Danse de la Mort

Additional Storyteller Notes

When preparing **Mary's Child**, the first installment of **Danse de la Mort** for it's print version, I was forced to cut a few interesting tidbits of Storytelling advice included by author Matthew McFarland. We crammed a lot into 40 undersized pages, but we just couldn't get in. Thanks to the joy of this online venue, however, I'm happy to be able to provide these notes to you. You'll notice that subsequent scenarios include Theme and Mood notes, so this discussion of that technique as it relates to **Mary's Child** may be very useful indeed. Notes on a few other topics are also included to help you out.

Storytelling Techniques — Theme and Mood

Every story, regardless of medium, has some theme or themes. A *theme* is an idea or concept that runs through the story. In a way, the theme is the point the story is trying to make. A roleplaying game doesn't need to have a theme at all, but it tells a story, and thus is a perfect medium for conveying a theme. Conveying it well is in large part up to the Storyteller. Each of the stories in Danse de la Mort has a different theme, and in each story we'll be offering some brief hints on what to do to sustain that theme.

Likewise, the *mood* of the story is the feeling or ambiance appropriate to it. Films evoke mood by means of lightning, music and cinematography. You can use some of the same tricks to evoke a mood in your games: You can play by candlelight, or at least without direct, overhead lighting to simulate the fact that characters have to operate by night. You can play Latin chants when the characters meet with Maldonato in the church and switch to something a bit more urban when they venture into the Tremé District. But as with theme, mood changes with each story.

The theme of **Mary's Child** is discovery. The characters are awakening to the Requiem, encountering a side of the world they never imagined existed. But this discovery isn't one of wide-eyed wonder, it's pure horror. The characters are dead. Everything they knew and loved is lost to them. The discovery of the world of the Kindred might be fascinating and even thrilling at times, but everything the characters learn should serve to underline what they will never see again. You can underline this theme by occasionally mentioning some detail of life that the characters might have enjoyed — food, sex, sunlight — and then questioning whether they can ever have it again (don't simply say, "Ha! No more steak for you, ever!" because it's annoying, and isn't necessarily true, anyway).

The mood of **Mary's Child** is pure menace. The characters are young vampires, and vampires are predators. Every other vampire they meet is a competitor for blood and power, and the characters are still too ignorant to effectively defend themselves. Every single character they meet either engenders a feeling of anger or fear, and every new situation, no matter how mundane, might hide a lurking

danger. Every time the characters meet another vampire, that vampire is decided whether it would be better, in the long run, to kill these neonates now. When you take on the roles of Kindred Storyteller characters, make eye contact with the players and stare a breath or two longer than you normally would.

Storytelling Option — Not the Big Easy

It is possible to run **Mary's Child** without setting it in New Orleans. We have written it this way because New Orleans is the signature city for **Vampire: The Requiem**, and because future books will expand on the characters presented here. If, however, you would rather choose another venue, you are of course free to do so. This story works best in a large city with a great deal of history, preferably a city in the south of the United States, as some of the history deals with the Civil War. The story has scenes that take place in Catholic churches, a mansion, a Jesuit University and a ghetto; most large North American cities can provide these. You will, of course, need to change out the names of places for appropriate locales in your chosen city.

Storytelling Technique — Dealing with Touchy Subjects

In a dramatic scene of **Mary's Child**, the character come face to face with Prince Vidal and he asks them about their faith. Some people react badly to open discussions of religion, however. **Vampire: The Requiem** is a game of mature themes, and "maturity" doesn't (and shouldn't) equate to gratuitous violence or nudity. The disposition of the characters' souls is a critical element in this game, and therefore it's not at all unreasonable for the players to know what their characters believe.

That said, the game is, first and foremost, about having a good time. If this sort of discussion makes the players uncomfortable, simply skip that part of the scene. Knowing your players' comfort levels is critical to running a good game, so make sure to keep communication open, and make sure to make it clear that you aren't challenging anyone's beliefs — this *is* just a game, after all.