. Roleplaying is popular because those who play are given the tools and setting in which they can quite literally be and do anything at all. In a traditional fantasy setting, characters typically gallivant about the medieval-inflected countryside battling monsters and trudging through forgotten dungeons in search of chests of gold and magic artifacts. The characters all know from the get-go that they will be a team seeking adventure together and that they will likely have a hard time surviving without each other's unequivocal support.

**Vampire: The Masquerade** is not so straightforward, however. Whether Sabbat, Camarilla or anarchy, the characters are creatures that by their very nature are forced into sunless existences of predatory, parasitic paranoia. They might be half-mad and utterly inhuman, caring only about ancient myths or where they will get their next fix of warm blood. Some spend their unives seeking monetary fortunes as a hedge against a bleak future, while others throw their energies into a morbid and sadistic game of social warfare that has no end. Those who play **Vampire** welcome the challenge of facing personal horror and of trying to find some way to bring purpose to their eternal struggle against the hunger and the Beast.

Using the inherent nature of vampires as an excuse for not being motivated to cooperate with other player characters is a cop-out. So is arguing that your character is a Loner or a Rebel or has some other nonsocial Nature. Saying that your character has a derangement or Flaw that somehow keeps him from being part of a group is also inexcusable, and Storytellers are advised to disallow any such Trait that might contribute to the problem of noncooperation. Players should stop thinking of having to work as part of a coterie, pack or other group as some sort of thing that is bad, wrong or just plain unacceptable. They must think of teamwork as not only a viable way for vampires to exist, but also as the only way for a successful chronicle to exist, hence the only real option in the end if they are to have any fun at all.

Finally, if some players just can't grasp the teamwork thing despite all the motivations they and their Storyteller have worked out, they can take some small comfort in remembering that most stories, whether on film, in a book or played out around a table covered with **Vampire** books, highlight only the most dramatic plot points. In most chronicles, it should be understood that the parts actually played might represent only a small portion of the things that occur in the characters' unives. The rest of the time they are off on their own or with their retainers, etc., pursuing private agendas and interests. Seen in this light, it should be fairly easy to imagine enough reasons for why every now and then the character chooses to associate with and assist some of the other local Kindred.

None of this means that the Storyteller is let off the hook. No matter how you slice it, the Storyteller will still bear the greatest burden in keeping the story moving along and the characters together throughout. It is as much the players' responsibility, however, one they should not only accept without reservation, but

one they should enjoy and see as simply another facet of their characters' personalities.

## LOVE, SEX AND ROMANCE IN VAMPIRE

By Ann Sullivan Braidwood

You knew someone would talk about it eventually. You know, the Big Bad, the nasty words we all whisper when we don't think anyone's listening to us. It will help to say them, even if you think your mother is within earshot.

It will get easier the more you say these words out loud. The words themselves won't kill you. You won't die of embarrassment. (Well, okay, maybe you'll want to. We've all traveled on that boat at one time or another.) So, get up, go stand in front of the mirror, chin up, chest out, deep breath, because here it goes: "Kissing." See, that wasn't so hard. "Heavy petting." Good job! It's getting easier, isn't it?

The next few might be kind of rough, so saying them in a rush might help:

"Sexual intercourse. Fellatio. Cunnilingus. *Ménage à trois*. Group sex. Anal sex. Anilingus. Homosexuality. Omnisexuality. Domination. Submission. Bestiality. Bondage & Discipline." Wow, you got through that without hyperventilating, didn't you? You're doing well! The big test is the vulgar vernacular, you know, the words that make you feel like you're 12 again, with your parents, a bar of 99 44/100 percent pure Ivory soap and a good grounding not too far from your mouth or your future: "French-kissing! Fingering! Straight fucking. Nasty fucking. Blowjob. Pussy-eating. Rimjobs. Three-ways. Orgies. Corn-holing. Hot boy-on-boy action! Hot girl-on-girl action! Someone's your bitch! You're someone else's bitch! Rover's your bitch! Nipple clamps! Mouse traps! Ball gag! Cock and ball torture!"

The point is that words are just words. They're some of the tools we use to paint the picture of the setting for the people who play storytelling games in it. That doesn't mean that words aren't hard to say, that they don't embarrass us or even make us uncomfortable. Sometimes they're supposed to do just that, because the things that words portray aren't supposed to be comfortable, especially in a horror game. Nobody wants to come off like a fire-and-brimstone doomsayer, and most people usually strive to be relatively tolerant, but, if we're honest with ourselves, I think we'll all admit that at least something about romance, love or sex makes us feel awkward, and that's okay. Probably not a single word in that string of, ahem, description above didn't make somebody cringe, that didn't make someone think, "Ugh, not with me,



no way, no how.” Personally, my “ick” factor kicks in with anything that involves a lack of solid respect for *e. coli* bacteria. I guess it’s the “no one is going to stick anything up my ass unless they’re doing it for the express purpose of removing something that’s likely going to kill me” axiom of personal behavior. Additionally, at the risk of sounding a bit judgmental, and as a dog lover, but not a *dog lover*, I’m not exactly sure that the canine denizens of our planet are likely to be construed as consenting adults in a court of law. (I’m also relatively certain that this concept applies to the whole of the animal kingdom.) And nipple clamps? Not so much, thanks, they don’t sound like such a good idea to me, but to each his own.

All kidding aside, when it comes to morals about love and sex, moderns are a study in contradictions. These contradictions are way too numerous to list, so I think it’s sufficient to say that we all have primary principles, axioms that we live by, be they religiously grounded or not, and that’s cool. I don’t want to belabor the point, but I do think we’d all probably agree that, if we’re largely a society of hypocrites, we’re silent ones. We may do these things in private, but we sure as hell don’t talk about them. We protect that privacy. We’re nondemonstrative; strong emotions and private pleasures embarrass us. That’s why, when we’re storytelling, the honest portrayal of love, romance or, for that matter, sexual behavior is pretty difficult.

Adult story content is just another tool that we can use to make the world that we play in come alive as players; it’s another note that we use to construct the larger symphony of emotional nuance that helps us make it texturally real to each other, just as it would in a good movie or a good book. It’s not necessary to include adult content; if it’s handled poorly, it can positively derail a story. It works best when it’s handled with care. While we all like to think of ourselves as mature, I think we can all admit that sometimes we’re not. While graphic content is best introduced and executed in a manner that’s respectful, simply including sex or violence doesn’t make a game a mature one. It’s too often that too many Storytellers and players confuse “maturity” in roleplaying with the inclusion of graphic game content. It’s not the same thing. A game can be mature without a single sex scene or depiction of violence, but a game that runs the gamut of adult-oriented material and does it with all the subtlety of a preteen looking at a dog-eared copy of his older brother’s *Hustler* magazine isn’t exactly a mature one. While a mature player can be one who handles adults-only material with respect, she’s also one who is empowered to admit that the same adult



content might fluster her, might make her blush, might even make her want to be elsewhere. People have boundaries, after all. It's up to us, as Storytellers and players, to know what our boundaries are and to communicate this effectively.

It will help to deal with a couple of misconceptions at the outset:

1. Love, love-making and all the gooey shit that leads up to it has no place in a horror game. My vampire doesn't care about anybody. She's a solitary predator.

Falling in love, being involved in a romance and taking that game romance to a sexual level nails home a character's core self on a very personal level. **Vampire: The Masquerade** is a game about personal horror; it's about what happens to a new-made vampire when all the props and crutches of her humanity are taken forcibly from her. It strains realism to say that this new-made vampire has never been emotionally pushed, pulled or manipulated by the actions of another person. Motives in a relationship are never wholly pure. You don't have to be an altruistic vampire to have some other being be able to effect you emotionally. Personal horror is much more personal when it involves the motives and machinations of people who affect the character. Love, romance and sex, with all their obsessions and willful guile, can make horror very personal indeed.

2. Romance isn't scary.

Wrong again. If your vampire is romantically involved with another, she's vulnerable. She's vulnerable to loss, she's vulnerable to manipulation. Her emotions can lead her to make choices that aren't exactly in her best interest, choices that can cause her to let her guard down. If your character shares anything — a candle-lit meeting, a kiss or even her bed — with someone else, she's just made herself vulnerable to enemies, to her lover, to just about anybody who would want to lay a hurt on her. If that vulnerability is juxtaposed against the horrific events of a vampire's dead man's walk across the decades, even the quietest, most romantic moments can make those horrific events scarier, like the sigh of relaxed relief we breathe when we think we've escaped the Big Bad, only to find that it hasn't attacked yet.

3. Ok, so it's not totally geeky, but roleplaying sex is uncomfortable. I don't want to have intellectual sexual intercourse in front of my friends. It's like pornography.

Three points can be derived from this very real statement. First, people have sex. It happens. They tend to like it when it does. So, having sex isn't the issue at

all. Plus, having sex, verbally, in front of a room full of people, is uncomfortable. (LARPers, don't try this at home.) Second, sex does make people uncomfortable, as it's very personal. But we all know our friends and we all know our gaming groups; they tend to consist of some of the same people. We know what they can handle, and what they can't, because, as respectful people, we communicate the intent of our plot and the choices to made within that plot to them. If in-game sexuality makes anyone at the table, including the Storyteller, too uncomfortable, he shouldn't have it force-fed to him. He should be given the choice to participate or bow out, because character sexuality doesn't have to be handled in open forum. It can be blue-booked, handled in a character diary, handled in a one-on-one session with the Storyteller or handled in any one of a number of creative ways. It's not fun to be pushed beyond your boundaries. Third, sex in a game, because games imitate fiction and film, are best presented as they're portrayed in good books and good movies. That is, effective sexual interaction should say something about the character that the audience won't find out about her in any other way. Sex in books and in movies, when it's used effectively, is always about sex as a metaphor for something else. If it's not about sex as a metaphor for something about the character that is undiscoverable elsewhere, it's like mutual masturbation in front of a room full of janitors, satisfying for the two people engaging in it, but rather like cleaning up the Lubriderm spills and the used tissues for the onlookers.

Okay, well, with the preparatory stuff out of the way, let's get to the specific questions.

Can vampires have sex? You know, like real people have sex?

Yes indeed. We're going to foray into a little bit of mechanics. (It's inescapable, really, and we've all probably thought about it. And no, you're not a pervert.) The answer to that question is yes and no. Vampires can't have sex just like mortals because vampires are undead. They are consciousnesses attached to animated corpses. All jokes about necrophilia aside, vampires cannot engage in sexual intercourse exactly the same way mortals do. Human arousal occurs organically, and vampiric arousal occurs intellectually. A vampire can move blood throughout his body in a conscious act of will, but male and female vampires actually only mimic the physical aspects of mortal arousal. It's not real because it's not coming from the same place that living arousal does.

Vampires may be able to derive sensual pleasure through the use of their sex organs — after all, their

nerve endings work, they can feel the pain of fangs ripping their flesh, of claws rending their skin, of bullets wounding them, so the pleasure of touch runs along those same lines of logic — but it's sensual pleasure rather than sexual pleasure. It's obtained through an act of intellectual will. The motivations for vampiric arousal, being so centered on a premeditated act of will, are the result of conscious planning on the vampire's part. Doesn't this logically infer that they're looking for something in the sensual act of vampiric love-making that's beyond just mere physical pleasure? After all, vampires can obtain sensual pleasure in a variety of ways other than sexual behavior, most of it involving the high state of arousal brought on by the sharing and taking of blood. Why put yourself through all the work of engaging in sexual intercourse, with all its trappings of awkwardness and discomfort, if you don't have a motivation for doing so? Finally, climax, in the way that mortals climax during sex, doesn't really make sense. Male vampires don't have any real ejaculatory capabilities because their testicles don't produce semen anymore. Both male and female vampires should be able to feel the pleasure of climax, because their nerve endings work, but they don't experience all of the physical attributes of living climax.

Why would a vampire choose to have sex? Would vampires choose to have sex for the same reasons that mortals have sex? Would they have sex with other vampires only? Would they have sex with mortals, too?

The answers to these questions are a resounding maybe. For vampires, the reasons that lie beyond the act of sex itself don't walk hand in hand with biology anymore. Mortal sex drive is instinctual, vampiric sex drive, if you can call it that, isn't; it's been replaced with an instinct for blood. The old adage "If you can't kill it or eat it, you'll fuck it" doesn't work for vampires. Vampires' basic instinct is just to kill it or eat it, not necessarily in that order. So, again, their reasons for engaging in sexual intercourse are mind-based. They're not based on physical need.

That doesn't mean vampires aren't motivated for sexual interaction by roughly the same emotions that motivate mortals. Vampires are fully capable of feeling strong emotion. They love, they hate, they get mad, they get depressed, they want to get even, they care. Vampires maintain all the gamut of emotional response that mortals do, because, if their brains aren't living anymore, their souls retain intellectual thought and with thought comes emotion.

Vampires can physically have sex with anyone who's willing, but with other vampires, it's only usually

done as the result of a wish to hold onto the trappings of humanity. Sharing blood is much more sensual to a vampire than sharing bodily fluids, and they don't have bodily fluids other than blood to share in the first place. It's a different story if a vampire decides to engage in sexual relations with a mortal. A vampire and a mortal approach sex from different places, a mortal from instinct and emotion and a vampire from emotion and will, so the physical aspects coupled with the emotional ones will be more pleasurable for the mortal. The vampire will derive his satisfaction more from the emotional aspect of sex; the pleasures of the act will be very secondary. After all, what ecstasy compares to the intensity of the Kiss? Why engage in sex if not for emotion's sake? And those emotions will probably be intensely positive or negative.

How do you effectively portray sexual interaction in your chronicle? Let's assume your players are okay with graphic content, as they'd like you to include it, and you'd like to accommodate them. But how the hell do you *do* it? You're not Hugh Hefner, after all.

The best advice I can give you is just to do what feels good and feels right. OK, it's kind of mired in the '70s, but it's also very apropos. Either as a Storyteller or a character, you know your own group. First, try to determine each member of your coterie's level of comfort. Then tailor your Storytelling, or your character interaction, to those comfort levels. Let's pretend that Lisa, one of your core players, hasn't been embarrassed by anything since she was 17 and saw Al Pacino's implied Crisco fisting scene in *Cruising*. Then, say you have Stephanie, a woman who, when she's confronted with feminine protection commercials on television while people of the opposite sex are in the room, makes noncommittal little throat noises to hide her embarrassment. Your last player is Eric. He's a pretty mature guy, and sex in a game doesn't faze him, but he has definite boundaries. Eric and Lisa are both portraying vampires, and Stephanie has chosen to play Eric's vampire's trusted mortal retainer. Lisa's intent is to have her vampire engage in all manner of sadomasochistic domination/submission with her ghouls as a metaphor for control and loss of it. Eric's vampire is a Toreador with feelings of jealous love and distrust for Stephanie's retainer character; he's approaching his intent of sexual interaction with her as a metaphor for the loneliness and separateness of the state of vampirism. Stephanie's retainer has a user's personality; she's cocky enough to think that she can play with a vampire's matches and not get burned by them, that she won't lose her sense of self-control and that she'll gain a lot of power. She wants to portray,

metaphorically, how much of themselves human beings are willing to give up for power, for the chance to rule from behind the throne (Eric and Stephanie have agreed on their relationship beforehand). The scene is set at a small gathering at Eric's haven, attended by a few Toreador, Lisa and ghouls included, with Stephanie attentively paying rapt attention to her "patron." Lisa's intent is to send the message that she's a force to be reckoned with by showcasing her power over her retainers, their personal strengths and what they're willing to do to each other for her; Stephanie's intention is to play Eric's jealousy off against his need for the information she can provide to him; and Eric's intent is to test Stephanie's loyalty. They all have good reasons and motivations behind why their characters will either behave sexually or entice others to do so. Somewhere in here, you have to deliver plot, because your newest antagonist is going to rear her lovely head at the gathering. So, how do you accommodate Lisa and Eric's comfort levels without giving Stephanie a coronary?

You can tell the same scene to each of these very different players with different emphases. Separate their parts in the action, but don't really let them know that they're separated by starting them off with an opening description of the new antagonist and get their minds working on that. Then cut to their individual parts in the plot action and ask them to set that scene for you. What are they doing? How are they behaving in reference to the new antagonist's presence? Here's where it gets tricky. You need to let them each play out their original intentions and keep things moving forward. Timing and tone are of great importance in all three facets of the scene. Lisa's interactions will be most effective if you tell them in hard, fast and, yes, sexually mechanical statements, giving her directorial choices along the way, but try to keep it short and brutal. (You're accommodating her wish for graphic content, but you're keeping Stephanie's comfort level in mind, and a brief "Eew" is a lot easier for Stephanie to swallow than long passages of "So now you tie Webster to the wall with tatters of human skin and lick his lover's blood off of his genitals." Nobody wants to sit around for hours while the minute specifics of sexual intercourse are described.) Then, tricky Storyteller that you are, you engage Eric in his intentions by letting him initiate the action with Stephanie. She's more empowered in this, because it's not coming from the Storyteller, it's coming from another player, and she's freer to act accordingly. He can say what he wants to do with her, but her responses are coming from a standpoint of action rather than reaction. You're

just on hand to adjudicate anything that needs game mechanics, if the need arises.

Here's one final bit of advice. Try to keep the emphasis on the emotional impact of sex, rather than just the mechanics. I can speak from personal experience here. As a player, I've personally engaged in only one really graphically sexual scene. The characters involved were a younger man stuck in an untenable situation, committing adultery for the first time in his life, and an older woman, a woman trapped in a loveless, abusive marriage. The younger man, out of necessity, was using the older woman to gain information on her husband but found out he wasn't at all emotionally equipped to be so callous. When he made love to her, complete with a brief but unmistakable description of the act itself, and then, in postcoital conversation, lied to her further, cementing his duplicity for the needs of the group's overriding goals, I was prepared to meet with clucking tongues and eye-rolls from the rest of my group. I was really surprised to find that they were caught up in the emotion of it, like they would be in a good sex scene on film. I was further surprised that, when next confronting the young man, they reacted in character with what their characters knew about the act and how they felt about it, in a manner that made it part of the game.

So I guess the point is, sex can be an interesting aspect of your game, if you want it to be. It can be done. It just has to be done carefully and respectfully.

## ENMITY BETWEEN CHARACTERS

### Storytelling Opportunity or Story Killer?

By Rhiannon Louve

The vampires of legend are solitary beings — nocturnal predators who answer to no one and nothing but their own unquenchable thirst for blood. They have no companions but their minions and their prey, and they certainly have no friends. Since the characters in a **Vampire** story are quite often based on players' ideas of these misanthropic legendary vampires, it is understandable that getting **Vampire** characters to work together as a team is rarely easy. Aloof selfishness, underhanded deceit and suicidal angst are not generally considered to be the best instruments for achieving group solidarity. In fact, they can often lead to just the opposite: characters who actively hate and plot against one another.

More so even than with nonvampire characters in the chaotic World of Darkness, the frequency of enmity between characters in **Vampire** is perhaps more typical than in any other storytelling game.



Naturally, this player-versus-player dynamic has a large effect on any storyline — an effect that can easily work for good or ill. To answer the question posed in this essay's title, characters who hate each other can easily be both an interesting storytelling opportunity and an instant story killer, sometimes within the same chronicle. Discussed below are the details of such potential and some advice for encouraging the former and avoiding the latter.

As has already been implied, vampires are fairly naturally prone to enmity with others, especially other vampires. Alliances and affections are possible, of course, and it should not be forgotten that camaraderie, when handled correctly, can provide just as many interesting storylines as can antagonism. Nevertheless, enmity between characters in a **Vampire** story is often unavoidable and helps create both atmosphere and action. In large troupe-style groups particularly, where one Storyteller may be leading a great number of players, conflict between characters is very nearly a requirement for everyone's enjoyment. It provides intrigue and interaction while the Storyteller is occupied with the needs of other players or with the overarching plot of the chronicle. Notably interesting in-character conflict

can provide the Storyteller with excellent ideas for how to keep the main story moving, as well. Finally, good conflict helps build the mood of the **Vampire** setting, emphasizing the concept that nothing and no one is entirely trustworthy.

In smaller groups, in-character hostility is not quite so necessary to the game, but playing a character who hates another character can be a great incentive for staying focused on the story and the acting, even without visual aids like costumes and props. After all, a *character* doesn't want to be caught discussing the *player's* life or concerns (which naturally do not exist inside the story world) when the enemy attacks, so most players concentrate much more closely on the story and their characters when confronted with imminent hostility. If that hostility might come from within the party, it is always there to provide the same focus and inspiration.

Even with all of these roleplaying and story opportunities to recommend it, however, playing characters who hate each other is not without its potentially story-threatening dangers. For one thing, many people, even the most experienced and talented roleplayers, have trouble separating in-game emotions from real-life feelings. In-character

arguments, if not handled correctly, can turn into out-of-character misunderstandings, especially if one of the characters is somehow harmed or thwarted by the actions of another. If conflict of any kind already exists between two players in the real world, such misunderstandings are all the more likely and all the more important to avoid at all costs.

Naturally, conflict between *players* (as opposed to their characters) is always something to stay away from. Even if it doesn't get in the way of the game (which it undoubtedly will eventually), it is, quite simply, unpleasant for everyone involved. No better way exists to stop a chronicle in its tracks and to sometimes even end friendships. The whole point of any storytelling game is for everyone to have fun, and the drama is supposed to remain at all times in the realm of the imaginary. Real-life hurt and anger are never as enjoyable as the pain and rage of people who, in the end, really don't exist. It is important to remember, therefore, that if anything is going to cause conflict between players, it is automatically a terrible idea and should be avoided. No roleplaying opportunity is sufficiently titillating to justify hurting the feelings or friendships of real people.

Another potential problem comes into play when the conflict between two characters becomes so heated that they cannot, in character, stand to be in the same room with one another. If a vampire's reasons to come to gatherings and his incentives to work with other vampires are completely eclipsed by his desire to be far away from a certain other vampire in the group, few options remain. One of the characters involved can leave the game — rarely a preferable option, especially for the player whose character dies or is forced to leave — or the conflict can somehow be lessened. Unless a player actively desires to create a new character, removing one from the game should never be considered a viable way to solve in-character conflict. If both players wish to keep their characters, therefore, the only alternative is to mend the relationship until they can tolerate each other. Storytellers can help with such in-character alterations by designing experiences for the players that will help engender a change of heart.

Mending relationships between characters is obviously something that must be individually tailored to the personalities and conflicts of the characters involved, but some basic examples of experiences that might encourage a change of heart include arranging events so that a character's enemy saves the character's unlife, having a character discover secrets about an enemy that makes said enemy easier

to sympathize with, and finding some goal or event that forces enemies to rely on one another and to act as allies. Storytellers and players should work closely together to make certain that these scenes make sense with a character's history and concept, and one-on-one storytelling sessions are usually recommended for deeper or more personal changes of heart. Try to always keep an open mind as to a character's ability to experience a change of opinion about another character. If none of the above examples works (and they won't always), think creatively until you find one that does.

In addition to the universal in-character enmity cautions, very small, intimate groups specifically have a few more possible pitfalls. With fewer players comes an entirely different storytelling dynamic. Unlike large troupe-style groups, it is not only possible for one Storyteller to pay constant close attention to the actions of every single player, it is actually necessary. Since the Storyteller must play every single Storyteller character herself, and since not enough extra players are around to entertain each other while she is occupied, the Storyteller, in large part, must be directly involved in every aspect of play. Too many plots and counterplots divide the group and slow down the story, whereas a focused, tightly allied group can help things run smoothly and excitingly from chapter to chapter. For this reason, characters who get along can often provide much more enjoyment and many more interesting situations and opportunities in small **Vampire** games than characters who hate each other might.

These warnings should not keep experienced roleplayers from creating whatever sorts of inter-character conflicts they wish, however. All of the above-mentioned potential hazards are entirely avoidable, with proper care and preparation. The most important thing to remember in any storytelling game is that it is a game, after all. Everyone is there to have fun, and anything (within reason) that makes the game more fun for everyone playing is, by definition, a good idea. The key word here is "everyone," however. With in-character discord, as with any other aspect of play, concern for all the other members of the group is a necessity.

One way to show this concern is to be sure to set up in-character conflicts with everyone beforehand. This is not necessary in every case; spats and disagreements between otherwise allied or neutral characters can come and go unexpectedly in the course of a single story, and these can simply be played out as they come up. Any serious hatred or



ongoing animosity, however, should be discussed with everyone before it comes into play. At the very least, the Storyteller and the characters involved in the conflict should communicate about the nature of the enmity. It is important that everyone agrees on how far the rivalry may go (such as whether or not it is acceptable to actively attempt to kill another character) and that everyone feels the contention will be an enjoyable addition to the game. In smaller groups especially, it's good to make certain a planned conflict won't interfere with other players' visions of the type of storytelling experience they want — as well as to arrange all ongoing conflict with the Storyteller — so that it will never detract from play.

Another type of concern for others involves checking in with fellow players after intense scenes of roleplayed anger or nastiness. Either immediately after the scene or at least after the game, make sure that the other players' feelings have not been hurt and that everyone understands the argument to be only in-game. This needn't be anything elaborate; a simple and casual "You know that was only in character, right?" is usually all that is required, and it helps reassure people and allow them to have more fun with intense and angry scenes. If a player genuinely cries during a scene or seems otherwise unduly upset — even if you're absolutely sure it's just excellent roleplaying — it's still best to break character just long enough to ask, "Are you OK?" in case you've accidentally hit a nerve, or the player's dog just died today, etc. Even the best of intense roleplaying scenes are not as important as real people's feelings. It's perfectly reasonable to break character long enough to check in.

Once you're certain that an in-character conflict will not hurt the feelings of any other players or ruin anyone's fun, the next most important thing to consider is the story and the Storyteller. Contrary to the beliefs of some, staying perfectly in character at all costs is not actually the first goal of good roleplaying. This is not professional theater, after all. If acting out of character is the only way to keep the story fun for everyone and running smoothly, then by all means, break character. Only an individual player can decide when this needs to happen and when it is unnecessary, but an example might be refusing to kill a character when given an easy opportunity, not because your character wouldn't, but because it wouldn't be kind to the other player. Another example could be choosing to accompany the group on some venture or exploit, even if your character would think it a

stupid idea, simply because your participation keeps the story more interesting for everyone.

If this sort of deviation from one's character has to happen very often, perhaps you might consider changing characters or working with the Storyteller to find better ways for your character to fit with the chronicle. Many players also find that they can better enjoy their roleplaying by maintaining a couple of different characters in the same large troupe-style story (playing one character in some chapters and a different one in others — see p. 79) or by playing simultaneously with two or more different smaller groups. These options allow a player to roleplay in-character conflict when it is appropriate to the current group or situation and still be able to participate and to have fun in groups where in-character conflict is unwelcome or counterproductive.

Another option especially recommended in small gaming groups is to have all players create their characters at the same time and place, with the Storyteller present to advise and coordinate. In this way, everyone involved in the game is on hand to share ideas of what the game should be about and what kind of coterie all players want to form. Characters can be designed specifically with the other players and characters in mind, as well as tailored to the sort of chronicle the Storyteller wants to run. When in-character conflicts are arranged in this sort of cohesive planning situation, they are almost always enjoyable for everyone involved. If the conflicts are a bad idea, this will usually come out during the creation session and can easily be avoided by creating a different, more agreeable character to begin with.

A final option is to create an extremely secretive character with other strong motivations for being civil to the rest of the characters in the game. With this approach, a character can feel all manner of hatred and animosity for the others in the chronicle without anyone else ever knowing about it. This can provide compelling back-story to aid in roleplaying and even give the Storyteller opportunities for interesting plot hooks involving your character, even though the other players may never realize that the conflict exists at all. If interesting roleplaying is really your only goal in creating in-character conflict, this can be a very interesting and challenging option as your character works constantly to hide his deep-seated hatred from the others.

In the end, the deciding factor in turning enmity between characters into a storytelling opportunity or a story killer is, put simply, how the situation is

handled by everyone involved. For sensitive, creative and experienced players, in-game conflict is often an excellent idea, especially in large and self-directed groups. When handled correctly, conflict between characters should never harm a story or the fun of everyone involved. When enmity between characters is a bad idea (and you will have, on occasion, coterries, gaming groups and chronicles in which it is a very bad idea indeed), it is very easy to avoid the associated difficulties, simply by checking in with everyone playing and then doing something else if necessary. If everyone playing is willing to be both considerate and flexible, problems should never occur.

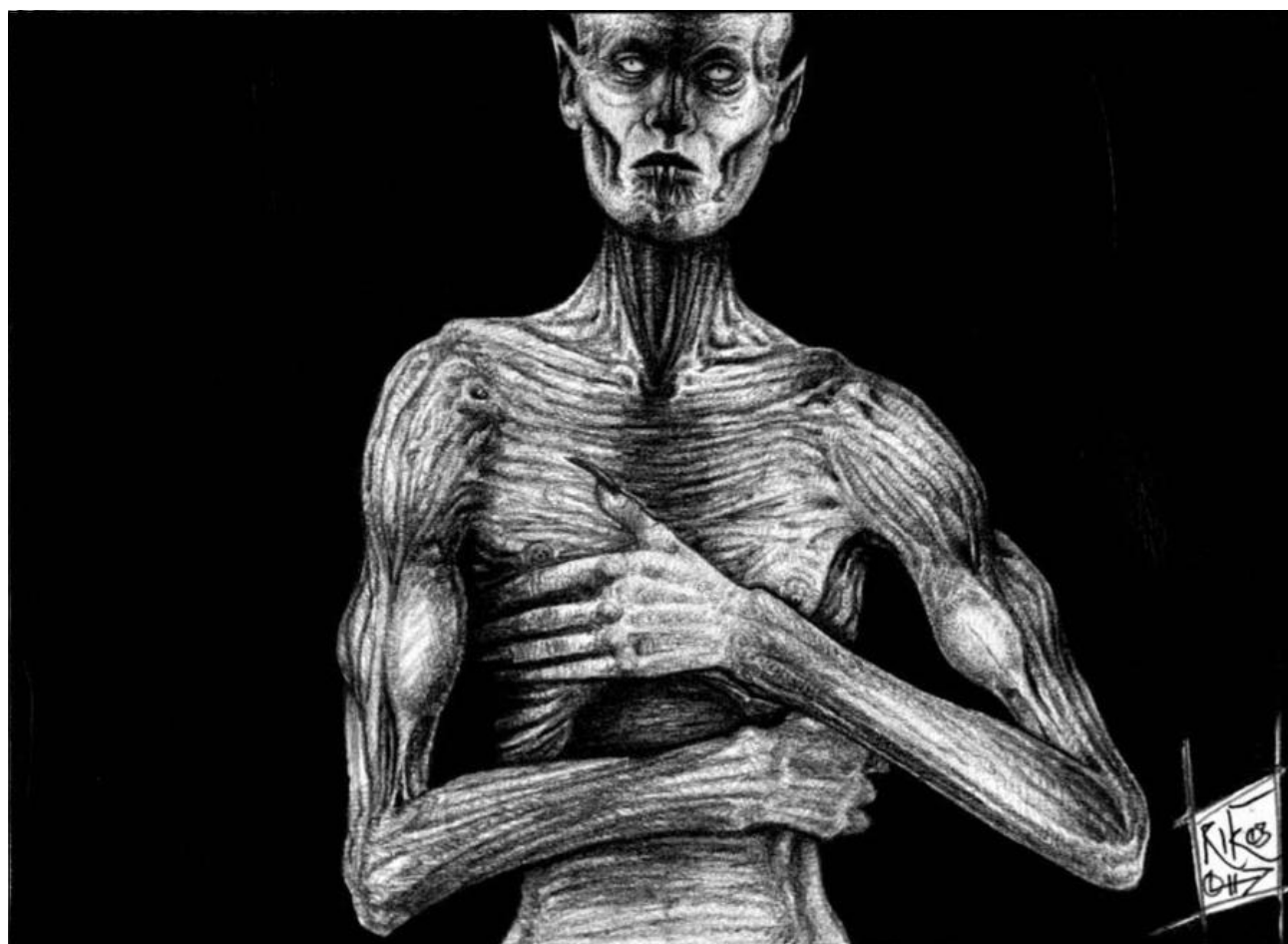
Speaking of flexibility, however, the most important thing to remember in **Vampire** or in any storytelling or roleplaying game is that the possibilities for interesting roleplaying opportunities are infinite. Enmity between characters is only one of these endless options for spicing up a game and providing openings for great acting and exciting intensity. Bonds of loyalty, true love, sorrow and tragedy can easily be just as impassioned and inspir-

ing as rage, and all of these emotions can also be directed at Storyteller characters rather than players' characters when necessary. Don't get stuck on the concept of player versus player conflict. When it's a good idea, have a blast with it, but when in doubt, do something else instead. The beauty of roleplaying is the complete lack of real-world limitations. Take advantage of the possibilities, and always remember that in games (and sometimes in other aspects of life as well), fun comes first.

## FLASH AND DAZZLE

*By Aaron Rosenberg*

One of the coolest things about any game is what's called "the Big Gun." That term covers any big nifty power you get for your character, whether it's an enchanted sword, a massive firearm, the power to fly, a cybernetic arm or something else cool and weird. In **Vampire**, the Big Guns are your Disciplines. You can turn to mist, see in the dark, change into a bat, move twice as fast as any mortal, rearrange your own bone structure and all sorts of other cool powers. It's great — these are what set



you apart from mortals, what make you superior, what give your character that serious edge.

But what are they?

Disciplines are innate gifts, the “good side” of the Curse of Caine, that apparently arise as part of the Embrace process. Your body is transformed into an undead shell with far more than mortal strength and speed, and these other gifts suddenly appear as well. But how do you handle them? How, as a player, do you deal with a character who can melt into the ground itself or poison a blade with his own blood? As a character, how do you cope with these strange new talents and abilities?

Players generally fall into one of two camps over Disciplines. The first camp believes that Disciplines are magic. Their characters are no longer mortal, but are imbued with an otherworldly power that allows them to exist even after death, and the Disciplines are simply one more manifestation of that power. For these players, the Disciplines are magic tricks, superpowers, something to be shown with pride. Their characters often make theatrical gestures while using Disciplines, or chant in an ancient tongue, or even grind a particular herb to powder and scatter the dust.

The second camp believes that Disciplines are part and parcel of the body’s new existence, much the same way that being left-handed is part of some people, or being good with geography, or having a knack for climbing trees. For these players, their characters are simply better at certain things — it’s not something they announce, or even necessarily think about. When it’s dark, the character’s eyes suddenly glow like those of a cat, and now he can see in the dark; no mumbo-jumbo, no gesturing, just the body adapting to its surroundings.

So which camp is right? Both — and neither. It’s up to you, really. Nothing in the game says either is correct, or that either is wrong, so you can choose your own camp. Try thinking about how the Disciplines work. Does your character need to concentrate on them to activate them, or do they simply turn themselves on by reflex? Remember to differentiate between your concentration and the character’s. Just because you have to spend a Willpower point for the character doesn’t mean she necessarily thinks about it — she may automatically know to focus her will. Regardless of mechanics, when the character uses Celerity or Protean or any other Discipline, does she stop and think, “Now I draw upon my energies to increase my speed” or even “I need to move really fast now,” or does she just react?

Again, the books don’t contain an answer. All they say is that the character activates his Disciplines, and that some need a point of blood or of Willpower while others can be activated with a thought, and still others are always active. Nothing is said about how the character should think about these powers. Look at the character’s history, his life as a mortal. Was he a religious man before his death? If so, the Disciplines might seem like miraculous powers to him ... or like infernal ones. Did he believe in magic and perhaps even try it? Disciplines would be a dream come true, magic that really works, and would almost certainly be meshed into his previous notions. If magic required hand gestures and chants, the Disciplines would as well, because that’s how the character thinks such things always work. Is the character a pragmatist who simply does what’s necessary? Or an intuitive character who trusts his own instincts and reflexes? Then Disciplines would seem like useful talents suddenly acquired and would be used as such, without fanfare or gesture and certainly without embellishment and melodrama.

Look to the character’s Embrace process as well. If his sire deliberately acted mysterious and grand and showed his Disciplines as if they were arcane gifts of the highest order, the character is more likely to feel that way about his own gifts. Some vampires might even concoct a “rite of inheritance” for their childer, a sham ceremony in which they claim to transfer their powers to their new protégés. Why? Because that way the novice believes his sire is responsible for the gifts and gave them deliberately. It increases the sire’s hold over his brood, especially since such a rite suggests that the powers could also be taken away at any time. Other vampires are very matter-of-fact about their abilities and don’t make a big deal of them. Their childer are likely to be the same way and to treat Disciplines as skills and knacks rather than infernal curses and powers.

How the character discovers his Disciplines will also play a part. Talk to your Storyteller about the character’s beginning as a vampire and work through his first few weeks of that existence, either by playing it out or simply through discussion. Did the character stumble onto a Discipline, like seeing in the dark? Or did he actively think “I wish I could see in the dark” or “I thought vampires could see in the dark” and then subconsciously activate the Discipline? Remember that, either way, the use is the same — even if the character thinks the power needs gestures and chants it may be a simple matter of subconscious will, and the rest is just window-

dressing. That first use will shape the character's perception of the Discipline, and of all future Disciplines as well — if the vampire thinks he needs to call upon his sire for aid before a Discipline will activate, he may subconsciously block the use of any Discipline until that ritual is completed.

What does this mean for the character? Well, first it affects how he views all vampires, including himself. If Disciplines seem like magic, then vampires will appear as magical beings, almost like demons and devils themselves. These creatures are not only no longer alive, they're not even flesh and blood, but simply a facsimile held together by the vampire's will, literal hellspawn in the eyes of the individual. Each vampire is a creature of magic, capable of great feats. Of course, powerful creatures usually have agendas of some importance, so these characters are likely to search for their true purpose—simply existing is not sufficient, since the power had to come from somewhere and surely such might would not be granted without reason.

On the other hand, Disciplines as magic could suggest a closer tie to some mystical source of energy. Life blocked the link, perhaps, but now the vampire is more attuned and thus can draw upon that energy more easily. For these characters, their personal goal might be to grow closer to the source, so that they can tap it even more. What they see as obstacles in themselves, and how they overcome those, could be very interesting. For example, a character might feel that the magic is instinctual, and so speech and thought and logic all get in the way. Only returning to the Beast within will allow the vampire to truly bond with the Curse of Caine and to use it freely.

Other characters may see Disciplines not as magic but as improved survival traits. Their goal is to survive — clearly the will was strong enough to overcome even death, and, though altered, the individual does continue to exist. These new gifts aid that existence in much the way that reflexes and instinct have always helped the fit survive. So Disciplines are not magical at all, and the characters are not part of some great destiny or plan. They're simply people whose bodies and minds refuse to give up, and who have adapted to become even stronger and more resistant to destruction.

Another aspect to consider is exposure. How does the character use his Disciplines? Does he display them openly and proudly, glorying in his mystical skills and daring others to show stronger gifts? Those who feel Disciplines are magic and the mark of some

greater force might behave in this way. Disciplines are a badge of honor for them, something to be proud of, and they'd be happy to demonstrate their power to others. Some vampires might even use Disciplines as a unit of rank, categorizing others by the number and power of their Disciplines and looking down upon those with weaker gifts. Clearly those vampires were not marked with as much favor and do not have as great a role to play in their collective destinies.

Vampires who see Disciplines as innate survival reflexes are more likely to hide their gifts, though. After all, by showing others what you can do you make it easier for them to counteract your abilities. In survival, it's better to conceal your abilities as much as possible, so that your opponents underestimate you. Then you can take them by surprise and gain the advantage.

One thing about Disciplines is that, no matter what your character thinks they are, they don't always work. Sometimes a Discipline fails. What does that mean to the character? If he believes the Disciplines are magic powers, he obviously did something wrong — used the wrong hand gesture or the wrong herb, mispronounced a word, had the wrong stance, etc. The power didn't fail; the caster did. That's a mark of shame, of course, to show such incompetence, and the vampire may beat himself up about such weakness and error.

If the vampire believes the magic comes from some higher power, having a Discipline fail could be a sign of displeasure. He has done something to anger this power or to go against its plans, and so it has taken away the gift as punishment. Obviously atonement must be made and the higher power appeased so that the Discipline is returned again. If the character thinks his sire granted the gift and then took it away, the sire may decide to play with this. He can appear disapproving and use his childe's guilt to gain still more sway over the younger vampire. Of course, if the sire also believes in a higher power granting the Disciplines, he may be genuinely angry with the childe, fearing that the novice's failure will reflect badly upon him as well.

For those who see Disciplines as innate talents, failure is even more confusing. How can you fail to remember a number, or fail to toss the ring around the bottle, or fail to smell someone's fear? Perhaps the character believes he is tired, stressed or undernourished, since all of these can cause mortals to become slow and sloppy and clumsy. Since the power is innate, it can't be taken away or not turned on, but perhaps it needs time to recharge, just like

a battery. Maybe the talent works only at certain times, or only when the character is in a certain mood. These vampires will probably run through a list of possible causes in their heads, trying to narrow down why the Discipline didn't work that time so they can avoid that in future. Or they might ultimately chalk it up to bad luck — everyone screws up occasionally — and move on.

No matter which direction you choose, you should certainly consider how your character sees Disciplines: where he thinks they came from, how he gained them, how they are activated and what happens when they fail. This will give you a stronger insight into your character and will make his actions more believable and more consistent. And so what if another vampire claims Disciplines are something different — your character knows the truth.

## HORROR IS PERSPECTIVE

By Matthew McFarland

Remember your first **Vampire** game?

I remember mine. I don't know if it was first or second edition, because I never read the rulebooks. I don't recall if I made my own character or if my Storyteller brought pregenerated ones. I do remember my character's name was Candace and she was a Tremere, and I remember that in the early part of the game the entire coterie was ambushed, staked, and dragged before the prince.

Now, for those of you who have been playing **Vampire** at least as long as I have, the old "dragged before the prince" trope isn't much to get excited about. I'd assert that being staked first adds a layer of harshness that's kind of cool, but maybe that's not so new, either. But man, way back then, in my parents' basement, lights dimmed, with the Storyteller describing me being grabbed from behind — I think I got one quasiseductive line out; an attempt to get my assailant to release me so I could bite him — and then the sudden, searing pain as the stake went home ... that was some scary shit. I'm pretty sure that most of us long-time **Vampire** players have been there, finding horror in something that, now, seems almost mundane.

This isn't restricted to **Vampire** or even role-playing games, of course. *The Exorcist* had people running from the theater in terror when it opened. I saw it for the first time recently, and though it was a damned disturbing film, I don't recall being actually scared. What scared us years ago doesn't have the same effect nowadays — maybe we're jaded, or desensitized, or whatever.



Except that we keep coming back to the classics, and that includes vampires. Something in the old monsters, in the supernatural, holds our fascination. And simply from that truism, I contend that **Vampire** still has plenty of horror potential, no matter how many times you've played it. You just have to work a little harder to get there.

It's worth the work, I promise. Let's get down to specifics.

What makes **Vampire** scary? A better question might be: What makes *vampires* scary? Vampires, called by scores of different names, have been part of human legendry as far back as legends go. Before going into all the permutations of the last couple of centuries, consider what a vampire is at the core: a corpse that drinks the blood of the living. Breaking that down even further, we have all of the horror of ghosts; this creature was once a human being, and now it's some horrible force of darkness. Because it was once mortal, any of us could become one. Add that to the very palpable fear that seeing someone you knew to be dead walking around again would engender, and it's easy to see why stories of vampires (and their dumber cousins, zombies) have stuck with us.

Now add the blood. Ever given blood? Even if you're not phobic about needles (like me) or about blood, you still have that lovely, light-headed sensation coupled with your arm going numb. Imagine that kind of feeling but without the controlled circumstance of a needle and a nurse regulating the blood loss. Severing the right artery can cause a person to bleed to death in *seconds*. Scary, right? What if all of that blood isn't spilling on the ground, but the aforementioned walking corpse is *drinking it*?

It's not so hard to see why vampires are scary, but it's easy to forget it, especially when we've dressed up vampires with clans, sects, nifty powers (some of which — let's be honest — don't bear the slightest resemblance to classic vampire mythology), political concerns and a good, healthy dollop of sex. It's very easy for long-time or even new **Vampire** players to create characters that focus on the **Vampire** backstory rather than on the essential facts of vampiric existence.

This leads us nicely back to the question: What is scary about **Vampire**? Aside from the basics (blood), the game's parameters bring two other horrors to the table: mystery and degeneration.

Mystery is a lure for some people, but most folks like to see movies about mystery and keep their everyday lives nice and predictable. Vampires in the

World of Darkness don't have that luxury. They're told only as much as their sires want them to know and, more importantly (I can't tell you how many times I've said this to players), *they haven't read the books*. Nothing says a young Kindred even knows about the other clans of the Camarilla, much less the Sabbat, much less the weird ones like the Samedi. Nothing says the characters' sires bothered to tell them that things like werewolves or even ghosts really exist. Of course, as the characters are vampires, they probably wouldn't think it much of a stretch that these kinds of things are real, but it's one thing for the coterie to discuss Lupines in a safe haven. It's quite another for them to see one — or think they see one.

The horror of mystery is being on unsure footing. The best horror stories are the ones that present a situation that is in itself disturbing, allow the reader (or viewer) to believe he has a bead on the situation, and then pull the rug out at the last moment. While they aren't vampire stories, *Sixth Sense* and *The Others* are good examples of this kind of mystery. If you can find it, a film called *Pale Blood* does something similar with vampires (and presents them in the same quasisympathetic light that our game does). This kind of mystery in a **Vampire** game depends largely on the Storyteller's presentation of events and characters. For instance, suppose a member of a coterie feeds on a homeless man and leaves him alive in an alley. As he's walking away, satisfied that he's fed without killing and his Beast has been nicely kept in check, he hears a low moan of pain from the alley. Curious, he turns back — and sees a humanoid figure hunched over the homeless man, chewing at his neck. The Storyteller's descriptions of this being are critical toward maintaining the horror of the situation. If the Storyteller says, "He looks like he'd be about six-foot-six if he stood up. He's not a vampire, but he's definitely some kind of supernatural creature," there's no horror here at all. Plus, the Storyteller has given the character information that he shouldn't know so easily, which makes maintaining mystery difficult and actually restricts the character's options toward resolving it (I'll get to that in a second).

But suppose the Storyteller says, "The creature raises its eyes at you, but doesn't drop the homeless man. You can hear its fangs scraping against bone even from the mouth of the alley. The creature shuffles back a bit, and you can see that it's squatting low — if it stood up, it might well be taller than you. As you step forward, it leaps back into the shadows.



You can hear a metallic *thunk* as it jumps on top of a dumpster and a skittering sound as it climbs the brick wall. The homeless man scrabbles at your leg, but he's dying. His chest is soaked in blood and his neck has been chewed open." Assuming that the Storyteller finished this entire description without the character taking some kind of action, consider what might be going through the character's mind. The creature he has just seen resembles a vampire in that it attacked a homeless man and apparently fed on him, but it is a very messy eater and obviously cares little for the Masquerade. The character might well assume that the creature was a vampire who had gone completely feral, or might guess that it is something entirely outside of his experience. In this situation, the Storyteller has presented *only* what the character perceives, and thus passed responsibility of maintaining the horror to the player.

How can the player help maintain that horror? Simply by keeping the description of what the character has seen in that character's perspective, rather than trying to imagine its game Traits. If the player thinks, *Could be a feral Nosferatu or Gangrel*, that's a perfectly acceptable leap in logic and it allows the character to find the other members of the coterie and begin looking for this "rogue Kindred." Even if it isn't a vampire, the characters can probably find clues while pursuing this line of investigation. Plus, since they're working off a premise that may or may not be correct, but is completely plausible within the characters' limited experience, the Storyteller has leave to steer the story in any direction she wishes simply by making sure the characters find the right clues.

If, on the other hand, the player thinks, *OK, it can climb walls and it eats flesh. Didn't look much like a vampire. Bet it's a Ratkin*, where does the character go from there? The character doesn't know the first thing about were-anythings, let alone Ratkin, so has no easy first step to take on the investigation. Plus, since the character is operating from a flawed premise (that wererats exist at all, which may or may not be the case in this particular **Vampire** game and is something that he wouldn't know anyway), he doesn't have any good way to pursue the mystery. The horror is lost because the player is sure that he knows what's going on; at that point, the game becomes a simple matter of running the creature down and stabbing it with the silver knives that the characters decided to have made "on a whim."

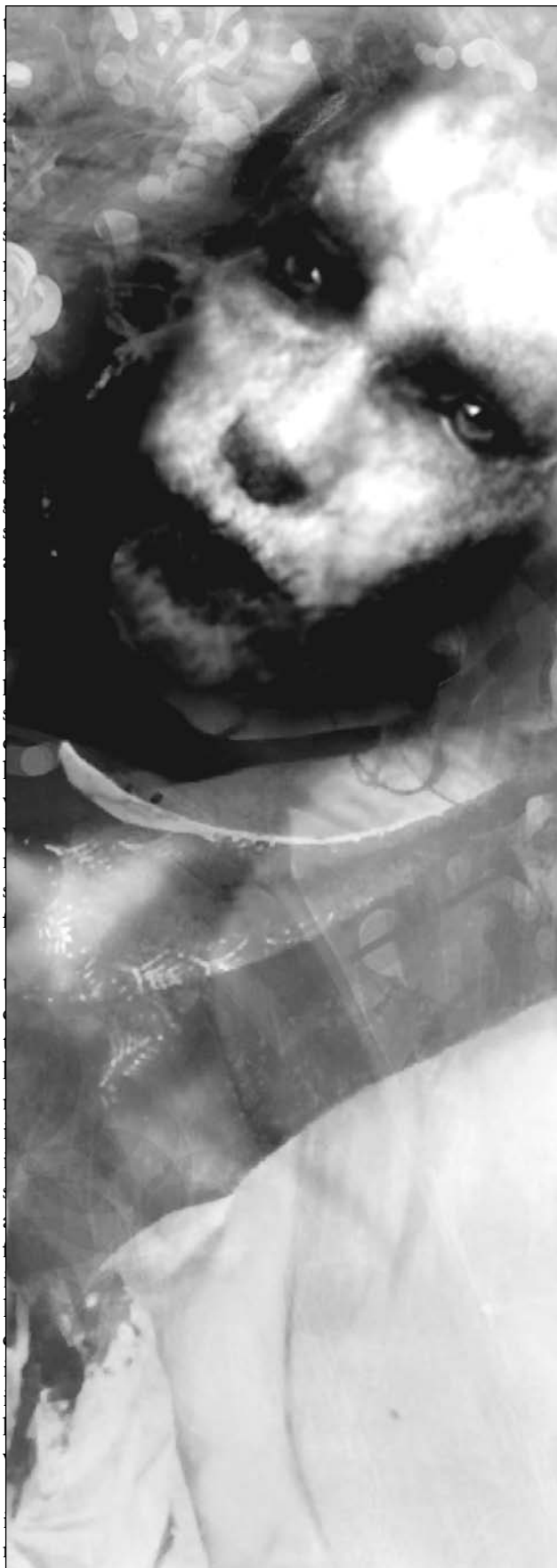
Mystery is an important element of **Vampire** even without involving other game lines. As mentioned

earlier, a neonate knows very little of the mountain of arcane secrets that have seen publication in various sourcebooks. That does not mean, however, that the player shouldn't read them. All it means is that the player needs to keep the character's perspective in mind when the Storyteller starts using elements from said sourcebooks.

Degeneration is probably at once the most important and most often-ignored facet of **Vampire's** horror. Consider: A vampire has to cope with the Beast on a nightly basis, so constant reminders of that lurking monster aren't going to do anything except encourage familiarity with the situation, and familiarity breeds contempt. Occasional reminders of what the Beast is and what it wants, however, make for superb horror. This is as much up to the player as to the Storyteller — after a fight, when the street (or alley or room or whatever) is strewn with carnage, consider what your character's Beast is feeling. Is it sated and contented (which can be scary enough in itself) or is it pulling at its leash, spurred on by the spilt blood? Every Kindred's Beast is different (if I may plug, see **Sins of the Blood** for a discussion on the subject), and knowing your character's Beast allows you to alter your roleplaying subtly in situations where your character might grow a little more ... volatile. After all, it's one thing when the Storyteller says, "OK, Brian, your character is feeling a little edgy because of all the blood strewn about." It's an altogether different experience for the other players if, without any prodding, Brian's character hunches over a little and his mouth hangs open a bit as he eyes the puddles of blood in the room.

A character actually *losing* a dot of Humanity by blowing a Conscience roll, however, should be a horrific event no matter how many times it happens. Remember that every Kindred with any degree of education on the subject knows that once the Beast takes control for good, everything that was human — or even sentient — about that vampire is gone. Vampires are acutely aware of their mortality (because make no mistake, vampires *aren't* immortal, they're just undead), and the loss of sentience all but ensures Final Death. Vampires — and their players — like to have control of what's going on around them, and degeneration is a spiraling loss of control. Glossing over it as "Whoops, blew a Conscience roll, I'll have to buy my Humanity back up, damn it" is a gross disservice to this aspect of the game.

We've examined what to do to keep horror in focus in **Vampire** stories (and it's really quite simple, isn't it?). Let's take a minute and look at what *not*



target. It all comes back to perspective — the character doesn't know that this is a game, so don't look at it that way. Look at the world through your character's eyes and see the blood as *blood*, rather than fuel. See the thing in the alley as what you might become food for — or what you might simply become. See vampires as what they are — the dead come to prey on the living.

In short, keep it simple. Don't dilute the horror with details.

## TALK THE TALK

### How to Get Involved in Political Chronicles

By Patrick O'Duffy

**Storyteller:** Lord Malkuth sits and motions for his servant. "Truly you are a hard bargainer, Ventrue, and I fear you leave me little choice. So yes, I will agree to withdraw my vote for Simon Argus in the contest to assume leadership of the Red Seraphim League."

**Irene:** All right! That means that Argus will lose control of the Seraphim and won't be able to stand against Cassiel's push to move into the Seven Points! We can increase our influence over the west side of the city by at least 15 percent.

**Dave:** Don't get carried away just yet. We still have to cement Rochester's deal with the Brujah dissidents, or we lose our grip on Julia's Mafia family. And if that happens, the Pact of Six Daggers falls apart and we fall way back in the game. This doesn't end until the whole compact is sealed in blood, and we stay here all night until Malkuth agrees to all the clauses.

**You:** Oh, great ...

**Storyteller:** What's up, man? You haven't said anything for a while.

**You:** Oh, nothing. It's just ... is there anything I can do at this point?

**Dave:** Do you want to come join the negotiations? I mean ... you might be able to do something, maybe ...

**You:** Yeah, well, I can't think of anything. Can you?

**Dave:** Umm ...

**Irene:** Well ...

**Storyteller:** Just hang tight a little longer, okay? We should be able to wrap this up before too long.

**You:** Okay.

**Storyteller:** Right. Malkuth's servant brings over a decanter of vitae and refills your glasses. "Now, with that out of the way, let us discuss the matter of clause number six. And I warn you, I will not budge on my demands here."

**You:** Hey, can I fire up your Xbox?  
Does this sound familiar?

**Vampire** isn't unique in having the potential for chronicles containing politics, intrigue and negotiations; almost all storytelling games include such things. But **Vampire** gives this kind of in-character, roleplaying-heavy maneuvering a lot more time than most games, and it's not uncommon to see entire chronicles revolve around politics and social battles.

Which is all fine and dandy if you like that sort of thing, but it kinda sucks if you don't.

Some players don't enjoy or can't get into politics- or intrigue-heavy chronicles for some reason. Maybe you're more interested in the horror/mystical elements of the game and find the character-based stuff dull by comparison. Maybe you want to focus on romance and relationships, and find political struggles artificial and dry. Maybe you just don't like staying in character for that long. And hey, maybe you want your character to get into fights and action scenes, and think all this talking-heads crap is boring.

Sometimes, players caught in that kind of not-fun-for-them game try to force the chronicle away from that kind of play. You could insist on doing your own thing at the same time as the other players are doing their negotiations, forcing the Storyteller to run two separate subplots simultaneously and splitting her attention between you and the others. That might give you a *bit* of satisfaction, but it's just going to piss everyone else off, and you're still going to end up roleplaying away from the rest of the troupe. And if you wanted to play on your own, you could have just stayed home and loaded *Final Fantasy X* into the Playstation.

No, if you're faced with a situation like this, you have only two sensible options. First, you can drop out of the chronicle and let everyone else do their thing. That's efficient, but hardly fun, and leaves you out in the cold. The better option, and the focus of this essay, is to become involved in the game in a way that doesn't irritate the others but that also doesn't force you to sit through stuff you don't like or require you to play in a way you find disagreeable. Many ways exist to get you involved, ways that can make the chronicle more enjoyable for both you and the other players, and they all revolve around one thing: working with the troupe to bring out the fun.

### **Working with the Storyteller**

First things first. If you're feeling left out of the chronicle, or think the chronicle is about to go in a

politics-heavy direction, you need to sit down and talk with your Storyteller.

Here's something you need to know about your Storyteller: *She wants you to have fun.* She isn't just running this game for her own sake; she wants you (and all the other players) to have a good time and enjoy yourselves. If she knows you're having trouble getting into the chronicle, she'll go out of her way to bring you and your character into the game. She probably won't just ditch all the politics, if that's an element that she or other players enjoy, but the two of you can do plenty to create a chronicle with room for you.

### **Striking a Balance**

If the chronicle includes politics and intrigue, you need to accept that and not try to diminish that aspect. Instead, talk to the Storyteller about bringing out other elements as well, ones you enjoy and can sink your teeth into. Ask her to include opportunities for romance, or horror, or action, or whatever it is that floats your boat, in addition to the intrigue and political maneuvering.

Of course, a chronicle has only so much room, and only so many hours of game time each chapter. Your Storyteller can't put everything in all at once; she has to juggle elements and try to find a good working balance. That means that yes, sometimes the politics dominates the game, and sometimes the stuff you like takes center stage. Be patient; if the Storyteller knows you want some spotlight time, you'll have some spotlight time soon enough.

### **Suggest Storylines**

The more help and material you give your Storyteller, the more she can cater to your tastes in the chronicle. If you're not involved in the politics-heavy storylines, suggest story ideas that will interest you. Don't ask for specific things to happen or present complete story ideas. Instead, give your Storyteller a basic story idea or framework that she can work from, something like "My character could be tracking down information in the Nosferatu sewer kingdom," or "Maybe the Ventrue try to target my character and turn him into a spy."

For the best results, suggest ideas that connect with the intrigue and politics stuff. If the rest of the troupe is negotiating with a street gang, you might go on a raid with that gang against their enemies to improve the relationship, or steal their supplies and equipment to weaken them and make them more likely to agree to the demands. You need to talk these ideas over with the other players, not just the Storyteller (more about that below).

### Playing the Numbers

This is a simple thing, but it's worth pointing out. Whether or not you enjoy the political end of things, your character has his own strengths, and social interaction may be one of them. Kindred are social beings who exist in a complex network of favors and obligations, and no one, not even the most solitary Caitiff outsider, can completely ignore that. You may want your character to be able to cope in social situations, even if you don't really enjoy playing out the scene, just as other players might create combat-capable characters despite not being that interested in combat. That's a perfectly valid attitude to take when making your character, but it leaves you in the odd position of having a character that works toward stories you don't enjoy.

If you're playing a character with good social skills but don't enjoy playing out negotiations and interactions in detail, ask your Storyteller if you can gloss over the details and simply focus on the mechanical end of things. Traits and dice pools are there to represent your character's strengths, not yours. You don't need to be a black belt to play a martial artist, and you don't have to be a master diplomat to play a socially adroit Ventrue.

If the Storyteller's cool with it, treat social scenes like combat or other mechanics-focused scenes. Summarize your character's style and goals, let the dice do the work and cut to the chase. You lose the in-character roleplaying aspect, but if that isn't fun for you, it's no loss, and your character remains involved in the story.

### Don't Bitch

It shouldn't need to be said, but let's say it anyway. You can complain and be a pain in the ass by demanding more attention, pulling focus from other players or forcing the Storyteller to run little parallel stories that are just about you. But you're just going to piss everyone else off, and they'll be right to be upset. If you're not involved in a scene, let it go. Read, have something to eat, go for a walk and think about the next scene. Have the sense to accept that not every aspect of the game is going to be about your character and focus on the parts that are.

### Working with the Other Players

Talking to the Storyteller is the first step. Talking with the other players in the troupe is the next. Hell, do it at the same time. Like you, the other players are here to roleplay and have a good time; like the Storyteller, they aren't here to deny you your fun as well. If they know you're not getting much out of the

game, they'll be inclined to help you out, as long as it doesn't diminish the fun they're getting out of the chronicle. The trick is to find ways of increasing your fun and opportunities that also increase those things for the other players, and that isn't hard.

### Reciprocal Involvement

You've been talking with your Storyteller about your ideas for stories and chronicle events. Now bring the other players in on those stories. Work with them to develop hooks and niches in your ideas that their characters can fill, and ways in which they can influence the stories you've suggested. Your character will likely stay the focus of these stories, but he'll share some spotlight with all the characters in the coterie. In return, your fellow players will probably tinker with their own political stories and their character's machinations to make more room (and more spotlight time) for your character.

Of course, the problem isn't just that your character isn't involved in the intrigue. It's also that he might be limited in how he can be involved. Let's look at some ways your character can work with his fellows to be useful.

### Behind the Scenes

Intrigue and politics are based around balances and agreements, with every side trying to gain a slight advantage over the others. Events that happen away from the negotiating table, such as the death of a major player, can make a major difference to the balance of power. A great role for a skilled but nonsocial character is to play with the stakes behind the scenes. Your character could be a hidden agent of change, striking your group's rivals in ways that give your coterie an advantage at the parleying session. This could be as cold-blooded as assassinating a rival, as hands-off as hacking into secret databases and financial records, or as exotic as traveling to Romania to investigate the origins of your chief rival's bloodline.

If this is too aggressive for your liking, turn it around. Your group has just as many weak points as your rivals and is just as vulnerable to sabotage and infiltration. Instead of attacking your rivals, protect your allies. Your character could be in charge of defending the secrets and resources of his coterie, with duties like chasing down security leaks, covering up breaches of the Masquerade or shoring up firewalls around important data. All of this can be done before or during negotiations, and protects your group for the destabilizing forces pitted against it. Your character might not come to the table, but the others only make it that far because of his efforts.



### Carrot and Stick

If your character isn't working behind the scenes, he can be involved in the negotiations indirectly as part of the deal. Pacts and agreements always come with price tags and rewards, bribes and incentives, and perhaps your character can play a role here. He might agree to lend his skills to your group's rivals for a time in exchange for a major concession, giving his mind or muscle to their cause, while taking notes about their operations for the benefit of his allies. Another option might be that your character agrees to drink the vitae of one of the negotiators, putting him a little closer to being blood bound. That's something that can spin the chronicle in lots of new directions, but it doesn't incur the same political risk that partial bonding of a more intrigue-focused character might carry.

Don't like being the carrot? Then maybe you can be the stick. Someone has to enforce the agreements and pacts the others put into place, make sure everyone honors the contract, and punish those who step out of line. Your character's intervention can be the threat the others use to make their opponents back down. This is easy if you're playing a killing

machine or powerful sorcerer, but other characters can play this role too. If your character's rivals know he can cripple their finances with his business-sector contacts, they'll toe the line for fear of losing part of their powerbase.

### Playing the Front Man

Another option for being involved is trickier but puts significantly more spotlight onto your character. He can be the front man for his group, playing mouthpiece or figurehead for the coterie. He assumes the spotlight while his viziers work in secret. This is a great role for a character who should be prominent in politics, due to things like high Status or Influence, or who has credibility and a squeaky-clean reputation.

This kind of arrangement is reminiscent of politics in the real world. You can play the president or senator or movie star, the one everyone looks at; the other characters are advisors and spin doctors and the brains behind the operation. The other players do all the heavy lifting and political work, using your character as a mouthpiece. Your character has all the attention, and you do as little or as much in-character roleplaying and politicking as you feel comfortable with.

### Working with Yourself

All of the above ideas are ways to integrate your character at least partially into the political shenanigans of the rest of the troupe. For that to work, though, and for you to increase your enjoyment of the chronicle, it's not enough for the Storyteller and other players to do all the work and change the way they play. It's up to you as well. You need to take a step back from the gaming table and take a look at your character, and at yourself, and make any changes needed to make the whole thing fall into place.

### Don't Play a Social Noncombatant

If the chronicle has a strong political focus, you really need to give your character some kind of political ability, even if you never plan to use it. In a chronicle that focuses on combat and action, it's foolish to give your character no combat abilities. Even a couple of dots in Dodge and a small pistol are enough to elevate you from pure victim status in that situation. Similarly, don't play a complete political nonentity in an intrigue-based chronicle, or the other players can't involve you, and your character just becomes a target for Storyteller characters to manipulate easily. A couple of dots in Empathy and a decent Wits Attribute will protect your character from being used too terribly often, while a few dots in Influence, Status or Resources give you options on those occasions you do play a part in the wheeling and dealing.

### Don't Play a Social Combat Monster

If you find combat dull, you wouldn't play a heavily armed Brujah with maxed-out Celerity and Potence, because all your character's strengths are in an area you don't want to explore. Similarly, don't play a character with strong political and intrigue abilities if you don't like the political aspects of **Vampire**. All that does is cause problems in the game and piss off the other players. They'll feel that you could be doing more to help them in the chronicle, but you won't take advantage of your character's abilities.

Sure, take a character with good Social Attributes, with strong Influence or Status, with Subterfuge and Empathy. These are all useful in plenty of situations and are great if you're going for the front-man role mentioned earlier. But don't load up with more than you need, or more than you're willing to work with, because it'll just be a waste. Take on the Traits you're prepared to play and work with in at least a little detail and leave the rest behind.

### Accept Compromise

If you don't like political games and the other players do, you need to accept that you will probably never have things completely to your liking. Don't aim to reduce the level of politics. Instead, aim to increase the presence of those game elements you do enjoy, and tie those into the politics so that you can gain some fun from the negotiating stuff. You'll probably have to involve your character with the intrigue, but only to a limited extent. You won't need to go past your comfort/boredom threshold if all the other players know where that threshold is.

If you've discussed stories and ideas with the Storyteller, you also need to accept that the political stories may take center stage first. It is possible to run scenes in parallel, by cutting between what your character is doing and what the others are up to at the council meeting, but it's hard to pull that off in a satisfactory manner. Such "meanwhile" scenes are usually too short to be enjoyable, and the other players can grow listless if the scenes are any longer. It's better to leave the parallel material until the right moment, which could be halfway through the political scene or right at the end, and then run through a reasonably sized scene. If that means that you don't do much for a while, leave the game for a bit. Get something to eat, read through supplements or go for a walk while you work out your upcoming scene in your head. This isn't you-being-ignored time, this is you-getting-ready-for-your-spotlight-scene time, and it's worth taking.

Remember, everyone in the troupe is here to have fun, and everyone wants the other members of the troupe to have fun too. You don't have to take fun away from the other players to increase your own, and you don't have to decrease your own enjoyment by sitting passively by while everyone else does his own thing. Get in there, talk to the others, put your ideas on the table, and see what you can come up with as a group.

## YOU ARE WHO YOU EAT

*Why Interesting Feeding Habits Aren't Just for the Ventrue*

By Adam Tinworth

What's the defining characteristic of a vampire? If you've been playing **Vampire: The Masquerade** for a while, the chances are that answers like "politics" or "the struggle with the Beast" will spring to mind. Both are reasonable answers, but both miss the point. What is it about vampires that draw us to them in the first place? What's the one, unique



factor that separates them from the general mass of supernatural monsters that populate myth?

The simple but easily forgotten answer is that a vampire drinks blood from living people to survive. It steals life from others in order to sustain its own unlife. The need to be a predator is something that it's very easy to forget in a **Vampire** chronicle, yet which is at the heart of virtually every vampire myth. To be fair, it's partially our fault. White Wolf has produced dozens of excellent supplements delving into the depth and complexity of vampiric existence to help you get the most out of your story. It is amazing how little space in those books has been devoted to a single fact: To survive, a vampire has to drive its fangs into yielding human flesh and suck out the warm, thick blood within. What is the point of playing a vampire rather than any other form of monster if you aren't going to give at least some thought to the blood-drinking aspect of the character?

Think of your early encounters with the vampire archetype in horror. Remember the chill of the idea of this half-dead creature stalking silently through your darkened room and swiftly draining out your life through two deep wounds in your neck. Recall the terror of feeling your body grow slowly colder as the night stalker steals away your life-giving blood, until blackness takes you for good. If you're more familiar with modern reinterpretations of the myth, think of the eroticism of the feeding, the bite on the neck that much resembles a passionate lover's kiss, mingled with the danger of this monster sharing this intimate moment with you. When was the last time you had a moment like that in one of your sessions?

If the answer is "not recently," don't worry; it's an easy thing to miss. We have all done it, both as players and Storytellers. The heat is on the characters, their enemies are closing in, and soon it will be a fight to the Final Death. Rather than spend any time either in or out of game on feeding, the characters just grab some hapless passers-by and drain them of the much-needed blood. Honestly, in times of high stress for your character, that's a likely and convenient response. Unless the Storyteller really wants to rack up the pressure, the time taken to concentrate on a feeding scene will distract from the dramatic flow of the story. Just suck the blood bag and move on, but be aware that such a careless feeding should have consequences down the road, if the Storyteller is on the ball.

### Why Should I Bother?

While it may seem like unnecessary effort, spending the time needed to focus on your character's true nature through his feeding habits can be a huge boost to the atmosphere of the story. Nothing forces you to develop a detailed picture of how and where your character feeds; it's certainly not a requirement of the rules. Of course, nothing in the rules forces you to decide on your character's hair color or fashion choices either, but most players do it to give the characters more depth and detail. Well, the same applies to feeding habits, except this time it is a detail about the character's unlife that you draw from his vampiric nature and not his mortal life.

The way your character goes about getting his nightly supply of blood also tells you much about his attitude toward humanity. Feeding is the one thing in his existence that forces him into the company of mortals. The necessity of drinking blood ties vampires to humanity forever, and the way your character chooses to feed tells you a little about how he has chosen to adapt to that relationship. These attitudes, of course, will have a significant bearing on your character's Humanity or Path rating, depending on which morality he follows. Moralities that are explicitly pro- or antikilling mortals in some way will both be put to the test when your character feeds, which is another good reason for not glossing over feeding scenes.

More than that, it also gives you a significant insight into the character's nightly routine, which gives your sessions a useful structure and stops you casting around for ideas of the night's prey. In fact, this benefit to you and the character is the same: You need to invest less time and effort in feeding. Other benefits come with these routine, however. Compare and contrast, if you will, the two following sample sessions.

#### Basic

**Storyteller:** "OK, James rises from his daytime sleep around 6 PM. What do you do first?"

**David:** "Well, the prince has called a meeting in Elysium for 10 PM. I'm a little low on blood, so I need to refill."

**Storyteller:** "How are you going to do that?"

**David:** "Oh, I dunno. Grab a couple of tramps somewhere."

**Storyteller:** "Well, your haven is in a pretty rough area of town. You find a tramp in an alley in

less than an hour. He's in no position to resist. How long do you drink?"

**David:** "I'm pretty low on blood, and no one's gonna miss him if he dies. I'll take about five points and then dump him by the dumpster."

#### Enhanced

**Storyteller:** "OK, James rises from his daytime sleep around 6 PM. What do you do first?"

**David:** "Well, James is pretty hungry when he rises. He's got some time on his hands, so he heads down to bars on West Street, as usual. He's looking for jocks out on the town as normal."

**Storyteller:** "As James makes his way through the familiar colorful streets around the university district of town, he can't help but notice that things are much quieter than normal. By the time he reaches West Street, he knows something's wrong. There are barely any cars parked and the bars look dead."

**David:** "Damn. Something's up, and I've only got a few hours before Elysium to figure it out. OK. I look for anyone at all in the usual bars. I might be able to get some information and blood at the same time."

As I'm sure you can see, the second example is significantly more vivid than the first. We gain a sense of the neighborhood of James's haven, which is also his assigned hunting ground. The Storyteller knows that the character is familiar with the locale and can thus use it to sow hints of upcoming plotlines. James's actions and reactions feel more real because David has a much clearer picture of how he feeds each evening.

Unless your character is damned blasé about leaving bloodless corpses, he's probably going to have to feed every two or three nights and perhaps more frequently. Defining his pattern of feeding, and in particular location, prey and methods, gives a routine that you can start to build his nightly activities around during the chapter.

Feeding habits are also something that you can develop in conjunction with the other characters in the chronicle. Does the coterie or pack feed together, or separately? Vampires, like us, are stuck with some nightly routines and obligations to others that they cannot ignore. Your Storyteller probably already prefers that you give at least some detail on how your character feeds every time you want to top up the blood pool.

Detailing how your character feeds is an inescapable part of creating a really good **Vampire** character. The fact is that your character is a vampire, a blood-

drinking supernatural predator, and the act of feeding is a necessity and core to his being and the course of the story. So, rather than asking, "Why should I?," perhaps we should be asking what possible reason you have for not putting in the effort to make it an interesting part of your character's personality rather than an irritating distraction during the story. Really, you don't have a good reason not to make the effort: It's what playing a vampire is all about.

#### Developing the Habits

How should you go about deciding how your character feeds? It might be worth looking at her eating habits prior to her Embrace. We mortals are funny creatures when it comes to food. Some people will eat anything, while others are very fussy eaters. A number of people choose to eat nothing but junk food, while others are happy only in expensive restaurants. For a few people, cooking and eating are some of the great pleasures of existence.

Try filtering those ideas through the vampire's frame of mind. Bear in mind that the vampire's thirst for blood is more consuming and intense than our own hunger, unless we are on the brink of starvation. This desire for blood occupies the space in the mortal psyche that is taken up with any number of desires, all linked with survival. The need for blood replaces the need for sex, love and even companionship, all of which mortals, as a species, need to survive. A vampire can, potentially, exist forever as long as she receives a steady supply of blood. So all the survival impulses having to do with reproduction, food and defense in mortals are replaced in this one, all-consuming desire for blood in vampires. In fact, you could imagine your character as someone who is always just above that all-consuming hunger of starvation and who finds herself surrounded by tasty morsels. How does she deal with that situation? To use the examples of mortal behavior above, does she just snack on any old person who happens by, or does she select exactly the sort of person she wants as her prey? Does she just grab a derelict on the street and get a quick draft of blood, or does she choose only healthy, well exercised people with strong, rich blood? Does she select a meal, ply that vessel with food or drink to enhance her flavor a touch, and then enjoy a leisurely sup from her neck?

Vampires are no longer mortal, but many of their attitudes and habits spring from their breathing days. Blood occupies roughly the same spot in their awareness that food used to, but with a passion and intensity that mere cuisine lacks. Indeed, it also has a strong addictive element, as if blood

is at once the vampire's food and drug. The range of attitudes mortals have toward their food are reflected in the vampire population as well. Where does your character sit on that spectrum, and how has her addiction to her food changed her?

### Seeking a Bloody Example

Previous **Vampire** supplements sometimes refer to mortals as "cattle," especially in in-character sections. That is not as good a metaphor as you might think. The flavor of beef doesn't actually vary hugely. Sure, you have a few different cuts of steak and you can always roast a joint, but the decision tends to come down to "tasty" or "not tasty" (usually based on the amount of fat in the beef). A better metaphor for blood would be something like whiskey. All whiskey is essentially the same thing: an alcoholic liquid distilled from grain. You have three broad categories of whiskeys, however — Irish, Scotch and American — and dozens to hundreds of graduations of flavor within those categories.

Blood is much like that. While all blood is a combination of platelets and other blood cells suspended in plasma, every individual has her own distinct taste to a vampire's palate. Broad similarities exist by racial group and area of origin. Similarities occur in all women's blood and all men's, too. Family lines contribute a little something to the overall taste, as do state of health and lifestyle.

All vampires start off liking blood, just as a whiskey connoisseur starts his drinking career by just liking whiskey. It is only later on that he develops a palate that can differentiate the subtleties of the different forms of whiskey. Blood is much the same for your characters. She started her unlife just learning to hunt and drink, and relishing the flavor of the blood. It is only as she slowly grows accustomed to this new existence that she grows able to detect the subtlety of taste each different person brings. Your character might well decide on a favored flavor of blood and, when left to his own devices, take the time and effort it takes to track down athletes ("I find the richness of their blood intoxicating"), drug users ("Gotta love the rush you get off them clubbers. Damn, E makes unlife halfway bearable") or even a couple of families ("There's something in the Slater blood that just tastes wonderful. You really should try it sometime").

### The Practical Predator

Your character's feeding habits do not necessarily stem solely from his enjoyment of his food, though. Just as some people are happy just to gobble down some fast food, some vampires just drink blood with

### THE VENTRUE ISSUE

You might well be thinking that defining feeding preferences for all vampires takes away the uniqueness of the Ventrue clan weakness. It's true that the inability to feed on anyone but a chosen class of prey makes the Ventrue unique. The distinction here is between compulsion and choice. The Ventrue have literally no choice in their dining companions: They cannot take sustenance from any other type of mortal. For other vampires a feeding preference is just that, an affected preference that is determined by behavioral choices and not by any inherent need of their unliving condition. In addition, a choice of prey is only the beginning of determining a set of feeding preferences. The real details flow from there. How does the character track down his prey? How does he take the blood, through force or through seduction? Does he habitually stalk the same parts of his assigned feeding ground?

no regard for its culinary qualities. These characters almost certainly have their own feeding preferences, though, driven by factors such as convenience, social class and habit. Camarilla vampires will have certain domains and hunting grounds, and choosing to prey on the upper classes doesn't make much sense if your character is stuck with an inner-city slum. The sort of people resident in the neighborhood will still limit your character's feeding choices.

A Sabbat Cainite usually has more freedom in where he decides to feed. His apparent social standing in mortal society still restricts him, unless he's prepared to use some of his Disciplines to aid his feeding. Burning blood to get blood seems like an odd choice, unless your character has really become a blood connoisseur, hunting out the rare vintages.

Your character's feeding habits are also going to affect the way other vampires regard him. At the simplest level that means any character who is a sloppy eater, leaving evidence behind that could create trouble for others, will drop in others' esteem, possibly with unlife-shortening consequences. On a more sophisticated level, a vampire who feeds exclusively on young, beautiful women is sending a very different message from one who chooses to prey on soccer moms instead. That message could be anything from "He's an aesthete who enjoys the beauty of certain mortal females" to "He's been undead 10 years, so isn't it time he stopped thinking with his dick?," depending on the character and

the observer. This is something that you can easily exploit to your character's advantage, if you're trying to create a particular image for him.

### A Word of Caution

It's worth noting that by giving your character an identifiable feeding pattern, you are also giving the character a weakness. The character is indulging in a pattern of behavior that a rival or enemy could discern and turn to her advantage. Still, that should not put you off doing it. The gain in the atmosphere of the chronicle more than offsets the risk, and aren't a character's flaws far more interesting than her virtues anyway?

### In Conclusion

A vampire drinks blood to exist. Everything else is merely part of the details, a set of distractions to keep boredom and stagnation at bay over the centuries and fill the gaps between feedings. If you take the time to make your character's hunting and feeding behavior clear, vivid and realistic, you have created a great bedrock on which you can build the rest of his existence. With just a touch of effort, you can put those atmospheric feeding moments from books and movies back into your games, and remind yourself exactly what it means to play an unliving predator once again.

## BEHIND THE MASK OF NORMALCY

By Dean Shomshak

**Vampire:** The *Masquerade* presents a world that superficially resembles our own. Those similarities of traffic jams and TV news, suburbs and soccer moms, however, mask a secret world of ageless monsters, mad conspiracies and bloody predation — the World of Darkness. These vampires don't lurk in some cobwebby Transylvanian castle, saying "Goood Eeevening" as they sweep down the stairs in Victorian drag. They dwell in familiar cities, among people just like you.

They could be anyone. Even you.

So run with that idea. **Vampire** may have a reputation as a game for (and about) angst-y goth posers, but let's face it, most of us players are ordinary, middle-class people. Very few of us could be mistaken for punk gang-bangers, transgendered sex workers, death-obsessed poets, Mafia enforcers, secretive tycoons or other Gothic-Punk stereotypes. So why do so many vampire characters fill these roles? Aren't these subcultures just another sort of Transylvania, distancing our characters from the

existence we know and thereby making them a bit ... safer?

Players and Storytellers sometimes forget about that mask of normalcy. The full horror and strangeness of the World of Darkness comes from its intimate links to the real world. The shock of finding something nasty and supernatural hiding behind the normal and familiar adds to the intrinsic horror of blood-drinking corpses and vicious secret plots. The world itself becomes uncertain and treacherous.

As a Storyteller, then, you face the challenge of first building the mask of normalcy — and then destroying it. You can do this through a number of simple techniques.

### Funny, They Don't Look Dark ...

Show the characters vampires who look like normal people, in normal surroundings. Don't let your chronicle become an endless round of strip clubs, sewer tunnels, rotting tenements and ruined churches — or, for that matter, ornate mansions, glittering corporate boardrooms, art museums and society parties. Lurid low-life and high society are both, in their ways, deviant subcultures: Most people don't belong to them, and they set their own standards of behavior. Wine and cheese at the art gallery just has better press. You expect to find abnormal people in abnormal surroundings, so vampires look right at home with their body piercings, Edwardian frockcoats and five-thousand-dollar silk suits.

Instead, make sure the characters meet some Kindred who look like soccer moms or store clerks — boring, middle-class people. Place them in banal surroundings, too, like mini-marts and all-night budget restaurants. Kindred engage in a *Masquerade*, remember? The prince of the city is easy to find if he insists on dressing like Louis XIV as he conducts business at the opera. Hunters may have a harder time finding him if he wears Levis and uses a laundromat as his cover. The vessels strung up by their heels become more shocking in the laundromat's back room than in an ivy-clad mansion or penthouse suite, too.

This doesn't mean you should eschew deviant corners of society. Revel in them, but keep them connected to the rest of society. Fetish night at the gay bar — or a gala at the art museum — means more if the characters (and players) receive frequent reminders that these are only little bits of the world, not the norm.

Go beyond the usual suspects, too, by leading the characters into more obscure subcultures. Pigeon-

fanciers or Latin clubs may not seem “dark,” but they can leave the characters feeling out of their depth.

While you’re at it, throw the characters for another loop by placing mortals they know in these unexpected surroundings. A line of junkies begging the sadistic dealer for their fix becomes more shocking when a character sees her old dental hygienist among the anonymous crew ... or dispensing the drugs.

What goes for the undead goes for their hunters as well. Grim-faced men with big crosses and big guns under their trenchcoats are dangerous, but they won’t surprise the players. Deadly Avon ladies, on the other hand, should weird them out quite nicely. A Boy Scout troop that’s entirely too well prepared also provides disorientation with the danger.

You don’t have to limit yourself to vampires, either. The *Adversaries* chapter of the **Vampire** core book provides werewolves, magi, faeries and wraiths. You can adapt creatures from other World of Darkness games as well. *Do not say what they are.* Keep them as mysterious as possible by making them seem like mortals with inexplicable powers. Allow them a Masquerade as tight as the Cainites’. For instance, do *not* present faeries as pointy-eared, magical refugees from a Renaissance Faire. Instead, have the characters encounter a trio of little girls with unnaturally knowing eyes, who sing vaguely ominous songs while out skipping rope past their bedtime ... and strange things happen soon afterward. Likewise, the suburban shaman merely seems like a fellow walking home after a day of feeding the pigeons or playing chess in the park — but any Cainite who tries to feed on him finds himself attacked by dog packs or stricken by the occasional downed power line.

### The Ordinary amid the Strange

You can also inject familiar, ordinary elements into situations that ought to be bizarre and grotesque. They seem just as incongruous and disorienting as a bit of strangeness amid the familiar ever could.

Imagine, for instance, that the characters visit an archetypal Tzimisce with a horribly warped ghoulish slave or two. In this case, the Fiend took two brothers and merged them into a two-headed, conjoined-twin monstrosity. Pretty grotesque, but also pretty standard for the Fiends. Now set the two heads arguing over who Mom liked best, or whose turn it is to wash the dishes, and the everyday sibling bickering makes the scene more disturbing. Monsters

shouldn’t act like your family ... which is the best reason for you to do it.

### The Truth Is Out There — Way Out There

As characters explore the secret World of Darkness, they discover conspiracies of vampires pulling the strings behind mortal affairs. Conspiracy itself, however, does not intrinsically inspire horror. In some ways, plots by “Secret Masters” make the world *less* frightening: They give you someone to blame for monstrous or tragic events. A war, a famine, terrorism, political corruption and tyranny — it isn’t chaos, human error and stupidity, it’s really the Jyhad! Which means you can fight it ... and if you don’t, you have a perfect excuse for your apathy, because poor little you can’t hope to thwart the omnipotent Antediluvians.

When you get right down to it, though, do you really care about this supposed Great Jyhad? If the Sabbat killed Kennedy, how does that affect your unlife? No, to generate fear from secret Cainite machinations, they must affect characters personally and concretely. “The Ventrue control the WTO” is abstract, remote and, therefore, meaningless. “The Ventrue primogen runs the local Kiwanis as a blood cult — and my father just applied to join!” carries more immediate impact. A character has to do something about a situation like that.

If you do want to bring grand-scale conspiracy into your games, try to avoid the usual suspects like the Cold War, famous assassinations, presidential elections, the CIA and the Freemasons. Too many conspiracy theorists have trodden the ground before you to leave any real shock. Get weird, bring it home to the characters and, while you’re at it, give the Kindred some reason for their plots.

For instance, suppose Clan Tremere subverts the American Library Association’s administration through mesmeric conditioning and blood bonds. They do this to influence which books libraries buy, and therefore which books are published — academic and public libraries constitute a large market share for some kinds of books. ALA conventions give the Tremere a chance to survey the profession and select useful pawns. The conspiracy extends to the library system of the city where you set your chronicle. The main branch conceals the local Tremere chantry. Beware when the bookmobile travels at night — the chantry’s regent may have sent it to kill or capture someone who knows too much or interfered with her plans.

A conspiracy like that might actually surprise characters and players. It also gives you a chance

to turn something familiar and friendly — a bookmobile — into something strange and frightening.

### **Long Time No See**

Don't cut characters off from their pasts. Bring in relatives, old friends and old enemies at inconvenient moments. Remind the characters of their connections to mortals so you can destroy those connections or show the danger of maintaining them. Meeting the high-school football star who crushed your adolescent heart gives interesting opportunities to work out issues ... and discover how much of a monster you've become.

Victims whom the characters know carry more emotional impact, too. If a character sees another vampire grab an anonymous stranger, drink him dry and throw the body in a chipper, that's certainly nasty, but not entirely unexpected. If the character sees the other vampire kill his old babysitter, that's a whole other level of shock.

Nothing brings home the horror of undeath better than family. Insist that players spell out what their characters do about their parents, siblings and, if applicable, children. Every choice can lead to horror, or at least to a situation the character does not want to face.

Do you tell your family you've become a vampire? You've just broken the Masquerade in a big way. If your prince, archbishop or other superior learns what you did, he will insist that you make sure your relatives never tell anyone else. This might mean blood bonds or Dominate conditioning. At worst, your superior decides that dead relatives tell no tales. Be prepared: Your relatives' lives and free will may depend on how well you argue that any action taken to silence them would endanger the Masquerade more than their cooperation.

Even if your family avoids such extreme measures, you place nearly as great a moral burden on them as you carry yourself. Every Cainite eventually kills. What do your relatives do when they discover your crimes? They say a mother's love has no limits. Care to put that to the test? If your mother decides that no matter what, you're still her little boy or girl, her attempts to help you in your new unlifestyle can become disturbing in their own way.

All this assumes that your family does not try to destroy you right away. They might. What do you do when your own father comes at you with a stake and a hammer while vowing to tell the world of the danger it faces from your hell-spawned kind?

You could try to stay in contact with your family but hide your true nature. Good luck; you'll need it. Sooner

or later, someone wants to see you during the day. How many excuses can you give before your parents suspect that something has gone Very Wrong Indeed?

When (not if) your family figures out that you've ... changed ... go back to "Do you tell your family you've become a vampire" — except now they have even less reason to trust you. Especially if they found out because you frenzied at a family gathering and killed your sister.

Do you cut yourself off from your family? They might try to find out why. Can you keep up this harsh deception when your mother asks, tears streaming down her face, what she did to make you hate her? (Although this doesn't work if you were estranged from your family before your Embrace.)

You could even try to fake your own death and create a new identity. That may protect you from your past ... for a while. A clever Storyteller can still arrange a surprise meeting with a relative or an old friend. How far will you go to preserve this fraud?

### **Will the Real Monster Please Stand Up**

Purely human evil can horrify as much as anything supernatural. For instance, even a single case of child sexual abuse inspires horror in any sane person. Now reflect on the recent Roman Catholic Church scandal, which revealed archbishops hiding, *protecting* abusive priests to shield their dioceses from scandal and expensive lawsuits. A few years before that, the Belgian police found an international pedophile ring that regularly flew its members to the brothels of Southeast Asia. You don't need blood-sucking corpses for a conspiracy of monstrous evil. If you took a situation like this and added vampires, you would not make the conspiracy more horrifying, but you might make the vampires more horrifying, and that's what you want.

Horror fiction has thrived on madness, obsession and secret crime from ancient myth to Stephen King. They work well in **Vampire**, too. A Cainite's very survival depends on crimes that it must hide from the world. The Masquerade does not exist because mortals are bigoted, it exists because the Kindred threaten lives every time they feed. Given such training in concealment and deception, would you wonder if vampires indulged other criminal appetites? Let your players decide for themselves which disturbs them more: the Cainite who hides his perverse obsessions from his fellow monsters, or the one who doesn't care? Either way, you link the character to thoughts and deeds that inspire fear and revulsion in their own right.



Remember that not all the secrets or the monsters in the World of Darkness need to be supernatural or conspiratorial. Not even *most* of them need to be. You can conjure just as much horror and disorientation from revelations about people the characters thought they knew. Let a character realize that his nice Aunt Mary is the Dominatrix Dungeon's queen, and he'll never trust anything or anyone again.

You can also build a mood of horror by accumulating smaller revelations about a neighborhood. As the characters discover the family doctor who "plays doctor" with his own children, the wife who plots with her lover to kill her husband, the highly vocal champion of public morality who is actually an alcoholic, and the gossip, rivalries and secret attempts to sabotage marriages and careers, an ordinary suburban neighborhood can become something like an antechamber of Hell.

### Twisted Television

Sad to say, most of us know television better than we know each other's lives. For a more advanced sort of mindfuck, send the characters into situations modeled on TV and movie clichés, suitably twisted to accommodate the undead. For instance, one standard **Vampire** element is the bar where vampires can buy blood. For one story, try turning this blood bar into an episode of *Cheers*, complete with a blowhard would-be harpy at the end of the bar. Sabbath often dwell in communal havens, like a bloody parody of a family or circle of friends; draw inspiration from soaps and sitcoms like *Seventh Heaven* (Sabbat packs include a priest ...), *Three's Company* or *Friends*, but remember that the characters are all bloodsucking animated corpses. For something truly demented, though, try a heartwarming holiday special in which the characters learn the true meaning of *Palla Grande*, or a very bleak Christmas story, showing the characters the full depth of their damnation.

### Moderation

Don't overdo it. If you make *everything* twisted, conspiratorial and supernatural, the players come to expect it. The weirdness loses its force. Instead of horror, you have a freak show — and people laugh at freak shows. Most mortals should still lead normal lives, untouched either by the supernatural or by madness and evil. If the players feel, however, that madness and evil might lurk anywhere, unseen, to erupt at any time, you have ably conveyed the sense of a true World of Darkness.



## ON AND OFF CAMERA

By Conrad Hubbard

One thing **Vampire** players eventually discover is that each of them is a Storyteller part of the time, as the chronicle's plot hinges upon the decisions that they make for the main characters of the story as much as it does upon the "real" Storyteller's manipulations. For many of us the effort to craft entertaining stories is inspired by the work of good filmmakers. One common tactic is to show us something that isn't precisely what we believe it to be. When the director presents us with an image of Edward Norton talking to Brad Pitt on a plane in *Fight Club*, we have no way to know that the character is really just talking to his imaginary self. Such outright trickery isn't essential — or even always desirable — when telling a story, but the lesson remains. Remember the invisible; until it has been shown "on camera," nothing necessarily exists or fails to exist, and even then perhaps it was just misunderstood by the audience because only one facet was perceived. This is a technique easily employed by the Storyteller and by players who are careful not to exceed whatever boundaries the director of their story sets. Suggest that your Storyteller try this approach herself and that she experiment with allowing your troupe to edit the camera's view of the story as well.

Many of us are not gifted with the ability to weave stories as tightly as master storytellers like Shakespeare or Spielberg. When constructing roleplaying game stories, we are also saddled with an added challenge the great playwrights and producers do not face: The main characters of our tale are breathing, thinking people with their own ideas of how the plot should progress. How many times have you been frustrated because you could not anticipate the actions of your fellow players or your Storyteller yet did not want to stifle their creativity? If you consistently remind yourself that only those things that have been directly presented to the troupe must have occurred, and that they may not be what they appear on the surface, then you have immense freedom to suggest changes to a story without altering the continuity presented thus far. Think of that which has been directly described as a verbal lens providing a camera's-eye view of the story, but remember that this "on camera" viewpoint is mutable according to the near-infinite elements that lie beyond its range. When the scene presented to your troupe is only the tip of the iceberg it is a simple matter to reconstruct the underlying, hidden foundation according to the needs of the plot.

Imagine that your characters manage to garner a clandestine meeting with Margaret, the prince of your chronicle's favorite city setting. The prince is well known for her prowess with the Auspex Discipline, but obviously none of you wield her supernatural senses in real life. Suddenly your troupe's angry young Brujah springs into action, clearly having decided to ambush the prince when she should have known it was coming. Naturally if it would make for a better story your Storyteller might seriously consider letting this ruthless, if poorly conceived, plan succeed, but not every story benefits from the primary local authority figure being punked by a casual gangbang. Looking at the scene purely from the viewpoint of an audience watching by camera might seem to indicate that Margaret is royally screwed. Instead, as a player concerned about the integrity of the story rather than your kill-counts, you step away from the situation long enough to consider the elements which are currently invisible from a camera's eye. What about the rooftops on either side of the fated alley where our ambush takes place? As everyone knows that her ability to sense danger would have indicated a deadly threat despite the fact that none of you could anticipate it yourself, you could easily suggest that the Storyteller change the scene without altering the continuity of what your characters have already witnessed. With a sudden flurry of metallic clicking noises, about a dozen men cock their shotguns and lean over crumbling brick edges of the roof to the left and right of the alley. Forewarned by unnatural premonitions, the prince came prepared with an unexpected bodyguard and thus upset her ambushers' plans.

Sure, your character might suffer flak for associating with the frothing Brujah, but your suggestion has kept things interesting and consistent with the reality of the story. Note that nothing presented to your troupe before or after the gun-toting ghouls leap to their master's aid has violated the "reality" presented to you thus far in the story. The camera has merely swung upward to the left and right to reveal a previously unseen factor. The invisible agent unveiled to shift the plot could just as easily have been any number of other things not yet shown. Perhaps the troupe's lone Ventrue, who happens to be a childe of the prince, was conditioned to be unable to turn against her sire and only now is aware that her unlife thus far has been that of a Manchurian candidate with secret commands buried in her mind. As she turns against her sire's enemies surely she will wonder what other commandments

merely wait for the right trigger. Other players may begin to doubt their own thoughts or freedom to act without fear of already being compromised. Because the camera's view is only what we see as of the moment, anything not violating that view is a fair addition to the story.

Trying to keep yourself open to the idea that only what the players — as opposed to characters — have actually seen, or think they have seen, is immutable makes all of you more flexible to creative input as well. Our previous example could just as easily have come about due to out-of-character cross-table talk between players. Having planned to ambush Prince Margaret, the players are surprised to find that she is unattended in the narrow two-story alley. Rather than assuming that the Storyteller has been naïve in believing they would not attack the prince, your troupe assumes that she must have anticipated the attack. As you ask for a Perception + Alertness roll to spot any potential hidden bodyguards the Storyteller can silently steal your idea and flawlessly present it as though it was her plan all along. Although they had not previously appeared on camera — indeed your Storyteller had not even conceived of them until you asked for a roll — the shotgun-wielding ghouls on the rooftop smoothly slide into the current scene and thereby alter the plot without threatening the suspense of disbelief created by an apparent continuity. Rather than crying foul because the Storyteller stole your idea, you might appreciate the fact that you have inspired her and thereby made the story more intricate.

One of the most readily available elements left invisible to the camera is that of motive. Unless you decide to announce openly the innermost thoughts of your characters, no one can be absolutely sure of what precisely causes them to take various actions. Why did our burly Brujah from the previous example foolishly assault Prince Margaret in the tight quarters of a dark alley? We know it was because the player thought it would be cool to have the coterie ambush the prince, but it is always possible that the character's motives are more complex than that. Perhaps Margaret has bound the Brujah and simply wishes to see how the remainder of the coterie will react when faced with an apparent opportunity to destroy her. For another interesting angle, suggest that the scourge Sir Thomas may have anticipated the prince's carelessness and arranged to meet his hated oppressor in the very same alley. Knowing that his childe's companions cannot stand against Margaret, he hopes they will weaken her while he

strikes a final blow. A conflict between the Brujah scourge and the antagonistic prince is a dangerous situation for the troupe, but less deadly than facing her alone.

Yet-unrevealed motives can change a scene as thoroughly as newly unveiled foes or environmental conditions. Imagine that your troupe has taken an interest in a newspaper story the Storyteller meant to be filler material unrelated to the actual plot at hand. They pull some strings at the police department and manage to acquire a copy of the bank's security tape of a robbery they read about in the previous day's paper. As it becomes clear that the Storyteller really just threw in the bank robber as a trivial detail in the daily paper when a fellow player asked about its current contents, you might suggest other plans for him. It occurs to you that he might be of use turning the story to a direction likely to be more interesting to the troupe. You might suggest that watching the tape doesn't reveal anything new, but subsequent investigation show that the bank clerk slain by the pistol-waving thug has been receiving odd letters from one S. Thomas. The masked face of the bank robber is transformed merely by the reconsideration of his motive. No longer simply a greedy robber, your characters find that he was being blackmailed by the clerk — at the scourge's behest — and finally settled matters. Note that his method makes him *more* suspicious to the police, as a murderer, but less suspicious to the scourge because the killing is buried beneath an apparent petty crime. Your coterie's characters might discover that the bank robber is quite aware of vampire society and fears the Kindred more than any mortal authority. The exploration of the motives behind the action has now transformed a petty bank robbery into a desperate attempt by one of the scourge's targets to protect against ruin or damnation.

Some elements invisible to the camera may literally be invisible to the cast of the story and yet still play a part. Vampires may bring powerful supernatural abilities to bear, not the least of which is Obfuscate. Certainly the empty alleyway where Margaret meets your ambush is not the same place if it is filled with Nosferatu using their clan Discipline to remain hidden from view. When you realize that the hideous spymaster Werner has been watching every meeting that Prince Margaret has conducted during the past months, it changes the scope of your conference with her. Perhaps Werner anticipates the treacherous assault upon his prince even if Margaret does not, and he suddenly emerges from

the darkness to grab one of the coterie helplessly within his Potence-enhanced grasp. Alternatively, Werner might be an ally of Sir Thomas and arrange for him to be in the same alley without realizing that the troupe and the scourge are deadly enemies, all without ever appearing before the viewpoint of the main characters.

Other Disciplines readily lend themselves to providing unseen hands, which nonetheless affect scenes beyond the view a camera might provide. *Auspex* introduces the ability to sense danger, read minds and project astrally; any of these might reveal previously unknown information or allow for unanticipated plot turns. *Quiet* can induce absolute silence and inflict debilitating attacks with a mere brush of the skin. *Animalism* ensures that the actions of the stupidest animal could be driven by some outside agency. *Necromancy* yields command over an entire realm normally invisible to earthbound creatures. Even *Protean* guarantees that the most ordinary-appearing patch of mist cannot necessarily be assumed to be so harmless.

One cinematic trick, if a somewhat overused one, is to reveal to the audience that what they have seen through the camera's eye thus far is not what they believe it to be. One could argue that foes rendered invisible by *Obfuscate* filled this role, but more esoteric illusions such as those provided by *Vicissitude*, *Chimerstry* and mundane dream sequences are far more devious. A *Tzimisce* vampire might use her fleshcrafting powers to replace your wife with a ravenous ghoul whose nature is revealed as soon as it attacks. Your troupe may seek to claim vanished winnings from a *Ventrue*-run casino in Vegas only to face a video tape showing them standing around an empty stretch of carpet, pantomiming like they are at a table and handing their money to an ill-dressed East Indian hooligan pretending to deal cards. Worse yet, a character could awaken from torpor only to discover that his activities of the past few weeks had been a strange dream. While he wonders who somehow caused his vampiric shell to dream, he could spend some time recovering from the shock of losing a month's time.

Many of the prior examples may seem to make things more dangerous or "worse" for the characters. Frankly, this is because interesting stories most often involve twists, turns and conflicts that arise to antagonize the protagonists of the story. This technique can also be used to aid the troupe directly, with your Storyteller's permission. Imagine that your *Ventrue*

character is busy searching Prince Margaret's office for clues as to why she hates the Brujah scourge so much. Suddenly, you are interrupted by ghouls loyal to the prince and are in immediate danger. Pretending to be calm, your *Ventrue* slides open the desk drawer, reaches down with the slightest of glances and draws the gun that your prince keeps there for emergencies. Of course, nobody ever said that a gun was in the drawer, but supposition wins the day. Assuming that such is the case, you announce your character's action and hope that your Storyteller will assent. She could deny you the chance to whip out a gun that you didn't have, but a good Storyteller will at least consider whether your proposal makes for a more interesting story.

Storytellers enriching their chronicles through constant adjustments to the story according to the elements which have not yet appeared to players "on camera" should be careful to balance their hidden elements with those that are obvious and logical. As **Vampire: The Masquerade** is a horror game, I would hope players are accepting of, and even go so far as to suggest, time-honored tales-of-terror tactics designed to induce fear of the unknown or a sense of helplessness. An evolving view of the ever-present current moment should be something any participant in the game can introduce without anyone crying foul. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that evoking horror in a story should not involve mentally torturing your fellow gamers, so remember where the line between frustrating tricks and an interesting story lies and stay on the entertaining side of it. If you are constantly revealing that the last six months of game time was just a dream, most of your fellow players will be tired of watching all of their accomplishments fade with their rise from a troubled torpor. If the prince always has armies of hidden bodyguards waiting to turn the story into an anime ninja festival, then her own ability as an elder is called into question and she becomes a bit of a joke propped up by Storyteller fiat. Beware overuse of hidden elements; the entire troupe should be able to reasonably expect that what they see on camera is a valid part of their personal stories.

Your troupe will probably find that it is also important to be sure that the invisible elements that intrude upon the camera's eye are compatible with that viewpoint. If the *Gangrel* clan is constantly presented with a bestial countenance and the mentality to accompany it, then you are going to stretch suspension of disbelief beyond the breaking

point if you suggest that they are secretly suave and sophisticated masters of the bureaucratic halls of power within American politics. Proclaiming Prince Margaret as a Sabbat infiltrator or spymaster Werner as a Toreador philanthropist would similarly stretch the limits of what other players will believe without rendering the story farcical. When you consider the hidden foundations of the chronicle, you should remember that they must support its on-camera scenes as surely as the underwater portions of an iceberg hold its tip above the surface.

When your troupe experiences a story within the **Vampire** game, you and your Storyteller may strive to achieve the dynamic flow of plot that films bring us. When you watch a movie, you are limited by the specific images that move across the screen before you. As the story unfolds you are faced with the cinematic tricks of the masters of film. If you can continually remind yourself that the eternal “now” presented by the camera’s lens is utterly mutable according to new revelations then you can enhance the story more effectively without threatening its continuity or believability. If you and your fellow players assume that anything not directly displayed as fact is not part of the story then you can more easily introduce new ideas, antagonists, concepts or reinforcements, whether as a player or as a Storyteller. This approach strengthens the plot and increases its flexibility commensurate with the creativity you and your Storyteller possess.

## HOW YOU CAN KEEP ONLINE VAMPIRE GAMES FROM SUCKING SO MUCH

By Jim Kiley

It is telling that when I discussed the title of the essay with a few different freelancers I know, more than half of them replied, “Don’t play in online **Vampire** games!” But I’ve been playing in online games of various sorts for about 12 years now, and I like to think that I have a pretty good idea what makes them work and what makes them suck.

I’m talking about big multiplayer games. Games with multiple players on staff as Storytellers, judges or administrators of some kind. They could be big IRC games, a game run on one of White Wolf’s servers, or a MUD of some kind (“MUD” is a general term including MUSH, MUCK, MOO, and similar servers. Really.).

You’re playing in a small-scale play-by-email game? Or a small chat-server game? You’re lucky;

you have the theoretically undivided attention of a single Storyteller who has it in his best interests to keep you personally involved in the game. This essay isn’t for you, really.

It’s my experience that the best online games are those where the staff and the players are focused on everyone having a good and memorable time, with good roleplaying, believable characters and honest plotlines that involve a broad cross-section of the player base. These sorts of games grow, have interesting new players join up and stick around to make their own contributions, and evolve over time.

Most of this advice can apply to just about any online World of Darkness game, and in my experience many World of Darkness online games are cross-game settings; they might run all of, say, Medina, Ohio, including vampires, werewolves, mages, ghosts, faeries, hunters, demons and so on. One key to success in an online game is focus. If you have a choice between a cross-World-of-Darkness game and a **Vampire**-only (or **Werewolf**-only, or whatever) game, give the single-character-type game a try first. Pure **Vampire** games do a better job of capturing the core themes of **Vampire** than cross-over mix-up games do; if you want a more authentic **Vampire** experience, this is the way to go.

### Don’t Make Characters That Suck

You’d think this would be common sense. As Voltaire suggested, however, common sense is not so common.

#### Concept

Listen. Everybody else has already run a fourth-generation Methuselah True Brujah who’s also a dead sexy computer whiz. You don’t need to run one too. Everybody else has *also* already run a brooding loner Gangrel warrior with a Desert Eagle hidden under his trenchcoat.

In a face-to-face game with a small group of players, you have room for a coterie with wild and weird backgrounds, because a dedicated Storyteller controls events tightly, builds on character backgrounds and plays out ramifications of the weird stuff. The Storyteller can also assume the role of all the vampires with more or less “ordinary” backgrounds. But in a large game with a rotating player base numbering in the dozens, wacky backgrounds can become commonplace.

Paradoxically enough, your character may stand out by virtue of having had an ordinary life and somewhat typical Embrace. In part that’s because characters with modest backgrounds stand out —

they indicate that a player isn't involved in the game because she has a wacky, setting-bending concept, but rather has a good solid idea for a character who is a person first. Players like that are fun to play with because they don't go over the top trying to be the coolest guy in the room.

### **Description**

Some very dedicated players out there will read every word of every character's description and do their best to incorporate other characters' descriptions into their ongoing roleplay, going so far as to note other characters' changes of clothing and apparent mood from night to night. Those people are dedicated and nice and deserve your appreciation.

Most everyone else will skim your description for one or two noteworthy traits and ignore the rest. So don't waste a lot of time on your description unless you really enjoy writing character descriptions. Figure out what you look like in broad strokes, note them, refer to one entertaining feature that other people can use as a hook and then go.

Oh, another thing. Male players: If you're running a female character, everyone will guess that you are a male player if your description makes reference to your breasts. Restrain the urge.

### **Activities**

Roleplay in "public" periodically. Hell, roleplay in public most of the time. Don't just interact with the same seven people you interact with every evening. Go out, find a social hangout and roleplay there. Involve other characters in what you're doing, even if it's only peripherally. Acknowledge their existence.

You don't have to grab every newbie you encounter and involve him to great depth in ongoing plotlines. That's unreasonable and unrealistic. But don't glower from the corner of your lair, acknowledging only the existence of your own pack or coterie, restricting your conversation and roleplaying to only them. That kind of thing conveys to other players that you and your coterie are snobby and exclusive; it alienates just about everyone.

Have a sense of humor. Please. Both in character and out of character. Decide at some point what sorts of things make your character laugh and then stick with them. Maybe he's a sucker for inadvertent physical comedy and will break down laughing when the town drunk trips over the town midget, even if the surroundings are otherwise serious. Occasional flashes of light help illuminate your character and the (presumably) dark setting around you.

Don't be afraid to have your character make a fool of himself if it's an appropriate thing for the character to do. Ridiculous things happen even to stern and serious people in the real world. Presidents vomit on other presidents.

The other players you're roleplaying with don't want to read your novel. While rat-a-tat regular short bursts of output can be annoying, typing in two-hundred-word paragraphs and spewing them out to eat up entire screens is downright rude. Online roleplaying is an exchange between peers. It's appropriate to present your character's activities at a decent length — again, a ton of one-line comments like "Bob laughs," "Bob smiles," "Bob agrees," "Bob says, 'Hi!'" becomes irritating.

When you present your character's activities in huge chunks of text, there are two primary reactions. Some players will feel obliged to respond in detail to your every pose; this compounds your spamminess as your next pose will have to be even longer to accommodate everyone who responded in kind. Others won't have the patience to pick through your massive block of text. They'll just ignore you entirely and probably resent you as being pompous and self-absorbed while they're at it.

Some circumstances probably exist when that kind of spam is okay. Big speeches in public or scenes where you really are the center of attention call for that kind of output. Otherwise, keep things a bit more under control and you'll find a lot more characters interacting with yours as interested equals — and that's the point of online roleplaying.

Lastly, avoid combat when you can. Combat takes a lot of time online, except on Diku MUDs, LP MUDs and their ilk, where combat systems are entirely automated. Few online **Vampire** games have that level of code support. This means that characters end up in strange time-stopped situations where hours of roleplay goes on in the city around them while they resolve a 30-second fistfight. Then, when it's over, they have to catch up rapidly on the scenery changing around them. Unless you really relish spending four hours on half a dozen turns of a fight, avoid combat when possible.

### **Don't Run Stories That Suck**

You could have the opportunity to run a plot of your own in a big game. Perhaps you're a player in a game with high trust where anybody can run a story at any time. Perhaps you're on staff, or you play a temporary Storyteller role, or you build some plotlines into your character's background and have a chance to run them.



If the online game you play in allows for player-run stories, I can't encourage you strongly enough to take the time to run one. Stories keep players interested in the game; they contribute a dynamic presence that simple soap-opera roleplaying alone can't provide. You have to be careful, though. Bad plots are worse than no plots at all.

### **Shaking the Earth**

Don't run plots that shake the entire game to its foundations or threaten to destroy the world. I have a few reasons for suggesting this. First, realize that if your plotline has consequences that can affect a game of 100 players, you're sure to have 100 players all bothering you so that they can have a say in what's going on. Secondly and along the same lines, if you do make a change that alters the game for 100 players, you'll have 100 people whining to you and complaining about you on various mailing lists and discussion boards.

From a believability and realism standpoint, remember that yours isn't the only plot going on in the game. Other things are happening. Keeping your plot's scale small reduces the likelihood that it will interfere with other plots, which is good for you because then you don't have to negotiate your storyline with other Storytellers.

And as silly as it sounds, after the 10th iteration of the Horrible Prophesied Methuselah Coming Out Of Torpor Under Our Fair City (and this is Medina, Ohio, remember), humongous storylines start to blur together. At smaller levels you have a lot more room to maneuver. Intimate plots that focus on characters' histories and Backgrounds (their Allies, Contacts, etc.) are much more memorable to the players involved than yet another horrible world-shaking plot.

### **Involving Players**

The flip side of avoiding world-shaking plots is involving the right players in your stories. In some cases it's easy to choose the characters for a story. Say you want to run something about the local Tremere chantry. Obviously most if not all of the local Tremere will know something's going on, and you can involve various Tremere characters per their levels of interest. You might also come up with a story that would work well for a particular pack or coterie, because you know the history and Backgrounds of that group and feel like your story would be a good fit for it.

Other times, though, you'll have a story in mind that nearly any coterie or pack could fit into. If your

online game is like most others, a few groups of players are fun to game with, whom you know well and would certainly enjoy running a story for.

Screw those guys. They get plenty of fun already. Someone else will run a plot for them if they're a good group. Hell, you might run your next plot for them.

Find a group of relatively new players and involve them. This gives you some real advantages. First, you find a new group of players to spend some time with. This might be painful, but it can also be a lot of fun. Second, it gives that group of players a reason to come back to the online game, and that helps the game from becoming stagnant. Third, a relatively new group won't have a lot of baggage or preconceptions about what's coming, which gives you the flexibility to run whatever sort of story you'd like. Lastly, the aftereffects of your story will give that new group of players something new to roleplay about.

Involving a group of new players, instead of the old hands, smoothes out the politics of your online game. It reduces the perception that the same old characters have the plots doled out to them, which brings us back to the thesis suggested at the beginning of this essay, which is that the best online games are those in which everyone involved cooperates to give everyone else the best possible roleplaying experience.

## **SEVERING TIES**

*By Aaron Rosenberg*

Vampires are creatures of the undead, men and women and children who have died and been brought back into something similar to life, but different. As a vampire, your character thrives on blood, hungers for the kill, lurks in the shadows — oh, and runs into his ex-girlfriend down at the 7-Eleven.

Unfortunately, for recent vampires that's a real issue. If your character was Embraced a week ago, or a month ago, or even a year ago, chances are you're still in the same geographical area. Unless you were just passing through, that's probably your old hometown, or where you went to school, or where you moved to look for work. So you know people there. And they know you. How do you get into the whole "creature of the night" mindset when you could bump into an old coworker or see a waitress who recognizes you at any time?

That's actually part of what makes **Vampire** a great game, though. In the movies and books, vampires are often vicious creatures, utterly devoid

of emotion or complex thought, beasts who slaver for human blood and who will do anything to get it. **Vampire** is about characters, though. You're not playing a monster — you're playing a person who was Embraced and *made into* a monster. The character still has many, if not all, of his old thought patterns, likes and dislikes, obsessions and prejudices. He can still be a huge Minnesota Vikings fan, or think Blink 182 rocks, or love to watch cheesy movies on late-night television. He can still miss his friends, or his parents, or his wife, or even his kids. In many ways, he's still at least partially human, and therein lies the rub—someone who was human and still think and feels like a human, but who now feeds on mortals to survive.

How do you deal with this aspect of your character? Obviously, different people will choose different methods. One way is to embrace (pardon the pun) your old connections. Some vampires, particularly new ones, refuse to accept what's happened to them. They'll admit to an odd new eating disorder, but otherwise will claim they're still mortal, still alive. Those vampires actually seek out their friends and loved ones to renew contact. That usually doesn't go well, of course. When you think your brother or boyfriend or roommate is dead, and then he shows up at the door, pale as a fish and smelling about as bad, with blood and gore dripping from his mouth — well, you're probably not going to hug him and offer him a beer. So most vampires who want to stay close to their old life learn to watch from close range. They don't approach their parents, but they cruise past their house every night, or call them and hang up after hearing their voices. Daring (and desperate) vampires may even contact them by phone or email or letter, anything that doesn't require face-to-face interaction — they'll concoct some excuse for being away or for not getting together, but will try to pretend everything else is normal.

That never lasts, of course. As a vampire, your character doesn't age. Thirty, forty years from now your parents may be dead, but you'll still look the same. You can only play the "I'm out of town on business, but we'll get together when I get back" card for so long before people start to wonder ... or simply give up on you. So the vampires who can't let go finally have to say good-bye and take to watching from the shadows, where it's safer.

Other vampires are anxious to forget their old lives. That's all dead and gone, and now they have a new existence, one filled with power and poten-

tial. It's easy enough not to call or write, but what happens when you bump into your kid sister in the movie theater or on a busy street? Claiming you just look like yourself doesn't work well with the people who really know you, especially since you still have all your old mannerisms. What do you do?

The first and best thing is to move away. Yes, it's hard to leave your home, but that's the old you, and this is the new. You need to go someplace where nobody knows you, so that you can start fresh. Try the nearest big city — more people, more activity, more vessels and more of a chance to lose yourself.

If you already live in a large city, at least relocate within that urban area. Move to the opposite side of the city, or from the suburbs to downtown. Find a new place (if you're the type who requires an actual "living" space) somewhere you didn't often go, so that you're less likely to be recognized.

You may need to sever ties with people as well. Break up with your girlfriend, leave your husband a Dear John letter, write a note telling your roommate you're moving out. Send a letter of resignation to your boss. Cancel your credit cards so you can't be traced through them. Otherwise, some of the people who care about you may track you down, and it may not be a happy reunion when they do.

Think about the places you frequented when you were alive and deliberately avoid them. With restaurants that's easy — you don't eat that type of food anymore, so why would you want to go back there? But stop going to your favorite movie theater or club, don't wander over to your old corner store late at night, don't hang out near the lion cage at the zoo. Wherever your friends and family might think to look for you, don't be there. That's hard, of course, because you have to give up a lot of your favorite things, but now you have the ability to find new favorites. Yes, sitting near the lion cage was relaxing, but no one's saying you can't find relaxation elsewhere. Your old club was fun when you wanted a dozen different martinis and the chance to hang out and chat with your friends, but other clubs cater more to your new taste in drinks, and you can find people there who understand your new situation and (un)lifestyle.

Don't forget the basics, either. Change your name. You can keep the first name if you're really attached to it, but ditch the last name. You have no need for it anyway — it's not like you're going to be filling out an employment application or signing up for a new credit card. Don't go by whatever

nickname your family and friends gave you, at least not for the first decade or two. Change your appearance, too. Get a new haircut, color your hair differently, try on different kinds of clothes. You're a vampire now, moving in completely different social circles, and you should look the part. Jeans and a KU sweatshirt don't really cut it when you're invited to see the prince.

The hardest period is the first year. That's when your character has to resist the urge to go back home and back to work and try to pretend nothing has changed. In the first year, his family and friends will still be looking for him, unless he had a definite death and a funeral, complete with corpse. Even so, during the first year they may be in denial themselves, and if they see the character they'll automatically call out his name — and he'll automatically answer. So during that first year you have to lie low and be very careful. As time goes on, you'll grow less accustomed to your old name and more comfortable with your new name and new look. You'll stop pining for your old haunts and start feeling settled in the new ones. And you'll start to forget what it was like to work a normal job and have parents and siblings and coworkers, and go out for a beer after work or barbeque on a Sunday afternoon.

The other side of the coin is that your character's loved ones will also move on. They'll stop looking for him every time they enter the library or exit the theater, and they'll stop jumping every time they see someone who reminds them of him. In a few years you could even walk past them without them noticing, or at least with them simply thinking, "Wow, that guy looked a lot like my brother." It becomes easier.

Which, strangely, is when your character is at risk. Not of being caught, however — this is a risk of a different kind. It's that period of time when the character is finally letting go of the past, and finally being released by others, that he is in the most danger of losing his sense of self. Because that's when you start feeling like you don't belong. The people who gave you life and raised you are either dead or simply don't know you exist anymore. The friends you grew up with have forgotten you. The people you worked with no longer mention you, and your desk is now someone else's. Your former girlfriend or wife has moved in with some other guy. Who are you, then? If no one remembers you, where did you come from, and where are you going? It's at this point that so many vampires give in to the Beast

within — they decide that they really aren't human anymore and let the hunger simply take over. That's dangerous, not just for the vampire in question, but for everyone — for mortals because they're prey, for other vampires because it can expose them, and for the character because he may make some error that results in his destruction, killed by other vampires to protect the society, or locked away somewhere and allowed to gibber and moan for the rest of his existence.

The key is to remember that you are a person, even if you're not mortal anymore. Hang on to who you were without focusing on who you were with or what you did. You once loved late-night walks. Take them again. You enjoyed old monster movies. Buy yourself a television and a DVD player and watch them wherever you now call home. You used to like card tricks. Find a deck of cards and polish your skills. You'll be able to do things with cards now that would have amazed your friends back then. You don't have to seek out the people you once knew, just remember that you had those interactions, those relationships. Concentrate on the relationships you've formed since, with your sire and the other Kindred in your area. Remember that you are not a monster, but a person, with a past. Yes, it's now a distant past, and it's something you can't go back to, but it's there all the same. It's part of who you are, just not all of it. Don't let the past consume you, but don't forget it either, or you'll be left with a gaping hole in your sense of self, and that emptiness will consume you in turn. This may be why older vampires often turn sentimental, seeking out scraps from their former lives: old portraits, letters written to loved ones, family heirlooms, anything to connect them to that time when they were still mortal. After decades or more, the risk of discovery is small, especially if the character has moved to a different area. It's much safer now to use your old name again, or get another old Mustang like you had when you were in college, or hang pictures of your parents in your living room. Now they're old memories, safe to show and to cherish, and they can help ground you. As your character's existence becomes longer and longer, and shows no signs of ending, he will need those reminders that he was mortal back then and that he still is the same person inside, beneath the power and the titles and the hunger. Some ties have to be severed for safety's sake, but others should never be cut, because they are all that keep us sane.



## THE TRUE NATURE OF MONSTROUSNESS

Or, Some Ideas on Playing Low-Humanity Characters Without Making Your Storyteller Want to Kill You

By Myranda Sarro

We've all seen these players and their characters. If we want to be totally honest with ourselves, we've probably all *been* those players and brought those characters to the table. You know the ones I mean. The ones that cause your friendly neighborhood Storyteller to hunker down behind her screen, sobbing quietly and muttering to herself, possibly begging for rescue from a higher power. The Tzimisce torturer who claims to be a hard-core Metamorphosist, who goes around randomly ripping the legs off puppies and small children for the purpose of achieving enlightenment. The Malkavian serial killer who somehow manages to wander around town dressed in nothing but a blood-stained hospital gown, carrying a beheaded teddy bear and a virtually endless supply of extremely sharp hospital scissors. Virtually any character whose concept includes the word "sadistic" — "sadistic doctor," "sadistic truck driver," "sadistic children's programming host."

The problem isn't the idea of the monstrous character in and of itself — monstrous characters are a staple of the genre. **Vampire** is, after all, a horror game, and such a game completely devoid of, well, horrifying characters would be pretty pathetic. It can be enormously fun to play a monster, and a seriously meaty roleplaying challenge, provided that the character in question isn't either a story-breaking problem child or a cliché whom you get personally sick of playing before you can do anything really interesting with the concept. Most problems that arise from monstrous characters are issues that can be dealt with at the very beginning of character creation. When setting out to create a monster, I personally follow a three-step procedure for working out just about everything I need to know about said character, in order to make it as fully fleshed and three-dimensional as I possibly can.

### Step One: Monsters Are Made, Not Born — The Importance of Prelude

Unless you're playing a game in which your character wasn't ever even marginally human, the odds are pretty good that he wasn't born a fucked-up freak of nature. Even revenants have a semidecent shot at not turning out completely warped, by human

standards, though they do tend to start existence with a better chance at developing unpleasant personality disorders than most. More likely than not, your character started out as a regular Joe Schmoe whose life took a flying leap into the Twilight Zone when he met his sire.

This being the case, the Prelude is extremely important in the construction of a monstrous character, since it defines who you were before the change and what parts of yourself have become twisted since. I cannot recommend enough playing (or writing) an extended Prelude with your Storyteller. Not only can this really enhance your ability to crawl around inside your character's head, it also gives the Storyteller invaluable clues on how to tailor individual plots and stories for your character, and how to account for that character's particular quirks in general.

What you want to do at this point, and I kid you not, is make an outline of the shape of your character's mortal life. The Prelude questionnaire, particularly those aspects related to the character's mortal background, is an invaluable tool here. Since you're already planning to play a monstrous character, it's here you need to start defining what makes that monstrousness happen and why.

What kind of person were you? It's sometimes assumed that, because you're monstrous now that you're a vampire, you were always a monster. This shouldn't necessarily be the case. After all, fewer serial killer clowns are in the general population of humanity than people who are only as good as they have to be. Your character doesn't have to start out either a killer or a saint in order to play up his post-Embrace downward spiral or basic lack of humanity effectively. Characters who were fundamentally normal people prior to the Embrace often have a higher horror-chill factor about them when viewed through the internal lenses of their own changing perceptions (see Dean Shomshak's **Behind the Mask of Normalcy** on p. 182), and to others watching their gradual devolution into something terrible.

What kind of life did you lead? Once again, this is an important part of establishing a genuinely chilling personal concept. Torturers attached to Central American death squads, serial killers of all types and perversions and other such already marginally human beings seem to be Embraced with startling frequency and then presented as a "monstrous" character. I take issue with the idea that this is actually an effective demonstration of the character type. It's easy to play a monster when

your character concept translates to "sociopathic fringe-dwelling quasihuman." It's harder, and often more fulfilling to play, when your starting concept is "second-year library sciences student at Drexel University" or "overworked single mother of two" or "dot-com orphan desperately looking for *any* new job." Sometimes initially playing against the easy definition of the type helps create a richer and more detailed character.

How do you feel? How do you think? At this point, you should also define your character's thoughts and feelings about a large number of topics, but, most importantly, about family and nonfamilial relationships. No one exists completely in a vacuum, not even monsters; the odds are good that someone out there cares whether your character lives or dies, and that the character feels the same way about someone. Similarly, you can quote the old saw that no force in the world — not violent video games, not Marilyn Manson CDs, not an encyclopedic collection of slasher flicks — that will mess you up as severely and completely as your family. Has someone in your family consistently screwed with your life? Would you lie down and die for someone? Who is it? Why does the character feel that way, what makes that relationship important? Does the character have a close or loose bond with her family? Is that bond abusive or loving or both? It helps to have a good grasp on the answers to these questions, as much roleplaying and characterization juice can be squeezed out of them, either initially or at later stages in the character-creation process.

### **The Embrace as a Mental Break from Reality**

The foundations of one's mortal existence aside, the Embrace itself is often the single most important defining moment in a young, monstrous vampire's unlife. Arguably, the Embrace is a horrifying experience for everyone who survives it, but the monstrous character comes through it even less intact than most.

In the case of the monstrous vampire, the moment of the Embrace represents a literal "break" with the person he once was — something inside him doesn't withstand the change, and what that is may take some time to become totally apparent. (A fully developed mortal background can often help identify this single characteristic, or group of several characteristics, with relative ease and give clues on how to go about playing that personality "twist" rationally.) It helps, at this stage, to mentally

explore the damage becoming a vampire did to the fleshy mortal character you created. Once again, the Prelude questionnaire is invaluable here.

How did the character end up Embraced, anyway? Was she simply in the wrong place at the wrong time, or did the sire stalk and test your character beforehand? There are arguments for and against both extremes with regard to monstrous characters. In the case of wrong place/wrong time, the massive trauma of the Embrace can be neatly played up and can often be more extreme than the same event happening to someone even moderately forewarned. On the other hand, the “surprise” random Embrace is generally somewhat rare, as the right to reproduce is a jealously guarded privilege, and few vampires are willing to waste such a boon on an arbitrarily chosen victim. (Of course, the character’s sire might not care about such Kindred social niceties, which is a separate and distinct character-construction issue.) A character whose sire stalked and taunted and tested her is just as likely to crack under the emotional and mental stresses of the change. For such characters, the days and nights leading up to the inevitable horror of the Embrace can be spent in a stew of dread and agony, waiting for the bogeyman to come and get them. Living in a constant state of fear and tension can break the will of the strongest person, and so can the Embrace. The drawback here is that the taunt-tease-stalk approach generally has a point of its own — to determine whether or not the mortal in question is suitable vampire material or just another dinner waiting to happen. Spending the time leading up to the night of the Embrace curled in a fetal position gibbering in terror is not likely to inspire one’s sire to follow through on her original intentions. This approach needs to be played delicately, with a balance between justifiable terror and whatever qualities first attracted the soon-to-be-vampire’s sire.

In either case, the Embrace itself should act like a ball-peen hammer to the character’s psyche. It should break something foundationally important about her in such a way that those pieces aren’t easily put back together, but not so horribly that the character can’t play well with others, as is usually necessary when engaging in a storytelling game. After the Embrace, something about her is a trifle ... off (other than the sleeping all day and drinking blood part, that’s pretty much a given). She doesn’t relate to herself or others in quite the same way anymore. This — probably even more than the sleeping all

day and drinking blood thing, given the prevalence of vampire movies and books in popular culture in which the vampire protagonist has an amazing number of friends and loved ones willing to help her — will impact heavily on how others perceive the character, including the aforementioned friends and loved ones and even the character’s sire, which will, in turn, impact how the character perceives herself.

### **Motivation — It’s Not Just for Method Actors Anymore**

Motivation is easily the most important quality of a monstrous character and often the most sorely underdeveloped. This is the juncture where the character either makes sense or *doesn’t make any sense at all* within the confines of his development.

As I said earlier, monsters are made, not born. Even if you selected the Monster Nature at character creation, something had to cause that Nature to happen, and what that something was will often define the character’s personality and motives. This is the point where you decide what that is, preferably based on the outline you developed of your character’s life to date. Keep in mind some of the following guidelines:

- Playing a monster doesn’t mean you should automatically flush every aspect of his former humanity and personality down the toilet. Truly monstrous characters are often only really interesting when examined and played in terms of contrast. Unrelenting, unrestrained splatter-punk squick grows boring very, very quickly — especially for everyone else around the table. Be willing to keep some defining aspect of the character’s humanity about him, so the inverse of that quality can stand out with particularly horrifying effect. Your character was a loving family man before the Embrace? Still loves his kids and would do *anything* for them? Imagine a vampire version of the Texas cheerleader mom who hired a hit man to murder her daughter’s rival — but with fangs and claws and the capability of killing all by herself.

- Similarly, just because you’re playing a monster doesn’t mean you have to be monstrous at all times. Even the most screwed-up vampire can turn unexpectedly humane when circumstances, and the details of her background, warrant. Your character might be sociopathically disconnected from all her former emotions and have a really hard time relating to anything that still feels — but great storytelling moments can come from incidents that accidentally,





or purposefully, shove that dislodged plug back into the socket, even if only for a scene or two. Define for yourself some things that could trigger an involuntary, hard-wired, emotional, human response from your character.

- Remember, even the totally crazy tend to be rigorously, mathematically rational within the confines of their mental states. Even if you're playing a deeply whacked-out Malkavian, your monstrous character's motivations and actions should be internally consistent with the quirks you developed in his mortal existence and his behavior since he became a vampire. Monstrousness should *not* be treated as an excuse for your character to perform every disgusting or absurd act that comes to his imagination. He should have reasons — personal, compelling reasons — for everything he does.

## BUT IT WORKED SO WELL ON TELEVISION ...

By Ari Marmell

A pair of investigators struggles to uncover a vast conspiracy, with its roots in the highest levels of government, but is thwarted at every turn by an enemy that seems to have eyes and agents everywhere.

A government agent who believes he's relaxing in a safe environment is left in a lethal situation, only to be saved at the very last minute by the coincidental arrival of aid.

An archaeologist struggling to unearth ancient secrets is captured by the enemy but survives because the power of the artifact they've captured is too much for them to handle.

A group of people are tormented and toyed with by creatures beyond their understanding, until an even greater creature steps in and sets things to right.

Recognize any of these? *The X-Files*, the James Bond movie *Thunderball*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by William Shakespeare. They're all remarkably appropriate, really. After all, **Vampire** is certainly a game of conspiracies, danger in apparent safety, lost lore and dancing to the whim of more powerful beings. Many Storytellers deliberately draw on unusual or unexpected sources for story ideas, and pretty much all of them, consciously or not, are inspired by tales they've seen, heard or read at some point in the past.

The problem here is that what makes for a good plot on the page or the screen often doesn't work as the basis for a storytelling game. In all such games,

but especially in the World of Darkness where the storytelling aspect is emphasized far more than the mechanics or the combat, it's easy for the Storyteller (or whatever you're calling the referee in that game) to fall into the trap of thinking that she really is just telling a story. She's not. This is a game, and the primary element of a game is that everyone participating is having fun. When you're writing a novel or a script, you have to ensure only that your audience is enjoying itself. With a game, it's the participants you have to worry about, and that's a very different situation.

### **Frustration and Accomplishment**

Sure, everyone loves a good story. Few experiences are quite like looking back on a chronicle and realizing how thoroughly you were sucked in. Horror, real drama (in the good literary way, not the high school/Internet forum way), gripping plot lines — all of these make a game, and a chronicle, great. But above and beyond experiencing such wonders as these, most players want to feel as though they've accomplished something. Certainly exceptions exist, but few roleplayers really enjoy playing through a story or a chronicle in which they were able to achieve none of their goals, in which the events played out exactly as they would have if the characters hadn't been present. To put it another way, frustration for a character is just fine and is, in fact, to be expected in an environment like that of **Vampire**, where the characters are almost certainly not the strongest or most influential Kindred in the region. When the players grow frustrated in more than the short term, however, the chronicle is on the brink of failure.

Let's go back to *The X-Files* for a moment. The overall concept might work when translated into a storytelling game, but the execution most certainly would not. For the duration of the series, few questions were answered, and, more often than not, those that were turned out to be false or misleading. That works for a while in a **Vampire** game, but sooner or later you have to answer at least those mysteries that are salient to the chronicle. By the time *The X-Files* wrapped up — with an ending that alienated many viewers, I should add, by its lack of any real finality — a large portion of the audience had ceased watching out of frustration. Imagine, then, how frustrated the characters must have been. No way were they enjoying what they were going through. Now imagine if you were characters in a chronicle where the Storyteller did the same thing, never answering questions, never really allowing you to

get to the heart of whatever matter you were dealing with, never giving you a victory without snatching it back right afterward.

Yeah, I wouldn't be having fun either.

Some frustration is inevitable. If your characters are accomplishing everything without setbacks or challenges, what's the point? But such frustration should be short-term, lasting only as long as it takes the players to find a different avenue of approach. Frustration isn't fun, so a frustrating game, almost by definition, can't be a fun game. The characters need not be able to deal directly with their adversaries, or to overcome them on any permanent basis. But they must be able to accomplish some of their own goals, thwart at least some of their adversaries' schemes, to come out ahead, to win at least some battles if not the war. Even if said adversary is a millennia-old elder who's been orchestrating such plots and schemes since before the rise of most modern religions, he can't always be one step ahead. Sometimes, no matter how powerful the forces arrayed against them, the players have to win one.

Speaking of frustration, a quick look at a potentially aggravating issue — balance between characters — is in order here. In most movies or books that involve groups of protagonists, say *The Lord of the Rings* or *Star Wars*, it's pretty clear that not all characters are created equal. I challenge anyone to tell me that Strider and Gandalf are on the same level as Merry and Pippin, or that Obi-Wan is statistically equivalent to Jar-Jar.

Some roleplayers enjoy the challenge of portraying characters of vastly different power levels, Kindred of different generations or even a vampire and his ghouls. This is, however, the sort of decision that must be made from the players up, not the Storyteller down. A large number of players — I'd even go so far as to say a vast majority, at least in my own experience — dislike playing characters that are wildly unbalanced as compared to the rest of the group. They often feel overshadowed, as though they're playing sidekicks to the chronicle's "main characters." It may seem more realistic (for all that word can be said to apply to a world full of vampires) for a randomly assembled group to be of uneven abilities, and it may be a better literary convention, but for the purposes of a game, where the enjoyment of every player is paramount, it's usually best to keep things equal until and unless you're certain the group wishes it otherwise.

Finally, before we move away from the frustration issue, let's look at one more example from popular

media: *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. At first examination, it seems the events of the movie would make a great basis for a game (with substantial modification, of course). The story has a set goal, specific events and adversaries and — more to the point of this essay — a series of victories for the protagonists, not just the enemy. More than once Indy succeeds in snatching the prize away from those who have it, or from escaping almost certain death.

But look at and think about the ending. It's the power of the Ark itself that destroys the villains and saves the heroes at the end. Did it really matter at all that the main characters were present? Did all their efforts throughout the story really accomplish anything? It certainly looks to me as though the end result might well have been the same had they taken no action whatsoever.

That sort of plot twist, the whole "This thing is bigger than all of you" trick, can occasionally prove useful to drive home the point that the characters, for all their abilities, are far from the greatest powers operating in the world. But it must be used sparingly. If the players start to feel that everything in the chronicle is beyond their control, that frustration factor — or, even worse, apathy — comes creeping back in, and once more you have a chronicle that nobody (except maybe the Storyteller) is enjoying.

#### **Who's This Story About, Anyway?**

Okay, enough about plot. Let's talk character.

The World of Darkness is absolutely brimming with important, powerful and impressive characters: princes and justicars, bishops and seraphim, elders and chosen-of-prophecy and things that go bump in the night. It might seem logical, even instinctive, to focus some of your stories on them.

Don't.

Once again, the players are not an audience. They're active participants. If you have them sitting on the sidelines, watching as your pet Storyteller or signature character accomplishes everything, they'd be better off watching TV or reading a book. The Storyteller characters can and should be vital to your story, to creating a living, breathing world, and they can certainly accomplish goals and attain victories of their own. For the most part, though, the players and their characters are, and must remain, the focal point of the game. They're the main characters, the folks on center stage, the actors who have their names in the credits before the movie title.

One of the easiest traps for the Storyteller to fall into in terms of taking the spotlight off the

players is the outside rescue. Remember the James Bond example above? The villain locks him into this bizarre stretching/exercise machine and turns it on high, and only the fact that the nurse happens to come by and turn it off saves him from — well, I'm not sure from what. The whole machine didn't really make sense to me, to be honest. But it probably would have hurt.

Anyway, that's not the point. The point is that a minor Storyteller character (if you'll excuse the analogy) stepped in and saved a player's character from a situation he couldn't possibly have gotten himself out of. Such an event can safely happen only at very rare intervals in a chronicle before the players begin to feel helpless and start to count on the Storyteller characters to save their bacon every time. When the game becomes just a string of events in which the cavalry or the characters' sires or the crotchety, pipe-smoking Merlin/Gandalf clone pops in and rescues everyone, it becomes once again an exercise in frustration. (Yes, we're back to frustration. I'm going to keep harping on that, thank you.) For the most part, it's best either to avoid situations where the characters need rescuing, or to arrange things so that one player can save another. This ensures that you keep the attention of the game focused where it belongs — on those who are playing it.

If you do plan to include a rescue by Storyteller characters, make sure that doing so is absolutely integral to the plot. More importantly, make sure you give the players a chance either to save themselves, or better yet to return the favor, in the relatively near future.

I'm sure some of you have heard the term *deus ex machina*, or "god from the machine." It's a Greek term, from plays in which one of the "gods" would rise up through a trapdoor in the stage or float down on ropes and pulleys to rescue the main character. Today it's considered bad storytelling. It's even worse than the standard Storyteller character rescue, since it usually involves forces that haven't heretofore been involved in the story at all. Oberon appearing at the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a good example — as, to be honest, is the aforementioned ending of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. These are mighty forces that appear at the last second to save those who cannot save themselves. It's the equivalent of having a justicar who hasn't been involved in the chronicle at all suddenly show up to save the coterie from a pack of Lupines. It's not only frustrating to the players, since it pretty much sidelines them and makes all their actions and decisions up to this point

meaningless, it's usually bad plotting.

Of course, rescues are far from the only situations in which Storyteller characters can steal center stage. Any situation in which the characters sit around and watch the bigwigs accomplish stuff is a recipe for disaster, unless the characters have their own subplots to which they're attending while the larger events are going on in the background. If I can get away with saying this in a **Vampire** book without Justin coming after me with a rusty tire iron, I have to say that I feel that some previously published chronicles fail in this regard. Giving the players the opportunity to "witness pivotal events in Kindred history" really isn't all that much fun when they have precious little opportunity to shape those events. They're once again playing the role of spectators, something they could just as easily do with a remote control in one hand and a bag of Doritos in the other.

Again, that's not to say you can't involve the characters in such proceedings. Just make sure to give them something to do. It doesn't even have to be directly related to the history-making, world-shaping events taking place around them, as long as it provides them something in which they can participate, accomplish character goals or at least affect the outcome.

### Shared Responsibility

In case you thought that all the onus was on the Storyteller for ensuring that the players have fun, and for knowing the distinction between what works in a published story to what works in a game, think again. The players have some responsibilities here too.

First and foremost, stop making rugged loner characters, damn you! Unless you've been a Storyteller trying to involve such a character, you almost can't imagine how bloody annoying they are. Sure, they're great in novels and movies where you have the option of cutting away for a few scenes or chapters to focus on them while the other characters are off doing something else. That doesn't work in a game though. Splitting the coterie isn't an absolute no-no — sometimes it's good for the story, and can provide opportunities for roleplaying that are harder to find in a larger group — but it should be a rarely used technique. Few players, at least among those I've met personally, particularly enjoy sitting around and watching half the group playing and interacting while they have nothing to do but wait for their turn to come back around. That's when the magazines open and the Playstation is flipped on, and then

the whole thing's pretty much lost. Bottom line, if you're creating a character the Storyteller is going to have drag kicking and screaming into the coterie, especially if she's going to have to do so on a regular basis as opposed to only once at the beginning, scrap the concept and start over, unless you have very understanding and patient people in your group. Not only is it no fun for the Storyteller to wrestle with your character every other game night, it slows things down for the troupe as well.

It's also worth touching on the concept of character-versus-character conflict here. **Vampire** is, of course, partially a game of politics in which players are portraying creatures that are inherently selfish, untrustworthy and vicious. A certain amount of conflict between characters, even in a coterie, is appropriate and, one could argue, inevitable. The key words are, of course, "a certain amount." Different players have different ideas of what constitutes an appropriate level of backstabbing. Once you've crossed that line, wherever it may be, you've gone from character-versus-character to player-versus-player. It's an unfortunate truth that, no matter how mature the players and how determined they are to separate in-game events from real-life emotions, certain actions are simply difficult not to take personally. Again, when dealing with scripted works, it can be a lot of fun to watch the group implode as the main characters cease trusting each other and start working against one another, but that sort of activity can easily derail a chronicle.

Unfortunately, it's not possible to say "X amount of conflict is too much," since even more than the other subjects discussed here, it's really a matter of personal preference. All I can say is that you're better served going for too little than too much, since nobody (to my knowledge) ever got mad at his fellow players and walked out of a game because they *didn't* mistreat him. (For a deeper look into player conflict, see Rhiannon Louve's essay on p. 164.)

### A Few Final Words

I have not the slightest doubt that some of you, as you've been reading this, have disagreed with me in the strongest way. "But I like doing that! And we all have fun with it!" If that's the case, more power to you. I'm not trying to step on anyone's favored gaming styles here. It's been my experience, though, that every one of the issues I've discussed here tends to cause far more frustration, resentment and disappointment with the game among players than anything else, and while it's probably not hard to find individual players who disagree with me,

I'd imagine it's a bit more difficult to find entire groups of them who actually game together. The bottom line is, even if you like some of the stuff I've mentioned here, odds are good that someone in your gaming group doesn't. Ask yourself if ruining the game for others is really going to increase your own enjoyment of it (and if the answer is yes, I think you have bigger problems than gaming style, but that's just me).

For the rest of you, don't be afraid to draw inspiration from outside sources, but give some real thought as to how best to tweak and twist them for use in-game. Just because it worked up on the big screen doesn't mean it's going to around the table. Forget, for a moment, how much you enjoyed watching or reading it. Try to imagine what it would feel like to portray a character involved in it before you decide if it would be fun or not.

Oh, one last thought. If you find yourself answering player complaints about your decisions with "I'm doing it that way for the story," maybe it's the story that needs rethinking.

I wish you good gaming.

## MAKE IT EASY ON US

By Matthew McFarland

Hi. This is your Storyteller speaking.

OK, I'm probably not *your* Storyteller, but I'm *a* Storyteller. I love playing these games, don't get me wrong, but I feel most comfortable behind the screen. As such, I'm taking down the screen for a minute and sharing with you, the players (and my fellow Storytellers, naturally) the biggest headache of running **Vampire** (or, indeed, any storytelling game). More importantly, I'm going to tell you what you can do to alleviate it.

(Before we start, a note specifically directed at Storytellers: I'm writing this essay assuming that you guys are mature, caring people who want nothing more than to make your players happy. I'm assuming that you want them clamoring to find out what happens next. I'm assuming you're not the kind of Storytellers who enjoy torturing players with unbeatable foes, and then having your old character show up to beat the snot out of the enemy while the players watch. Right? Good. On we go.)

If I had to identify the single biggest problem with running games that I've had over the last 18 years of running games, I'd have to say "miscommunication." Others have come up, of course — I've had my share of problem players, just like any Storyteller — but the most galling situations come from players

who know exactly what they want from a game and either don't bother to tell me or don't tell me in a way that allows any remedy.

For instance: I've had a number of players over the years who have dropped out of chronicles citing boredom with the game. Specifics range from "the novelty is gone" to "I don't like where the chronicle is going." The former isn't something that I, as Storyteller, can do about — if the player is truly bored with the notion of gaming, my hands are rather tied. The direction of the chronicle, however, is something the players should be intimately involved with. If you, as a player, have ideas about the ongoing chronicle, tell the Storyteller. Remember that you're not running the game, and so you don't get to dictate exactly what's happening, but the suggestion box is always open. Good Storytellers aren't so proud of their tight little scripts that they won't scrap their ideas and run with ones the players give them.

That means, however, that a level of trust between players and Storytellers must be present. I had a player tell me, months after a chronicle had ended, that toward the end of the chronicle he had dreaded showing up every week and wasn't at all having fun with the game. Aside from grievously wounding my pride, this was doubly upsetting because I hadn't picked up on that attitude at all from the player's behavior. He showed up on time, played his character just as well as he always had and seemed enthused by the game. Hearing that he wasn't enjoying himself at all was a major blow, especially months after the fact, because I couldn't do anything about it.

If you're in such a position, tell the Storyteller. I don't recommend doing it in front of the other players, because that puts the Storyteller in a very uncomfortable position. Ask if you can show up early for a game or meet outside of a regular session and discuss where the game is going and why you aren't having fun with it. This last is especially important — have some concrete, specific reasons why you're not enjoying the game. If you say, "I'm just not having fun," the Storyteller has no way to fix it. If you say, "Ever since that Tremere became prince, the tone of the game has gotten way too 1984, and it's stifling," that gives the Storyteller something to work with. Don't be accusatory; just because you're not having fun doesn't mean that the Storyteller is deliberately torturing you. Be honest and trust that your Storyteller has a way to change things for the better. In fact, it's probably a good idea to bring

some suggestions to the table. In the above example, you might suggest that the game's Orwellian tone would be more fun if the players were involved in the prince's schemes more directly, perhaps becoming a "secret police" of sorts. Anything that's going to result in a major change for the chronicle needs to be discussed with the other players, of course, but it's always better to have some solid ideas about where to go rather than to say, "Right, this chronicle needs to change. How should we do it?"

It's important to recognize, too, that just because the chronicle isn't working for you doesn't mean that other players aren't loving it. This is an unpleasant turn of events for the Storyteller (who wants everybody to be happy with the chronicle) — one player dislikes the game while the others are having a blast with it. About the only thing to do is to discuss with all the players what they see as the best and worst points of the game have been and see where the consensus lies. As anyone who's ever worked in a design group knows, however, consensus doesn't lend itself well to truly enjoyable results. At best, you'll wind up with a chronicle that everybody feels lukewarm about. Remember that when forming complaints to the Storyteller, you might have to be involved in stories that don't spark as much interest for you. Instead of complaining about such stories, try to figure out how best to fit your character in, and provide suggestions to the Storyteller about elements she could include to allow your character to become part of the action. Also, keep the Storyteller informed about your character's story arc, so that perhaps the next session might involve him a bit more directly.

Roleplaying games are shared experiences, and this means that you can't have the spotlight all the time. Your Storyteller should recognize this and tailor stories and even individual game sessions to provide chances for each character to shine. If you feel as though you're getting shafted in this regard, let the Storyteller know — but first, take a moment to look back over the last few sessions and make sure you didn't have opportunities to get involved that you just didn't take advantage of. The more fleshed out your character is, by the way, the easier such situations are for the Storyteller to create. A character with a couple of dots in Etiquette "just because" doesn't help the Storyteller. A character with a couple of dots in Etiquette gained from growing up affluent in Savannah gives the Storyteller a good idea what the character's social mores are and allows the Storyteller to play to them. If you have a very detailed character and

you still feel useless in the game, let the Storyteller know. Odds are, he thinks he's giving you plenty of chances to speak up and you just aren't taking them. Honest communication, with specific examples, is once again the best cure for this.

All of this encouragement to take grievances to the Storyteller might make said Storyteller a bit nervous, so I'll add this, too: Tell the Storyteller what's right about the game as well as what's wrong. We like to hear that you enjoy the games, because we put a lot of work into them. Let the Storyteller know what part of a story you particularly liked and why — it gives him the ability to work similar elements into future stories (Storytellers, don't go overboard here. Listening to the players is good; repetition is bad). A great time to do this is after one story is completed and everyone is spending experience points. Discuss with the troupe what the next story should be about. If the Storyteller has an idea, he should mention it, but if the players are all clamoring for a given story, the Storyteller should cheerfully set aside any plans that he has and run what the players want (or, better yet, merge the two). I've found that asking each player to write down three suggestions about what the next story should entail and then choosing the most popular suggestion works well. Likewise, if the players all decide that their characters are going to Cleveland for the next story, the Storyteller shouldn't force them not to. The Storyteller is perfectly within his rights to ask the troupe what they plan on accomplishing by venturing to Cleveland, what Storyteller characters (if any) they hope to meet and in general what they, the players, want out of such a story. The more information you provide the Storyteller about your desires for the game, the better equipped he is to make the game enjoyable. The biggest compliment a Storyteller can receive is the story becoming important enough to the players that they become involved. If the players are taking time out of their schedules to email you with ideas or suggestions, you're doing something right.

The general dynamic between the players and the Storyteller merits some discussion. This is mentioned in the **Vampire Storytellers Handbook**, but I'm going to bring it up here because the players need to hear it, too: The players and the Storyteller are not in competition. The goal of a roleplaying game is to have fun and tell a satisfying story. The players and the Storyteller need to agree on what a "satisfying story" means, but never once in my long years as a gamer has "the Storyteller characters kill all the players' characters"



(or vice versa) been regarded as mutually enjoyable. The Storyteller wears a lot of different hats, and the “antagonist and conflict hat” is one of the most common (I picture one of those Hun helmets with a big spike on the top). That doesn’t mean that the Storyteller is out to get you or your characters, it just means that conflict is crucial to any good story and the Storyteller is responsible for adjudicating it.

Note that I said “adjudicating it,” not “creating it.” A well crafted character should give the Storyteller plenty of opportunities for conflict, so when creating your character, involve the Storyteller. Check out the example of character creation in **Vampire: The Masquerade**. That character is great — she’s complex, she has built-in ties to the larger Kindred community, and her character isn’t tied to her clan or her Disciplines (tying a concept too closely to clan ignores one of the fundamental aspects of **Vampire** — that every vampire was once mortal). A good Storyteller can read those few pages and come up with all kinds of story ideas — make life that easy for your Storyteller, and you reap the benefits. This is also true of character development; the experience point distribution guidelines for **Vampire** recommend giving a point for “learning curve.” This requires stating what the character learned from a given session. I’ve found that many players have a habit of coming up with some pretty insightful stuff when it comes time to get that experience point ... and then forgetting all about it. My advice: Write it down. If your character has learned that the primogen council in your city consists of a bunch of scrounging bastards kowtowing to the prince, that realization should color future interactions with them and their agents. That realization should also give the Storyteller ideas for potential conflicts between you and the city’s big-wigs — so remember that you said it. As you learn about your character, share your discoveries with the Storyteller and let her help shape that character into a truly dynamic individual.

Of course, in-game events aren’t the only things to shape character development. What if, several months into a **Vampire** game, you pick up the **Guide to the Anarchs** and become enamored of the concept of becoming a baron? Your character, however, is a rather mousy Camarilla lapdog who has no idea that in some places in America the Kindred roam free (so to speak). The best thing to do is to buy another copy of **Guide to the Anarchs** for your Storyteller (or lend her yours) and say, “I think this would be perfect for my character.” All of that information we put out in sourcebooks

really is meant to help in creating interesting and dynamic stories, so *use it*. Share it with the Storyteller and ask her to create the kinds of situations in-game where the ideas you read in the latest book become useful.

Whenever you share an idea with the Storyteller, you lose control of that idea. That’s intrinsic to storytelling games; they’re shared experiences, and as the Storyteller has final authority over the game, she is free to rule that a given idea needs some fiddling in order to fit into the existing chronicle. For instance, the player who decides that his character should become a baron might not have the chance to take over the city and make it his barony — but might, during a subsequent story, have the opportunity to take part in a plot to take down the prince and then participate in the Kindred battles that follow, as the entire city comes up for grabs. If you come up with a new Discipline combo, don’t be surprised when the Storyteller tweaks it a bit. This, after all, is exactly what happens when we Storytellers present ideas to the players — you put your individual spins on our plotlines and scenarios, and the end result is a surprise for everyone. And that’s *great*, because if the ending is predictable, why bother? (Incidentally, this is why we ask our authors not to write their own characters into sourcebooks. It’s not only gooby as hell, but then those characters become ours, and the authors might not like what we do with, or to, them. This is also why Nehemiah dies in **Sins of the Blood**.)

In closing, I said before that the biggest game-killer I’ve encountered is miscommunication. I’ll expand that a little to “lack of honest communication.” To play any storytelling game well requires a level of trust among players, and between the player and the Storyteller. In **Vampire**, where so often the players wind up doing sneaky things to each other, this is doubly true. The player needs to be able to trust the Storyteller with his character and the character’s plots, hopes, dreams and final fate. Likewise, the Storyteller needs to be able to trust the players with her precious storyline. Both sides need to accept that at the end of the night, neither the characters nor the story are going to be in the same condition as when they started, and that’s a good thing.

So that’s the deal, players. Tell Storytellers what you want from the game, honestly and respectfully. We’ll play fair by you, treating you and your characters with the attention and respect they deserve. When all is said and done, we’ll meet someplace neither of us ever expected to go.

## A LONG LOOK BACK

By Carl Bowen

As far as gaming goes, I feel like I've done pretty much everything. I've done all sorts of math and rolled all sorts of dice. I've played card games and board games of every description and all manner of tabletop pen-and-paper games. From *D&D* (before I even knew there was an *Advanced* version) to *Shadowrun*; from *Magic* to *Munchkin*; from *Dungeon* to *BattleTech*; from *Vampire* to *Exalted* to *Aberrant* and back again.

And that's not all by a long shot. I've also set the paper and dice aside and participated in other acts of gaming (or gamer) culture. If you want to count the computerized variety of games, I've been suckered into playing everything from MUDs and MUSHes to more multiplayer first-person shooters than most sane individuals would find conscionable. I haven't tried out any chat games on the White Wolf website yet, but only because I know it would come down to playing the games or working, knowing how much I like to read the sound of my own voice.

I don't just go in for the sedentary gaming, either. I've played in plenty of live-action games, too. I started out swinging insulated and duct-taped PVC pipes at my friends in the woods and occasionally dodging whizzing packets of birdseed. I kept that up all through college, turning what would have been otherwise perfectly good camping trips into excuses to exchange welts or plunge headlong down muddy embankments in the name of full-immersion alternate-reality interactive adventure. Being a talker instead of a fighter at heart, though, I gravitated toward *Mind's Eye Theatre* live-action roleplaying. Sure, less actual "action" was involved, but it was large, and it was social, and it was a lot like the pen-and-paper gaming I liked so much.

On top of all that, I've also been on the other side of the table. Not only have I been a player in loads of roleplaying games, I've also been an occasional Storyteller. Granted, I've run only White Wolf games, and I didn't hold the august position very long, but I did it. I've been there. I understand and respect the archetypal role of Storyteller.

So since high school I've been racking up all this gaming experience, and it turns out that it was actually good for something. With luck, tenacity and a brilliant command of our native language, I parlayed my stockpile of experience into an honest-to-God job with White Wolf. The fascinating and educational story of how I did that can be found

on our website, but somehow it's even less relevant than everything leading up to this point seems, so I'll just move on.

Anyhow, I'm not the oldest employee here by a wide margin (ha-ha), but neither am I being glib when I add my work experience in with my gaming experience to say I feel like I've done everything where gaming is concerned. I started out five years ago as a copyeditor, and that job is still my primary one. For a couple of my first years, I was also the developer of the *Mind's Eye Theatre Journal* — an 80-page LARPers' quarterly that picked up where other *Mind's Eye* publications left off. I've also developed several other tabletop and live-action game books. I've written for many others. Beyond that, I've been helping design games (to sharply varying degrees) since *Exalted* was first dreamed up. I've been a play-tester, I've helped design marketing campaigns, and I've even written ad copy. When it comes to the creative aspect, I know my stuff. I've been there; I've done that, as that dated saying goes.

"So?" I can almost hear you asking now. "How does this help me?" Well, it doesn't yet, unless you're starting a fan club or something. I have been building to something, though, and this is it. Considering what all I've done in the world of gaming since way back in high school, I came to a realization some time last year: I was bored. Bored with all of it. Bored with making up characters. Bored with Gothic-Punk. Bored with ethical dilemmas and gray areas and villains who are mostly just like us but seen as though through a glass darkly. And since White Wolf games have always been my favorite (ever since I first read the *Beast Within* anthology and crowed, "You mean I can actually play one of these vampires?"), that meant I'd grown bored with White Wolf. I'd become a jaded gamer. I didn't want to read these books cover to cover like I used to, and I didn't want to play these games anymore. I was moping around under a heavy lethargy, fighting off sickly ennui and watching my creative spark gutter and flag. Alas ...

Maybe some of you are heading that way right now. Maybe some of you are already there but you keep playing out of sheer habit. Maybe you see it happening to a friend and you wonder what you can do to help. Well, that's what I'm here to talk about. I'm here because even though I felt those feelings and was that terribly, melodramatically jaded, I'm not anymore. I found a way out of that funk, and I figure that what helped me will help you, too.

But I have to tell you, I thought nothing could help me at the time. Nothing new in the world of gaming impressed me, game-design meetings at the office were exercises in frustration, and violations of standard grammatical rules perpetrated by our authors were starting to really piss me off. I wasn't much fun to be around, and I didn't even seek company all that much (considering the fact that many of my friends are folks I've met through gaming). Where gaming was concerned, I was turning into a grumpy old man, and here I wasn't even 30. Fortunately, I recognized this happening to me while I still had time to eradicate the feeling and get back to enjoying my hobby. (Just as you must have if you're reading this essay in a self-help capacity.)

So why should I feel this way about a hobby (and, indeed, a profession) that had brought me such amusement thus far? What was it about gaming (and *White Wolf* in particular) that had turned me off? It wasn't like the quality had gone downhill. The writing, editing, layout and design of *White Wolf* games has only improved since its kitchen-sink beginning in the early '90s. It couldn't have been the fact that people just naturally outgrow gaming as they get older. I know guys who've been enjoying *White Wolf* games without flag or fail since those selfsame D.I.Y. days. Hell, I know guys who've been gaming faithfully ever since the first edition of *D&D* and have no apparent intention of ever quitting. You know, old guys; *ancient* guys — 35-year-olds and such. Geezers. So it looked like age had nothing to do with it. That must mean I was the problem somehow. But how?

It took a while, but I finally figured it out. My problem was that I'd become extremely critical. (I'm sure that people who know me and are reading this just let out a collective, "No, *really*!!?") You'd think being critical is a good quality for a guy to have if he makes his living copyediting things, and you'd be right. Having this quality also keeps writers and developers from creating flawed products that don't hold up under even their own internal logic. Knowing how sentences and paragraphs and stories are all structured and supposed to work together to form a powerful and cohesive whole makes one a better writer, a better editor of writers and generally a better storyteller (or Storyteller). What it doesn't make one into, though, is someone who can passively appreciate other people's stories and written works. When you learn how to spot flaws in sentence rhythm and story structure and (God help you) grammar, you start to realize that not



everyone can do it as well as you can. Even some established so-called professionals who are paid buckets of money to write or direct prime-time TV shows or summer blockbusters, or who option themselves into early retirement writing mystery or fantasy novels are pretty terrible at it, by and large. But no one cares, because enough media hype and spurious accolades have already washed over us to trick us into spending our nonrefundable money and wasting our irrevocably lost time to subsidize this tripe. That, and the average person who considers his entertainment nothing more than entertainment doesn't have that critical eye it takes to be good at telling stories in the first place. Even when these stories that are being produced aren't bad (or are, at least, better than the rest of the effluvia out there), they're formulaic and predictable, which is kind of worse because they have no wonder and magic left to surprise you.

Wow, that rant's so practiced I almost didn't realize I was typing it until I was done. I say that sort of thing all the time where movies, television and books are concerned. Worse, I used to say it about gaming too. And that's just the finished products I'm talking about. The products I was most happy with. That says nothing about the mess I knew about behind the curtain — the part the consumer never sees. I'm talking about the ugly wonder that is an unedited manuscript. The bastard train wreck of misspellings, mixed metaphors (like "bastard train wreck") and run-on sentences with semicolon sutures. Yet it's still better than the predeveloped version that the person one step above me usually has to deal with (except when I'm in that position). Talk about an exercise in mind-flummoxing Lovecraftian horror ...

But yeah, that was my attitude about gaming after years of doing it, then more years of peering behind the curtain. I was sick of it, there was nothing in it for me, and I didn't want to play anymore. So what was to be done? What could cure this crisis of all the faith I'd invested in the gaming "industry" all these years?

Well, the first thing was that I had to get over myself. A point had come during my disillusionment phase at which I realized that I was no longer simply bored or disappointed in the state of gaming, I was actually getting *angry*. Somehow — and I blame the 1990s for this — I'd grown to feel that I was absolutely entitled to only the very best sort of entertainment reading for my disposable-income dollar, and the fact that I wasn't getting it royally

pissed me off. Especially as I refined my sense of style and my taste along with it. I deserved better. Hell, since my money was paying White Wolf's employees' salaries for a while there, I *demand*ed better. How dare they not give it to me?

As I said before, though, the company's products' overall quality *was* steadily improving, and it had been for years. That wasn't even the real problem. The products weren't fundamentally flawed, they just weren't perfect, yet that was what I demanded. I'm not one-hundred-percent certain what brought about the revelation that I was being a high-horse-riding, ivory-tower jerkweed, but it certainly didn't hurt to check out some of my old writing and my first couple of editing assignments. That helped me realize that perfection might be a somewhat lofty goal for us mere mortals. My friends' willingness to point out that I was being, by turns, a whiner and a prick about things helped put my attitude in perspective as well.

So that took the high-and-mighty, holier-than-though arrogance out of my opinions, but it didn't cure the other lingering issue that I was still struggling with. I wasn't looking down my nose at my roleplaying games' quality anymore, but I still wasn't excited about them. I no longer dismissed other people's enjoyment in their own games, but I couldn't find it in mine either. I was still burned out. So I talked to a couple of my good friends — who also happen to be frequent Storytellers and avid roleplayers — and they both gave me the same piece of advice independently. It's pretty basic advice that can reasonably apply to anyone who's jaded about anything they used to love, but it's the sort of thing you might not think of on your own unless you hear it from somebody else first. Simply put, the thing to do is to look back at your first character (or your favorite if they're not one and the same) and describe him to yourself. Write it down if you have to. Go over a few of his exploits and even delve a little into his secret history. Repeat a couple of his best lines of dialogue. Reminisce about his in-game friendships with other characters. Retell the story of his greatest success and gripe for a while about his most ugly defeat.

Seriously, either do this out loud or write it down somewhere — hell, if your friends are gamers and they were in some of these games with you, you've probably done something like this before. If you really enjoyed this character, you'll start to feel a little of the same excitement you felt while you were actually playing this person. You'll start to remember

the thrill you felt as inexperience and ignorance gave way to awe and dreadful understanding of the dangers mercifully hidden from your character until he got a little too curious. You'll start to relive the desperate excitement of a hunt gone sour or a vicious argument turned to frenzy or a fight averted at the last second by slick words. You'll remember excitedly talking about your character before and after each game session, and sometimes just out of the blue. You'll remember taking notes during a game or writing pages and pages of character history before the game. You'll remember dusting off your old character sheet long after the original game ended and finding another use for the old icon somewhere down the road (be it in another game with a new Storyteller or in an independent work of fiction or who knows where). In short, you'll remember the fun you had playing your favorite character.

Now, think about your *best* character. Think of the most realistic, fully developed, dramatic, human character you've ever conceived. The one you felt the most pressure to play "right," lest you devalue the whole roleplaying experience. The one who wasn't afraid to wreck so-called "party unity" by hewing especially close to the roleplaying guidelines of his Nature, Willpower and Virtues. The one who could just as easily have been some real person you described from memory, rather than created from scratch. The ultimate testament to your superior, mature powers of creativity.

If you're lucky enough to still be enjoying gaming as much as you did the day you started, your best character is either the same as your favorite or remarkably similar. If you're like I was, though, what you'll find when you perform this little exercise is that those two individuals are very different indeed. One is a very normal-seeming regular person thrust into a supernatural world, the other an engaging icon at peace with the world he's a part of and largely concerned with making a go of it in style. One makes roleplaying seem a chore or a responsibility (which it really isn't); the other makes roleplaying fun (as it should be).

Now look at these two characters and figure out what it is that makes the best so different from your favorite. Ask yourself these questions: Was your favorite character fearless and inconsiderate where your best is more diplomatic and cautious? Was your favorite quick to act and just as quick to rationalize dismissively, whereas your best agonizes over every moral quandary? Was your favorite an idealized version of who you wanted to be at the

time, while your best is a reflection of who everybody (including you) pretty much thinks you are? Did you actually put a lot of time and effort into making your best character a solid, well portrayed individual, while your favorite character just did pretty much whatever you thought was cool under the circumstances?

If you're coming up with a lot of yes answers there — which I certainly was when I went through this process — you're orbiting the source of the problem. You're making yourself uptight by holding your creative efforts up to some artificial standard that nobody actually enforces. You're under the mistaken impression that your characters have to live in a John Steinbeck novel or something, and as such they have to be paragons of human drama and exemplars of mature themes. The truth is, they don't. You're just here to have fun, so relax and create a character you think is cool. It doesn't matter if that character is pretty much just like your old favorite character (or every other character you play). Look back at what it was that made your favorite so interesting (physical prowess, an exotic collection of Disciplines, a sardonic wit, utter fearlessness, deadly marksmanship, whatever) and stop trying to convince yourself that something is wrong (i.e., immature or two-dimensional) with it. After all, the real world is already replete with fully developed dramatic icons with deep personal issues and cleverly constructed guidelines of behavior and social interaction. If you find that so oppressive and mundane that you're looking to dark fantasy and horror roleplaying games for some light escapism, maybe you shouldn't burden your gaming experience with more of the same.

What happens as a result of all this looking back, then, is that you'll recapture what it was that you used to find so entertaining and engaging about gaming in general. You'll see what it was that helped you let your hair down and kept you coming back to this pastime that we all enjoy so much. I know it helped me to look back and see my past with new eyes — even ones so critical. It helped me see the common themes running through all my favorite characters and understand what it was I found so enthralling about letting them play out in game after game. It was also very educational to realize that when I stopped trying to incorporate said themes into my most recent games (largely because I thought there was something wrong with them), I was no longer having as much fun roleplaying. I'm not going to bore you by going into what those

themes are and showing how they came across in each of my characters by describing my rogues' gallery to you in living detail, but as I'm typing this, I actually kind of want to. I'm getting that fuzzy, nostalgic excitement that broke me out of my funk last year, which is evidence that what I'm talking about actually works.

But, if you're like me, you won't believe it works until you've tried it for yourself. So pause a minute here, breathe a few deep cleansing breaths and take that long look back at the fun you used to have. Remember the mystery and magic; the awe and tragedy. Remember the thrill of victory and the pure, unadulterated fun. Remember what it was that made your games great when they were entirely new to you and bring those elements back into your current gaming situation. You might need to make up a new character, start a new chronicle or find a new Storyteller to do so, but you'll be happier and enjoy the gaming experience more once you do, I promise you.

Trust me, I've been there; I've done that.

## BLOODLINES

by *Kraig Blackwelder*

Saffron is a brightly colored and intensely flavorful spice. Made from the stigmata of crocus flowers, it is hard to come by. Gram for gram, it is the most expensive spice on the planet — and a good thing too, because saffron is remarkably toxic. Two grams of high-quality saffron is enough to kill a healthy man.

The point here is not to act as a tutorial for all the would-be Borgias reading this, but to point out that certain spices, however popular, should be doled out sparingly, lest even the best-meaning chef incur unintended consequences.

In *Vampire*, the more exotic bloodlines are a little like saffron: A little can add spice, while more than that can cause problems.

The rare vampiric bloodlines in *Vampire: The Masquerade* — Baali, Blood Brothers, Daughters of Cacophony, Gargoyles, Harbingers of Skulls, Kiasyd, Nagaraja, Salubri, Samedi and True Brujah — are a polarizing lot. Folks tend to love them or hate them. Players love their exoticism, their high-apocryphal status and strange Disciplines. Storytellers, on the other hand, have often lumped the bloodlines together and, somewhat unfairly, filed them all under "B" for Broken. Among some players, even asking to play a character from one of the bloodlines is

enough to get the player a reputation as a twink, whether that reputation is deserved or not.

The bloodlines have changed since their inception early on in the history of *Vampire*, and they're no longer quite as disruptive to games as they once were, and they're certainly not just for twinks. The following section takes a look at the appeal of playing one of these characters as well as the pros and cons, and it explores what it takes to successfully play the role of one of these outcasts among the outcasts.

### The Allure

It's no surprise that people want to play unusual vampires; they have an appeal that the more familiar clans may have lost due to overexposure. There's nothing wrong with being a little mysterious, after all. It's a horror game about vampires; mystery, therefore, is in order. If you've given some thought to playing a vampire from one of the bloodlines, and you have some good reasons for not playing a vampire from one of the clans, your first step is to ask for what you want, so check with the Storyteller. You're always free to approach your Storyteller with a proposal for a character from an unusual bloodline, but be aware that your Storyteller may or may not be satisfied that the flavor your exotic character adds to the game is worth the effort (or potential annoyance). As a player however, it's good to recognize that there are more and less sensible reasons to play a vampire from an odd little bloodline, and you'll want to know which reasons make sense to your Storyteller and which don't.

First of all, everybody wants to be special. It's fun to be different (or can be when you do it right). Playing a bloodline character is like driving an exotic sports car: it comes with a certain amount of prestige. Be aware, therefore, that your Storyteller may want to you meet certain requirements before she'll let you play a bloodline vampire. She may not let new or inexperienced players take exotic characters, for example, or she may want to establish a storytelling history with you first.

Secondly, bloodline vampires add a different flavor to a game. As different as vampires are from mortals, the problems and needs of some of the bloodline vampires can be even more... unusual. The goals and problems of the standard clans may pale sometimes when compared with some of the goals and problems of the more unusual bloodlines. Just be aware that your Storyteller isn't likely to downplay the drawbacks of being a particularly odd



vampire. If you insist on playing a Nagaraja, don't be surprised if your Storyteller goes out of her way to make sure you realize what a pain in the ass it is to be a cannibalistic vampire who has to keep his feeding habits secret from the world (and probably from others of his kind). Furthermore, be aware that a Storyteller may be perfectly happy with the flavor of her chronicle and she may not want to tinker with what she sees as a working formula.

Thirdly, bloodline vampires appeal, in part, due to their sheer exoticism. All but the most tedious and hidebound people are drawn to concepts that are new, different or exotic. Gamers, in particular, tend to appreciate things that fall outside the mainstream (in some cases *well* outside the mainstream...). Consequently, the exotic bloodlines will always have a certain allure to players. Bear in mind, however, that exoticism, when tossed about too freely, becomes commonplace. And, more pragmatically, the nail that sticks out too far gets hammered down. If you're playing an uncommon bloodline, it behooves you to keep your exotic nature masked until it needs to be brought to the fore or it can be done with the most dramatic impact. Discretion is the better part of playing an exotic bloodline. Playing it thus makes more sense in the context of the story as well; after all, the few surviving True Brujah don't survive by saying "Hey everybody, look at me! I'm using Temporis!" Far worse than not being allowed to play a bloodline character is being allowed to play a bloodline character who meets Final Death after one game because he couldn't keep his mouth shut about what a rare and special creature he was.

Fourth, the unusual Disciplines used by many of the bloodlines can be an interesting change of pace (and an unexpected surprise for your in-game antagonists). If you've grown tired of Dominate, Potence, Presence and the other standard Disciplines, playing with the Disciplines of the Daughters of Cacophony or Kiasyd can be a good time. That said, be forewarned that there are some Storytellers for whom even the words Melpominee, Mytherceria, Thanatosis, et al. are like the vilest obscenity, in which case you're going to need to rethink your character concept (or else become *very* persuasive).

Many players also find a degree of freedom in playing a vampire from one of the bloodlines that they may not find in portraying something a little more conventional. Most players have either played the more dominant clans or they've seen them played. And many players are inclined to

play characters the way they've seen them played before. They know how a Toreador or a Gangrel is typically played, and — despite admonitions here and there to do otherwise — they've seen and probably accepted many of the notions associated with particular clans. Toreador vampires (they believe) should be a tad arrogant, a bit effete and mostly too, too jaded. Gangrel on the other hand are mostly feral and are therefore likely to growl a lot, but they're noble at heart and might even have a connection to the Lupines if not a longstanding ally..... On the other hand, vampires from the bloodlines are largely terra incognita, the stereotypes, while there, have not been modeled and reinforced so frequently that they're inescapable. There's still room for a player to personalize a bloodline vampire. The player gets to decide just what a Kiasyd is like, not other players who have already modeled Kiasyd behavior a hundred times before.

### The Challenges

Playing a vampire from an exotic bloodline comes with a number of challenges, and for the most part, unless you have a specific goal in mind that requires you to play such a character, it's often easier to slant a vampire from a more mainstream clan to your tastes, but for those of you intent on playing an unusual bloodline, here are some things to think about.

While playing bloodline vampires can be fun and can add to the chronicle, they, more than most of the clans have a lot of potential to detract from the game as well. They have a great potential for screwing up group cohesion. It takes a significant creative stretch to explain why a vampire from most of the bloodlines would spend any significant time with a party of clan vampires. Players can, of course, come up with a thousand ways of making this creative stretch, but doing it without straining credibility can be a problem that either the other players or the Storyteller may find too annoying. Other players are not obligated to change their characters or how they play their characters to allow you to play a vampire from an exotic bloodline.

Characters from the more unusual bloodlines can cause problems with the feel of the game. Folklore credits vampires with certain supernatural abilities, and the more common an ability in the lore, the more common it is in the game. Some of the abilities possessed by the exotic bloodlines don't have much in common with vampire legends at all, resulting in a game that feels less like **Vampire** and

more like Superhero by Night or Weird Idea Plus Blood. If you're going to be portraying a character from one of the odder bloodlines, give some thought to what you might do to interpret your character's Disciplines in such a way that they flow from his vampiric nature.

Often the first challenge associated with playing an exotic vampire is getting it past the Storyteller, and with good reason. Your Storyteller may have a particular idea in mind for her chronicle that requires a coterie of Camarilla vampires, with all of their social mores and expectations in place, and your character concept for the Kiasyd assassin might not fit into her game neatly (if at all).

Some Storytellers may disallow bloodlines because they feel their Disciplines are unbalancing to game play. Others may disallow them as too odd for the chronicle they had in mind. Others may prefer to keep the more exotic types as Storyteller-only plot devices. In any case, your Storyteller isn't obligated to let you play any thing you want. Don't hesitate to ask to play something unusual (especially if you have a good history of playing more quotidian vampires responsibly), but don't expect her to let you and, *most importantly*, don't whine if she says no.

That said, there are some ways to approach playing a bloodline character that might help your Storyteller deal with running a chronicle with a non-traditional character.

### Tactics

Below is some advice for how to go about playing a bloodline character. The following guidelines are applicable no matter what kind of character you're playing, but they're especially apropos for avoiding the pitfalls that come with playing a character from an exotic lineage.

### Are You Experienced?

Under very few circumstances should your first character be from one of the odd bloodlines. Walk before you run, pal. Your first character should be about figuring out vampiric unlife. Your second character should be about playing a vampire convincingly and well. Then, a few characters later, if you've developed the ability to play well with others (while in character), you might want to look into the slightly more complex roleplaying challenge of playing a character from a bloodline that may or may not have enough individuals to form a decent baseball team, who may be hunted by other vampires and who may be the only one of his kind on the continent in which the chronicle is set.

### A GENTLE REMINDER

If you've approached your Storyteller with a character concept for a vampire from one of the bloodlines and she's said replied with a firm no, don't despair. Keep one thing in mind above all else: It's the roleplaying that makes or breaks a character, not the clan, bloodline, Discipline or Traits. Lame roleplayers think that playing a vampire from an exotic bloodline makes them better roleplayers. That's not how it works. What really happens is that bad roleplaying turns even exotic, interesting vampires with great potential into tedious characters that other players try their damndest to ignore. Likewise, a good roleplayer can breathe new life into any clan by fully fleshing out the character and effectively getting inside the character's head.

A well roleplayed 13th-generation Ventrue is — and always will be — a more interesting character than a poorly roleplayed 7th-generation Gargoyle with six dots in several Disciplines.

### No Twinkin'

One of the primary reasons that so many Storytellers are loath to allow characters from the exotic bloodlines is that the odd bloodline Disciplines — Thanatosis, Temporis, Daimoinon, Sanguinus, Melpominee, Mytherceria, Visceratika and a few odd Necromancy Paths — have a reputation for being twink-bait. A lot of this reputation is leftover from the early days of **Vampire** when a few nascent ideas suggested that it made perfect sense for vampires to be able to, among other things, commune with nature spirits, travel through time and enter the Umbra. **Vampire** eventually resolved most of these dubious Disciplines, but Storytellers remain who still dislike the bloodline Disciplines simply on principle alone. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to prove to your Storyteller that your desire to play a character from an odd bloodline is not, in any way, rooted in the primitive urge to twink out the character. That's not to say that you can't use your character's "special" Discipline, or even that you shouldn't make clever and highly efficient use of it (that is part of the fun, after all), just don't try to get away with twinkish excesses. You'll know if you're doing it, and if you're ever in doubt, look around the table at the eyes of your fellow players. Sneers of disgust indicate that you may have compromised your roleplaying with twinkery and you

will want to fix the problem posthaste, before the Storyteller or your fellow players take care of the problem themselves.

### Be 3D

Your character's entire *raison d'être* should not be "I'm Baali." That's a flimsy character concept, and it will grow stale within one or two gaming sessions. If you refer to your bloodline more than twice a gaming session, or if you never use any but your "special" Discipline, you may be guilty of creating such a flimsy character. The character may be Baali (or Nagaraja or what have you), but he's more than that. Decide at character creation how you're going to play to type (that is, behave in accordance with what is expected of a given bloodline) and how you're going to play *against* type (that is, how your particular character does not fit stereotypes associated with his bloodline). Okay, so you're Baali; are you a tedious, cardboard cutout, run of the mill, "Bwah-ha-ha!" Baali? Or are you an individual who happens to have been Embraced by a vampire from the Baali bloodline? Give some thought here to the usual sensible character creation questions: Why were you Embraced? How do your mortal past and vampiric present synch up? If you're playing a Baali, were you chosen by your sire because you were a Satanist, or because she wanted to see what would happen if she Embraced a fundamentalist? What makes you different from the standard "eeeeevil" Baali? After all, if you just want to play an evil character, you can much more easily play a Tremere infernalist. Are you a Baali with a heart of gold? A Baali who likes tempting only vampires? Who is torn between the taint of his blood and his Humanity? You can play a vampire from any bloodline against type, but make sure you have a three-dimensional character concept from the beginning (your Storyteller should make sure you do) and proceed from there. Characters almost always gain depth during play, so even if the character isn't quite as fleshed out as he could be, if you work toward making him more convincing and complex the character could wind up being realistic and cool even if he didn't start out that way.

Everybody wants to play something special. Some players want to play an exotic bloodline to make up for their lack of storytelling or roleplaying talent, which, in all probability, is one of the reasons the bloodlines got a bad rep in the first place. Storytellers are, therefore, wise to allow or disallow a player to take a bloodline character

based on his past roleplaying history. Players for their part, should remember that by personalizing their characters, by ignoring or downplaying clan stereotypes and by fleshing out a character, good roleplayers can make any clan interesting, just as a crappy roleplayer can make even a cannibalistic Nagaraja sorcerer seem dull (at best), stupid, or, at worst, disruptive to the story.

If you want to play a character from an unusual bloodline, be prepared to tell your Storyteller why, and be persuasive. If you just announce to your Storyteller that you want to play a Baali, for example and don't tell her why, nine times out of 10 she's going to say no (as well she should given the potentially catastrophic results of letting bad or twinkish roleplayers play a Baali). If you put some thought into what you want to do and how you hope to enhance the gaming experience and *then* present your great idea, complete with well conceived and articulate arguments for why it would be a good thing, you're much more likely to get the chance to play that character. To that end, think about what you want to do and what your Storyteller (from what you know of her) might find interesting or beneficial to the game. What kind of roleplaying experience are you hoping to get that you can't get from playing a more orthodox character? Have you played the standard clans so much that you need a break? Do you want to mix up the Disciplines available to you? If you just think it would be a cool change of pace, that's a perfectly acceptable answer (this is a game, after all; there's no need to be doctrinaire), so long as your Storyteller is fine with it, you're golden. You may, however, need to explain to your Storyteller how your foray into coolness is going to benefit the chronicle as a whole and not detract from the experience of your fellow players.

### Just Don't

There are many, many bad ways to play any character, but there seem to be more opportunities for bad roleplaying with vampires from the assorted bloodlines. Following are some ideas for things to avoid if you should get a chance to play one of these exotic vampires.

### Ahrimanes

If you're absolutely, positively certain that you want to play one of these extremely rare female native American animistic vampires, and you can do so without damaging the mood and tone of the game you're in, and the Storyteller has smoked enough crack to let you, please feel free. Otherwise, wouldn't

you rather just play a Gangrel (or a werewolf)? Note that the Ahrimanes didn't make the transition from the second to the revised edition — if you don't know what they are, don't sweat it anyway.

### **Baali**

Do not play a Baali assuming that you will be able to hide it from the rest of your troupe. You will not. Your entire party will know what bloodline you're from within three gaming sessions (at the most) and the other players will be forced to either kill you or strain game credibility to rationalize why they let you hang out with them. Furthermore, if you insist on playing a Baali, make sure you come up with a new strategy for playing them, because the standard "I am an infernalist! Bwah-hah-hah!" approach to the Baali gets stale very quickly. Play a Baali character if and only if you can come up with a creative new angle to work the character in.

### **Blood Brothers**

If you're the only one in your troupe who wants to play a Blood Brother, think long and hard about it. In fact, the best time to consider playing a Blood Brother is if there are three or four of you and you're going up against three or four vampires from other clans, in which case you get to take advantage of Sanguinus, the bloodline's excessively odd (and entirely un-vampire-like) Discipline.

### **Daughters of Cacophony**

Many Daughters of Cacophony are played exactly like Toreador, suggesting that the player could have played a Toreador just as easily. If you want to play a Daughter of Cacophony, figure out what the similarities are between the Daughters and the Toreador, then do the same for the Daughters and the Malkavians (the other clan they're compared to). If you come up with a character that really couldn't come from one of those two clans, and is still an intriguing character, then you might want to try playing a Daughter of Cacophony.

And remember, all the males have been killed off, so don't even think about creating a "Son of Discord." (Where did that name come from, anyway?) If you're a guy and want to play a Daughter of Cacophony, have the grace to play a female character. You might learn something.

### **Gargoyles**

If you have a serious masochistic streak, this is probably the bloodline for you. Here are a few things to think about before playing a Gargoyle: You are a huge, craggy blood-sucking statue, and you will

need to use Disciplines almost all the time in order to interact with others with any degree of subtlety whatsoever. Furthermore, most Tremere vampires, if not all, will take it as their natural right to throw attitude in your direction and possibly order you around. While Gargoyles are often played as imbeciles, bear in mind that playing a 90 IQ character gets tedious after the first hour, and the rest of your troupe will get pissed off at you if you ruin the mood of the game by playing your character's low intelligence for laughs.

### **Kiasyd**

These guys are, arguably, responsible for the whole "only twinkys play bloodlines" attitude of a lot of gamers. When they first appeared, their Disciplines were Necromancy, Obtenebation and Mytherceria, and they were the weirdest thing on the block. They've been toned down since then, but they're still very odd and most Storytellers have trouble fitting them into a chronicle. The big drawback to the Kiasyd is that there's really nothing very vampiric about them. They might be interesting antagonists for a **Changeling** game, but they do not fit into most coteries well (if at all). Any player who insists on playing a Kiasyd is usually in for an exceptionally irritating storytelling experience — as are his fellow players, in all probability.

### **Nagaraja**

Among the rarest of the bloodline vampires, the Nagaraja are also among the hardest to justify. **Vampire's** metaplot has them in Korea working with the Kuei-jin, and even the Yin-aspected vampires of the Middle Kingdom find them odd. If, for some hard to believe reason, your coterie is made up primarily of Giovanni and Tremere vampires, then it might work, otherwise you're probably setting yourself up for rejection by the group and a very truncated storytelling experience.

### **Salubri**

While they might be workable in a Sabbat game, the big target on the forehead of the Salubri makes their unlife expectancy surprisingly short in most other contexts. The whole vampire-cum-healing-martyr thing is a bit of a stretch and takes some good roleplaying to pull off convincingly.

### **Samedi**

Fun to play and interesting, Samedi can be great characters, but if you insist on trying to keep up that vaguely Haitian accent for the entire chronicle, your fellow gamers are going to start laughing every time you speak. Unless, of course, you're from Haiti.

### True Brujah

If you can keep your secret, you're welcome to try playing one of these guys, but bear in mind that it's not easy, and *Temporis* isn't the uber-twink Discipline that it once was.

### Bloodline Stories and Chronicles

Hey, Storytellers: If a lot of players in your troupe are intrigued by the idea of playing characters from exotic bloodlines, you might want to consider telling a story in which all the characters are from bloodlines.

Hey, players: Your Storyteller will decide how such a chronicle might work; she might decide to make it a one-shot story, or a mini-chronicle just

to see how the players handle the challenges of roleplaying bloodlines. The explanation for why vampires from the bloodlines are so common are up to her, you or a mutual agreement. Maybe the vampires from the main clans have somehow been wiped out. Maybe your coterie is from a group of vampires wanting to form a new sect of bloodline vampires. Maybe it's a different World of Darkness altogether and it's the vampire clans that occupy the fringes while the bloodlines have somehow come to prominence. There are obviously a number of ways of working this kind of game, and if the troupe has fun during the mini-plotline, the Storyteller may opt to make it an ongoing chronicle.



# INDEX

## A

Abilities 20, 39  
 Advantages 20  
 Allies 20, 40  
 Anarchs 74  
 Archetype  
 19, 50  
 Attributes  
 20, 38

## B

Backgrounds 20, 40  
 Bitter Blood (Merit) 27  
 Blood Bond 75

## C

Camarilla  
 68, 116  
 Clan 31, 71  
 Concept 18, 28,  
 31  
 Conscience 21, 48  
 Contacts 20, 40  
 Conviction 48  
 Courage 22, 49  
 Criminal Record (Flaw) 28

## D

Deluded (Flaw) 28  
 Demeanor  
 19  
 Disowned (Flaw) 123

## E

Experience 91

## F

Fame 20, 41

## G

Gehenna  
 75  
 Gullible (Flaw) 28

## H

Herd 42  
 House Goratrix 74  
 Humanity  
 22, 50

## I

Infernalists 74  
 Influence  
 20, 43  
 Insomniac (Flaw) 28  
 Instinct 49

## L

Lexicon 9  
 Lone Wolf  
 52  
 Low Pain Tolerance (Flaw) 28

## M

Mentor 20, 43  
 Merits and Flaws 27, 50  
 Mortal Characters 15

## N

Nature 19, 49  
 Night Vision (Merit) 27



<b>P</b>		Specialized Vocabulary	9
Prelude	25, 97	Status	21, 45
Principles, Setting	10		
<b>R</b>		<b>U</b>	
Resources		Unlucky Supernatural (Flaw)	28
21, 44			
Retainers		<b>V</b>	
21, 44		Vampiric Recognition (Merit)	27
		Vigorous (Merit)	27
		Virtues	21, 48
<b>S</b>		<b>W</b>	
Sabbat	68, 106	Willpower	24, 50
Self-Control	22, 49		



## INDEX BY TOPIC

Mortal Characters	15
Character Concept and Personal Storyline	28
Getting the Most From Traits	38
The Lone Wolf	52
Filing Off the Serial Numbers	59
Beyond the Clans and Sects	66
What is Troupe-Style Play?	79
Legacy of Damnation	92
The Phenomenon of Packs and Coteries	105
Power Vacuum: When No Sect Structure Exists	122
Packs and Coteries Outside the Norm	137

## INDEX OF ESSAYS

A Little Discipline Goes a Long Way by Christopher Kobar	146
"But I Vas Chust Followink Mein Character Concept!": The Gamer Nuremburg Defense and Vampire: The Masquerade by Greg Stolze	148
Dead Again: How to Make a Character's Death as Satisfying as His Unlife by Christopher Kobar	151
The Call of the Blood by Aaron Rosenberg	154
Rebels with a Cause by Christopher Kobar	157
Love, Sex and Romance in Vampire	

by Ann Sullivan Braidwood	160
Enmity Between Characters: Storytelling Opportunity or Story Killer? by Rhiannon Louve	164
Flash and Dazzle by Aaron Rosenberg	168
Horror is Perspective by Matthew McFarland	171
Talk the Talk: How to Get Involved in Political Chronicles by Patrick O'Duffy	174
You Are Who You Eat: Why Interesting Feeding Habits Aren't Just for the Ventrue by Adam Tinworth	178
Behind the Mask of Normalcy by Dean Shomshak	182
On and Off Camera by Conrad Hubbard	186
How You Can Keep Online Vampire Games From Sucking So Much by Jim Kiley	189
Severing Ties by Aaron Rosenberg	191
The True Nature of Monstrousness: Or, Some Ideas on Playing Low-Humanity Characters Without Making Your Storyteller Want to Kill You by Myranda Sarro	194
But It Worked So Well On Television... by Ari Marmell	197
Make It Easy On Us by Matthew McFarland	201
A Long Look Back by Carl Bowen	204
Bloodlines by Kraig Blackwelder	208

# VAMPIRE

## PLAYERS GUIDE

NAME:

NATURE:

CHRONICLE:

PLAYER:

DEMEANOR:

CONCEPT:

### ATTRIBUTES

#### PHYSICAL

Strength ☐☐☐☐☐  
 Dexterity ☐☐☐☐☐  
 Stamina ☐☐☐☐☐

#### SOCIAL

Charisma ☐☐☐☐☐  
 Manipulation ☐☐☐☐☐  
 Appearance ☐☐☐☐☐

#### MENTAL

Perception ☐☐☐☐☐  
 Intelligence ☐☐☐☐☐  
 Wits ☐☐☐☐☐

### ABILITIES

#### TALENTS

Alertness ☐☐☐☐☐  
 Athletics ☐☐☐☐☐  
 Brawl ☐☐☐☐☐  
 Dodge ☐☐☐☐☐  
 Empathy ☐☐☐☐☐  
 Expression ☐☐☐☐☐  
 Intimidation ☐☐☐☐☐  
 Leadership ☐☐☐☐☐  
 Streetwise ☐☐☐☐☐  
 Subterfuge ☐☐☐☐☐

#### SKILLS

Animal Ken ☐☐☐☐☐  
 Crafts ☐☐☐☐☐  
 Drive ☐☐☐☐☐  
 Etiquette ☐☐☐☐☐  
 Firearms ☐☐☐☐☐  
 Melee ☐☐☐☐☐  
 Performance ☐☐☐☐☐  
 Security ☐☐☐☐☐  
 Stealth ☐☐☐☐☐  
 Survival ☐☐☐☐☐

#### KNOWLEDGES

Academics ☐☐☐☐☐  
 Computer ☐☐☐☐☐  
 Finance ☐☐☐☐☐  
 Investigation ☐☐☐☐☐  
 Law ☐☐☐☐☐  
 Linguistics ☐☐☐☐☐  
 Medicine ☐☐☐☐☐  
 Occult ☐☐☐☐☐  
 Politics ☐☐☐☐☐  
 Science ☐☐☐☐☐

### ADVANTAGES

#### BACKGROUNDS

☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐

#### DISCIPLINES

☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐

#### VIRTUES

Conscience ☐☐☐☐☐  
 Self-Control ☐☐☐☐☐  
 Courage ☐☐☐☐☐

#### MERITS/FLAWS

☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐

#### HUMANITY

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

#### WILLPOWER

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐  
☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

#### BLOOD POOL

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

#### HEALTH

Bruised ☐  
 Hurt -1 ☐  
 Injured -1 ☐  
 Wounded -2 ☐  
 Mauled -2 ☐  
 Crippled -5 ☐  
 Incapacitated ☐

#### WEARINESS

# VAMPIRE

## PLAYERS GUIDE

## ■ OTHER TRAITS

[illegible]

## RITUALS

NAME

LEVEL

[illegible]

## ■ EXPERIENCE

## DERANGEMENTS

## BLOOD BONDS

BOUND TO

## RATING

## BOUND TO

## RATING


## COMBAT

[illegible]

# ARMOR

---

---

---

---

---

# VAMPIRE

PLAYERS GUIDE

## EXPANDED BACKGROUND

ALLIES

MENTOR

CONTACTS

RESOURCES

FAME

RETAINERS

HERD

STATUS

INFLUENCE

OTHER

## POSSESSIONS

GEAR (CARRIED)

EQUIPMENT (OWNED)

FEEDING GROUNDS

VEHICLES

## HAVENS

LOCATION

DESCRIPTION

# VAMPIRE

## PLAYERS GUIDE

# HISTORY

## PRELUDE

This image shows a blank sheet of primary-ruled paper. It features four sets of horizontal writing lines, each consisting of a solid top line, a dashed midline, and a solid bottom line. There are also four vertical margin lines spaced evenly across the page. The paper is otherwise empty, with no handwriting or other markings.

## ■ APPEARANCE ■

[illegible]

## VISUALS

## COTERIE CHART

## CHARACTER SKETCH



# The Grand Masquerade



2011

SEPTEMBER 15-18

NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

[www.thegrandmasquerade.com](http://www.thegrandmasquerade.com)

