

COTERRIES

TM

the World of Darkness

A sourcebook for:
Vampire
THE REQUIEM

Listen, whelp.

*You're new to this
and we didn't ask for you.*

*You're here because someone
has to show you the ropes
before you ruin the Requiem
for the rest of us.*

*Play your part, know your role,
learn when to speak up
and when to mind your silence
and you'll go far
with our little crew.*

*Make a mess of it
and we'll stake you for the Sheriff
and call it a favor.*

— Jenny Jazzy, Carthian Black Marketeer

ISBN 1-58846-251-X WW25100 \$24.99 U.S.



PRINTED IN CANADA



Vampire
THE REQUIEM





COTTERRIES™

by: Craig Blackwelder, Jacob Klinder, Matthew McFarland and Will Hindman
Vampire® created by Mark Rein-Hagen

Credits

Written by: Kraig Blackwelder, Jacob Klünder, Matthew McFarland and Will Hindmarch

Vampire: The Requiem is inspired by **Vampire: The Masquerade**

Vampire: The Masquerade was created by Mark Rein•Hagen

World of Darkness created by Mark Rein•Hagen

Developer: Justin Achilli

Editor: Carl Bowen

Art Director: Pauline Benney

Layout & Typesetting: Pauline Benney

Interior Art: Samuel Araya, Fred Hooper, Travis Ingram, Vince Locke, Michael Phillippi, Jean-Sebastien Rossbach

Dave Seeley and Hannibal King

Front Cover Art: John VanFleet

Front & Back Cover Design: Pauline Benney

Special Thanks To:

Fred "Very Public Restroom" Yelk, for superhuman hearing at Origins

Chad "Golden Deuce" Brown, for volunteering to demo his, uh, *game*

Philippe "Patio Table" Boulle, for facilitating the stolen table's journey through the window

Ben "Worst President Ever" Monk, for his personal campaign to have President Grant removed from the fifty

Jim "Beer Can't" Zubkavich, for injuries sustained in the line of duty



1554 LITTON DR.
STONE MOUNTAIN,
GA 30083
USA

© 2004 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, World of Darkness, Vampire the Masquerade are registered trademarks of White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Vampire the Requiem, Werewolf the Forsaken, Mage the Awakening, Storytelling System and Coteries are trademarks of White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. All characters, names, places and text herein are copy-

righted 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 and rec.games.frp.storyteller

PRINTED IN CANADA.



COTERRIES™

Table of Contents

<i>Prelude and Introduction</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Chapter One: Cosmopolitan Coteries</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Chapter Two: The Ordo Dracul</i>	<i>44</i>
<i>Chapter Three: The Gauthian Movement</i>	<i>60</i>
<i>Chapter Four: The Circle of the Throne</i>	<i>76</i>
<i>Chapter Five: The Insurrectus</i>	<i>90</i>
<i>Chapter Six: The Lancea Sanctum</i>	<i>112</i>



Prologue:
Numbers



He drags the knife down my ribs like he's playing a xylophone. I try getting through it by counting the ribs. People get through a lot by counting inane shit. I used to get to sleep by counting sheep and get through sex with my husband by counting cracks in the ceiling. It doesn't work so well this time.

The guy cutting my side open doesn't speak a lot of English, but he sure knows the word "bitch." That's about all he's said since I've been here. I get a bunch of French, slurred together like it's one long, liquid sound, then "bitch." I was never much for languages. I'd rather watch people's faces.

The knife goes in again, and I resume counting. You'd think that if the body's dead, it wouldn't care about being sliced up. Three. It shouldn't hurt. Four.

It hurts.

* * *

Five hours ago, we were all together. I looked around the room and tried to breathe in the smoke. I miss smoking, I think, more than food. I can still smoke, I guess, but it's not the same.

It's funny the things you miss. I think Carlos misses being able to get pissed off about smokers. It's not like he's going to get cancer now, and he doesn't have to smell any sharper than he used to, but he likes using his senses as an excuse for getting all up in smokers' faces. Whatever works, Carlos.

Anyway, we were all together in our usual haunt. This place used to play metal, then it turned into a dance club, then some guy who thought the city needed a piano bar bought it. It's been a regular hunting spot for us for years, but after the last purchase, other Kindred stopped coming here — scared off by the newness of it all, I guess. Honestly, I was a little put off originally, too, but then Dre pointed out that being ready to change

with the times was a big point of the Carthian Movement. The two guys who play piano and sing are really god-awful. That doesn't explain why this place gets so busy every night of the week, but there it is. So we started going there, hunting, feeding, getting cozy with the pianists.

That was my job, and I don't need to hear about any double-entendres, either.

We were sitting at a table near the front of the room. You'd have to yell to be heard while the music was playing, but we talk during the breaks between songs. That means it takes a while to have any kind of meaningful conversation, but that's kind of the point. During the songs, you can't talk, so you look around, you take in detail. That was how we noticed Jean's boys in the first place.

The two guys were in the middle of "American Pie," which is a damned long song. We had our system all worked out. Carlos watches for the Prince's guys. He used to be with the Invictus, before he realized it was bullshit, and he's got a good eye for their kind. Dre watches the door for cops. This place doesn't do much in the way of drug traffic, but you never know. Elise sits with her back to the stage, making sure nobody's watching us too carefully. James just sits there and stares into space. I don't even ask him questions anymore, not since I found out he believes in ghosts. And me, I look for vampires.

Dre told me to watch out for "other Kindred" the first night we went there. I said, "We're the Kindred. I'll watch for vampires." The others knew what I meant. I think that's why I like these guys.

Five hours ago, we were sitting at a table in the piano bar when I saw four vampires walk in. I nudged Elise. She kicked Dre. Dre tapped Carlos, and he tugged

on James' sleeve. We all took a look, and we all felt that crazy mix of fear and rage well up in us, like the Blood's trying force its way out. You can tell a lot about another Kindred — sorry, vampire — by the way they make you feel. If it's anger, you're probably on even turf. If it's fear, you've got a problem.

We all felt fear, but we sat still. And then one of those guys — this big, blond wuss in a silk shirt and a badly disguised mullet — looks over at us, stares right at me and mouths something to his buddies. Carlos didn't catch a word of it, but when the song ended he told us it was French. Elise told us she had a friend who'd mentioned something about some French Dragons in town. But the pianists were into "Crocodile Rock" by that time, and we couldn't hear a damn thing.

* * *

You hear all kinds of weird shit about the Ordo Dracul. I don't know how much of it's true. James said they approached him once about joining up, and I guess that doesn't surprise me. He's a spooky bastard.

The guy with the knife has already cut me up a dozen times. My wrists don't burn from the ropes like they should. They just kind of ache. I can feel where the bones have come loose. I grit my teeth as he slices a chunk out of me again. I can't stop myself from healing it, either. It just looks so goddamned disgusting, especially since it doesn't bleed.

I look at him, but avoid his eyes. He must have shaved his head tonight. He's got nicks in his scalp, but of course they aren't bleeding, so his head is just covered in these little triangular furrows. I start to count as he cuts in again. Two. Knife under the ribs this time. Four.

* * *

"Four of them, five of us. I'm just saying, Theresa."

We had figured out who they were. They were still in the club. We'd left separately, me and Carlos out this nifty little back entrance that the pianists had shown me one night, James and Elise out the front, and Dre out a fire exit. He must have disabled the alarm. He was clever like that.

"Yeah, but who the hell knows what they can do? James already said—"

"They were Dragons. I know. I'm not fucking impressed." Carlos was so full of shit. We'd all heard the same stories. We rounded the corner and found the others. Elise was already on her cell phone, bobbing her head like a chicken. James was staring at the wall of the club with his head cocked, a weird expression on his face. Dre watched the door. "I was telling Theresa—"

James waved for quiet, still staring at the wall. Carlos started to get that "I'm about to flip out" look. I put a hand on his shoulder to calm him down. Part of watching each other's backs is keeping Carlos under control. Elise hung up her cell phone.

"My guy doesn't know why they're here," she said, "but they're definitely Dragons. Their leader's a Shadow named Jean, but he's not with them."

"We're sure about that?" Dre was always paranoid about Kindred who could change their faces. He'd been jumped and very nearly burned by some crazy Haunt out in Lansing who'd looked like his father for a second. Once bitten, I guess.

"Yeah." Elise shook her head. "He's meeting with Ozzie."

"Aw, hell." Dre snarled. Oswald was the Sheriff. We'd been on his list since the first night we'd shown up. The Carthians were decidedly unwelcome here.

"So fucking what?" Carlos said. "Their leader's off kissing ass. Let's wait for them, drag them into that alley and set them on fire. They're outnumbered. We can take them."

We all looked at Carlos like he'd just suggested we go sunbathing.

"Don't know how many times we have to remind you, Carlos," Dre said quietly, "but some of us aren't macho suicidal idiots. We don't know what these guys can do."

James muttered something. Nobody else was paying attention, but I sure as hell caught it. "Say again..."

He spoke up. "I know they can see us."

* * *

You wouldn't think it would hurt, but it does. What hurts isn't so much the pain but the memory of pain, the thought of, "Shit, this would really kill if I still had a pulse."

This fucking bald frog's finally tired of rooting around under my rib cage with his knife and is now sharpening another knife. I'm listening, but it takes me a second to make out anything over the scrape of stone on metal. There are people moving upstairs or outside the building. Somewhere above me, anyway. I wonder whose side they're on.

I hear two sets of footsteps.

No, three.

* * *

"Three blocks. It's on the right." Elise knows this city like no one I've ever met. She was born and died without ever leaving city limits, her parents are salt of the rust belt, and so on. She knows which of the abandoned buildings are going to be knocked down and which are going to sit condemned forever just by glancing at the state of the notice tacked to them.

We were all parked in different lots, but we always left James' car nearby so we could get away quickly if necessary. Trouble was, that depended on no one figuring out which car was his and slashing the tires. When we left the club and found his car, we knew we'd been fucked. Dre went back inside — stay visible, meet us later. The

rest of us were walking, trying to get to Elise's ride, when we heard them.

One of them was on a motorcycle. It wasn't some little rice-rocket, either. It was a Harley and the pipes were nice and loud, just like my ex-husband's bike. I turned around and saw one of the guys from the club heading toward us. About three seconds later, a car rounded the corner a block ahead of us. The fuckers surrounded us. They must have homed in on us somehow.

James looked up, and we all followed just for a second. We saw a bat swoop under a streetlight.

We're all idealists here, but there's a time for realism, too. They found us way too quickly, so it's time to vanish. Elise is best at that. She just steps back into the shadows and she's gone. James is no slouch, either, and he's easy to overlook anyway. Carlos doesn't like to run, but he knows when he's outgunned, and he knows the streets, so he can get away.

But when it comes to fading into the background, I've got nothing. Call me a damn show-off, but I took a step toward that Harley. I heard the car screech to a halt behind me and I heard a bump, but all I remember seeing was the bright light of the bike's headlight in my face. I raised my hands, and I said something to the effect of, "Let's talk about this." I tried to sway him, but I couldn't even see him. It's hard to be seductive with a motorcycle bearing down on you.

I guess he must have hit me. Next thing I knew, the four guys from the club were standing over me. That's when the bald guy slurred some French in my ear and punctuated it with "bitch," and then they put a stake in my heart.

* * *

He's got me hanging from my wrists like a side of beef, and my shirt's lying on the floor with a hole in it. On

any other night, that might piss me off, but at present, I'm kind of glad he left my bra where it was. I'm even more glad he took the stake out of my heart, because pretending to be motionless is near-impossible. Pain I can handle. Staying completely still and dead isn't the same thing.

I finally get up the strength to speak. I haven't yet because I'm afraid I might scream at him. "Where am I?"

Hopefully he doesn't speak English so he won't realize what a stupid question that is. Of course he isn't going to tell me where we are.

He looks up with his now-sharp knife and talks some more French at me. I don't look at his eyes. I look at the windows behind him. They're painted over in black. It's a makeshift haven, but judging from the smell, we're still downtown. That means these guys are probably working with Ozzie. Only two Kindred hold enough sway downtown to lend out a haven like this.

* * *

Two of the guys threw me in the car. One of them reached over me and grabbed something out of the trunk. I didn't see what it was, because his arm jostled the stake in my chest. It didn't come out — it was wedged between my ribs — but it loosened. I felt it wiggling between the muscles of my chest like a tooth hanging from a nerve. They didn't notice, and I didn't (and couldn't) make any noise. All I could do was wait.

The car took off, and they hit a bump a little ways down the road that knocked the stake loose. God bless shitty roads and broke public works departments. I reached for my cell and dialed Elise's number. She answered, which is good, because she wouldn't have if she were still being chased. I told her what's happening, and she went to find the others.

That's dumb luck. That's not betting odds. Just their clumsiness and a bump in the road. Now, I had a choice

right then. I could have kicked open the trunk and run for it, but I knew that Dre would want to know why these guys were in town, why their leader was meeting with the Prince while they were cruising the Rack for rabble like us.

When you get handed dumb luck, you go with it. And I wanted to know, too, damn it. So I took the stake and jabbed it back into my chest. It didn't stab deep enough to paralyze me again, but it hurt like a son of a bitch.

And then it was just a matter of staying still. Like I said, that's the hard part.

They opened the trunk. They wrapped me in a sleeping bag or something and dragged me into this basement. I lay there on the floor as they all slurred at each other, and then three of them left me alone with le Bitch.

I'm getting the feeling he was just supposed to watch me. It's not like he can question me if he doesn't speak English. This must be how he gets his jollies. I've heard stories about the Ordo Dracul.

He puts the blade of the knife against my lips and pulls down gently enough that I barely feel it cutting into my flesh. He holds the knife up so I can see that it's got my lipstick on it... but no blood, of course.

I'm still listening to the footsteps. They're outside the door now. I can't tell whose are whose, but depending on if the door opens gently or forcefully, I'll know if it's Elise or Carlos.

It's Carlos. He kicks open the door and launches himself into the room at the sicko with the knife, claws already extended. Elise and James follow him. I don't know where Dre is, but it's still three against one.

* * *

One look at Carlos' claws, and the guy cutting on me is gone. He knows better than to fuck with a Savage when all he's got is a knife. He dives for one of the

blacked-out windows and smashes right through it. I guess this building must have those little nooks by the basement windows; never really understood about those. It doesn't make much difference to the French guy; Carlos is too fast. He grabs the guy by the shirt and flings him back into the room. I see James, Elise and Carlos on top of him and hear a strangled scream, then they stand up. The French guy's skin is rotting off, but not very quickly. He must've been pretty young.

James cuts me down and I collapse on the floor. Elise helps me to my feet. "We need to get going."

"Where's Dre?" I hate the way my voice sounds when I'm hungry. It sounds like there's a bad phone connection behind my words, this horrible hiss and growl to everything I say. Maybe it just sounds that way to me, I don't know.

James speaks up. "Close by. Making a call."

Oh, of course. He's calling in to find out who owns this building, and then probably calling in a favor at his old precinct. He'll put out alerts on the bike and the car. It probably won't help. These guys are fast and connected, so they'll be off the streets in minutes, but it'll put a kink into their works. "Where are the other Dragons?"

"Not sure," Elise says, looking through the guy's clothes. "I lost the ones chasing me, I thought, but they aren't here yet. Maybe they're still looking."

James touches the guy's knife and his eyes roll back in his head. "They left to prepare another haven. They weren't going to keep you here very long."

I hold the skin on my ribs closed. Carlos pulls off his sweatshirt and tosses it to me. "What then? Why'd they care about us?"

James shrugs. "Ozzie doesn't like us, but I don't think it's that simple. I think someone else wants us — all of us, the whole Movement — out of town. They're serious

enough to make a deal with..." he nods to what's left of the French guy.

"Well, fuck that," I growl. "We can make deals, too."

We leave the building and I start thinking about where I can go to feed. We can't go back to the piano bar, and I don't want to chance visiting any of my special friends. Carlos gives me a look, but I shake my head. "Forget it, Carlos. I'm not drinking from you again."

James and Elise exchange a look. I pretend not to notice. Like they're fucking bastions of restraint.

Carlos pulls me up ahead of the others. "That's not what I had in mind, anyway, Theresa." He licks his lips. They remain dry. "We need to get out of town. Just out to the 'burbs, maybe just for the rest of the night. Dre's got a place we can go."

"And?"

"And you've got to get us in." What that means is that we're going to knock on someone's door and I'm going to charm our way in. Doing that when I'm this hungry is going to be a bitch, but I don't have to look seductive or cute or needy or whatever for very long. Just long enough to get us in the door. That's how it works. James sees it, Elise or Dre sets it up, I make it happen the easy way or Carlos makes it happen the hard way. We've got this down.

So did they, though. It all just came down to numbers. If they hadn't hit that bump, if I hadn't made that call, who the hell knows where I'd be right now?

Dre pulls up in an SUV. I ride shotgun. I shoot him a look; he knows I hate these fucking things.

He shrugs. "Figured this wouldn't stand out in the 'burbs." He's right, damn it.

We start heading east. I check the clock. We've got about 90 minutes to dawn.

I start counting broken streetlights, just to pass the time.

Introduction

Theme and Mood

No **Vampire** chronicle should be designed without attention to its theme and mood, otherwise the story occurs in a vacuum. To that end, here are the specific theme and mood addressed in this book.

Theme

The main theme of this book is trust, with loyalty working closely with that theme.

Trust is an absolutely critical issue when it comes to Kindred coterie. Vampires are always in competition for finite resources as represented by precious Vitae. Since power struggles and treachery come as second nature to the Kindred, trust is a rare commodity among them. "Friendships" among Kindred do not exist at all. True camaraderie among the Damned is rare, and most such relationships degenerate over time, just as the Kindred do themselves. As such, trust becomes dangerous, but a Kindred with one or more fellow Kindred she can genuinely trust has a leg up on most other Kindred, who keep a wary eye on their allies for fear of betrayal. In the end, it becomes a question of how much trust members of a coterie are willing to extend to each other and if this trust is betrayed when one or more members see an advantage. Loyalty, whether to family (clan), ideals (covenant) or individuals (the coterie), also plays an important role.

Mood

The mood of this book is largely one of oppression — the coterie versus the rest of the world — with a bit of light offered by wonder at the potential offered by cooperation.

A coterie usually creates a sense of unity and strength in numbers, but at the same time, it is easy for a Kindred to define herself based on her membership in that coterie. As such, the enemies of other members become her enemies. At the same time, a particularly successful coterie might easily draw unwanted attention from older and more established coterie and Kindred who see them as potential rivals and even enemies. Among the Kindred, you're damned if you do and damned if you don't.

As for the wonder of the potential offered by cooperation within a coterie, this potential is tainted by the fact that Kindred almost inevitably betray the trust that slowly forms among coterie. (Remember the theme?) Just as prey

animals suffer when wolves hunt in packs, mortals usually suffer when the united strength of a coterie allows them to expand their influence and hunting grounds. The aforementioned jealousies and rivalries undo the Kindred among their own kind as well. Will your troupe's coterie succeed or fail in its World of Darkness?

Vampire is a game unlike many others in the Storytelling medium. Most roleplaying games assume that the players' characters stick together through thick and thin, regardless of their connections to one another. Often with little more justification than "a man sees you at a tavern and gives you a map," the characters are expected to suffer, fight and even die for one another. Among the Kindred, however, such devotion is exceedingly uncommon, if it exists at all. While Storytellers are cautioned to discourage their players from having their characters stab each other in the back for its own sake, they might wish to spotlight the crucible in which Kindred relationships form and test them during the course of the chronicle.

Other Notions

Mix and Match

This book contains a wealth of ideas. Many of its pages are devoted to coterie formed by single covenants. We don't expect every coterie to be formed by members of a single covenant, though. Especially among groups of players, different covenants offer different things that enthrall different people. The purpose for the inclusion of this material is for the players' coterie to mix and match the ideas they like. In this sense, each coterie becomes unique, much like each Kindred domain is unique. It's your chronicle, and the ideas we present are foundations for those chronicles, not the chains in which you must bind them. A coterie with a de facto Invictus leader will be a lot different than one in which a pair of Carthians seems to call the shots — and every other Kindred in each of those coterie will bring their own unique personality and outlook to the group, further changing the dynamic. You'll soon see that no such thing as a "normal coterie" exists, and that each group of vampires is as unique as the Kindred who join it. Take ideas from each chapter and blend them into your troupe's coterie — and into the coterie that aid or oppose them in the Danse Macabre. Also, remember that no overarching global covenant society exists, and if deviating from these foundations makes a better story, more power to you.

Upper and Lowercase

You'll notice a few words over the course of your reading **Coteries** that have capitalized first letters. In these cases, the word that describes the idea is a common conceit. Much like Prince or Whip, such positions or coterie types are almost universally understood. On the other hand, words with lowercased first letters are used more often as simple signifiers of ideas — paladins, for example, aren't necessarily called Paladins in every city that hosts them. This is to allow the Storyteller maximum versatility. If the Storyteller wants a specific group of vampires in place but doesn't want to refer to them by a specific name, he doesn't have to. (After all, familiarity breeds contempt, or at least quantifies the idea, which isn't always the intent in a horror environment.) The ideas in this book are generally suggestions and springboards, as opposed to being a checklist the Storyteller must complete when she designs her chronicle's home domain.

How to Use This Book

This book is part toolbox and part source material. The various chapters provide information on how the concept of a coterie functions within a given covenant or, in the case of the first chapter, how it functions with members from more than one covenant or with members drawn from a single clan.

For Storytellers, this information can help both in the creation of coteries composed of Storyteller characters, as well as how to keep a coterie together when the chronicle has started (and challenge the unity of the coterie during each story). In addition, Storytellers can find advice on how to create plausible scenarios for multi-covenant and single-clan coteries.

For players and Storytellers, this book gives ideas on how to build a coterie that will serve as a strong anchor for a chronicle. At the very least, it should provide options and considerations for play beyond the desire to betray one's fellows for short-term, immediate gain. Think of it as a discussion on how to portray

the social dynamics of a group of Kindred. Players might also be inspired by the source material presented on the various capsule ideas when creating their characters and/or coterie from the ground up.

The **Prelude** offers a look at the Requiem for a young coterie and shows what can be accomplished as a group. In addition, the **Introduction** lays out the mood and theme of the book as well as offering a few general words of guidance.

Chapter One: Cosmopolitan Coteries mixes it all up. While the following chapters focus on coteries comprising members of the same covenant, this chapter explores the possibilities and problems facing a coterie that draws members from multiple covenants, as well as the possibilities inherent in coteries based around a single clan.

Chapter Two: The Ordo Dracul deals with the coteries formed by the followers of dread Dracula, the practitioners of the eldritch Coils of the Dragon. It includes details on occult societies, bizarre duties of the Dragons and beyond.

Chapter Three: The Carthian Movement focuses on the youngest covenant to interpret the coterie concept. It offers information about the various groups of philosophers, intellectuals and political rabble-rousers that espouse "new thinking" among the undead.

Chapter Four: The Circle of the Crone gives you information about the various coteries that make up the most spiritual and most religiously unorthodox of the covenants, as well as a few of their rituals.

Chapter Five: The Invictus provides a close look at the neofeudalism of this covenant and examines the groups formed under its monolithic structure. Specifically addressed is how coteries relate to the convoluted power structure of the First Estate.

Chapter Six: The Lancea Sanctum gives you information and ideas about individual groups of Sanctified, from die-hard fundamentalists to more moderate groups, as well as the spiritual functions that bind the coteries.



Chapter One:

Cosmopolitan Coterjes

I have kept the company of many Kindred in this domain. In younger nights, I whiled away the hours discussing transient philosophies with the Order of the Dragon and I sparred with the Platonisms of the Invictus. My own faith rang hollowly in the ears of my Sanctified companions, while the Circle of the Crone matched wits but not theologies with me. Even those who swore by no covenant or creed called us allies.

Yet still, despite our differences, we kept each other's confidences and counsel. We did this because, those differences aside, we were beholden to each other. We watched each other's backs, because who else would?

— Handsome Jack, "Confessions to a Prince"

Misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows

—William Shakespeare, “The Tempest”

While the Kindred might feel themselves drawn to other members of their covenant, it is just as understandable for them to find common ground with vampires from other covenants. While the ideology of certain covenants might seem to be too at odds for members to work together, it is not impossible for a Carthian and members of the Invictus to be in the same coterie, or for Sanctified and Acolyte Kindred to work together. In fact, cosmopolitan coterie occur frequently among Kindred society, though not by a large margin and typically among young vampires. Occasionally, coterie of elders and ancillae exist, but they are more rare as time tends to contrive circumstances that drive Kindred apart.

From the viewpoint of players and Storytellers, cosmopolitan coterie are likely to be the norm. It not only allows for more choice for the players, it also gives the Storyteller a variety of plotting options and allows for roleplaying opportunities. On the other hand, sometimes special circumstances are needed to explain why members of certain covenants would be willing to work together.

Of course, a cosmopolitan coterie need not arise simply because the Storyteller allows the players to create characters from a variety of covenants. The possibilities of mixed-covenant coterie have a number of benefits (along with a few flaws) for both players and characters — not to mention numerous story hooks for the Storyteller.

For players, a cosmopolitan coterie allows for built-in conflicts that make for roleplaying opportunities, as philosophical and moral discussions are bound to arise when widely different ideologies meet. A player who enjoys immersion in her character's beliefs will likely find the idea of a cosmopolitan coterie appealing, as it allows her to really consider her character's convictions, especially in regard to the ideals of the covenant with which her character aligns herself.

For characters, the perspectives offered by those with a different outlook can be quite advantageous. They might find allies who have a different, even better, approach to an aspect of vampirism that they themselves lack, be it withstanding the ravages of the Beast, interacting with humanity or playing games of power and influence. In addition, a cosmopolitan coterie offers diversity, which is often an advantage. Different covenants tend to appeal to characters with different strengths and weaknesses, and as the Lancea Sanctum and the Invictus demonstrated before the collapse of the Camarilla, those strengths can thrive in concert. Cooperation between people who complement each other often leads to a greater whole. For example, the Carthians are often quite good at working with mortals, but they tend to neglect the spiritual aspect of unlife, whereas the devotion of the Sanctified to their spiritual side tends to separate them from mortals. As such, a Carthian might be able to strengthen a member of the Lancea Sanctum's connection with humanity,

while the Sanctified might give the Carthian some spiritual insight she was missing.

For Storytellers, a mixed-covenant coterie offers a number of story options, both obvious and less so. Each covenant has its own internal politicking and social dynamics, and it is easy to imagine the kind of tumult that can arise if outsiders are brought into the mix. Imagine a devout Acolyte who tries to rise in the hierarchy while her Ordo Dracul coterie-mate constantly tries to witness the rituals of the Circle. Think of how the other Dragons might react when the entire coterie (including a Carthian firebrand and an Invictus pragmatist) tags along for a social affair. The Storyteller can also play on the paranoia of hard-line covenant members who fear that a cosmopolitan coterie might reveal covenant secrets to outsiders. He can also create stories centered around trying to reconcile differing ideologies, possibly in the light of a citywide cold war between one or more coterie. Indeed, in such a cold war, the characters' coterie might be the only mixed coterie and find itself taking center stage.

One of the strengths of a cosmopolitan coterie is that most chronicle ideas that work for a single-covenant coterie can be applied to one of mixed members with even more interesting results.



THE POWER OF “NO”

Storytellers take heed. Just because we're offering a chapter dedicated to a mixed coterie doesn't mean that you have to accept it. For example, if you have prepared a chronicle that focuses on spiritual awareness, then the threat of political infighting might be too high and ultimately might detract from an otherwise singular theme. The other chapters of this book show the rewards of a more focused group and some of the pitfalls of a more diverse coterie are discussed in this chapter. In the end, it is a good idea for you to examine the theme, mood and goals of your chronicle and talk with the players before ultimately allowing or denying cosmopolitan coterie.



Numbers

Just as vampires have no set number when it comes to the size of a coterie, neither have they defined any specific point at which a coterie is considered a cosmopolitan coterie. In most domains, any coterie that has members from more than one covenant is considered a cosmopolitan coterie. Some coterie have several members from a single covenant and only one member from another, however, which is not always

considered a cosmopolitan coterie. This mainly happens when one covenant is clearly dominant in a domain and a coterie counts most of its members from that covenant. In other domains, two or more covenants are so strongly allied that coteries containing members from only those covenants are not seen as cosmopolitan coteries. Sometimes, a coterie contains only two members, both from different covenants, and that is not always considered a cosmopolitan coterie either.

Presented here are just some of the reasons a cosmopolitan coterie might form; several other reasons might apply. For example, the members of the coterie might be the only neonates in a small city. Their sires might all be in the same cosmopolitan coterie and expect their childer to join together as well. One or more of the coterie's members might have sought out the others in order to spy on their covenants.

The main thing to consider about a cosmopolitan coterie is that it is rarely formed "just because." While this holds true for all coteries, it is more apparent when it comes to mixed-covenant coteries.

Psychology and Formation

A number of reasons exist for why Kindred might seek the company of those outside their covenant. Recognition from before the Embrace, clan considerations, common interests, orders from above and a whole host of other factors can result in one or more Kindred from different covenants forming a coterie.

Recognition

The Embrace is likely the most harrowing and intense experience a person will ever experience, and it thrusts a neonate into a whole new world in which everything she knew and believed is challenged. A neonate struggling to come to terms with what she has become is in a very fragile state of mind. As such, a familiar face might be just the kind of anchor one needs in this Damned condition, no matter how obscure or far removed that familiar face was in life. Occasionally, very recently Embraced Kindred form short-term coteries across covenant boundaries when they recognize each other. This recognition runs all the way from having been actual friends before the Embrace to co-workers who rarely spoke to neonates who recognize each other because they frequented the same grocer to something as fragile as having gone to the same high school.

Generally, the closer the new Kindred were in their former existence, the lower the chances are of such an Embrace happening. While stories do circulate of sires Embracing friends or even siblings (or Kindred who are allies each embracing one side of a closely connected pair), this is so rare as to be almost nonexistent. It is rare for a prospective sire to find something useful or appealing about both sides of a relationship and few vampires want to go to such lengths to comfort a new childer anyway. As such, neonates who were close before the Embrace are more often than not the result of pure chance.

Lesser familiarity happens somewhat more often, however, though mainly in smaller cities. (The characters might know



each other's face from the neighborhood or discover that they attended the same college, though not the same classes.) Recognition need not even be this strong for some neonates to bond. Being fans of the same sports team, having interest in the same hobby, having the same taste in music or enjoying a passion for local history are all reasons neonate Kindred band together. They might be only grasping at straws, but with the loss of humanity and the transition to vampirism, something solid often creates comfort. Working with these ideas might be a good idea during character creation, if the players and Storyteller are trying to come up with ideas for why the coterie formed.

Sometimes, this familiarity results in a tighter focus for the coterie. For example, a coterie made up of musicians might end up forming a band, which gives them access to resources and contacts on the club and performance scene but makes them visible and threatens the secrecy that Kindred try to maintain. A coterie whose members are all passionate about animal rights might spend time demonstrating and conducting awareness rallies and even seeking a mentor in an older Kindred — or at least trying to, possibly making an enemy who resents the intrusion of these annoying neonates.

Characters might also join together due to associations from the very early nights of their Embrace. Their sires could be allies, even in the same coterie, or they might just meet for chess once a month. And then, once the characters are released from their sires, they might gravitate to the other neonates they remember from their first, confusing nights. Such relationships are very much impacted by the experiences of those first encounters and not necessarily by the impressions left by the other neonates. If a young Kindred remembers a sire's contact bestowing him a proud smile and a nod while visiting with her newest childe, he might transfer the memory of that kindness onto the childe and seek her out. Or a neonate might gravitate to a remembered face, even though she associates it with harsh comments made by her sire to the sire of that remembered face about her own potential.

Coterie based on recognition from before (or just after) the Embrace rarely last beyond a few years, since the anchor is no longer needed once a neonate has come to terms with her new existence. Such coterie break up as the members recognize that all that is really holding them together is nothing more than nostalgia. As they become more sophisticated, their mutual inexperience is no longer sufficient to bind them together. The amount of time needed for such a break varies immensely, depending on the personalities of the Kindred involved. Insecure or "clingy" Kindred stick together longer than more independent or self-assured ones.

Many times, a dissolution of such a coterie comes because one of the members decides to establish dominance, becoming the leader. Sometimes this works, but often, it results in a split or bitter infighting.

Yet such coterie do not always break up. Sometimes, members of such a coterie form real bonds of amiability (as much so as Kindred can) or discover a common interest. Some realize that they have managed to accomplish a lot by working together. The band mentioned before might decide that the

money and access to fans from whom to feed outweighs whatever minor differences the coterie might experience.

A coterie founded on past association or erstwhile common interests is rarely as strong as one founded out of genuine need or a common goal or interest discovered later in unlife. They do, however, provide players and Storytellers a quick, easy and believable way of creating a coterie across covenant boundaries. In the case of a coterie formed due to a common interest, it can create any number of story hooks for the Storyteller. For example, to continue with the band, the Storyteller could build a chronicle about the difficulties that arise when the band becomes successful. One or more of the coterie's sires, mentors or rivals might decide that they are entitled to a cut of the proceeds. The characters also have to explain why they keep saying no to daytime interviews. The Prince might even be worried that the group threatens to expose vampires to mortal scrutiny.

Clan Considerations

Recall the old saying, "You can choose your friends, but you can't choose your family." As such, some Kindred liken clan to family. Most can't choose which clan or which sire Embraces them. Kindred can, however, choose their covenant in all but the most oppressive domains and as such, covenant loyalty tends to outstrip clan loyalty among Kindred. That being said, events do occur when Kindred might have different ideas about Kindred society at large, as defined by the covenant they belong to, but be in agreement with their clanmates within the city. Maybe some of the city's Mekhet are deeply involved with the city's university, a group of Daeva are trying to keep the city's red-light district free from police interference, or the city's Ventrue are all dedicated to ascendance of their clan within the city's hierarchy.

Since newly Embraced Kindred often become members of the same covenant as their sires, they might choose to seek out others of their clan rather than join coterie within their own covenant, especially if they find themselves having differences with some of the ideology of their own covenant. Young Kindred might believe that they have more in common with those of their own clan than those of their covenant — and are often disappointed. While a few common traits can be applied to members of a certain clan, differences are likely to be at least as broad as differences between varying clans in the same covenant. Therefore, such single-clan cross-covenant coterie don't often work out, especially when a sire might be worried that her newest childe will be seduced by another covenant. In cities where certain clans have come to present common fronts and many opportunities exist for clans to meet, however, newly Embraced Kindred sometimes form coterie simply because they are the new kids on the block within a certain clan. Such single-clan, cross-covenant coterie present opportunities for both the players and Storyteller to examine the position of the various clans in different factions. Storytellers can also craft stories focusing on the single-clan aspect across covenant boundaries.

Occasionally multi-covenant, mixed clan coterie form due to some alliance of clans. In a city where the Ventrue and

Daeva have allied themselves across the covenants, a coterie of Mekhet, Gangrel and Nosferatu might join together to oppose this. A coterie of Ventrue and Daeva might then come together to preserve the alliance and power of these clans across all the covenants.

Such alliances have both merits and flaws. Most obviously, they create a polarization that could end in more or less open warfare between clans and covenants, something most Kindred actively seek to avoid. Additionally, such monolithic politics often result in the subordination of the individual, and not every character wants to play a cog in the greater machine (as the political existence of the unaligned attests). Just like Kindred of various covenants might supply strength to cover each others' weaknesses, however, such alliances can help create a greater whole. In the preceding example, the Mekhet will be excellent spies to gather dirt on the opposition, while the Gangrel might help when the Ventrue and Daeva manipulate a local gang into attacking Mekhet holdings. On the flip side, the Daeva can lend their vast social acumen to the pragmatic, businesslike approach for which the Ventrue are famed, making the alliance deadly when it comes to securing vital influence.

In the end, however, such clan alliances tend to break up in the face of covenant and personal pressure. After all, covenants tend to place considerations of clan and individual agendas secondary to those of the institution. In such a situation, a mixed-clan coterie could easily be in danger of angering the high-ranking members of their covenant, should they persist.

Sire Relations

Sometimes, cosmopolitan coterie are more or less forced together due to their sires being allies or even in the same coterie. Usually, the sires they work together on something, be it a business venture, a political endeavor or a large research project. The business or project then grows so large that competent and diverse help is needed, so new childer are Embraced and expected to work together to further the designs of their sires.

While the advantages are obvious (once again, the strength of diversity), problems often arise. Different neonates might have problems working together, or the coterie's members might become strong allies and realize that once the project they were Embraced to work on is complete, they are likely to be broken up and "reassigned" by their sires — potentially leading them to sabotage the project. This kind of coterie is also likely to include more than the normal amount of backstabbing, since the various members are competing with each other to look good to their sires. Kindred who are Embraced solely to fulfill once single function might even grow to resent their sires.

Both for players and Storytellers, this kind of coterie offers a wealth of opportunities. First and foremost, there is the ready and easy reason for why a somewhat diverse group of Kindred work together, even if they do not always get along. Players have an excuse to create very competent individuals (within their chosen field). Playing someone who

is forced to cooperate with people he does not like creates built-in conflict, which makes for a compelling roleplaying challenge. For Storytellers, this kind of coterie can be a good excuse to hand the players' characters resources and influence beyond what they might normally be able to access and then see how they manage it. Dramatic tension results from sires' demands for more progress, and a tense situation can arise when one of the coterie's "employers" decides to cheat the others out of a profit or discovery and calls upon her childer to help.

For example, imagine a coterie consisting of members of the Invictus, Carthian Movement and Lancea Sanctum (respectively a Ventrue, Nosferatu and Daeva) who are heavily involved in a string of antiques businesses and an auction house. As a result, the characters have revenue, scholarly contacts and a chance to get their hands on rare books and antiquities. Their business grows large over time, and they decide that they need competent childer to manage part of their business. The Invictus Ventrue Embraces a scholar who is an expert on old books, the Carthian Nosferatu makes a security expert his childer, and the Daeva Embraces a young woman who excelled in business school. These three childer are put to the task of managing the city's largest antique books store, protecting the store from rivals and ensuring a steady stream of both money and rare volumes. If the coterie succeeds, the characters have the opportunity for an excellent start to their own business venture. Should they fail, though, they will likely face the combined wrath of their sires. For the players of the characters, the challenges are the interaction between the widely different characters and facing the business demands of the sires. For the Storyteller, this set-up provides ample opportunity to not only have the character fend off business rivals and struggle to acquire even more varied and interesting books, but also to explore the different ways in which the three covenants do business and the different approach each covenant has to the business at hand.

Common Interests

Apart from those Kindred who focus all their time and attention upon the practices of their chosen philosophy, all vampires have interests separate from their covenants. Sometimes, coterie form on the basis of such interests.

One of the most common interests that draws Kindred from several covenants together is an interest in Kindred history and occult lore. Those Kindred who wonder about the origins of the clans, the purpose of the Kindred and the beginning of the covenants often congregate to share findings and assist each other. While not all such gatherings are coterie in the strictest sense, coterie frequently form based upon these relationships. Such Kindred pool their resources and assist each other's research. These coterie might be viewed with some suspicion from insular covenant members and leaders who fear that covenant secrets might be revealed to outsiders, but startling revelations sometimes come out of this cooperation. A Kindred from one covenant might manage to compare notes on a section of an obscure Kindred

text with scholars from other covenants, shedding light on an unsolved mystery. In addition, the Lancea Sanctum, the Circle of the Crone and the Ordo Dracul have more or less magical rituals. While few Kindred are willing to share all (or even some) of their sacred rituals, a number of curious scholars might be willing to share some details of these rites and esoteric knowledge in the name of research.

This cooperation need not always be about rituals and magic either. Knowledge of other supernatural creatures, such as werewolves and spirits and mortal mages is also debated and shared. In most domains, such coterie must either meet in secret or be content with significant supervision by covenant leaders who do not want proprietary secrets to be shared with outsiders. This can lead to a rather suspenseful chronicle, where the characters must do their best not to be discovered by the higher-ranking members of their covenants.

History is by no means the only thing that draws Kindred together, however. Sometimes, something as seeming innocuous as a classical game or collecting rare items is enough to unite a group of Kindred.

The basic need for survival is also a common reason for a cosmopolitan coterie to form. If several Kindred, especially neonates, manage to make the same powerful vampire their enemy (or inherit this enemy from their sires), they might decide that drawing together lessens the chance of any single one of them being targeted. The sins of the sire also tend to be transferred to childer, so if, for instance, a group of Kindred manages to make enemies of a political faction that fails, or the group is subjected to a blood hunt, their childer would do well to stick together. This is especially true if their sires are more interested in saving their own hides than trying to help their childer. From such a simple introduction, complex stories can arise. Does the young coterie run for it, despite all the dangers of traveling? Do the characters lie low, waiting for the storm to blow over? Do they face their enemy, hoping to settle the score with one mighty blow? Do they sell out their sires and hope for the best? And what if one member decides to sell out the others? What if a high-ranking member of one covenant offers sanctuary to the characters... provided they all join said covenant?

Kindred who are drawn together for survival in the face of overwhelming odds tend to stick quite closely together, with strong bonds of loyalty forming through the hardship. Notions of solidarity grow and can result in a strong, united coterie. Yet what happens when the threat is over? Do the Kindred still stick together, or do they suddenly realize that they have little in common — or even grow sick of the sight of each other? If the latter happens, a breakup can often be quite dramatic.

For Storytellers, such a coterie represents an easy way to more or less force the players' characters to stick together, at least initially. United they stand, divided they face destruction. Internal bickering might arise (and result in some of that inherent conflict that makes for good roleplaying opportunities), but as long as the outside threat exists, the coterie's best interest is to present a common front.

Common Enemies

Sometimes a coterie forms because its common interest is that all the members have mutual enemies. For example, Kindred who have lost sires, lovers or confidantes to another coterie might decide to unite in order to exact revenge upon that coterie. If members of a certain coterie have made enemies of a number of different Kindred, these Kindred could join together to better fight their opponents. If the political climate is one of allies and enemies, coterie of allies often come together to oppose the other side.

When opposing a common enemy, strength in numbers is just one of the possible rewards. Each member might bring some kind of information about the enemy to the group, and diversity means more strengths and more allies to compensate for weaknesses. Such diversity can also be a boon to Storytellers, who can create greater and more intense challenges for players' characters to face.

Such coterie rarely last beyond the current struggle if closer bonds fail to develop. If neonates have joined together to take care of the deranged unbound elder who has killed their sires in his quest for Vitae, then they have little reason to stay together after this elder has been destroyed. On the other hand, sometimes genuine bonds of kinship and respect form through such tribulation. In addition, some high-ranking Kindred in the city's hierarchy might have noticed the success of this new coterie. Does this mean that the coterie is offered a chance to earn prestige or resources when this Kindred asks for help with a little problem he has, or does it spell trouble when the paranoid elder decides that the coterie is just a little *too* competent?

Joining together to stop the enemy of a sire or ally is a rather straightforward approach, but deeper ulterior motives are often at work. Sometimes a young group of Kindred fabricates a threat to one or more of the members' sires and then come to the rescue, hoping to earn accolades and recognition. Such a scheme often requires Kindred from several different covenants, in order to gain insight into possible threats to vampires. It is also obviously dangerous, especially if one of the members of the coterie decides to turn on the others. If it succeeds, however, it will not only mean a reward for the coterie, it will also give the characters a wonderful reason to stick together. None of them can really trust the others not to come clean at some point, so mutually assured silence might be quite advisable.

For example, consider a cosmopolitan coterie made up of a single member of each of the five major covenants. One member is a childer of an influential elder who happens to be a rival of the Prince. This Kindred hatches a plan to wring some favors out of her sire, with the help of her new allies. Drawing upon various connections in the covenants, the coterie begins to spread rumors about a coup attempt being planned by the elder in question. While the Prince brushes these rumors aside, the "loyal childer" makes sure to inform her sire about the rumors she hears that the Prince is secretly planning on sending a dangerous independent mercenary after the elder. At the same time, another member of the coterie hires an independent Kindred to attack the elder. He claims it's a play

in a larger battle of influence, downplaying said elder's powers and claiming that he has succumbed to the weight of the ages. Then, when the mercenary Kindred attacks, the coterie arrives to save the elder before he realizes that the threat is not as dire as he assumed, neatly destroying the unaligned Kindred in the process.

Orders from Above

Sometimes, Kindred are ordered (more or less politely) to form a coterie, usually for a very specific purpose. A Prince might "request" that a group of martially inclined Kindred unite in order to take care of a problem that requires direct force. A group of young Kindred who all have substantial knowledge of computers and electronics might be gathered by their sires to sabotage the businesses of an undead rival. In cities where some or all covenants are allied, covenant leaders might "loan out" members of their covenant to such coteries.

Often, such missions come with some form of payment, even if it is just recognition and a chance to rise in the hierarchy of the city or covenant. In addition, practically inclined Kindred see this as an opportunity to learn from others, presumably competent others. Even if there is no reward, the threat of punishment or censure from above might force Kindred who dislike or even hate each other to work together in strict or oppressive domains.

Such a focused coterie presents a number of options for interesting play. The story itself might become secondary to the

characters' internal interactions, if the Storyteller has arranged it so that the characters know and dislike or mistrust each other from the beginning, or if they just have clashing personalities. Complications might also arise. For example, the newly formed coterie might decide that however much they dislike each other, they dislike being ordered around even less, so they scheme together to get back at whoever forced them into confidence.

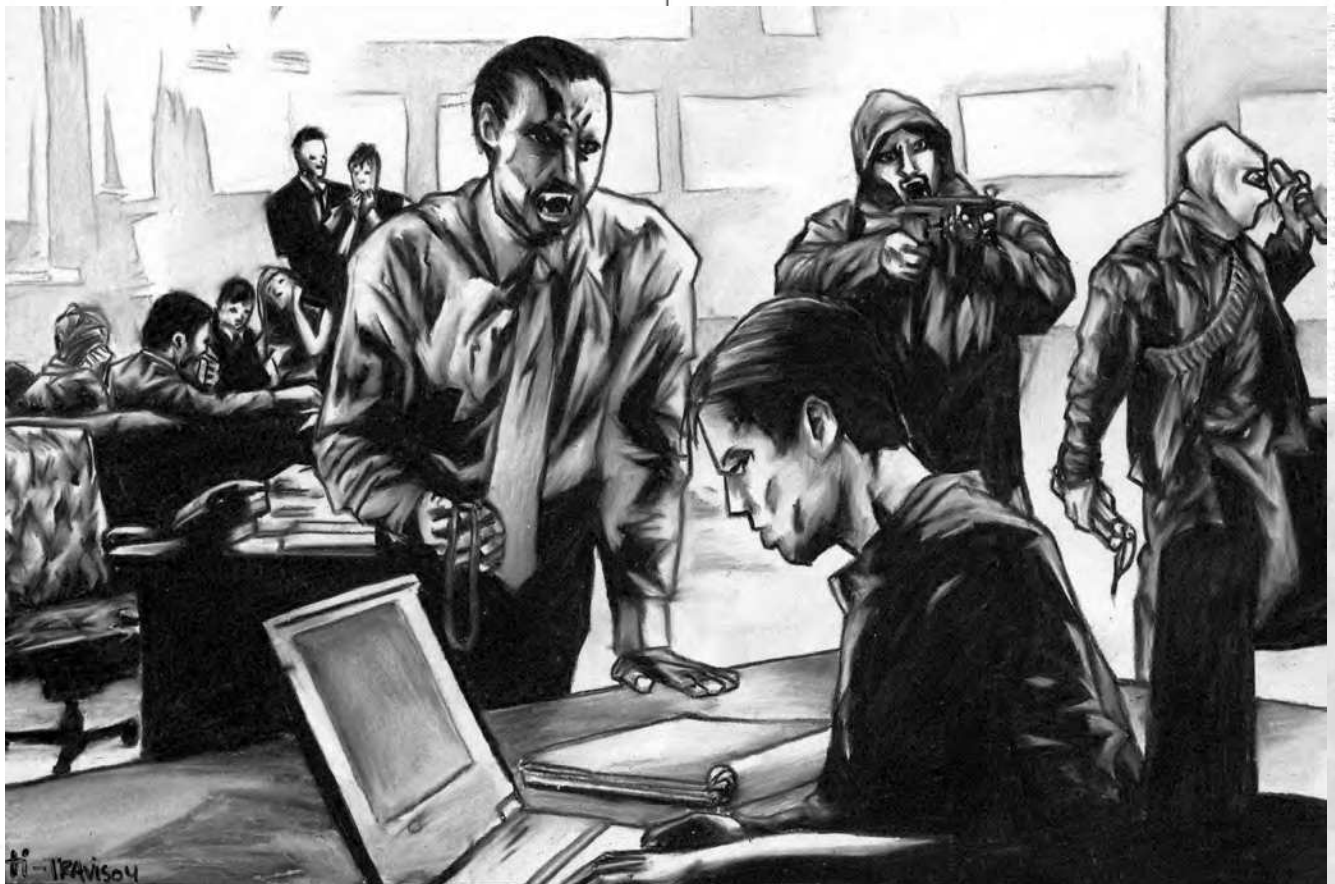
Your Mission...

A coterie formed for a single objective could be a good focus for a one-shot or a short chronicle (though it works for a longer chronicle, too, as long as the characters commit to each other). Covenant and/or city leaders have put the characters together as a team dedicated to resolving a specific situation and each character has a role to play.

Such situations can be many and varied. Maybe the characters are required to scour the ranks of society in their domain in search of a criminal Kindred who eluded the sheriff by going to ground. Maybe strange, magical happenings at local cemeteries require a team of scholars and occultists. Maybe the Prince's new child is being presented to the Kindred community at large and the Prince needs someone to plan the party while she deals with the rabble-rousing Carthians — or vice versa.

Release the Hounds

A variation on the coterie focused on a mandated single purpose is a coterie dedicated to assisting the Sheriff. Such a



group is usually formed by orders from above, though a Sheriff might approach individual Kindred or an entire coterie and ask for assistance, effectively deputizing the characters.

Both positions of Sheriff and Hound have immense potential for stepping on the toes of other covenants. If one covenant holds sway over a domain, the other covenants might suspect the Prince of using the Sheriff and Hounds to silence rivals for power. In domains where the power is more evenly distributed, the Sheriff and Hounds must do their best to appear as neutral as possible. At the same time, both positions might require the assistance of someone who possesses skills that they do not have, or simply require more people to tackle a potentially dangerous situation.

A cosmopolitan coterie assigned to serve as the Sheriff's assistants or helpers to the city's Hounds can help show that no covenant is being unfairly targeted and that the Prince is determined to see justice done for all Kindred in her domain. Of course, that might not actually be the truth at all. Some people might've been chosen to serve in this kind of coterie specifically because they seem bribable or in other ways willing to betray their own contacts or relations. Some Princes truly see the benefit of having a cosmopolitan coterie helping the Sheriff and Hound, though. After all, a devout Kindred from the Lancea Sanctum might be less than forthcoming with an Acolyte Sheriff, but if the Sheriff's Sanctified assistant is the one asking the questions, things might be different.

Of course, the altruistic ideal of involving all the covenants equally is understandably rare among Kindred society. More often than not, the Sheriff chooses his Hounds based somewhat on prevailing covenant alliances. As such, a Hound might decide to show leniency to members of her covenant and allied covenants while arranging for less ideally suited Kindred from other covenants to represent those covenants among the other Hounds. This can create quite an interesting coterie, where everybody is supposed to be working together toward a common goal and complement each other, yet where the reality is much different. Some take to the job at hand easily, while others blunder along, making their covenant look bad by association.

The coterie is usually put together in such a way as to be able to support the Sheriff in areas that might not be her strength, though Kindred with an undeniable talent that can be put to use might also find themselves offered a position in such a coterie. Once again, partisan interests might take over and someone who does not have the skills needed are drafted for a job with the express purpose of making her covenant look bad.

When it comes to the Sheriff, Kindred who have investigative experience or skill at tracking are often preferred, along with Kindred who have made a point of studying the city's Kindred laws. The Sheriff is rarely the brute she's made out to be, as that job typically falls to the Hounds. Anyone with influence in the police can also be put to good use, as can anyone with good connections to her covenant's leadership within the city. Such a coterie usually includes at least one Kindred with combat training (or, failing that, Kindred who look big and tough) for those situations when the Hounds

need to persuade someone to come along... or be beaten into torpor while "resisting arrest."

Of course, not all assistants are experts in the areas needed. Sometimes, Kindred are assigned duty as Sheriff's assistants (even if they aren't formally declared Hounds) as a subtle form of punishment from the Prince. For example, a group of ass-kissing, ladder-climbing courtiers might find themselves given the "prestigious position" of Assistants to the Sheriff, complete with a more or less official announcement and find themselves completely out of their league. It gets even worse if said courtiers are rivals or even direct enemies. They now have a chance to impress the Prince, gain an ally in the Sheriff and maybe even frame their rivals but only if they can put aside their differences, improvise in the many areas where they are lacking and avoid making complete fools of themselves.

Hounds and their coterie tend to be made up mainly of muscle, with a few people who know how to track and travel. Such coterie are far less common than the coterie that directly support the Sheriff, if for no other reason that the Prince and Primogen prefer that as few people as possible know about whom they eliminate. If a city includes Kindred with an aggressive bent, Princes sometimes try to include them among the Hounds in order to give them a focus for their aggression. And if they have some useful skill, even better.

Being the Sheriff's assistants or recognized Hounds are both good ways for neonates to gain respect, recognition and status despite their youth. While some might see this as selling out and many others might only respect them out of fear, these are small considerations for coterie willing to take any path to power.

Of course, sometimes a coterie that helps the powers that be is put together from Kindred with vastly different outlooks on the matter at hand. Some might be bootlickers who are either given the position as a reward or assigned the position by some title-holder in the hopes that they will screw up. Others might be rebels and/or the members of the opposition, either brought in to make the arrangement fair (or, more likely, *seem* fair) or because the established hierarchy heeds the old adage, "Keep your friends close and your enemies closer." Such a coterie is likely to have some volatile group dynamics, and the initial distrust can make even simple cases a lot more difficult. The coterie must either overcome its internal differences or face failure, with consequences for both sides. The characters will need to trust each other despite their different views, sometimes even to the point of leaving their Requiems in the hands of their potential enemies.

Sometimes, however, a coterie dedicated to assisting the Sheriff forms independently. Suppose a group of young vampires decides to band together and go after the target of a Regent's ire without being recognized by the Regent as formal Hounds. If the characters succeed, they have a chance to gain recognition and possibly rewards, but if they fail, they stand to make things very difficult for themselves. Kindred in official positions rarely take kindly to amateurs complicating their affairs. It becomes even more troublesome if the characters manage to interfere with the Sheriff or any "real" Hounds.

At best, they might be censured or punished. At worst, the Regent might have new subjects of his ire.

With both success and failure come good reasons to stick together. If the characters fail, they share the blame and punishment and might find themselves unpopular with everyone but each other. If they succeed, an authority figure could make them the official Hounds. In either case, individual members might realize that they don't like each other or have little in common, apart from a desire to reap the rewards of bringing down their targets, which can lead to fractious group dynamics when the coterie is forced to stick together.

Sticking Together

While single-goal coteries make for fine short stories, what about longer-spanning chronicles? If the coterie was formed with a single, set goal in mind, what happens when its members achieve that goal?

Sometimes, a coterie does stay together after it has achieved the purpose at hand. The coterie's individual members might have formed close ties (as close as vampires ever allow each other to grow, that is) and genuinely have come to rely on each other's company. On the other hand, they might have recognized just how efficient they are together and decided to make the arrangement permanent.

Sometimes, more sinister motives arise. Maybe, during the course of the mission, one of the members gained some hold over the others. She might know they committed diablerie, broke some of the domain's rules or performed other acts that could land them in hot water if revealed. As a result, this Kindred now demands that the coterie stay together and that she be recognized as the leader.

Another nasty option is that whomever the characters performed the service for now wants them dead. During the course of their duty, they might have learned something that their erstwhile benefactor does not want to become public knowledge. This leaves the characters with no option but to stick together in order to survive and deal with their new enemy.

If the characters were given a reward, this reward might be a reason to stick together. If an influential Kindred grants the characters significant interest in one of his own endeavors as a reward for a dangerous job, the coterie might not be willing to divide up the payment. The characters might decide to stick together and reap the profits of their new resource instead.

If the Storyteller decides from the start to extend the story beyond a single objective, it is a good idea to make plans for keeping the characters solvent after the problem forcing them together is resolved. One good idea is to make sure that the players create characters who will not instantly dislike each other (such as an arrogant, high-society snob being forced to work with an Embraced dock worker and devoted union man). While minor differences can be worked around, and will likely lead to rewarding group dynamics, major trouble between the characters can end up stretching the suspension of disbelief just a little too far in the end.

Also a good idea is to make sure that the characters have abilities, advantages or interests outside the role they play in

the coterie or that one of the other characters might see use for whatever abilities brought the Kindred into the group. A character with his sights set on becoming a Harpy might not have any interest in sticking with the coterie after the objective is completed, but if he learns that one of the other members is a historian with plenty of dirt on local ancillae and elders, he might just stay.

The Storyteller can also devise events that lead to the coterie wanting to stick together after the initial situation concludes. A common enemy or reward or a realization of the advantages of working together are all good reasons. The Storyteller might set up the story so that the characters are guaranteed to make at least one powerful enemy, or he could tailor the chronicle so that the players realize just how effective their characters are together.

For example, the coterie is formed in order to shut down a corrupt elder's main business through sabotage and industrial espionage. A shadowy mentor assembles a diverse group with a corporate expert, a hacker, an experienced burglar and a structural engineer. During the course of the job at hand, the characters not only manage to make an enemy of the elder whose business they are attacking, they also learn just what they are capable of when they put their various abilities to use in synergy. As the clandestine cause draws to a close, they consider sticking together. This does not endear them to their mysterious employer, who fears what they can reveal if they ever discern his identity. As a result, a preemptive strike might be in order...

Expectations of the Sire

One thing vital to consider about cosmopolitan coteries is that a Kindred's sire might have plans for that Kindred that doesn't involve her running off and joining some motley crew of young rabble. Embracing progeny represents a serious investment and a violation of the rules of the Kindred condition and is never done frivolously. While a neonate might certainly rebel against her sire (and this might be just the thing to drive her into a group of equally rebellious neonates), few Kindred are willing to brook consistent insubordination from their childer. They often have ways of ensuring cooperation, however unwilling, but if such cooperation cannot be assured, few Kindred are willing to destroy their childer outright. Of course, sires with such attitudes might be just the kind of Kindred that foster resentment in childer, causing them to flee their draconian protective custody. Often, young Kindred who resent their sires meet at Kindred gatherings and conspire to break away, hoping that their respective sires will either be intimidated by the show of unity or simply decide not to retaliate if each childe has proven to have strong allies. Some shrewd, rebellious Kindred try to align themselves with other vampires who are still in the good graces of their sires, hoping that their own sire won't strike at the coterie for fear of angering the Kindred who still appreciates his childe.

Sires often look askance at childer who run off and join a cosmopolitan coterie, especially if the sire herself is part of a single-covenant coterie or one-clan brood — or if her childe joins a coterie that has members from covenants with which

the sire has issues. Usually, a sire will let her childe “run loose” a little, more often than not subtly manipulating things so that her childe might come to realize the error of his ways. Yet sometimes a sire will demand her childe break with his new allies. At other times, the sire accepts the new arrangement and hopes for the best. One thing that is almost certain is that the sire will not simply disregard her childe (though she might certainly consider the experience a lesson learned for any future childer she might Embrace).

With all this in mind, two things often happen when a childe joins a cosmopolitan coterie against her sire’s wishes. The first is that she (and probably her coteriemates too) makes an enemy of her sire. Sometimes the sire is content to utterly ruin her childe socially and economically, perhaps hoping that said childe will come crawling back. Other times, the sire goes so far as to want her childe destroyed. A more dramatic possibility is that a sire develops an animosity toward the rest of the coterie, perhaps thinking that they seduced away her childe. The sire might then monitor affairs in the hope that the coterie breaks up or possibly even try to destroy the others while her childe is otherwise occupied.

The second possibility is that the sire accepts the choice of her childe at least somewhat and decides to make the best of it. This can result in the entire coterie gaining a mentor (or just an ally) in this one sire. In this case, the sire might actually help the entire coterie if she feels that doing so would benefit her childe.

A number of story hooks can arise from sire interference in a coterie that consists mainly of rebellious childer. Sires might plot to pull the coterie apart, or they might clash, with one sire wanting to destroy the childer of others to drive her own childe back to her.

Concerning the Covenants

When considering cosmopolitan coteries, it is important to remember that covenants are not monolithic entities constantly involved in a shadow war against each other. Certainly, the Lancea Sanctum and the Circle of the Crone have a degree of animosity toward each other and the hierarchical Invictus is strongly at odds with the egalitarianism espoused by the Carthians. By and large, though, the covenants realize that they must accept each other to avoid outright war — which only the self-destructive would want. Therefore, it is quite possible for coteries with members from different covenants to form and exist without any trouble. After all, people with vastly different political and religious beliefs can and do become friends. Of course, mortals are not ageless beings who slowly drift away from their humanity. One thing Kindred excel at is holding grudges, so pragmatic reality isn’t always enough for covenants to keep things civil.

Player Concerns

As a player, it is important to remember that most members of a covenant are not fanatics. Sure, all of the covenants have people who believe extremely strongly in the

party line, but such Kindred are rarely the type to join cosmopolitan coteries.

On the other hand, throwing out the ideology and beliefs of a covenant simply to fit into a multi-covenant coterie is selling the covenants short. Sure, the Sanctified character and the Ordo Dracul character have vastly different beliefs and might even end up arguing from time to time, but as long as this conflict does not split up the coterie, it poses more of a roleplaying opportunity than a problem.

As such, players who create characters for a multi-covenant chronicle should spend some time not only defining the character’s beliefs and convictions concerning her own covenant, but also how she might react to the dogma of other covenants.

Covenant by Covenant

While no Kindred should be a walking stereotype, covenants do attract certain types of personalities, so some generalizations can be made. The following, however, are just that: generalizations. They can serve as a good springboard for a character concept or a hook that a character might want to develop in relation to another covenant.

The Carthian Movement

Carthians are both the easiest and the hardest Kindred to get along with. For older and more established Kindred, as well as those with experience in Kindred Realpolitik, the Carthians’ fervent dedication to higher ideals seems naïve and often dangerously foolish. Their strong secular focus also tends to rattle the more devout members of the Lancea Sanctum and Circle of the Crone. On the other hand, younger Kindred, and those with no power, status or influence, are often intrigued by the Carthian ideal. After all, the equality of opportunity that the covenant proposes tends to resonate most strongly with those who stand to gain from it, rather than those who stand to lose.

Those Kindred who join coteries with Carthians for reasons other than interest in their political ideals often find the Carthians trying allies. Carthians are nothing if not willing to discuss politics and ideals, and this can quickly become taxing.

Many young Kindred of other covenants speak with Carthians at least in passing, and from these relationships coteries sometimes form. Elders of other covenants tend to look down their noses at such coteries, troubled that the Carthians might seduce members to their vainly idealistic movement. Some sires, however, see this as a valuable learning experience for their childer. They know that the cold, harsh realities of the real world will eventually shatter whatever fancies with which their childe’s Carthian associates have filled her head.

This is not to say that all Carthian ideas are doomed to fail or that all mixed-covenant coteries that contain Carthians are dedicated to rebelling against the power structure or seducing members of other covenants. Many Carthians use cosmopolitan coteries (even those that contain no Carthians) as examples of how cooperation between Kindred can lead to



something bigger and better. Of course, most other Kindred shrug this off and claim that similar cooperation can never work on a grander scale. From time to time, however, the Carthians illustrate their points when a mixed-covenant coterie accomplishes something that a single-covenant coterie has been unable to do.

What Carthians most often have to offer mixed-covenant coteries is a connection to and contacts among mortal society. Many Carthians are relatively young, and most of them tend to maintain at least some connection to the mortal world — something a Dragon sorcerer or Acolyte cultist might have neglected.

For their part, Carthians tend to enjoy cosmopolitan coteries. Anything that fosters understanding between Kindred is positive as far as they are concerned, and it can be used as an object lesson. Such coteries can also help Carthian members learn more about other covenants and influence nascent leaders within these covenants toward a more open and equal distribution of power. In cities dominated by Carthians, mixed-covenant coteries are much more common than normal, as the city leadership actively encourages such cooperation. The same is true in those domains where the revolution has become its own enemy as well, because the leaders want spies in other factions.

In fact, the Carthians' appreciation of the cosmopolitan coterie goes so far as to quiet the normally verbose members of the covenant when the subject of politics come up. The

Carthians believe that their ideas are validated by the mere existence of a cosmopolitan coterie and that other Kindred will realize what this means on their own in due time.

The Circle of the Drone

Almost as secretive as the Ordo Dracul, more enigmatic and undoubtedly unorthodox, the Acolytes are the sort of Kindred with whom one gets along famously or not at all. Outsiders rarely take any middle ground where the Circle is concerned. Yet this is precisely what happens in a cosmopolitan coterie if for no other reason than because Acolytes who join cosmopolitan coteries tend to be the more open-minded or approachable of the lot. Add to this the fact that they can be just as fervent as the Carthians, though in spiritual matters rather than political, and it is a wonder that anyone is ever willing to join them in a mixed coterie. Mistrust runs high on both sides. The Acolytes wonder if a mixed-covenant coterie might result in their most guarded practices being exposed, and other covenants worry that the Circle might try to convert members to their pagan beliefs.

Individual cultists are often easier to get along with than the cult taken as a whole, however. Their chief motivation for joining a coterie is often to challenge their own perceptions, as the Circle sometimes recognizes that other covenants might have some insight that can lead to greater understanding. Whereas the Ordo Dracul is interested in any and all kinds of knowledge — be it occult, historical or otherwise —

the Circle tends to focus mainly on occult secrets and the sorts of experiences that can broaden her understanding of the Kindred world.

Indeed, it is knowledge of many and varied occult secrets, some of them quite dark and forbidding, that an Acolyte can add to a cosmopolitan coterie. While a Dragon is likely to have some esoteric knowledge and some secrets about the vampiric condition, the Acolytes have access to secrets that none of the other covenants have, due to their focus on the natural world and their connection with old powers. While they are even less willing to let others know of their secrets than the Dragons are, they are still willing to give some insight to members of their own coterie. Of course, such insights rarely come cheaply (and never free). An exchange of knowledge is often required, sometimes along with swearing bloody oaths or some form of trial. Many Acolytes believe that one must suffer punishing and exacting epiphanies before one can truly understand what the Circle teaches, so they often demand as much from those who want to learn what they know. More often than not, the Acolytes hope that Kindred who go through such tests will gain enlightenment that leads her to abandon her former covenant and join the Circle.

Another kind of coterie that often appeals to the Acolytes is a physically oriented one. Those Circle members who focus on testing their bodies often find like-minded Kindred of other covenants with whom to experience the limits of endurance. These Kindred are sometimes put off by the extremes to which an Acolyte is willing to go, but often, they are simply spurred on, and such coterie can grow quite skilled through Circle associates. Such coterie are well liked by those who can direct them if they can be put to good use, but they are feared and distrusted if they cannot be commanded, retained or manipulated.

From the perspective of the Circle, cosmopolitan coterie present both a danger and an opportunity. The danger is the distraction that might occur from an Acolyte's beliefs, especially if he is allied with Dragons or members of the Lancea Sanctum. As such, many Acolyte members of cosmopolitan coterie focus strongly on their beliefs and teachings, making sure that they rarely miss gatherings and rituals, in order to keep their faith strong. The opportunity to convert other Kindred to the Circle's viewpoint is something the Circle is well aware of and one reason that it encourages the formation of cosmopolitan coterie. Of course, most Acolytes are not preachers who try to convert others of their coterie to the Circle's beliefs (if for no other reason, then because other covenants might take offense as such blatant proselytizing). In cities where the Circle is strong, however, the Acolytes have little to fear in doing so. In such Circle-dominated cities, Acolytes are far more often encouraged to be members of cosmopolitan coterie without supervision, as the covenant leaders are less worried about spiritual pollution.

When the Circle is not in a position of strength, though, individual members are often watched and sometimes interrogated and punished for mixing with outsiders.

One might wonder what members of other covenants have to offer an Invictus Kindred. After all, the covenant has elders who usually conspire to keep it in a comfortable position, and its finely defined hierarchy cannot be ascended with outside help. Also, a good deal of Invictus Kindred tend to be arrogant and consider their covenant to be more exclusive than any of the others — mainly, they say, because you need brains and skill to succeed in the Invictus but can get by in the other covenants with simple devotion. It is a wonder, then, that anyone wants to be in a coterie with the stereotypical member of the Invictus.

Not all Invictus Kindred are arrogant elitists, however, and even those who are can sometimes find common ground with members of other covenants. As the covenant is more of a political organization than a system of belief, Invictus Kindred tend to be more functionally diverse than members of other covenants, with much broader interests. And the Invictus is more than willing to form partnerships in order to increase influence or resources. Such partnerships often arise when the cornerstone diversity of the Invictus fails. As history has shown, the Invictus and the Lancea Sanctum complement each other quite well, with the spirituality of the Lancea Sanctum aiding the worldliness of the Invictus. The Lancea Sanctum is not the only covenant that has something to offer, though. Much as the Invictus is loath to admit it, its members often have trouble truly relating to mortals instead of seeing them as resources. In a situation where empathy with humanity is required, an Invictus Kindred might seek the aid of a Carthian. Also, the secular approach of the Invictus often leaves individual members lacking when it comes to esoteric knowledge about the Kindred, so an inquisitive Invictus Kindred might be drawn to a Dragon or Acolyte.

Interestingly enough, most Invictus Kindred join cosmopolitan coterie in cities where the Invictus isn't dominant or where it contests power with other covenants. In cities where the Invictus holds power, most members are focused on social climbing. Many Invictus Kindred understand that relationships with Kindred from other covenants can be a benefit, though. Such Kindred hope to score points with their own covenant by acting as a liaison with other covenants, banking on the belief that Kindred society isn't static and that other factions might gain power. In other domains, many Invictus Kindred try to "get in good" with the covenant that holds power, while others eschew political power in the Kindred world and recognize the kind of resources that members of other covenants can offer. Instead of the political power about which their covenant is so often obsessed, such Kindred might decide that occult knowledge or knowledge of the Kindred condition is power and pursue this avenue. Alternatively, they might take a more Carthian approach to humanity, hoping to gain an edge in battles of influence by neglecting hierarchical rank (and the enemies that come with such a rank) and just accruing resources.

One thing that redeems Invictus Kindred in the eyes of their peers is that Kindred of other covenants who join in a cosmopolitan coterie with one rarely have to listen to

proselytizing. The First Estate makes no grand speeches about political equality or the power of the Old Ways or the need for adherence to the teachings of Longinus' laws. Instead, most Invictus Kindred focus on matters at hand and leave political and religious discussions for others. As a matter of fact, although Invictus Kindred tout the virtues of their covenant, they rarely try to convert their fellow coterie-mates. From a very pragmatic standpoint, they don't want the competition. The Invictus hierarchy has only so many rungs on the ladder and it would be foolish to bring in more members to share those rungs. Of course, Invictus Kindred are not perfect coterie-mates. They tend to think of themselves as leaders. Even if they aren't, they often take their fellows for granted and are not above using (or even abusing) their supposed allies. After all, that is the way the Invictus works.

If in good standing with the covenant, an Invictus Kindred can often contribute surprising resources to a coterie, in the form of both mortal resources and pull in Kindred politics. Those who are on the bottom have the advantage that very few covenant leaders care at all what they are doing. Although they might not have much political and social pull, they are still likely to bring the pragmatic mindset and can-do spirit of the Invictus to the coterie. Others might also consider their Invictus coterie-mate an "in" into the covenant, even if she is at the bottom of the pecking order.

Since most Invictus Kindred are groomed by their sires for a "career" in the First Estate, they tend to make excellent leaders, organizers, bureaucrats or advisors. Of course, this also leads to situations in which an Invictus Kindred in a cosmopolitan coterie is merely using her coterie-mates to further her own goals. Such "use and discard" mentality can be exceptionally dangerous if the Invictus Kindred is coarse or rude; she might end up making enemies of her former allies. With that in mind, some Invictus who are members of a cosmopolitan coterie only to use the others try to divorce themselves from their former coterie less dramatically once they cannot get any more out of them.

In general, the Invictus approves of cosmopolitan coterie almost as much as the Carthians do. With no central spiritual dogma, the Invictus is less worried that members will be exposed to unorthodox ideas from anyone except the Carthians. A certain level of confidence also applies here, as most Invictus leaders consider the covenant so attractive that no Kindred could be seduced away from it. After all, the Invictus is the premiere of the covenants. In cities where the Invictus is strong, the leaders often encourage cosmopolitan coterie in order to keep an eye on rival covenants and to promote an air of cooperation that might make the other covenants believe that they have some influence. In cities where the Invictus holds less power, mixed-covenant coterie represent an excellent way of gleaning information about the stronger covenants.

The Lancea Sanctum

As the self-styled — and widely accepted — spiritual advisors of the Kindred, the more moderate members of the Lancea

Sanctum work rather well with other Kindred, especially considering normal Kindred relations. Many take a keen interest in forming cosmopolitan coterie. On the other hand, a good number of the Sanctified are fanatics, something that can lead to frustration at best and the splitting of a coterie at worst, when an issue arises.

Many of the Sanctified join cosmopolitan coterie that have spiritual interests or who are involved with Kindred history, especially anything related to *The Testament of Longinus*. They also offer their services as spiritual guides and advisors in religious matters, sometimes pressing their services upon others without having been invited to do so. Indeed, missionary work is the primary motive for the Sanctified to seek out Kindred from other covenants. Kindred from the Lancea Sanctum are also some of the most willing when it comes to being ordered to form a coterie, at least as long as the goals for the coterie seem worthwhile. Such directions, however, usually have more weight when the order comes from someone higher in the hierarchy of the Lancea Sanctum, as opposed to a high-ranking member of the city hierarchy who is not among the Sanctified. While the Lancea Sanctum isn't quite as hierarchical and focused on ladder-climbing as the Invictus, its members tend to have just a bit less ambition and a bit more straightforward loyalty. Of course, this idealism can also be a problem if those Kindred they join are less idealistic.

In many ways, the Lancea Sanctum exemplifies the best and worst of a mixed-covenant coterie. When it works, the Sanctified can be the glue that holds the group together, the mediator, the one the others can come to with their problems, the confessor figure offering absolution. For example, if an Invictus or Carthian Kindred finds herself experiencing extreme moral doubt and guilt over breaking one of the central laws of the Kindred, maybe having Embraced or endangered the Masquerade, a Sanctified counselor can listen to what the Kindred has to say, offer advice based on Kindred texts and prescribe a proper penance. Such confessional work can often keep a Kindred from sliding into spiritual decay and losing herself to inhumanity.

When it doesn't work, the Sanctified members often try to convert the others and insist that she should lead, on the basis of her supposed moralistic superiority. Few coterie can survive such a member. Yet those Sanctified who truly consider themselves the keepers of their fellow Kindred can sometimes hold even extremely varied groups together by sheer perseverance and charisma. For example, a Sanctified Kindred might bring a member of the coterie who was sliding into moral decay back or rally the coterie in the face of overwhelming opposition with inspiring oration and leading by example. When it comes to Sanctified who consider themselves above their coterie-mates spiritually and morally, a few leave in exasperation, but many tough it out. They see the tribulation as a form of penance, believing they are doing good work or gaining satisfaction from the instances when they do get through to their coterie-mates.

Apart from spiritual advice, most Sanctified can offer their coterie at least some help from the Lancea Sanctum, unless

she is totally at odds with her covenant (which might happen if the Sanctified in question shows too much interest in and sympathy with divergent beliefs espoused by her coteriemates). Help can come in the form of conversations with more experienced confessors or access to the covenant's influence (which, while nowhere near as large as that of the Invictus, is still formidable).

Other resources depend on the Kindred in question. A true disciple of the covenant will likely have a lot of insight to offer about *The Testament of Longinus*, which can help shed light on the Kindred condition, Kindred history or moral dilemmas faced by a coterie. The size and influence of the covenant means it harbors a number of politically savvy members as well. When it comes to influence within the Catholic Church, the Lancea Sanctum is second to none. This influence can be turned into a source of hard cash at the very least, but it can also provide access to experts in such fields as ancient languages, angelology, miracles or demonology.

In general, the Lancea Sanctum encourages cosmopolitan coterie, as it represents not only an opportunity for members to spread the faith, but also to be there for every Kindred the way the covenant is meant to. Sanctified leaders keep tabs on any covenant member who joins a coterie containing those Kindred whose spiritual beliefs run counter to those of the covenant, however. Some Sanctified also espouse the belief that it is healthy for members of the covenant to be exposed to other ideas and beliefs in order for them to consider their own and come to the conclusion that the Lancea Sanctum's dogma is correct.

Unofficially, the Lancea Sanctum prefers cosmopolitan coterie in stable domains in which either it or the Invictus is dominant. The general belief is that not all members are strong enough in the faith, so it is best to have them be exposed to other ideas in a stable domain rather than a domain where they might be tempted to change covenants.

The Ordo Dracul

Dragons are some of the rarest members of cosmopolitan coterie, yet at the same time, they are some of the most inquisitive Kindred when it comes to occult lore and the history and metaphysics of vampires. Indeed, they represent the one covenant that all the other covenants have substantial interests in learning more about, though each for their own reasons.

In general, the Ordo Dracul believes that its rites are the most important and powerful among all the covenants, as witnessed by the fact that their founder had himself turned into a vampire by its own accounts. The Dragons are also quite interested in gaining access to the knowledge of the other covenants, be it the Circle of the Crone's strange rituals or the many passages of *The Testament of Longinus* possessed by the Lancea Sanctum. As such, many Dragons join cosmopolitan coterie in order to gain a greater knowledge of outside history and obscured secrets. Not all Dragons have ulterior motives, however. Some are dedicated scholars who are more than willing to share their findings with other knowledgeable

types. In fact, scholarship is one of the main factors that brings Dragons into cosmopolitan coterie.

Being the two most conventionally spiritual covenants, the Circle of the Crone and the Lancea Sanctum are the ones that most consistently object to members joining with Dragons. The Acolytes see the Order's beliefs and practices as artificial, contrary to their own naturalistic origin philosophies. The Lancea Sanctum worries about the sinful practices and beliefs of the Order's members, wary of putting the individual before the Creator. That is not to say, however, that Acolytes or Sanctified Kindred never join with Dragons or that there is always an element of distrust. Those who do join a coterie with a Dragon are simply more likely to raise eyebrows among covenant superiors (and, in the case of members of the Lancea Sanctum, by the Inquisitors of that covenant).

Many of the reasons given thus far can be applied to explain why a member of the Lancea Sanctum might overlook the comparative heresy of a Dragon and join her in a coterie. Knowledge (and the search for it) is one of the key elements in bringing such philosophically divergent Kindred together, but a devout member of the Lancea Sanctum might also ally herself with a Dragon in hopes of converting him to her beliefs. This can give rise to many intense discussions and might, in the end, result in some genuine respect between the two Kindred — much like Aquinas discoursing with Averroës.

The Invictus and the Carthians have fewer reservations about the Dragons, though a number of Kindred in both covenants certainly resent what they see as flippant disregard for the vampiric condition espoused by the Ordo Dracul.

In mixed-covenant coterie, Dragons are often scholars, lore-keepers, historians and linguistic experts. If they are part of a coterie that is not dedicated to scholarship, they tend to be in advisory positions rather than leading the coterie. They often consider themselves the philosophical leaders, though, manipulating the less knowledgeable and enlightened members of the coterie.

For their part, the Dragons have a pragmatic relationship with the concept of mixed-covenant coterie. It is obvious that such coterie provide not only insight into other covenants, but access to their lore, fresh perspectives on old problems and access to occult secrets. Yet it also exposes the Ordo Dracul's secrets to members of other covenants. While this wouldn't be a problem if the Dragons who joined such coterie were as secretive as the covenant leaders would prefer, the fact is that most of the Dragons who cooperate with others tend to be the kind of reciprocal scholars who are more than willing to share what they know with others if that can help solve problems. As such, exceptionally territorial leaders of the Order try to keep a sharp eye on Dragons who associate with member of other covenants. They might occasionally bring such a Kindred in for interrogation, demand that the Kindred leave the coterie or threaten destruction if she does not comply. At other times, such elders might inflict physical or psychological punishments (often with the use of Disciplines) in order to teach fellow Dragons not to share covenant secrets.

Some might see this as paranoia on the part of the Ordo Dracul's leaders, but in truth, many are the Kindred who seek to ally themselves with a Dragon only in order to learn the covenant's esoteric secrets. In such a situation, the other coterie members might dispose of their Dragon member when they believe they have learned all they can. If the Kindred in question becomes aware of this situation, it is usually too late to go to the covenant for help (as more xenophobic members are likely to rebuke the Kindred for revealing secrets), so the Dragon must continue to keep herself valuable to the coterie. This value can come in the form of providing more secrets and information, thus creating a dangerous downward spiral.

Methodology

Whatever reason a cosmopolitan coterie has for coming together, that reason tends to dominate the night-to-night affairs of the coterie, as well as its long-term goals. A coterie that forms for survival in the face of a common enemy will devote its energy to fighting this enemy, while coterie focused on gathering resources and mortal influence for their members will be involved in taking care of businesses and looking for new sources of revenue.

Keeping Busy

When you come right down to it, very little separates "business as usual" for a cosmopolitan coterie from that of a single-covenant coterie with the same interests. A mixed-covenant coterie bent on destroying a common rival will not differ overmuch in practice from a coterie drawn from a single covenant with the same aim.

Coterie rites are mainly found in the more spiritual covenants, namely the Ordo Dracul, Circle of the Crone and Lancea Sanctum. The most private of these rituals are rarely performed with coterie of mixed covenants. Not only are the Kindred who can perform them rarely interested in sharing such knowledge with outsiders, the other members of the coterie will probably find the rites either pointless (in the case of the Carthians and the Invictus) or blasphemous (in the case of the Ordo Dracul, Circle of the Crone and Lancea Sanctum). Sometimes, a coterie that contains members of the spiritual covenants will develop specific rituals for that coterie. Such often happens when Dragons and the Sanctified are in coterie together or when both (or either) share a coterie with Carthians or Invictus Kindred. Acolytes are very rarely willing to design rites for Kindred outside their covenant, as it is not considered appropriate to bring such enlightenment to those outside the Circle. On the other hand, few non-Acolyte Kindred are interested in participating in Circle of the Crone rites.

This has potential to cause schisms within a coterie, with separate members following separate rites and some not having any specific dogma to practice. As such, some spiritually inclined characters decide to create rites specifically for their coterie. Such rites incorporate something from each covenant involved, fulfilling some function of the major covenant rites, while not offending the beliefs of the individual members.

This is often artificial (just imagine an Acolyte and one of the Sanctified trying to agree on just whom should be venerated in a rite of blessing), but it can be a chance for Kindred from the Carthians and Invictus to show their worth, stepping in as mediators and helping matters along. These Kindred might know little about spiritual matters, but standing on the outside, they can facilitate the creation of nondenominational observances that can satisfy the entire coterie.

Covenant responsibilities are mainly meetings of all the members of the covenant in a certain domain, meetings from which non-covenant members are typically excluded. In a single-covenant coterie, the entire coterie can attend the meeting, but such is not always the case with cosmopolitan coterie. Sometimes members of a cosmopolitan coterie have certain other covenant duties (such as Acolytes who help with initiation rites for newcomers to the covenant or a Sanctified who serves as a mentor to a younger Kindred), which they must attend to without the rest of her coterie.

Single-Clan Coterie

Kindred assemble themselves into coterie based on more than just covenant affiliation. In some locales, the undead find that similarities of the Blood carry more weight than similarities of philosophy. Alternatively, they might find the sense of community generated by the Blood to be more primal, and consequently more deeply connecting, than that generated by mere philosophical similarities. Sometimes, vampires Embrace whole broods as a tactic in the Danse Macabre. Others might trust only in the sense of community engendered by the Blood.

A vampire who gives precedence to the power of the Blood over the ideological connections of the covenants and joins a coterie of like-minded, like-blooded vampires, is making a statement — a potentially dangerous one at that. Such an act places monumental value on the shared identity inherent in the Blood and says that the old primordial connections of Vitae are stronger than the more cerebral (and more malleable) alliances of the covenants. It can also be construed as insolent, heretical or rustic to those whose loyalties lie with the covenant system.

Kindred who stick with their own clan regardless of covenant affiliation do so for a variety of reasons. The unbound certainly have no reason to assemble into coterie based on anything *but* the Blood. Some Kindred prefer single-clan coterie because they fancy themselves ultraconservative, icons of a time when alliances were based not on matters of philosophy, opinion and doctrine, but on the fundamental similarities granted by the Embrace. Alternatively, some young Kindred assemble themselves into single-clan coterie as a means of rebelling against the established norms of their community and against the hegemony (or excesses) of the covenants.

Players or Storytellers might want to play a single-clan chronicle to tell a story with a very focused theme that resonates with the chosen clan. An all-Gangrel coterie will have different goals — and different means of attaining those goals — than a coterie of Mekhet or Ventrue vampires.



SINGLE-CLAN THEMES

While covenant affiliation is usually the deciding factor when Kindred enter coterie, it's not the only factor. Each clan has its own strengths, weaknesses and outlook on the Requiem that are determined by the Blood. Those traits shared by members of a clan are just as legitimate as philosophical outlook in determining who a Kindred chooses as her allies.

One reason for playing a single-clan coterie is to more closely explore the themes relevant to a particular clan. The following is a list of the clans and what kinds of stories a troupe might tell with a single-clan coterie:

Clan	Theme
Daeva	Decadence, sexuality, social competition and intrigue
Gangrel	Civilization versus barbarism, slavery versus freedom, security versus safety
Mekhet	The power of the intellect, overt versus covert machinations, knowledge versus wisdom, pursuit of occult knowledge (or other secrets)
Nosferatu	Alienation, humanity versus monstrosity, forgiveness versus resentment
Venture	The struggle for dominance and political advantage, the price of power, the difficulties of leadership, survival of the (politically) fittest

The motives behind single-clan coterie are ultimately as varied as such broods themselves. Most Kindred domains have at least one such group, and some areas have many more than that.

Single-clan coterie have a narrower range of strengths and weaknesses than the more common covenant-based coterie do. They might be quite strong within a limited range but weak in aptitudes with which their clan is generally less proficient. They also differ from standard coterie in other ways.

The Ties That Bind... Forever

The most common form of single-clan coterie is the brood. A brood is a coterie comprising Kindred Embraced by a single vampire (often called either the patriarch or matriarch as circumstances warrant). If the brood contains grandchilder, great-grandchilder or the like, the coterie is still called a brood, with specific attention to the multigenerational nature of the group only when it becomes relevant.

Vampires assemble broods for myriad reasons. Some remember their living days and long for something resembling a family. Some do so for reasons of clan solidarity or to pursue a goal shared by their childer. Some create broods with the expectation that their childer will be more loyal than a randomly assembled group of Kindred. In particular, many elder vampires see the creation of a brood as the first step toward achieving real power among the Kindred. It could represent

the beginning of a new bloodline, the establishment of a cult of personality or, at the very least, a sympathetic audience.

Among powerful elder vampires, broods are often trotted out and displayed as symbols of prestige. The better-behaved and more powerful the childer are, the better they reflect on their sire, making him more esteemed — and more capable of rewarding them in turn.

Despite their popularity and usefulness, broods are relatively rare for two reasons — one physiological, one political.

First, the toll taken by Embracing a childer is not one that most Kindred are able to repeat with much frequency. Embracing childer demands a heavy price, and no Kindred can create another of his ilk without feeling notably lessened. Tales abound of vampires growing feeble-minded after siring too many childer in too short a time in an effort to assemble a powerful brood. Given the long spans that separate a given Kindred's childer, then, it's frequently the case that older childer have gone off on their own by the time the would-be patriarch sires another. As such, the opportunity for spawning a brood never presents itself. This is not absolute, of course. Most vampires never leave the city where they were Embraced, and a vampire intent on creating a brood rarely has much difficulty keeping a tight enough grip on progeny to call them back when he desires their presence. Still, as has been proved repeatedly, childer do have the irritating habit of thinking for themselves and making plans of their own, often at the most inconvenient moments.

Another more common factor contributing to the rarity of broods is that Princes don't often like broods that aren't their own. From a Prince's perspective, any Kindred who sires a brood is clearly entertaining dreams of empire, especially among Regents. Since such ambitions can be dangerous to a Prince's power, any Kindred attempting to accrue a coterie of her own childer is watched very closely. More than one ambitious elder has been forced to witness most or all of his brood sent to Final Death as a reminder of his appropriate and humble place in the city's power structure. This is not the preferred way of dealing with a would-be patriarch, of course, as it makes the Prince a powerful enemy, but it has been done. In cities where the Lancea Sanctum is dominant, for instance, granting the Embrace at all is already considered a violation of the Dark Prophet's wishes, so siring a brood only compounds the sin.

Those patriarchs and matriarchs who do establish broods find that whole new facets of the Requiem open up to them. Their standing in the city can improve if their brood reflects well on them. The opposite can also happen, however, and more than one vampire has been forced to kill a brood of his own progeny to avert a social freefall caused by wayward childer.

Brood Politics

Common wisdom holds that the Blood should be more than enough to keep a coterie of co-sanguineous vampires together. Common wisdom is often wrong. A brood is very much like any family unit, and like a family unit, it can suffer from internal disputes. With the added antagonism engendered by the

Beast, broods can be far more dysfunctional than mortal families. Rife as they are with decades or even centuries of unmet expectations, hurt feelings and rivalries for the patriarch's favor, broods are frequently among the most chaotic configurations of Kindred. The sense of commonality granted by the shared Blood is expected to make up for the absence of philosophical common ground. Sometimes it does and sometimes it doesn't.

Sometimes Kindred in a brood expect to feel that sense of Blood-based belonging and don't. They might expect to feel an instant loyalty to their brood-mates, but they never do. Worse, they might expect to benefit from those same loyalties, only to find other members of the brood betraying them just as readily as any other untrustworthy Kindred would. Sometimes a vampire feels a strong Blood-based sense of loyalty, only to learn (the hard way) that not all members of his brood feel that loyalty or choose to act on it.

Sometimes the similarities bequeathed by the Blood only complicate matters further. It's not unheard of for a clan's weakness to undermine efforts to create single-clan coteries. The excesses of the Daeva, for example, make coteries of the Succubi more difficult to hold together than the relatively unilateral weakness of the Nosferatu.

Other times, the binding power of the Blood shines through. The chemistry is just *right*, and the brood becomes extremely close-knit. When the brood's sire is just and fair to all her childer, when the brood-mates share something in common other than their Damned status (similarities harking back to their breathing days, for example), or if the brood discovers that it does seem to work better together than with others, a group identity coalesces. The members might perceive all other Kindred to be suspicious or hostile. When the shared blood results in a sense of mutual trust and dependence between broodmates, the bond between them far surpasses that generated by mere covenant affiliation. There's more trust, more communication and more dependence. In such situations the group functions seamlessly as a cohesive whole, with each member performing her function in the group intuitively without needing to be asked. When a patriarch is blessed with such a flawlessly integrated group, his will is carried out perfectly and his standing in the city is likely to rise.

When the power of the Blood isn't enough to overcome petty rivalries and philosophical differences, though, often the only thing that keeps the coterie together is the fear of the patriarch's wrath. Such dysfunctional broods often get sidetracked from their goals by internecine conflicts, and they can reflect poorly on their sire. A patriarch who is too frequently disappointed by his brood's performance might take the extreme action of destroying the most troublesome members of the brood and Embracing new Kindred in hopes of rectifying whatever chemistry was out of balance. He might even leave their places vacant as an object lesson to other progeny.

Strategies

Kindred establishing a single-clan coterie should consider strategy when putting the coterie together. Single-clan

coterie have different strengths and weaknesses than the more traditional covenant-based coterie. Teamwork strategies that work for the former may not work for the latter and vice versa. Single-clan coterie suffer from certain problems more often than traditional coterie do, and those problems can hamstring the group in the long run if they're not addressed early on and well. Wise Kindred take an inventory of their group's strengths and weaknesses and work to turn the latter into the former.

Embrace Strategically

A wise sire Embraces a variety of mortals for his single-clan coterie to make up for the lack of diversity in the Blood. While he has little control over the Disciplines his brood masters, selecting mortals with a range of abilities yields a more viable coterie in the long run.

Create a Group Identity

Traditional coterie have a major advantage over single-clan coterie: They share a philosophy and a goal, however nebulous. If a Ventrue, a Daeva, a Mekhet and a Nosferatu all come together as part of an Invictus coterie, they have their covenant's culture in common, and they know what the rules of interaction are. If, however, a single-clan coterie of five Daeva comes together and draws its members from three different covenants, those members might share a sense of commonality, bonding and group identity. ("We are Daeva.") Philosophically and motivationally, though, they're going to be all over the map. They've been indoctrinated into three different ways of looking at the Requiem. Worse, if a single-clan coterie contains members of seemingly antagonistic covenants (for example, the Circle of the Crone and the Lancea Sanctum), the conflict between the covenants could become a fracture point within the coterie.

A coterie wishing to avoid such conflicts would do well to create a cohesive group identity for itself to take the place of the sense of identification the members usually get from their respective covenants. It needs to have a philosophy of its own. That philosophy need not be as complex as those of the covenants, but at the very least, the coterie needs some unifying idea to act as a core around which to rally. "Know all secrets, because where there is mystery, there is power," is one example. Other examples of coterie philosophies include, "Strength through unity"; "For us, everything. For the rest, nothing"; or "Ventrue über alles."

Once a coterie has formulated a core philosophy, it might want to complement that ideal with a range of other unifying elements: a coat of arms (or similar iconography), a motto, secret gestures or handshakes, or maybe even a dress code or uniform.

If members gain a sense of their identity through their relationship to the coterie instead of a covenant, the coterie is that much stronger. The major covenants are aware of this dynamic, and they resent it to varying degrees. While the Carthians and Ordo Dracul don't have a problem with single-clan coterie, the Lancea Sanctum finds them almost heretical because they divert attention from "proper" affiliations. The major covenants occasionally try to forbid members from

joining single-clan coterie, but it's rarely a concerted or long-term effort. Alternatively, if one of the coterie's members does let her responsibilities to the covenant lapse in order to join a single-clan coterie, members of that covenant might go out of their way to try to charm her back or give her second thoughts about changing her allegiance. Again, the Sanctified are notorious for using such tactics to prevent apostasy among its members.

Respect the Blood

If a coterie of vampires from a single clan is to succeed, its members must acknowledge and respect the primordial nature of the bond they share. Blood is already a weighty matter among the Kindred for many reasons, but members of a single-clan coterie must have respect for, and faith in, their lineage. They must trust in the similarities highlighted by the Blood. They must believe that the Blood counts for something. If they don't, they're little more than a motley collection of Kindred from a variety of covenants.

While some coterie are satisfied with the symbolic nature of shared blood, some take it in a more concrete direction. Many single-clan coterie pay special homage to the symbolically binding nature of Vitae by making the symbolic literal. Such coterie are more likely to advocate a network of Vinculum, with members from the most opposed covenants (such as the Lancea Sanctum and Circle of the Crone or members of the Carthians and Invictus) being blood bound to each other to minimize political friction.

Cultivate Diversity

The same similarity that gives the single-clan coterie its sense of identity can also be its downfall if the group's members don't have a wide range of talents and interests. A single-clan coterie will have a narrow range of effectiveness if none of the members have developed any unusual interests or out-of-clan Disciplines. While the coterie is strong where it has multiple redundancies in interests and talents among its members, it is weak where it has gaps in its capacities. Daeva are commonly held to be attractive, perceptive and socially adept, so it would be easy for a highly social Daeva coterie to charm any number of adversaries in the pursuit of their goal. Yet the coterie would be stopped cold the moment it ran into a situation that required violence (as many in the Kindred world do). Likewise, a pack of Gangrel might have combat expertise to spare, but the moment those Gangrel are forced into a gathering of the social or intellectual elite, they fall apart. Clan Disciplines provide the most obvious example of this hazard. Members of a given clan share the ease with which they can learn their clan Disciplines, and they may choose to take advantage of that ease and specialize where it's easiest. If every member of the coterie does so, however, the group as a whole will suffer for it.

In the long term, single-clan coterie that intend to stay together experience a sort of radiation of competencies. That is, each member of the coterie stretches her abilities in a way that makes her more useful to the group. A single-clan coterie that doesn't do so will find that, it has no flexibility or strength outside of a narrow range of situations. Once established, clever coterie address this problem early on in order to diversify and maximize their effectiveness as quickly as possible.

For example, the Fifth Ward Spooks, a five-person Nosferatu coterie, discovers early on that its members have too much in common and too little breadth in what each brings to the pack. Not only do they have basically the same Disciplines, but they have about the same degree of competence in those Disciplines. To maximize their effectiveness, the Kindred make a conscious decision early on to vary their talents. Three of the coterie's members each opt to specialize in one of the clan's favored Disciplines. A fourth opts to study *Auspex* with a "minor" in *Obfuscate*, to maximize his efforts as a gatherer of information. The last member of the group, the least off-putting, opts to become the coterie's liaison and spokesperson. She specializes in social Attributes and Skills, and she might even develop a dot or two in *Majesty* in order to represent her coterie's interests well among the city's socialites.

Each member of the Fifth Ward Spooks has given up a little personal effectiveness to maximize the coterie's overall performance. On her own, each member might be a little less effective than expected of a Nosferatu Kindred, but they're far more effective together than they would have been otherwise.

If a coterie has members representing several different covenants, it's better off yet. Not only does each member have a slightly different perspective on the Requiem, but the coterie as a whole has an "ambassador" to a range of covenants. Better yet, the greater the diversity of the coterie is, the more likely it is to have access to one or more of the strange sorceries of the different covenants (*Theban Sorcery* or *Crúac*, for instance).

Best of all, every skill a coterie develops beyond those it is assumed to possess is one more tactical advantage it can throw at its opponents. If the Prince's thugs are expecting the Nosferatu coterie to display only *Nightmare*, *Obfuscate* and *Vigor*, they're going to be caught completely off guard when the coterie uses *Auspex*, *Majesty*, *Crúac* and *Theban Sorcery* in the course of a confrontation.

While the example given here is a coterie of Nosferatu, any single-clan coterie can benefit from cultivating a range of competencies beyond those it is expected to possess.

Competition

Another of the internal stresses to which single-clan coterie are prone is competition. Kindred are used to having certain clan-derived advantages when dealing with other Kindred. *Mekhet* are used to being the stealthiest of their kind, for example, while *Ventrue* are used to being the most socially direct. When placed in a single-clan coterie, however, a vampire might find that the skills he's known for most of his Requiem aren't that rare all of a sudden. A Nosferatu in a coterie of his own kind might not be the most harrowing one in the group, forcing him to reexamine what he has to contribute.

Kindred with similar capabilities in a single-clan coterie are often compelled to outdo one another. Properly handled, this urge can be one of the key motivating factors in the coterie. With every member of the coterie pushing herself to outdo her comrades, the group's effectiveness is likely to surge. As long as the members' commitment to the group is enough to maintain group cohesion, more competition is better. If the level of competition exceeds the group's commitment to stay together, it will likely come apart at the seams in a spectacularly hostile finale.

BROOD INTO BLOODLINE

Establishing a bloodline is a tremendous undertaking. One reason broods are so popular and prestigious among elders is that a brood is often the first step toward creating a bloodline, itself one of the ways a vampire can have a truly lasting impact on Kindred culture.

One step requires the would-be founder to learn a Discipline beyond his clan Disciplines, and to learn it so well that it becomes "hardwired" into his Vitae. Far more difficult than mastering a common or known vampiric Discipline is creating one from scratch. In that case, the vampire has to consciously channel the mystical power of his Vitae in entirely new directions, mastering all of the techniques evolving from the Discipline's basic powers and then imprinting that mastery into his Vitae so thoroughly that his mastery of the new Discipline passes on to those he Embraces. This need not happen before the bloodline is truly formed, but many vampires do things in this order, so that they have something immediate to pass on to their childer.

Even after a vampire has created and mastered a new Discipline, he has no guarantee that all of his subsequent childer will learn the new Discipline easily. The first few generations of a nascent bloodline typically determine how viable it ultimately proves to be. The would-be inceptor's childer and grandchilder must be chosen with care. He must Embrace childer whose temperaments are in line with the nature of his new Discipline. If his new Discipline centers around stealth, he should Embrace wily, subtle mortals. If it centers around generating fear, he should Embrace those who make others uneasy.

Childer whose psyches are in line with the nature of their sire's unique Discipline are more likely to see the founder's Vitae flow true in their veins than childer whose very temperaments are in conflict with his nascent Discipline.

Even after a patriarch has seen his mastery of a given Discipline pass into the veins of his childer, it's wise to keep such offspring away from the Kindred mainstream while their talents mature. Distractions hamper progress. The more difficult powers of a Discipline might require immense effort on the part of the childer and great pedagogy from the sire, and even a minor distraction can undermine months of instruction. Historically speaking, many bloodline founders have met with success only when they could enter isolation in some way with their broods for a significant period of time. Doing so gives the patriarch time to further guide and groom his childer and to let them master their new, unique Discipline before returning to the nightly distractions of the *Danse Macabre*. Conveniently, it also allows him to destroy any failures without raising eyebrows.

Once back in the fray, the patriarch can show off his new brood and lay claim to his status as the founder of a new bloodline.

For more information on bloodlines and bloodline Disciplines, see Appendix One in **Vampire: The Requiem**.



On the whole, however, competition within a coterie pushes the group in a good way. Any vampire who is the best at what she does in her coterie will be respected. Yet if she's the best at one or more of those things that her clan is renowned for (the best fighter in a Gangrel coterie or the stealthiest spy in a Mekhet coterie for example), she's likely to find her fame extending far beyond her coterie, and her coterie is likely to benefit from her renown.

The Allure of Dissolution

One reason single-clan coterie aren't more common is because they often tear themselves apart. Coterie based on covenant affiliation enjoy wider approval and have more backing from Kindred society in general. Single-clan coterie typically receive no support from the covenants and are often looked upon as unorthodox arrangements.

Although this list is by no means comprehensive, the following are some of the most common threats such a coterie is likely to face.

Covenantal Conflicts

Depending on how immersed a Kindred has been in the ideologies of her covenant, she might be something of a dogmatist where her covenant's ideals are concerned. One member of a single-clan coterie waxing canonically that way can cause all the members to take their covenant's side, leading to a serious breakdown in the group's cohesion. Characters who

place the importance of the Blood before politics have no problem with this threat.

Outside Interference

Many Kindred consider single-clan coterie somewhat heterodox. Some Kindred might dislike the arrangement so much that they bring social pressures to bear on the members of the coterie in an effort to break it up. The members of the coterie might find themselves being deserted by friends or mentors, they might be the subject of influence attacks, or members could be bribed by their covenant to leave the coterie. A strong coterie that is used to working as a team won't succumb to these kinds of pressures, but a single-clan coterie just starting out might find the pressure too much to bear.

Competition

Members of a given clan share many of the abilities by which they define themselves in the world of Kindred. Many Gangrel, for example, are used to being the best fighters in their coterie, and they might find their self-concept challenged if they associate with an all-Gangrel coterie. The same goes for Daeva and seduction or Mekhet and stealth activities. As the members of the coterie strive to outdo one another, rivalries blossom into full animosity and blatant aggression. If the group has more diplomatic members who can ease the tension, or if the members learn to define themselves by other traits and abilities, the competition might fade away and be forgotten.

Otherwise, it's likely that the coterie will dissolve (if the members don't kill each other first). If the group has an overarching goal that means more to the members than ego gratification, the coterie can channel its members' competitive natures into constructive, rather than destructive ends. In such cases, each member pushes herself to her limits and learns what she can from the other members of the coterie, ultimately resulting in a more effective and integrated team.

Boredom

Without members from other clans occasionally pulling the Kindred out of their comfort zone, it's possible that the group will get stuck in a rut and find itself always doing the same thing. A Gangrel coterie might prowl the Rack every night in search of sustenance, a Daeva coterie might regularly go on the lookout for mortals to use in their harem, and so on. After a while, the tedium can take a toll on member loyalty if the coterie doesn't do something besides what's easiest for it. Less hidebound Kindred might find themselves looking for a more diverse coterie and pursuing a wider range of activities. A coterie that varies its routine from night to night, perhaps to cater to its members' individual interests, has a better chance of avoiding dissolution from boredom.

Disillusionment

Many Kindred enter single-clan coteries with great expectations of clan loyalty or notions of the superiority of their clan. Nothing challenges those kinds of assumptions like actually hanging out with one's own kind. A Kindred might discover, to her horror, that the other members of her clan are *not* uniformly noble, insightful and trustworthy (or even shrewd, committed and effective), but rather, prone to the same pettiness, viciousness and bad behavior as any other Kindred. After this realization hits one time too many, a vampire might decide that covenant affiliation is a more sensible basis for coterie-building after all, and leave her clan-mates to their business. Alternatively, a coterie that regularly acts on the clan's highest values or at least makes a serious attempt to do so, can reinforce a proud clan identity and make the group more effective.

Cross-Covenant Conflict

Shared lineage is no more an assurance of group harmony among the Kindred than it is among mortal families. Being from the same clan does not mean that two vampires will see eye to eye on philosophical, religious or any other matters. If members of a coterie are not members of the same covenant, they might have serious differences of opinion. This rarely effects broods, which almost uniformly subscribe to their sire's covenant affiliation, but other single-clan coteries can be torn apart if members are too sectarian. A Mekhet from the Lancea Sanctum views the Requiem in a radically different light than a Mekhet from the Carthian Movement does. They are both Mekhet, they are both driven to manage the world around them through stealth and intellect, but they'll be inclined to harness those drives in radically different ways. A single-clan coterie that can't get beyond covenant differences will rarely

go far. The dogma of any covenant, taken far enough, will undermine the cohesion of a coterie. Whether it's the church-versus-state conflict between members of the Lancea Sanctum and the Invictus, or the religious conflict of the Circle of the Crone and the Sanctified, or any of the several other deep-rooted inter-covenant conflicts, any two covenants have enough fundamental differences to rip apart a fledgling coterie. No sensible Kindred is likely to put her unlife or reputation in the hands of a zealot who violently disagrees with her approach to most things. To do so knowing the vindictive tendencies of Kindred nature would be sheer folly.

To some degree, the problem takes care of itself. The most dogmatic members of a covenant simply won't join coteries containing members outside their own covenant. Those who do join cross-covenant coteries understand the need for a certain ecumenical truce, learn diplomacy quickly or leave the group entirely. Coteries simply can't survive when members place covenant affiliation before loyalty to those with whom they associate every night. Once a coterie has met a few challenges successfully and ironed out the most challenging teamwork issues, covenant affiliation begins to fade into the background. Excepting zealots, most Kindred come to identify more strongly with the coterie than with their covenant. A covenant is a powerful philosophical organization, but sharing common experiences night after night tends to draw a coterie's members closer together.

The covenants, for their part, are prone to seeing single-clan coteries as dangerous. They funnel members away from the covenant's overarching goals, they challenge their members' loyalty to their covenants, and they raise the possibility of defection. Attitudes toward single-clan covenants vary between covenants. The Lancea Sanctum, in particular, frowns on mixed single-clan coteries because it's having enough difficulties maintaining its numbers in the secular modern age as it is. The Carthian Movement, on the other hand, acknowledges the right of its members to join any kind of coterie they want.

Coteries can find themselves in the middle of the fray if two (or more) covenants go to war. Such conflicts are never good for single-clan coteries as they highlight the differences in the covenant's ideologies and often cause the coterie to take sides or keep a very low profile for the duration of the conflict. If two covenants go to war and a single-clan coterie has members from only one of those covenants, that covenant might try to draw the group into the fray. If the coterie has members from both the warring factions, both might pressure their members to abandon the coterie and join the fight on their side. Covenants are not above bringing immense pressure to bear against such coteries in times of conflict. In response, a coterie might break up as its members capitulate, the coterie's members might defect from the demanding covenant, or the coterie might go underground or leave town in hopes that the conflict will blow over.

Family Values

Some coteries are based not just on clan, but on the lineage of a particular powerful member of that clan. These so-called "families" can be more tightly connected than many mortal

families, particularly if association with the lineage carries some degree of prestige.

Under the right circumstances, such coterie can be very influential, especially if they serve an important function in the city — command of a particular kind of mortal influence, for example. The more one such coterie has at its disposal, and the more the coterie functions as a single unit, the more powerful it grows in the night world of the Kindred. Stories tell of a Prince whose Seneschal, Sheriff and Hounds were all her childer. Other tales recount the conflicts that arose in one city when one Kindred, along with his childer and grandchilder, came into direct opposition with the Prince and won because his “family’s” collected influence was enough to oust the Prince.

In some cases, a large coterie of one lineage actually includes the founder, while other times the founder simply acts as something of a gray eminence and directs the actions of his childer from behind the scenes.



A FAMILY AFFAIR

Vampires sometimes opt to damn their entire mortal families by granting the Embrace to none but their mortal relatives. This is sometimes due to paranoia — that is, a Kindred might feel that only childer drawn from his own mortal family will be trustworthy companions in the Requiem. Other times, it is simply arrogance (“Only my family deserves this dark gift I have to give.”) or revenge (“Such is the wickedness of my family that it deserves to suffer this curse that only I can bestow.”). Some Kindred Embrace one member of their family every generation just as that family member reaches her prime (or, ideally, just as she’s about to pass it). With their best and brightest scions dying or disappearing at a relatively young age, such families often develop a reputation for being cursed. Only those who know the whole truth realize how accurate that really is.

Still, such families often find their fortunes rising in the mortal world as their enemies suffer inexplicable tragedies, influence pools in their hands and unexpected wealth comes their way. Rumor has it that some of these families even know the truth behind what’s happening to their family members, or that they are complicit with the Kindred, but since such an arrangement would be a clear breach of the Masquerade, such things certainly *never* take place. Ever...

Those vampires who Embrace their mortal families can accrue an enormous tactical edge over others. Not only are their coterie drawn from one clan and overseen by the head of one lineage, but they share certain traits to begin with. This last can be either a benefit or a drawback. A family that already has a penchant for empire building can truly become a force in the Kindred world when Embraced by a Ventrue sire. Alternatively, a family that has a history of illness will surely find that Nosferatu Vitae truly brings out the worst in all of its members.



The Clans and Their Coterie

If each clan possesses a certain “personality,” then single-clan coterie allow observers to witness that unalloyed personality in action. Members of a single-clan coterie are interesting both for the way they play to type and the way they play against the stereotypes of their clan.

While only the five main clans are detailed here, coterie comprising members of a single bloodline generally (and only generally) follow the patterns of their parent clan. And, if it need be said, exceptions certainly occur.

Different coterie with similar functions approach their causes in different ways. Whatever its function, a single-clan coterie approaches its nightly business from its own perspective, working in ways that emphasize the clan’s strengths and minimize weaknesses. Two single-clan coterie comprising vampires of different clans will approach their goals through different venues. Two such coterie may be assigned to gather information on the Prince. If one is Ventrue and one Mekhet, the two coterie will pursue their goal by radically different means.

Two clans find themselves in the position of forming single-clan coterie more than any other. Not only do their members tend to share a great deal in common, but they are often excluded from traditional social venues. The Gangrel and the Nosferatu share a certain degree of outsider status, and members of both of those clans frequently join to form single-clan coterie, preferring that dynamic over an unlife of social isolation. If a character has run across only one single-clan coterie in the course of her Requiem, it’s likely to be from one of these two clans.

Nosferatu Coterie

Disturbing and disturbed as they are, the Nosferatu are beloved by none. Physically and mentally unsettling, the Nosferatu are frequently hounded from vampire society not by violence, but by the nigh-palpable fear of the other clans. Many Kindred would be perfectly content to see the Haunts destroyed down to the last neonate. Only their often-useful skills at stealth and terror earn them a place in Elysium at all. And while they are useful, they are not appreciated. Other clans are happy to avoid them when they can, so, in the absence of others of their kind, the Nosferatu frequently find themselves forced into the role of loners. That said, the Disciplines of the Nosferatu make the Haunts a force to be reckoned with. Their penchant for lurking in shadows and preying on other’s fear makes them dangerous, especially when they’re working in concert. While one Haunt can be disruptive, an entire coterie of them can bring its enemies to their knees.

Nosferatu coterie suffer from some significant deficits as well. Socially, the Nosferatu are at a disadvantage. They might work well together, but Kindred would rather not deal with them at all — even Kindred of their own clan in many cases, as causing fear grants no immunity to fear. Many Kindred remember the terror inflicted on them by Nosferatu in the past and actively avoid all Haunts. If a Nosferatu coterie is going



to work for other Kindred, at least one member needs to have enough social finesse to approach other vampires for business purposes. A coterie of Haunts might find that using a mortal retainer works wonders. The Kindred themselves might not have the best social skills, but if they hire (or subject to the Vinculum) someone who is charming, they might find their fortunes improving rapidly. Alternatively, having at least one member in the group emphasize Social Attributes and Skills helps the group considerably. A coterie of Nosferatu can benefit from sharing a haven. There are places the Nosferatu go that other Kindred are much less likely to find, and a group of Nosferatu who combine Haven dots can wind up being quite safe indeed.

The Disciplines of the Nosferatu don't facilitate group action. Just because two Haunts are allied, for example, doesn't let them see through each other's Obfuscate to know where the other is. Likewise, some powers of Nightmare are as likely to affect allies as enemies.

The more common types of Nosferatu coteries include:

Brute Squad/Assassins

The Nosferatu are terrifying, even to other Kindred. Haunts are capable of lurking unseen in ambushes or even taking the appearance of trusted friends and suddenly turning their fearsome strength on their targets without hesitation or mercy. A coterie of bitter Nosferatu might find that selling its violent services to the highest bidder is a rewarding channel for its members' hostilities. Some such coteries are reluctant to send other Kindred to Final Death. Others have no such compunction. The difference between a pack of violent thugs and a pack of killers, after all, is one well-placed blow, and a coterie operating on one side of that line can find itself operating on the other almost without thinking. Coteries that willfully and repeatedly kill for pay are doubtless among the most coldhearted vampires around. If the pack opts to align itself with the Kindred power structure, it can easily fill the roles of the Prince's Hounds. If, on the other hand, it sells its services to the highest bidder, it could wind up changing the power structure.

The Frighteners

While the Nosferatu are always unsettling, a group of them working in concert to brandish a hammer of fear against its enemies is terrifying. A coterie of Haunts focusing on the Nightmare Discipline is truly formidable. Nightmare is one of those Disciplines that can be wielded by a coterie with much greater effect than an individual. Even Dread, which is hard to use when the coterie members are in close proximity, can be used to create a sort of "wall of Dread" if the Nosferatu fan out to drive their targets away or channel them toward a specific destination. A coterie of Nosferatu can cause riots or human stampedes with strategic uses of Nightmare and Obfuscate, and the same tactics applied against Kindred foes can bring vampire society to its knees. Even vampires who think they shouldn't be afraid of a coterie of such Haunts suffer the effects of Nightmare when it's laid on by several Nosferatu.

Traders of Rare Antiquities

Secrets aren't always intangible things passed from lips to ear. Some are unmistakably solid. A handful of

Nosferatu coteries specialize in finding old, lost *objets de puissance* and selling them to the highest bidder. Part archeologist, part lore master and part elite art dealer, each member of such coteries specializes in finding, transporting and discretely brokering the sale of such items. These sorts of coteries like to portray themselves as genteel businessmen in the presence of other Kindred — or at least around potential buyers — but the fact of the matter is that obtaining many such items (such as the Spear of Longinus, splinters of the one true cross, seals warding against various ancient demons or weapons of the great vampire nobles of old) places these coteries in extreme peril on a regular basis. Many coteries of this type have become infamous among Kindred for doing business with mortals, mortal mages and even the occasional desperate Lupine. They sell to anyone who can meet their outrageous price, though what they ask in exchange for their wares is rarely monetary. (The asking price for the artifacts they peddle would be astronomical anyway.) Some coteries ask for extensive information about individuals or places, or for vast amounts of mortal influence. Others ask for extended periods of gracious hospitality, and some ask only for favors to be named later. *Caveat emptor.*

Rebels

There's only so much a vampire can take from the arrogant, condescending, petty, pushy and obnoxious Kindred at the top of the heap before he snaps. Coteries of this type comprise those Nosferatu who have had enough and have decided to actively work together against the Kindred power structure in their city. Such coteries can be lethal, and they are greatly feared. As the Kindred who lurk in the background, Nosferatu know the whereabouts of every haven, every back-up haven and every emergency safe house in the city. They can gain access to the building plans and skull near the secret entrances and exits of those places. Such coteries merrily wreak havoc on a Kindred power structure that they feel has screwed them over.

As a general rule, this sort of coterie is both rare and short lived. Few Princes are willing to allow such chaos to run rampant in their domains for long, and if a blood hunt doesn't suffice to bring down these insurgents, meeting their demands will. Use of these tactics *will* bring the full weight of the power structure down, probably upon all Nosferatu in a city, and a coterie that rebels in this way too often or for frivolous reasons might find itself quietly targeted for Final Death by other Haunts.

Gangrel Coteries

Like the Nosferatu, the Gangrel frequently form single-clan coteries, but not because Kindred society shies away them. Rather, they remove themselves from Kindred society to avoid the politics, the games and the constant pressure to join in the Danse Macabre. Of all the clans, the Gangrel (and the bloodlines descending from them) have the greatest capacity to eschew Kindred society altogether. No other clan is as well suited to the rigors of unlife posed by the confines of the city. The Savages are enduring, if somewhat primitive, and ferocious in combat, if brutal in their other dealings.



The Gangrel are among the least organized of the Kindred, and many are happy to pass the Requiem alone, never becoming part of a coterie at all. When they do join coterie, most Savages find that they're more comfortable in packs of other Gangrel — groups determined by the Blood rather than the thinner, more fragile, bonds of the covenants' philosophies.

Of all the single-clan coterie, the Gangrel have the greatest potential to be extraordinarily lethal in combat. They're limited in other areas, however, and they of all clans stand to gain the most from diversifying their Skills and Merits.

A Gangrel coterie is likely to be quite devastating in combat against most opponents without even particularly trying, so the group would do well to shore up other weaknesses. At least one member might focus on Mental Attributes in order to minimize the clan disadvantage, and another might emphasize charm (and possibly develop Majesty) to handle the group's social interactions. If all members of the coterie possess Haven of Soil, it might be in the group's best interest for forgo the Haven Merit in favor of other, more useful, Merits.

The following coterie are representative of those the Savages join.

The Wild Ones

The bestial nature of the Gangrel sometimes renders them unsuitable for the usual urban environments that other Kindred favor. Manifest urges of feral instinct, these vampires know better than to stray into certain areas except during the very dead of night. Beyond the glare of city lights, however, unlife can be solitary, poor, nasty, brutal and short. Passing the Requiem in such an environment might be too harsh for a single Gangrel to manage on her own, but a pack of them is another question. Coterie of Gangrel have been known to lay claim to small towns and even some rural areas where they feed equally on the blood of animals and mortals. The pack controls its territory with the power normally associated with a Prince or Regent, and trespassing Kindred rarely ever make it back to safer territory. Most such packs of Gangrel count themselves among the unbound. If they do claim affiliation with one of the covenants, the affiliation is either very loose or with the Circle of the Crone.

The Posse

Tough, savage fighters, a pack of Gangrel can be a potent asset to any Sheriff, particularly one with a large domain to police or many remote or uncivilized areas such as large parks, undeveloped subdivisions or forsaken project housing. As long

as they remain loyal and useful, such packs are typically granted an unprecedented degree of freedom by the Sheriff and, by extension, the Prince. Wise Kindred afford them more respect than they would typically show a lone Gangrel, out of fear as much as anything else. While the role of posse can be a comfortable one for a pack of Gangrel, it puts the coterie in danger on a regular basis and leads to the perennial accusations of being lapdogs for the power infrastructure.

Savants

Gangrel are known for more than just their ferocity in combat. Some coteries emphasize the clan's primitive wisdom or spiritual bent over its combative nature. Such a coterie might be inclined to remove itself from Kindred politics entirely, passing the Requiem quietly at the edges of Kindred society. The coterie's members might be pursuing Golconda. Alternatively, they might be studying the secrets of blood magic. Whatever their bent, they are not empty charlatans. Gangrel learn by doing, and a savant coterie will be well grounded in the common sense of those who "walk the walk." Whether they obtained their wisdom from seeking enlightened states, plumbing the secrets of pagan redemptions or mastering themselves through extreme ascetic practices, the knowledge they possess has been hard won, and they might be hesitant to share it too freely with others.

Pretenders

Not all those Embraced into the Gangrel clan are inclined to give up their gentility and manners for an existence more fit for a barbarian. Such Kindred aren't unheard of, and they occasionally gather in coteries of their own and offer themselves as proof that the Savage stereotype is not all there is to being Gangrel. They sometimes call themselves "reclaimed" or "reconstructionist" Gangrel. Some pretenders go to extreme lengths to distance themselves from their more bestial kin. Like the Daeva and Ventrue, they might attend large social gatherings of the Kindred, adopt formal modes of dress, study the social Disciplines or enter the Danse Macabre with a vengeance. More than one such coterie has been mistaken for Ventrue by those who did not know the group's lineage — until a member entered frenzy and revealed the claws that are unique to those of the Gangrel line.

Mekhet Coteries

The Mekhet glean more from one another's company than many of the Damned. The clan's thirst for knowledge is the stuff of legend, and the Shadows have found each other to be among the best sources of esoteric knowledge available. They might question one another about subjects they're unfamiliar with to the point of interrogation. Likewise, when the coterie turns its attentions on its fellow Kindred, there is little they cannot ascertain.

Mekhet are unsurpassed spies, but they're not particularly effective in combat. Their best bet when confronted by violence is retreat, stealth or attacking from a distance. A coterie that expects to run into trouble that it can't run or hide from would do well to learn some fighting techniques, including the Firearms Skill. In tumultuous domains, younger Shadows might join Mekhet-only coteries as a means of defending

themselves against the more overtly violent Kindred. The combined intellect and stealth of a coterie of Mekhet is enough to give pause to even the most ferocious Gangrel. Even if they're not capable of besting her in combat, they'll know how to disappear from the fight, how to track down their attacker later, and, most importantly, how to take a slow, satisfying revenge. Even a coterie of Mekhet neonates is clever enough to lay a trap — mental, physical or social — for their prey. And, of course, they would never get caught.

Mekhet coteries use any tools they are given to great effect, including Merits. Other coteries might see a haven as a place to spend the day, safe from the sunlight; a coterie of Mekhet vampires sees it as a refuge, a library, a laboratory or the perfect killing ground. Other Kindred might engage the services of hit men or private investigators as retainers; Mekhet hire an array of instructors, inventors, mages and other purveyors of insight. Whatever other coteries do, an all-Mekhet coterie will find a way of doing it shrewder, better and more stealthily.

Spies

The Mekhet are the most accomplished spies among the Kindred thanks to their Disciplines of Obfuscate and Auspex, and they are even more effective working in concert. Many longstanding Mekhet coteries have made themselves indispensable to the power structure of their home cities by providing the Prince, Prisci, Primogen or Sheriff with information obtainable through no other means. Espionage coteries are aware that their particular abilities make them exceptionally skilled at what they do, and they rarely pander their services to random Kindred. More often they are discrete agents who work for only a single employer — usually one among the domain's power structure. Not only does it lessen the likelihood of questionable assignments, it also makes them valuable to those with the power to reward them. That said, such coteries make enemies easily and often just by the nature of their work. Given their reputation for gathering information, Mekhet might even find that certain powerful individuals believe that the coterie spied on them even when it has not. Paranoia runs deep among the Kindred, and a coterie of spies had best get used to it or change vocations.

Seers

The Mekhet know things. Not only do they know things they shouldn't know, they know things they shouldn't *be able to* know. Seers step in where spies give up. When Mekhet skilled in Auspex work together, there is very little they cannot find out about the target of their inquiry. The clan possesses a certain mystical bent to begin with, so those accomplished in Auspex are happy to make the most of their skills. Seer coteries are considered extremely dangerous by their enemies. Their perceptions can sidestep any defense and catch glimpses of things that have happened long ago — and possibly things that have yet to happen. Because of their unpopularity, seer coteries often keep their heads down and make their true abilities known to only a select few Kindred.

Sorcerers

Many coteries of Mekhet gather to study the various forms of blood sorcery. They bring with them their understanding

of blood sorcery from their respective covenants and use them in service to the coterie's goals. Some coterie seek out practitioners of as many forms of blood magic as possible, including such esoteric traditions as necromancy, divinations and other nigh-mythical lore. Given the clan's intellectual hunger and its fascination with the occult, this kind of coterie isn't as rare as one might expect. More than one such coterie has incorporated Shadows who are familiar with Crúac, Theban Sorcery and the Coils of the Dragon. Other Kindred often seek out such formidable coterie, hoping that magic can accomplish what nothing else can.

Scholars

Coterie of Mekhet scholars channel their passionate intensity into learning. To their way of thinking, they are in the perfect position to discover anything they want to know, no matter how time consuming it is. Theirs is the luxury of acquiring knowledge for centuries on end. They may be collectors of Kindred history, seeking out the journals of elders who have succumbed to torpor. They might be philologists seeking out, collecting and translating ancient manuscripts of *The Testament of Longinus* or some other key vampiric scripture. Their great stealth and perceptive abilities also help them acquire knowledge that others might not want them to have. While such characters are normally erudite and focused on their studies, getting between them and the knowledge they seek is typically an invitation to disaster given the driving intellectual hunger of Mekhet vampires.

Ambassadors

At their best, Mekhet coterie have great respect for many different ways of unlife, and a well-deserved reputation for wisdom in dealing with difficult matters. A Mekhet coterie containing members from two or more covenants is perfectly suited to act as ambassadors between those covenants. The Shadows generally eschew dogmatism, largely because they possess the inherent capacity to view covenant politics through objective, intellectual lenses. Their facility with *Auspex* makes them excellent judges of intent, and their *Celerity* makes them quick envoys. In domains where the political climate is tense, it is frequently Mekhet coterie that are tapped to act as liaisons between the factions in conflict.



DUPlicitous DIPLOMATS

Ambassadorial coterie were once regularly drawn from the Kindred of Clan Daeva. In the modern nights, that is no longer necessarily the case — and with good reason. While the Succubi are beautiful, alluring and charismatic, they also possess a perverse streak that makes them wholly inappropriate for ambassadorial duties. One Daeva coterie, operating in Europe in the 17th century, scandalized Kindred across the continent by deliberately mishandling its diplomatic duties. Bored by the decidedly unglamorous negotiations they were involved in, the Daeva subtly undermined their own diplomatic mission to “liven things up a bit.” Two covenants went to

war, several prominent Kindred met Final Death, and the Masquerade was nearly torn apart. When the Prince, himself of Clan Daeva, finished his investigation, he had his Hound torture all four Daeva “diplomats” to Final Death and decreed that the Succubi would never again be called upon to perform diplomatic duties in his city.



Ventrué Coterie

All-Ventrué coterie are relatively rare, which is surprising given that the Lords are often thought of as being inclined toward the social end of the Kindred spectrum. And while the Ventrué are social in some ways, they are strongly inclined to think in terms of “I,” not “we.” Teamwork is an option only when rulership is not. As a general rule, the Ventrué prefer to manipulate others, not cooperate with them. When the Ventrué do form coterie, it is almost always to pull off some grand power grab that lies beyond their power to attain separately. In such cases, the coterie's hierarchy is established as early in its founding night as possible, and the struggle for dominance within the group lurks barely under the coterie's placid surface even then. In most cases, such coterie are led by the Ventrué with the most status (meaning that such coterie frequently have an unusual degree and variety of status, as members constantly try to surpass one another).

Once one of these coterie does establish itself, it is truly formidable. The Ventrué are capable of puppet tactics (using *Animalism* and *Dominance* to make others attack their foes) the likes of which few Kindred can take for long. The will of the Ventrué, especially wielded in concert, is difficult to stand against. A single coterie in which most of the members possess the ability to command beasts, mortals and other Kindred is almost impossible to withstand.

Ventrué coterie are adept at manipulation, but they're not as skilled at pure violence. They can take it, but they're not good at dishing it out — for that they use others. Ventrué are past masters of using bureaucrats, assassins, private investigators, police, lawyers, animals, Manchurian candidates and their targets' closest allies to take vengeance on those who have earned their ire. A Ventrué coterie can often pass itself off as harmless and beneath notice, largely because it has others do its dirty work. Yet an intelligent Ventrué coterie is far from harmless. Between its amassed allies, retainers and contacts, its herd, its ghouls and its living pawns and any Kindred under its sway, a Ventrué coterie can amass a small army with which to carry out its will.

Influence Brokers

The Ventrué frequently manage extensive amounts of influence in the mortal world. On occasion, influence-rich Lords might find it in their best interest to pool their influence to achieve results that would be beyond their reach individually. The results can be astonishing. Corporations and small cities alike can be manipulated almost entirely by a coterie wielding its influence in concert. Such an alliance of Lords is incredibly powerful, particularly in the mortal world. If another Kindred offends them, they can turn their



collective might on him and strip him entirely of mortal influence. If they focus on the mortal realm, they can manipulate elections, slate whole neighborhoods for “urban renewal” (or outright demolition), establish an organized crime cartel or put into action any number of large-scale projects. The power of such a coterie is often quiet, hidden and slow to evince itself, placing it beneath the radar of many less savvy Kindred, but when the coterie aggressively wields its combined influence, it can depose Princes, affect the policies of city governments and change the course of history. Other Kindred, those who curry favor with the coterie, might be able to make deals with these influence brokers to benefit from their clout, but the cost for such “favors” is usually just one step short of totally outrageous.

Blood Cult Leaders

The organizational skills of the Ventrue coterie need not always be channeled in constructive directions. The Ventrue possess the ability to take control of mortal minds to an uncanny degree. Power, as they say, corrupts.

Many Ventrue coteries have found that they’re able to establish a larger herd of mortal vessels if they establish “an alternative, primordial spiritual organization” (which is to say, a cult) or the like. Once the first few mortals experience the “will-bending power” of the Ventrue cult leaders (in the form of the Dominate Discipline), they become easy targets. Obviously, the coterie can tailor the tenor of the cult to draw in mortals who are more likely to suit them.

Ventrue who’ve grown accustomed to having their own cult typically find the power and adulation to be moderately addictive, and once a coterie of this type comes into being, few things short of a direct decree from the Prince or ranking covenant figurehead carry enough weight to break it up.

Oligarchs

Sometimes a city doesn’t have a Prince, but a ruling council comprising a coterie of cooperating Ventrue oligarchs. Oligarchic coteries function exactly as a Prince would, ruling the domain and policing Elysium. Sometimes the oligarchs divide power among themselves, with one taking responsibility for parceling out feeding grounds, another enforcing the Masquerade, another for dealing with non-vampiric threats et cetera. Coteries of this sort frequently have more influence over their city than a Prince of similar or slightly greater power. Four or five Kindred wield four or five times the influences of a single vampire and generally wield it aggressively. Established Princes — wise ones, anyway — watch Ventrue coteries very closely. Even a powerful Prince can find himself outwitted and outmaneuvered by a determined coterie of Ventrue oligarchs.

Social Club

Many Ventrue who do not, for whatever reasons, choose to align themselves with a covenant often form loose “micro-covenants” of their own that they typically refer to as social clubs. Club coteries are generally relatively loose aggregates of Lords who gather for camaraderie, influence networking and personal and political safety. Such coteries might have a political agenda, though that is rarely their raison

d’etre. Being Ventrue, however, even the least political coteries might weigh in on one side or another of issues relevant to a city’s Kindred population. On occasion, such coteries might take an interest in something a bit more active (confounding a particularly resilient witch-hunter, for example), but for the most part, they are content to remain a loose confederation of political allies looking out for each other’s best interests.

Daeva Coteries

In the eyes of the Daeva, no other clan is discerning enough to appreciate the dramatic nuances of their nightly performance. Consequently, much of their performance is carefully conducted in front of one another lest it be wasted on philistines. Succubi often find that they have more in common with one another than they do with other members of their covenant. They also find the demands of the covenants to be irritants, so single-clan coteries of Daeva, both unbound and loosely affiliated, are not at all uncommon. The problem with Daeva coteries, however, is that the more Succubi there are together, the more they egg one another on and the more extreme their behavior becomes. Peer pressure drives Succubi coteries to do things that their members would never do on their own, and the results of that dynamic are rarely constructive.

It’s a wonder the Daeva get anything done on a nightly basis, given that the group has to work around the collective lusts and Vices of its members. Yet they can accomplish a great deal provided their members can show some self-control. Daeva coteries are most effective when most of the members have high Willpower ratings, allowing the group to focus more easily on the business at hand.

Among its members, a Daeva coterie is likely to possess all of the Social Skills, especially Persuasion, Socialize and Subterfuge, and most at remarkable levels of proficiency. This serves most coteries quite well, especially when backed up with ample ratings in the Herd and Status Merits.

A coterie that doesn’t want to be powerful only in social conflicts, however, might want to focus on more physical and mental Skills. While they don’t always acknowledge it, the Daeva are well suited to violence thanks to the clan Disciplines of Celerity and Vigor. Succubi who focus on combat Skills and Disciplines could easily become some of the most dangerous Kindred in their domain.

Socialites

The simplest and most common of the Daeva coteries are exquisite collections of witty, charming and lovely courtiers devoted entirely to the ongoing game of social standing. All members of such a coterie know how to flatter, flirt and jest in a charming and captivating fashion even as they discretely glance around the room for prettier, wittier or more powerful Kindred upon whom to work their wiles. Socialite coteries are concerned almost exclusively with their standing in the city’s social hierarchy. The role of the Status Merit in coteries of such characters is easily summed up: More is better. Due to the mercurial nature of fashion and social standing, the behavior of these types of coteries can be unpredictable. Last

week's ally might be next week's target. One minute, they're attending a concert by a critically acclaimed pianist; the next, they're hosting a lavish ball. The next, they're gathered around a mortal victim in the basement of an exclusive sex club competing to see who can inflict the most agonizing torments or the most debased pleasures. Appearances are everything to members of socialite coteries, and they will be seen only in the hippest and most glamorous gatherings of a city's Kindred.

Debauchees

It happens from time to time that entire coteries of Daeva fall prey to the curse of their clan, give way to their baser natures and revel in perversion and vice. This is a relatively common outcome when the Succubi grow jaded with mere beauty or status and begin craving more thrilling fare to overcome the emptiness of death. On their own, individual Daeva Kindred might become solitary blood addicts or practitioners of some extreme indulgence or another. When several such Daeva gather themselves into a coterie, however, they can create a vice ring of their very own. What begins as decadent fun or mild obsession, however, can often turn into a degenerating spiral of peer pressure and excess. Such Kindred often nudge one another further along the decadent path they share, and they viciously turn on any member who tries to escape the cycle or call attention to what's happening. Such coteries have been responsible for some of the most vile torments and perversions inflicted on Kindred or kine throughout history, and savvy Kindred keep an eye on Daeva coteries that might have gone down this road.

Widows

Sometimes the Daeva grow tired of fighting against the emptiness of the Requiem with their petty games, and they fall into the cold hollow of their undead existence. When a number of these burnout Succubi gather in a coterie, they are occasionally called widows (regardless of the gender of the group's members). For these Daeva, the charm of society, the allure of petty games and the striving to reclaim the warmth of life all fall by the wayside as the Succubi forge themselves into icons of walking death. Acknowledging their emptiness, they adopt the trappings of death and bereavement — black lace, funereal attire and the associated symbolism of death — as their own. This they do as a means of accepting that they have lost what they were in their breathing days. As their unives have been drained of color, they wear (and surround themselves with) only black. As they give in to a kind of vampiric depression, widow coteries can take their toll on the morale of a city's Kindred. Coteries of this sort may form when burnout Daeva gather, or when a Daeva coterie of another type suffers some kind of shock (anything from an epic embarrassment to the Final Death of one of its members).

Mainstream Daeva see widow coteries as collections of fallen Daeva who succumbed to the desolation of the Requiem when their passions weren't enough to keep them engaged. The moment a coterie of widows forms, its members are all instant pariahs in the eyes of all other Daeva in the area. Other

Succubi disinvite them from all social functions and steer clear of them, as though their condition were contagious. For their part, widow coteries see other Daeva as fools fighting against the inevitable.

Thugs

In general, the Succubi are lovers, not fighters, but the Daeva's passionate natures and combat prowess sometimes come together in a wholly destructive way that makes them nothing but bullies and brutes. They take what they want, rough up anyone they don't like and might even ignore the sanctity of Elysium. Daeva coteries that make violence the crown jewel in their Requiem have been known to terrorize entire cities with their strong-arm tactics. Individual Kindred refuse to stand up to such coteries. Those who do get sent violently into torpor or to Final Death, and the whole of Elysium caters to their every whim, lest the Succubi's vice-ridden natures go off. Able Princes, of course, tend to nip such obnoxious coteries in the bud, either with a stern warning or with a strategic blood hunt (or two), but in cities where authority is weak or absent, where the Prince needs the coterie for whatever reason or even when the authority itself is a bully coterie, these sorts of Daeva can take root and all but take over. Elders engaged in the Danse Macabre love such thug coteries because they make excellent heavy artillery for their bigger strategic lunges.

Critics

Similar to socialite coteries, the critic coterie exists not to move up the social ladder itself, but to push others down. Such coteries deal in malicious gossip, cruel reparation and other people's secrets. The Daeva aren't as good at gathering information as the Mekhet are, but they twist any information they *do* uncover to make it as damning as possible to the subject. Critic coteries are often affiliated with a city's Harpies in some way, or they strive to be if they're not. Sometimes they take it upon themselves to investigate the activities of other Kindred just so they can keep a Harpy up to date (whether or not the Harpy wants them to). Coteries of this sort take a deep delight in others' misery and destruction, but they often bring upon themselves the wrath of those they discredit. More than one coterie of critics has been marked for Final Death by a Kindred it humiliated.

Other Kinds of Coteries

The Requiem is long, and it is more than politics that make for strange bedfellows. Covenant determines the composition of coteries more often than any other factor, followed distantly by clan, but coteries have been known to form around a range of other similarities as well.

Humanity

Saints and fiends do not mix well socially, and it is often difficult for vampires with very high or very low Humanity to be in a coterie together. Some coteries form based on this fact and comprise only vampires who endeavor to retain their

Humanity well into their Requiems. Others consist only of those who have sunk comfortably to the immoral depths of the Kindred condition.

Hopeful Assemblies

For those Kindred who aspire to high ethical and moral standards, associating with other like-minded Kindred is a tremendous boon to eking out (or even improving upon) the moral standards of their breathing days. Members of such coteries can nudge one another toward more humane behavior and keep one another from falling prey to the rationalizing and justification that so often contributes to the erosion of a vampire's Humanity. These kinds of coteries might also be assembled to seek the mysteries of Golconda.

Kindred in such a coterie help restrain one another during frenzy, chaperone each other when they feed as a way to avoid draining vessels and generally look out for each other's physical and moral well-being. Such coteries are more likely to interact with mortals constructively as well, providing yet another bulwark against the incursions of the Beast.

Kindred in these coteries have some advantages in holding on to their Humanity, but others of their ilk rarely make it easy for them. Derisively referred to as lambs, Sunday schoolers and other epithets, these types of coteries are often subjected to ridicule by vampires who are less attentive to their own moral decline. Such coteries weather a remarkable amount of social pressure from other Kindred who perceive them to be self-righteous or morally arrogant. These antagonists might try to interfere in the activities of a high-Humanity coterie by trying to incite its members to frenzy or even by tricking the members into thinking they killed a mortal when they didn't — just to watch the unfolding pageant of remorse that follows.

Coteries of high-Humanity vampires might fall apart if the Humanity of one or more members falls below 7. At the same time, participation in such a coterie might make it easier for a vampire to rededicate himself to his noble goals and get back on track.

Unsavory Types

Just as vampires with high Humanity find themselves inclined to form coteries with like-minded others, so too do vampires with very low Humanity find each other's morally relaxed and bloody-minded company more desirable than that of other vampires. Such packs are largely sociopathic, and they interpret the Embrace as *carte blanche* to engage in the most despicable behavior imaginable — and God help any mortal who gets in their way.

Low-Humanity packs typically adopt a philosophy of, "Bleed, feed and be merry, for tomorrow we face Final Death." They're fully aware of what they're risking through their monstrous behavior; they just don't care. A few decades of outrageous violence is better, to their way of thinking, than centuries of tedious political machinations and

walking on eggshells. The individual members of coteries of this sort might not even particularly like each other, but there aren't a lot of Kindred willing to keep their company once their behavior has reached a certain point. More often than not, the vampires who belong to coteries of this type develop an interaction style based on mutual use, typically because "friendship" and "respect" are entirely out of the question once a Kindred has sunk so low.

Packs of this ilk tend to dislike Kindred who do not subscribe to their nihilistic view of the Requiem. In their eyes, anyone and anything that tries to prevent them from acting on their worst impulses is a threat to their chosen way of unlife and must be destroyed.

Kindred in such packs often push each other to increasingly vicious and morally repellant acts — and ever lower levels of Humanity. Yet they know that if one of their number breaks with Humanity altogether and becomes one of the draugr, it will be their task to hunt him down and send him to Final Death (in order to preserve the Masquerade, of course).

Kindred Embraced into such packs rarely have a chance at any other kind of unlife than the violent, blood-drenched one into which their twisted mentors drag them. By the time they learn that other Kindred nurse their Humanity for decades or even centuries instead of years, they've often fallen so far that redemption is all but impossible.

Wayward packs of this sort usually burn themselves out in a matter of years and typically end in some grandly repulsive act of sanguinary excess — which other Kindred then have to cover up.

Age

Tradition all but prevents elders and neonates from belonging to the same coterie. In some places, Kindred clarify these lines even further, by placing vampires into coteries based on age. While doing so has its advantages, it has not proved to be one of the more stable bases for the establishment of coteries. Kindred Embraced in, say, 1878, tend to share a common view of the Requiem and their place in it. Little of that perspective is shared by vampires Embraced in 1978. The morals of the Victorian era and the proto-punk era are only one of the barriers to such intergenerational coteries, and there are many others.

More often than not, age-based coteries are chosen for young Kindred by elders, who expect such arrangements to fall apart in time as the coterie's members find that date of Embrace provides only so much commonality.

Many decades later, however, those same vampires might find themselves banding together again once a few of their number of been thinned out and younger Kindred have begun treating them alike anyway.

Necessity

Sometimes a vampire is faced with the very awkward dilemma of being the only Kindred of his type in a given



domain. In such situations, he can associate with Kindred he would normally have nothing to do with, or he can go through his Requiem alone. Given the dangers of social isolation in the Kindred social milieu, most Kindred who find themselves in such grim circumstances will set aside their differences and associate with whatever other vampires are available — at least until something better comes along. While such coterie are usually very short-lived, it is not unheard of for such an association to last for several years — particularly if they can find and nurture some basic degree of commonality.

Small Coterie

Vampires, thankfully, are not common creatures. While the largest cities support a substantial enough mortal population to feed tens or even hundreds of Kindred, more common is the smaller city with a mortal population large enough to support, at most, a handful of Kindred. This dearth of kindred can make the more common coterie types unrealistic. If the Kindred population of a city numbers around the low teens, it's unlikely that any covenant or clan is going to have the membership to make a proper coterie feasible, and a vampire associates with whomever circumstances require him to. This can result in odd collections of vampires being tossed together, but it still tends to work better for those Kindred involved than the solitude of an isolated Requiem.

Powerful Enemies

The predations of one powerful vampire — a Sheriff, a Prince, a Hound, a hellish revenant — can leave weaker vampires with no other option but to work together. Any elder worth the title can destroy one or two lesser vampires without effort, but a close coterie provides its members with a solid defense against even powerful enemies. Common enemies have forged even the unlikeliest collections of vampires into a coterie, some of which can outlast the elder who forced them into existence to begin with.

Such coterie work best when their night-to-night activities are centered around fighting the elder's agenda. Many such coterie fall apart the moment they neutralize the menace posed by their erstwhile tormenter.

Such coterie can be very effective, but only if its members are comfortable spending most or all of their waking time together. An enemy might not be able to take on the coterie as a whole, but the threat posed by a coterie isn't very effective if an antagonist can pick off the coterie's members one by one. Elders dealing with such coterie are likely to use divide-and-conquer tactics. If the coterie is unable to see these tactics for what they are, its members' sense of security will be as fleeting as it was reassuring.



The Dregs

All Kindred need allies if they are going to survive the nightly intrigues of the Requiem. This is especially true for those Kindred on the lowest rungs of the Kindred social ladder. A handful of disparate Kindred might realize that their only chance of succeeding in the cutthroat games of the Danse Macabre is to hang together, even though nothing else binds them. Shared adversity is easily a powerful enough catalyst for alliance that it can hold a coterie together even when the Kindred involved have nothing else in common.

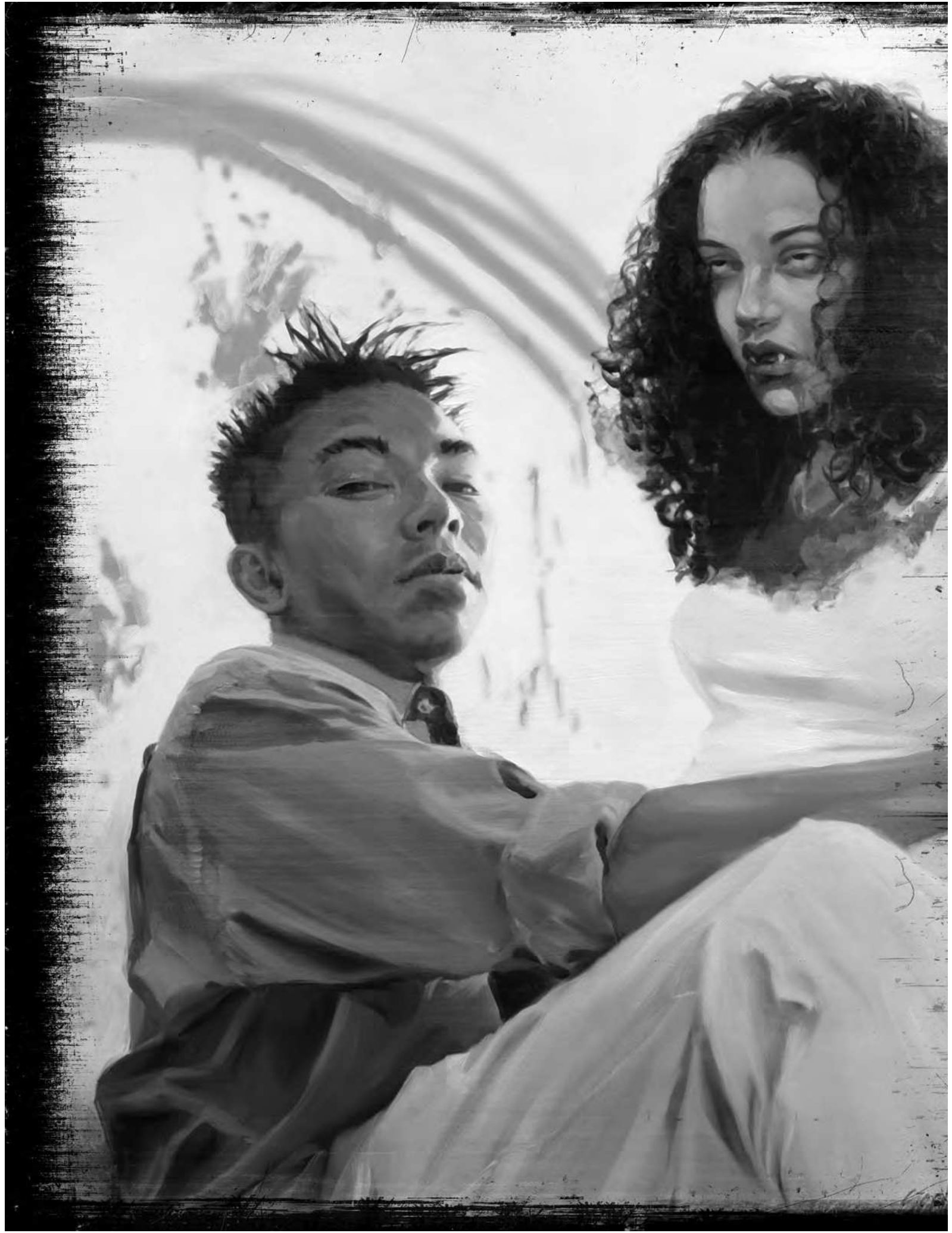
An example of such a coterie might include a shamed Daeva socialite, a particularly eerie Nosferatu neonate, a surly Gangrel hooligan who's new to town and an inscrutable Burakumin. Under normal circumstances, such Kindred would be uncooperative with one another, and probably antagonistic toward one another. If they all find themselves one step away from

Final Death or banishment, for whatever reason, they might find that allying themselves with one another is preferable to the alternative.

More often than not, such associations are short-lived. Success or atonement by one member often undermines the integrity of such coteries, however. The dregs of Kindred society might find themselves losing their outcast status if they do something together that improves the social status of one or more of the coterie's members — performing a favor for a Priscus or Primogen, for example. This kind of stress tears a coterie apart even more quickly if only one or two members are recognized while the others find themselves stuck with their outcast status.

A wily or influential elder might deliberately notice one or two members of such coteries while coolly ignoring the others as a means of dissolving problematic loyalties and fracturing a coterie she finds inconvenient.

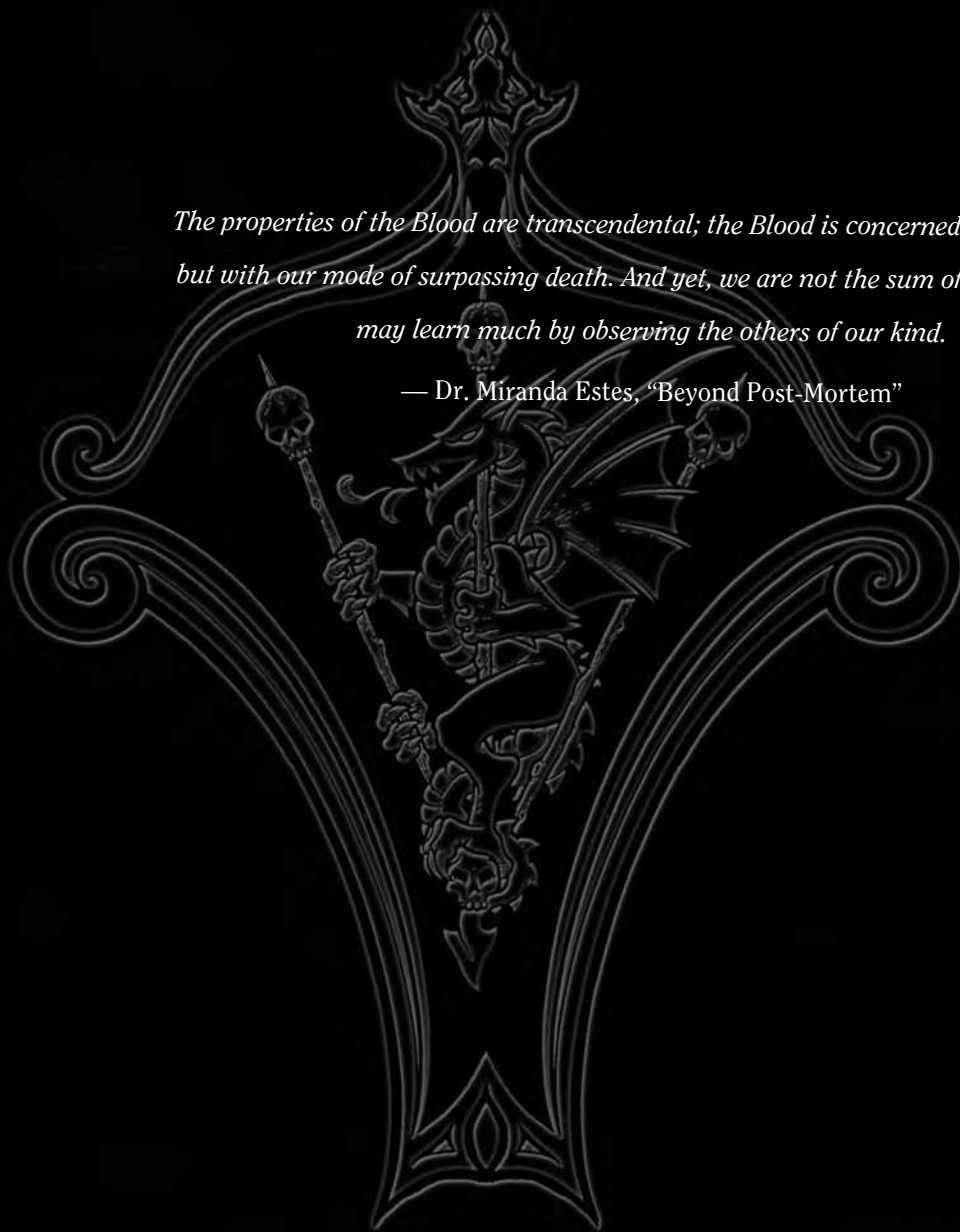




Chapter Two: The Ordo Dracul

The properties of the Blood are transcendental; the Blood is concerned not with death but with our mode of surpassing death. And yet, we are not the sum of our states. We may learn much by observing the others of our kind.

— Dr. Miranda Estes, “Beyond Post-Mortem”



*There had been a time when they had met every year,
but now decades passed with no reconciliation.
“Don’t forget, we meet in Salem in 2009!” someone cried.*

— Ray Bradbury, *From the Dust Returned*

A vampire’s motivation for seeking out and joining the Ordo Dracul isn’t usually as simple as wishing to learn the Coils of the Dragon. This power is often a factor, of course, but the covenant attracts seekers of truth and possibility as well as seekers of eldritch power, Kindred who wish to experience the totality of the Requiem, not just the simple acts of consuming blood and binding mortals to their wills. Finding a mentor is the first step, but the Dragons don’t normally make themselves readily available, as this would be suicide. A would-be member of the Order has a much better chance of joining the covenant if she first joins a coterie of like-minded Kindred.

PSYCHOLOGY

Dragons come together to form coterie for a variety of reasons, but the impetus for these groups forming is usually academic. Members of the Ordo Dracul studying under the same mentor, or under several mentors who correspond with each other, might begin practicing their arcane arts together in order to benefit from several teachers’ wisdom simultaneously. Likewise, a Dragon who loses her mentor, because either the mentor meets Final Death or the teacher-student relationship simply goes sour, might cast about for instruction and find others of her covenant.

Not all coterie of the Order form in such benign circumstances, though. In cities where the Lancea Sanctum holds sway, members of the Ordo Dracul might be declared anathema or persona non grata, depending on the zeal of the Sanctified regime. The problem is that the Ordo Dracul and the Lancea Sanctum find many of the same cities desirable. (In particular, southern Louisiana and the Cajun and voodoo culture therein intrigue many Dragons, even though New Orleans is a Sanctified stronghold.) But the Lancea Sanctum is not the only covenant with which the Ordo Dracul must practice careful diplomacy. Any covenant in power looks askance at others infringing on its territory. Therefore, Dragons in cities claimed by other covenants often form into coterie dedicated to public relations, negotiation, manipulation and, if all else fails, war.

BLOOD COVENANT

The following are six of the most common types of coterie one is likely to find among the Dragons. Please note that not all Ordo Dracul coterie fall strictly into one of these categories. A given group of vampires might incorporate aspects of any or all of them. A coterie made up entirely of Dragons is often referred to as a “Blood Coven” within the covenant.

STUDENT

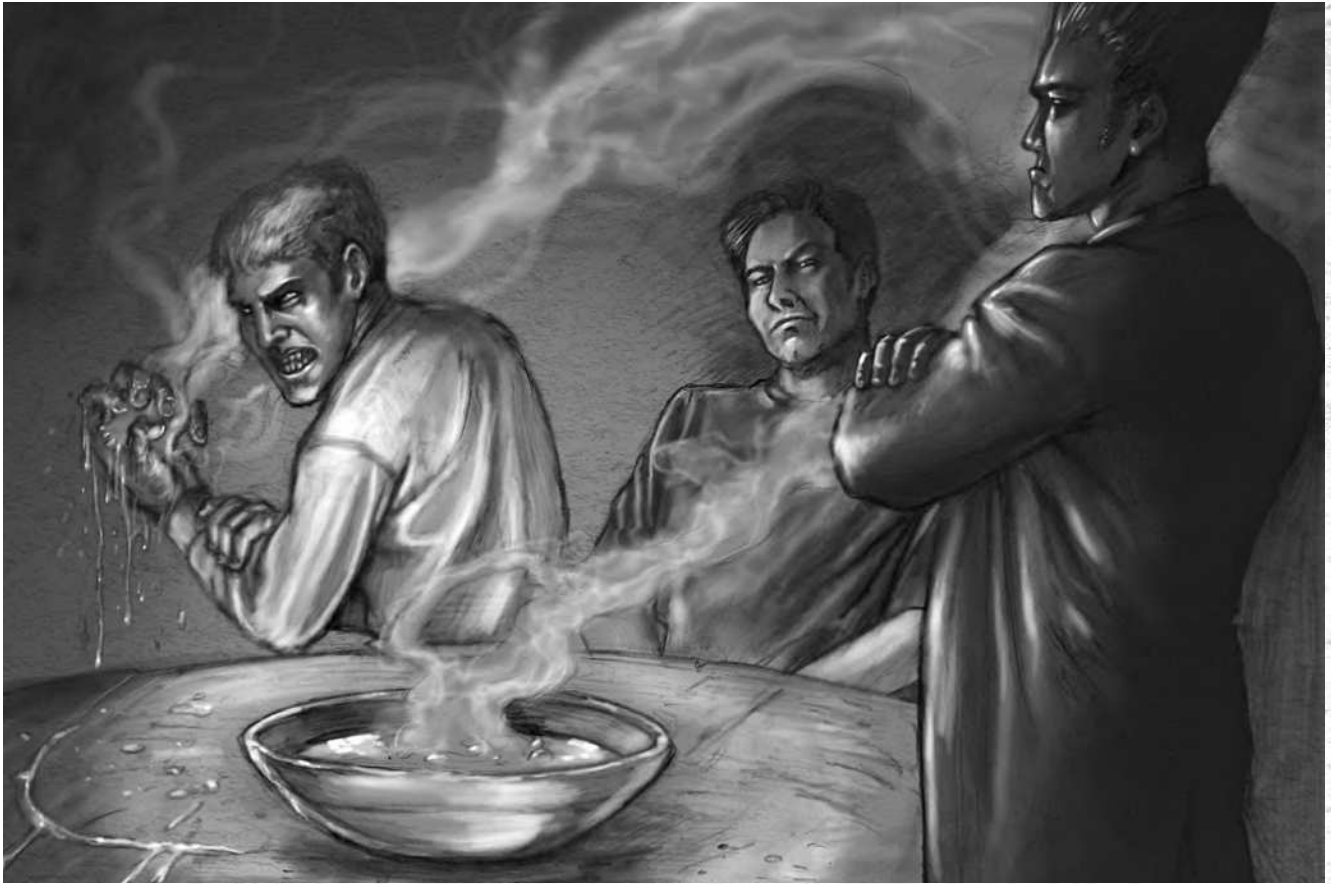
Probably the most common type of coterie among the young ranks of the Order, these groups come together when

several neonates or new converts wish to join the covenant. The individual motivations of the Kindred involved typically vary. Some are interested in the Ordo Dracul because of the power the covenant can bestow; some are curious about the vampiric condition on an academic level. Others wish to escape the Requiem entirely. Whatever the feelings of each member of the coterie are, the group as a whole usually forms around one individual who has the tenacity, the organizational skill and the charisma to keep the other members focused long enough to find a Dragon mentor. When the group does find a mentor, the mentor notes whether this would-be Dragon set himself up as the “leader” of the coterie. Such vampires worry the Ordo Dracul. Ambition for knowledge and change is one thing; ambition for lording over other Kindred is another, and is not a goal the covenant espouses. (Nonetheless, the Order of the Dragon has a place for such vampires. See “Diplomacy” on p. 50.)

The search for a mentor is probably the most difficult phase of the student coterie’s existence. The Dragons do not advertise, so the Kindred must learn as much about the covenant as is possible for outsiders. This investigation often takes the form of tracking down Dragons (or former members of the covenant), not all of whom are happy to talk about their former allegiance. The Kindred also spend time searching out reports of mystical activity, as it might either be the work of the Ordo Dracul or might simply attract them. Finally, the coterie might spend time in Elysium, discussing the Requiem with elders just loudly enough to be noticed.

Once a coterie finds a mentor, its relationships inevitably change. Because the Kindred involved (probably) had no opportunity to learn the Coils of the Dragon before finding a mentor, they have no sure way to know which of them would take to these teachings with the greatest skill. Many Dragon coterie find that the members who participated enthusiastically in debates and who spent their time engaged in esoteric research quickly comprehend the Coils, whereas the vampire who organized the attempt to find the Ordo Dracul mentor and demonstrated leadership skills doesn’t necessarily catch on easily.

This stratification in ability highlights the greatest advantage or danger of student coterie (depending on the bent of the vampires involved). If the coterie’s members are willing to help each other learn and achieve, they can point out their fellows’ weaknesses and aid them in their understanding. If, however, the Kindred are distrustful, grasping and selfish (which is much more common), they will instead seek to become strong where their fellow Dragons are weak. After all, one never knows when a fellow student will become Prince of a city... and knowing which lessons that Prince could never quite master would be a powerful bargaining chip with that Prince’s rivals.



Once the students have become full members of the covenant, the focus of the coterie typically shifts into one of the other types discussed in this section. Which one depends on the specific circumstances involved, of course. Some coteries do not shift focus, however. These coteries are discussed further under “Philosophy” (p. 50).



THE CREATED COTERIE

Because Embracing a mortal is a supreme act of will, no vampire enters into it lightly. (Many commit the act for the wrong reasons, yes, but it still isn't something done without purpose.) Occasionally, a small group of Dragons Embraces childer for the express purpose of forming them into a coterie. This “created coterie” begins as a student coterie, typically learning under the sires of each of its members, and progresses naturally from there. The difference is that none of these Kindred has seen much of the Requiem beyond the covenant. The result is that the sires of the created coterie's members are able to observe their transition from mortal to vampire to Dragon every step of the way. The created coterie is an experiment in change on a practical level. Of course, the members of the created coterie are rarely told this. No one likes learning that they have been damned for all eternity because of someone's psychology project.



RESEARCH AND INVESTIGATION

In cities where the Ordo Dracul either holds a majority of the political power among the Kindred or does not face significant opposition, student coteries often develop into research-oriented coteries. Coterie that found mentors quickly are especially well suited to research and investigation. Mentors sometimes steer their coterie toward this sort of activity, as well, which is especially true in cities that contain sites of great mystical significance or long history. Cities such as London, Rome and Jerusalem lend themselves well to such coterie, given the sheer amount of human history there, and even some American cities such as Boston or Savannah have spiritual or mystical activity far beyond what their age or size would indicate. Mentors in such cities often take on coterie for the express purpose of molding them into efficient research teams.

These coterie sometimes form spontaneously, of course. Lone Dragons find their way to areas replete with secrets and mysteries then cross paths in the course of their work. Provided that the members don't suffer from overwhelming pride or professional jealousy, the Kindred form a coterie for the purposes of unraveling the mysterious history of an area. As modern technology allows greater communication over vast distances, it becomes possible for members of the Order in many different places to work on the same problem or riddle, meeting only when they have information that simply cannot be shared via telephone, Internet or mail.



Research and investigation coterie are typically goal oriented, and they drift apart once they have achieved their goal. A coterie might form around a particularly intriguing legend about an apocryphal battle between vampires in a given locale. The members research the Kindred in question, discover who they were, why they were fighting, what the result was and perhaps even the resting place of the victor. Once they have learned all that they can from the legend, the members take that information and apply it in whatever way they wish. Following the example, one Dragon might have been descended from one of the combatants and simply wished to “discover her roots,” while another believed that a bloodline came to an end with the loser of that battle and wishes to see if any trace of it survived. The members of such a coterie might even find their goals in conflict when the answer to the riddle is finally revealed, though many Dragons enter into pacts not to engage in direct opposition with each other for a certain period of time after the coterie disbands.



SHARE AND SHARE ALIKE

Mortal academia is fairly cutthroat. Professors and scholars struggle to publish within their given fields and not only produce engaging and interesting work, but do so before their colleagues can do so. (The common maxim is “publish or perish,” though James Thurber probably hit closer to the mark with, “Don’t get it right, just get it written.”) The Ordo Dracul draws a good percentage of its membership from academia, and this competitive attitude follows. When discussing the Coils of the Dragon rather than literary deconstructionism, however, much more is at stake than professional acclaim or pride. The very souls of the Kindred involved could be the price of jealousy and peevishness.

That doesn’t always matter, though. A vampire who has spent a decade looking for an exacting rite might avoid sharing her work with other Dragons, simply because she is afraid they might progress to a more complex Coil than claim the credit. Dragons often desire not only the direct rewards of their labors, but the credit for those labors as well, and vampires, like mortals, don’t share well.

Most Dragons enter into coterie with a spoken agreement to share findings, theories and (eventually) accolades with their fellows. This kind of communication and professional respect is quite rare in practice, however, and is most often seen in martial and guardian coterie. (When one’s unlife is on the line, such petty concerns do tend to fade.)



Because the methodologies of research coterie don’t necessarily involve the Coils of the Dragon, such groups are the most likely of any Ordo Dracul coterie to involve members of other covenants. After all, a Carthian vampire might have the same historical questions as a Dragon and be just

as capable of seeking out answers to those questions. The Kindred of the Ordo Dracul are usually more than happy to allow those of other covenants to join such coterie, but they do make a point of turning their investigative skills on such outsiders before entrusting them with any real information about the coterie members. When the Dragons are involved in important research, they don’t wish to be worried about whether their new compatriot is leaking information back to his covenant or setting the coterie up for failure... or ambush.



THE WYRM’S NESTS

Being chosen to participate in finding the Wurm’s Nests is a great honor among the Ordo Dracul. Often, the most promising Dragons from several different coterie form or are placed together into a special investigative coterie and sent to investigate and map a specific area. Once the mapmaking is complete, the members of these coterie are allowed to return to their usual duties and routines.

Not all of them do, of course. Dragons who are placed together with others of their own skill and intelligence often find that they have much to teach each other, and remain together even when their duties are complete. Mentors often discourage this practice. They likely stand to lose students, and then are left with the thorny proposition of explaining to any remaining pupils why the Dragon who was at the head of the class has been promoted a “best of the best” coterie. Murder has been committed over less than being left behind thus.



PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY

A natural outgrowth of student-coterie, practical philosophy coterie are dedicated to the practice of the Coils of the Dragon above and beyond the theory. They spend as much time poring over books as necessary to be able to perform their rituals, but as soon as these Kindred feel that they have enough expertise to attempt metamorphosis, they do so. As such, these coterie suffer the highest turnover due to Final Death of any Ordo Dracul coterie, with the possible exception of martial coterie.

Practical coterie typically comprise the least bookish and most adventurous of the Ordo Dracul. Such Kindred are usually driven to learn as many Coils of the Dragon as possible, but rarely with any specific goal in mind (apart from the covenant’s overarching goals of transcendence and change). They thrill to the prospect of gaining new power and learning to wield it more fluidly, and aggressively track down mentors and scraps of esoteric lore that could lead to innovative new approaches to their condition. These coterie vary on their attitudes toward accepting Kindred of other covenants — a vampire from outside the covenant might know a Discipline or (better yet) a Devotion that would stimulate learning and invention. On the other hand, many



such coterie are devoted to the principles of the Order, so unless an outsider is willing to join the Dragons, what could she contribute in the long run?

Intrinsic in uncovering or inventing new facets of the Coils is delving into the philosophy of why and how the magic works. As such, practical Blood Covens' methods often blend with those of research coterie as they search for elders and ancient writings describing the earliest vampires. Where other Dragons might search for such things for the sake of knowledge, however, practical Kindred seek to apply it directly to their Requiems. Using the previous example of a coterie investigating stories of the battle between two Kindred, the practical coterie is interested in the physical details: where the fight took place, what sort of remnants might still linger and so on. Such details can provide tactical advantages or moral lessons. The motivations behind the battle might be of interest if one or both participants were Dragons, but for the most part, pure history is too abstract for this sort of coterie.

MARTIAL

Dragons are not necessarily warriors, but their ability to circumvent some of the worst aspects of vampirism can make them devastatingly effective opponents. Also, nothing prevents a Dragon from being an expert in the more combative Disciplines as well as the Coils of the Dragon. The covenant has need of such vampires, too. Unlike most Ordo Dracul groups, elders of the covenant usually create martial coterie rather than letting them form organically. When a war that involves the Ordo Dracul brews between Kindred factions — or when another threat such as vampire-hunters or werewolves makes its presence known — an elder Dragon sends out messages to her students and mentors, asking for volunteers who are combat-capable and available. Of course, the term “volunteer” is rather loose, and mentors have been known to send aggressive but troublesome students into such situations, sometimes without telling them the full truth of what awaits them.

Kindred in such created coterie do not have the benefit of months or years of training and study to create bonds between them. If they spend any time together at all before being sent out into the fray, it is usually just enough to discuss their strengths and weaknesses and those of their enemies. Hopefully, the chemistry between the individual vampires in the coterie is enough to make up for their brief association, but if not, the first combat experience is usually a good measure of their mettle. Kindred who can fight together instinctively and well are rare. More often, each member of the coterie looks out for himself. Fortunately, the Dragons are usually intelligent enough that the survivors learn from these mistakes.

Not all martial coterie are the work of nervous elders, however. In places where the Order is under fire from enemies, coterie can form with the simple goal of survival. (They usually have another goal keeping them in the area as well, or else they all share a desire to escape the area as quickly as possible.) These vampires are normally survivors from other coterie of other types, so they include Dragons with only two things in common — a strong survival instinct and the skill to act on that instinct.

Martial coterie are occasionally formed for offensive purposes (usually when the Ordo Dracul intends to seize praxis by force in a city) but more often for defense. This can be defense of a domain, of a mystical site, of a powerful elder or simply of the coterie itself. Most martial coterie include only Dragons. Those that form organically rather than deliberately sometimes include members of other covenants working toward the same goal. For example, in a city where the Invictus holds an oppressive rule over all resident Kindred, an Ordo Dracul coterie might find support from Carthians and even unaligned vampires.

Martial coterie usually include a confessor (see p. 57). Those that form organically in conflict often do not, though, so the mean Humanity level of the group can plummet dramatically as the coterie does what it must to survive.

GUARDIAN

As mentioned on p. 65 of *Vampire: The Requiem*, the Ordo Dracul jealously guards sites of mystical importance. Whether these sites are haunted houses where the shades of human dead roam or places where creatures of a more mysterious type mingle with the mundane world, the Dragons see all such locales as places where God pays a bit more attention. Therefore, the clever vampire can find power and enact change in such places.

Unlocking how best to seize and use that power, however, can take years. In some cases, it isn't possible at all. The Dragons like to be able to take their time while studying such places and not have to worry about others among the Damned looking over their shoulders the whole time. Therefore, coterie of guardians form to protect these locales and any Kindred performing research therein.

Guardian coterie often form in a similar manner to martial coterie. In many cases, elders hand pick a number of young Kindred and send them to the site with instructions on how closely it needs to be guarded, what Dragons are already there, what sort of research they are doing, what kind of threats the characters are likely to encounter and at what point they should abandon their posts. Some guardian coterie form more incidentally, with a group of Kindred (not all of whom are even necessarily Dragons) unexpectedly coming across a site of supernatural significance. Guardian coterie don't suffer from the same low morale or attrition that martial coterie do, though, because they are rarely sent into active hostility. These Dragons aren't asked to give up their unives for the covenant. Everything changes, including mystic sites, so even if another faction manages to capture one, the covenant can quite possibly claim it sometime in the future. Besides, the elder Dragons scoff, it isn't as though other factions would know any more than they do about such places.

What guardian coterie *do* suffer from is jealousy. Occasionally, they are sent either to guard sites that the Ordo Dracul has written off as too dangerous or too complicated to be of any use, or they have instructions to protect a research coterie in the area. Guardian Dragons are still Dragons, though, and the notion of so much power so close to hand is tantalizing to them. Most guardians are chosen as such because their talents lie in

that direction, and when vampires who are much better suited toward combat start trying to unlock ancient, unpredictable energies, the results can be disastrous for the Kindred in question, the covenant and even the surrounding area.

Not all guardians protect locales, however. Some form to look after elders of the covenant or mystic artifacts. In the latter case, the Ordo Dracul usually hides such artifacts in places that mortals cannot reach them (underwater, for instance) and then most of the guardians' work involves making sure that the existence of the artifact stays hidden and watching out for any supernatural interference from other quarters. These coterie run into the same sort of problems with jealousy and curiosity as other guardians do in that the temptation to have an item of power at hand and not be allowed to use it or investigate it is sometimes too much to bear.

Guardians protecting elder Dragons are rare. Most elder members of the Order who wish any sort of contact with their covenant take on students, and protection is implicit in the student-teacher relationship. The most common Dragons benefiting from this sort of protection, then, are the Kogaions.

As explained in **Vampire: The Requiem**, the Kogaions are keepers of information, including maps of ley lines and nexuses and the names, specialties and havens of all Dragons in the city. A city's Kogaion is typically a powerful recluse. Few Dragons want to be associated with a Kogaion, since Kogaions are the first targets of hostility or capture if war breaks out between the covenants. This means that being named as a guardian of a Kogaion is something of a mixed blessing. The characters can benefit from the Kogaion's wisdom, but the more they do so, they better their chances of leading enemies to the Kogaion.

It is uncommon but not unheard of for guardian coterie to include members of other sects. When it does happen, the members of the coterie who aren't affiliated with the Order tend to be experts in local history, lore and geography, or otherwise bring something to the table that the Ordo Dracul cannot provide. The elders of the covenant richly reward non-Dragons who take on guardian duties with money, favors and sometimes even cursory instruction in the Coils of the Dragon, but they do not tell these outsiders one iota of information more than necessary. As an interesting aside, no known guardian coterie with non-Order members have been assigned to protect Kogaions to date.

DIPLOMACY

The Ordo Dracul suffers from the stigma of blasphemy in the eyes of many devout Kindred, the Sanctified especially. While the Carthians and the Invictus don't necessarily object to what the Dragons do on religious grounds, they do note that the most powerful members of the Order have the potential to be vicious and inhumane *in extremis*. Diplomacy coterie, then, are necessary in any city that boasts a sizeable population of Dragons but is the domain of an opposing covenant.

As mentioned on p. 46, when student coterie form, Ordo Dracul elders pay attention to see if a leader emerges. That leader might not be a competent mystic, but such Kindred make able diplomats. Even if the diplomats know only a single

Coil, their social skills still aid the covenant by helping convince other Kindred that the Ordo Dracul is not dangerous, does not intend to take over the city and will not bring down the wrath of God for doing what they do.

Of course, the truth of the matter is that the Ordo Dracul might very well be planning to take over the city. The central tenet of the covenant involves enacting change, and change is often bloody and difficult. The diplomats, however, aren't always told the truth of the covenant's intentions. The Dragons are well aware that plenty of supernatural and mundane methods exist to catch someone in a lie, so they feel that it is sometimes in the best interests of the covenant if the diplomat can be honest, even if his facts are wrong.

The Ordo Dracul seldom sends lone diplomats. Diplomat coterie usually contain one main figurehead, often a Daeva (though this is by no means universal). Other members of the coterie are expected to be good speakers as well, but each is supposed to have a clearly defined and understandable reason for being in the city. One might be a researcher, another a bodyguard and a third a technology expert. Of course, these distinctions are usually made for the benefit of the vampires in power, and even if the coterie does actually contain these niches, the Kindred aren't always honest about which member of the coterie serves in what capacity. The short, bookish Dragon who makes a point of tripping and pointing out esoteric facts while in conversation with the city's Acolyte Hierophant might actually be a terrifying combatant. The muscular man barely concealing the gun in his jacket might be fluent in dozens of languages and a metaphysical theoretician par excellence. The importance of misdirection while among enemies is not lost on the Ordo Dracul.

Diplomat coterie don't normally include non-Order members at the outset, though circumstances sometimes align Kindred from other covenants with the Dragons in order to aid the cause... or keep an eye on them. In the true spirit of diplomacy, the Ordo Dracul Kindred don't balk at this, but it's an unspoken assumption on everyone's part that if things go sour, the non-Order members in the group can expect to be abandoned or sold out.

PHILOSOPHY

No matter what a coterie's function is, all the Kindred involved are still Dragons who follow (or are at least aware of) the central tenets of the covenant. Every coterie of Ordo Dracul Kindred is expected to practice the Coils of the Dragon, to observe and enact change on some level, to understand the nature of causality and change, and ultimately to work toward transcendence of the vampiric condition. This section explores how they work toward the covenant's goals and cope with the Requiem while doing so.

CAUSALITY AND CHANGE

Young Dragons are fond of saying that change is good. Elders agree with that sentiment, but caution that it is better expressed as, "Change is inevitable, and is therefore the will of God, and



is therefore good.” Change, in and of itself, is arbitrary. Only by understanding the Creator’s will as expressed through a given change can the “goodness” of it truly be understood.

That in mind, all six types of the coteries discussed in the beginning of this chapter have their own takes on causality and change as these concepts relate to their functions and memberships.

STUDENT

Student coteries, as mentioned on p. 46, usually evolve into other types of Blood Covens after the members have become true members of the Order, but such is not always the case. At times, the Kindred become “perpetual students,” keeping their focus on learning Ordo Dracul philosophy. They differ from practical coteries in that they might *know* a great deal about the Coils of the Dragon but are able to implement comparatively little of what they know. (This discrepancy can be expressed in game terms by a high Occult rating, perhaps with a Specialty in the Coils of the Dragon, but few tiers in the actual “Discipline.”)

Student coteries rarely put into direct practice their studies of causality and change, so busy are they with learning other Kindred’s thoughts on the matter (much like law students are taught precedents and theory). These coteries enact the tenets of the covenant by observing, by writing out treatises or by conducting controlled demonstrations of how a given change in the world is likely to affect it in a certain amount of time, and then waiting patiently to see if they were right. One of the reasons that the Dragons prefer coteries of students to lone pupils is that with several “classmates” watching over each other’s experiments, it is less tempting for a given Kindred to falsify her own results.

As the members of a student coterie learn about the Requiem and about the effect their actions have on the world around them, they typically lean toward other types of coteries. Some, however, remain students indefinitely, which typically happens for one of two reasons. Either the vampires of the coterie are using their mentor, or the mentor is using her students.

In the former case, the students conspire against their teacher, remaining with her as long as possible to soak up every conceivable drop of wisdom. They learn not only the Coils of the Dragon, but any other Disciplines and knowledge that the elder can teach them — languages, fighting techniques, archaic skills, city secrets. Anything that might be of use in the future is written down and absorbed. When the coterie feels that the elder has nothing more to teach, its members sometimes commit diablerie on their elder. (Since they have learned everything about her, they know how to best strike with the least fear of repercussion.) Sometimes the students take credit openly for disposing of their mentor, defending their actions by saying that everything that the elder knew is now in the keeping of a greater number of Kindred, meaning that it has a much reduced chance of being lost for good. (At this point, the coterie has “only” to worry about the Prince’s interpretation of the matter.) Besides, nothing is permanent, and the destruction of an elder is a superb object lesson of this. The covenant as a whole is ill equipped to punish an

entire coterie, and besides, this defense makes a certain degree of sense, given the covenant's tenets. Coteries that take this avenue would do well to remain out of sight for a good length of time after the deed is done, however. If the Kindred go on to threaten other elders of the covenant, they find that second chances are hard to come by, let alone the matter of Princes and city politics.

Not all such scenarios end in diablerie, of course. Sometimes the students are content to simply leave their teacher behind, pursuing their own agendas. Consider, however, that an elder Dragon might have centuries worth of information to impart, and this kind of in-depth instruction can't be distilled down to a semester or two (particularly if the students are interested in not only learning but mastering the material). Also, remember that all Dragons are supposed to be constantly learning, meaning that learning everything that a given mentor has to offer is probably impossible, since that vampire is learning from another mentor concurrently. By the time the students reach the point that they feel they have nothing left to learn, they might well be unwilling to harm the tutor who has shared so much with them. On the other hand, their Humanity might have dropped so sharply that they do it without a second thought.

In the case of a mentor using her students, the mentor is in a much more advantageous position, especially if her pupils are not receiving instruction from any other Dragons. The mentor governs her students' access to information and can therefore limit their progress and exposure to mystic secrets and skills that could potentially threaten her later on. She can also share tales, true and otherwise, of the bloody vengeance exacted upon Kindred who slay their elders and of the vast rewards of loyalty and service. Thus she trains not only capable Dragons but capable bodyguards as well.

For Kindred of truly advanced age, another, more sinister possibility exists. Elder Dragons who have progressed beyond the ability to feed on mortals might train their pupils in the best ways to capture or even diablerize other vampires. As the pupils bring their victims back to their patron, the elder is then able to feed from them, sometimes using a combination of emotional manipulation, Disciplines such as Majesty and Dominate, and promises of greater rewards to come. Thus he ensures that the pupils don't even realize that they are being groomed not for greatness but for eventual consumption. This strategy is also a common fallback for elder vampires pursuing the Coil of Blood: In case the elder cannot reach the level of change necessary to avoid the stringent hunger of age, at least her students can satiate her.

RESEARCH AND INVESTIGATION

Research coteries, like student coteries, usually observe change and causality rather than enacting it. The difference is that their studies are normally in preparation for action of some kind, whereas students simply observe for learning's sake. Most members of research coteries enter into such groups with a goal, be it for the covenant in general or their own personal fulfillment. The Dragons encourage their members to seek out their own goals; innovation is the best kind of change.

During the course of investigation, Kindred are inevitably confronted with many different opportunities to observe, record and enact change on a variety of levels. They are urged to indulge their curiosity, but be aware that no change happens in a vacuum. This warning is especially applicable when research coteries investigate Kindred history (which is common). Delving deeply into the religious lore of the vampires puts the Dragons into contact with devout members of the Sanctified, which, in turn, places Ordo Dracul Kindred in the position of debating philosophy with vampires who are often prepared to kill to underline their points. But a Dragon's unlife isn't the only thing she risks in this sort of investigation. She risks her loyalty as well. More than one member of the Order, after lengthy conversation with an elder Sanctified, has forsaken her covenant and converted... or met the sun in guilt. The covenant as a whole understands that loyalty is no more permanent than anything else, and that by leaving the Ordo Dracul, defectors are proving the Order's theories. That doesn't stop martial Blood Covens from occasionally being dispatched to "retrieve" such errant vampires, though.

PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY

Of all of the different types of coterie found in the Ordo Dracul, the practical coterie espouses and exemplifies the covenant's goals and philosophy most clearly. Such coteries seek out transcendence and change as their stated purpose. No unnecessary or laborious research goes into these Kindred's efforts, and they are usually on the cutting edge of the covenant's theory and innovations. Many Dragons try to follow mortal technology and trends, but the practical coterie *must* do so. Its members want to spend as much time as possible achieving transcendence, which means that every hour that a PDA or another time-saving device gives them is another hour they can spend investigating the Kindred condition.

Practical coteries tend to be the most respected of the Ordo Dracul. Other Dragons view these Kindred as the heart of the covenant, testing and applying the principles of change to the Requiem every night. Other types of coteries serve useful and necessary functions, true, but the practical coteries make the covenant what it truly is (see Status, p. 57, for more on this). The members of these coteries normally don't capitalize on this respect. If they did, they wouldn't be spending their energy on the practical applications of the Coils, and the respect would dry up in short order.

As well respected as these coteries are, however, they also tend to be the shortest-lived. The hazards of the Coils of the Dragon are myriad. Suspicious outsiders and the possibility of permanent frenzy are just two of the dangers. Very few practical coteries last for more than a few years with their membership completely intact. Some such coteries replace their members as Kindred suffer Final Death or lose interest in such a risky Requiem. Others simply drift apart, joining other coteries or settling back to teach younger Kindred. Many Dragons, however, have difficulty letting go of their practical philosophy. After all, they might be only a night's practice away from exactly the right chant, the right mindset, to transcend their lifeless state and move on to whatever awaits them.

MARTIAL

The two types of martial coterie, those that are assembled by the covenant's elders and those that form organically, represent the Order's interests in very different ways.

Since they usually form in response to a threat to the covenant as a whole, assembled martial coterie are less concerned with the covenant's philosophies than with its prolonged survival and prosperity. Martial coterie have limited time available to research and practice the Coils of the Dragon. Instead, the members focus more on honing what skills they already have. Members of these coterie don't concern themselves too much with understanding the impermanence of the world. They are more interested in preventing certain facets (fellow covenants members' unives, for instance, or Ordo Dracul power within an area) from changing. In a covenant that venerates and seeks to understand change, martial coterie make the most devout Dragons uncomfortable. If the covenant as a whole truly believed in its doctrine of observing and not impeding change, these coterie wouldn't exist. The usual response to this argument is that only change that can be understood is of any real value to the Ordo Dracul, and change that results in setbacks for the covenant is nearly impossible to understand. (More realistic vampires admit that while it's fine to argue that change is good and necessary, it's something else again to give up a comfortable unilifestyle or submit oneself to the flames in the name of change.)



EXECUTIONERS

The Ordo Dracul understands that it cannot keep the Coils of the Dragon to itself. The Dragons might like for it to remain their exclusive domain, but that isn't the case, and they must content themselves with the fact that advancement in these practices is difficult without an Ordo Dracul tutor. In fact, instruction in the Coils is one of the strongest bargaining chips the covenant can offer when trying to win support among Kindred of other covenants.

That said, some secrets, and therefore some Kindred, *cannot* leave the covenant. Most notably, Kogaions who attempt to defect to other covenants usually don't survive long, but occasionally, a Dragon in a lesser position knows secrets or lore so essential that if she attempts to leave the Order, a coterie is assembled to kill her.

These executioner coterie are formed in much the same way as other martial coterie, with two main exceptions. First, they are always told as much about their quarry as is known. Often, in fact, at least one member of the coterie is a former student of the target. Second, once the target is dead, the members are richly rewarded and then separated. Sometimes, elders of the covenant even employ liberal uses of the Dominate Discipline to cloud or erase memories of the mission. The Ordo Dracul doesn't wish stories of sanctioned execution to circulate, at least not in any verifiable form.



Assembled coterie's members don't usually become drawn into such debates, as they are too busy defending themselves and their covenants. Organic martial coterie, on the other hand, while they might not have any more time to engage in philosophy, often have the inclination to do so. After all, if the members formed a coterie by choice and are actively engaged in violence, again, by choice, they must have a compelling reason to do so. Are they resisting change? If so, why? Self-preservation isn't usually a good enough answer, because even as phobic as most Kindred are about leaving a city, if remaining is too great a risk, flight becomes a worthy consideration. Working toward the covenant's goals, likewise, doesn't carry much weight. After a certain point, stepping back and observing becomes a truer representation of the mentality of the Ordo Dracul than trying to change the world in a random fashion. If the coterie has entered a conflict and adopted the cause with some passion, it is devoted to making a change. That kind of devotion is an expression of the covenant's philosophies, and is, in the Dragons' opinion, a worthy way to spend one's unlife. Following a cause too far, though, leads a given Dragon to abandon the esoteric rigors of the covenant for the Carthians, or perhaps to abandon the politics of covenants altogether.

GUARDIAN

Amassing mystical knowledge and protecting that knowledge is a means to an end for the Ordo Dracul and not an end in and of itself. Even so, guardian coterie are afforded respect and resources in the execution of their duties. They facilitate the work that other Dragons do in discovering mystical secrets, and the covenant as a whole thanks them for it.

That isn't always enough, however.

Like martial coterie, guardian coterie are warriors in a covenant that prizes intelligence. While guardians are much more stable and are allowed to innovate more often than martial Dragons, they are still not engaged in their own research, at least not with the sanction and backing of the covenant as a whole. This can be frustrating to their members, as they guard the haunted houses and nexuses of the world, never able to access their secrets.

Of course, the Ordo Dracul prizes innovations and, as a matter of policy, doesn't mind being surprised. It happens sometimes that a guardian coterie uncovers a secret that a research coterie cannot (sometimes with the result that the research coterie is disbanded and the guardian coterie replaces them). This typically takes place when the guardians break the rules and experiment with whatever it is that they are guarding, but rules, after all, are impermanent just like everything else. Sometimes mavericks in the covenant are placed into guardian coterie as "punishment," with the unspoken hope that they will rise above the position and bring the covenant greater wisdom. Sometimes, of course, this punishment is afforded to Dragons who think of themselves as mavericks, but are simply hopeless with respect to the Coils of the Dragon. Both types of Dragons might be placed in the same coterie, whereupon the question becomes whether the true mavericks will lead by example or be dragged down by the slower members.



No matter what the ultimate goal is behind assembling a guardian coterie, the members of the group must be trusted members of the covenant. (Typically each member already has at least one dot in the Covenant Status Merit.) After all, guardians, even more than martial Dragons, are put in positions where they can betray their covenant and give away sensitive information. While innovative thinking is a positive thing for any Ordo Dracul Kindred, those vampires who are asked to guard the covenant's prized properties and possessions must be loyal first. Occasionally, a coterie of guardians is assigned to "protect" a place or person of no real importance, just to flush out lurking enemies of the covenant. Caged elder Dragons recognize that this sort of deception ultimately results in the guardians either being destroyed or rising to the challenging situation, and either is an acceptable change.

Guardians who are assigned to protect Kogaions are afforded not only status in the covenant and the resources to do their jobs well, but every word they say and every suggestion they make is taken under advisement. If the coterie is trusted with the Requiem of a Kogaion, it is worthy of respect.

DIPLOMACY

Like practical coterie, diplomats are charged with changing the Requiem to better suit the Ordo Dracul. Unlike practical coterie, however, diplomatic coterie aren't necessarily making those changes through mystic innovation, so they don't always get the respect they deserve from other Dragons. When a city's Prince allows the Order to establish Elysium around a mystic site, however, or banishes an unbound or rabble-rouser who's antagonistic toward the Order, the covenant usually has a diplomatic coterie to thank for it.

Diplomats need to be conversant in the Order's core beliefs, but they can't be fanatical about them unless they hide their fanaticism very well. Like all politicians, members of diplomatic coterie need to be proficient at saying whatever is necessary to keep things running smoothly while still pursuing their agendas. Safe to say, then, that the greatest liars of the covenant find their homes among the Ordo Dracul's diplomats.

METHODOLOGY

The methods that the various types of Ordo Dracul coterie use to achieve their goals and to overcome the challenges that they face necessarily vary. The covenant prides itself on recruiting innovators, and so doesn't place much stock in "tried and true" methods. The Order knows that "tried and true" can become "stale and predictable" in very short order. That said, the Dragons do have certain avenues of approach that they have found consistently useful, and certain problems that will always need addressing.

TACTICS

Whether the goal of a Blood Coven is to amass information, defend a location or develop a new ritual, a few general

avenues of approach have worked well for the covenant in years past, and are still taught to young Kindred.

LEARN, THEN ACT

Entire coterie are devoted to research and investigation, and with good reason. With incomplete information, the first tier of a Coil can plunge a vampire into madness, and that lesson is just as applicable to the Requiem as to the Coils of the Dragon. A martial coterie that doesn't take the time to learn about its foes is going to end up destroyed, just as a practical Blood Coven that jumps into an attempted transcendence without taking the time to make sure it is ready should be grateful if the ritual simply fails.

Research *can* involve spending hours poring over books, digging through computer files and assimilating the information... but it doesn't always. (That sort of thing isn't very interesting to roleplay, anyway.) Even coterie devoted to research spend much of their time in the field, sifting through physical evidence left by a mystical occurrence, gathering samples to subject to experiments later and even more mundane forms of investigation such as taking photographs and interviewing witnesses and experts. Of course, where vampires are concerned, this involves finding the experts and witnesses first, which can involve an entirely different set of investigation. Small wonder, then, that most Dragons have some degree of proficiency at detective tactics, no matter what the function of their coterie is.

USE ALL POSSIBLE RESOURCES

Elder Dragons tell stories about how Egyptian cities were conquered when invaders marched into battle carrying cats. The Egyptians, being cat-worshippers, refused to fight, and simply surrendered. This kind of lateral thinking is one of the qualities the Ordo Dracul looks for in new members. Dragon coterie are told not to shy away from making alliances in strange quarters, using psychological warfare or (though it's not usually stated outright) breaking the Traditions and the laws of a city to achieve their goals. When this tactic is questioned by moralistic Kindred of any covenant, the response is simple and predictable: Nothing is permanent, laws included. By breaking the laws, the Dragons are simply looking to the future. (Kindred who point out that this attitude is self-serving usually receive a response of, "Yes, but that doesn't mean we're wrong.")

Therefore, Ordo Dracul coterie might be found making deals with Kindred of other covenants, influencing mortal authorities, poisoning a Prince's herd, allying with mortal mages, stirring up trouble among Lupines or any of a hundred other underhanded and dangerous tactics. The covenant as a whole encourages this sort of behavior but does add one caveat: Every action has a reaction, so be prepared for it.

PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE

Dragons' schemes and tactics can play themselves out in a matter of nights, but just as often they are circuitous



and Byzantine. Again, this refers back to the covenant's central tenet: Nothing is permanent. If a coterie can afford to wait for a given change to happen naturally before putting another plan into effect, that coterie is less likely to ruffle feathers among other Kindred. It isn't uncommon to see Ordo Dracul coterie waiting for a troublesome mortal to die of old age rather than murdering him, or waiting for the owners of a house that sat on a ley line to put the house up for sale rather than Dominating them into moving. Or at least, this patience wasn't uncommon in years past.

Modern society doesn't have much in the way of patience, and since Dragons keep abreast of the times, they unfortunately are beginning to adopt this emphasis on accomplishing their goals *now*. After all, technology provides the means for speedy results, so why not use them? Elders of the covenant have a hard time arguing with this. After all, the world is changing, so why not change with it? What concerns them is the notion that other Kindred might simply apply the lesson of patience, wait for the technology to fail or for the consequences of haste to catch up with the Ordo Dracul, and then strike decisively.

CHALLENGE

Regardless, the overarching goals of a Dragon coterie, some challenges remain consistent. The methods of dealing with

them can be as varied as the individual Kindred making up the Blood Coven, of course, and therein lies the covenant's greatest strength.

THE COILS OF THE DRAGON

Through the use of the Coils, the Dragons are capable of some miraculous feats. No matter how dense the philosophy of change and transcendence becomes, however, the curses under which vampires labor are in place for a reason, and the Coils of the Dragon circumvent natural laws. This carries risks.

Progression along any of the three Coils is called "chrysalis." The vampire in question is changing the nature of her Requiem. A chrysalis involves testing the limits of the vampiric condition, reading and understanding the teachings of others of the covenant, and spending time in meditation in which the Kindred attempts to force the desired changes on herself. Doing so can result in the Kindred sidestepping one of the banes of her existence... or it can result in that bane becoming more acute. A vampire unsuccessfully attempting to learn one of the tiers on the Coil of Blood, for instance, might find that regardless of her Blood Potency, only Kindred Vitae nourishes her. Or, she might burn through Vitae at an accelerated rate, requiring two Vitae per night to animate her undead body.

STORYTELLER'S OPTION: COILS OF THE DRAGON

What if the Storyteller would like to impose this kind of danger on Ordo Dracul characters in her chronicle? As stated, the player simply needs to spend the necessary number of experience points, but if you would like to add the chance of failure to the process, here is a suggested system. Be sure players know beforehand if you wish to employ this system. While the *character* doesn't know the rules that affect her in the game world, it's not fair to spring this chance of failure on a *player* without warning.

Using this system, paying experience points to increase one's knowledge of the Coils of the Dragon costs the new dots x 6, not the new dots x 7 as listed in **Vampire: The Requiem**. When the player wishes to purchase a new Coil of the Dragon, she rolls her character's Resolve + Occult with the following results (though the Storyteller may choose to make the roll herself, in order to better hide certain bonuses and penalties):

Dramatic Failure: The character's undead nature attempts to reject any changes she has already made, much like a transplant patient rejecting a new body part. The player must spend one experience point per tier the character already possesses or two dots of Willpower, or these tiers disappear.

Alternatively, the character suffers as described in the text. The exact effect depends on which tier the character was attempting to master, as some tiers are better suited to this than others. For example, a character attempting to master Blood of Beasts might lose the ability to feed from animals at all, but only if her Blood Potency is so low that she could otherwise subsist on animal Vitae. A character with a higher Blood Potency, who cannot feed on animal blood, would be unaffected by this limitation, so the Storyteller would do better to inflict the experience point or Willpower dot penalty on the character. On the other hand, any character would be affected by a reversal of the Perspicacious Blood tier — the vampire receives only two Vitae for every three he takes from his subject.

Experience points spent to learn this tier are lost.

Failure: The character simply fails to learn the new tier. Experience points spent to learn this tier are lost.

Success: The character learns the new tier without anomaly.

Exceptional Success: The character gains an intuitive understanding of this particular Coil and need not make this roll again when advancing on it. For instance, if the character learns Conquer the Red Fear and the player rolls an exceptional success, she need not make this roll if the character later attempts to learn Surmounting the Daysleep and/or Sun's Forgotten Kiss (even if the character attempts to learn them at different times).

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	The character is taught by a Mentor (as per the Merit) with at least two more tiers mastered than she has.
+1	The character is part of a coterie of other Kindred studying the Coils of the Dragon, and at least one of those other characters is trying to increase her own mastery of the Coils of the Dragon at the same time.
+1	The player has roleplayed the character introspectively or with otherwise noteworthy devotion to the ideal of changing her vampiric form.
—	The character hasn't been exceptionally diligent in pursuit of the chrysalis, but hasn't been exceptionally distracted, either.
-1	The character indulged her Vice at any time in a story in which she earned experience points that would be devoted to learning the new tier. This penalty is cumulative.
-3	The character has repeatedly acted outside the interests of the chrysalis or has consistently eschewed introspection and mystic devotion. (An example might be a character who earned a lot of experience points overcoming challenges but didn't bother conducting any meditation or mystic study.)

This roll occurs in downtime, as per normal experience point expenditures. It is also an abstraction. The character doesn't suddenly receive a burst of insight that allows him to use the Coils of the Dragon. Rather, the downtime roll represents the character's study, exploration and any epiphanies during the downtime. See p. 230 of *Vampire: The Requiem* for more information on spending experience points.

The Ordo Dracul does not tolerate a cavalier attitude toward the Coils, for two main reasons. One is that without the proper respect for the Coils of the Dragon, a Dragon is much more likely to make a mistake. The other is that the curses on vampires are divinely ordained, and treating them otherwise is blasphemy. The Dragons might not be as hidebound about their faith as the Circle of the Crone or the Lancea Sanctum, but they recognize the source of their banes just the same. Treating the Coils with less respect than they deserve tempts the vampire to use them recklessly, which can draw attention from those who would destroy the Ordo Dracul.

This problem is exacerbated among coterie, particularly practical ones, because each individual Dragon is surrounded by others who can accomplish the same things. Elders warn their students against this kind of recklessness, sometimes applying punishments of sunlight, fire or forced frenzy or starvation, just to remind the Kindred of the power that the Dragons truly wield.

RIGHTSOUL WRATH

Of all of the covenants of Kindred, the Ordo Dracul is one of the most likely to see alliances form against it. The Dragons hold an advantage that no other covenant can boast, and whether out of fear, jealousy or genuine feelings of moral outrage, other Kindred do band together against them. When this happens, the Dragons are often troubled severely, as their opponents employ Kindred who are adept at rooting them out and pressure other vampires into blackballing or even destroying the blasphemers. Ordo Dracul Kindred, then, try to stop this kind of behavior before it starts.

The best means of doing so is the diplomatic coterie. These Blood Covens try to be accessible and accepting while they are in other covenants' territory, and they also try to avoid all of the worst stereotypes of the Ordo Dracul. In particular, they avoid flaunting their Coils visibly, unless asked, and they don't answer questions evasively. Making cryptic comments about the arcane power of the covenant might be a suitable tactic for guardians involved in psychological warfare, but it leaves much to be desired when trying to gain the trust (or at least allay the fears) of an Invictus Prince.

HUMANITY

The greatest challenge to a coterie of Dragons (and indeed to the covenant as a whole) is the simple fact that transcending the vampiric condition involves leaving Humanity behind as well. While a Kindred doesn't *have* to become a monster in her studies, many do, or at least become detached and incomprehensible. Therefore, any coterie of the covenant can benefit from a confessor, though martial and practical coterie are most likely to include one.

A Blood Coven's confessor is technically a member of the covenant, but one who does not study the Coils of the Dragon or no longer does. (Some Kindred who find the blasphemy of the Coils too much to bear sometimes take on this role.) Her role in the coterie is, as the title suggests, hearing confession from the other members. She cannot, however, absolve their sin, because once the world is changed, no amount of contrition can change it back. All she can do is prevent the Kindred from sliding any further. Therefore, a confessor acts as psychologist to her fellow Dragons, helping them to understand the drives of the Beast and accept that their metamorphosis could result in the Beast gaining power. She helps them prevent themselves from sliding any further into degradation than they have to, but as no moral "thermometer" exists to measure a vampire's Humanity, the task is largely instinctive.

If a Dragon has slid beyond the level that his enlightenment justifies (in the confessor's opinion), she might advise him to take time off from his role in the coterie and attempt to come to grips with his Humanity. Some confessors even accompany their fellows on this journey, helping to make sure that the subject doesn't fall even farther. The role of confessor is a respected one, but as it requires a Kindred who is willing to subscribe to the philosophy of the Ordo Dracul but not enjoy its greatest ben-

efit, very few of them exist. Most coterie must police themselves, with each member watching the others... but with each member slowly eroding his own Humanity, it takes a great deal of objectivity and self-realization for this arrangement to work.

USING CONFESSORS

This position of confessor offers a tangible degree of relief and guidance to other Dragons. The following system is for players and Storytellers who are interested in the confessor's role.

A confessor serves to keep her fellows following the precepts of Humanity. If the confessor hears a Dragon's confession of a sin or transgression against Humanity, the Dragon in question gains three "phantom" experience points to use toward raising his Humanity if the sin in question caused him to lose any. They are not real experience points to be recorded on the character sheet — they merely represent the confessor's efforts to keep the character on a reliable moral track. These experience points apply only to raising Humanity, and they must be used the next time the character spends experience points, otherwise they are lost. The confessor grants these "phantom" experience points only once per experience expenditure period. A character may not receive additional experience points for confessing multiple times (though confessing multiple times for multiple crimes is certainly a good roleplaying method of justifying spending actual experience points).

Storytellers, keep a close watch on players who want to be confessors. Be sure to allow confessors portrayed by players to allow the experience-point bonus only if they themselves uphold the duties of the confessor as well as abstaining from learning further Coils of the Dragon.

STATUS

Power — temporal power — changes hands frequently in the Danse Macabre. While some Ordo Dracul coterie don't seek political power in a city's vampiric infrastructure, others see the fluid nature of praxis, subinfeudation and the nightly pageant of politics as the penultimate expression of change and adaptation.

In some cities, this isn't a problem. Coterie of Dragons can exist within another covenant's political structure, sometimes even taking roles in the city's vampiric government. (This is much more likely in, say, an Invictus city than a Lancea Sanctum one.) In some cities, though, even to take an observer's role the Dragons must change the city's nights. Change, fortunately, is their specialty.

ORDO DRACUL CITIES

When a Blood Coven comes to power in a domain that already has Dragons in power, what sets that coterie apart from



others in their covenant distinguishes them. After all, almost every Dragon has some degree of proficiency in the Coils, so an up-and-coming Blood Coven can't trade on that proficiency and expect to gain much status within the covenant. (They can try, of course, but the curve is extremely steep.) When the powerful Dragons of a city notice a young coterie of their covenant gaining prominence, however, that coterie finds itself under a magnifying glass as the elders of the covenant watch to see how the coterie changes the city.

One Kindred can vastly alter a domain, depending on how he feeds and what sort of unlife he leads. A coterie of vampires can indirectly affect how tax dollars are spent, what the local police focus on, what local interest groups campaign for and more, simply based on who they hunt. The fact that the act of feeding is so basic, yet carries such far-reaching consequences isn't lost on the cerebral Dragons. Since elders of the covenant in a given place are likely already set into some sort of routine, a rising Blood Coven provides an opportunity to see what kind of change a group of Kindred can enact. Therefore, regardless of the type of coterie, a group of young Kindred in an Ordo Dracul city is rarely alone. Yet it is rarely punished for minor transgressions, either. The goal isn't to stifle potential but to observe results.

As the new Dragons settle into their own routines, focus shifts off them, though Ordo Dracul elders often like to know what members of their covenant are doing in a general sense. What the coterie has done to that point, however, the elders see as indicative of a given "generation" of Kindred, and they tend to use the coterie's actions to set policy. Canny Dragons realize this early on and structure their activities to set changes in place that will benefit them down the line.

MIRACLES

Over the centuries, the Ordo Dracul has found that populated areas seem to increase in mystical activity and power if many of the mortals living there are devout in some form of faith. In the modern World of Darkness, however, faith is a rare commodity. In cities where the Order holds power, it has occasionally given young coterie the task of raising the average "faith level" of a city. Since vampires aren't inclined to start preaching on the streets, though, more germane measures are usually involved.

To wit, the elders sometimes ask young Blood Covens, those concerned with practical philosophy especially, to selectively break the Masquerade with the ultimate goal of leading people to believe. The elders have a few very strict rules about these breaches, though. First, they should never be structured so that a witness thinks she saw a vampire (meaning no feeding, changing into wolves, displays of superhuman strength or other "classic" vampire legends). Second, a miracle should involve more than one person. If only one person tells a story of a supernatural occurrence, it's easy to write that person off as a lunatic. If an entire subway train full of people witnesses a mugger falling dead of fright, however, the skeptics must admit that *something* happened. Finally, the characters can leave no verifiable evidence behind. They must not allow themselves to be photographed or recorded in any other way. This



last rule isn't just about the Masquerade, but about the ultimate goal of the action. Proof denies faith, after all.

Certainly, the Ordo Dracul isn't alone in this exercise. Even if they don't have the same goals in mind, other vampires are bound to break the Masquerade in one form or another. Other supernatural creatures test the limits of mortal faith nightly. Indeed, the even less understood aspects of the World of Darkness — the unknowable but palpable horrors and strangenesses that lurk beyond men's realm of vision — do their part as well. It might simply be that the Ordo Dracul has more in common with this strangeness than their fellow Kindred do.

ENEMY TERRITORY

Ordo Dracul Kindred who set out to make names for themselves in cities where other Kindred factions hold sway had best be very careful. While any Prince worth the title is aware of active coteries in his city, members of a Blood Coven run the risk of being branded blasphemers and exiled if they are flagrant with their studies. On the other hand, the unique nature of the Ordo Dracul means that just as many political contacts want to cozy up to the Dragons as nurture suspicions about them. Depending on what faction holds the most power in the city, the coterie can expect different responses and avenues of approach.

INVICTUS

Provided that the coterie respects the Prince's (probably extensive) laws and keeps the Masquerade intact, it should be able to coexist with an Invictus government. The Kindred might find themselves embroiled in the low blows of high politics, but any coterie in a First Estate city runs that risk. Many Invictus Princes are willing to take Dragon advisors or turn a blind eye to the coterie's activities in exchange for counsel or instruction.

As an Ordo Dracul coterie grows in power in Invictus domains, the Prince is likely to demand greater obeisance from the Blood Coven, wishing to know where it is and what it is doing at all times, and ask annoying questions like, "What's so important about that old house?" Not answering those questions can result in scrutiny from the Prince's Sheriff (or worse, the Hound) or drive the Prince to undercut the coterie by (for example) decreeing the old house to fall within a hostile Regent's tenorial domain.

CARTHIAN

In cities where the Carthian Movement has taken power, the Dragons often become staunch supporters. The Carthians can't restrict the Order's activities without looking like hypocrites, and since the Order doesn't wish to take power away

from the people, the two covenants have very little to fight over. On the surface, in fact, it would seem that they have much in common. Both covenants revere change, both would prefer their members to think for themselves, and both ask that their coteries not waste time with pointless pomp and circumstance when they could be out doing something.

The problem is that the two covenants' attitudes on change are actually very different. In particular, the Ordo Dracul doesn't view change itself as a good or bad thing, but rather sees it as a way to understand the world and God's intention. The covenants, therefore, can conflict on a "church vs. state" level. The Carthians believe in transferring all power to the people, while the Order never forgets that true power rests with knowledge and understanding.

CIRCLE OF THE CRONE

When the Acolytes claim praxis, the Ordo Dracul tends to be very curious about it. The Dragons might dismissively believe that the Circle of the Crone is fundamentally flawed in its philosophies because its members don't concern themselves with more metaphysical matters, but that doesn't mean that they aren't fascinated by the lore and worship practices the Acolytes espouse. That in mind, when the Dragons discover the Circle's presence in a city, whether or not that presence is indicative of the city's policies, they tend to try to involve themselves as much as possible. Doing so typically involves special coteries mixing the attributes of diplomatic and research Blood Covens, whose members then try to ingratiate themselves with the Acolytes enough to witness their bloody rites.

How the Circle reacts to these efforts depends largely on the members in question, but the response can be anything from guarded acceptance to violent rejection. The Dragons are, of course, fascinated in any case.

THE LANCEA SANCTUM


The Lancea Sanctum often defaults to the belief that the Dragons are blasphemers, which makes unlife difficult for any Ordo Dracul coterie that must operate within Sanctified domains. Blood Covens that must operate within such cities typically find themselves hard pressed to earn any appreciable status. In extreme cases, the coterie occasionally becomes little more than a pack of fugitives in the eyes of the Bishop. Elder Dragons are sympathetic to such coteries' plights, and give them what aid is possible, but unless a very compelling reason exists to remain in Sanctified territory (for instance, a powerful mystical site), the usual advice is simply to lie low. After all, the Kindred in power will change in time.





Chapter Three

The Carthian Movement



We will not labor in service to an outdated aristocrat. It is not the duty of the Kindred to exist in conditions more deplorable than those of the kine.

— Handsome Jack, “Confessions to a Prince”

Politics have no relation to morals.

—Niccolo Machiavelli

Of all the covenants, the collectivist Carthian Movement finds the act of gathering into coteries the least unnatural. For them, collective action is both natural and ethically superior to the selfish lunge up the ladder commonly seen in other covenants. Carthians view group endeavors with a certain reverence and coterie membership as a noble calling. Given that Carthians, in general, trend toward the younger edge of the Kindred age spectrum, they are also safer and more effective working together than alone. Only through effective group action have the Carthians been able to make any headway against the monolithic power structures established by the Camarilla and continued into the modern nights by the Invictus and the Lancea Sanctum.

Since history is against them, the Carthians are keenly aware that they need to make the future work for them. Innovation appears to be somewhat less difficult for the young Kindred of the Carthian Movement than for most of the Damned, a fact that works in the covenant's favor. Carthians make it a point to be less hidebound than the Kindred of the older covenants, and they're also more willing to experiment with new concepts in coterie structure. Innovation and risk go hand in hand, of course. While the covenant's openness has resulted in a number of noble failed experiments, it has also led to a handful of remarkable successes that have served the Movement well. In certain American cities, for example, the covenant has adopted the form of a union. In the mid-'60s, one domain's Carthians called a "strike" of the city's neonates (and Carthian ancillae and elders) against the unfair tactics of the dominant Invictus and brought the city's Kindred politics to a standstill. Without its minions, the First Estate was seriously compromised, and the Carthians gained immense standing. That approach resonated so strongly with the city's neonates that it is now easily the strongest covenant in that city.

On the whole, Carthian coteries show more variety than other covenants' coteries do. They include teamsters' unions, small pockets of political dissidents, governmental councils, salons of political philosophers and similar social bodies. They do not typically revolve around power and control the way the coteries of other covenants do. Instead, they focus on what they can do to loosen the bonds of the Kindred condition.

A caveat is in order at this point for those who might see the Carthians as altruists among the Kindred. They are not. Carthians are drawn to that which provides them with a sense of equality and protects them from the depredations of elders, not to that which is kind or compassionate. For all their lofty principles and ideals, they are just as prone to excesses as any other Kindred. Indeed, they have the same thirst for blood that characterizes all of the Damned. No political system is immune to corruption, and the Carthians often take inherently noble systems (democracy or true communism, for example) and bring out the worst in them. While the Carthians favor egalitarianism and freedom for other Carthians, they

are not so generous to those who lack the ideals to join the revolution, whom they often regard as no better than beasts or kine — and treat accordingly. The collectivist urge pushes Carthians to work together toward a goal, but that goal need not be noble. In fact, among the Kindred, it rarely is. Fascism and communism are both, at their roots, noble systems. Just as mortals failed to make those systems work, however, Carthians — especially as they grow older and more powerful — are predisposed to turn even the most perfect systems into dangerous totalitarian nightmares.

PSYCHOLOGY

Coterie of Carthian vampires often gather for protection and find that they're much more effective together than they are apart. The very notion of the political individual is strange and vaguely menacing to the Carthians, who strongly favor group effort. Publicly, Carthians support the rights of the individual, but privately they assume that any Kindred who spend too much time alone is up to something suspicious.

That's only one reason Carthians gather into coterie, of course. Given the importance of coterie among the Carthians, they have myriad reasons for working together.

FEAR

Young Carthian coterie are held together by fear as much as anything. The world of the Damned is cruel, and some small degree of safety can be found in the company of others. That said, a Kindred might find that buying into an alien spiritual, political or philosophical paradigm (as represented by the other covenants) comes at too high a price to pay for companionship. In comparison, the collectivist model of the Carthians is familiar, especially in the Americas where "team spirit" and revolutionary zeal have long held an important place in the mortal consciousness. The concepts of democracy and egalitarianism play well to groups of young Kindred who've just been confronted with the realities of the Requiem. It feels more familiar and, possibly, more "natural" than the structure supported by other covenants.

When he signed the Declaration of Independence, Benjamin Franklin said, "We must, indeed, all hang together or, most assuredly, we shall all hang separately." The sentiment of his words informs the actions of many young Carthian coterie in the modern nights. Strength thrives in numbers, and Carthian Kindred make more use of that group-derived safety than any other covenant does. Any vampire who espouses equality among Kindred is automatically making enemies of most elders who benefit from the inequality of the Danse Macabre (which is to say, most of them). A coterie of Carthians, for example, might hold its own in an influence battle with an entrenched elder by pooling its influence and other resources.

IDEALISM

Another force that holds many Carthian coterie together is sheer idealism. There *ought* to be a better way to go through the Requiem than the other covenants provide. There *should* be opportunities for young Kindred who don't want to buy into the corruption of the vampiric underworld. And there is: the Carthian Movement. The covenant is somewhat vague on just what its goals really are, though. Freedom from oppression by elders, the right of each Kindred to determine the course of her own Requiem and a more equitable approach to Kindred politics are all very noble — but very vague — goals.

Many coterie have one and only one function: to spread the word of the Carthian Movement in that particular domain. The more Kindred the covenant can lure to its banner, neonates in particular, the more power the covenant has to shape the face of Kindred politics.

EFFECTIVENESS

There's no arguing that the deck is stacked against younger Kindred in nearly every domain. The elders of other covenants have done everything in their power to consolidate their own position, often at the expense of subsequent generations of vampires. The Kindred of the Carthian Movement overcome this disadvantage by working in concert. An elder of the Invictus or the Lancea Sanctum might be more powerful than any single member of the Carthian Movement, but a collective of Carthian Kindred can resort to swarm tactics and take out even most powerful elders, though probably at a terrible cost to the covenant. In a sense, the

mob power possessed by Carthians is akin to the much-feared mob power possessed by mortals. Elders might dislike the Carthians, they might think of them as uppity fledglings, dangerous loose cannons or anything else they please, but they're still forced to give them a free hand in the nightly Danse Macabre. To do otherwise would risk the wrath of the most united of all the covenants.

One of the ironies of the Carthian approach is that while the covenant as a whole claims to respect and work for the betterment of individual Kindred, the covenant itself recognizes only group identity. The Carthians get their power through group actions. They see and interact with humanity as a mass, and they school like fish through the midnight world of the Damned. A single Kindred attempting to achieve anything of import as an individual is nearly heretical in the view of the Carthian Movement. It reeks of grandstanding, of setting oneself above others, or of being "first among equals."

Consequently, as long as a Kindred is content being a cog in the machine, she and her fellow cogs can achieve great things. The moment she tries to be something more, though — to think in terms of "I" instead of "we" — she's likely to find the whole covenant turning on her.

This describes a great deal of what happens to Carthians as they age. They have a tendency to think of the work of their neonate nights as a form of paying dues, but when they've gained some experience from their nights of struggle and want to lead instead of follow, they're accused of trying to waylay the Movement. At that point, they can either shut up and take their place among the masses, or they can defect to another covenant.



INTRA-COVENANT CONFLICT

The goals of the Carthian Movement are (necessarily) somewhat vague. Without a definite agenda (beyond “striving together against the incumbent system”), Carthians often find themselves split on many issues. This was, perhaps, inevitable, given that the covenant’s goal is to gather up masses of disparate Kindred, mostly neonates with very little sense of history, and forge them into a powerful force for adapting understandable governmental models to Kindred society. The covenant has no policy on preferred tactics, and since having only one agenda would alienate many of its members, it aims for very general goals. It’s the perfect recipe for internecine conflict. The doves want to stay connected to humanity while the hawks want to achieve their goals by any means necessary. Older Carthians feel that they’ve attained many of their goals and want to “take the Movement to the next phase,” while the younger ones feel the revolution hasn’t even started in earnest yet. The intellectuals want to debate their policies more before taking action, while the hands-on members of the covenant think it’s time to act *now*. Some elders from other covenants (including many who have defected from the Carthians) have stated that the ideal image of the Carthian Movement is the ouroboros, the snake that’s perpetually devouring its own tail. The elders might even laugh about this if the 20th century hadn’t seen the Carthians become so dangerous. A prevailing cynicism is that the Carthians have only two enemies that they really have to worry about: themselves and everybody else.

At the coterie level, this conflict confronts all members with an opportunity: They can either fall to the bickering that plagues their covenant, or they can rally around the ideals of their brand of Kindred politics and achieve something. For a coterie, this means deciding exactly what its political structure is. Does it mean that the coterie’s more powerful members have to handicap themselves to stay in league with its weaker members? Does it mean that no single Kindred is allowed to guide the coterie? Does it mean that the language of those in the coterie has to be cleansed of any words or phrases that might suggest an inferior/superior dynamic between two Kindred? Do members favor syndicalism? Communism? Fascism? Democracy? A classical senate? Members must come to some sort of agreement about what brand of political system they favor before the coterie can strive for it, after all. In this sense, coterie can often become a dysfunctional microcosm of the covenant as a whole. A new Carthian coterie should address these issues in the course of the chronicle to explore just what it takes to be a member of the Movement.

PHILOSOPHY

Of all the Kindred covenants, only the Carthian philosophy takes into consideration the plight of the common vampire and sees the humblest Nosferatu neonate as having a voice equal in worth to the haughtiest Daeva Prince. Whereas the basically feudal power structures of the other covenants strive to raise elders up by subjugating younger Kindred, the Carthians strive to achieve an egalitarian vampiric society in which a neonate receives the same kind of justice an elder does. They want a feral Gangrel to receive the same treatment as a politically connected Daeva. They want the modern rights of the individual to prevail over corruption.

At its root (in theory, anyway), the Carthian Movement seeks rational governance, a vampiric order established “by the Kindred and for the Kindred.” Most Carthians feel that mortals have stumbled onto something good with democracy, and that Kindred need to stop clinging to obsolete power structures and adapt to the times.

Nowhere is the idealistic nature of the Carthian Movement more obvious than at the coterie level. There are no hierarchies to worry about, no favored clans, no second class Kindred — and there is precious little order. Under most circumstances, Carthian coterie are half a step away from being undirected rabble. Every member of the coterie knows full well that she’s neither better nor less than any other member of the coterie. Yet, from this chaos comes the covenant’s strength.

In most Carthian coterie, every Kindred has an equal say. The group is less likely to take extreme courses of action, as the group dynamic tends to counsel against extremism. Once the coterie has agreed to a course of action, every member can work toward that goal energetically, knowing that once the goal is attained, an equal share of the power (or blame) will be hers. For the Carthians, this is the greatest motive of all.

COTERIE FORMATION

Among the Carthians, the phrase “coterie organization” is an oxymoron. What little organization a coterie has is the direct result of how much organization its members choose to adopt.

Among some other covenant-specific coterie, many (though by no means all) are the products of elder decree or experimentation, a sort of Kindred version of arranged marriage. Most Carthian coterie, on the other hand, typically assemble themselves according to whatever criteria they feel are important, and any outside Kindred interfering with that in any way is subject to severe social sanctions (e.g., being snubbed, scolded or glared at by her peers). In the absence of elder involvement, the selection of coterie members can be haphazard. There is rarely any strategy in how a coterie gains members. More often than not, the luck of the draw is the only thing dictating the result of a bunch of Carthian Kindred joining together as a coterie, as long as ideals mesh. Some of these free-form coterie work. Others don’t. Others might not work *initially*, but the members learn relatively quickly how best to cooperate to further the goals of the coterie as a whole. And, of course, vampiric nature makes the process harder than it needs to be.

This approach to coterie is the most common in the Movement, but by no means the only way coterie come into being. From time to time, ancillae put out a call for Kindred to volunteer for a particular duty that furthers whatever cause the dominant Carthian faction favors. These ancillae (or possibly elders) don’t assemble the resultant coterie directly, they simply call attention to a need, suggest some criteria and hope for the best. (“The Carthians in this infiltration coterie should have exceedingly good social skills and preferably some ability and experience with stealth operations.”) If this method *doesn’t* result in a workable coterie, the ancilla might offer a reward to those Kindred who volunteer.

Members of a coterie choose one another for myriad reasons and explain it away as “the best thing for the coterie.” A Carthian Daeva might opt to take a Nosferatu into her coterie out of a

feeling of obligation, pity or political correctness. The Nosferatu might accept her invitation because he sees the Daeva as a good tool to further his personal goals. A Mekhet philosopher in the process of choosing his own coterie might decide, however reluctantly, to include a Gangrel brawler for his martial prowess. The Gangrel brawler might agree because the Mekhet stokes his lusts. The adage about how politics makes strange bedfellows is particularly true when describing the process by which Carthian coterie come into being. Members of the Carthian Movement have been using idealistic politics to cloak their less noble agendas since the covenant's very first nights.

Once a coterie forms, however, it needs some kind of guidance or direction. Unlike the strict hierarchical system used by the less progressive covenants, many Carthian coterie refuse to lower themselves to recognizing any sort of hierarchy inside the coterie, unless their personal politics favor such things. They prefer to take a more enlightened approach to managing the coterie, and any attempt to choose a leader would be considered scandalously atavistic. Having one designated leader calling the shots in a Carthian coterie is looked down upon by many Carthians, but that doesn't mean it doesn't happen. Allowing one member of the coterie to make decisions for the group is considered not just anachronistic, but horribly passé as well. The obvious alternative is a sort of anarchy, which, as a general rule, results in the coterie tearing itself apart within a month or two. The more effective Carthian coterie adopt one of two approaches to decide who makes the group's decisions.

CONSENSUS BUILDING

The Carthian Movement places a great deal of importance on egalitarianism. The covenant's philosophy of treating all Kindred with the rights they could expect among the living is responsible for a large portion of its membership, particularly the high percentage of neonates among its membership. No member of a coterie should have unwarranted power over another. Some Kindred may accept positions as spokespersons or advisors for their coterie, but only with the consent of the other members. Still, coterie need some means of reaching decisions. A coterie without the ability to establish and follow an agenda won't get much done or stay together for long. As with most things, coterie are encouraged to make their own choices regarding the group's decision-making processes. The strictest and most dogmatic Carthian coterie require unanimity before engaging in any given course of action. That is, all members of the coterie have to agree before the group takes any action. That degree of accord requires an enormous amount of discussion before the undertaking of every significant action, and most Carthians secretly agree that coterie that insist on consensus do more talking than anything else. On the other hand, some Carthian coterie are like macrocosmic dictatorships themselves, with the empowered, revolutionary leader calling all the shots. Practically, most coterie are comfortable with simple majority rule, mostly because a majority is far easier to achieve while unanimity can slow down a coterie to such an extent that it gets nothing accomplished. In the long run, majority rule results in more ideologically unified coterie, since members who find themselves consistently outvoted on issues that are important to them are more likely to find a place in another coterie. A Nosferatu with a bad temper might want his coterie to crack more rival heads, but if he's constantly outvoted by the coterie's calmer members,

he's likely to leave eventually. Not only will he be more satisfied with a more aggressive group of Kindred, but his original coterie won't have him pushing them toward conflicts they'd rather avoid. A Kindred who finds himself at odds with his coterie on a regular basis, but who doesn't want to leave for whatever reason, might choose to stick it out and try to win over other members to his approach. Alternatively, he can wait until the coterie acquires new members and try to sway them as early as possible toward his approach to the Requiem. Or, most easily, he can start trying to understand the perspective of the majority more often and work with his coterie, not against it.

If a coterie would rather not lose a particular member, however, the members might vote with her more often than they'd like just to keep her around. A vampire with important political connections, knowledge crucial to the coterie's goals or an enormous amount of money might find that she can get away with a lot more in her coterie than she could otherwise.

THE UN-LEADER

The majority of Carthian coterie are content to let majority rule dictate the group's direction. Other coterie, perhaps attracted to the convenience of having one person do all the thinking or simply drawn to old habits, might *like* the idea of having a strong leader because it makes the Requiem so much simpler. One member of a coterie might have the charisma (or resources) to command the group's votes on a regular basis, and the coterie might implicitly begin to treat her as though she were the leader. Such an individual is usually a bit older, a bit more experienced, or she might just be more charismatic. This "un-leader" makes decisions for the group, usually after soliciting its members' input. Her orders are often phrased as suggestions to downplay the appearance of leadership. (Of course, no one uses the term "un-leader." That's simply a conceit for the sake of discussion here.)

These Carthian figures *can* be inspired, subtle, effective leaders, but just because they're members of the Carthian covenant doesn't make them any less Damned. An un-leader in a Carthian coterie can easily be an enlightened despot, absolute in her control over the group, but subtle and indirect enough that the power disparity doesn't chafe the other members. Daeva (or other Kindred with Majesty) are particularly good at guiding coterie thus. If they don't for some reason, such leaders rarely hesitate to appeal to group loyalty, Carthian dogma, the laws of the domain, social standing or anything else necessary to get her orders carried out.

Often, the aspect of the un-leader that drives her coterie to follow her is her absolute devotion to the political cause. In some circumstances, Kindred are surprised to find out that "the cause" carries more weight with their leader than the unives of the coterie's members. More than one un-leader has seen fit to sacrifice her entire coterie (including herself, in many cases) in the name of achieving some great goal for the cause. Indeed, multiple individuals might find themselves jockeying for the position of un-leader in a Carthian coterie. Such behavior is usually the product of a great deal of personal politicking and a good many secret deals and special arrangements.

THE REVOLVING GUIDE

Another innovative approach some Carthians have taken to the subject of coterie leadership is to let each member act



as the coterie's guide for a week. The term "guide" is sufficiently removed from the concept of unilateral or dictatorial authority that most Carthians find it acceptable.

In coterie's using the revolving-guide approach, each coterie member leads the coterie for a set period before handing over the reins to a compatriot. In this way, every member gets equal say in the group's activities, but there's still focus and order. Some coterie's find this to be the best of all choices, but others find that certain guides take the coterie in such personal directions that the other members can hardly wait for the term to be up. Most Carthians with experience in using the revolving-guide approach strongly advocate some kind of override or veto ability for the rest of the coterie to keep the guide from rampaging over the rest of the group. In such cases, if *all* of the other members side against the guide, his decision is overturned. Furthermore, most coterie's also stipulate that if the guide is overruled by the coterie in this way, he forfeits the rest of his term of guiding as a reminder to lead more wisely in the future.

SACRIFICE

The dark reflection of zeal is sacrifice. No Carthian can be called a true member of his covenant until he has sacrificed something important for the Carthian cause. This message is reinforced frequently by other members of the covenant from the night of their Embrace. Members of the Carthian Movement, therefore, are intensely aware that their cause needs its members to sacrifice from time to time. The willingness of Carthians to sacrifice for the covenant is one of the strengths

of the Movement. It allows the relatively young covenant to achieve things that even a more established covenant might have difficulty pulling off. Depending on what the situation calls for, a Carthian might find himself sacrificing key mortal contacts, financial stability, his social standing or even his unlife in the name of the Carthian Movement's local ideology.

It's not unusual for "the cause" to request that a coterie make a small sacrifice from time to time, and large ones less frequently. Such sacrifices vary enormously, but they can include a commitment of anything from time to money to a member of the coterie's mortal herd or even to fighting in the name of the Movement. Such sacrifices aren't called for often, and when they are, it's usually because the covenant as a whole needs to fend off the other covenants or needs to increase its power in a certain domain. For example, if a Regent's tenorial domain is known as a haven for Carthians, that Regent might be asked to host Carthians from outside the domain in order to increase the covenant's presence in a city. Of course, like all Carthians, the Regent is perfectly free to decline the request. She might find her social options drying up, her support from others in the covenant growing sporadic and other members of her covenant leaving the room when she enters it, but she's certainly free to refuse the request.

Typically, the smaller the requested sacrifice is, the more pronounced the social consequences are for not acquiescing. A coterie that declines to make some small sacrifice for the betterment of the Movement (a moderate sum of money, for example) might face total social ostracism, while a coterie



asked to sacrifice the lives of the herd the members feed from might get only a brief cold shoulder for refusing.

Curiously, it tends to be the covenant's ancillae who do the asking in these situations and neonates who provide most of the sacrifices, though this arrangement is by no means absolute. What this means to a particular coterie is that it learns the techniques of social extortion as it gains experience working with the Carthian Movement. Once the group has learned to sacrifice resources to the cause (or suffered the ostracism of its peers after *not* making such sacrifices), it will know better how to manipulate younger Kindred using those same techniques. In many ways, this dynamic is the very heart of the Carthian philosophy, which makes it all but transparent to the members of the covenant. Those who have recognized this "abuse of lesser" typically pass it off as one more cost of playing politics.

For a coterie of characters, the willingness to sacrifice could potentially impact some of the Merits each character started with. While it can be rough to lose those points that way, it's pale shadow of what such a sacrifice means to the character in the context of the chronicle.

Almost any Merit can be sacrificed in the name of the cause, should it come to that. A haven hiding Carthians from out of town can be burned to the ground. Money can be spent or lost. Retainers, allies and contacts can be killed, as can members of a herd who are fed from too frequently. City or Clan Status can be sacrificed, often resulting in some increase in Covenant Status. Unless the circumstances are truly extraordinary (outright war between the Carthians and another covenant, for example), no member of a coterie should lose more than one dot in any given Merit in any single situation. After all, one of the reasons for working collectively is to spread out the sacrifice as much and as thinly as possible. That said, dots lost thus are gone until the player buys them back with experience. The struggle for dominance in the Danse Macabre does not offer consolation prizes.

EQUALITY

The vast majority of Carthians believe fervently in an adaptation of modern, mortal notions: that all Kindred are Embraced equal, and that what they choose to do with their Requiem is and should be up to them. Almost every Carthian philosophy states that if every vampire were shown respect and granted an equal say in the nightly governance of a city's Kindred population, it would bring an end to many of the injustices suffered by many vampires (including the gratuitous game-playing by elders who are so wrapped up in the Danse Macabre that they lose sight of all else). Of course, espousing the equality of Kindred is anathema to covenants such as the Invictus, whose entire structure is based on *inequality*. For Carthians, however, nothing but equality among Kindred is acceptable — even if some individuals make them wish it were otherwise.

Some of the most vociferous supporters of equality among the Carthians are sophisticated neonates. Of all the Kindred, the young are those most regularly relegated to positions of inequality throughout Kindred society. Their influence within the covenant, based on both their unshakable absolutism on the matter and sheer numbers, keeps the Carthian Movement honest. The moment a savvy neonate sees something that undermines the Carthian ethic of equality, the voice of popular dissent within the covenant grows progressively louder until the inequality is addressed.

All members of a Carthian coterie are considered equally valuable. Given that most members of the Carthian Movement are neonates, and that a few coterie combine neonates and ancillae, that's likely to be accurate. Any member of a coterie suggesting, in any way, that all members are not equally valuable could be reprimanded (or possibly accused of undermining the Movement and kicked out of the covenant) for both his callousness and heterodoxy.

An emphasis on equality is not necessarily an emphasis on compassion or morality. Some Carthian coterie are together because all members are equally terrible or equally willing to take advantage of the mortal herd. For example, one coterie might decide that the best way to advance its political goals is to weaken the mortal herd. To that end, it would make a concerted effort not to feed on the disadvantaged and seek more vital blood in order to remove them from the mortal population (and keep them from ever becoming Kindred).

INNOVATION

Carthians rarely favor formalized notions of vampiric superiority. On the contrary, they recommend holding on to as many mortal practices as possible, in part to avoid losing Humanity, and in part to help the covenant stay up to date with new developments in mortal politics and governance. The closer the members of the covenant stay to humanity, the more they can stave off the encroaching stasis brought on by their damnation. By holding onto their mortal ways, Carthian vampires hold at bay the ossification to which so many Kindred are prone. While doing so puts them at odds with their own static nature, it also gives them an advantage when it comes to adapting to a changing world. Whereas Kindred of other covenants, the older ones in particular, are still trying to understand the concepts behind computers in general, Carthians long ago adapted to computers and now concern themselves with the details of videoconferencing, Internet security and optimizing bandwidth. Computers represent only one facet of the covenant's knowledge of the modern era that it uses to maximum benefit. The Kindred of the Carthian Movement do everything they can to prevent the kinds of generation gaps that divide other covenants.

The Carthian Movement staunchly advocates interaction with mortals. Through mortals Carthians learn the tricks that will further their long-term goals. To that end, Carthians interact with mortals on a regular basis, and not just as predators among prey. Carthian vampires are often inclined to converse with mortals wherever they find them, and they believe that by doing so they're staying in touch with what is most innovative and vital in themselves.

The relative dynamism of Carthians is part of what underpins their reputation as the innovators of Kindred society. Another part stems from the covenant's acceptance of dissent. Arguing, sharing opinions and participating in the covenant's ongoing internal dialogue are all mainstays of Carthian existence. While a member of a more calcified covenant might have an idea for improving the covenant, she's unlikely to voice it lest she antagonize her elders. Likewise, even if she does propose her idea, the elders would likely dismiss such a suggestion out of hand, coming as it does from someone so young. The best this hypothetical Kindred can hope for is to have her mentor steal her idea and present it as his own. After experiencing the resentment and useless rage stemming from *that*

a time or two, she's likely to lose all motivation to bring up her ideas ever again — even if they're brilliant.

The Carthian Movement, however, approves of constructive dissent. Consequently, neonates who are eager to impress others in their coterie or to make a name for themselves as clever, innovative types are likely to share their ideas at the drop of a hat. The constant brainstorming inevitably leads to an evolution of ideas that works in the covenant's favor (despite the occasional periods of chaos).

This dynamic is more obvious among the Carthians' coterie of philosophers and politicians, but even in more martial groups, debate over the most appropriate tactics to use in a given situation lead to better outcomes than sticking with a more static approach would.

Some members of the Movement have suggested that debate is the covenant's main strength. Unlike other covenants that use dogma or authority to quell their younger members, the Carthians advocate a free exchange of ideas. While this exchange unavoidably opens up the covenant to the input of firebrands and radicals, it also allows the Movement to hear the ideas of insightful neonates as well.

Debates within Carthian coterie sometimes come right after the group performs the Chain (see **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 47). Whoever holds the revered object is the designated speaker. No interruption or crosstalk is allowed as long as that member holds the object. Once the member has had her say, she passes the object along. A vampire who wants to challenge or refute her views must wait until the object gets to him. In this way, Carthians have open debate without it degenerating into shouting matches (which is how most other approaches to "free exchange of ideas" turned out before the current method was adopted). In other, similar formats, the object passed around during the Chain serves as the "speaker's right" but isn't necessarily passed in a circle, allowing for more point-counterpoint forms of debate.

While Carthians like to preserve the peace, insightful dissent is valued as a means of forcing the covenant to consider ideas with which it might not necessarily be comfortable, but which could help the Movement function better.

METHODOLOGY

The Carthians' unity is a powerful advantage in their night-to-night struggle for justice. What the covenant's visionaries scheme, its coterie can often achieve when they work together. This willingness to cooperate gives it an advantage over the dogma-bound *Lancea Sanctum*, the scholarly *Ordo Dracul* and the ultra-hierarchical *Invictus*. Likewise, the members of the Circle of the Crone are so individualistic that they're less likely to work en masse toward a group goal.

The overarching goal of the Carthian covenant is the leveling of the playing field for all Kindred (whatever form that takes personally for each Carthian). In the absence of hierarchy and division — or so the visionaries claim — all Kindred will be equals, freed from the ages-old systems of enslavement used by the other covenants in their pursuit of the *Danse Macabre*.

The unofficial motto of the Carthians is "Whatever it takes." This motto could be (and has been) used to answer any of several questions, including the following: "What are we supposed to do about this damned Acolyte Prince?" "What did you want

us to do about the haven's security?" or "How much pressure did you want us to put on the union guys to make them show up tomorrow night?" Carthians, on the whole, are the most innovative vampires dwelling in their domains. Some of this capacity comes from the basic intelligence of the mortals culled for the Embrace, some from coterie's willingness to brainstorm ideas, some from their relative nearness to the mortal state and some from sheer animal cunning. They are like ants or rats in their ability to find ways around obstacles, and that ability is one of the covenant's single greatest strengths.

The Carthians are pushing for a hierarchical change that will wipe out the ossified power structures of the old Kindred establishment and level the playing field for all of the Damned. Some of the Movement's members go so far as to describe themselves as revolutionaries. When pushed to it, they are not averse to adopting the violent tactics used by other revolutionary movements. As far as these radical Carthians are concerned, force is the only thing that ever persuades power-mad elders to loosen their collective grip on vampire society. Even as the covenant presents itself as an idealistic and egalitarian alternative to "the establishment," it works behind the scenes using whatever tactics it has to — including some that would likely horrify its own less devoted members.

Carthian coterie often find themselves with the awkward dilemma of choosing between their Humanity and their revolutionary cause. A coterie that maintains its connection to humanity might be forced to forgo certain very effective tactics (betrayals, assassination and the like) in its war for equality. On the other hand, a coterie that takes advantage of every available violent, destructive technique will quickly find itself alienated from the human morality its members had hoped to maintain over the centuries.

This dilemma is, predictably, the basis for much intra-covenant disagreement. Carthians who truly value the human side of their personalities find themselves horrified at the mayhem caused by some of their fellow Carthians. On the other end of the spectrum, the more violent members of the faction find themselves constantly frustrated by the inability of their "gentler" brethren to get things done, expeditiously or otherwise.

Any given Carthian coterie likely contains adherents of both views. What tactics the group winds up using depends, in the end, on how the group makes decisions and what tools it has in place to avoid or resolve conflict within the group.

The Carthian Movement uses an array of tactics in its fight for the common Kindred. Given its many disadvantages (such as the relative lack of elders and the frequent disdain of the other covenants), the Carthians need to make the most of what advantages they have. The following are among the most common tactics used by Carthian coterie in their nightly struggle for the cause.

TEAMWORK

On the whole, Carthian coterie comprise Kindred of young *Vitae*, but while few Carthian neonates or ancillae are the equal of a crafty elder from another covenant, a coterie of determined vampires can apply more than enough force to succeed. If a single coterie cannot accomplish a given task, it might bring in another (and another and another...) until enough Kindred are assembled to get the job done. The persistence of Carthians is one of the few

reasons the covenant is a credible threat to the older and more entrenched covenants. One Carthian vampire might not be able to take on the covenant's enemies, one Carthian coterie might not be able to take on the covenant's enemies, but having several coteries of zealous, diligent vampires working toward the same goal is likely to be devastating to nearly any enemy.



COLLECTIVES

The strength of the Carthian Movement lies in its numbers, but sometimes a single coterie simply doesn't possess the sheer numerical force necessary to achieve a goal important to the covenant. In such cases, Carthians may put together a collective, an ad hoc aggregate of several coteries working in concert as one large "meta-coterie" to achieve a one-time major goal. The goal can be any large task, such as a crucial investigation, purging a domain of another covenant's influence, clearing a neighborhood of an infestation of dangerous mages, repelling an incursion by another covenant or seizing imminent praxis.

Kindred of other covenants rarely develop any concept of a mid-level social unit between coterie and covenant. Even their internal factions rarely work openly and in tandem. A single coterie is enough of a challenge to vampiric nature, no less two or more coteries working in concert. The sight of a dozen Carthians working together in tight unison is very disturbing to other Kindred, most of whom are either completely self-focused or unused to thinking of Kindred acting in groups larger than coteries.

The process of gathering coteries into a collective is fairly simple. A call for assistance goes out, stating what the objective is and how many Carthians are needed. Members of the coteries involved gather and discuss taking a cooperative approach to their shared problem. The nascent collective usually convenes a planning session in which strategies are worked out and then the coteries merge into one large group. Each coterie sends one member to represent it in an "executive council" that guides the group. A collective pools all the resources of its component coteries, so a collective can bring to bear vast power and influence in its joint effort, be it financial, mortal, martial or what have you. Whatever it takes.

Obviously, collectives are relatively common in cities where Carthians are numerous. Yet even in places where Carthians are weak, the covenant has fielded enough Kindred to assemble collectives large enough to deal with critical obstacles (even if some members brave the dangers of travel to aid the cause from elsewhere). Participating in a collective doesn't pay or benefit a coterie in any way other than the recognition of others in the covenant. It's one more thing Carthian coteries are expected to do "for the cause." In general, coteries might grumble if the call for collectives goes out too often, but if they didn't support the cause to begin with, they likely would have joined another covenant.

Assembling a collective can't help but be a political action. Not only does it function as a show of force for the Carthians, it tends to swell their ranks with disaffected neonates from other covenants and

make the Vitae of the other covenants' Kindred run colder than usual. Some Princes and Regents have taken to subtly punishing known Carthians after the formation of a collective, just to see that it doesn't come to be too common an occurrence.

It's possible that a collective action could be called if another covenant were to commit some kind of atrocity against a Carthian coterie. The offense would have to be severe (such as persecuting the group solely on the basis of its covenant affiliation or martyring a Carthian), because collectives are a threat best wielded with discretion.

While there's nothing technically barring other covenants from using collectives, only the Carthians have ever shown the social wherewithal necessary to suspend typical Kindred infighting long enough to make one work.

From a Storyteller perspective, collectives are a good way to accommodate visiting friends who want to give the game a shot or for super-sized one-shot games. They also serve as significant plot devices that don't necessarily plunge a city into utter chaos, but nevertheless presage significant changes in the power structure.



Carthians are aware of this strength, and they wield it strategically. Minor infractions against the cause can be overlooked, but serious offenses — such as abandoning a fellow Carthian to Final Death — is grounds for action. Hostile members of other covenants have been forced to stand down from violent action against Carthian coteries (or individuals) after being threatened with widespread rebellion by the covenant's members.

This is not to suggest that individual Carthian coteries don't have their own agendas, just that the covenant's agenda can come first. As the Carthian Movement sees it, every time an entrenched vampire takes advantage of a disempowered vampire, he's striking at the Movement's very heart. If the Carthians take no action, the foe grows emboldened enough to do it again. If, on the other hand, the Carthians take action against the foe every time he steps out of line, even if some of those actions are not entirely successful, it reminds their adversary that any vampire taking advantage of the Kindred masses can expect to be met with resistance. The first, second or third time the Carthians resist might not have any impact at all, but even the most arrogant elder is eventually going to get tired of bracing for conflict, defending his haven and influences, just to play power games with younger Kindred.

MORTAL MASSES

Quite frequently and with its own unique methods, the Carthian Movement works well and effectively with mortals. It makes inroads into mortal institutions and cultivates mortal contacts more easily than any other covenant does because of its inherent proximity to mortal governmental structures. While Carthians never explicitly claim solidarity with the mortal masses, most Carthians reflexively eschew any kind of dominance/submission dynamic, even with kine. Unlike the more anachronistic covenants, the Carthians don't lord over their mortal pawns, they work *with* them to achieve the Movement's goals. "Working with" in this instance simply means that the Carthians tend to use mortal curiosity, gullibility and idealism instead of money



and threats to accomplish their goals. Carthians use their advantages to cultivate masses of followers instead of fewer but better placed ones. Carthians are much more likely to have a hand in labor unions, political causes, radical youth groups, New Age cults, organized crime and other groups and organizations that respond well to charisma and causes. In the face of a corporate power play backed by the Invictus, for example, a Carthian coterie might use its mortal influence to incite a strike to hamstring key labor influences. Alternatively, if the Lancea Sanctum were to launch a crusade of some sort using the Church, the Carthians could call for a coalition of alternative denominations or religions to protest, demonstrate or write letters. They might even incite mortal firebrands to launch a more direct, physical attack against the Church and make the Sanctified fight a rear-guard action to pull strength away from their main force.

These tactics can be chalked up to making a virtue of necessity, as the Carthians typically lack massive financial resources and upper-tier pawns. Rather than compete with more traditional Kindred directly for mortal influence through the same channels, the Carthian Movement appeals to human nature and the herd instinct to press its agenda. As the Carthians have phrased it, they prefer taking a more “grass-roots” approach to acquiring influence among mortals.

While the gap between Kindred and mortals might be too wide to span entirely, Carthian coterie downplay the differences and interact with mortals in as egalitarian a manner as possible. While mortals have nothing to gain from helping the Carthians, per se, the Movement is adept at making mortals believe that its goals are their goals. The relative youth of Carthian Kindred is an advantage in such cases, since fewer members of the covenant have lost touch with their own humanity and don’t exude the same disturbing presence or alien philosophies as the Damned of other covenants do.

SECRECY

Undeniably, the Carthians use secrecy and “cloak and dagger” methods to further their goals. The covenant enjoys a few advantages where espionage is concerned.

First, most local incarnations of the covenant harbor more neonates than ancillae and elders put together. There’s no way that established Kindred can watch every Carthian operative all the time. The Carthians have many sympathizers among the neonates of other covenants, and they can sometimes call on those sympathizers to provide information or similar favors.

Additionally, Nosferatu and Mekhet vampires make up over half of the Carthians’ numbers. Kindred from both of those clans are drawn to the Carthian Movement in disproportionate numbers, and both of those clans play a key role in the Movement’s undercover operations. Not only do the powers of Obfuscate allow them to pass unseen among other Kindred, but the information-gathering abilities of the Shadows surpass those of any other clan, giving the Carthians a pronounced advantage in the espionage department.

TERRORISM

Violence is neither the favorite tool nor a desired goal of the Carthian Movement, but as many revolutionaries have noted in the past, sometimes it’s the only way by which immense change can be effected immediately. Carthians have been known to kick ass with extreme prejudice in their quest for an

equitable Kindred society. Threats, violence and pyrotechnic excess are all tools that have been used by Carthians in the past when navigating through the obstacles placed in front of them by other covenants. The Carthians think of themselves as eternal underdogs, and they feel that even extreme tactics are sometimes necessary to make up for their lack of pedigree. It’s not like breaking heads runs counter to any Traditions, after all. Sometimes the easiest way to deal with an insufferable Prince or overzealous Sheriff is to have ghouls burn or raze their havens on the sunniest day of summer. What the truly radical Carthians lack in power they more than make up for in viciousness. Some deny using terrorist tactics and claim instead to be using the tactics of guerilla warfare, but the result is the same: Havens are reduced to cinders, arrogant elders disappear, and the Movement’s most aggressive detractors find themselves the targets of hidden enemies.

That fact that the Carthians should resort to such methods should really surprise no one. Guerilla tactics represent one of the few viable strategies available to weaker groups when confronted with the superior power of a monolithic enemy. The young and relatively inexperienced Kindred of the Carthian Movement would be annihilated if they went against the power of established covenants directly, so they don’t put themselves in direct conflict. Instead, they keep a low profile, they wait, and they watch for the enemy to reveal his weakness. Then they exploit that weakness viciously and to the best of their ability. At least one city has seen control of the domain pass to the Carthians after engaging in a concerted war of attrition in which the Carthians killed or intimidated enough members of the rival faction that they not only stopped persecuting the Carthians, but ceded praxis.

When the Carthians are dominant or at least wield an appreciable amount of political power, terrorist tactics tend to fall by the wayside for all but the most extreme groups. Not only does the covenant see little reason to continue waging guerilla actions in a cause it might well win, relying overmuch on these tactics tends to unite Kindred of other covenants against them. Carthian “Bosses” and other Prince-analogues have met their own ends as their coups succumb to the swings of political pendulums, ousting them from praxis as quickly (and violently) as they seized them.

COTERIE TYPES

Carthian coterie often come together randomly as the situation (and the cause) dictate. Being less static than many Kindred, Carthian coterie change membership and purpose on a fairly regular basis. Carthian coterie might come together for only a brief time or might work together for decades. Likewise, a coterie that came together for one purpose might choose to stay together and turn its attention to other goals. The Carthians have a particular talent for re-purposing coterie in this way.

Due to its large numbers of neonates, its lack of rigid structure and its tendency to innovate, the Carthian Movement boasts many types of coterie, ranging from the standard, easily recognizable coterie fielded by other covenants to the experimental or prototypical coterie that would be found only among the Carthians.

BOOT SQUADS

Boot squads are the Carthians’ eager vigilantes, coterie that take matters into their own hands when the Kindred of other



covenants get too carried away with their own power. In most cities, they are the shock troops of their covenant, forming when needed and going to ground or disbanding after carrying out an action of singular importance. If elders of other covenants dislike the Carthian Movement on general principal, they save their pure, unmitigated loathing for its boot squads. More than one such Carthian coterie has found that elders are susceptible to the quick-thinking, fast-paced assaults of younger (and often more tech-savvy) vampires.

Boot squads are among the Carthians' best weapons in their struggle for equality among the Kindred because they provide many elders with a reason to rein themselves in and not antagonize members of the Movement. The presence of such coterie has proved to be a powerful deterrent to elders' excesses in some domains and little more than an irritant in others. Untroubled with political niceties or petty influence wars, boot squads exist solely to monitor, stalk and punish rival Damned who take too-frequent aim at members of the Carthian Movement. An errant Kindred might find his haven burned, his ghouls killed or his mortal pawns dead or under Vinculum to someone else. He might even find himself staked and placed in the concrete of a building's foundation. The violence of such efforts sends a clear message to foes, which can sometimes result in the boot squad becoming the champions of the down-trodden within a city. Alternatively, though, it could result in the coterie's members becoming seen as dangerous thugs, depending on what spin a city's covenants place on its actions.

The typical boot squad consists of Mekhet and Nosferatu vampires, and they are generally ancillae, as neonates lack

the power necessary to go against the breadth of political foes a Kindred might face. Motivated Gangrel or overt Daeva might occasionally join a boot squad as well if they're intent on serving their covenant in a martial capacity.

Some boot squads have found that their calling sets them up nicely to commit diablerie upon elders with whom they come into conflict. Those coterie that are willing to pay the price for power can find themselves rapidly becoming the most powerful Carthian coterie in the domain. While the covenant officially forbids this practice, it appreciates unofficially the increase in the raw power of its membership.

Only the most liberal Prince would stand for a boot squad coterie forming in her domain. When most Princes hear of such a coterie forming, a blood hunt likely follows in short order. Consequently, many boot squads masquerade as other sorts of coterie entirely.

DISSIDENTS

The shape taken by most Carthian coterie in non-Carthian (or anti-Carthian) domains is the dissident coterie. Such a coterie comprises Kindred who are dissatisfied with the political situation in the city and who are willing to work together to do something about it. Members of most other covenants, especially elders and the more entrenched ancillae, see dissident coterie as dangerous rabble-rousers, so they take aggressive action against them. Such action serves only to drive the dissidents underground and fuels their outrage and determination to change the status quo.

Most such coterie occur organically, as dissatisfaction with the existing hierarchy festers and affected Kindred learn of Carthian causes and methods. Some also form as crypto-Carthian sympathizers, meet up and begin working together for the ideals of their Movement. Due to the extreme consequences imposed by the powers that be upon those caught operating in anti-Carthian domains, a mood of paranoia sometimes permeates dissident cells.

Ironically, young dissident cells are nearly as likely to appear in domains under Carthian control as they are anywhere else. While “the revolution eats its young” is a commonplace Carthian aftereffect, dissident coterie prove that the Movement is perfectly capable of devouring its elders as well. Operating in a Carthian domain, such coterie claim that the order isn’t egalitarian *enough*, that it’s not pushing for change *fast enough*, that it isn’t dedicated *in the right way*. Ideological clashes between factions of Carthian coterie occur, as between totalitarians and those favoring democracy or socialists and fascists. From the standpoint of the ancillae, they’ve done everything they can within the framework of the Kindred political structure, but the newest of the neonates place ideals before political realities and consequently see their own ancillae (and elders) as being part of the problem.

SPIES AND SABOTEURS

Much of the Carthian Movement is populated by Nosferatu and Mekhet vampires. That alone would account for the covenant’s emphasis on espionage even if it weren’t one of the best ways to deal with the greater power of the other covenants.

Carthian vampires not only spy on their foes, they take an active role in undermining activities they don’t approve of (which includes anything that works against the overarching goals of the local Carthian Movement).

A spy coterie might pose as some other type of coterie, something innocuous like philosophers or recruiters, to prevent undue attention from being placed on them. Alternatively, they might pass as members of another covenant entirely. When they’re not being watched, however, they monitor the Prince, Regents, Prisci, Primogen and other power brokers for anti-Carthian sentiments and activities.

Such a coterie might even go so far as to pose as members of the extant hierarchy, over the phone, in correspondence or in person, in order to sabotage their target’s relationships with influential mortals or other key underlings.

More than one rival has found his strategies against the Carthian Movement hopelessly compromised or deftly shut down by the activities of a coterie of dedicated spies and saboteurs.

GARTHIAN EXEMPLARS

Some coterie perfectly capture the essence of what it means to be a part of the Carthian Movement. These Kindred usually epitomize all of the archetypes venerated by the covenant: a diverse group of individuals striving for and embodying the Carthian virtues of Kindred autonomy, egalitarianism and mutual effort and responsibility. These coterie are somewhat less common, because it’s difficult for a whole coterie of Carthians to come together who have the same notion of just what the covenant’s local goals are. Many coterie that claim to be exemplars are model coterie put together by ancillae or elders as rallying points for the covenant.

Most of the Kindred operating in an exemplar coterie are likely to have the significant amounts of Covenant Status, even if that translates more into reputation than position in the covenant. Each is likely to be an ardent supporter of the covenant’s ideals and tactics. While the covenant as a whole is still too young to be certain, it appears that exemplar coterie have the greatest likelihood of reaching elder status without alienating the Movement’s younger members. That’s one reason the covenant reveres these coterie so highly: Anything that helps the Movement gain more credibility among other covenants’ elders stands to benefit the covenant immeasurably.

Of course, that’s exactly why exemplary coterie make it to elder status. Their dedication to the covenant’s goals are so utterly without question that even accusations that they’ve sold out are obviously without merit. Exemplars demonstrate that it’s not “elders” that the Carthians hate so much, it’s the arrogance and abuse of power that typically come with being an elder vampire. If an elder can maintain her integrity and Carthian values, the covenant is all for it, because it provides a big gun with which to fight the big guns of the other covenants. As perennial underdogs, Carthians aren’t averse to anything that furthers their vague, overarching goals. Again, “whatever it takes” serves as the vital methodology.

PHILOSOPHERS

The driving intellectual force behind the Carthian Movement is found in its coterie of political philosophers. These coterie generally comprise ancillae or elders and consist of the brightest and most idealistic Kindred the covenant has to offer. Such coterie spend large portions of the Requiem discussing mortal and Kindred politics, debating the history of the Kindred political establishment, analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of various political systems and brainstorming ways to improve the lots of average Kindred. Such coterie generally go out of their way to include vampires from the five main clans, and any such bloodlines as are available, in an effort to represent a wide range of personal views. The opinions of noteworthy philosophical coterie are often disseminated among the Kindred of the Carthian Movement, sometimes as fodder for discussion, sometimes as outright propaganda. Recommendations made by such groups might become widespread policy within the covenant, or they might remain codicils to the main body of local Carthian political philosophy.

While these philosophical coterie maintain the lowest profile among other Kindred, they often determine prevailing Carthian policy and serve as the drivers of the local Carthian Movement itself. Some Carthians think of the philosopher coterie as *éminence grises* lurking behind the scenes of the covenant. Others see them as the unsung heroes of the Movement.

Such philosophical coterie typically operate in the largest and strongest bastions of Carthian power and surround themselves with such defenders as they can field. Hostile scions of other covenants see these “think tanks” as the real root of the Carthian problem and would love to wipe them from history entirely.

WHISTLEBLOWERS

The nightly games of corruption in which Kindred engage serve to perpetuate the hegemony of elders over ancillae and neonates. Every underhanded deal, every strategic bribe and

every unfairly acquired advantage increases the power of those *with* power and takes away from those who already have little. Whistleblower coterie shine light on the seamy underside of Kindred politics and reveal the lies, the graft and the corruption that keep powerful elders in control and the common vampire entrapped. They bring to light the untoward sources of elders' dominance. They ask questions that those in power don't want asked and then spread the answer throughout Elysium. (And they usually have enough evidence to back up their claims to prevent their target from ignoring them.) Did the Ventrue Priscus arrange for the death of the Nosferatu Primogen because the latter was blocking a lucrative construction deal with a mortal corporation? Did the Invictus make an underhanded deal with the Lancea Sanctum to screw over the Ordo Dracul? If so, then a whistleblower coterie looks into the specifics of the deal and does everything in its power to expose the details.

Very few standing coterie perform this function, but those that do certainly make a place for themselves not only among the Carthians but also among the (relatively) forthright Kindred of the city. What Regent wouldn't want a devoted group of muckrakers reporting to him? What Harpy wouldn't want to hear about failed coups and daggers in the night when Elysium convenes? At other times, whistleblowers rapidly become unwelcome in a city. At the very least, it's common for whistleblower coterie to find themselves on the wrong side of those selfsame Harpies, and when the Prince or Regent is the one plotting treachery, well, the obvious answers go unsaid. The best of all possible worlds, from a Carthian standpoint, is when a member of a coterie of whistleblowers actually gets promoted to or claims the role of Harpy,

because it lets her gain status in the city by doing the things she's already doing. This happens most often in those rare cities where the vast majority of power sits in Carthian hands, because the other covenants are often loath to allow this to happen.

If it needs to be said, many such coterie meet unpleasant ends after exposing the wrong Kindred with powerful allies — and most relatively soon after forming. Members of such a coterie would do well to have better than average combat skills and ample political connections to protect themselves from those whose enmity they provoke (and whose failures or hypocrisies they expose).

RECRUITERS

Religiously driven covenants are not the only groups that make use of missionaries to increase their numbers. Carthian coterie comprising some of the covenant's more socially adept members have been known to "poach" members from other covenants to swell their own numbers. Their favorite targets are the disenfranchised young Kindred of the other covenants, or unaligned Kindred who have grown disillusioned with their own political abstinence. Such vampires are often so far removed from their covenant's rewards that they're happy to entertain offers from other covenants. Members of such a coterie play up the benefits of Carthian egalitarianism and make much of the freedoms and privileges enjoyed by all members of the Carthian Movement. Often they follow this propaganda by asking their target if she's *really* happy with her covenant (or self-imposed exile) and its myriad practices, while discretely suggesting that she might be happier in the Carthian camp instead. This approach is fairly



ti-TRAVIS 04

straightforward (though elders of other clans call it insidious), and it yields a surprising number of new recruits from all the other covenants. Especially responsive are members of the arch-conservative covenants due to the cavalier way the standing members treat their neonates. While other covenants disdain the Carthians in general, they actively loathe recruiting coterie, because their success inarguably comes at the detriment of the other covenants. On occasion, such coterie place an emphasis on scholarly debate and make heavy use of rhetoric and the complex art of persuasion.

Recruiter coterie generally comprise attractive, gregarious and socially skilled Kindred, but they also need some ability to defend themselves or avoid combat if they are beset by members of another covenant who don't like Carthians spreading their philosophy. Many Carthian recruiters hail from Clan Mekhet, although a number of Daeva take pleasure in seducing members away from other covenants as well.

THE HIVE COTERIE

Rarest of the Carthian coterie, a hive is a group of Kindred who take the covenant's collectivist tendency to its extreme. Not only do members strive to be equal, they strive to be as similar to one another as possible. To a hive's members, such a group is the logical outgrowth of the Carthian approach to the Requiem. Members of a hive coterie dress alike, talk alike, think alike and share one haven. They often pursue the covenant's doctrines with a fanatical enthusiasm. Some fancy themselves the avant-garde of the Carthian Movement, while others are more cultic or literally anti-individualist.

Obviously, hive coterie are hard to miss or mistake for anything else, rendering them uncommon outside domains where Carthians are accepted as part of the local infrastructure. Where they are found, they are considered a curious and somewhat eccentric variant of the Carthian type.

Members of a hive sometimes even go to the extreme of subjecting each other to Vinculums as a way of increasing the coterie's intimacy and group cohesiveness. Most such coterie see to it that at least one member possesses enough *Auspex* to act as a telepathic nexus for the group's members, allowing them to access one another's consciousness.

Given that hive members have so much else in common, it's all the more important that the coterie comprise members of different clans, otherwise the group will have an extremely truncated range of competence. The coterie is already likely to have many interests and talents in common, so if the members share the same Disciplines as well, it could be very difficult for the coterie to function in wide range of situations.

The sense of belonging that members of a hive coterie share is intense and deeply fulfilling. It sometimes leads to too much unanimity as no one in the coterie wants to dissent from any stance taken by the group. Members of such a coterie might eschew their personal identities in favor of an identity relative to the coterie (such as "the tallest of us," or "our spokesperson"). A Kindred who has spent any length of time in such a coterie might prefer Final Death to being separated from his coterie.

While other Carthians generally allow hive coterie to operate as they see fit, some members of the covenant find them disturbing and illustrative of a dangerous vein of Carthian thought.

Status is paradoxical among the Carthians. To attain any degree of status means to become part of the establishment, and the establishment is what the Carthian Movement is trying to change.

From the standpoint of a Carthian coterie, real status is gained only through the act of changing the society of the Damned (which is difficult). A Carthian coterie often finds it difficult to gain status outside its covenant unless the Carthian Movement has a controlling share of the power in a city. At that point, a coterie gains status to the degree to which it works for Carthian ideals.

Status among Carthian coterie is problematic. Carthian philosophy dictates that all Kindred are created equal, so no coterie should be elevated above another, yet it happens. More successful coterie are praised as champions of the Carthian Movement while the Carthian establishment ignores the less driven and less competent ones. The covenant at least has the grace to attempt to explain the paradox away.

Because egalitarianism does figure so prominently in the ideals of the Carthians, status and age play less of a role in Carthian coterie than they do in any other covenant. This is great for the neonates because they have no overlords. It's good for the ancillae because they wield the kind of power and influence in the Movement that other covenants reserve for the elders. For elders, however, the egalitarian approach is often a problem. If an elder isn't truly and deeply committed to Carthian principles, she's likely to start resenting her decades of service to the covenant. More than a few Carthian elders have grown so annoyed with their own upstart neonates that they've recanted their belief in the covenant's principles and defected. The Carthians have only recently been around long enough to boast any elders in their ranks at all, and the high rates of defection make many Carthian philosophers wonder about the Movement's long-term viability.

NEONATES

The vast majority of Carthians are neonates, which is simultaneously a blessing and a curse. Young Carthians are full of passionate intensity to make changes to a system they see as unjust, unethical and hopelessly corrupt. What they possess in enthusiasm, however, they lack in guidance. The covenant is painfully short on elders, and the absence of more experienced mentors results in inexperienced vampires taking action based on impulse more than wisdom, experience or strategy.



NIGHT TO NIGHT: NEONATES

Enthusiastic, aggressive and unrestrained are three terms commonly used to describe Carthian coterie. The line between anarchic mob and dynamic agents of change is, among Carthians, a thin one. Any project that intensity and impulse might facilitate is perfect for the Movement's youngest members. Such coterie are known for achieving their goals through means best termed "unorthodox." No other group embodies the "whatever it takes" philosophy like a coterie of Carthian neonates. On any given night, such a coterie might be found...

- undermining the domain or influences of an elder who's been harassing local Carthians

- staging a rally to make other Kindred aware of the unjust actions of some elder or covenant
- making inroads in a local mortal institution such as a labor union, gang or civil service branch
- looking for suitably idealistic mortals to bring into the covenant
- touting the advantages of revolution and the Carthians to neonates of other covenants in an effort to attract “converts”
- using the Internet, libraries or other archives to research a target of the Movement
- finding a way to break an elder’s monopoly on some sphere of mortal influence in the city
- obtaining the components for some terrorist endeavor



ANCILLAE

By the time the members of a Carthian coterie rise to the level of ancillae, they’ve seen the ethical, idealistic side of the struggle as well as its grimy underbelly. If they’ve opted to side with humanity, they’re still close enough to the mortal herd that they can work closely with the kine without drawing undue attention to themselves. If they’ve sacrificed their Humanity to achieve greater and more devastating victories for the Movement, then they’re probably hardened enough to do anything the revolution requires of them, no matter how vicious.

With their proven ability to work in unison, coterie of Carthian ancillae are both accomplished team players and revolutionaries.



NIGHT TO NIGHT: ANCILLAE

For all intents and purposes, ancillae are at the top of the heap in the Carthian Movement — or would be if the covenant recognized a unilateral hierarchy. Still, while power and the obedience of younger Carthians are two benefits an ancilla might not be able to depend on, she can still command a certain respect through her great experience. Given the dearth of elders in the covenant, coterie of ancillae have to do everything that a covenant’s elders would normally do. Luckily, they work well together, because they’d be out of their league otherwise. Any given night might find a coterie of Carthian ancillae...

- launching an influence attack on a troublesome elder
- coordinating a unified recruiting campaign to increase the number of the domain’s Carthians
- establishing a cult
- arranging to have a key “enemy of the Movement” kidnapped, staked or destroyed
- assembling a collective to achieve a major goal
- inciting younger Carthians to action
- conducting a spirited debate about the future of the Movement
- keeping its eyes on the activities of fractious Carthian neonates



ELDERS

The Carthian Movement has so few elders associated with it that there’s really no typical coterie of Carthian elders. Every Carthian elder associates with the movement for her own unknowable reasons. Many of these motives are noble; some are not.

Only North America boasts more than a handful of these paradoxical Kindred.



NIGHT TO NIGHT: ELDERS

Coterie of Carthian elders do not often enjoy the status or the comfort of station that elders of other covenants do. Younger members of their own covenant might perceive them to be part of the problem that the Carthian Movement set out to solve or resent them as potential traitors. The elders might come to believe that revolutions are for the young, but the decades that they gave to the Movement are like chains restraining them from exploring other options. There is no rest, no reward for sticking with the cause except for the suspicious and contemptuous glances from the Movement’s younger members and the occasional, fleeting, impression that they *might* be doing the right thing. The Movement’s elders are forced to push the Carthian agenda of egalitarianism even more aggressively than they did early on in their time with the covenant lest the Movement’s neonates and ancillae accuse them of “selling out” and overthrow them. Consequently, there is no comfortable reward for devoting their Requiems to the pursuit of justice and equality. Instead, any given night might find a coterie of Carthian elders...

- pretending to defect to another covenant to discern inside information
- leading the younger Carthians in attempts to overthrow the more antiquated covenants (which is to say, all the others)
- convincing younger Carthians *not* to overthrow *them*
- concocting a new identity to strengthen the local Carthian “revolution” through sheer charisma and star power
- quietly arranging the destruction of a Carthian neonate or ancilla who didn’t know when to hold his tongue
- fending off attacks and assassination attempts from other covenants, who find the very notion of a “Carthian elder” simultaneously deplorable and threatening
- placating the fears of other elders who find themselves feeling threatened by the Carthian Movement
- talking younger members of the covenant out of some of their more extreme ideas for “the grand revolution to come”
- planning a period of torpor
- defecting to another covenant





Chapter Four: The Circle of the Crone

See us when we reach toward heaven,

When our arms reach upward toward thee.

When the Full Moon shines upon us,

Give us thy blessings.

Teach us of thine ancient mysteries,

Ancient rites of invocation that the Holy Strega spoke of,

For we believe the Strega's story:

When she spoke of thy shining glory,

When she told us to entreat thee,

Told us when we seek for knowledge to seek

And find thee above all others.

— A Circle of the Crone invocation of Diana

*Night, sable goddess! from her ebon throne,
In rayless majesty, now stretches forth
Her leaden sceptre o'er a slumbering world.*

—Edward Young, *Night Thoughts*

The old gods are not dead. They sleep in the earth like ancient vampires. To wake them, the Circle of the Crone dances on their graves and sings their names into the night.

The Circle of the Crone is the covenant most interested in the occult practices of the nighttime world. While the rest of vampire society faces inward, the Circle walks the perimeter. Acolytes from San Francisco to Moscow and everywhere else are dancing, bleeding, feeding and screwing where the lights of vampire society give way to the woods and the mountains and the ruins of the societies that came before. Acolytes test the philosophies and ceremonies of the bygone age that lie broken and ignored in the darkness just outside the firelight of memories in the minds of the eldest among the Damned.

The polymorphous mother of this diverse and misunderstood covenant has inspired her worshippers to form countless dissimilar cults from the Old World to the New. The creativity she represents and her followers revere inspires — or perhaps demands — a massive spiritual body made up of unique and sometimes wholly independent cells. The Circle of the Crone is the covenant with a thousand faces, and its members revel in its magnificent variety.

As a covenant of religious ideology, the Circle of the Crone manages to keep its disparate parts together through a broad and open-minded cosmology that encourages members to expand the metaphors of the religion and explore new philosophical territories. The job of the spiritual leader in every domain, the Hierophant, is to sculpt and shape the dogma of the covenant's local membership. Beneath even his sometimes meager authority, each coterie of Acolytes is welcome to draft new ideas, challenge the old imagery and create new variations on the covenant's sacred ceremonies.

The Circle of the Crone practices a vital faith that puts the power and responsibility of spiritual growth into the hands of the individual worshipper, but its most important rites and ceremonies require multiple hands and voices. It is at once an inclusive and innately personal religion. Its roots go back to the most ancient of the undead, long before Dracula or Longinus, and its widest branches touch a vast and unlikely array of members from every clan, century and mortal culture yet known. The Circle affords coterie an inspiring and empowering spiritual charge with the freedom to release that charge in any of a hundred ceremonies venerating the true nature of vampiric existence.

PSYCHOLOGY

In a way, the Circle of the Crone believes more in the worship than the god. The dogma of the covenant is deeply concerned with personal trials and enlightenment through tribulation. While every act venerates and praises the Crone herself, the real benefit in the end is to the vampire who challenges himself to higher and higher states of enlightenment.

The covenant's inclusive outlook makes it easy for Kindred to find a coterie of like-minded undead. The intensity of faith the covenant cultivates inspires a powerful loyalty that holds coterie together. The variety the covenant welcomes allows for coterie of formidable strength through diversity.

Ideological coterie have the advantage of an underlying psychological bond keeping the group together despite the specific actions they have to undertake. The motives of religious covenant members are often similar enough to keep the competing ambitions of a coterie's members from tearing the group apart. When those motives do prove incompatible in Circle coterie, the members can depart on good terms with the confidence that the right coterie for that Kindred exists somewhere in the covenant.

THE STRUCTURE OF CIRCLE COTERIE

Circle of the Crone coterie often assemble by happenstance. Perhaps the coterie is simply made up of four Acolytes with nearby havens, or maybe the coterie consists of all the chorus members currently awaiting formal initiation into the covenant. Unlike political coterie or spiritual coterie from such rigidly structured religious covenants as the Lancea Sanctum, a Circle coterie can survive for decades with only loose threads tying the Acolytes together. Such coterie are able to weather more difficult threats without fracturing under internal stresses and avoid internal betrayals and melodrama by limiting expectation and emotional demands.

Circle coterie are devout and dedicated to the proper observances of the Crone and the practice of coterie- or city-specific rites, but they are lax on logistical demands beyond worship. Although a city with tightly organized Acolytes might have specialized coterie dedicated to particular duties like a Sanctified city does, just as many cities leave the individual coterie to their own devices. Since the coterie is the largest worshipping body of the covenant most nights of the year, this attitude suits the Circle fine. On those nights of major ceremonies or festivities, the coterie that come together rely on tradition and the Crone's Liturgy to guide them. Otherwise, Acolyte coterie might vote on important decisions, consult texts or seek supernatural guidance when necessary. More often, though, each member of the coterie is given purview over some aspect of covenant operations for the coterie or the larger area, such as security, correspondence with the city at large or the tending of herds.

Coterie of Acolytes do develop certain group identities, however. Rather than being mandated by a presiding Bishop or Archduke or title-holding figurehead, these collective identities are based on the mutual interests and goals of the coterie's members, which naturally grow over time into some kind of group momentum. The demands of maintaining a religious

ideal lead coterie to take up those tasks that are necessary for the success of the covenant, and those tasks eventually come to be associated with the coterie. If nothing else, the outside pressures of the city guide and motivate the coterie to define itself in relationship to the larger vampiric society.

The dogma of the Crone and the Kindred it attracts makes it possible to define a few broad categories of coterie. These examples, while common, are by no means standard. Most coterie, in fact, resemble hybrids of two or more of these models.

CULTS

All Circle coterie are effectively cults. Some, however, are dedicated exclusively to obscure or unique religious practices. Some coterie cults act as religious advisors for all Acolytes in the city, sometimes forming into complex relationships of tangled authority and overlapping holy nights. Other coterie practice observances that are so far removed from the covenant's traditions as to be unrecognizable — possibly even going so far as to invent new gods.

It's not uncommon for each of the coterie in a region to worship subtle variations of the same goddess. In such cases, individual coterie take responsibility for certain ceremonial rites. A coterie's status within the covenant can hinge on the quality of observances it prepares for all covenant members.



COTERIE THAT DON'T GET IT

In some areas, the decentralized nature of the covenant amplifies poor translations of the dogma into a strange or broken iteration of the covenant's actual beliefs. Maybe a coterie is started by some daft whelp who's heard of the Circle of the Crone but never actually seen the Crone's Liturgy (and who tells other vampires the text doesn't exist anymore). Or maybe some failed Acolyte shows up in a town without Kindred of the covenant and uses her limited experience to redefine the covenant's faith from memory. In so doing, she sparks a pack of would-be Acolytes in reverence around the sort of half-feigned, half-authentic philosophy that she would've preferred.

A cabal of New Agers thinks it's tapping into some Wiccan heritage when one member finds half a copy of the Crone's Liturgy and takes to worshipping Cleopatra with sacrifices of stray cats. Abandoned neonates break into the community theater's props closet and steal Greek masks to use in an orgiastic feeding frenzy they're calling a ritual in hopes that it summons up their own faith. A cell of former Lancea Sanctum members sets itself up as the Many Faces of the Crone and rallies a cult of mortal blood addicts to worship the members as gods, because that's what they think Circle coterie do.

With no overseeing body to police the actions of coterie using the name, this is the sort of debased worship that happens in remote Kindred territories. Woe to such groups when a genuine member of the Circle of the Crone hears of it. The Circle is open-minded as a whole, but it does not suffer fools who blaspheme against the Crone in its own name.



MISSIONARIES

The past few decades have seen the Circle of the Crone take up dedicated missionary work, where the growth of its membership was once simply one more responsibility on the back of every coterie and cult in the covenant. This isn't to say that the covenant placed a low value on the expansion of its ranks, but it does demonstrate the sort of operational trends that can occur when covenant elders get the word out.

Traditionally, the Lancea Sanctum has played the role of the gospel-barking missionary, and the Circle of the Crone played the inverted role, keeping the faith and tending it like a field. Now that's changing. The Circle is actively drumming up new membership with coterie of proactive spiritual advisors. Instead of spreading like a net beneath the streets to catch the chaff from other covenants, the Circle is now going out and plucking new converts from the tree.

In some domains, the role of the Circle missionary is more like the role of an explorer. The covenant doesn't follow any mortal model of missionary work, so when a Circle coterie seeks to expand its constituency, it doesn't necessarily make the fact known by thumping its holy text and building a temple. Instead, Circle missionaries monitor the attitudes of the local vampire and mortal populations and estimate the kind of Acolytes in the area and the quantity that could be culled from both bodies. When the coterie's confident in its assessment, it either gets to work extending and refining covenant territory in the area or it goes back to existing covenant territory and seeks out a coterie that's a good match for the local population. Even when the Circle overtly pursues new converts, its missionary work is subtler than its ceremonial practices.

Low-ranking coterie don't know what's inspiring the new missionary work, but many assume it's the result of the covenant's recent study of the Lancea Sanctum. If the vampiric population as a whole is losing interest in the strict and penitent ways of the Sanctified, then perhaps Kindred society is approaching a tipping point. Now is the time to find out, by gathering as many vampires around the Crone as possible by taking advantage of the Lancea Sanctum's cracking flagstones and convincing casual allies to solidify their relationships.

INFILTRATORS

The Circle has been using the noncommittal reputation of its initiates, the chorus, to its advantage for decades by insinuating low-profile neonates among the ranks of the Lancea Sanctum, the Ordo Dracul, and any other theologically inclined covenants that might exist only in certain localities. The covenant elders are after more information on the internal workings of the competition. The low fidelity of vampire polling makes it possible for a coterie of the chorus to get far enough inside either organization to be recognized as members throughout the city. When the coterie backs out and joins the Circle of the Crone, it's not symptomatic of some wavering faith among the Sanctified but a sign of the Circle's subtle prowess — those faithless priests never accepted the dogma of Longinus. And now the Circle knows what the Sanctified and the Dragons worry about, and it has members with knowledge of each house's sacred and secret miracles.





The same tactic works outside the ideological theater to scout out new domains and prepare them for claims by the Circle of the Crone. Some chorus coterie are given the task of posing as fledgling missionaries for the Lancea Sanctum and going into contested or abandoned territories to ruin the reputation of that covenant before real missionaries can arrive. Once the local Kindred temperament is predisposed against the Sanctified, the Acolytes petition for those domains from the Prince, Regent or other authority figure.

ACADEMICS

Much of the factual and religious lore detailing the old religions beloved by the covenant has fallen from popular wisdom and academic records into the category of the occult. Most of it has been in that category since the beginning. To recover the wisdom of the ancient world and record it anew for the benefit of tomorrow night's waking elders, the covenant requires scholars, academics and researchers working to ratify each local body of "canon," or at least form the basis for orthodoxy. This is one of the rare coterie types the Circle actively organizes, usually through word-of-mouth or ghoul petitioners. Naturally, most are organized by the Hierophant (who might even be a member of such a coterie), while others are selected by the covenant as a whole, particularly in domains where it is populous.

Academic coterie (also thought of as investigative coterie) have a reputation for disdaining the Masquerade and keeping unusually large numbers of mortal servants and ghouls. Researchers need access to rare or one-of-a-kind sites and artifacts under mortal control and often require manpower to work in the daylight at historic and archaeological sites. Acolytes weigh the risks carefully before each actual breach of the First Tradition, and the wise ones have a plan for the elimination of mortals in the know. In practice, however, the covenant's academic coterie have had remarkable luck with the kine they choose for this work; the truth about vampires and supernatural forces ignites an excitement more powerful than fear in the mortal allies chosen by Circle scholars. Still, the covenant acknowledges that luck runs out eventually and nights without consequences come to an end. It's better, these coterie say, to get as much done as possible before that happens.

Expeditions to historic sites center on academic coterie but swell to include packs of muscle and sometimes tag-along devotees to the site in question. Formal expeditions are rare, though, as many of the great occult sites of interest to the covenant are difficult to reach or study by night. More often, an expedition amounts to a coterie independently visiting a remote site and hiring poorly informed workers to explore, catalog and photograph sites while the coterie waits, often for weeks. Then the coterie takes the results of its secret expedition back to covenant elders for praise and reward. Just as often, these quiet expeditions are devoured by those remote sites or surrounding hazards.

Academic coterie are responsible for tracking vampiric genealogy and history, keeping and cataloging stacks of books, maps, plans and records, and recognizing the truth. Scholarly

Acolytes dig new fragments of knowledge out of the dirt of old texts and inscriptions, advise the covenant or even the Prince, and judge what to share or keep secret. It's an intriguing existence, if not always a safe one.

OCCULT AMBASSADORS

From their positions on the outskirts of vampire society, Circle coteries are as likely to be exposed to the other horrors of the darkened world as they are to be threatened by other Kindred. To survive, such coteries develop a rapport with the odd occult powers of the land. Some Circle coteries have cultivated strong enough relationships with the neighbors to meet sporadically with Lupine agents and be welcomed at meetings of mages. Certain studies of the occult lead Acolytes to deal with ghosts, self-proclaimed "demons" and things even less identifiable with meager human words. These are the covenant's occult ambassadors.

This is an important niche not just for the Circle of the Crone but for many cities. A coterie with connections in the arcane underworld can make itself invaluable to Princes and Prisci, though the balance of loyalties is difficult. Such a coterie must be dedicated foremost to the covenant or risk losing the occult credibility that comes with membership. After that, the coterie must be concerned with all allies who aren't vampires, for they are the hardest for a coterie to replace.

A coterie of this category could be another one with good standing in the larger world or one comprising active scholars and diplomats. The covenant needs Acolytes who are capable of coaxing new revelations from the other occult powers of the world so that the Circle's spiritual horizons can continue to expand. This research mission turns coteries into cabals of supernatural anthropologists of the old school: the type who wear finger bones at tribal festivities and eat with the cannibals. Other such coteries become the hubs in the black market of magic, selling looted artifacts in exchange for ones that the covenant wants.

GARDENERS

In cities with small or sedate Circle populations, the term "gardener" has come to mean any Acolyte or coterie that tends neutral ground or Elysium. Often, these Kindred are literally gardeners, cultivating strange and secluded circles of wildflowers in abandoned industrial zones or maintaining hanging gardens in forgotten cisterns and subway stations. In an increasing number of cities, Acolytes are given authority by the Prince to beautify and enliven Elysium throughout the city. In domains governed by the Circle, the studios, greenhouses and workshops of prominent Acolytes might even be granted status as Elysium.

Where the Circle is less welcome, some coteries create unofficial neutral ground in a park or gallery and offer solitude or stimulation to any visitors. Sometimes rival zealots or the agents of an unsympathetic Prince sabotage these efforts, and sometimes the sites evolve into alternative meeting grounds or genuine sites of Elysium. Most often, though, Circle gardens find a few loyal visitors or appreciative return visitors

and become little more than meeting grounds for local Acolytes and avenues of recruitment into the covenant.

The advantage to coteries who tend such sites is in the trust of other vampires. Coteries whose greenhouses become Elysium have a distinct advantage as long as they can keep the secret. If nothing else, tending such a site is a good way for a coterie to make contacts without taking sides.



NIGHT WATCHMEN

The job of watching, guarding and protecting the covenant's sacred and secret sites falls on cherished volunteers or honored appointees. It's a symbol of respect and authority to be trusted with the protection of a pagan catacomb or the oversight of a mystic barrow. Sometimes the work requires military vigilance, sometimes a delicate knack for obfuscation. Each site has different needs that the coterie must meet.

It's dangerous work. Not all the sites watched by the Circle of the Crone belong to vampire history, and it's entirely possible that most don't. Mages, werewolves, spirits and worse might come looking for a site... or out from it. Acolytes welcome these risks and the chance to overcome them and enrich their eternal existence.



ARTISTS

The Circle of the Crone believes that the power of creation is sacred, so all Acolytes strive to create. Coteries of artists make works of art the top priority and participate in the Danse Macabre primarily through the pieces they create. These coteries strive to get their works in front of audiences at all levels of Kindred society. Coteries of this sort seek out formal relationships with figures in local art communities and the Prince's inner circle. For artist coteries, being seen is the purpose for forming a coterie.

Not all art is beautiful. Acolyte artists might be masters of ancient techniques or pioneers of questionable new media. A coterie of bird breeders in one European city gifts nightingales to all the known vampires in the city each year, while a North American pack of Acolytes makes snuff films on the streets of its urban domains. Sometimes creating the art is the coterie's purpose, but sometimes it's about reaction to the art.

Different coteries have different motives and expectations, of course. Some use art to attract converts to the covenant, some want personal attention or status, and others want to influence the trajectory of the society of the Damned. Artist coteries might get lucky and become a city's Harpies, or they might be branded dangerous by a Bishop and forbidden to continue creating. Any artistic venue that becomes popular has a chance of being hijacked for use by political agents, such as subversive Carthians or a propagandizing Regent. Artists intend for their works to go into the night and change society, but the art usually drags the coterie into the night and changes it.



CHALLENGERS

The so-called challenger cults of the Circle come in many forms, chased or preceded by many names. Cells of blatant, leather-hooded sadists with power tools are called tormentors on the American East Coast, but that same name is used to describe a gang of tortuous jailers in the Midwest, too. Throughout Europe and Canada are coteries of religious pain fanatics who provoke visions from (usually voluntary) subjects through expert anguish. They call themselves tribulations.

The specifics vary, but all challenger cults tend to be inspired by the covenant's belief in personal enlightenment through extreme experiences. Coteries that focus on exploring the philosophy begin by testing and expanding their own limits, but they can eventually become celebrities among Acolytes and chorus members in the domain and sometimes even beyond. It's prestigious to be mutilated by the masters of the craft. Rare and famous cabals of ceremonial torturers follow the invitations, visiting one domain tonight and another tomorrow. These are glamorous and revered coteries within the covenant.

In some fiefs, challenger cults strike out into the city on nights of revelry, testing Kindred and kine alike, with or without permission.

PHILOSOPHY

Diversity keeps a Circle coterie together. Look at the way the covenant worships: Circle ceremonies bring many worshippers into a single celebration that might itself celebrate multiple mother-goddesses. The covenant doesn't necessarily put pressure on Acolytes to agree with one another about all things, but it often allows them to enjoy the easy trust that comes from sharing a belief system. (That is, under all but the most domineering of Hierophants.)

Faith in the Crone is the invisible vein that runs from one member of a coterie to another. Faith can't be torched like a fleshly political leader, and it can't be torn down like a shared haven. Whatever happens to a coterie's physical possessions, whatever mistakes are made, however the group changes to the eye, the faith is still there, holding everyone together.

The flexibility of the covenant's faith is a boon to coterie fellows. Kindred of like minds naturally congregate, and, with no higher rule to override the organic cliques that develop, the coterie never chafes under the choices of some arbitrary organizer. At the same time, Acolytes are comfortable recognizing a worshipper of another god or goddess as an ally, so coterie members enjoy the flexibility to disagree without straining their allegiance. The diversity and strangeness that brings Acolytes together at the fringes of Kindred society also gives them the ability to assume any social structure necessary to survive.

PRINCIPLES OF THE CRONE

The guiding principles of the covenant are considered to be spiritual truths by Acolytes. The essential power of the

principles is the clarity of purpose they bestow upon the worshipper. The principles give meaning to the Requiem.

That spiritual guidance creates social stability within the covenant and its component coteries. Each principle helps hold the vampires in a coterie together while encouraging them to go forth and pit their mettle against the world's. This supportive and inspiring dogma keeps the covenant and its coteries strong through nights of loss, setbacks and defeat.

CREATION IS POWER

The power to create is sacred to the Circle of the Crone. Although the covenant's many avatars and the Crone herself are worshipped as mothers and masters, the covenant reveres the power to create in all its forms. Artists and craftsmen are cherished. Leaders are honored for the social constructs they organize and bind with charisma and insight. It's the responsibility of every soul to add to the world around it. For the deathless childer of the Crone, this responsibility is especially heavy. Vampires must create works to justify their eternal existence.

In the social dogma of the covenant, a coterie is a creation made up of the vampires themselves. There's no shame in altering a coterie or displacing one member for another, but the disintegration of a coterie is considered a major failure for all the Kindred in its membership. Coteries, in some cases, are considered to carry on even if all the original members no longer belong. Kindred who wish to break up a coterie are encouraged to replace themselves with unaligned converts and neonates, so when the parting Acolytes go and eventually involve themselves with other coteries, the total number of covenant coteries might not shrink. The practical benefits of this philosophy on the covenant as a whole are plain to all Acolytes, but the spiritual ramifications are always considered more important.

TRIBULATION BRINGS ENLIGHTENMENT

The Requiem is a supernatural manifestation of the harsh world the Crone faced (in whatever form that takes in a given domain's mythology). It's a curse, but it's not hell. It's a challenge set forth for the Crone — and all her undead descendents — to overcome. By experiencing the horrors, joys, agonies and relief of undeath, a vampire becomes wiser in the ways of the world. The Requiem is a look at another layer of the metaphysics of the world, a layer mortals never get to see. By throwing herself into those metaphysics, a Kindred tests herself and slowly reveals the natural systems that make everything run. What doesn't destroy her makes her wiser.

This philosophy also keeps coteries together. Strife is not necessarily something to flee. Enduring and overcoming the spite and discord of existence in a vampiric coterie betters that coterie. Practicing this philosophy teaches coterie members to forget internal grudges and weather the storms of Kindred society. The coterie strengthens every time its members choose not to destroy it.

FAITH VERSUS MOTIVE

Faith has the power to hold a coterie together, but what brings a coterie together in the first place? Most fledgling vampires don't come to the covenant rich with faith in Hecate. Most come with a motive that opens them up to an infusion of faith. A coterie might even come to the covenant already formed, looking for legitimacy or purpose through religion.

In any case, some philosophical path leads each character to the pack. Even if the philosophical path of every Acolyte were unique, some commonalities can be identified between them.

BOGeyMEN

The bizarre rites and strange customs of the Circle attract strange and bizarre vampires. Some come to play and explore taboos. Some come to scare themselves. Some come to scare everyone else.

Circle coterie supply bogeymen with the basic social treasures they need: challengers, spiritual sounding boards, an audience. Bogeymen in packs of bogeymen never have to explain their own strange psychology or justify their actions, since the others already get it. Bogeymen who are after attention, on the other hand, might seek out a coterie it can shock and surprise without being unwelcome.

Whole packs of bogeymen appear like undead carnivals, and the rituals such coterie observe resemble freak shows. As Acolyte bogeymen slowly wear away their own Humanity, the acts of mutilation they lust after become more and more externalized. Eventually the drive to act on other creatures might overwhelm the pack. These shock-loving groups probably make up the majority of the covenant's challenger coterie.

NATURALISM

Many Acolytes come to the Crone out of a direct rejection of the Sanctified philosophies of damnation and penance. *The Testament of Longinus* casts vampires in a static role that amplifies the alien infinity of undeath. Kindred who find the philosophy unbearable are quickly drawn in by the ever-changing existence promised in the Crone's Liturgy.

Naturalists believe that every creature on Earth has a purpose and that the unnatural state of the undead allows each vampire and each coterie to define and redefine its own purpose throughout eternity. Therefore, vampires who are drawn to the covenant for its naturalist worldview join coterie that play an active role in the domain. These are the Kindred who further the cause of the covenant, seek out converts and plan to impact vampire society. The naturalist philosophy benefits any coterie in search of an active voice or motivator. Naturalists are often comfortable in the role of spiritual advisor for the coterie, and they sometimes expand their view of "nature" to include the magical rites of Crúac. When they do, they learn those rites on behalf of the coterie.

CURIOSITY

The Embrace changes the world for each of the undead. The revelation of a supernatural world just beneath the one

experienced in mortal life inspires intense curiosity in some vampires. For them, the Circle of the Crone represents a religious alternative to the pessimistic familiarity of the Sanctified's church-like gospel. It also provides an active and unashamed organization of spiritual explorers for the fledgling to latch on to.

Even a single curious vampire energizes a coterie with new ideas and ambition. In time, a hunger for knowledge and experience might give way to long-term goals for the coterie or the covenant, casting the coterie into a leadership or spearhead role in some larger project. Curious coterie are social butterflies or pilgrims between the hierarchies of the undead. The rituals such coterie observe vary over time as the members encounter new customs and ways to worship.

SAFETY

For some scared whelps, a Circle coterie affords the same benefits as any organized and supportive group: a safe distance from the pains and problems of ordinary society. Even if it creates its own social troubles or moral problems, the coterie is at least a wall the whelp can lean against. Neonates who find themselves in over their heads amid the grotesque, flesh-rending rituals of some coterie still benefit from the social safety that comes from clarity. If the neonate attempts to leave the coterie, the others might destroy him. Worse, they might not, and then what is he supposed to do?

In a coterie, an overwhelmed fledgling is at least plainly shown the hoops to jump through. Decisions are made for him. Expectations and rewards are explained for him.

Impale yourself on this fence with us, and we'll like you. Sew this into your skin, and you can sleep in our haven. Drink my blood, and I promise I'll never leave you.

METHODOLOGY

The methods of Circle coterie descend from the covenant itself but are interpreted, enacted and modified by every coterie in operation. No two coterie behave the same way. Still, these three practical strategies are employed by so many Circle coterie that they're thought of as an innate part of the covenant's identity.

MYSTERY

The Circle of the Crone and all her coterie surround themselves with mystery. Some coterie refuse to explain their ceremonies or keep the identity of their favored god secret. Some behave with a caution, formality or precision that makes other Kindred wonder. Circle coterie keep things to themselves, avoid discussing details of the covenant and maintain strict barriers of privacy over certain subjects. Since so much of the covenant's ideology is misunderstood by the outside population, coterie usually find it easy to maintain an atmosphere of mystery.

Mystified outsiders are enticed to ask questions and interact with the coterie, which creates opportunities for the coterie to ask questions of its own. Mystery implies desirability as well, simultaneously attracting potential converts and holding off

possible attacks. Enemies might withhold violence until they understand what exactly the coterie is up to. Finally, mysteries make outsiders afraid.

FEAR

The Circle of the Crone uses fear in many of the same ways other covenants do: as a shield. Fear can keep enemies at bay and relationships in balance. Fearful populations commiserate, which facilitates information gathering and promotes the coterie. Fear also exaggerates, inspiring lies that can hide vulnerable truths. Fear inspires respect in those who might make valuable converts and draws out potential traitors in enemy organizations. It's good to be feared.

PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT

Contrary to the other two tactics — or to balance them — the covenant also promotes its ever-expanding dogma and open-mindedness. The Circle of the Crone demands less and inspires more. The Circle's faith adapts to absorb the beliefs of converts. Its coterie defines their own goals and rituals. Acolytes might not be personally recognized, but they'll never be faceless.

By promoting this reputation in conjunction with the covenant's image as a strange and frightening mélange of independent cults, membership seems simultaneously redeeming and exciting. The nightly rituals appear solemn and involving. The motives of the covenant are difficult to identify, so local authorities must make decisions based on the local coterie, rather than popular generalizations. The individualization of coterie means that one can raise hell without necessarily implicating the other covenant followers. In the feudal city-states of the undead, that kind of freedom is an attractive luxury for street-level whelps and a powerful weapon for the covenant elders.

NEW CRÚAC RITUALS

To varying degrees, these new Crúac rituals benefit coterie of Acolytes, especially those with a shared haven. Each of these follows the rules for Crúac rituals in *Vampire: The Requiem*, except as noted. Not all rituals are in practice everywhere, so be sure the Storyteller allows a ritual before you plan on learning it.

BLOOD WITNESS (• CRÚAC RITUAL)

With the presence and power of her own Vitae, a ritualist can observe what happens in the vicinity of blood she leaves behind during the performance of this ritual. The performer must spend the standard one Vitae to complete the ritual, plus another Vitae (or possibly more) to bear witness at the site to be watched. The Vitae left behind must come from the performer, whether it's vomited up, spilled from the wrists or via some other means. The blood may be dribbled on a floor, soaked into a rug, painted onto a wall or otherwise applied as

the performer sees fit. However the blood is left behind, it remains as detectable as any ordinary blood. If it's scrubbed away, the power of this ritual is broken.

For one full night per Vitae spent, the character invoking the ritual gains the ability to witness events at the location as though she were present and standing in whatever spot she had marked with her Vitae. If the character creates a trail of blood around a room, for example, she may later observe the room from any point on that "circuit." Because the seer isn't actually present at the location, she may even observe events that occur during the day — the images come to her in an achingly vivid dream while she sleeps. Some Acolytes use this ritual just to gain a glimpse of their own gardens in the sunshine. Seers are still subject to the Röttschreck, however, as the Beast panics in the light of the sun. Observers who succumb to the fear frenzy do not actually lose control of themselves, but do lose their connection to the Vitae they've used in this ritual. While the seer is watching through her blood connection, she is unable to see or hear through her own body.

The boundaries of this power are limited. Only one arcane connection can be employed by any single character at one time, even if multiple Vitae are spent on that connection. Multiple Vitae can be used to widen the area of observance, at one Vitae per room included. Vitae may be deposited in a vehicle, so the observer becomes a clairvoyant passenger. If the distance between the character and the Vitae exceeds 10 times the sorcerer's Blood Potency in miles, the mystic connection breaks.

The observer's perception is limited through the mystical connection, but not by physical barriers the character can see around. If a rug is laid down over the blood she leaves behind, she sees as if she stood on that rug. If a door is closed between her Vitae and another room, she doesn't gain any power to see through it, but may hear sounds that come through it. Her powers of perception depend on her supernatural prowess. The number of successes on the Crúac roll becomes the number of successes she scores on all attempted actions to perceive the world through her arcane connection (such as Wits + Composure or Wits + a certain Skill; see p. 46 of the *World of Darkness* rulebook for details). The testimony of the blood witness is affected by environmental impediments like darkness and smoke just as ordinary vision is affected. No other Disciplines may be used through the blood connection, so a character may not employ Heightened Senses, for example.

BARRIER OF BLOOD (•• CRÚAC RITUAL)

This defensive ritual is used to mark an Acolyte's territory and prevent entry by unwanted Kindred. To perform this ritual, the character draws lines of his Vitae across doorways, underneath windows or anywhere else she wishes to ward. One Vitae is necessary for each portal to be protected, in addition to the Vitae spent to complete the ritual itself. Multiple barriers may be created with a single activation roll, provided all barriers protect a single room or space and are linked by solid

walls. The character can also define areas to be protected by painting circles or other shapes on a floor using Vitae. For this purpose, one Vitae is sufficient to create standing room for two average-sized people. The Vitae to be used can be donated by any willing or unwilling vampires.

Vampires with Blood Potency less than that of the Vitae used in the creation of the sanguine perimeter cannot voluntarily cross without making a Resolve + Composure roll and scoring more successes than were scored on the initial roll to create the barrier. Regardless, any Kindred crossing the barrier suffers bashing damage equal to the successes scored on the Crúac roll, minus his Defense.

The performer of this ritual must touch any Kindred permitted to pass the barrier before the barrier has been completely drawn. Kindred with permission ignore all effects of the Barrier of Blood, as does the sorcerer who cast it.

The Barrier of Blood lasts for 24 hours.

FLOWER OF DEMETER (... CRÚAC RITUAL)

Knowledge of this ritual has been passed down from the most ancient vampires, according to those Acolytes who use and teach this horticultural rite. With it, a character grows a unique species of red lily said to have been brought back from Hades by Persephone. The flower grows only in mortal blood — which must be supplied in total at the start of ritual — but is traditionally grown from a human corpse. To raise a Flower of Demeter, the sorcerer's player must

make a successful invocation roll once per week until the three successes necessary to satisfy the roll have been accumulated. (In this case, the extended action happens over the course of a week or weeks, not turns as is normally specified by Crúac rituals.) Over this time, the stalk of the plant grows slowly taller and taller from the ground or corpse that supplies its blood, up to a height of about six feet. Once the three successes have been garnered, the Vitae of the Acolyte brings the flowers to bloom. One bud on the stalk blooms per dot of the character's Blood Potency, less one per week it took to cultivate the stalk, with a minimum of one.

The plant itself is inspiring to Kindred in an intangible, mystical way for as long as at least a single blossom remains on its stalk. All Craft and Expression rolls made in the presence of the flower gain two extra dice. This inspirational power is said to be an echo of Demeter's springtime joy.

A vampire who swallows a Flower of Demeter experiences the blush of life until the next sunrise, with no expenditure of her own Vitae. She is capable of keeping down food, keeping up sexual activity and mimicking respiration and blood flow almost without thought. When the sunrise comes, however, the vampire undergoes an awful purge, vomiting up all food and drink consumed and experiencing tremendous but harmless anguish described by those who've experienced it as a "mourning of the flesh."

An Acolyte cannot raise a new Flower of Demeter until her current specimen has been fully deflowered or allowed to die. The plant suffers all the anathema of the Kindred, and is



destroyed in seconds by fire or sunlight. Blossoms clipped from the plant lose all mystical properties at the next sunrise, when they flake away in sheets of ash like burnt paper.

STATUS

The many faces of the Crone wear many masks. Coteries of the Crone play different roles on the different stages of the world's cities. More than any other covenant, the status of a Circle coterie is dependent on the coterie itself, rather than the reputation of the covenant.

Although all Crone-worshipping coteries can be said to be mysterious and misunderstood, each city's local Acolytes practice a different sort of strangeness. Two Circle coteries might have contrary relationships with the powers that be. One might be an unwelcome cult of crazed troublemakers, the other an aloof cabal of garden-tending spiritual advisors. What Circle coteries usually have in common is their relationship to the city's larger social strata. Coteries of the Crone either position themselves or are habitually forced outside the normal social structure of the city. They are the uncommon covenant, the city's "organic" spiritual voice.

Therefore, Circle coteries rarely bother to play the more elaborate political games attributed to elder culture, even when they have positive political standing. A coterie might have formidable status in local affairs, or it might not have any formal influence on policy at all, preferring to work indirectly. An Acolyte might be a respected voice at court, but less august members of the covenant often do not hold high regard for formal politics. The covenant's focus of spiritual matters suggests that its most powerful members are not too concerned with feudal power. In recent times, though, many Princes have sensed a change in the priorities of the Circle.

COMMON STATUS FOR THE CRONE

When the Circle thrives in a domain, it plants coteries like seeds and hopes some cultural influence takes root. When Circle coteries advance the city's political framework, they grow like vines, tangled and tenacious. When Acolytes claim power, the covenant sprouts up through cracks in the city's foundation until the domain is entwined in its web of influence.

So the Circle of the Crone does wield substantial power in select domains, but its total territories are few and its aspirations for secular power are minor. Like the Ordo Dracul, the Circle of the Crone tends to focus its political resources on select positions of influence in hopes of controlling private territories where covenant members can worship, study and challenge themselves unmolested by the other covenants. In some cases, Circle coteries pay for this privilege with favors to feudal lords and spiritual contributions to the city's Kindred. In many cases, Circle coteries avoid participation in formal contracts altogether and exempt themselves from the feudal system as best they can with a curtain of fear and a reputation for xenophobia. Rather than the intricately defined relationships that

seem to be the obsession of the Invictus and rulers from every covenant, the Circle of the Crone prefers to deal with the hierarchies of undead society on a case-by-case basis.

THE IN-BETWEEN PLACES

The spaces occupied by Circle coteries reflect their standing in the city and inevitably bring with them a social status both unsought and invaluable. Acolytes dwell in the in-between places of the realm: the areas technically within a Prince's domain but outside of his interest. The areas unwatched by the Sheriff and his Hounds. The areas attractive to outcasts, exiles, runaways and fugitives.

Circle coteries sometimes become the untouchables, the useful X-factors playable by every side against the others, but not responsible for their own wicked acts of war. The Carthians might enlist the help of the Acolytes against the Invictus, for example, but the Invictus knows that the Carthians were behind the act and retaliates against them, not the Circle. The Acolytes accept this arrangement because it puts them in an ideal position to collect the tired, the disgusted and the cast-off members who flee the factions after every defeat. Therefore, the Circle is in contact with every instrument in the city's Danse Macabre, well informed and well protected.

CAMPAIGNS FOR POWER

Status is about recognition and acknowledgement. Status comes in response to actions taken and bestows responsibilities and freedoms. Or does it? It can appear real, it can inspire genuine sentiment and provoke actions with real consequences without ever being real itself. Status can be a strange thing — a lie that becomes true, an illusion made manifest by its audience. Convince enough people that a Kindred dwells in an unassailable fortress of esteem, and his reputation builds protective walls around him.

The more formal covenants that make up the establishment of Kindred society have mechanisms in place for the political promotion of their own members. In one city, it's simply understood that all churches and synagogues within the city limits are the domain of a Bishop selected by the Lancea Sanctum. In another, the Primogen always belong to the Ordo Dracul.

The internal disparity and external unfamiliarity of the Circle of the Crone makes it more difficult for the covenant to gain ground in many domains, and even for its own members to gain recognition within the larger body of the covenant. When local agents of the covenant decide that the time is right to gain visibility and status within either body, they sometimes form coteries and mount street-level campaigns to benefit and promote a figurehead or leader. The largest challenge for these ambitious coteries isn't the opposition, but the lack of support from the larger reputation of the covenant.

The techniques such coteries use aren't unique to the Circle of the Crone, though. Storytellers are welcome to use this system for coteries of other covenants and for any other kinds of Status relevant in the chronicle.

STORYTELLER'S OPTION: FREEFORM STATUS

The simplest way for Storytellers to handle Status is to just award new dots in the Merit to reflect recognition of a character's acts by the vampires of the domain. (In practice, this can be the same as the pooled experience point method, except the Storyteller keeps track of it all behind the scenes.) This freeform system makes Status a much more delicate and precarious dance for those who want it and those who have it. Using this option, Status no longer has to be purchased incrementally, but can instead be boosted in a single night by a cavalier, clever or lucky vampire who succeeds when it counts, perhaps joining the ranks of the Harpies after some quick-witted victory in Elysium or being singled out by a clan elder at some fraternal gathering.

Under this system, Status is much more malleable and easy to lose. When a player is putting valuable experience points into a Merit, the threshold for losing it should be higher and wholly dependent on the consequences of choices made by the player and her character. When the reward comes not just from a character's gradual insinuation into the city's culture, but from sudden bursts of popularity, Status also "wears off." An Acolyte who becomes popular with the Harpies might enjoy increased Status for a while but find it dropping when the Harpies tire of her.

Freeform Status works best with City Status. It lets the Storyteller use an abstract method to chart popular sentiment — most useful when the chronicle is set in a city with a large and well-informed vampire population. Covenant Status and Clan Status measure recognition and responsibility within a more closed structure, and Freeform Status in those categories can become incongruous with formal titles and duties. As it is, Status as a Merit is designed to work as one part in the internecine ballet of the Damned, where mental, physical and social struggles are each equally vital. Freeform Status awards are intended for chronicles focusing on physical action or chronicles in which social action falls somewhat into the background. This option plays up the fickleness of vampire culture and downplays the eternal staying power that's truly necessary in the Danse Macabre.

COTERIE FIGUREHEADS AND POOLED STATUS

Kindred must often conspire to win the most valuable seats of power, though only one of the conspirators claims the seat when the campaign is won. In the case of the Circle of the Crone only one Acolyte in each city can be considered the Hierophant — typically the wisest and most revered Acolyte. Therefore, even if a coterie of unprecedented fairness and

equality works together to pursue the position, even if several of them attain maximum Covenant Status, only one typically claims the title. Better, then, to decide in advance which vampire takes control and work to maximize the benefits of the situation. To be sure, the covenant has historically seen "co-Hierophants," but such a situation is almost always a political, spiritual and personal problem simply waiting to happen.

Coterie members should consider carefully who gets the power, with all the freedoms, responsibilities and risks involved. The rest should consider keeping lower profiles — possibly so low as to warrant no Covenant Status themselves. To gain Covenant Status, other vampires of the covenant must hear of the candidate and come to recognize him — and the more other vampires know about him, the more vulnerable he becomes. Keeping some members of the coterie off the popular radar is a good way to keep potential enemies in the dark.

The Storyteller should consider allowing coterie members to pool experience to purchase dots in Covenant Status (or even City Status, as might fit a cosmopolitan chronicle, though this is not universally recommended) for one member of the pack. Doing so represents the members of the coterie using their own efforts to promote and earn favor for their figurehead. Of course, such efforts should actually take place if experience-pooling is to be justified. The Storyteller may decree that only experience points earned specifically for actions promoting the coterie or its figurehead can be pooled to purchase Status, and then award such experience points at the end of a chapter with serious campaigning. This method creates a separate registry of experience points belonging not to any one member of the group but to the coterie as a whole, who get to turn those points into a dot which must itself land on one character's sheet.

To share Covenant Status, two or more characters simply have to pool their dots to reflect the increase in the figurehead's standing. A shared rating in the Covenant Status Merit cannot rise higher than five dots.

Shared Status dots can be lost. Coterie members or associates might withdraw their support. Kindred initially supportive of the situation might sour on it later, undertaking actions or even smear campaigns that reflect poorly on the figurehead. Initiatives might be won or lost. If any group member does something to diminish the figurehead's reputation, its dots decrease accordingly. The Storyteller dictates when character actions or events in a story compromise shared Covenant Status dots.

Characters can also abandon a shared-Status arrangement. When a character leaves such a relationship, the dots he contributed are removed from the pool. The character doesn't get his dots back for his own purposes. He must begin on the road toward building his reputation from square one, given that he was effectively a "silent partner" up until this point.

On the other hand, a character need not devote all of her experience-point expenditures (or starting Merit dots) to the pooled Status. A Kindred might make a name of her own outside the communal one represented by the shared trait. Any leftover dots a character has (or is unwilling to share) signify what she has to draw upon as an individual, separate from her partners.

For more suggestions on sharing Merits, see the Haven Merit on p. 100 of **Vampire: The Requiem**.

STORYTELLER'S OPTION: STATUS THROUGH PROTRACTED ACTIVITY

Storytellers running chronicles with complex casts of interrelated characters, carefully designed corridors of intrigue and an attention to the ongoing details of the Requiem might go so far as to define in advance the specific actions necessary to earn certain kinds of Status in the city. The job of the players, then, is to identify and complete those tasks to climb the steps of the social pyramid. By defining those tasks as extended actions, the Storyteller amplifies the coterie's sense of ongoing progress and a constantly developing social scene.

In this method, the cost of dots in Status is paid for with awards from every chapter in which progress is made toward the completion of a Status-boosting protracted endeavor. The Storyteller grants a bonus experience point at the end of the session, usable only for purchasing another dot in Status, in other words. Alternatively, the Storyteller simply awards increased Status when the right political challenge has been overcome.

The undertakings required for Status awards should be unique to the city, clan and covenant involved. For example, the Storyteller requires a representative of the coterie to make numerous, memorable appearances at court to gain the attention of the Prince's entourage of Harpies and be welcomed into the city's innermost social circle. To represent this, the Storyteller chooses Presence + Socialize as the relevant dice pool, decides one check can be made per night at court (which convenes monthly), and sets the number of successes at 20 for the extended action. To add a challenge, the Storyteller decides that an up-and-coming Ventruie is also competing for the open position. Whoever totals 20 successes first gets the position and the compensatory dot in City Status.

Meanwhile, the coterie members are also attempting to get through their probationary period in the Circle of the Crone. To graduate from the chorus and become Acolytes, they must prove their dedication through recitations from the Crone's Liturgy at three Circle ceremonies. To avoid disappointing the Hierophant, the Storyteller decides that each character must earn 10 successes over three or fewer Manipulation + Occult rolls, each made one week apart and requiring one hour to perform. Characters who succeed earn the first dot in Covenant Status (Circle of the Crone). Of course, with the patience and attitude of vampires, the Storyteller could design extended actions that take place over years or decades to earn the most advantageous positions in the city.

Note that this system largely abstracts the nightly power plays of the Kindred. If the chronicle is intrigue-heavy, social interaction-heavy or otherwise relies on the quick wits of the players as well as the characters, those players will probably be disappointed with this system. Players who aren't so graceful as their characters, however, might enjoy the opportunity for the characters to excel where their own personalities might not be in accord.

Campaigning

Politics is clearly the Skill that covers actual political campaigning, but City Status isn't always about politics. Covenant Status, especially in the case of the ideological Circle of the Crone, might have nothing to do with politics. Lots of different skills can and should become important when trying to gain Status.

Use Intelligence + Expression to write speeches or essays that make the figurehead look good, and Presence + Expression to pull off those speeches. With Manipulation + Socialize, coterie-mates can subtly influence eavesdroppers or acquaintances with promotional oratory disguised as casual ranting or conversation. Intelligence + Empathy could be used to dissect the bitching of street-level whelps and identify the religious or political angle that'll finally get through to them.

No Vacancies

So, the coterie's got six experience points pooled and ready. With those six points, the coterie's figurehead will get a third dot in Status and become "known to all in the local covenant" (see **Vampire: The Requiem**) as the Hierophant of the Circle of the Crone in town. Trouble is, another vampire's already using that title, and he's not ready to give it up. The Storyteller might decide that the coterie's figurehead can purchase the third dot in Status, become known throughout the city, and be recognized as a rival for the seat. The Storyteller could also decide that the third dot can't be purchased until the position can be captured; it's her call. While Status isn't a rigid measure of social rank with each dot indicating a special title, the Storyteller does get to decide how the scale of Status works in the city and the chronicle.

Either way, if the coterie wants to fill that seat, the characters have got to get rid of the current Hierophant. To do that without losing the favor of the Acolytes or the chorus in town and provoking a violent backlash is one more reason why some members of the coterie avoid getting Status of their own. While the figurehead positions himself as a loyal right-hand to the Hierophant, the rest of the coterie gets the Hierophant incinerated by the Lancea Sanctum or exposed as a hypocrite by a coterie of whistleblower Carthians.

A HOUSE WITH NO FOUNDATION

Something that's not real can't be revoked, but it can be disbelieved. If the coterie's campaign is based on lies or half-truths, and those lies are revealed, the whole house can come down. Covenant Status is a vertical path, as you can't be a member without Status. If a Hierophant is revealed to be a fraud, for example — perhaps he won the title by taking credit for the actions of another Acolyte — he'll almost certainly be ousted and probably exiled from the covenant. He might even meet Final Death. The higher one's Status is, the further the fall is when that status disappears.

KEEPING STATUS AFTER LOSING A TITLE

Again, Status isn't necessarily fused to a formalized title. A character's Status can utterly change within the context

of the chronicle without the player gaining or losing any dots on her character sheet. Imagine a Hierophant who falls out of favor with the covenant but translates it into City Status when news of his masterful power play gets out.

An earthquake under the political landscape of the domain might be an opportunity for a character to redistribute his total dots in Status into new categories. What if the Circle of the Crone usurps dominance in a city from the Carthians and your character was a spy in the Carthian ranks with one dot in Covenant Status (Carthians)? That dot might move to City Status to reflect a new post beneath the new Hierophant-Prince.

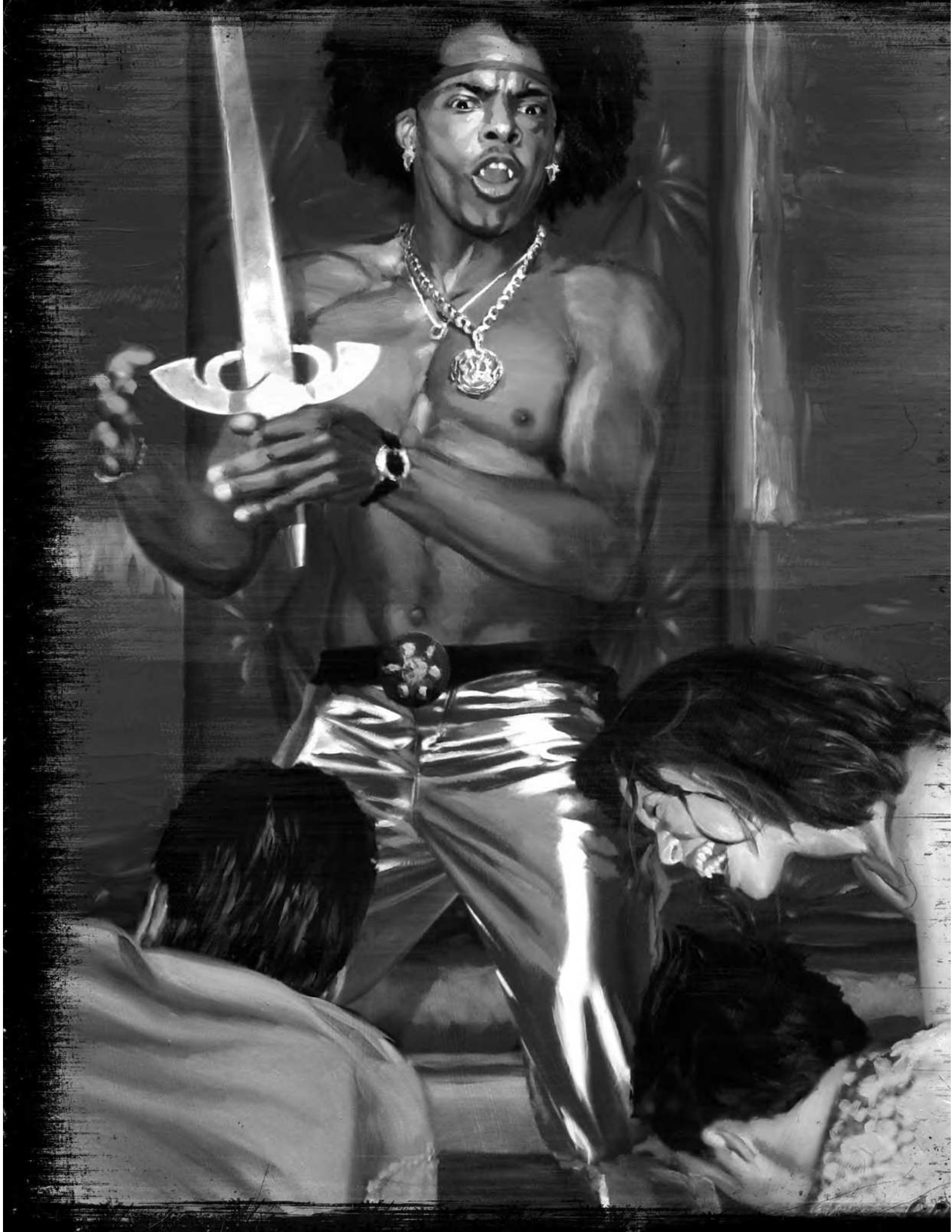
Depending on the size of the city and its vampiric population, the Storyteller might decide that there's no way for part of a coterie to hide when the social spotlight is cast on one of its members. If the coterie members represent every Acolyte in the domain, they become the poster boys for the covenant and possibly the basis of stereotypes. This is the unavoidable



weight of recognition. This is especially suitable for Acolyte coteries, which often organize around a powerful figure, like a Hierophant, rather than beneath a powerful figure, as the Lancea Sanctum is structured below its Archbishops.

Status is something other Kindred respect, but not necessarily like. An Acolyte whose City Status is based on word of the gruesome act of vengeance that got her kicked out of the covenant might be feared, but that fear can be a form of Status. Among the undead, such Status might make her feared or idolized (or both), depending on the social climate of the city at large. Status is foremost a measure of magnitude — the number of extra dice you get in social situations — which can be colored in countless ways by the chronicle and your own roleplaying.

Note that not every situation allows for dot-switching. In some cases, lost Status is just that: a reputation sent straight to the shitter. Storytellers, pay careful mind to Status, as hard-and-fast guidelines in the form of rules can't always accurately apply to something so capricious as public opinion.

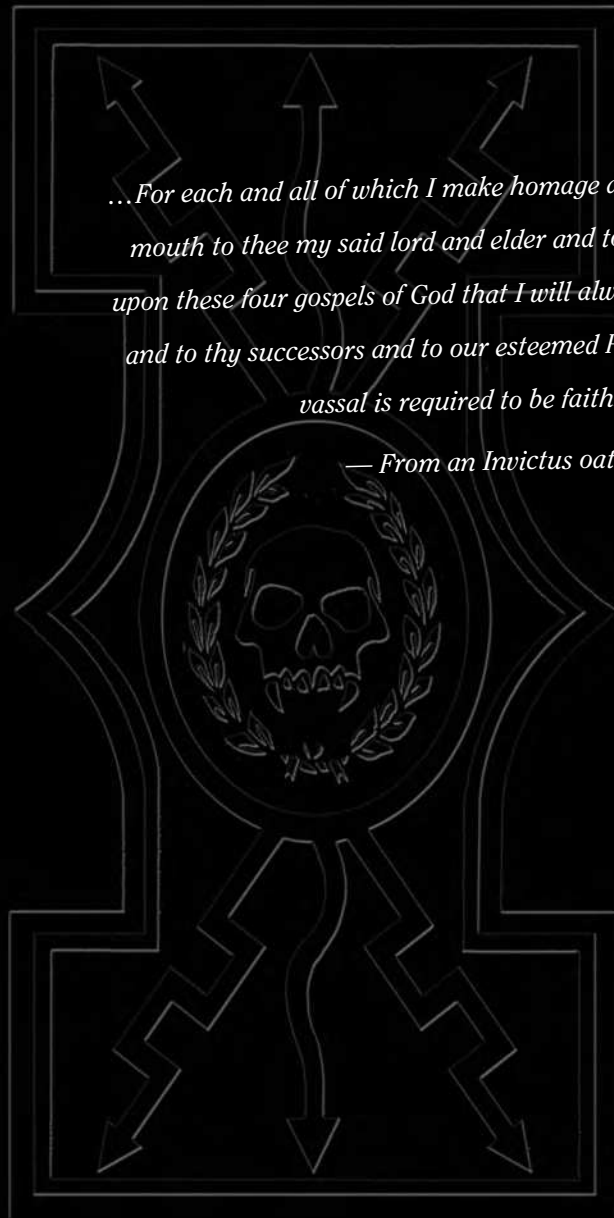


Chapter Five

The Invictus

...For each and all of which I make homage and fealty with hands and with mouth to thee my said lord and elder and to thy successors, and I swear upon these four gospels of God that I will always be a faithful vassal to thee and to thy successors and to our esteemed Prince in all things in which a vassal is required to be faithful to his lord.

— From an Invictus oath of fealty



Ambition is not a vice of little people.

—Michel de Montaigne

The genteel lords and ladies of the Requiem, night's aristocracy, pride themselves on their long and estimable history and on their ability to govern effectively. While the Invictus does show an admirable degree of integration, its members are far more varied than they let other covenants know. The covenant's overarching goals — power and dominion over the Kindred — are abundantly clear to anyone watching the covenant's nightly maneuvers in the Danse Macabre, but the goals of its coteries, the real agents of Invictus' agenda, are myriad, varied and often hidden. That's the way the Invictus likes it. For tactical reasons, the Invictus (the covenant) does not like to reveal what the Invictus (the tapestry of interwoven coteries) is doing. The appearance of pluralism impairs the covenant's ability to present a unified front and undercuts the impression of the Invictus as a monolithic and unwaveringly successful institution.

The face of the Invictus, the one it lets be seen, is a mélange of the faces of those in the apex positions of Kindred society: the powerful and experienced Invictus Prince, the crafty Invictus Primogen, the influential Invictus Priscus. The irony, of course, is that these old, powerful figures make up a small minority of the First Estate's membership. For every well-known and obvious Invictus Prince giving the organization a face, there are 10 coteries of younger Kindred acting as the covenant's eyes, hands and daggers.

Belonging to an Invictus coterie means helping oneself to the grudging respect of most other covenants, but it also means serving the covenant's hierarchy like a slave for decades in hopes of being found worthy to advance in the organization.

Serving the Invictus as part of a coterie is an inescapable part of being a member of the covenant. From the covenant's perspective, being a member of the Invictus is a privilege, and the privilege is a reward for loyal service. An Invictus vampire who refuses to join a coterie is considered highly suspicious and, probably, a loose cannon waiting to go off. Teamwork and fulfilling one's role in the chain of command are crucial to the Invictus strategy. Any vampire who can't master them has no future in the First Estate.

Kindred of the Invictus swear oaths of fealty to Princes and other authority figures, and they carry out the will of their superiors until such night that they *are* the superior and have vassals of their own offering pledges of fealty. Neonates and young ancillae are commonly gathered into coteries and used as "knights errant" to accomplish those tasks that are deemed important to the covenant, but not worth the direct attention of its ancilla or elders. It gives young coteries a taste of Invictus politics, keeps younger Kindred from falling to idleness and lets them get a bit of experience under their belts while advancing the covenant's

agenda. Older ancillae have attained a degree of experience and sophistication through their work for the First Estate and are more likely to take up the role of "idle nobles." Such nobles must have earned the right to attend to their own business through their prior work for the covenant, and they must continue to pay proper tribute to the Prince and elders of the domain upon request — unless the Invictus directly opposes that Prince and his regime. Always, similar oaths bind these ancillae to elders of the Invictus itself, occasionally making for split loyalties that covenant elders demand favor them. These ancillae nobles are usually well versed in the covenant's politics, however, and have no problem flattering, ingratiating themselves and serving their elders as needed — as long as such behavior furthers their personal agendas.

Psychology

Those Kindred who expect to rise to the top of the Invictus hierarchy find themselves facing something of a conundrum. Most members of the covenant are intently focused on furthering their own goals, their own well-being and their own agendas. "I" is the operative word in every sentence uttered by an Invictus vampire. The overall goal of membership in the covenant is to acquire power and, hopefully, to ascend to any one of a variety of Kindred positions, whether in the covenant's local hierarchy or the overarching domain itself. That said, there's no progressing through the Invictus' ranks without proving that one can work well with others. When looking at the structure of the Invictus, one thing becomes quite clear: The most basic element of the First Estate is not the individual, but the coterie. Even the greatest lord's power is much diminished if those sworn to him won't lift a finger for his cause. Only in groups do Kindred possess enough importance, enough substance, to be noticed by the great and terrible Invictus. Members of the First Estate who insist on going solo often find themselves written off and forgotten as eccentrics by those in positions of power unless they take some bold action to distinguish themselves from the rabble. While this is possible, it is also extremely difficult and commensurately rare. And so it is in groups, then, that the vast majority of Invictus Kindred make their way through the Requiem and attend to the business of their covenant. For self-obsessed creatures like the Kindred, this is no mean feat.

Paying Dues

No vampire pledges himself with the Invictus without the goal of one night wielding immense power and influence as a mighty elder among the Kindred. Even the



rawest neophytes of the First Estate take comfort that being a veritable serf among the Invictus carries more prestige than being a lapdog for any other covenant. The interwoven melodies of power and prestige are at the core of the Invictus' siren song. Within the First Estate, however, the reality is that a tiny fraction of those who join will ever wield the kind of power they dream of. The Invictus' membership comprises 10 Kindred for every position of real power in the covenant and its domains. The current elders know this, and they offer younger Kindred occasional tastes and flashes of the power that could one night be theirs — perhaps commanding a handful of coterie or even being Prince for an hour or two. Then they remind them that before they can attain those lofty heights of power, they have to pay their dues. To do otherwise, the elders say, would be unjust to those who have striven long for their position and would almost certainly result in power falling into the hands of the unworthy — a state of affairs the Invictus *will not* allow.

Once elders have given the young a glimpse of the glories of power and informed them of the hoops they'll need to jump through before they can wield that power, the rest is up to the ambition of the young Kindred. Those who don't like the odds may leave the covenant, but most take their chances and side with the Invictus. After all, what is a decade (or two or three...) of paying dues compared to long centuries of power and the respect of one's fellow Kindred?

And so the neonates and ancillae of the Invictus gather into orderly coterie night after night, doing as they're told and furthering their covenant's myriad local goals.

Paying dues is not just a matter of persistence, but of performance as well. At every level, the covenant provides its members with ample means to weed themselves out of the running. This one proves herself too violent. That one proves himself incompetent with money. The other shows himself incapable of maintaining order in his coterie. Each successive hoop the Kindred jumps through is a little narrower than the one before it, and with each success, the rewards are greater. For the neonates and ancillae of the covenant, coterie are the social environment in which they prove their mettle. For the elders, coterie are the petri dishes in which they conduct their experiments in Kindred governance.

As a unit, the coterie also provides Kindred with a means of coming to terms with unlife that's safer — both for the vampire and those around her — than letting individuals run around alone. In the absence of a group's moderating influence, a solitary Kindred is prone to more extreme behavior. Temptation and anger, occasionally catalyzed by boredom, can get a grip on a lone vampire far more easily than one who is part of a coterie. Experience has shown such Kindred to be more likely to fall prey to petty temptations, threaten the well-being of other Kindred and generally make rash decisions more than those in coterie, who have the advantage of a group's tempering influence — a

crucial advantage to those who want to sustain their Humanity over the centuries.

The Invictus values experience in its members. It does not aim to be an institution of purely inherited lordships. Power is too precious to be given to those who do not understand how to earn it through diligence and wield it with discretion. Members of the Invictus must prove themselves worthy of the power and authority invested in them in their night-to-night comportment. Even the most self-serving elder knows when a favored childe is incompetent to take over in his absence, and in most cases, such a childe is more likely to meet an unexpected demise than progress any further through the covenant's ranks. The best way a neonate in the Invictus can rise through the hierarchy is to gain experience, and the safest way to gather experience in the cut-throat world of the Kindred is within the confines of a coterie. Therefore, an elder may ask his childe to take care of some of his less taxing business, including monitoring stock portfolios, soliciting potential mortal pawns or representing his interests at a meeting of some sort. This introduces the childe to the realities of the Invictus, but in a relatively safe way that (probably) doesn't put the neonate (and his coterie) at risk.

The Invictus also places a premium on a Kindred's ability to cooperate with her fellows. Those who understand the intricacies of power realize early on that ruling is more than issuing edicts, it is the fine art of motivating those of lesser status to carry out one's will and, ideally, to do so with enthusiasm. A leader who is unable to do that is no leader at all, but, rather, a figurehead and, likelier than not, a target. Elders, then, advance Kindred according to their ability to function in the context of a coterie, and woe betide the vampire who prefers his own company. A vampire who insists on being a loner, a maverick or a rebel clearly does not have what it takes to rise to the position of prominence. The same goes for those who prove themselves incapable of functioning effectively in a coterie.

Membership in an Invictus coterie is a balancing act. Those Kindred who stick out too much, especially for the wrong reasons, are more likely to be considered questionable choices for promotion in the covenant. Those who are too quiet to make some kind of a name for themselves never bring themselves to the notice of others and never get considered in the first place. As many Invictus elders and ancillae have counseled their childer, "It's the middle path that takes one the farthest through the night."

The grooming of Invictus vampires begins early. Fledglings are counseled to choose their coterie carefully, lest their images be marred by association with Kindred of poor lineage or scurrilous behavior. Within the Invictus, it is a common practice for sires to place their childer into coterie, so Invictus vampires whose sires are also members of the Invictus are more likely to be assigned to a coterie. On the other hand, a character who leaves his sire's covenant to join the Invictus has more latitude in choosing his own associates. The more powerful or prestigious vampires of the Invictus have the luxury of placing their childer into coterie with

other powerful Kindred. Once so placed, a neonate is expected to interact effectively with her new coterie and reflect well on her sire. Sires take note when a childe fails to do either. Worse, so do the other elders.

A Kindred abandoning her assigned coterie with any but the most compelling reasons (the coterie was plotting the diablerie of the city's elders, for example) had best be leaving the covenant at the same time, because she will quickly find her opportunities for advancement within the Invictus considerably thinned. Her sire will probably not be inclined to go out of his way to do her any more favors. Within the First Estate, a childe's actions reflect strongly on her sire (and vice versa), and a childe who defects from the covenant is one of the greatest embarrassments an Invictus member can suffer.



WHAT ADVANCEMENT MEANS

The goal of any Invictus member is advancement, but what does that mean? Basically, any Kindred who shows herself worthy of promotion will be granted more responsibility, greater access to those in power, and more responsibility for the protection and growth of the covenant's resources. Upon successfully resolving some bit of the First Estate's business, a member of the Invictus might find herself granted control of a business front (the value of which she is expected to increase), some representative of mortal influence (whom she is expected to groom and advance so that he can serve the covenant better) or even a coterie of neonates (whom she is expected to mentor into competence). In theory, every significant success in the pursuit of the First Estate's goals should result in more responsibility and authority within the covenant. Given the realities of the Requiem, however, ranging from inattentive elders to webs of politics to glass ceilings that hold back a Kindred for reasons that are never explained — that advancement might or might not come to pass.

Elders, for their part, want to advance their own childer. Not only does it add to one's prestige to have a respected childe, but it allows an elder to delegate some of his own responsibility to another. An elder who cannot further the advancement of his childe runs the risk of losing that childe to the schemes of another elder or to another covenant altogether if promotions are too few or far between. An ancilla might find that her own advancement up the Invictus hierarchy comes to a standstill if she proves unable to effectively mentor her own childer.



The Oaths of the Invictus

Invictus coterie are expected to swear loyalty to one elder, usually the Prince, if the Prince is an Invictus member, but any member of the covenant is appropriate. If, through some result of politics, the Invictus holds no important seats



in a city, coteries might swear their allegiance to any First Estate elder or even an experienced ancilla.

Two of the three oaths are matters of great pomp and circumstance at their swearing, with all involved Kindred dressed in full regalia and performing ceremonial rites established centuries ago during the age of the Camarilla. These rituals often take hours, with the covenant's elders watching as the pledging vampire makes a long speech in which he swears his oath in the most verbose manner possible, followed by the elder accepting the pledge, also in lengthy, formal terms. After that, the elder is congratulated on his new vassal and the vassal passes through a greeting line of all important Invictus elders and ancillae in the city, ostensibly so they can pass on wise or inspiring bon mots, though that does not always prove to be the case.

What the elder gets from the young Kindred is relatively straightforward, but what the younger vampires get from the older varies a great deal. Sometimes the coterie members benefit from easy access to the elder they're sworn to, other times the elder provides them with a commitment of resources or a competent servant of some sort (equal to Retainer ••• or better). However it turns out, the elder almost always gets the better end of the bargain.

How a particular elder comes to accept the services of a particular coterie can be a convoluted tale in itself. Sometimes the elder simply needs vassals because his operations have expanded or his old vassals have been disgraced or promoted or met a grisly end. Alternatively, he might take on the coterie as a favor to a colleague, a mentor or his sire. A coterie's experience with its liege depends largely on the elder's reasons for taking on the coterie. An elder who really needs the Kindred in question is likely to treat them better and be more assiduous in helping them advance than one who sees them as a burden taken on as a favor.

Elders judge coteries according to a range of criteria. A well-rounded coterie is generally most sought after because such coteries can be assigned to any task, whereas a martially inclined coterie, for example, is good only for breaking bones. This can change depending on the state of the city, of course. An elder who is involved in lots of touchy diplomatic work might be more inclined to go for a socially adept, diplomatic coterie than a generally competent one.

A truly accomplished coterie might find itself the object of a kind of bidding war, with elders offering increasingly enticing rewards for servitude. A coterie in this position might find itself shocked at the money, power and privilege thrown in its direction, and it can get very flattering, but once the group pledges its loyalty to one elder, it had best be prepared to weather the ire of those other elders left standing.

The three types of oaths the coterie can take include the Oath of Service, the Oath of Defense and the Oath of Fealty. A demanding title-holder or elder is likely to expect a coterie to swear an Oath of Fealty to her, but a more relaxed elder, an elder who already has her bases covered, or one who simply isn't that concerned about such things, might allow a coterie to serve in some lesser capacity.

The Oath of Service

The least binding of the oaths sworn by Invictus coteries, the Oath of Service loosely binds a group of Kindred to carry out their lord's will on a nightly basis. The connection forged by an oath of this sort isn't particularly deep, more akin to the bond between employer and favored employee. Such oaths are deliberately undemanding, allowing the lord to pursue his agenda, albeit casually, through the actions of the coterie without burdening the group excessively. A coterie serving an elder in this way might expect to attend to one or two issues of its lord's business at that liege's will, but otherwise its time is its own. These duties might include acting as a courier, meeting with a lawyer or banker on the elder's behalf, overseeing a business interest or similar duty. Elders might expect this sort of oath from more established coteries of ancillae with whom they have an almost collegial relationship. The elder understands that the ancillary coterie has an agenda of its own and grants the group time to pursue it once business has been attended to.

Expecting more from an arrangement of this sort is considered both unwise and unseemly. An elder who wants more from the coterie should ask for a more binding oath. Breaking an oath of this sort — by “forgetting” to perform the promised duties or getting sidetracked with some other business — is held to be rude, disrespectful and possibly scandalous, but not particularly serious or criminal. A coterie that breaks an Oath of Service is often punished by an Invictus Harpy or other public figure, who gleefully drags the coterie's reputation through the dirt. The offended elder might even dismiss the coterie and refuse the group all further aid. Breaking even an Oath of Service could impair the coterie's reputation enough to impede its advancement through the covenant's ranks.

The Oath of Defense

The Oath of Defense is an emergency oath that comes into play only if the coterie's lord is in danger and summons them or if the coterie members learn of plans against their lord. It is not unheard of for a coterie to swear an Oath of Service to one elder and an Oath of Defense to another. A coterie may not swear an Oath of Defense to more than one lord. Invictus Princes and other high-ranking elders of the covenant, who already have enough sworn Kindred (and don't need any more Oaths of Service), almost always have nascent coteries swear Oaths of Defense as a matter of course. Almost a type of “stealth oath,” the Oath of Defense is quiet and unobtrusive in the coterie's night-to-night activities. It's obvious whom a coterie is serving openly, but no one knows whom a coterie is sworn to defend, if anyone at all. Finding out to whom a coterie has sworn an Oath of Defense is often a means of finding out where that coterie's true loyalties lie. An Oath of Defense is a contingency arrangement that might never even be invoked. Decades might pass without the lord ever calling on this oath, but when he *does* call, the coterie is expected to drop anything else it might be doing and come to his defense immediately.

The Oath of Defense stipulates two things. First, the coterie taking such an oath will do everything possible to return to the side of its lord in times of conflict, danger or upheaval. This could mean abandoning other duties and gracefully accepting the consequences for doing so. In return, the coterie is able to call upon its liege for much weightier matters than a mere Oath of Service would entitle them to. Second, the coterie is obliged to be attentive to any potential threat to its lord and to inform her immediately of any manner of plot, scheme or conspiracy against her.

Because the Oath of Defense requires the liege to have absolute faith in the loyalty of the vassal, rare is the elder who will accept an Oath of Defense from a coterie that has ever broken any other kind of oath.

Breaking an Oath of Defense is considered an unforgivable breach of trust. Someone to whom such a coterie has sworn and broken the oath might push for a blood hunt or otherwise call for the Final Death of her betrayers. Characters might survive the experience, but they'll need to keep a very low profile and find protection soon thereafter, most likely with another covenant (provided the new covenant wants the oathbreakers...). Furthermore, if the liege meets Final Death because the characters defaulted on their oath, other dutiful elders of the Invictus who know about the forsaken bond will likely make sure that the characters are hunted to the extent of their influence.

Oaths of Defense do offer a few ways to circumvent them. At the lord's wish, they can lapse entirely, which occasionally happens as a coterie falls from favor or the sworn Kindred wishes to disassociate himself with them. If the Kindred to whom the oath is sworn ever forms a Vinculum to one of the Kindred in the coterie, the oath is considered null as well, as the peculiarity of the resulting relationship would call the validity of the oath into question. Finally, any Kindred of greater status than the lord to whom the oath is sworn can cancel the oath, but only if the coterie so sworn instead transfers its oath to that Kindred instead.



STORYTELLING THE OATH OF DEFENSE

The effect that the Oath of Defense is designed to simulate is that some of the best Storytelling experiences are about dilemmas. The characters certainly don't have to swear an Oath of Defense to an elder, and if they don't think they can fulfill their duties, then they shouldn't. They might be drawn to do so by the benefits it provides, though, even as they hope that they never have to fulfill their obligation. If they do have to honor the oath, the chronicle can take a turn when their loyalties become public, and more interesting still if they find themselves defending their liege against someone they think of as an ally. As such, if they *don't* honor the oath, the chronicle takes a whole new twist as the characters try to survive the consequences of their own dishonorable actions. The damned-if-you-do, damned-if-you-don't situations provide an emotional charge to what would otherwise be simply a physically dangerous conflict.



The Oath of Fealty

The most absolute of the Invictus oaths, an Oath of Fealty binds the coterie to serve its lord without fail or question. Swearing fealty to an elder leaves no room for a coterie to swear any lesser oaths to another elder. It presumes and supercedes the Oaths of Service and Defense, and it incorporates the additional stipulation that the coterie will proactively and independently seek to work in its lord's best interest in all ways. Coterie swear an Oath of Fealty to a powerful liege might find themselves in the very thick of elder politics, which is generally very educational, but it is also unlikely to leave the coterie with much time to pursue its members' own agendas.

Only under tremendously dire circumstances would an elder approach the members of a coterie asking them to swear an Oath of Fealty. An elder who's already familiar with a coterie's work and ethics might, at the most, casually mention in conversation that he's looking for a coterie to mentor in exchange for service, but even that might be perceived as overstepping bounds by more hidebound members of the First Estate. Invictus tradition stipulates that a coterie must humbly approach an elder whose vassals they wish to be. The elder then asks how the Kindred wish to serve him and informs them of what he's willing to do for them in exchange. If both sides are satisfied with the terms, the formal ceremonies are scheduled. Should one or both sides not like the terms, tradition indicates that negotiations may take place between the two parties. If that is not sufficient to resolve differences, both parties are free to go their separate ways, and no harm is done — at least theoretically. Some would-be lieges grow vindictive when coterie approach them and then reject them when their offers aren't sufficient. Likewise some coterie have turned subtly hostile to elders whom they have perceived as arrogant, demanding or thrifty with their beneficence.

A coterie swearing the Oath of Fealty to a lord is likely to be kept quite close to that lord. They operate in whatever capacity he desires them to, from valets to account managers to assassins. The relationship between lord and vassals can become very intense, and many lords resort to the Vinculum with their vassals, so they can be sure that their trust is well placed.

A coterie is likely to swear an Oath of Fealty if their liege is uncommonly powerful, or if they're expecting an unusual degree of assistance from her.

Unlike other oaths, the Oath of Fealty is sworn for only a year or a decade at a time. At the end of that period (agreed upon before the oath is sworn), both the liege and the vassal coterie have the option of rethinking the agreement. The elder can dismiss the coterie, ask more of it or promise more compensation. For its part, the coterie can ask for more compensation or stipulate any other changes it wants made before agreeing to another term of duty.

As with the Oath of Defense, breaking an Oath of Fealty is grounds for immediate and severe retribution. Given the amount of gravity with which the Invictus imparts its oaths, anything less would defy its principles.





Fulfilling the Oath

An elder may “lend” a coterie bound by Oaths of Service or Fealty (but not Defense) to another vampire in the same way that he can lend access to his feeding grounds. This is done, usually on a temporary basis, as a sign of favor to an ally or subordinate. A loaned coterie serves its temporary master just as it would its regular lord, with the understanding that any attempt to turn the coterie against its original master immediately nullifies the arrangement.

Whole hierarchies of oaths underpin the nightly functioning of the Danse Macabre. A neonate might be in a coterie sworn to serve an ancilla, who has, in turn, sworn an Oath of Fealty to an elder (or some powerful figure in the city hierarchy). The Kindred, of course, have rules for how such things work. A coterie functioning under an Oath of Service is not obligated to turn its own servants to serving its lord, but a coterie that has sworn an Oath of Defense or of Fealty is. In times of conflict, entire chains or cascades of oaths can be called into play that had theretofore been kept entirely secret. This is one of many reasons that Kindred of other covenants are hesitant to take action against Invictus elders. It may appear that they are attacking a single elder (no small feat in its own right), but in reality they are warring on that elder, any Kindred who has sworn an Oath of Defense or Oath of Fealty to her, and a cavalcade of subordinate Kindred who have sworn such oaths to them (and so on). Therefore, a vampire who thinks

he’s making war on one elder might find that he faces the entirety of the Invictus’ local might.

Types of Coteries

All coteries are not created equal. It’s possible for a coterie to change from one type of coterie to another, but that’s unusual, primarily because the function served by a coterie is determined by the makeup of that coterie. A coterie composed entirely of Daeva and Ventrue will probably not be a part of a law coterie, while a coterie of three Gangrel, a Mekhet and a Nosferatu is unlikely to be a very adept social coterie. That said, even the static nature of Kindred allows for some change as the group gets more skills under its belt. A coterie that begins its time together as hired muscle roughing up mortals could yet wind up acting as ambassadors, Harpies or the Inner Circle itself.

Social Coteries

These groups gather to monitor the Kindred social scene. They’re often affiliated in one way or another with a domain’s Harpy, possibly sworn to him if he’s a member of the First Estate. They might be composed of the city’s social elite, busybodies or just ardent connoisseurs of gossip.

An average night could find such a coterie attending (or putting on) a masquerade ball in Elysium, gossiping with a Regent, plotting to undermine another coterie’s social standing or making the rounds of the Rack’s best dance clubs. Other coteries sometimes find social coteries

hopelessly frivolous, but who says the Requiem always has to focus on the Danse Macabre?

Daeva, Ventrue and exceptionally social Mekhet are the primary members of such coteries, but Nosferatu are also common members due to their ability and willingness to provoke responses from other Kindred.

Law Coteries

The Invictus doesn't expect proper behavior from Kindred, it demands it. To maintain order, the Invictus puts together law coteries (occasionally called posses) intended to lobby for changes in local policy. Occasionally, such coteries serve the will of the Sheriff, especially when the Sheriff is a member of the Invictus or the covenant is closely tied to the city's prevailing political power. Law coteries might be dispatched to investigate a Kindred's disappearance, to "neutralize" vampires who have become revenants or, more generally, to beat down any Kindred who's disturbing the peace as the Invictus (or their lord) sees it. In some Invictus domains, law coteries take the place of a Sheriff and his Hounds. Kindred of all clans are evenly represented in law coteries, but Gangrel and Nosferatu tend to form a large portion of such groups.

Cover-Up Coteries

Comprising Kindred with influence in the media and law enforcement as well as the social graces to be effective, cover-up coteries are dispatched when the Masquerade has been breached to a potentially catastrophic degree. Their job is to destroy evidence of the breach and convince the public that nothing happened that was in any way out of the ordinary. Violent conflicts between covenants keep these coteries busy. On a given night, such a coterie might need to explain to the police or media how a violent thug was hit by a hail of bullets and still ran off into the night, how a woman threw a sewer lid at a police car a quarter of a block away or destroy a videotape of a group of strangely pale, shadow-faced individuals performing a bizarre blood ritual. Ventrue, Mekhet and Daeva often make up the majority of such coteries.

Reconnaissance Coteries

Travel outside cities is neither easy nor common for the Kindred, but sometimes it's important for the Invictus to know what's happening at the perimeter of the city lights. In those cases, it assembles a coterie to venture out and report back. Some of these coteries don't make it back, but those that survive more than a mission or two are considered quite valuable. Such coteries include members of any clan, but Gangrel and Mekhet are almost always well represented.

Knighly Coteries

Coteries of young Kindred pay their dues to the Invictus by performing the covenant's nightly business, whatever that happens to be at the moment. A very general excuse for a coterie, knighly coteries are usually the result of

swearing an Oath of Service or Fealty to an Invictus elder. In some cases it might mean working against the other covenants as the group is sent out to spy on or undermine Carthians, prevent the Lancea Sanctum from recruiting or similar goals. By the same token, it could mean carrying out a blood hunt, tracking down an elder's rogue ghoul or seeing to it that the Masquerade is not ruined in a trouble-prone neighborhood. These coteries function as the knights-errant of the First Estate, and whatever the covenant needs done, they do.

Equite Coteries

Experienced coteries often seek activity of more import than serving as pages and squires for covenant elders, and they often have the power or resources to buy back their relative autonomy with tribute. These so-called "idle coteries" have mastered the basics of the Requiem and now have time to further their own agendas. Outside of feeding and reflecting well on the First Estate, there's little such coteries need to do. They often spend a great deal of time in Elysium, quietly making alliances, consolidating their social standing and nurturing ambitions of various sorts. Equite coteries (from the Latin origin of the word, indicating a freeman able to equip himself with a horse and armor to serve in the cavalry) are expected to forgo their own agendas if circumstances require it. The more powerful the coterie is, the more powerful an elder needs to be to call it back into active service, but any coterie can be called back to service by the city's ranking Invictus elder. (The Prince or other ranking city figure can do so as well if he is not a member of the Invictus.)



TRIBUTE

An Invictus equite coterie is free to pursue its own goals so long as it pays tribute in some way to the highest ranking member or members of the covenant in its city. In a domain with a minimal Invictus presence, this might mean a minor token tribute of some sort to a First Estate Priscus or the like. A short-term Oath of Service or an oath to defend her honor might suffice, for example. In a city with a powerful Invictus presence, it could mean paying tribute to a half-dozen hierarchical superiors — and not with token tribute, either.

The more Invictus elders there are in a city, the more tribute a coterie pays, and the accumulated tribute can add up very quickly. In strong Invictus domains, so-called "equite" coteries might find themselves working just as hard to come up with tribute as they did on charges delivered directly from feudal lieges. Still, while it costs more in tribute for an equite coterie to dwell in a domain where the First Estate is strong, the benefits are also greater. The characters have more reflected status, more elders to act as mentors, more under-the-table kickbacks from the powers that be, and less likelihood of being harassed by members of other covenants.

The exact nature of tribute paid by a coterie is determined through private negotiations between the coterie and the elder or elders in

question. Mortal influence, feeding vessels and the ever-popular “favors to be named later” are common forms of tribute. A coterie with significant financial resources might simply be able to pay for its autonomy with cash. Coteries that acquire a windfall of some sort, particularly powerful artifacts with a history behind them, might receive offers to waive tribute indefinitely in exchange for turning over the item in question.

In the course of negotiations, a wise coterie always seeks to minimize the tribute it pays its elders while maximizing the benefits it receives from its membership in the covenant. Elders, of course, benefit from the exact opposite situation. Generally speaking, the more tribute elders can demand from younger coteries, the more rewarding it is for them to be at the top of the heap. That said, there is a dynamic working in favor of the young coteries of which they may not even be aware. To wit, coteries need to feel that they’re getting the better end of the bargain, or at least a fair bargain with regard to the tribute they pay and the benefits they receive in return. A coterie that is not benefiting sufficiently from the tribute it pays is not motivated to increase its covenant’s presence in the city. A coterie that feels it’s getting the better end of the bargain with its elders will be driven to increase the local Invictus presence. In theory, a coterie that feels it’s doing well is more likely to do all it can to strengthen and expand the city’s Invictus presence. The stronger the covenant is, the more they benefit. On the other hand, a coterie that feels its getting ripped off by the elders of its covenant will want to keep its own covenant weak lest it have to pay even more tribute for even less benefit.

What’s more, the notion of tribute is an open one. An equite coterie — or any Invictus Kindred, really — can make its own tribute demands of other Invictus members. Obviously, doing so rarely works if a coterie or Kindred is so brash as to demand tribute from its superiors. On the other hand, in a city with many Invictus Kindred, a coterie might be able to rest on its laurels a bit by getting involved in the affairs of Kindred with less status. Even in a city with few Invictus Kindred, that means the coterie has less distance to travel before it can start making demands of tribute. Granted, these demands come to rest on the shoulders of fewer providers, but, as always, a balance must be struck.



Philosophy

Invictus coteries are driven by one overriding impetus: making a place for themselves in the organization. The elders of the covenant understand that well, of course, so they have harnessed the goals of the covenant to the drives of its coteries. Coteries gain recognition, responsibility, power and prestige from furthering the goals of the First Estate.

Coteries, then, are tasked with three overarching goals, summed up in three tenets held dear to the Invictus.

The Invictus Must be Respected.

The coterie must respect the authority and hierarchy of the First Estate. While a certain degree of treachery is acceptable (and even shows initiative), the ancient feudal notion of honor has a high place among the Invictus. Hierarchy serves a purpose, and those seeking to threaten the hierarchy jeopardize both the Invictus’ honor as well as its ability to function. Invictus Kindred might commiserate about their place in the covenant, but rarely are they so disrespectful as to malign the covenant itself.

The Invictus Must Maintain Order.

Kindred nature is not such that self-rule is sufficient to the task of maintaining order. In the absence of order and civility, Kindred society will break down, the Masquerade will be abandoned, and the kine will band together to destroy them. As foremost among the covenants, the Invictus must take upon itself the responsibility for maintaining order, leading by example when it can, and claiming positions related to the praxis when available. In the minds of many Invictus Kindred, the First Estate equates to the city’s prevailing governmental structure (even though the facts don’t always support this outlook).

The Invictus Must Protect its Flock Lest it Lose its Ability to Exploit it.

Wolves and poachers abound among the Kindred. The survival of the Invictus depends on the mortals they manage and exploit. Kindred who interfere with the Invictus’ dealings with mortals, or interfere with the mortals they deal with, might find themselves struck down with extreme prejudice as an example of what happens to those who meddle where they ought not.

Those coteries that further these goals are rewarded. Those that do not often linger interminably among the lower ranks of the covenant’s status tiers. There might come times when a coterie has no idea if it’s doing the right thing or not until it achieves (or is denied) recognition. Key to the covenant’s functioning is rank.

Hierarchy

Not only does a general sense of rank exist between First Estate coteries, but members of coteries are ranked as well, all the better to keep its members in a constant state of striving.

Invictus coteries commonly observe a rigid hierarchy determined by age, power, experience and, on occasion, lineage. This last factor comes into play often if all members of the coterie are neonates or otherwise too inexperienced to have a track record of their own. A coterie comprising only neonates might be assigned a degree of “interim hierarchy” based on their sires’ standing in the covenant until the members of the coterie sort themselves out through their own individual conduct and effectiveness.

It rarely takes long for the members’ strengths and weaknesses to assert themselves, and coteries rarely maintain the hierarchy initially imposed upon them. Strong, driven leaders quickly differentiate themselves from followers, lickspittles and cowards. Those with power outshine those



without. Likewise, those with guile and power outshine those possessing power alone.

And the group's mentors smile as the long race for dominance begins.



THE PRIVILEGES OF RANK

Talk of a hierarchy within a coterie is all well and good, but it doesn't clarify what advantage there is to being higher in the hierarchy than another. For coterie that keep track, and it's mostly young or casual coterie that do, there are minor advantages to being higher in the pecking order and minor disadvantages to being lower on the scale. In practice, the benefits of rank are trivial in a modern context, but such is the way things have always been done, and much is made of it among elders. However disdainful or critical individuals are of the system, their disdain seldom keeps them from participating in the Invictus' own, private *Danse Macabre*.

Invictus coterie often express ranking with a Latin numbering system. The primus is the highest ranking vampire in the group, followed by the secundus, the tertius, the quartus and the quintus, and on down the line (sextus, septimus, octavius) for as many individuals as need be. A common joke in Invictus coterie is that an especially disgraced member is the septimus (in a coterie of five), and "septimus" has become young Invictus slang for, "You get to hide the bodies."

The exact benefits and drawbacks of coterie position vary from domain to domain, but the following discussion cites a few examples.

Higher-ranking Kindred may ask small favors of those beneath them and expect to have them granted. Examples of this might include borrowing small items from the subordinate, small acts of deference toward the ranking member like opening doors or pulling out chairs, or handling small annoyances that the ranking member doesn't want to be bothered by (finding a good lawyer who will meet after nightfall, driving duty, etc.). A ranking member of a coterie can ask any subordinate member to be his second in a conflict. The primus can ask favors of all other members of the coterie, the quintus (in a five-Kindred coterie) cannot ask favors of the others and expect to be taken seriously.

If feeding occurs in a group situation, Kindred in a coterie slake their thirsts in order of rank. The coterie's quartus and quintus might find themselves going hungry a lot if there's not time for everyone to feed in a night, so it's often in the interest of the lowest ranking members to have feeding fodder waiting for ranking members as early in the evening as possible to avoid going hungry and possibly risking the *Wassail*. This is imperative for unusually large coterie comprising six or more members.

Should the coterie wind up with a windfall of any sort (a victim's cash, an adversary's blood dolls, the new feeding territory's best strip...), the primus gets the pick of the trove, followed by the secundus and subordinate members in order of rank.



Rank within a coterie is determined by the coterie's mentors, if it has one or more, and it is neither fixed nor absolute. Intra-coterie rank isn't ironclad so much as it's a strong suggestion. Ignoring rank (through any kind of rudeness or disrespect, for example) isn't heresy, but it is considered a breach of etiquette, with all the social consequences implied thereby. A Kindred is free to ignore rank at any time (for example, a quartus may refuse to perform a small favor for the secundus), but doing so could get him noticed by the coterie's "overseers." Being noticed too many times is likely to result in loss of rank or some other mild punishment meted out by members of the covenant whose job it is to enforce such things.

Despite appearances to the contrary, being the ranking member of a coterie is not all about being deferred to and coddled. Every right has a responsibility tightly bound to it. Ranking members are expected to comport themselves as exemplary representatives of Invictus at all times. Much of the decision-making falls to the primus, for example. The primus is expected to be a role model for the rest of her coterie. Subordinate members might be forgiven small trespasses, but the higher one's rank is, the fewer mistakes the covenant is willing to overlook. A primus who makes a particularly noteworthy blunder — showing disrespect to an elder, losing a large sum of money on an ill-considered investment, straining the *Masquerade*, alienating a crucial mortal pawn — will quickly find himself the lowest ranking Kindred in his coterie. The secundus will then be promoted to primus, and the formerly lowest ranking member now has power over the individual to whom he used to pander.

The primus enjoys small benefits from his position, but he earns them every night. Responsibility for the coterie's nightly behavior is his. If the coterie goes astray — if a member of the coterie frenzies in public, if the coterie endangers the *Masquerade*, if the coterie offends (or kills...) an important Kindred in the city's own status hierarchy and doesn't cover its tracks well enough — the consequences fall on his head. Invictus elders are often strongly inclined to blame a coterie's failures on either the primus' faulty judgment (for leading his coterie astray) or incompetent leadership (that proved insufficient to convince the coterie to carry out his will). At times, elders might insist that a particular Kindred stay in the primus position even if he's screwed up so badly that he would normally go to quintus (or "septimus").

On the other hand, a successful primus is every elder's darling. The more a mentor is known as the patron of a successful primus, the better his social standing is. The better the sponsor's social standing becomes, the more he's willing to do for the upwardly mobile primus. The more rewards a primus gleans, the more he has to reward his coterie with. Better feeding grounds, better assignments, larger mortal herds, more investment funds and more capable retainers are all common gifts for a successful primus. If the primus chooses not to share those rewards with her coterie, she's likely to find that her team has discovered a knack for finding trouble — a knack that disappears once she cultivates a little generosity.



Wise coterie (and the primus in particular) quickly learn not to screw over their lower ranking members, because circumstances often see fluctuations in a coterie's internal hierarchy, particularly in the group's first few years together. Given the static nature of Kindred society, a coterie can reasonably be expected to stay together for several decades, so the sooner the members of that coterie learn to play nice together, the better off they'll be in the long run.

Competition is another source of change within a coterie. Members of the coterie are expected to jockey for position within the coterie. Not doing so indicates a lack of ambition, and the Invictus has no place for those lacking ambition. A primus who rests on his laurels might find himself the new secundus, while a member who lags too far behind the rest of his coterie might be demoted to a less prestigious coterie or punished by a disappointed mentor for not meeting the covenant's demand for excellence. At the same time, there are appropriate and inappropriate ways to enhance one's standing in the coterie. Quietly but regularly outperforming the rest of one's coterie is one way to gain notice from the Invictus power structure, though it's limited by the observation power and possible apathy of those watching the coterie's efforts. A Kindred who does so on a regular basis might expect to remain primus of her coterie for a long time. Alternatively, she might be reassigned to a more prestigious coterie (should such a coterie be deemed to need new blood).

Some coterie are unusually competitive. Such groups constantly struggle to outdo (or undermine) one another in an effort to gain the rank of primus. Members of a coterie might

misbehave, make their primus look bad in front of the group's mentor or, if things get bad, deliberately botch a task assigned to the coterie. The sabotaging member will suffer, but the primus takes the brunt of the covenant's displeasure.

Another tactic popular among the upwardly mobile is shedding light on the failings of a peccant coterie mate. Behavior that cleverly reveals the deficiencies of another member of the coterie is considered perfectly acceptable, provided it's done tactfully, as it makes the coterie stronger in the long run. (It also teaches object lessons to those Kindred who don't hide their shortcomings effectively.) Anonymously sending evidence of another coterie member's blunder (photographs of her in frenzy in front of mortals, for example) is a perfect example of this kind of tactic, as is having "a sober word" with a rival of that coterie's mentor.

Anything that blatantly undermines coterie cohesion — frequent insubordination, belittling or demoralizing one's own coterie or undermining the coterie's legitimate goals in any way — is self-fulfilling prophecy. The definition of "blatantly" differs from domain to domain, though.

If infighting becomes too fierce and the coterie becomes unable to function well because of it, elders might take steps to rectify the situation. Such steps include severe disciplinary action (public flogging or sending a member into torpor), adding or removing members or having the coterie spied upon to determine the source of its disciplinary problems.

Particularly traditional mentors of the Invictus look well upon coterie that show a bit of public scorn for other covenants (occasionally excepting the Lancea Sanctum). It sets



a precedent and reinforces the Invictus' position. Depending on the scorned covenant, this could potentially cause a diplomatic ripple, but First Estate elders are notorious for defusing those situations by denouncing such acts in public and then rewarding them privately. Anything the coterie has said is out, and its subtle corrosive effect will linger far longer than the memories of the masses of Kindred.

Religion

The Invictus loves religion as an institution because it provides the covenant with another tool with which to manipulate others. Mortals crave miracles to banish the tedium of their own lives, and they find hope in the notion that their great reward must certainly be better than the corrupt hell that is the World of Darkness. Members of the Invictus are happy to stage a miracle every now and then as long as doing so keeps its coffers full and its flock in line. Religion is a major influence on the mortal herd, and the First Estate would be rash indeed to overlook such a source of power.

That said, it often feels, as Marx did, that religion is the opiate of the masses. When its own membership is involved, however, its thoughts on religion change. While subtle, a pronounced bias against spirituality and religiosity occasionally surfaces within the First Estate. It is fine for other covenants to expound on their bizarre theories of morality, spirituality and concepts of an afterlife, but members of the Invictus who subscribe to any of that could find themselves looked down upon. The First Estate is about ruling here and now, not some theoretical, theological other place.

This antagonism toward religion is due largely to the First Estate's old (but growing) rivalry with the Lancea Sanctum. When the Camarilla splintered centuries ago, the Spear took its blood magic with it, vowing to use it to dominate the other covenants. To this night it has failed. In fact, the secular nature of the modern age has shaken the Lancea Sanctum to its core, and the elders of the Invictus appreciate the disparity.

In the modern nights, a few hard-line Invictus Kindred would love nothing better than to see the zealots of the Lancea Sanctum fall by the wayside and become a footnote in Kindred history. One tactic they take is to beat the zealots to the punch and infiltrate religious (or at least Christian) institutions before the Sanctified can establish themselves. This makes churches one of the most hotly contested prizes in the modern nights.

Clever Invictus coterie members garner influence within churches whenever possible. Not only can large churches be just as profitable as any other business venture (and sometimes even more so), they provide the coterie with another means of nudging the mortal herd and determining the attitudes of the kine on a large scale. While a church is a somewhat harder nut for Kindred to crack, the Invictus has its own ways of overcoming that problem. Among other things, clergy — especially the supposedly celibate ones — are easy prey for Daeva seducers and blackmailers. Ventrue can bend wills to

their own. Skulking Mekhet and Nosferatu can eavesdrop on confessions, and even Gangrel can be the proverbial fly upon the wall.

Methodology

The First Estate is not inclined to spend its time seeking power through mystical means. It does not fear the strange magics of the covenants that use them. It's not that the Invictus doesn't see the power of blood sorcery — on the contrary, it has seen the power of Crúac, Theban Sorcery and the Coils of the Dragon on many occasions. Rather, it is quite sure that it has something better.

The tangible power of the mortal herd is often overlooked or, worse, disparaged by Kindred of the other covenants with the exception of the Carthians. Kindred who do so seem to forget that the Tradition of the Masquerade exists out of necessity lest the kine overwhelm the Damned and scourge them from their domains.

Like air to men or water to fish, mortal influence is transparent to many vampires, who are so busy reveling in their position at the top of the food chain or indulging their own petty politics that they forget about it. Yet the Invictus remembers.

The First Estate has had centuries to fine-tune its strategies, and many of those revolve around the immense permeability and utility of mortal institutions.

Observing the Masquerade

The Invictus relies on humanity even as it makes the most of its vampiric nature. It operates in the world of mortals, seeks inroads into mortal institutions and surrounds itself with mortal operatives. It has no time for gratuitous monstrosity. The coterie members of the First Estate, then, often feel obligated to make themselves as compatible with mortals as possible. High Humanity scores allow a vampire to maintain a more human appearance and get an earlier start on her night's work. A lawyer might understand the need to meet at 8:00 in the evening, but a Kindred who can meet only after midnight is more likely to have difficulty keeping up appearances. For this reason, then, Invictus coterie members are strongly urged to closely monitor their behavior. What this means, among other things, is that high-Humanity vampires are given more duties pertaining to the mortal herd, and those who have let their Humanity slip, are relegated to the background when the coterie is dealing with kine. (This is one of the reasons elders need coterie members of young Kindred to do their work for them. Many elders have lost so much of their Humanity that they can no longer convincingly pass among mortals.) Likewise, a coterie's lower Humanity vampires take care of the coterie's dirty work so the rest of the members don't have to sully their hands. In the eyes of the Invictus, it's a very practical division of labor.

All but the oldest Invictus coterie members have at least a member or two who are able to interact with mortals with little difficulty. Should it come to pass that a coterie grows too withdrawn to

comfortably pass among the herd, it might be forced to delegate a good deal of its business dealings to younger Kindred (perhaps their childer). Knowing the untrustworthiness of their own kind, however, most elders put this milestone off as long as possible.

Tactics

Even in the modern nights, the Invictus remembers the martial aspects of its aristocratic past. It understands the necessity for intelligent, dependable tactics. The covenant does not just push its coterie into interaction with mortals unguided. It teaches its coterie, through mentors and example, how to deal with the mortal world, lest every coterie have to reinvent the wheel for itself. First Estate elders have used many of the same techniques for centuries, and they pass the ones that work best along to their childer. Likewise, a covenant of vampires won't last long if it can't manage others of its kind. The First Estate knows how to manage Kindred nearly as well as mortals.

Masters of the Herd

The First Estate considers the mortal world its rightful dominion. So habitual is this assumption throughout the Invictus that suggesting otherwise would likely elicit a response of either puzzlement or laughter. Over the centuries, the Invictus has embedded itself in certain key mortal institutions like a barbed hook. Were it to cease its interference in those areas now, the most infested of them would be temporarily crippled until enterprising mortals (or rival Kindred...) moved to fill in the power vacuum. The covenant's presence in mortal affairs is far from pervasive, however, and the Invictus works its will through layer upon layer of middlemen. Yet it does have influence with corporations whose stock they own, with authorities they bribe and with priests they blackmail. It doesn't control the mayor, but it might make suggestions to her husband at a fund-raiser or her advisors through intermediaries at a council meeting. Its influence is by no means direct or absolute. Rather, it is a gestalt effect of a thousand strategic bribes, favors and threats. This methodology of misdirection has served the covenant well. Applying strategic nudges here and there has brought the Invictus to the position it holds in the modern nights, and it finds that position quite comfortable indeed.

Immersion in the herd brings many rewards to Invictus coterie. The kine are needy creatures, and Kindred often possess exactly what mortals think they want.

The First Estate knows mortal society, and it knows what channels it likes to go through to achieve its goals. It chooses the wealthy and those who manage wealth as their mortal agents. Bankers, investment brokers, corporate raiders, financial advisors, decadent scions of wealthy families and high-level executives are all ripe for the picking. These are the Invictus' first-tier cat's-paws. With the money and power these individuals provide, the covenant can buy influence in any other sector of mortal society it needs to.

To foster its sizeable investment in mortal affairs, esteemed Invictus mentors train the covenant's coterie in

the techniques of influence management from their earliest nights. Charm and money are the covenant's two major strengths in this regard, but it doesn't shrink from using other methods to control mortals when necessary.

One of the most insidious ways a Kindred can use these techniques is to gain access to increasingly powerful individuals just by saying, "Introduce me to your superiors." Such tactics allow a coterie to start out manipulating lower-ranking mortals and then work their way up to the highest echelons of power.

The following are the most popular among the coterie of the First Estate.

Tools: Selection, Care and Maintenance

Selecting mortals to manipulate is one of the skills that Invictus coterie learn early in the Requiem. The Kindred cannot simply plug in to some vast network of human agents waiting for their orders. Mortals must be picked carefully and groomed. Young Kindred don't usually have easy access to powerful established figures. Their elders have likely tied up those influences long ago, and making moves on them will likely result in dire consequences for the fledgling. A neonate's best bet is to find a mortal with potential, seal a relationship of some sort, and then "nudge" him toward success. Over the course of 10 years, a vampire can guide a motivated mid-level manager to the CEO spot, a beat cop to the police commissioner's seat or a savvy journalist into the editor-in-chief position with the local paper.

A coterie comprising favored childer of Invictus elders might be granted access to some higher-powered influence as a gift (or a test), but most coterie start with nothing and need to establish all of their influence on their own.

Influence not only needs to be cultivated and groomed, it needs to be defended as well. Young coterie often find that once they've successfully established their mortal influences, other Kindred are eagerly waiting to reap the benefits of their work. A coterie might find its mortals subjected to Vinculum, coerced into serving another or even killed by another Kindred (or coterie) trying to advance her own mortal pawn. This last is rare, though. Killing influential mortals almost assuredly leads to reprisals, investigations and violations of the Masquerade.

One advantage young Kindred and coterie do have is that, as childer of modern times, they perceive resources of which elders and ancillae remain unaware. "New economy" companies, prestigious boutique agencies, cutting-edge lounges and nightclubs all serve as examples of these kinds of opportunities. A small press agency that handles a handful of high-profile clients might give fledgling coterie access to the kind of credentials formerly offered only by long-established management companies. Kindred with good reputations at the hot club of the month have just as many opportunities to rub elbows with the wealthy and powerful as those elders who belong to the longest-lived of social clubs. Power and money still exist to be cultivated and taken. Only their sources vary.

Division of Influence

Some coteries have found that letting each member of a coterie specialize in one particular sphere of mortal influence works quite well. Instead of each member knowing a person or two involved in trucking or law enforcement or whatnot, one member manages all of the coterie's influence with the media. Another takes care of all interactions with dock and warehouse workers, a third has a number of allies in the police department and so on. This allows each member to maximize her familiarity with one sphere of influence and optimize her effectiveness in those circles.

The potential drawback of this approach is that losing a member can cripple a coterie. This contingency is usually addressed through slight redundancy. Each member of the coterie has a sphere of influence that he specializes in and another for which he's something of an understudy. That way, even if the coterie loses a member, it won't be denied access to a particular sphere of influence entirely.

Charm

The Ventrue clan is often the most powerful in individual Invictus domains, and so it happens that many of their tactics are also the tactics of the covenant they shepherd. The Ventrue and Daeva alike are adept at getting what they want through sheer charm or force of will. They've had decades to perfect their social skills. They captivate, intrigue and fascinate mortals as a matter of habit, sometimes without even intending to. Given time, any coterie can learn these skills. Even vampires know that mortals are more drawn to honey than to vinegar, so they use their allure and their charm at least as often as criticism and threats. Even if mortal employees find "the boss and his weird cronies" a bit disconcerting, they often find themselves moving closer to them, wanting to be near them, wanting to serve them just the same. This allure, by itself, is often enough to get favors done, contracts signed and the coterie's will carried out.

Combined with the powers of certain Disciplines, personality grants a coterie a huge degree of latitude when dealing with mortals. Many Invictus coteries claim at least one member with Majesty and often more. Given the pressure placed on Invictus Kindred to operate subtly, even Gangrel and Nosferatu members show at least some rudimentary knowledge of this Discipline.

Cold. Hard. Cash.

As a covenant, the Invictus is outrageously wealthy. It has money; mortals want money. It's a perfect arrangement for the coteries of the First Estate.

Without necessarily intending to or even being aware of it, mortals broadcast their financial status to the world. The shoes he wears, the neighborhood he lives in, the accent he speaks with, the car he drives, what he drinks, where he dines and how much he tips all provide clues to the health of a mortal's finances. Kindred pick up on those clues without even trying. A mortal who's worried about the next credit card statement, tuition payment or hospital bill is easy pickings.

Money talks and mortals listen. For Kindred, the allure of Vitae surpasses all other wants. Simple greed often goes abandoned in favor of more visceral desires yet money pours into the coffers and Swiss bank accounts of the undead almost unbidden. Over the course of decades, a savvy vampire can easily accrue vast fortunes through clever investments. The First Estate as a whole probably controls billions of dollars. No one vampire controls more than a sizable fraction of that, but many members of the Invictus are quite wealthy personally, and they know how to spread around their wealth to great effect. And mortals, if it need be said, will do almost anything for money.

A thousand dollars is nothing to the average Invictus coterie. To some poor slob trying to make his insurance payment so he can get a vasectomy so he doesn't have to worry about having another kid, it's the world, the thing for which he would do anything at that moment. When the amounts get larger — 5,000 dollars, 10,000, 100,000 — there's very little mortals won't do. Joe Bureaucrat will never make more than 40 grand a year working at the DMV, but if the pale chick is willing to pay him a substantial fraction of that for letting her into the office late at night and making her five fake licenses (an hour's work at most), who's he to say no? If the state really cared about fake licenses, they'd pay him better, right?

Invictus coteries wield wealth like a weapon. They do not do their own dirty work, they pay others to do it for them. The typical modus operandi for an Invictus covenant is that mortal cat's-paws are used whenever possible, especially when the deeds to be done are... untoward. Certainly, a Kindred's superior abilities might be needed from time to time, and certain knowledge is best kept from the eyes of the living. It's far wiser, however, to pay mortals to do the things mortals do then sit back and enjoy the dividends than it is for the coterie to do its own ugly deeds and grunt work. Private investigators, bounty hunters, stock brokers, lawyers, thugs and petty bureaucrats are all easy acquisitions for a shrewd coterie, and they can be worth their weight in gold to those needing their expertise or assistance. They also make convenient screens and buffers against breaches of the Masquerade, and they're an excellent means of conducting business beyond the view of prying eyes that the coterie can't otherwise avoid. The Kindred also feel a certain degree of *schadenfreude* when they tell their lessers, "I'll have my man look into that for you."

Few tools are as useful as money for getting mortals to do what you want. Services, information, substances and must-have items are all for sale to coteries with enough resources. For the coterie involved, cash is the most tedious solution to most problems. Doling out bribes gets repetitive, but it's too effective not to do.

Experienced Invictus Kindred often maintain that true loyalty cannot be bought on a one-time basis. One-time lump sums elicit appreciation, but not loyalty. A coterie using the same agent repeatedly, however, can cement a pawn's allegiances with an ongoing financial arrangement. Bonuses, bribes and monetary "tokens of appreciation" are all time-

tested tools in the arsenal of the Invictus. Freely giving a mortal small gratuities, over and above sums agreed upon for services rendered, is like throwing a bone to a loyal dog. It motivates the pawn to come back for more, and more and more. Doing so on a regular basis also makes them much less likely to betray the coterie for a single bribe. A foe offering a mortal a \$1,000 bribe to squeal on his Invictus employers won't elicit much of a response if the coterie has been paying him \$400 a month for several years. Any mortal pawn crucial to an Invictus coterie's activities knows full well which side his bread is buttered on. Not only can the coterie probably count on such an ally to refuse the bribe, but he might have enough savvy to feign ignorance to the would-be bribe giver and inform the coterie of what happened as soon as possible — all because he expects to be rewarded handsomely for his loyalty.

All the Lonely People

The World of Darkness is a scary, lonely place. Awkwardness and fear isolate individuals and keep them from reaching out to others. People watch television because the world outside scares them so much they don't have any friends of their own. They jerk off to Internet porn because getting real sex is too genuine, too much trouble and too dangerous. Loneliness equals safety.

Enter the coterie.

Vampires are what mortals dream about: powerful, sexy, aloof. This makes lonely mortals prime targets for Kindred. Despite their sometimes disturbing appearance, vampires seem to have everything the mortal could want: money, sex, connections, power... Mortals have been known to tell vampires everything about what they do — at the office, at the newspaper, in the morgue or at the nuclear plant — just for a few evenings of companionship. Buying a mortal a few drinks, asking some strategic leading questions, and then listening attentively, nodding from time to time, can get an Invictus vampire more information than he'd even expected. Particularly seductive or manipulative Kindred have been known to trade companionship or sex for trade secrets, birth certificates, death certificates, authentic drivers licenses, stock market information, political campaign strategies, hopes, fantasies and, of course, blackmail material.

Exploiting Need

Mortals sometimes land themselves in the nasty predicament of really *needing* something. A coterie that can provide such a mortal with what she *needs* will find itself with a handy debtor. The exact nature of the need varies, but money, love and addictive drugs are all common needs that a savvy coterie might use to clinch a mortal's service.

Coterie use two different approaches to exploiting mortal need. Those using the hunter approach advocate looking for mortals who are already in need and exploiting them. Kindred who use the farmer approach seek out a suitable mortal and cultivate an exploitable need in him that the Kindred will then be able to use like a handle. Hunting requires putting in the effort to find a mortal with a suitable need that the coterie can meet. Farming is



easier but requires a longer term of cultivation. (It's also less ethical and might require a degeneration check when its efforts come to fruition.)

Hypothetically, say an Invictus coterie needs the mayor's ear because he's about to pass an ordinance that will close all clubs and bars at midnight, making it harder for the city's Kindred to feed. A coterie using the hunter approach would likely do some reconnaissance to see if anyone in the mayor's immediate circle *needed* something it could provide in exchange for counseling the mayor against such a rash move. Doing so might require an Investigation, Larceny or Streetwise roll or funds to hire a private investigator.

A coterie that subscribes to the farmer approach would be more inclined to "accidentally" run into the mayor's daughter at a club and ask if she likes to party. From there they can give her a "free sample" of a popular designer drug to get her started on her way to addiction. They might take blackmail photos in the same evening. Even if she's not "that kind of girl" Dominate and Majesty go a long way, though clever Kindred hardly need Disciplines for this kind of operation. Mortals are eager to be led, and vampires are happy to lead them. Once the coterie has brought the daughter under its sway, it then withholds the drug until she puts serious pressure on her father to change his mind.

Satisfying the mortal's need is rarely difficult. Money is easy to come by for Invictus coterie, for example, as are drugs and other ready vices. Individuals whose need is for another person can be trickier. If the mortal is pining for a particular beloved — a man obsessed with his brother's wife, a gay man in love with a straight man, or a woman who would do *anything* to get her ex-husband back — strategic use of many Disciplines can usually get the needy one what he or she is craving, at least a few times.

Mortals who allow themselves to need something this badly are not good candidates for long-term tools. It takes a certain self-destructive bent to become this obsessive in the first place, and that self-destructive tendency can turn around and bite the coterie in the ass. Furthermore, some needs can be fulfilled only once (like the guy who just wants to have sex with his brother's wife one time), after which point they have no ability to motivate. Of course, at that point there are other tactics a coterie can use.

Blackmail

For gaining solid, long-term cooperation from mortals, nothing beats a good camera and a thorough mastery of Dominate. A single explicit photograph of the right corporate board member can go a long way toward pushing a coterie's municipal agenda toward fruition. Kindred have little difficulty acquiring blackmail evidence on mortals who won't cooperate any other way. Most Kindred find it easy to convince mortals to commit deeds they would never commit on their own, and once these activities are captured on film (or videotape), there's little the target can do to refute appearances. A coterie might use blackmail tactics against a priest who was about to preach

against "the supernatural threat," or a doctor who was about to put too much information into a death certificate. Anyone with status to lose is a perfect candidate for blackmail. The lower an individual's place in the mortal hierarchy is, the less effective blackmail is.

Blackmail tactics are *not* the way for a coterie to win friends, but it does influence people, and a coterie in a tight position can fall back on quick and dirty tactics like blackmail all too easily.

Threats

Sometimes, the old ways work best. While not subtle or good for ongoing situations, threats of violence can yield results that nothing else will. While many Kindred fancy themselves civilized, several prefer the blunter instruments of force and coercion. Particularly when time is short, the more subtle means of persuasion can go out the window. These tools are effective in the short term, but rarely longer, as fear has a relatively brief shelf-life and rapidly degrades into resentment against the feared party or parties. On rare occasion, threats can facilitate the coterie's business, but only with individuals the coterie is unlikely to encounter ever again. A coterie in a situation where results, not loyalty, are important, might indeed unleash the coterie's Gangrel, Nosferatu or cruel Daeva on the object of its ire, but situations where such behavior is appropriate should be few and far between.

The Vinculum

The thralldom brought about by the Vinculum sways mortals to do things that nothing else will. An enthralled mortal will side with her Kindred domitor against her family, against social pressure and against the law. The Vinculum evokes from thralls an utterly sycophantic loyalty, particularly when the thrall is treated well. Invictus coterie are loath to use the Vinculum to manage their mortal assets, though, for myriad reasons. First and foremost, resorting to the Vinculum is sometimes seen as acknowledging defeat, admitting that the mortal in question is immune to manipulation through any other means. Such admissions of incompetence might be fine for coterie affiliated with other covenants, but the Invictus expects more sophistication from its members.

That said, under pressure from other Kindred, a coterie might find that it has no choice but to subject certain key contacts or crucial influence brokers to the Vinculum to keep them from falling prey to other vampires who might try to "poach" a group's influence. If one of the city's gangs is experiencing a string of successes that place it at the apex of the city's underworld, no doubt someone among the Invictus wants that gang to answer to her. Submitting the gang's leader(s) to the Vinculum is going to be the safest way to make sure that that Kindred controls that gang. Otherwise, other covenants are going to offer more money, make graver threats and the like until the mortal capitulates. Only the Vinculum cuts off the possibility of another coterie taking control of that mortal. It's a lock on pawns that Kindred use both hesitantly and strategically.

A coterie that subjects a mortal to the Vinculum for this reason usually follows up by launching a concerted offensive against the party or parties who forced it to use the Vinculum. In this way it makes sure that such tactics aren't called for again.

There's another reason the Invictus is sparing in its use of the Vinculum. The Invictus has noted that certain other Kindred, mages, Lupines and some witch-hunters can detect its use in mortals, which can cause... problems that the Invictus is happier avoiding.

Ghouls

For their closest servants, those they *have* to trust (such as the caretaker of their haven) Kindred commonly use ghouls. Ghouls have a number of drawbacks, not the least of which is that Kindred Vitae sometimes causes ghouls to become somewhat unhinged. But the combination of the Vinculum that eventually develops and the thirst for Vitae make for powerful leverage.

Ghouls are great for retainers or even for brute-force tactics, but Kindred don't make ghouls a regular part of their business deals or influence brokering. It's simply too great a liability, especially as Kindred Vitae becomes more potent and the Vitae on which they can slake their thirsts becomes scarcer. That said, there are times when ghouls are the best tools for the job.



HERD MANAGEMENT

At their core, nearly all Invictus coterie are about managing a herd. More often than not that herd comprises kine, but experienced Kindred might be put in charge of managing younger Kindred or even managing other covenants through the strains of the Danse Macabre. Herd management, simply defined, is making others do as you want them to do, through whatever means necessary.

Extremely subtle coterie might do this simply by managing the motives and opportunities of their chosen herd. If members of a coterie provide their target with both a goal and a motive to push it through the goal, they can be reasonably certain of getting the results they want without ever involving themselves personally. Telling a mortal, "You'll get the ten thousand dollars when you bring me the report on Terrell & Swain," is much easier and less dangerous than breaking into the T&S headquarters. This is the ideal that Invictus coterie strive for because it's powerful, subtle and poses no threat whatsoever to the Masquerade. All other forms of manipulation are secondary, but the Invictus is adept at those tactics, too.



Even the most useful mortal pawns can age and die. This can sometimes pose a problem, especially for Invictus coterie that dislike such change and upheaval. Ghouls have the advantage of longevity over normal mortals. A coterie might

be inclined to turn mortals into ghouls as a way to keep certain talented functionaries — lawyers, bookkeepers, private bankers and the like — around longer than their natural spans would permit.

Not only does creating a ghoul increase the tool's value by extending its life, but its loyalty is also assured. If the vampires absolutely, positively have to trust a pawn (as they must those performing their daylight business), more often than not that individual will be a ghoul.

Ghouls kept by a coterie are easier to maintain than those kept by individual Kindred. Even one ghoul can be a drain on a Kindred's Vitae, but a coterie can keep two or three ghouls properly fed without being unduly taxed. On the other hand, when a Vinculum eventually does form, the ghoul might suddenly become resistant or even obnoxious to other members of the coterie. Many ghouls maintained in this regard are "short-term investments," that is, individuals the coterie needs now but not for much longer.

Among the Fiends

Kindred of the Invictus are past masters of games that use mortals as pawns, and their power over mortals grants them an unquestionable edge in their dealings with other covenants (with the possible exception of the Carthians). Many of the tactics the Invictus uses to sway mortals can also be used to bring Kindred into line, but many of the more obvious ploys a coterie might use against mortals (such as using Disciplines to obtain evidence for blackmail) are transparent to other Kindred. Still, the Invictus has many ways to convince others to capitulate to their requests, and the tactics the First Estate uses against other Kindred are different from those they use to sway mortals.

Elders

The Invictus' frequent interaction with mortals often has the welcome side effect of staving off degeneration and helping to maintain functional levels of Humanity. High Humanity increases a vampire's waking hours and minimizes the length of torpor, giving high-Humanity elders a more noticeable presence among the Kindred overall. This grants the Invictus something of an advantage over covenants that don't work well with mortals (such as the Lancea Sanctum). Much of the power wielded by the First Estate comes from its many elders — the big guns and power players of the Kindred world. Invictus coterie often have more frequent and cordial relations with their elders than most Kindred do, and they can use this advantage in the veiled nightly conflicts of the Kindred world.

In addition, it is common knowledge among the Kindred that an unusually high percentage of Invictus vampires are on very good terms with their elders (as represented in the game mechanics by the low cost of the Mentor Merit for Invictus characters). A coterie might find itself at an impasse with another Kindred until they reveal that they are all the protégés of Octavio the Seneschal, at which point negotiations favor them.



While Invictus coterie often do have an advantage over other vampires in the form of their access to elders, it is an advantage that many are loath to call upon. Name-dropping is a fragile form of power, and one that reminds a coterie that it is too weak to meet its objectives without falling back on another's power or reputation. The elder in question might not appreciate it either.

Members of an Invictus coterie might ask an elder to intercede on their behalf with a ranking member of the domain's hierarchy, or they might gain an audience with the Prince because of their elder's influence.

An Invictus coterie with good relations with its elders can often simply go over the heads of others in the same age bracket to get things done. The coterie might not have enough clout to have the Regent's child investigated for diablerie, for example, but an elder (especially a Primogen or a Priscus) might. If the coterie is on particularly good terms with the elder in question, it might not even have to promise her anything in return.

Alternatively, an enemy might believe he has all of a coterie's forces tied up (through legal wrangling or other tactics), only to find that it was his influence that was being tied up as the full weight of an elder's influence comes down on him like a hammer, costing him money, standing in his covenant or the city and possibly even his haven. This would likely benefit the elder more than the coterie as she would undoubtedly help herself to the spoils of war, but the coterie would have the pleasure of seeing an enemy crushed.

Tradition

More effective with other Invictus Kindred than those of other covenants, calling upon tradition can weaken an opponent's position politically. For vampires, static creatures who eschew change, tradition is a weightier matter than it is for mortals who can change their minds or establish new traditions more easily. If a long-standing precedent exists establishing that only a domain's Prince may have more than two progeny in the city at one time, the Invictus coterie would most likely assert that such a policy must surely be in place for a good reason. To claim otherwise would be an insult to the wisdom of all the Kindred who came before and agreed on this matter.

The reason that the Invictus is so tradition-bound, of course, is that it probably established many of the traditions common in modern Kindred domains in the first place. If the Invictus wants to change tradition, it calls doing so "bringing Kindred society into the modern age." If any other covenant wants to change a tradition, the Invictus calls it radicalism.

Influence

Whereas the Lancea Sanctum think of mortals as nothing but food, and Carthians see them as comrades, the Invictus thinks of mortals as tools — and powerful ones at that.

In many domains, Invictus coterie often wield more mortal influence than those of any other covenant (with the

possible exception of the Carthian Movement), and it makes them formidable opponents. Members of other covenants might have access to strange blood magic and powerful Kindred allies, but only an Invictus coterie can have its enemy arrested (or shot) by mortal police, have the enemy's haven condemned and slated for demolition and have her ghouls murdered by the local crime boss, all with only three quick phone calls.

The Vinculum

While it's rarely called for among mortals, a coterie that needs to keep other Kindred in line might be somewhat more amenable to using the Vinculum. Many of the tactics used to manage mortals either aren't applicable when dealing with other Kindred or simply don't work well enough to rely on them. Crude though it is, the Vinculum works. As it does with mortals, the Vinculum reduces the thrall to an emotionally dependent slave. Why compete with an adversary when you can enslave her and have her cater to your every whim?

As effective as it is, the Vinculum is rare between Kindred. No one wants to subordinate himself to another unless there's no getting around it.

Still, Kindred aren't stupid. Most vampires recognize the symptoms of a Vinculum when they see them, so it's not like the blood bond is the be all and end all of control. Enslaving a key member of Kindred society might come with certain social rewards, though, especially if the thrall is known for being a foe of the Invictus.

Force

The Invictus uses force as a last resort, but it does use force if order is breaking down. The First Estate portrays itself as having both gravitas and discipline. After all, someone has to keep fractious Kindred in line. When vampires question or ignore the weight of tradition and the debt of fealty, the Invictus might call upon its coterie to deal with the problem. The elders and Inner Circle members of the First Estate are willing to ignore ethical lapses, lying, double-dealing and an array of other behavioral defects, but anything that disorders the Kindred world, imperils the Traditions or threatens the existing model angers the Invictus. And the Invictus has a long history of destroying those who anger it.

Consequently, Invictus coterie have an edge over some of their peers in other covenants. Threats might be enough to keep rogue Kindred in line, but failing that, the coterie might invoke the Invictus' responsibility to maintain order. At the very least, that provides the coterie with a plausible cover story, and it might be enough to capture the interest of more powerful figures (such as the Judex).

Given how much of an Invictus coterie's time is spent making nice with mortals, it's not uncommon for the more aggressive members of a coterie to get a little rambunctious from time to time. Invictus coterie might resort to forceful tactics merely as a way to keep those members satisfied and quiescent.

A coterie might resort to violence if an elder sends it to put down an elder from a rival covenant, as a show of force in a city where the Masquerade had been violated too many times or if the Invictus as a whole were making a play for dominance in a domain.

Stages

Invictus coterie go through stages that roughly correspond to the ages and levels of experience of the Kindred who make up the coterie.

Neonates

Young Invictus coterie are in an odd position. They are considered full plenipotentiaries of the First Estate when dealing with other coterie, which puts them far ahead of young coterie of other covenants. Yet within the power structure of the Invictus itself, they are obviously at the bottom rung of the order's hierarchy. The First Estate's elders watch them with a mixture of admiration and wariness. They are too inexperienced, too rash, too gullible, too violent and too anything else nervous elders can think of when looking for excuses to deny power and responsibility to young coterie. The more established members of the covenant might not even try to hide this attitude, depending on the availability of and need for new blood.



NIGHT TO NIGHT: NEONATES

Neonate coterie have the least control over their own nights. In pursuit of advancement, they're likely to find themselves serving under oaths to ancillae and elders in small ways that pose no threat to the coterie but expose the group to new facets of the Requiem. Alternatively, the powers that be in a city might think of them as disposable, especially if the coterie has a history of behavioral problems. On a night-to-night basis, a coterie of Invictus neonates might find itself...

- investigating reports of a new, unacknowledged Kindred in the city
- charming mortals into service
- orchestrating complex power plays in order to acquire new or greater influence in the mortal world
- carrying messages, summonses or invitations to ancillae or elders of other covenants
- ejecting Kindred of another covenant from Invictus territory
- "neutralizing" a mortal threat to one of the covenant's (or the covenant's allies') favored influences
- locating the haven of a problematic Kindred of another covenant
- learning the finer points of the Danse Macabre from a mentor



That said, the Invictus is neither blind nor stupid. Elders of the covenant might want to hoard power, but they show coterie of young vampires as much respect as necessary and trust them with more responsibility than they would otherwise, in order to maintain or grow its membership base.

Expedited advancement through the covenant's ranks is especially common in many American cities, for example, where children of Invictus members regularly leave the First Estate for the Carthians or other covenants. America is the land of instant gratification, and neonates who still possess their mortal reckoning of time are not interested in serving the covenant for 50 years before gaining some tiny measure of respect from their higher ups in the covenant. Scions of the covenant have compromised by giving young coterie more responsibilities to shoulder than they would get otherwise. Doing so serves to advance them through the ranks faster. This approach poses risks to both the elders and the fledgling coterie, but given the First Estate's difficulty in North America, it's unavoidable.

Conversely, in the Old World, where history goes back further, where echoes of the feudal system are still resounding and sovereignty is properly respected, even neonates are inclined to take a longer-term view of advancement. Many young Kindred are not just willing, but eager to serve the Invictus until such time as they rise to the top of the heap, be it decades or centuries. Advancement in such places is slow, but it's more comfortable for the elders and probably less risky for young Kindred.

Regardless of the speed of advancement, young coterie are largely put to the same uses.

Ancillae

The Invictus' expedited weeding-out program sees to it that by the time a coterie reaches the ancilla stage it is worthy of bearing nearly any responsibility given to it by the covenant. With only occasional supervision from elders, coterie of ancillae are trusted with the guidance and grooming of younger coterie and growing the covenant's holdings. By this time, many Kindred are likely to be taking positions of power in the domain's hierarchy and a coterie might be expected to support a member in his work for the domain. An Invictus Sheriff might need the aid of a Whip in the coterie. A Harpy on good terms with the covenant might need informants. A Ventrue Regent might need attendants or advisors. These are all roles for which coterie of ancillae are ideally suited.



NIGHT TO NIGHT: ANCILLAE

The ancillae usually compose the bulk of Invictus membership. Potentially on the brink of being elders themselves, they have more experience and power than neonates, but they have yet to become institutions in the way that elders often do under the responsibilities of City,



Covenant and Clan Status. In the course of an average night, a coterie of Invictus ancillae might find itself...

- grooming and building mortal influences for the next stage of their careers, thereby increasing and extending their usefulness
- conducting a meeting with a mortal banker, stockbroker or financier to shepherd its investments and protect them from hostile influences
- making an appearance at Elysium to hobnob with the city's luminaries
- adjudicating a feeding grounds dispute between two Invictus neonates
- searching for a Lupine or mage suspected to be at large in the domain
- undermining the efforts of a rival coterie to gain positive notice from the covenant's scions
- stealing influence from Kindred of another covenant
- daring the space between cities to consolidate Invictus efforts in another domain



Elders

This is where the long decades and centuries of struggling up the pyramid finally come to fruition. Not only do these lords of the Danse Macabre have the power of

their own blood and Disciplines to draw upon, theirs is also the immense wealth that comes from decades of shrewd investment, as well as unsurpassed influence at every level of the mortal world from neighborhood drug dealers to corporations to powerful city officials. Almost all old Invictus coterie can call upon extended networks of informants, enforcers and agents. Add to that the coterie of younger, up-and-coming Kindred who have sworn Oaths of Fealty to them, and elders have a great deal of power that they can bring to bear on anything they consider a problem.

At the elder level, many Invictus members reach the very highest levels of the Kindred power structure. Many elder coterie need to flex or reconfigure themselves to accommodate their members' ranks. If one member of the coterie becomes Prince or Regent, for example, she will almost certainly have little time to participate in the coterie's business. That said, the coterie as a whole might be plunged into whole new levels of politics as the Prince decides to make the members of her coterie into Regents of their own tenorial domains. The first step taken by most Invictus Kindred when attaining a major position of power is to reward the members of their coterie. Not to use the power of a new office to do so is a faux pas of catastrophic proportions and would likely result in extremely embittered former coterie-mates.



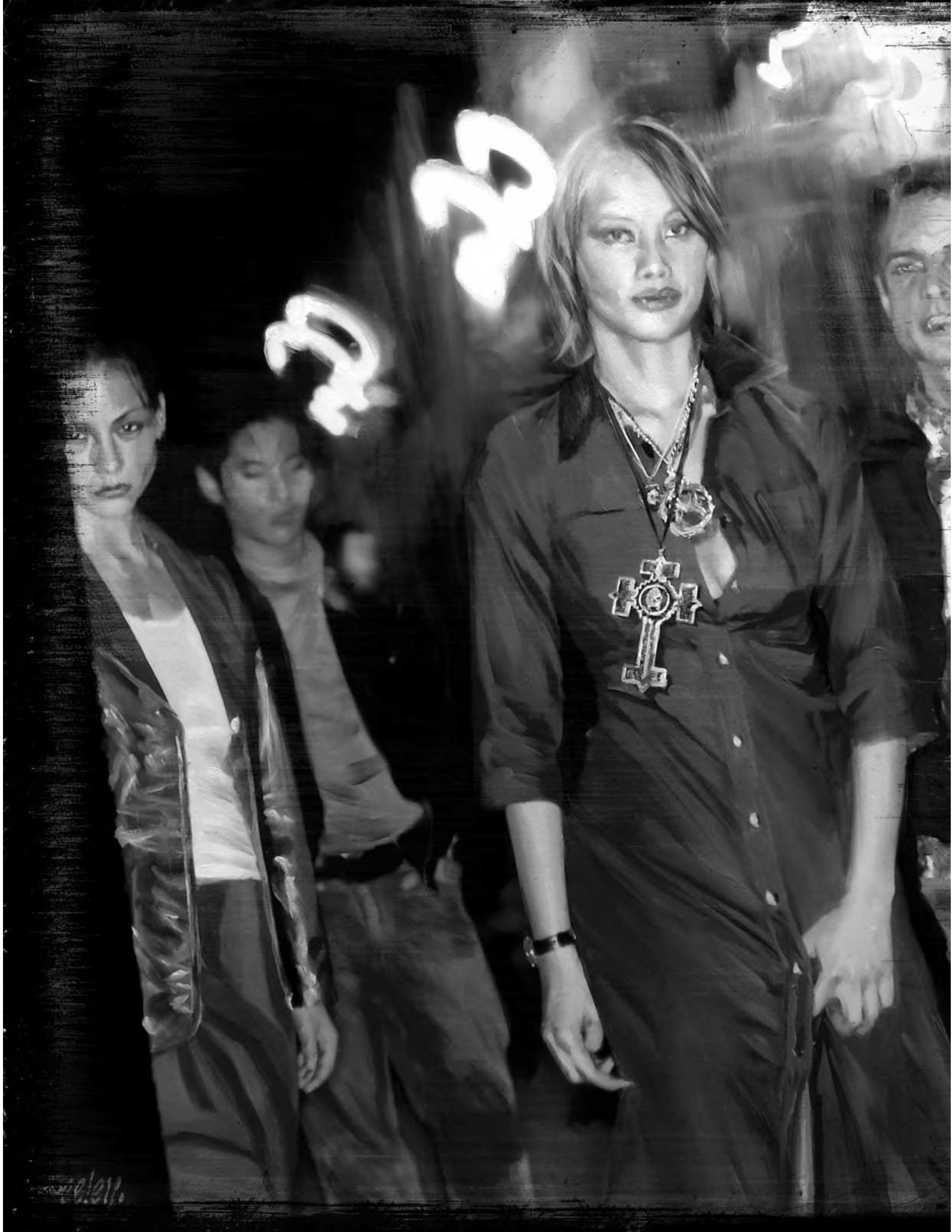
NIGHT TO NIGHT: ELDERS

At least at first glance, the nightly games of the Invictus' elders are the subtlest of all. That's because they have the most to lose. They have not made it as far as they have by making rash mistakes, and they're not likely to make any move that puts their unives, their empires or even their mortal influence at risk. They're playing for the highest stakes, including a monopoly on the city's influential mortals, the covenant's future in a particular domain and positions among the Inner Circle. Failure could be disastrous not only for them but, in some cases, for the covenant as a whole.

On a nightly basis, a coterie of Invictus elders might find itself...

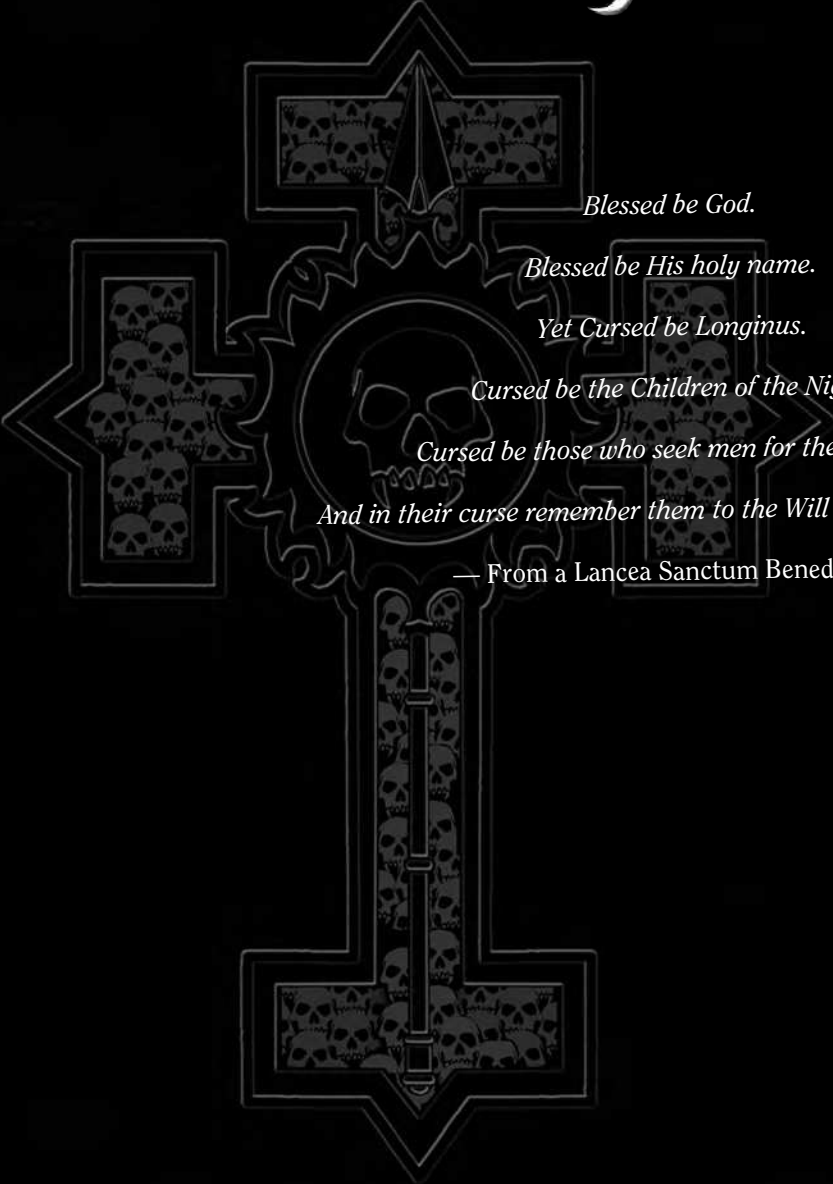
- systematically undermining the mortal influence of another covenant in preparation for a power grab
- issuing a formal declaration of war on another covenant in the domain
- meeting with the Prince, Primogen or Prisci to negotiate favorable terms for the covenant's members
- appearing at Elysium in full formal regalia to attend to domain business
- forming bloodlines or broods of their own, or studying unique Disciplines
- making preparations before a member enters a long torpor or welcoming back a member who's just coming out of a long torpor
- calling in favors from the city's media outlets in order to squelch a major breach of the Masquerade
- attending a production of *Madame Butterfly* with the mayor and her family





Chapter Six:

The Lancea Sanctum



Blessed be God.

Blessed be His holy name.

Yet Cursed be Longinus.

Cursed be the Children of the Night.

Cursed be those who seek men for their blood.

And in their curse remember them to the Will and Word of God.

— From a Lancea Sanctum Benediction

Is a faith without action a sincere faith?

— Jean Racine, *Athaliah*

The deathless priests of the Damned, the members of the Lancea Sanctum represent the cult of Longinus, which stands as the preeminent religion of God's secret race: the Kindred. Yet the varied and fickle domains of the undead make it all but impossible for a global institution to present a unified face. An unknowable World of Darkness separates the cities where the undead dwell as it has since the fall of Rome and the Camarilla. So the Damned emulate the practices of God's mortal churches and divide the world geographically into parish domains responsible for the packs of predators in their keeping. Likewise, the Lancea Sanctum divides its membership into coterie responsible for specific rites, duties and operations. After all, it is easier for the Damned to memorize particular rites and specialize in particular practices, just as it is easier for a Priest to recognize the worshippers in his local parish.

In the Old World, coterie of faithful or loyal vampires are played like pieces on the chessboard of Kindred politics — and they know it. This isn't necessarily a frustrating or embarrassing fact for coterie in service to the Lancea Sanctum. Membership in a Sanctified coterie is a chance to gain glory or enlightenment through association with fellow covenant members, and it's an honor to be a part of the larger strategies of the church elders. Even when larger or more varied groups of vampires could be used for a given task, individual coterie can be employed to test the group for future tasks or reward it with recognition for previous assignments.

Although the short distances between cities in western Europe could allow for rapid reorganization of task-specific coterie, the covenant knows that vampires who foster reliable and familiar relationships with others of their kind find a stability that leads to faithfulness and a unity that leads to loyalty. The Damned can take a great span of time to become comfortable with one another. Without comfort, all discussions are shallow or halting. If a group of vampires is allowed to bond and develop trust, however, the members develop a rapport and delve deeper into discussions of faith and *The Testament of Longinus*. This philosophy has become a tradition over time. Therefore, the Lancea Sanctum uses organic or covenant-organized coterie for social or traditional reasons in Europe rather than logistical reasons.

In the Americas, coterie are seen as social constructs but are also logistically vital to the covenant. Vast distances between cities, greater rivalry from other covenants and a weaker historical foundation makes it somewhat difficult for the Lancea Sanctum to maintain a strong, unified identity in the New World. By breaking the covenant's representation down into domain-sensitive coterie, the Lancea Sanctum uses its splintered identity to appeal to a wider array of the Damned. A coterie can identify, appeal to and serve the specific needs of a given parish, or it can direct neonates toward a nearby

coterie or parish better suited to an individual's particular needs or tastes. Coterie are personal enough to attract shy or frightened would-be converts and dynamic enough to chase down heretics without attracting too much attention.

The covenant can't rely on historical momentum or common traditions to instill the same general acceptance of the gospel in American neonates that it can across the ocean. The Damned of Europe might not all accept or even tolerate the word of Longinus, but they can be counted on to hear of it within nights of their Embrace. In the Americas, the recently Damned too often survive those first precious nights without ever being exposed to the truth of a vampire's place in Creation.



OF PRINCES AND PARISHES

Like all matters of domain and the Danse Macabre, no generalizations of Sanctified parishes can be truly universal. In some cities, parishes are determined geographically, with respect to feudal or municipal borders. In other cities, parishes are defined by the size of their membership, regardless of geographical territory. A parish might be an official region (as counties in Louisiana are called "parishes") or it could simply be a reference to the Sanctified vampires of the area. In many cities, no proper parishes exist at all. In certain rural areas, several small cities could fall under a single parish.

Parishes might correspond to feudal or tenurial domains granted by a Prince or Archbishop, and they often do in regions where the Lancea Sanctum is strong. In some cities, Bishops formally dole out parishes as territories to followers like a Prince grants domains, but unless these parishes are also endowed with authority by the Prince, the parish has no weight or value in city politics. In some cities, vampires outside the covenant have no idea where a parish's boundaries are. They might not even be aware of the parishes at all.

Depending on the number of devout vampires in the area, a parish could include many different coterie or a single coterie. Therefore, coterie in some parishes are given specific tasks to perform, while the Damned of a one-coterie parish are responsible for all covenant operations in the area. It's not unusual for the covenant to send specialized or experienced coterie from one parish to another as necessary within the domain. Parishes are a spatial unit; coterie are a social unit.



In those New World cities where the Lancea Sanctum's foundations are weak or its membership low, small bands of

devout vampires allow the covenant to maintain a spiritual presence without sparking unwanted political fires or threatening a Prince's sense of lordship. If the covenant can't yet influence an area with clear displays of righteous might or spiritual magnificence, it settles for a constant presence in the Requiems of the Damned who dwell there. In especially small, remote or hostile areas, a Sanctified coterie might be the sole presence of the Lancea Sanctum in the domain.

On both continents, specialized coteries and unique situations sometimes require multiple groups of the Damned to work in tandem. This experience is almost always cautious and uneasy for the vampires involved. Thankfully, ritualized behaviors and practiced formalities smooth the process, and the Lancea Sanctum has plenty of both for unacquainted Kindred to fall back on.

The righteous relationship that develops between unfamiliar vampires with a shared background in Sanctified traditions and routines is just one more advantage in the Lancea Sanctum's favor. Shared references and the sureness of faith give disparate Kindred an ability to relate and work together that few other formalities of the society of the Damned can rival. Even vampires from opposite corners of the United States with different observances of Midnight Mass or the Creation Rite can find a common ground in *The Testament of Longinus*. As many Sanctified elders know, a mix of familiarity and strangeness sometimes yields the most prosperous coteries. Such groups have the trust necessary to work together smoothly, without the emotional baggage to distract from the priorities given to them by their leaders.

Psychology

Sanctified coteries run the gamut from strictly ordered collections of Kindred in the loyal employ of the covenant to far-removed cults of fanatical maniacs acting out some harrowing interpretation of the Book of Revelation. Although the age and relative homogeneity of the Lancea Sanctum has left it with a lesser variety of coteries than the cultic and disorganized Circle of the Crone, the covenant's plentiful members and widespread influence naturally forms coteries of many different styles and functions.

Both internal and external factors motivate the covenant to organize its members into coteries, but coteries also form organically as the result of circumstance or social connections between the Damned. The covenant recognizes any such organic coterie that is useful to the church as a whole. In time, however, an organic coterie can come to be seen as covenant-organized group and find itself assigned a new member, even though the coterie members thought of themselves as a social circle. In the same way, an organized coterie might bond (or become emotionally tangled) over time. A group that was intended to focus on the piety or loyalty of its predatory parishioners might instead find itself turned inward, concerned most with its own passion play.

Sanctified elders — and Inquisitors — keep a constant eye out for coteries whose interpersonal bonds could threaten the piety of its members or the group's loyalty to the covenant. To be clear, the covenant does not discourage personal devotion



among its members, but certain positions within the covenant demand its members to prioritize the covenant above the coterie. The first priority of any Sanctified must always be his role in God's play.

Rivalry for Rule

One external factor has been a constant in the formation of coterie among the Sanctified for hundreds of years: the covenant's occasional ally and informal sparring partner, the Invictus.

The Invictus believes that the Lancea Sanctum holds the weaker position in the centuries-old rivalry, and many of the Sanctified elders are happy to let the Invictus think that way. The victory conditions for the Invictus involve the subordination of Sanctified power, but the Lancea Sanctum needs only to endure the trials of the alliance to maintain the partial victory it already enjoys. The Sanctified have little interest in seeing the Invictus destroyed. As long as that esteemed covenant continues to draw blame for the failures and strange anachronisms of Kindred society, the Lancea Sanctum can continue to take credit for the successes of organized spirituality and the precious traditions of Kindred society. The Invictus simply doesn't stand in the way of what the Lancea Sanctum needs to achieve total victory. The two covenants are fighting different wars, but only the Sanctified seem to see that. The Invictus can claim dominion over the possessions and behavior of all vampires, but the Sanctified want to rule the thoughts and wills of their kind. The Invictus can impose formidable restrictions, but engaging in their power plays only diverts necessary attention from the Lancea Sanctum's divine pursuits.

In a collective sense, all the Sanctified must do to maintain the covenant's power and freedom is resist erosion by the Invictus. As long as the Invictus continues to pursue the ruination of the Lancea Sanctum, it plays the role the Sanctified want it to: the reliable aggressor. If the Invictus were to spend more time updating and modernizing itself, rather than half-maintaining and half-undermining its alliances, it could break free of the calcified antiquity that binds the two covenants. In fact, it might leave the Lancea Sanctum vulnerable to serious losses in membership among modern-minded Kindred for whom religion is optional. The Sanctified depend on their ancient authority and customs to appear as a constant landmark on the social landscape. If the Invictus modernizes (or the Carthians develop substantial credibility) and tradition goes out of fashion — that is, if the Damned as a whole stop fearing a separation from the established ways — the Lancea Sanctum might not survive the cultural shift with its position of power intact.

So the Lancea Sanctum has worked for several decades to make itself attractive to modern Kindred without downplaying the fearsome romance of its old-fashioned ways. The idea is to build bridges that link godless modern vampires with a medieval faith in something larger, greater and more terrible than themselves — to translate a fascination with flat-screen TVs and the Internet into an appreciation for stained-glass windows and illuminated texts. That is, to convert contemporary vampires into devout Kindred and convince them that the philosophies of Longinus make up an undeniable part of the Requiem that's not going away tonight or ever.

At the heart of the Lancea Sanctum, this mission is a sincere attempt to reach out to directionless, unaligned Kindred. The Lancea Sanctum believes it must bolster its reputation as a pillar of Kindred society not just to maintain power, but because Kindred society is genuinely better off with the guidance of Longinus' words. While corrupt vampires seek out new devotees to swell their own egos or elevate their own status among the Sanctified, so too do devout Kindred carry out the covenant's mission for the sake of those poor Damned souls who need faith to escape an existence of aimless monstrosity and become God's predators.

Political games require the Sanctified to organize coterie that won't appear threatening to dominant covenants in established domains, lest the First Estate demand more attention or the Sanctified find themselves at war with some paranoid Prince. Even when righteous violence seems justified, the Sanctified must sometimes send pilgrims in place of crusaders. This reputation for avoiding matters of political power makes it possible for the covenant to spread the word of Longinus in domains where conservatism would be unpopular or unwelcome. It also allows the Sanctified to guide influential vampires and impact local politics when it suits them.

The Lancea Sanctum's oft-inherited status as the Second Estate requires the covenant to perform certain duties in support of the Invictus. Most of these duties are included in the roles of priest or paladin, however, and are no offense to the Sanctified. At the same time, at least a few of the Damned in each major city must be given the task of dancing with the scheming dilettantes of the First Estate to demonstrate respect or to watch for treachery.

Coterie Cults

A coterie might represent the sum of the covenant's presence in a city. In the case of a religious covenant, a small circle of religious zealots might be seen as a foreign church or as a cult. Therefore, local coterie are trusted to be self-reliant, expected to be faithful and true to *The Testament of Longinus* and brutally punished for deviations from the scriptures or the mandates of the covenant. In practice, however, it's impractical for the Lancea Sanctum to know what's happening in every parish. No hierarchy exists outside the local, so policing would be impossible, even if someone knew where to look.

So what happens when a coterie is given the freedom and authority to define what it means to be Sanctified in a given domain? Every vampire who encounters the coterie might believe that it represents the true and intended beliefs of the covenant. When a coterie's sense of authority outweighs its sense of duty, what happens to loyalty? If an isolated coterie's faith grows stronger than its ties to the covenant, does its allegiance slip? If so, in what direction?

Devout and charismatic Kindred become venerated cult leaders by design or by accident. Coterie turn inward and develop aberrant or heretical philosophies. Parishes mistake their own beliefs for those of the covenant at large. A coterie's resemblance to its covenant can shift through carelessness and self-involvement or cavalier orthodoxy. Just how much can the coterie get away with when it has the run of the place?

The consequences for such coteries can be severe. Covenant representatives (themselves making subjective judgments based on their own experience with Sanctified practices) might either shepherd the group back in line or demand a sacrificial subject for a fiery demonstration.

The point is that, while the covenant upholds the idea that Sanctified coteries are centered on duty, some are all about faith and others are just a matter of geography. Coteries separated from large developments of the covenant by the rural dark and isolated from the surrounding vampire population by dogma seldom fit the Sanctified archetype. Some make use of Southern chapels and keep herds of mortal churchgoers for Vitae. Some handle snakes in ecstatic ceremonies. Others hide out in remote compounds and wage private crusades against the neighboring vampires. The word of Longinus has traveled far, but it's spread by word of mouth, like a game of "telephone" played out over centuries. Not all coteries have heard the same message.



FLIGHT FROM SANCTUARY

It's happened before. A coterie exploring its faith wanders outside the "canon" claimed by the covenant and finds itself cutting new paths through doubt or uncertainty. When a coterie goes outside the bounds of the covenant's strict interpretations, it risks alienating itself from the mother parish. Some coteries see it as growing above the safe strictures of a stale belief, which is a natural growth of the religion — a positive thing.

Most regional representatives of the covenant don't. The Lancea Sanctum proscribes such notions and those coteries that don't hurry back to the landscaping from the brambles. Characters who go off and explore new dogma in the spirit of the evangel might be pitied or missed, and even forgiven when they return, but those who do so while wearing the habit of the Sanctified or claiming to represent the covenant are worse than pagans. They're heretics. The covenant views coteries that confuse *The Testament of Longinus* as a great threat to the laity. The confusion and arrogance that corrupts one Sanctified coterie cannot be allowed to spread into other faithful coteries.

In practice, of course, locality is everything. Lancea Sanctum dogma in one domain might be heresy in the next. While the institution of the Sanctified has remained intact over the centuries, its individual cells have mirrored the Christian church, which has splintered over its history.

Therefore, characters bound by faith might find themselves on the run, in the dark between a cathedral of disapproving clerics and a city of unsympathetic pagans. Such coteries have a unity of faith stronger than their loyalty to the covenant, and loyalty to the coterie becomes essential for such groups. Though they might still consider themselves the faithful of Longinus, they become pilgrims without a Mecca, a parish with no pope, a religion of four or five. And the Hounds of Longinus are after them.



In the Service of God

The maintenance, expansion and promotion of a religious organization in a domain requires a lot of work. Although the evangel of Longinus demands that the Damned all behave as pious predators and serve the will of God, a vampire can serve Him in many different ways. Many, perhaps most, Sanctified coteries are labeled with or recognized by the job they do. There is no finite list of coterie "occupations," because coteries are identified by vague reputations as often as formal duties. Not all coteries come with a job description.



LONG-TERM COTERIES WITH SHORT-TERM DUTIES

Throughout his Requiem, a Sanctified Kindred is likely to wear many costumes and play many parts. The Lancea Sanctum encourages its members to hone many skills and experience many trials in their nights on Earth. Although a coterie might exist chiefly to carry out one duty, it could inherit any task required by the covenant. The duties around which a coterie resolves are not to be confused with professions. All the Sanctified are tradesmen, but the trade they ply is that of a servant to the Almighty, and He could demand anything on any night. Only the most proficient vampires — Inquisitors, Bishops and experienced paladins — equate themselves with their work so utterly. Even they do whatever is asked of them by God.

A coterie organized by Lancea Sanctum luminaries should expect to be given responsibilities related to the expertise of its members, but the covenant might demand special actions from time to time. A coterie formed through social or circumstantial connections should expect more varied assignments as the covenant learns the coterie's strengths. Still, as a Benedictine considers himself a monk, he might also consider himself a scrivener, and the covenant rarely asks its members to carry out tasks for which they are ill-suited. Reputation and renown do matter.

Unusual assignments can be given for a variety of reasons, the most common of which is happenstance. If the coterie is the only collection of Sanctified vampires in the domain with reliable sway at a university, it might be given a research task to resolve. Sometimes, however, and perhaps more often than is speculated, elders pass down assignments as tests of mettle or faith. The quality of success in such cases is often of less interest to the coterie's superiors than the manner in which success (or failure) is achieved... and the price it exacts from the coterie.



The covenant knows that not every vampire is suited to the most honorable jobs. There is no shame in performing an unglamorous job among the Sanctified. Authority and status



are not accessible from every parish or every station, but any Kindred who dedicates himself to the service of the covenant and God, who strives to uphold the Traditions and exist as Longinus instructed, is respected and recognized for his faith. The root of faith is, after all, in the nightly demands on the Damned as the hunter and haunter of mortals.

The Lancea Sanctum does not accept sub-par work from vampires who feel they were meant for some other task. Longinus did not strive to become undead, but when the Requiem was thrust upon him, he met God's challenge.

Missionaries

All Sanctified vampires are expected to share the evangel of Longinus with their fellow Damned, but missionaries for the Lancea Sanctum take up the honorable task of actively converting the undead for years, even decades at a time. When Christian missionaries ventured out into the darkest, brightest and strangest corners of the world, they were followed by the Lancea Sanctum. When Jews and Muslims first immigrated to the Americas, the Lancea Sanctum shadowed them. As the curse of the Embrace spreads further across the globe, the Lancea Sanctum spreads with it.

Unlike mortal religions, which can erect missions and temples in plain sight to inspire awe and attract converts, the Sanctified must evangelize in secret, preach in basements and ruins, hold Mass after hours where mortal eyes won't find their devotions and sermonize in the dark. Without their own church steeples, bell towers, billboards or

neon crucifixes to keep thoughts of religion in the minds of the masses, the Sanctified must constantly remind the populations of the Damned, constantly proselytize, and personally contact potential converts. While mortal missionaries can teach English, build chapels and leave behind Bibles, the Lancea Sanctum must revisit the same locations again and again or assume the roles of undead missionaries to spread the word to every neonate and childer created in recent nights. Each new vampire must be found and let in on the secrets of his own existence. Every childer brought into the Requiem must be given at least one chance to accept the word of Longinus before he is judged.

The missionaries of the Damned have it rough. Whereas a mortal child can be taught slowly, childer are Embraced stubborn. Some vampires come into the night with one religion already close to their heart. All of them come wearing a forfeited mortal coil. The notion that a whole layer of God's plan has been hidden in the shadows outside the cathedral walls can be difficult for a new vampire to accept. Worse, mortal doubt can swell to fill the vast emptiness of a looming eternity. Vampires, like mortals, can be slow to see the light, so Sanctified missionaries must have magnificent patience. True missionaries and evangelists alike learn that conversion of the undead is seldom quick and never easy.

On the other hand, the Embrace has a way of shaking one's faith in atheism. The transformation from the living to the Damned demands a reevaluation of the self and the world. These early nights are the ideal time to expose a vampire to



The Testament of Longinus. It has been the experience of the covenant that vampires who are contacted within their first year or so as Kindred are likely to accept the existence of God even if they did not before. Souls who convert early are more likely to become missionaries themselves.

True Missionaries

Tonight, few of the coteries in search of converts classify as true missionaries. Most missionary coteries don't bother to categorize themselves more precisely, anyway. The difference between missionary coteries and evangelical coteries is a practical one, and most coteries of one type spend at least some time as the other.

The idea of finding fledgling or untapped vampires and showing them the truth of their place on Earth is thrilling to missionary coteries. Seeing a new vampire react to the tale of Longinus reminds many missionaries of their own first exposure and acceptance of the *Testament*. Sharing that epiphany with another of God's chosen is the reason many Kindred converts become missionaries. The bond that comes from a shared epiphany drives some missionary coteries to welcome new converts directly into their own circle. It's irrefutable that many of the Damned trust the priest who exposed them to *The Testament of Longinus* more than they trust their own sires.

The job of a true missionary coterie is also dangerous. Though a large number of Sanctified missionaries encounter vehement or even violent opposition to the word of Longinus, many more simply disappear into the darkness between cities. To the surprise of young vampires, such losses are common even in areas that are heavily populated and modernized by mortals. It's assumed that as many missionary coteries are lost to hostile vampires as are lost to werewolves or the simple attrition of unlife away from a reliable domain.

True missionary coteries travel often — sometimes to areas new to the Lancea Sanctum, sometimes to areas new to the Danse Macabre. In unstable regions, especially throughout the Americas, missionary coteries must even visit cities where vampires have been successfully converted in the past. The fact that the previous converts and missionaries are missing or destroyed suggests that such coteries should expect trouble. Therefore, missionary coteries attract vampires who are willing or eager to face danger, as well as vampires who were worldly in life or wish they had been.

The isolation of vampire dominions is exaggerated for a missionary coterie. Herd, Contacts, Allies, Havens and even Status can become useless. Forces press against the coterie from all sides, either driving the members together or breaking them apart. The coterie must be self-reliant, well motivated and flexible. The Damned are inherently territorial, though, so it's very difficult to survive as a coterie on the move.

Outside the established domains of the Lancea Sanctum, coteries find themselves tempted by freedom. In time, every missionary coterie is forced to choose between its own survival and its devotion to the covenant. Although help might never arrive if the coterie gets in trouble it can't handle, word of misdeeds might likewise never make it back to superiors.

Evangelists

Evangelists are the local voice of the Lancea Sanctum, the patient homebodies whose missionary goal is to convert the neighbors. Evangelical coteries are usually long-term residents of a domain, often well known throughout the city, and they sometimes occupy positions of power. In cities where the Lancea Sanctum is the dominant covenant, an evangelical coterie could comprise Harpies, promoting the glory of faith and undermining the reputations of those Kindred who've already decided not to convert. In cities with little Sanctified influence but an acceptance of the covenant's limited presence, evangelist coteries often perform odd jobs for the covenant or its allies while working full-time to get the word out. Evangelical coteries might make regular rounds, visiting Kindred who'll listen but aren't yet ready to convert or attending a Prince's court to offer advice and share news.

Some evangelical coteries are dedicated to converting specific other coteries or in changing the mind (and religious affiliation) of some influential vampire. Evangelical coteries need social skills, creativity and connections. It's not uncommon in large cities for the Lancea Sanctum to organize evangelical coteries from Damned of each clan, creating a public relations body that can communicate across lines of Blood and, hopefully, belief.

These Kindred are in it for the long haul. As fixtures of the community, an evangelical coterie can't afford to make important enemies. The social standing of the covenant can hang on the actions of an evangelical coterie, even if the political or martial standing of the covenant doesn't.

Although evangelical coteries aren't typically considered a threat by other covenants, they are sometimes targeted for violence because of their visibility.

Cultivators

Officially, so-called cultivators are not authorized by the Lancea Sanctum. For centuries, the existence of such coteries was denied. The undead can't even decide if they're coteries, cults or cells of secret operatives. The Lancea Sanctum does not claim responsibility for acts of cultivation among its membership, but it cannot deny that some Sanctified coteries have been breaking the Traditions under the covenant's nose.

Cultivators scour the mortal herds for souls ripe for recruitment into damnation. Candidates are subtly tested and prepared for the Embrace. If the cultivators are sure that the candidate would make a loyal and valuable member of the covenant, she is Embraced and brought before the Anointed for acceptance into the covenant. This sort of recruitment is forbidden — it's a violation of the Traditions that Longinus exalted — but is not as uncommon as the covenant claims.

In some cases, cultivators have gone so far as to break the Masquerade before deciding whether to Embrace a candidate. If the candidate isn't chosen, he is destroyed before he can share what he has learned. In extreme cases, cultivators secretly Embrace the mortals they choose without observing the covenant's Creation Rite, then they point the neonate toward the Lancea Sanctum and skip town to avoid punishment.

Are these coterie some sort of fringe cult? Violations of the Traditions and interactions with mortals are blatant violations of Kindred physiology as well as *The Testament of Longinus*, but the covenant has received some valuable new recruits as a result of these transgressions. Such brazen coterie experience strange nights, meddling in the affairs of mortals, perhaps out of misguided faith or perhaps in search of a power trip.

Societal Support

The Lancea Sanctum has been a reliable and familiar feature of the Danse Macabre for centuries, arguably even millennia. The roots of Sanctified philosophy and mythology are buried deep beneath the foundations of the modern society of the Damned. Even Kindred who do not revere the religion of the Lancea Sanctum respect the wisdom and judgment of its Priests. As the prevailing and most unified theological denomination familiar to the Kindred world, the Lancea Sanctum has a responsibility to the communities of the Damned. When the neutrality or temperament of a domain's social construct cannot be counted on, the Sanctified provide mediation, guidance and avenues of communication.

Arbiters

As priests are consulted on matters both religious and secular by mortal men, so too are the Priests of the Lancea Sanctum consulted by the Kindred. From individual vampires to Princes and Prisci, the Damned seek out neutral arbiters from the ranks of the Sanctified to help settle disputes and clarify interpretations of the Traditions. The moral and religious lessons that accompany such mediations are considered a reasonable price to pay for a dose of fair and rational thought or an unbiased perspective.

Of course, not just any priest will do. Sanctified members of the Primogen and other politically biased individuals are seldom consulted for arbitration. In some communities, no such neutral Kindred exists. In others, however, whole coterie of consular Kindred stand between hostile factions, religious differences, and furious punks. Coterie in the business of being neutral have the benefit of being allowed almost everywhere in the city but are cursed with constant petitions for aid. An arbiter coterie has the ear of the Prince only as long as it can stay neutral in the face of temptation, bribery and threats of violence — or only so long as it tells her what she wants to hear. If such a coterie gains enough respect, it might also attract the jealous hatred of an unappreciated Primogen or Regent.

Cases for arbitration are sometimes made by quoting from *The Testament of Longinus*. Arbiters then engage the aggrieved parties in discussions about the meaning of recited passages. The arbiter's analysis and interpretation of those passages reveals the proper course of action.

Arbiter coterie might instead maintain an Elysium in the city where the Damned can find sanctuary. Even if the site isn't officially Elysium under the mandate of a Prince or Regent, wise Kindred think twice before provoking the retribution of the Lancea Sanctum. Consider the advantages and difficulties of a coterie whose haven is considered neutral

ground. When would the time be right for such a coterie to use all the information it accumulates and make a power play to earn the covenant real power in the domain?

Advisors

Advisors are renowned for their insight rather than their neutrality, whether the advising coterie is in the service of the Prince or some other influential Kindred figure. Even Bishops retain advisors to keep them informed of happenings among the Damned at ground level and below. Priests who serve as messengers, confessors or spiritual advisors might also serve as political advisors to superiors in the covenant hierarchy.

The duties of advisory coterie often require investigation, fact-finding missions and the vetting of new converts or visitors to the domain. Therefore, many advisors either have aspirations of becoming Inquisitors, or they develop such aspirations while on the job. Advisors are frequently too involved in the matters of feudal politics to develop the reputation necessary within the covenant to achieve truly authoritative positions. Instead, Sanctified advisors often find themselves drawn out of the religious sector of society and into the political sector, sometimes without even leaving the covenant. Some Bishops earn posts this way.

Messengers

As arbiters are respected for their neutrality, Sanctified messengers are ignored for it. In domains where the Lancea Sanctum can be taken for granted, messengers from that covenant are sometimes used by other covenants or organizations to bear packages and correspondence through hostile territories. Since the wrath of the Sanctified is so feared, messengers bearing a sigil of the covenant (often just a ring, pin or patch) might be allowed through dangerous territory unmolested. A whole coterie of messengers is even more secure, as the odds increase that at least one member of the coterie will escape to bring back the punishers of the Sanctified.

Messenger coterie, like arbiter coterie, gain access to otherwise forbidden regions of the city. Like missionaries, messengers travel and experience all the danger that doing so entails. Few coterie serve the covenant as messengers for long, however. Eventually, the coterie is either promoted or the covenant elders in the city put its freedom to some other use. Then it's only a matter of time until the coterie's credibility as a trustworthy third party is ruined.

Spiritual Support

The role that secular Kindred assume a Sanctified coterie takes is one of spiritual support. The stereotype of the Damned of the Lancea Sanctum usually puts the vampire into a role of priest or paladin; the priest stereotype falls into this generalized category. In practice, all Sanctified coterie perform the following duties to one extent or another, but a few are so respected as to be considered experts at these tasks.

The spiritual matters to which such coterie attend resemble mortal religious services of antiquity. Priests of Longinus perform all the duties of Jewish rabbis, Catholic priests and Muslim clerics, often in a manner that references or incorporates customs from multiple

Judeo-Christian religions. The Damned have transcended many inter-religious conflicts as they have risen above mortal existence. A Sanctified Priest might even offer a vampire familiar rites and ceremonies from mortal religions to smooth the transition into the religion of the Damned (or lure him into the covenant).

Advisory coterie are as likely to be dedicated to spiritual matters as to matters of custom, so circles of wise Kindred might form de facto coterie with the duty of counseling a pious Prince or advising a Bishop. In Sanctified cities, the Bishops of various domains might be a coterie themselves, ostensibly organized to advise the Archbishop.

Confessors

According to most prevailing Lancea Sanctum dogma, the sins for which the Damned must atone are sins against the Traditions and *The Testament of Longinus*. The lessons of Longinus are never mastered; they must be learned and exercised each night. Every vampire must forever strive to more fully fill the space that God has made for him on Earth. Therefore, confession for Sanctified vampires is sometimes little more than an admission of failure and an acknowledgement of the tenets at which the sinner must work harder. Confessions of sins against the Traditions, on the other hand, serve the practical purpose of alerting the covenant to possible threats stemming from those transgressions: suspicious mortals, unacknowledged neonates and so forth.

The Lancea Sanctum does not grant absolution, for there can be none for the Damned. Instead, the Lancea Sanctum demands penance to strengthen the sinner's resolve and sometimes grants pardons from the punishment that must otherwise come from violating the Traditions. A Priest is not required to pardon the Damned, though, and sinners should not assume that confessions are secret unless the confessor specifically says so. Some confessors grant their parishioners the privilege of silence to encourage confession, but such privileges are the policy of the confessor and not the mandate of the covenant as a church.

Coterie of confessors either travel the city to tend the flock (as with an esteemed Priest or in the retinue of a pious Primogen, for example) or maintain a venue where sinners can come for guidance and penance. Confessor coterie are often well connected and might be owed favors by parishioners of multiple clans and covenants. Confessors are also respected, for the penance a confessor demands might require material donations to the Lancea Sanctum or payment in pain. All charges are collected by the confessor. Resistance only results in the return of the confessor coterie with the backing of Sanctified Hounds or armed paladins.

Performers of Rites

Ritual coterie can be specialized in particular Sanctified ceremonies (such as the Creation Rite) or none at all. Some ritual coterie travel to private havens or Elysium to perform requested rites for secular vampires who are eager to keep the approval of the Lancea Sanctum. Others are simply the ritual experts for multiple Sanctified churches who tour an assigned circuit performing Midnight Masses on a regular schedule.

It's the business of a ritual coterie to be familiar with (or create) as many of the various unique rites observed in the domain as possible. Ritual coterie might even take appointments to teach observances to local parishioners. A selected and honored few Sanctified coterie have the job of teaching the rites of Theban Sorcery. As a result, ritual coterie also become the covenant's experts in the occult.



SANCTIFIED CONFESSORS

The word confessor is used here as well as within the Ordo Dracul (see p. 57). This overlap is intentional. Not only is the role of relieving the soul's burden similar in both covenants, but the blurring between the position of confessor occurs between covenants as well as the mortal institution of confession. Storytellers, when the troupe hears the word "confessor," they shouldn't necessarily know immediately what covenant the purported "confessor" hails from, or even if it's a function of his covenant at all. Make use of this blur and overlap to highlight the air of the unknown that Kindred domains should possess in addition to the significance of religion and spirituality to many vampires' outlooks.



Enforcement and Judgment

The Lancea Sanctum's reputation for fearsome retribution and unwavering justice straddles the divide between the covenant's social and spiritual roles. The covenant occasionally sponsors individual Damned to serve as sword-arms for churches and Princes alike. The loyalty of such coterie must be to the scriptures of the Lancea Sanctum (or the covenant itself...) first. Coterie formed through social contact are very rarely given martial authority by the covenant; personal biases won't be allowed to affect the coterie's efficacy.

Hounds

The most common and least prestigious coterie of Sanctified combatants are Hounds. The name for these coterie comes from the name for a Prince's enforcers, for the jobs of such coterie are identical. In some cases, Princes from other covenants even draw Hounds from the ranks of the Lancea Sanctum. Sanctified Hounds serve the church or the church and the Prince, but they usually answer to Bishops first and foremost. Those Bishops in turn balance the Prince's wishes with the covenant's own needs.

Hounds hunt, fight, punish and kill for the covenant. Hounds may be kept on a leash by confessors or Inquisitors, if so ordered by a Bishop. Hounds are rarely given long-term assignments, however, and almost never attain autonomy.

Paladins

Paladins, on the other hand, hunt, fight, punish and kill for God and Longinus. Paladins enjoy an autonomy born of unquestioned loyalty. Paladins are often given long-term goals by Sanctified elders and then let loose for years at a time to carry them out. A paladin coterie might be charged



with the security of a Sanctified city, for example, or the elimination of an Acolyte cult. Some paladins find themselves at odds with allies even while they're at war with the covenant's enemies. Paladins are never put in the service of the Prince, however, even if they honor his position as pre-eminent Kindred of the domain. They obey a higher authority, and He speaks to the paladins of Longinus only through the covenant's leaders.

The autonomy paladins require gives them the freedom to form more organic coteries and the flexibility to conscript vampires into the coterie as needed. Most paladins are crusaders, but some are extremely dedicated warriors out to better themselves. All, it seems, are violent zealots or armed fanatics.

Inquisitors

Contrary to rumor, the Inquisitors of the Lancea Sanctum do organize into coteries. In practice, such coteries sometimes disguise themselves to appear as an Inquisitor backed by Hounds or paladins and maintain the reputation of the Sanctified Inquisitor who's so clever and dangerous that he travels alone. In truth, most Inquisitors are too clever to travel alone.

Inquisitors organize into cells of peers and act by consensus when they are given the autonomy to do so. Inquisitors are a closed group, seemingly impenetrable to outsiders. The trust necessary for vampires to make such a fluid and powerful group is difficult to muster and harder to maintain. Inquisitors rarely let outsiders see them consult with one another. Newcomers can only be added to such a coterie at the order of a Bishop or his better. It is a formalized, almost professional relationship built on the foundations of the covenant itself.

Philosophy

Coteries make natural and strategic sense for the Lancea Sanctum. The Sanctified believe themselves to be exalted through their devotion to God and the gospel of Longinus, and that exaltation makes them different from non-believers. Therefore, a follower of Longinus naturally congregates with people who share his reverence. A Sanctified vampire in a group of non-believers might evangelize, but a group of Sanctified vampires has the freedom to explore their shared faith together. Though many Sanctified vampires find adequate places serving as the priest or confessor for a group of less-than-devout companions, others find themselves unable to let their guard down around non-believers.

Strategically, Sanctified coteries present a desirable appearance to the covenant's enemies and those Damned yet to be converted. A coterie as a discrete unit can appear closed, incorruptible and impenetrable, inspiring fear and awe. On the other hand, a coterie can appear to be inclusive, supporting and inviting, making membership seem attractive. Coteries make it possible for individual vampires to relate to a global empire and allow the Sanctified to present two disparate representations of itself: the fearsome, mighty champion and the wise, benevolent guide.

Coteries as Monasteries

Among vampires of other faiths (or no faiths), adherents to the *Testament* do their best to bring the Damned together and form coteries, even if the members of the pack appear unlikely to convert. Such a vampire might attempt to gather others around himself or even play matchmaker and fix up other lone Kindred with suitable coteries. Other vampires sometimes joke that this practice descends from a religious obsession with fidelity and marriage.

The desire to see vampires congregate is rooted in the religion of the Lancea Sanctum, but the philosophy stems from monastic life rather than monogamy.

Longinus is sometimes described as becoming a hermit following his damnation, but the Lancea Sanctum believes that only the most devout and powerful of the Damned has the ability to exist as a lone predator. Most of the Damned, at least in these modern times, spend the entirety of their Requiem as pack hunters. Only revered elders manage to survive on their own for long, but only until the insatiable thirst that comes with age drives them into torpor. When they awaken, they are neither willing nor able to exist alone, at least until they regain a modicum of strength. Few vampires can become hermits as Longinus supposedly did.

The importance of Longinus' hermitic existence isn't in his isolation from other vampires, but his isolation from the mortal world. As medieval monks lived separate from the common folk, as wolves do not visit with sheep, so should the Damned dwell with their own kind and not make contact with mortals except as demanded by their station. Wolves that loiter in the vicinity of sheep become domesticated. God did not intend for the Damned to become the dogs of men.

A vampire requires social contact, and if that contact is not found among others of his kind, he finds it among mortals. Yet the temptation to fraternize with humans is a test of faith. The Damned are meant to hide from the mortal flocks, to wear the sheep's clothing only when hunting. Anything else is a sin against God.

The Horizontal and the Vertical

Another way of looking at the division of power between secular covenants and the Lancea Sanctum, the philosophical way, is to divide the concepts of societal control into two axes, a horizontal and a vertical. Elders within the Lancea Sanctum sometimes refer to these axes in discussions of strategy or politics, but this is not a formal way of looking at the responsibilities between two (or more, in certain domains) covenants. The Sanctified avoid using this language with other covenants, even though the concept is familiar in many feudal systems.

As the Sanctified see it, the primary interest of secular covenants is controlling the vertical axis of undead society — the realms of material power. This includes political, governmental, social and esoteric power. These facets of society lead to elitism and lordship and yield material wealth and social leverage. These things are always

fleeting. The vertical axis soars like a skyscraper, from which everyone must eventually descend.

While it gladly accepts control over vertical elements of society when such control becomes available, the Lancea Sanctum's true interests are in the sole rule of the horizontal facets of existence — the realms of spiritual power. This includes religious, spiritual and intuitive power. These facets lead to personal clarity and spiritual harmony, yielding wisdom and enlightenment. These things influence every aspect of material existence and carry over into Heaven and Hell after the Final Death. The horizontal axis is the foundation for all things, to which everyone must eventually return.

The Lancea Sanctum's dirty secret is that it's more difficult to maintain control of the horizontal facets of society. The Lancea Sanctum cannot and would not change its beliefs, but the teeming masses can and do. To maintain spiritual power over the populations of the Damned, the subjects of the Sanctified must understand, agree with and believe in the tenets of the covenant. They must belong. The Invictus, the Carthian Movement and even the Circle of the Crone can adapt and revise the stances they take in response to popular developments. They can pursue social trends. The subjects of such secular endeavors (and the Acolytes, where the model fits) must behave only according to the laws and customs of the domain to maintain the power and pleasure of their masters. They must merely obey.

So it is that the Sanctified must win new spiritual territory away from ever-more-popular competitors, such as the Ordo Dracul and the Circle of the Crone — territory kept in the dead hearts and eternal minds of the Damned. It can be won only through patience, persistence and education. Conversion is a delicate and tricky thing. A false convert can spread doubt like poison through the devout. A clear and defiant enemy is always better than a traitor.

So it is that the Sanctified must enforce a degree of hierarchy over its membership. A horrifying reputation and a legacy of fear surrounds the devout like a city wall, keeping the believers in and the heretics out. When in doubt, Inquisitors and paladins drive the uncertain one way or the other — into the city or out of it — to keep the covenant's enemies clearly separated from its allies. Enemies can then be crushed when the time is right. An enemy is best defeated within sight of potential converts.

To make this complex balance between societal axes, between sentiment and punishment, work, the covenant needs to be able to exert precise amounts of influence in particular ways. It must present the fearsome, armored face of a doubtless crusader to its enemies and a wise and welcoming face to its potential allies. It must move into new spiritual territories without upsetting the vertical operations of its allies. It must keep either position on the scale from growing too heavy. Small, easily moveable weights — coteries — have proven to give the covenant the most precise control over its interests. Even while it promotes rumors of lone Inquisitors and armies of grim paladins, the Lancea Sanctum orchestrates the actions of its finite local coteries just like every other covenant does.





COTERIES OF VIRTUE OR VICE

Although the philosophies of Longinus don't direct the Damned to better themselves as Judeo-Christian religions do, they do push a vampire to master his own damnation. To do so requires the Kindred to be acutely aware of his strengths and weaknesses while recognizing that what makes a human strong or weak does not apply to him anymore. A vampire who is a slave to his own behavior is nothing but a beast who dishonors the message sent to Earth by God in the form of the undead. The separation of the soul from the corpse is what puts the Damned above mortals, driven by animal instincts and tempered with human thought. The undead body provokes only one instinctual need: the need for *Vitae*. *The Testament of Longinus* demonstrates that actions are more important than essence, and the actions of a predator should not be anchored by mortal concepts of morality.

Sanctified elders sometimes organize neonates into coteries of similar morality. The idea is that a group of the Damned with many of the same lessons to learn benefits from learning together. A sympathetic Priest might even guide pious Kindred from other covenants into a coterie based on their personal morals. In practice, such a coterie might start off as a kind of support group and grow later into a more traditional coterie. Perhaps the group has been put together as a probationary measure. When the characters demonstrate an ability to look past human morality and see the relationship between the Damned and humanity, the group might be allowed access to the first rites of Theban Sorcery.

Of course, Kindred of similar morality naturally gravitate toward each other. Gluttonous or wrathful vampires fall into routines of frenzied feeding or arbitrary violence before they choose to pursue a Requiem in the footsteps of the Dark Prophet. Kindred concerned with charity might attempt to deny the horror of their curse by working together to help people, before being relieved of their mortal worldview by their growing understanding of *The Testament of Longinus*.



Damned in Servitude

Identify a coterie's function and you've identified only half the coterie. Sanctified coteries are combinations of duties and motives held together by faith. To understand why the Damned commit to an eternity of servitude, you must identify what it is that motivates them.

Each vampire has his own reasons for participating in a coterie or a covenant, of course. In the case of the Lancea Sanctum, however, the membership has a great deal in common even before it is broken down into coteries. So, while few of the Damned fit neatly into a category of motive, many

can be better understood by comparing their reasons for participation to these broad descriptions. It's important to note, though, that many of the undead fail to examine their own motives in this way. How well can one understand a being that doesn't understand itself?

Practical Reasons

While faith attracts the Damned to the Lancea Sanctum, many of the covenant's most valuable and influential leaders are personally motivated by practical concerns. This is not to say that the church of Longinus is riddled with pretenders, only that zealotry can obstruct strategy, and the leaders of the Sanctified know this. Faith might bring a Bishop into the fold, but rational thought, careful planning and wise choices carry him into power. Practical Kindred concern themselves with the successful operation of the covenant as an organization, either to secure personal power or to perpetuate the organization itself. Neither precludes faith.

Many of the duties to which coteries dedicate themselves are practical as much as philosophical. Bishops must be skilled managers and leaders in addition to being experts of the evangel. Confessors draw out admissions of guilt not just for the betterment of the Damned, but to keep aware of what concerns face the domain.

Practically minded students of Longinus are concerned with excellence in work and the success of the covenant above all else.

Philosophical Reasons

The Lancea Sanctum has more than its share of zealots and fanatics. Enthusiastic members of the covenant comprise a vital part of the image projected to enemies and allies. Without academics, the covenant would stray from the *Testament* and God's design. Without vigilance, the covenant would be poisoned by liars and cowards. Honesty and courage grow from faith, and the covenant needs both. Only with trust can an organization the size of the Lancea Sanctum endure; only with sacrifice can it be protected.

Philosophical fulfillment can make otherwise frightening or intolerable duties seem bearable or even exciting. The covenant's missionary ranks are filled by volunteers with philosophical reasons to strike out into the darkness. Its ranks swell with fearless zealots. Paladins brave the risk of Final Death because they truly believe that their destruction serves the Almighty.

Philosophically minded vampires are concerned with the significance of the work they do and the success of God's plan above all else.

Improvement Through Servitude

The Lancea Sanctum is dedicated to the betterment and exaltation of all the Damned. It is not a fundamentally destructive organization. Most members of the covenant can be said to participate either for the benefit of individual vampires or for the greater good of all vampires. These concepts are not necessarily opposed in spirit, but they often are in practice.

Personal Good

Vampires concerned with personal growth are pilgrims or powermongers.

Some vampires pursue religion to make sense of their own predicament or make the Requiem easier for companions. Traveling to a revered Sanctified site might not benefit the covenant, but it does benefit the pilgrim. The exemption of a vampire might have no impact on the parish, but it might strengthen the faith of a single follower. Selfishness in such matters is not frowned on by the covenant either. Each of the Damned must strive to become the monster that God demands, and the Priests of the covenant cannot lead from behind.

Of course, a great many Sanctified vampires pursue personal benefits not out of faith, but out of greed, pride or worse. The Damned form coteriess to survive hostile nights and achieve positions of power. They surround themselves with shields of flesh and make allies of those who are too dangerous to be enemies. The seat of Bishop attracts the undead for its security and status as much as for its responsibilities and respect.

Greater Good

The Damned concerned with the betterment of the Kindred world are crusaders or politicians.

Paladins of the Lancea Sanctum might hope to be absolved or revered in Final Death, but they know that the covenant will be served by the sacrifice regardless. Crusaders work for the recognition of Longinus, the promotion of the covenant and the glory of God. Lowly positions become bearable by replacing an interest in the self with a dedication to something larger. Coteriess of crusaders defend cities, lay claim to territories and crush heretics so that all of the Damned are better able to hunt.

Sometimes, though, the “greater good” means “the four of us.” Some coteriess are little more than temporary truces among vampires who are capable of tolerating one another. The Damned take on responsibilities that strengthen the domain to earn status among all those who see them do it. They want to impact the Requiems of many vampires to build a reputation for usefulness or to enter the ranks of the Harpies. It’s good to make the vampire race strong so it can win wars for you.

Methodology

Customs and traditions passed down over centuries color everything the Lancea Sanctum does. Remarkably, many of these medieval and even classical practices have escaped substantial errors in translation or revision. Even with lines of custom broken by sleeping elders and splintered coteriess, many of the covenant’s methods are the same tonight as they were in the 16th century or before.

At the same time, new rites and practices are constantly developing out of tastes imported into the night by young vampires. Culture clashes and a search for local identity

create even more variations on methodology. Whole coteriess are dedicated to tracing, recording and understanding the many customs and tactics of the Damned.



THE PAGEANT OF THE PREDATOR

The Sanctified exalt and honor the Traditions as Longinus did. So, too, does the covenant identify itself and all the Damned in relation to mortals. *The Testament of Longinus* holds that the Damned exist to show mortals the penalty for impiety. How are the Damned to do so if the Tradition of the Masquerade is never to be breached?

Some coteriess take it upon themselves to break the First Tradition and perpetuate the vampire myth among mortals in the slightest ways. The trend began in the United States, where the isolation of mortal settlements made it possible for bloody evidence and eye-witness accounts to dilute into campfire tales and urban myth, where provincial attitudes obstruct serious investigations. The coteriess select remote and vulnerable mortals for attack, then feed and murder in sight of just one or two witnesses. The fanatical attackers work at the smallest scale possible — killing one of a pair of humans, for example — and strive to create a scene that the locals will remember for decades. In many cases, these errant zealots go so far as to proselytize about the risks of defying the Lord and the penalties for sin.

These misguided fanatics see themselves as martyrs, damning themselves to the wrath of the covenant as Longinus damned himself to the wrath of God. And while the covenant is aware of these forbidden displays, the behavior of some coteriess has been ignored... in case the covenant can think of a good use for them. In the meantime, such groups never turn themselves in, but they also never recant their actions when they are finally caught by the covenant.



Specific Tactics

As a coterie’s duties can be paired with different motives, so can they be attempted using many different methods. While some tactics do not benefit certain duties — sinners might seek out a church to confess, but heretics never come to be burned — no one method is necessarily right for every situation. The covenant knows that context can be the key to conversion — what makes allies in Europe might make trouble in Mexico.

Pageantry and Performance

The Sanctified appeal to their brethren as medieval churches appealed to peasants, with elaborate ceremonies, awe-inspiring rites, moving sermons and grand holiday festivals. From the outside looking in, the Damned who participate in formal ceremonies and enjoy covenant-sponsored celebrations seem fulfilled. Vampires, like mortals, desire to be a



part of something larger than themselves. The Lancea Sanctum gives them something larger, something impressive, something sacred to belong to.

The curse of undeath is terrifying, and the Sanctified bring relief from fear. The thirst for Vitae is overwhelming, and the Sanctified give it meaning. The eternity of night looms like an open pit, but the Sanctified know the way through.

Sanctified coterie attract the Damned who counted on religion in life as well as those who seek it out only in undeath. Pageants and shows draw the Damned in and make the unaligned (and even active rivals) *want* to belong. Within that membership are more select positions to attract elitists and powermongers and give them a purpose to benefit the covenant.

Sometimes referred to colloquially as the Show, the Lancea Sanctum's methods of attracting attention are not just tradition. The Show is carefully designed to appeal to certain kinds of beings. Pageants draw in those who were devout in life, fiery rites entice those who revel in their monstrosity, and solemn ceremonies attract those who are terrified of themselves. Evangelical vampires wave oversized copies of *The Testament of Longinus* in the Bible Belt and host orgiastic raves of predatory lust in the Racks of major cities. Neither necessarily reflects the medieval heart of the covenant, but it gets Kindred in the door.

The Show also elevates morale and gives structure to the centuries. As the Damned become increasingly familiar with Midnight Masses, they feel more as though they belong to the covenant. When a coterie of on-the-fence vampires is blessed by a Sanctified priest and given permission to enter covenant-domain sanctuary, its members feel a safety otherwise unknown in the Danse Macabre. The Show doesn't end when you sign up.

Patience and Insinuation

Some people just refuse to have their minds changed. Fortunately, the Lancea Sanctum has eternity to try. Not everyone responds to pressure or performances, and the Sanctified understand that.

The patience and restraint of the covenant allows the Sanctified to operate even in regions where the word of Longinus is not popular, as long as it is not violently opposed. Even vampires who do not agree with the gospel might become allies over time if the covenant proves itself to be honorable and valuable to a domain. In time, membership will follow. If not, the covenant is willing to settle for obedience or respect. For now.

To insinuate itself into the Requiems of non-believers, the Lancea Sanctum makes itself ubiquitous and easily accessible. Where possible, it operates all-night chapels or tends Elysium. With a precise touch and calculated tone, the covenant then builds a reputation for being open-minded, cooperative, sometimes even casual. It gets out the message, "We're here if you need us."

A coterie with the job of creating or maintaining such standing in a city must be delicate, perceptive and cautious. Its job is to avoid making enemies and to be useful to as many of the

Damned as it can. The coterie must lead by example, provide advice and assistance, but be careful not to sermonize or chastise where it's unwelcome. The job is something like performing a hushed pageant in slow-motion. Very slowly, the attitudes of the local vampires change. They always do.

Force

When the covenant must operate in a region where the word of Longinus is violently opposed, the Sanctified act with confidence and power. When the locals refuse to tolerate the presence of the "Second Estate" or make it clear that they'll never open their minds, the Sanctified react with awesome force. The Lancea Sanctum, for all its supportive endeavors, all its kind pilgrims and counseling priests, is known everywhere for the hellish might of its religious warriors.

When another covenant stands in the way of Sanctified operations, the Lancea Sanctum fights to the end of every opponent. Only when the last of that covenant's members are gone can newly Embraced vampires be free to convert without the fear of being targeted by their regime. Only without the distraction of blasphemy or temporal pleasures can neonates focus on *The Testament of Longinus*. The Sanctified know that the Damned cannot be terrorized into believing the word of Longinus, but they can be made afraid to join the ranks of another covenant.

Fear is difficult to manage, but it is often useful. Some vampires see a show of force and react with defiance, but some see a show of force and want immediately to enjoy its protection. Some see a way to become strong themselves. If nothing else, the zeal and skill of the covenant's dark paladins makes loyal followers feel safe.

Coterie that must engage in violence are encouraged to choose their battles carefully. The Lancea Sanctum prides itself on fighting battles it can win and recognizing those battles in advance. And while the covenant recognizes that victory comes in many forms, it never accepts a Pyrrhic victory in public. Cycles of violence are undesirable. The Lancea Sanctum seeks to end conflicts, even when it starts them. If the consequences of force are uncertain, then force should follow meditation and patience. It is better to win absolutely than to win now.

Coterie-Specific Rites

Every coterie in the covenant has its own rites and rituals. Some are simply altered versions of common rites, such as the Blood Prayer recited in French instead of Latin. Others are unique, meant to inspire the coterie or define its boundaries. Some coterie write their own sermons and celebrate their own holidays. Some coterie hunt only on certain nights or feed only from subjects approved by the group as a whole. Coterie with shared religious traditions from life observe variations of Jewish or Muslim services, such as fasting or praying in the direction of Longinus' damnation.

Sanctified coterie are encouraged by the covenant to develop their own initiation rites to bestow a feeling of true belonging on new members. (For centuries, one longstanding European coterie prodded new members with spears.) Many



coterie also develop exclusionary rites, unique punishments for transgressions against the coterie or the Traditions, and rituals for the Vinculum. For the most part, coterie-specific rites are inspired by ancient covenant traditions and centuries of prior custom. Even those coterie that invent whole new rites color them with references to the old ways.



PALADIN'S ABSOLUTION (• THEBAN SORCERY RITUAL)

This rite is a boon for the conscience and well-being of the Damned who must sin in the service of the covenant. This rite relieves the subject of guilt for some action he is soon to perform. The ash from the offering must be used to mark the head or face of the subject. Each success on the invocation roll grants the subject a bonus die on the Humanity roll to see if a derangement manifests when provoked by degeneration loss for a specific action, provided the act is performed after this rite is performed and before the next sunrise. "The murder of Elizabeth Parson," is specific enough, but "murder" is not.

Offering: An icon or image of the person or people affected by the vampire's actions. By extension, this ritual does not aid actions that do not harm people (including the vampire herself).



Status

The strict and often confusing hierarchy of the Lancea Sanctum creates rigid paths of promotion for successful coterie. Still, the paths to power do branch. To achieve greater standing, to earn a more prestigious place in the covenant, a coterie must complete the jobs it is given while also attracting the attention of Bishops and other higher-ups. It must exhibit respect for the task it has been given while demonstrating an aptitude for the position it seeks.

If the covenant has a cordial relationship with the dominant covenant in a given city, this relationship creates opportunities for coterie to gain status in city politics and at court. Respected coterie

might be given a domain by the Prince to turn into a Sanctified parish. Bishops are often named to the Primogen.

Coterie of note can also gain access to previously forbidden resources, be honored in formal ceremonies or be rewarded with knowledge of Theban Sorcery. If the covenant is in possession of territory within the city, it sometimes doles out havens, coterie parishes and parcels of territory to its members. Coterie of great status might even be allowed to sire childer.

Coterie directly below the most advantageous positions must be wary. Only a single Kindred can become the Archbishop. Even if the coterie works together to open the seat, only one of them gets to sit in it. It's possible, of course, for one of the Damned to act as the face for a secret council. It's happened before.

Working with the Sanctified

Vampires who do not formally belong to the covenant, especially unaligned vampires, might find themselves working for the Lancea Sanctum all the same. In cities where the Sanctified are dominant, this is common when tasks to be accomplished exceed the capacity of the Sanctified to perform them.

Coterie that work with the covenant but are not actually a part of the covenant are politely thanked, and sometimes pitied, by members of the church. Outsiders regard such arrangements with suspicion or derision, even if the Lancea Sanctum is respected in the domain. Mercenary coterie are thought to be setting themselves up for conversion in the best situations. More likely, the covenant just has a job it needs done that's too menial or too dangerous to waste even Sanctified neonates on.

In the meantime, though, mercenary coterie enjoy the benefits of allegiance, such as freedom of movement throughout the city with a letter of release from the Bishop or permission to feed in Sanctified territory.

Promotion

The best an allied outsider coterie can hope for is more responsibility without the benefits of membership. Some coterie try to milk the Sanctified for favors and grants while feigning an interest in joining the covenant, but the Sanctified routinely see through such ploys. If a coterie works with the Lancea Sanctum but refuses to convert, it'll eventually tire of the limits on advancement and the mockery from other coterie.

