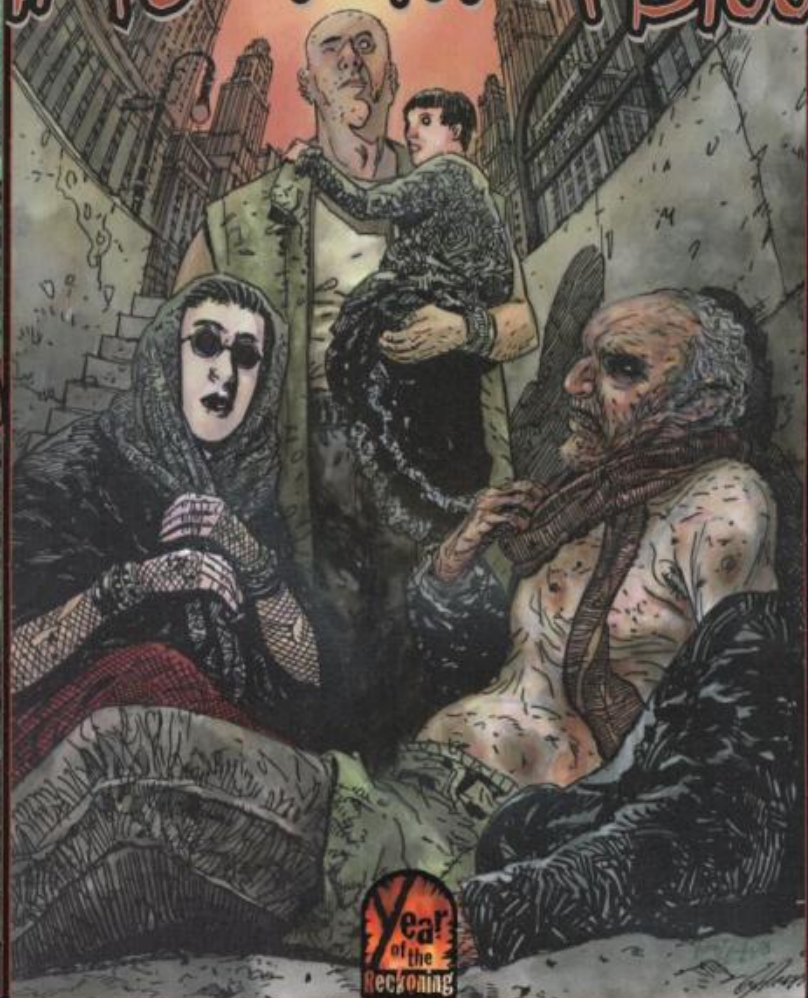
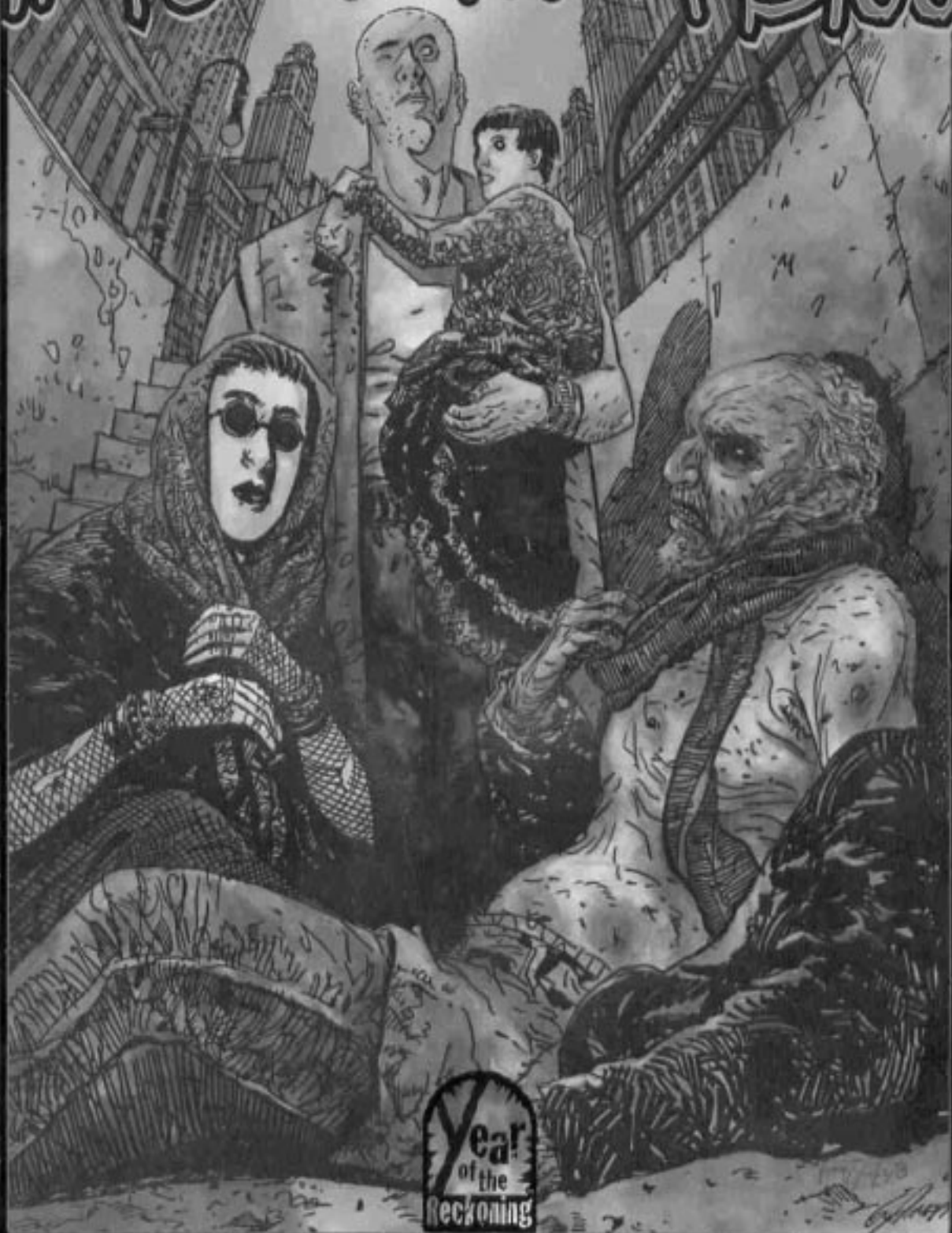


Time of Thin Blood



for vampire: the masquerade

Time of Thin Blood



Year
of the
Reckoning

for vampire: The Masquerade





UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN

Marvin Jenkins was in that annoying state at the border of sleep where he felt like a man in a broken elevator: His head would droop and his mind sink away, only to be jerked back up into consciousness a second later, and then he would sink again, and jerk awake again. This was no good — he still had three hours to go on his shift. Time for another coffee.

He stretched and yawned, picking up his coffee mug. It left a tawny ring on the desk calendar. StarBrite Motel, the calendar proclaimed, as did the mug and half the things in the lobby, including the magazines. The remainder of his last cup of coffee had turned into a brown sludge at the bottom. He sloshed it around in distaste. He didn't want to be hyper later. Maybe what he needed was some air.

He had started to heave his middle-aged body out of the chair when an obnoxious, piercing beep from the little speaker in front of him signaled a customer wanting in. He rolled forward and squinted to see through the plate-glass window. A young couple stood there, overnight bags in hand. He buzzed them in. They opened the door; an icy breeze rushed past them and stirred the things on the desk. Marvin held up a preemptive hand.

"We're all booked up," he said. "Sorry."

Neither of them seemed especially surprised at the news, but they exchanged glances and pushed inside anyway. The young man came forward, dropping his duffel bag on the desk with a thunk. He was a skinny kid, nerd type. His parka nearly swallowed him whole.

"Didn't you see the sign?"

"Yeah, I saw the sign," the kid answered, brows coming together slightly in annoyance. "But listen, we've been all up and down the row, and nobody has anything."

"You picked the wrong weekend."

"I know. Actually, I didn't pick it, but—" the young man glanced at his companion. She said nothing, staring out into the night through the transparent walls of the little receptionist's vestibule. Peering, actually, and shifting around, as if looking for somebody. Somebody she'd rather not run into. Marvin frowned.

"You know," the kid finished lamely. "Anyway, we were just hoping somebody might have canceled, or checked out."

"Yeah, checking out at four A.M. I'm afraid not."

"Look," he persisted, "where else are we supposed to go?"
"You could try on the east side," Marvin said. "There's a La Quinta, a Motel 6 and a Days Inn."

"But it's four A.M. You said it yourself. And it's cold, and we're on a motorcycle, and my wife—"

"Really needs a hotel room right now," the young woman interrupted in a bell-like voice. She turned around. Pale, hollow-eyed and stringy-haired, she looked like an addict. Marvin let his gaze travel down her frame and spotted the bulge under her puffy, quilted overcoat. She was ripe.

"Shit," Marvin exhaled.

"See?" the young man exclaimed, taking his consternation as a sign of surrender.

Marvin felt his heartburn flaring up again as he reached down into a desk drawer and pulled out a fresh check-in slip.

"All right. I've got a room," he said reluctantly. "Not a good room—"

"We'll take it."

"Lemme finish. There isn't a bed in it right now. This 400-pound lady sat on it and broke it, so we had to order a new one. The toilet doesn't work too good, either. And it's smoking. But seeing as it's the holidays, and if you really don't want to go anyplace else, I'll let you have it. So you can't say there was no room at the inn... you know." He offered a weak smile.

"No. We'll take it. Thank you... thanks so much." The kid started scribbling furiously on the slip. The young woman put a hand over her burgeoning belly and swayed a little, eyes closed.

"Hey, she's not gonna drop it right here, is she?"

"No, no," the kid said, too hastily.

Marvin ignored him and leaned forward, addressing the girl. "Ma'am. You in labor? Should I call the hospital for you?"

She just shook her head.

"It's not time yet," the young man assured him. "They're Braxton-Hicks, we're pretty sure."

Marvin wasn't sure how sure they were, but he shook his head. "Okay. I'll get you a couple of roll-aways in a little bit. They're better than nothing."

"Thanks. Really, you have no idea."

"Oh, I do. I remember when my wife was pregnant." Marvin's gaze fell on the young woman's left hand and couldn't help noticing that it was bare. Wife, huh? Oh, well.

"That's 44 dollars, but since the room is crap, I'll make it 30."

They paid cash. "Merry Christmas," he said as they hurriedly picked up their bags.

"Merry Christmas," they echoed. He handed them the key and buzzed them out.

"That was pretty good," Leila commented as she struggled up the stairs. "I wasn't even sure you'd remember what Braxton-Hicks was."

"I'm doing good to remember my own name," Pete said. His hands shook as he tried to get the key into the lock. Finally he managed to unlock the door.

The night manager hadn't been exaggerating. It was a dismal room. Stripped of its centerpiece, it looked empty, depressingly boxlike. The rectangle of industrial carpet normally covered by the bed was a decidedly brighter orange than the rest. An aging radiator hissed in the corner. The smell of high-tar cigarettes and other less pleasant substances stuck to every surface. One of the light bulbs had burned out.

Pete took off his parka and spread it against the wall so Leila could lie down in something less than hellish discomfort. He added a couple of towels from the bathroom to pad it further. Then he locked the door, deadbolt and chain. He looked out the window before pulling the drapes closed. He didn't see any headlights, but he knew now from personal experience that vampires could drive through the dark without them.

"Hope those roll-aways show up soon," he said.

"Not too soon." She was pulling one of the drawers free of the bureau. At first it wouldn't come, but she gave it a good yank and it popped out. She took off her coat and arranged it inside.

"What's that for?"

"Well, where else are we going to put it when it comes? Ohh, I must be close. Feel me, see if I'm close."

"Jesus." It was not exactly a job Pete relished, but he'd done it a few times already. He slowly lowered her to the floor, reached under the pitifully thin fabric of her God-I'm-a-whale dress and peeled off her panties. The skin of her thighs was like ice, leaching warmth away from fingers he'd thought couldn't be frozen any stiffer. Pete made a face like he tasted something bitter.

"Pete. Pete, am I close?"

"How should I know?" he snapped. "Tell me what about this has been normal."

"You know what I mean. Am I open?"

"Pretty wide open." He withdrew his fingers and cleaned them with a cheap motel washcloth. "Good thing we didn't stand around any longer, you really might have dropped it in there."

"Bullshit," she growled. She sat up, hoisting her ungainly body into a crouch.

"Leila, what are you doing? Lay down, rest, it's probably going to be a while."

"I want to squat."

"Fine, squat then." Pete got up and looked out the window again. Nothing. This would be the worst part, just sitting here thinking about everything that could happen.

Behind him, Leila groaned and moved from squatting to lying and back again. He sat down at the table and smoked a clove cigarette down to the filter, then another.

"Pete, get over here!" Leila called at last.

"What?"

"Check me again."

"You'll have to hold still. Stop rocking. Jesus."

"What's the matter?"

"It's the, what's it, the sac. Jesus. I can see the sac. Lie down."

"I don't want to—"

"Lie down!"

She shuddered and groaned as a contraction came, her bony frame tensing, her eyes dilating and going distant. Her mouth opened slightly; her fangs peeked out beneath her lips. He took her under the armpits — she felt oddly light, considering — and propped her back against the wall.

"It's coming now," she sighed. "I can really feel it. Pete, please — help me."

Pete swallowed to force back the rancid taste rising in his throat. He'd been steeling himself for this for weeks. He'd even known that the circumstances would not be great. But it was only now, in the face of it — his dead-but-walking lover sprawled on a dirty floor, about to bring into this world a thing that shouldn't even exist, and begging him for help, for fuck's sake — that he was truly impressed

with his own incompetence. There was no answer to make. He started babbling.

"Okay, look," he said. "I don't care what you say. I'm calling 911."

"No! Pete...."

"Leila, baby." He smoothed her hair back. Her forehead was already slick with a red sweat. "We have no idea what we're doing here. We're just a couple of stupid kids. I mean, whatever else you are now, you're still a stupid kid. And even if they've never seen anything like this before, they've got to know better than either of us."

"Pete—"

"I'm doing it. I'm calling."

"Pete, come back!" She grasped at him as he stood to go to the phone, but she was in no position to stop him.

"You can't call," she protested weakly. "They won't understand this...."

"I don't care."

"I might be done before they get here!"

He dialed and waited. The line did nothing for a few seconds. He waited some more. Eventually it started beeping at him. Busy? Could 911 be busy? No, this was a fast busy signal.

"Even the goddamned phone's not working!" he growled, throwing it against the wall. Some of the blood-strength Leila had given him kicked in; he didn't mean for



it to, but it did. The phone crashed into the dingy plaster, scattering a few flakes then falling to the floor with a clang. The cord, torn from its socket, lashed around like an adder for a half-second before coming to rest.

"Did you dial 9 to get out?" Leila asked when it was over.

He was too far gone even to feel sheepish. It was just one more blow to his psyche at this point. "No," he said stupidly. He went over to the cord and examined it. Sure enough, it had left its little plastic attachment behind. Wires trailed out uselessly.

"Then that's why." She was actually smiling a little now.

"Dammit, Leila—"

"Look, Pete." Her eyes were luminous, bright with exertion and pain. "We don't need them. For all we know, this is the first time this has ever happened. Ever in all history. All it took to make that was you and me."

"Sex I know how to do," he complained.

"We're enough for this too," she persisted. "So come on."

That was the end of that argument. So what if the vampires busted down the door? So what if the manager came in with the roll-aways and got all pissed? He let himself be coaxed back, sinking down at her side. There was a new odor now, the powerful, yeasty smell of birth, mingling with the other scents of mildew and dust and vampire blood and Love My Carpet.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked helplessly.

"Help me breathe."

"Help you breathe?"

"Or whatever! Tell me when to push."

"I think starting now would be a good time."

"No, look and tell me when."

"I'm looking. That bag's in the way. Should I break it?"

"Don't. It'll break itself."

"What if it doesn't? Oh. There it goes. Oh, Jesus... gross."

She strained horribly. The crown of a tiny head peeped out. He could see wisps of black hair, the same shade as his. He thought to himself, it may look like me, but it's not going to be like me. At nine months, it's already tougher. Surviving in a cold womb, finding its own breath and heartbeat with no motherly rhythms to measure itself against. Even unborn it was a hell of a thing, and who knew what it might do once it was out? He cheered it on mentally. *Come on, little whatever-you-are. Come on out for Daddy. Don't know what I'm going to do with you, but let's get this thing going.*

They heard a knock at the door.

He froze. Leila lifted her head, still not quite far enough along to be oblivious.

"The manager?" she whispered.

Pete shook his head. Could be. Could also be their death knocking at the door. Either way, nothing could be done about it.

Then another rapping came at the window, and a voice, faintly audible through the glass. It was a woman's voice. He couldn't make out the words, but Leila's senses were tuned a good deal higher. She listened to it for a minute.

"See who it is," she said.

"What if it's one of them?"

"I don't think it is. Open the door."

"What about you?"

"I'm fine... need to rest in between anyhow."

Far be it from him to go against female intuition at such a time. Pete got up, reluctantly, and opened the door. A young black woman in a turquoise jogging suit hunkered at the window outside, shading her eyes, pressing her nose to the glass. She straightened up immediately.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"Who do you think?" she replied. He made the classic mistake for the second time this week and met her swift glance. She said, "Step aside, honey," and he felt his feet shuffling back so she could step past him into the room. A moment later his body was his own again, but it was too late.

Leila stared at the stranger; lost to modesty, she made no attempt to sit up or compose herself. "You're one of us."

The woman nodded. "I'm one of us. Thin-blooded, like you. Outcast, like you."

Pete instantly felt another surge of adrenaline, but she didn't seem intent on doing anything hostile, so he just stood there and quivered. The woman paced from one end of the room to the other, looking all around.

"And this is it," she murmured. "This is what we saw."

"What are you talking about?" he snapped.

"This was the vision. We've never tried it together before. We had no idea it would be so much clearer. Pissant motel room, no bed. Orange carpet. Leak stain in the far corner." Her gaze followed the items on her checklist, noting each in turn with the same keen appraisal. "Vampire in labor. Clueless mortal boyfriend. Even the broken volume knob on the TV set. This is it."

"What vision? Leila—"

The woman spun around, went back out the open door and shouted: "Boys! This is it! Let's bring in the stuff!"

"What stuff?"

She just smiled over her shoulder and walked away.

Pete ran back to his lover's side, his brain spinning a stunted, frantic network of strategies. Moving a woman in her birthing throes was out of the question. That flimsy door would never stand up to a gang of the undead. The last vampire he'd shot with his pawnshop .38 had actually laughed. But he had a Zippo in his pocket, and somewhere in his duffel bag was a can of spray paint.



As he desperately rummaged through it — amazing how the thing most needed always managed to sink to the bottom — two men appeared at the door. Easier to tell that they were of the undead; they were as chalk-white as Leila. One of them had a bulging grocery bag in his arms. The other held a baby carrier.

They came in and unloaded their bag onto the floor in the middle of the room.

"I think we got everything here," said the older-looking of the two. "Some formula, just in case. Hot plate to warm it up. And some chunky beef stew for Daddy — how long's it been since your last square meal? You can tear the label off and cook it right in the can. Baby blanket...."

"I don't understand," Pete stammered. Leila was in the middle of another prodigious contraction, howling and digging her heels into the carpet. He took her head in his hands and stroked her damp hair. "I don't understand, what are you doing, I don't understand."

"These might want to wait a while...." The woman's imperturbable voice wafted in with the cold air. She had a

tall stack of foil-wrapped presents tucked under her outstretched chin. The men hastened to unburden her. "Sun's coming up soon. And we'll have to hit the road the minute it gets dark again."

"We?"

"Yes, we. You gonna strap a newborn baby to the back of a motorcycle in the freezing rain? And go where? I left this unwrapped." She dangled a plastic hanger on one finger. Tiny, footed pajamas drifted on the winter gusts like a miniature flag. Pink pajamas.

"Who the hell are you?" he snarled, knocking it aside.

She looked at him. Her expression hovered in some ineffable space between pity and beatitude.

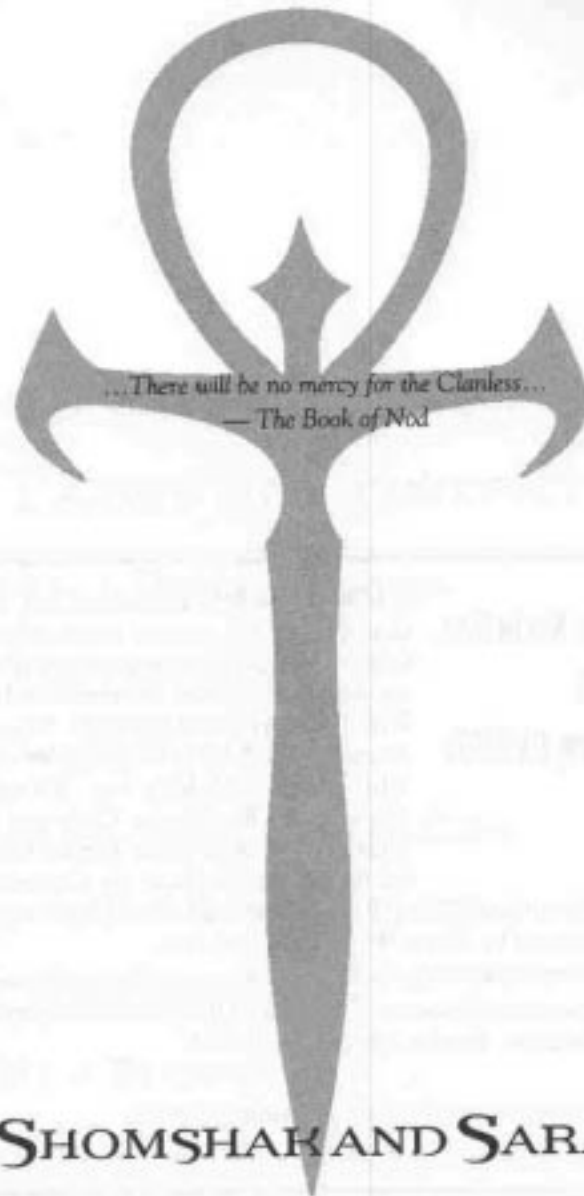
"Santa and his elves," she said at last. "The Three Wise Men. The Tooth Fairy. Does it matter? We're the ones who are here now. The ones who come at the time when we're needed."

She gazed down at Leila, gasping and contorting, at the birth of a new race and not just of the baby hidden in the compass of Leila's belly.


"And it's time."



Time of Thin Blood



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Time of Thin Blood



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INTRODUCTION: THE DARK SEED

But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty...

— 1 Corinthians 1:27

The World of Darkness is a world of giants.

For ages untold, the Kindred have walked that world, mightiest of the giants. The very eldest of them are indistinguishable from gods. The weakest of them can stand against many men. Now safely hidden behind the veil of human skepticism, they have insinuated themselves into every mortal institution. Cities swell under their attentive influence to provide ever more disposable vessels for vampires' endless thirst. Although wise mortals and other desperate creatures fight them every step of the way, they continue to flourish. Nothing seriously threatens the prominence of the undead.

Until now.

In their hubris and selfishness, the Kindred have finally exhausted the eternal Curse of Caine. When a vampire of the 14th generation attempts to create

another of his kind, he has a substantial chance of failing; and even should he succeed, his childe will never be able to sire a childe of her own. Fifteen is the utter limit. The Final Nights are upon us. We have entered the Time of Thin Blood.

THE EVE OF GEHENNA

This book fulfills its title in two different but closely related ways. First, it describes a setting, the world into which thin-blooded vampires find themselves Embraced: Kindred society teetering on the edge of apocalyptic chaos. Second, it describes the thin-blooded themselves, giving an explanation of their nature and role in the World of Darkness as well as mechanics for creating a thin-blooded character.

What is presented here for your delectation is not Gehenna itself. Instead, the idea is to push everything

that much closer to the brink, to sound the echoes that eventually bring the avalanche. This book examines the millennial hysteria presently gripping the Cainite race and provides suggestions for chronicles set on the eve of Gehenna. In other words, it isn't the end, only the beginning of the end.

Things fall apart, as the poem says. Peace and cooperation among the Kindred are historically fragile at best, and it never takes much to make them crumble. Underneath their rational, cynical façades and their smug assurances of superiority, the Kindred are terrified by Noddist prophecy. The Book of Nod tells them that their time is now short. Moreover, it tells them that the very least of their kind, the clanless, thin-blooded masses, will be their undoing. Hemmed in by their own paranoia, they are ready to lash out at any scapegoat, to follow any messiah, to resort to any stratagem. And as omen after omen manifests, things can only get worse.

THE RAZOR'S EDGE

The thin-blooded, vampires of the 14th and 15th Generations, are the oblivious instigators of all this controversy. Their appearance heralds Gehenna. Their weak blood, which often lacks the potency even to bear the full Curse of Caine, earns them the

fear and contempt of other Kindred. Their ignorance of vampire lore and customs makes them strangers not only to their own kind, but also to themselves. Worst of all, a few of them bear the dubious gift of visions. These waking nightmares intimate ancient mysteries and a dire reckoning to come. Possibly, they could be of use in averting the doom of the Earth, but only if the reluctant prophets can survive long enough to decode them....

Make no mistake: The last generations are pathetic weaklings as vampires go. Although, like other clanless, they can sometimes create their own Disciplines, they can attain only middling proficiency in any power of the Blood. Moreover, their diluted vitae can barely sustain their bodies, to say nothing of fueling supernatural feats. Their unique abilities are much more useful for getting them in trouble than out of it. Most thin-blooded know they aren't long for the world; hell, the world isn't long for the world.

However, a thin-blooded character is also a unique roleplaying opportunity. Of all the Kindred, the weaklings are chronologically and biologically closest to humankind. Thus, their temptation is commensurately greater. They walk the razor's edge: On one side is the mortal life they haven't yet had a chance to leave behind; on the other, the Kindred, the deadly and inscrutable immortals who hold the secret to their



new existence. Here is a chance to look at undeath with new, innocent eyes.

Also, despite their outcast status, the thin-blooded are inextricably linked to the changes taking place in the World of Darkness. An anarch or autarkis can remain skulking at the edges of Cainite society for as long as he wishes; few really care. But many thin-blooded, whether they like it or not, find themselves caught up in something far larger than themselves, simply by virtue of their part in the ancient prophecy. They have no power, no control, no answers. What they do have is destiny.

A quick note on vocabulary: Kindred of the clans often use the word *vagrants* as a general term for all those troublesome, benighted vampires who refuse to participate in the traditional order, whether of legitimate or illegitimate siring. Anarchs, autarkis, Caitiff and thin-blooded are all vagrants. The phrase *the vagrant problem* is being bandied about Elysium with increasing frequency as disaster looms ever nearer.

Chapter One: Twice Damned examines the biological reality of what renowned Malkavian sanguinarian Dr. Douglas Netchurch refers to as "Thin Blood Syndrome." It also contains certain rules systems for thin-blooded quirks, such as altered blood point costs and information on the "half-vampire" dhampirs.

Chapter Two: Alas, That Great City explores the social aspects of the Time of Thin Blood. It explains the perspective and the survival strategies of weakling vampires, then discusses the Kindred reaction to the thin-blooded and other portents of doom (the picture is not a pretty one). The scourge — a bloody reincarnation of an ancient Kindred office — is expanded and developed.

Chapter Three: A Stain on the Soul provides mechanics and suggestions for creating vampires of the last generations, as well as systems for the curious power of Insight.

Chapter Four: Written in Red offers concepts and advice to Storytellers for building chronicles set on the eve of Gehenna, particularly with thin-blooded player characters.

Chapter Five: New Blood gives five plug-and-play templates for thin-blooded and dhampir characters.

Finally, the **Appendix: The Week of Nightmare** looks at the terrible toll the Time of Thin Blood has taken on the World of Darkness — and one clan in particular. It seems that Gehenna came early this year for one of the Cainite clans....

Proceed, then, with caution, into the birth of a new and darker age....





CHAPTER ONE: TWICE DAMNED

For a minute I lost myself.
— Radiohead, "Karma Police"

Greetings and felicitations to you, my esteemed patron, and greetings as well to my other sponsors and fellow scholars. Allow me to present this report on my latest research in Kindred physiology. The last two years have been fruitful—more fruitful than I could have guessed when I undertook, at the request of several sponsors, to disentangle the facts and fancies about Thin Blood.

Perhaps because we Kindred do not suffer most of the "shocks that flesh is heir to," the possibility of any sort of handicap assumes a peculiar horror. When that disability lies in the Blood—our vitae itself, the very essence of our being—is it any wonder that rumor should grow? "Thin blood," once rare, has supposedly become common among the youngest and weakest generations of the Kindred. Is it contagious? Could it spread from anarch rabble to honored princes? Fortunately, the research I have conducted and analyzed can dispel the clouds of myth.

(Nota bene: In the interests of keeping this discourse as free from occlusion as possible, I have chosen to relegate the condition of thin blood to lower-case. Henceforth, I shall refrain even from using those dreadful quotation marks. My interests in the matter are scientific rather than prosaic, and I would choose not to burden the audience with affectations.)

Until now, thin blood lacked a precise definition. Different Kindred could mean different things when they spoke of thin blood. For instance, one might call an elder vampire with little influence or force of personality thin-blooded to suggest feebleness or even senility.

More often, however, Kindred use the term to refer to their juniors, in both age and generation. I have met elders who regarded all vampires of the Eighth Generation or higher as thin-blooded. Tonight, thin blood usually refers to neonates of the highest generations, especially Caitiff and anarchs, who abandoned their sires or who were abandoned by them.

As I will show, this popular definition is too broad. Thin Blood Syndrome is a precise vampiric condition. It is not the product of any moral failing, either in sire or child.

WHO HAS THIN BLOOD?

Many speak of so-called "Caitiff" or "clanless" vampires as having thin blood as if the terms were synonymous. This equation is false—though as I will show, Caitiff and Thin Blood Syndrome have a connection. For now, suffice it to say that while many Caitiff genuinely do have Thin Blood Syndrome, others have blood as potent as any other vampire of their generation.



Others refer to all high-generation neonates as thin-blooded. This is merely the prejudice of age and generation against youth. Of course Kindred of the 13th Generation are weaker than Kindred of the Eighth! Of course Kindred sired five years ago are weaker than those sired five centuries ago!

Yet the differences are of degree, not of kind. Only the veriest idiot would read some moral lesson into these simple facts — or dismiss a fellow Cainite as somehow inconsequential, or unworthy of their Blood, because of age and generation. Any prudent vampire realizes that power comes far more from intellect and experience than from innate strength of the Blood. An astute neonate of the 13th Generation makes a far better ally than a fool of the Eighth who has dwelt under his sire's protection for the past century.

Thin Blood Syndrome does correlate strongly to generation, though. Although extremely rare among most vampires, it occurs with some frequency among 12th-through 13th-Generation Kindred and very often among 14th-generation Cainites. Only among 15th-generation Kindred does it become universal.

Permit me, however, to dispel a common misconception. The viscosity of vitae does not change from generation to generation. Although vitae does literally thicken somewhat with age, the difference becomes noticeable only when the vampire is many centuries old.

THE VITAE EFFICACY SCALES

While most Kindred know that some vitae has more intrinsic power than other, until recently no one has quantified this potential. I am indebted to Professor Maxius of Clan Tremere for his Vitae Efficacy scales of measurement, and I refer interested readers to his papers. In brief, Maxius defined five scales:

- **The Starvation Scale:** The test vampire feeds until fully sated. It then goes hungry until it enters torpor from starvation, taking care not to expend vitae upon any other function. All vampires of the same generation take roughly the same number of days to completely starve if they engage in no other use of vitae. Repeated trials produce an average value of high reliability.
- **The Wound Regeneration Scale:** Sated test vampires are repeatedly wounded in the same way, healing the wound each time. Note that one must adhere strictly to experimental protocols, making each wound identical, or one cannot be sure that the same quantity of vitae is expended in healing each wound.

For the most accurate results, test subjects should be forced to continue until they expend all vitae. Maxius found, however, that the change in a test subject's weight before and after regeneration could also be used to measure vitae efficacy: Lower-generation vampires consume a smaller mass of vitae when they heal wounds.

(I also feel some compunction to note that this test is, perhaps, unnecessarily harsh on the subjects, but I do not presume to judge Maxius' personal stake in the matter.)

• **The Might Scale:** Test subjects repeatedly expend vitae to augment their strength. From the number of times participants can increase their strength before exhausting their vitae, or (again) the change in body weight, one can calculate vitae efficacy.

This scale is less reliable. One must quantify each subject's "normal" strength before he heightens his strength. Participants may also augment their strength by different amounts in each trial. Statistically valid results demand many repeated trials.

• **The Discipline Scale:** Sated vampires repeatedly employ some Discipline that consumes vitae, until they reach the point of starvation. This requires, however, that all test subjects know the same Discipline — a condition the experimenter can seldom meet. Usually, the Discipline Scale is useful only to confirm test results from other scales.

• **The Ghoul Scale:** After complete exsanguination of the subject, one determines how many ghouls one can create using the subject's supply of vitae.

My own research confirms Maxius' results. All vampires of the same generation have the same potential for exertion, measured in what Maxius calls "Vitae Efficacy Units" (VEUs). The lower a vampire's generation, the more VEUs it contains — even though by fluid volume, they contain roughly the same quantity of Blood. One can determine a vampire's generation just by measuring the mass of vitae lost in the course of a day's sleep, or in healing a calibrated wound. More importantly, for most vampires the four scales all give the same results.

This is not true for vampires with Thin Blood Syndrome. For vampires of the 14th and 15th Generations, the Vitae Efficacy scales do not always match.

By the Starvation Scale, fully sated vampires of the 13th, 14th and 15th Generations all contain the same number of VEUs. In 10 nights, they reach minimum weight and exhaustion of vitae; on the 11th night, signs of physical deterioration appear; on the 18th night, they enter torpor. Tests using the other scales, however, reveal severe restrictions on vitae usage among 14th and 15th-generation vampires. In the course of testing, three distinct populations emerged.

POPULATION I: "NORMAL" 14TH GENERATION

Even when sated, these vampires could regenerate wounds or augment their strength only eight times before needing to feed again. Despite this, they kept a reserve of two VEUs. They could use this reserve vitae only for the autonomic function of waking each evening. I found no other measurable handicap in this population.

POPULATION II: "THIN-BLOODED" 14TH GENERATION

These Kindred could regenerate or quicken only four times. When they exhausted their ability to use vitae, however, they too kept a reserve of two VEUs, usable only for waking. Careful measurement of changes in body weight while expending vitae revealed the reason for this discrepancy: Kindred of this population expend vitae at double the rate of other vampires. More detailed testing also revealed other handicaps relating to vitae usage.

POPULATION III: "THIN-BLOODED" 15TH GENERATION

These Kindred could regenerate or quicken only three times when fully sated at the start of testing, but kept a reserve of four VEUs, usable only for waking. They, too, expended vitae at double the normal rate.

OTHER HANDICAPS

More detailed testing of my research subjects revealed two other disabilities arising from Thin Blood Syndrome. Anecdotal evidence suggests a third.

GHOULS

The Ghoul Scale proved completely inapplicable to Populations II and III. These vampires could not create or sustain ghouls at all. Population I vampires could sustain ghouls normally, even with their last two "reserve" VEUs.

THE BLOOD BOND

Nor could Population II or III vampires bond mortals to them. Several research subjects eventually volunteered to accept blood bonds from other subjects, in the interests of science. None of the vampires in Populations II or III could blood bond another vampire. Kindred of Population I had no difficulty.

Vampires of all three populations, however, proved equally susceptible to blood bonds from Population I or "normal" vampires. They can be blood bound just like any other Cainite — a reassuring discovery, in view of certain other of their abilities.

Vitae Efficacy Units

Dr. Netchurch has, of course, discovered the blood point. In game terms, vampires who actually have the Thin Blood Flaw have double blood point costs for healing wounds, boosting their physical Attributes and fueling Disciplines (those Disciplines that cost blood points, anyway). The cost for nightly rising, however, remains one blood point. Compared to other vampires, vampires with Thin Blood Syndrome can hardly use their vitae at all!

Alternate Rules

Why do only some vampires of the highest generations have Thin Blood Syndrome? Why not all of them?

Good question. Storytellers who want to make the thin-blooded an important part of their campaign can rule that in their World of Darkness, every 14th-generation vampire has the Thin Blood Flaw (but have a better chance of siring childer — say, 50 percent instead of 20 percent — or there ain't gonna be many 15th-generation vampires!) Or they can rule that only Caitiff receive the compensations of thin blood (personal Disciplines, Insight, etc.), but the generational limit doesn't apply. Or they can rule that only vampires with the actual Thin Blood Flaw get the special benefits. Ultimately, as always, the decision rests in the Storyteller's hands.

would like to determine exact percentages under laboratory conditions. Unfortunately, the concomitant ethical problems make testing very difficult. I will tender a complete report once I have located a large enough supply of suicidal or socially negligible mortals to act as test subjects.

Questioning of thin-blooded subjects also revealed a peculiarity about their own Embraces. As we all know, the change from human to Cainite takes a very short time — usually less than a minute. Several subjects, however, claimed that longer periods passed between their exsanguination and their rising as a vampire. The longest hiatus reported was 15 hours. During this period, as far as their sires could tell, the subjects were dead.

Only one of my Population I subjects claimed such a "delayed Embrace." Three of my Population II subjects did so, as did four of my Population III subjects. (See the appendices for a complete tabulation, but the data set is too small for statistical analysis.)

DISCIPLINES

The highest generations may also have a reduced capacity for developing Disciplines. That none of my test subjects had completely mastered any Discipline is perhaps not surprising, considering their youth. None had been a vampire more than seven years. Among the 15th-generation test subjects, the oldest had spent just 14 months as a vampire. Obviously, none of them had heard of a 14th or 15th-generation vampire ever fully mastering a Discipline. Several reported a rumor or legend that the thin-blooded could master a Discipline only if they lowered their generation through foul diablerie.

I cannot yet corroborate this rumor. To confirm or refute that the thin-blooded can *never* master a Discipline will take many years. The experimenter will have to train numerous thin-blooded subjects for statistically valid results. I cannot add such a program to my research schedule without increased funding and resources. Perhaps some other Kindred eugenicist might take up this challenge?

I can report, however, that the latter generations learn Disciplines more slowly than vampires of lower generation (though not so slowly as a ghoul). I leave it to other researchers, with greater experience at educating childer, to calibrate this deficiency and establish whether it correlates with genuine Thin Blood Syndrome or whether it occurs among all vampires of the highest generations.

THIN BLOOD DEFINED

From these test results, one can construct a precise definition of Thin Blood Syndrome:

- Thin-blooded vampires must expend twice as many VEU's as other vampires to heal wounds, increase their physical prowess or fuel certain Disciplines. (I conjecture that the Might Scale results for strength will also hold for reflexes or resistance to damage. Unfortunately, Maxius has not yet published detailed experimental protocols for measuring these aspects of physical augmentation.)

- Thin-blooded vampires cannot create or sustain ghouls at all.

- Thin-blooded vampires cannot blood bond mortals or other vampires.

- Among thin-blooded vampires, ability to confer the Embrace is greatly reduced, if not completely eliminated.

Populations II and III suffer from Thin Blood Syndrome in full measure. Population I does not. All three populations, however, show certain features in common. I believe that Thin Blood Syndrome merely indicates a deeper change within the highest generations.

THIN BLOOD AND THE CLANLESS

Contrary to popular belief, not all Caitiff fit this proper definition of thin blood. I believe that this misconception arose because so many high-generation vampires do not know their clan ancestry and culture. Some do not even know what a clan is!

THE EMBRACE

Thin Blood Syndrome affects a vampire's ability to Embrace mortals. Two of my "normal" 14th-generation vampires (Population I) had sired childer (one of whom herself became a test subject in my research). One of my Population II subjects claimed that she once tried to sire a childer and failed, killing the unfortunate mortal. Vampires with connections to the anarch and neonate communities report other incidents of 14th-generation vampires failing to sire childer. For Kindred of the 14th Generation, the overall chance of siring a childer seems to lie between 40 and 60 percent. What's more, popular reports claim that 15th Generation vampires cannot sire at all.

I suspect that success at the Embrace would vary between Populations I and II — that Population I vampires could sire with little or no incidence of failure, while Population II would suffer almost certain failure, just like Population III Kindred. I



RESISTANCE TO SUNLIGHT?

I was as skeptical as anyone about tales of “Caitiff rabble” walking by day. I know from experience that even Methuselahs must fear to walk by day: Despite their fantastic resistance to other sorts of damage, the elders may burn within minutes, even on a cloudy day. I can verify this from witnessing my grandsire Addemar’s suicide in 1877. Addemar is said to have taken a cannonball to the chest without harm, but in sunlight he caught fire in 34 seconds and burned to ash 12 seconds thereafter. (Naturally, I estimate those times as accurately as possible.)

As a scientist, however, I keep an open mind and put these stories to the test. I, six local neonates of various generations and several of my high-generation test subjects briefly exposed ourselves to sunlight at various intensities. Only the left hand was so exposed to a narrow beam of sunlight, carried into the laboratory via a fiber-optic cable. Chaining the subjects to vivisection tables eliminated the possibility of phobic reaction (Dörn’s overwrought “Rötschreck”) spoiling the experiment. I must particularly thank my ghoulish assistant, Dr. Reage, for her invaluable help with test subjects who could not stay awake until the experiments. Fortunately, wakefulness or sleep had no discernible effect on test results.

I myself am more than usually resistant to sunlight, having cultivated supra-physiological resilience (what my sire, Trimeggian, dubbed “Fortitude” in *Encyclopædia Hæmovoria*). Despite this, exposure to full sunlight burned my left hand to ash in short order. Most test subjects exhibited similar responses (complete data, with statistical analysis, appears in Appendix Two). Among my 15th-generation test subjects, however — and *only* among them — trauma from sunlight progressed at a slower rate than it did with 14th- or lower-generation test subjects. Later experimentation showed no further evidence of general resistance to other forms of extreme damage among 15th-generation vampires. Chemical combustion damaged their flesh as quickly as it did the tissue of other vampires. Likewise, violent removal of large masses of flesh from limbs or the trunk caused equal reduction of their ability to perform various physical and mental tasks.

I also exposed research subject tissue samples to sunlight. These *in vitro* experiments permit a more precise measurement of 15th-generation resistance to sunlight, since the tissue samples do not struggle, scream or expend vitæ in attempts to regenerate themselves. At high intensities, incineration progressed at almost the same rate as for other vampires. At low intensities, however, incineration took much longer for 15th-generation tissue samples than it did for the flesh of other vampires. If a 15th-generation test subject could stay awake during the *in vivo* tests to augment their resilience with vitæ, they could resist sunlight even longer. For all other vampires, vitæ expenditure does nothing to resist sunlight.

What is more, these subjects could heal the damage as easily as they healed punctures, small incisions, broken bones and other conventional wounds. Theoretically, a 15th-generation vampire with well-developed “Fortitude” might resist a mild exposure to sunlight (as, for instance, on a heavily overcast day) for several minutes, and could easily survive briefer exposures to more concentrated sunlight.

This is hardly the “immunity to sunlight” of popular rumor. As we all know, however, tales grow in the telling. I now have two 15th-generation test subjects repeatedly exposing themselves to low doses of filtered sunlight in an effort to develop their “Fortitude.” In a few years, I hope to provide graphic and incontrovertible proof that 15th-generation vampires can develop such remarkable resistance.

NOVEL DISCIPLINES?

Wild tales of vampires with unknown Disciplines are certainly nothing new. Nor are they confined to rumors about the thin-blooded: In the last two years, some quite absurd stories about the vampires of the Orient have gained wide circulation. Until recently, these “new Disciplines” proved elusive. Like the vanishing hitchhiker or the poodle in the microwave, they were always seen by a friend of a friend, never in an Elysium with a dozen reputable witnesses. (I refer interested parties to my sire’s attempts to locate a vampire with the alleged Discipline of “Bardo.” He concludes that the Discipline does not exist.) How could one believe that a neonate should generate a new Discipline, when even Methuselahs find it a labor of centuries, if at all possible?

(Again I refer to the work of my sire, who concluded that our dead flesh and static states rendered such creation impossible. Although I have noticed aberrations in the greater condition of vampires, particularly those of the high generations — see below — vampires do seem to be inclined toward stasis rather than evolution.)

Almost a third of my research subjects, however, clearly displayed “Discipline” powers not described in *Encyclopædia Hæmovoria*. These occurred in all three populations. Allow me to describe three of the more interesting cases. (For complete descriptions, see Appendix One. All names are pseudonyms to protect the privacy of research subjects.)

The “New” Disciplines

Some of these are actually Disciplines from other supplements. “Jason” and “Jeff” have Sanguinis, described in the Guide to the Sabbat. “Jinx” comes from the Dark Ages Discipline of Maleficia, described in Dark Ages Companion. See below for more on using “old” but obscure Disciplines and Thaumaturgical Paths as “new” Disciplines for the thin-blooded to invent.

"Carlos," a 14th-generation Ventrue (Population II), preferred to feed from sleeping vessels as a matter of convenience (in my lab, of course, this is no longer necessary). He developed a literal hypnotic power, putting mortals to sleep simply by staring at them for a minute or so. This ability does not require verbal interaction or any awareness of Carlos' presence on the victim's part.

"Jason" and "Jeff," twin 14th-generation Caitiff (Population I) who share a blood bond, can heal each other's wounds from more than 50 meters away, so long as they can see each other. They claim they discovered this ability within a month after their Embrace. In the course of experimentation, they also found they could make external body parts such as arms or eyes vanish from one of them and appear on the other's body. (As yet, they have not found any use for this power more constructive than, as they put it, "grossing out" my other subjects and research staff. Not all these anomalous powers are useful.)

"Mary," a 15th-generation Caitiff (Population III) and enthusiastic gambler, had an unusually subtle power. She could guarantee her victory in any game of chance... or rather, she could guarantee her opponent's defeat. More than that, she found she could make anyone fail in their next clearly defined task, if it had any aspect of chance or uncertainty of success. For instance, she could not make a pair of dice roll a specific number but she *could* make a person lose a bet about whether the next number would be even or odd. Her mark bet wrong more than 90 percent of the time. In the same manner, when she concentrated on a target-shooter who normally hit a bull's-eye at a given distance 70 percent of the time, his accuracy dropped to less than 10 percent.

Nor were these the occasional freaks of vampire physiology, neither teachable nor heritable, that one sometimes encounters among the Kindred. I myself have learned Carlos' "Sleep Whammy." Jason and Jeff have taught their wound-healing trick to another pair of mutually blood bound Cainites. Mary, alas, met Final Death before she could share her probability-influencing "Jinx" with me and so render my research self-supporting (or rather, involuntarily funded by Las Vegas and Monte Carlo).

The evidence is overwhelming. The thin-blooded can create new Disciplines, obviously, and other vampires can learn them. According to my sire, vampires who devise new Disciplines once received the title of *inceptors*. Hitherto, only Antediluvians and other elders of low generation received this honorific. Despite the outrage to sensibilities — and my sire became quite voluble when I made the suggestion to him — we shall have to get used to speaking of thin-blooded, neonate inceptors.

CLAIRVOYANCE?

Rumors of "Caitiff prophets" and thin-blooded "seers" have become nearly as common as tales of anomalous Disciplines. This rumor has proved more difficult to confirm or refute.

To date, four of my research subjects have claimed that they experience prophetic dreams, clairvoyant visions or simply hunches which proved uncannily accurate. They have grouped all these phenomena under the label of "insight." Such claims actually seemed quite plausible. Initially, I believed that they had developed the Discipline my sire has dubbed (uncharacteristically poetically) *Auspex*, but did not understand its significance.

Standard tests for *Auspex*, however, failed to show the characteristic powers so carefully catalogued by my sire and familiar to so many of us. Only one subject could augment sight and hearing to superhuman levels. None could perceive auras. All failed at the Zener card tests that would have shown use of telepathy or remote viewing.

My secondary hypothesis was another new Discipline, perhaps a variation of *Auspex* appearing widely throughout the thin-blooded population. With the assistance of the local Skeptics' Society, Dr. Reage developed several tests for precognition and clairvoyance. Once more, results fell below a statistically significant rate of success, well within the range of mere chance.

Test subject "Wendy" claimed that her so-called "insight" only dealt with the present, past and future of other vampires. At this point, I confess I suspected the "cold reading" tricks employed by mortal fortunetellers to dupe the gullible. (I myself can perform cold readings of other people's history, character and interests. These seem quite astonishing to persons who do not appreciate how a trained observer can extract information from even the tiniest clues. An ability to pull information from "nowhere" is claimed for the Discipline called *Dementation*, which has now become all too well known — but I of course do not practice that Discipline.)

During a visit by two ancillae, however, three of my self-proclaimed "seers" spontaneously made shocking claims about the visitors' past activities and connections to senior Kindred. As my patron well knows, these claims not only greatly upset both visitors, it led to the murder of one, the execution of the other as the killer, and the current prosecutions by the scourge. (May I share my outrage over the accusations of treason against your dear childe. I cannot believe them and am sure that investigation will lead to full exoneration.) Still, the investigations have borne out most of the specific claims by my "seers."

One demonstration, however, does not constitute proof. The entire situation could have been a setup, with information hypnotically implanted in my subjects' minds by parties unknown, precisely to cause such turmoil.

Subsequent attempt to evoke this insight proved inconclusive at best, blatant failures at worst — with one exception. Dr. Reage suggested that the stringent protocols against tampering used in solo tests might have an intimidating, negative effect on test subjects. A more sympathetic group setting might cause less anxiety and give better results. Although this smacked of the "bad vibes from skeptics" that psychics use to explain away their failures, it seemed worth trying at least once. Dr. Reage

also suggested using the placebo effect — some harmless flimflam — to increase the subjects' confidence. Normally I dislike deceiving my test subjects, but Dr. Reage supplied abundant precedent for such techniques in psychological research.

My honored sire, Trimeggian, paid one of his all-too-rare visits just before the *séance*. With his permission, I made him part of my "placebo." Before the test, all four subjects consumed blood that, unbeknownst to them, contained a small dose of ketamine. In mortals, this drug produces a dreamy, suggestive state; in a blood solution, it has much the same effect on vampires. The subjects and my sire sat in a circle around a table. I told the subjects that my sire would use his awesome mastery of Auspex to open their minds to the future. My sire then sonorously counted to 10 in Old Church Slavonic as I lowered the lights.

Seldom have I seen such shared concentration. I must confess to a moment of superstitious dread as my four "seers" cried out the name "Lamdiel!" in perfect unison. Still speaking as one, they described a small lake surrounded by mountains — then three owls sitting together on a tree branch — and then a naked youth rising from the waters beneath a blood-red moon.

As is well known, the power to read minds seldom works upon one's fellow Kindred. Nevertheless, I made a supreme effort and was rewarded with success. I entered the minds of my "seers" and... I saw. I saw the youth — a boy in his early teens — cast a silver butterfly at a great tower marked with a rose, and the tower falling. I saw myself standing beside my sire Trimeggian as the cast-iron door to his sanctum broke into thousands of scuttling beetles. I saw my sire's precious books take wing as birds, as the youth stepped through the doorway, blood dripping from his hands. I saw him pick us up — we were no larger than mice — and swallow us whole.

I beg my readers to forgive any lapse from scientific objectivity. It was a shattering experience. Severe as it was for myself, it left my seers (I can no longer use the quotation marks of doubt) in torpor. One has not woken up yet.

Let me repeat that I still have only anecdotal evidence for this prophetic power of "insight." In science, no single eyewitness report can constitute proof. We must have reproduction of results, or at least some sort of corroboration. Trimeggian hopes to prove the vision's worth by finding the Lake of Three Owls and that youth, his grandsire, Lamdiel, whose portrait he inherited from his sire, Addemar. Yet I fear the search will prove futile, and we will know the vision's truth only when it is far too late to take action.

ANOMALOUS BIOLOGICAL ACTIVITY

The final aspect of Thin Blood Syndrome seems to have escaped popular report. If my research subjects are typical, most thin-blooded know so little about the Cainite condition that they do not recognize their own anomalies. Other Kindred notice the highest generations' vitae handicaps and strange paranormal powers. They miss the subtler effects of Thin Blood Syndrome. I, however, have made *detailed* observations of the thin-blooded for two years, under a wide variety of physiological stresses. As a result, I have discovered a phenomenon so unprecedented as to call into doubt our most fundamental understanding of the Curse of Cain.

The stasis of our corporeal form is so well known to us that we often ignore it. It is a truism that we Cainites do not age; more than that, our bodies do not change at all, except for a slight increase in pallor as the centuries pass. When we awaken each night, our bodies have restored themselves to the *exact* condition and appearance they held on the first night of the Embrace. Mortals grow and age; we do not.

(I can attest to the power of this stasis. As a neonate, newly entered upon my trademark research, I undertook to remove a tattoo from a fellow Cainite, a former sailor who found the vulgar mark hindering his new courtly ambitions. In the end, I had to excise nearly a pound of flesh to keep the tattoo from reappearing on his regenerated skin.)

Thus, when I noticed that research subject "Jason" bore an unaccustomed five-o'clock shadow on rising one evening, I suspected one of his jokes. When I told him to "wash off that fake stubble," however, he seemed genuinely surprised to find it there. I am ashamed to say that we exchanged heated words, but in the end Jason appealed to my scientific objectivity, inviting me to inspect his whiskers for myself. Words cannot convey my surprise when I discovered that Jason spoke the truth!

My second hypothesis, that a Tzimisce impostor moved among my staff, I rejected within moments. If a flesh-altering Fiend had infiltrated my laboratory, it would have struck in a far deadlier manner. I was left with the improbable — insane! — conclusion that, as he slept during the day, Jason had indeed started growing a beard.

The most minute examinations on subsequent nights showed no further activity of Jason's follicles, but from then on I kept special watch for other evidence of transitory metabolic processes among my thin-blooded subjects. Over the following six months, I found several instances of anomalous biological activity. Specifically, I found five instances of hair or beard growth by up to two millimeters; three instances of nail growth by half a millimeter; three instances of perspiration (mortal sudation, not the "blood sweat" we Kindred sometimes experience under extreme stress); two instances of sun-tanning; and one menstrual period. Three instances involved more than one form of biological activity. (See the case studies in Appendix Three for details.)

As the case studies show, each biological episode followed a period of intensive vitae expenditure. Five occurred during or shortly after convalescence from vivisection. Four occurred when the subject repeatedly fed to repletion then expended vitae to exhaustion as part of Vitae Efficacy Unit testing. The remaining two episodes (the sun-tanning) occurred during the sunlight exposure tests. All biological episodes lasted less than 12 hours. Four episodes occurred among 14th-generation test subjects and seven among the 15th generation.

My patron may well wonder why I make so much of these petty examples of cellular activity. I know that many Cainites not only accept their corporeal stasis, they come to find mortal physiological processes faintly repulsive. A slight growth of beard may seem trivial. At most, does it not further show the weakness of the highest generations' blood, that it cannot completely prevent change? In my research, however, I found two other forms of anomalous biological activity in a thin-blooded vampire. One such instance was *not* of short duration, and its consequences were far from trivial.

THE DHAMPIR

I come now to perhaps the most surprising and momentous discovery in my researches — perhaps the most astounding discovery in the history of the research of Kindred physiology.

Last year, one of my correspondents reported that the Kindred of Cleveland were in an uproar about a masterless ghoul. As you know from my past reports, such creatures exist in greater numbers than most Kindred care to believe. My correspondent brought this young ghoul to my attention because he seemed not to require monthly infusions of vitae to maintain his unnatural state. She hoped I could explain this impossibility.

I immediately recognized the creature as a revenant, a hereditary ghoul. (I have never traced the origin of this odd misnomer. I leave that task to the etymologists of our kind.) In case the passing of time has dimmed my patron's redoubtable memory, I shall summarize my last report.

On very rare occasions, a ghoul conceives a child and bears it to term — most fetuses miscarry upon the mother's ingestion of blood. Such a child, continuously exposed to Kindred vitae while in its mother's womb, might not only be born already ghouled, but may sustain that peculiar state by itself, without consumption of Kindred vitae.

If such anomalies breed amongst themselves, their children may become self-sustaining ghouls in turn. The loathsome Tzimisce have bred families of such "revenants" for more than a thousand years. To date, I have only examined specimens from two families of this unusual race, the Bratovitches and Zantos. Only one revenant, a Mr. Zantosa, has participated in a detailed series of examinations. (My attempts to breed a revenant of my own have so far met with failure. I suspect that the process may involve other factors as yet unknown.) The prospect of another revenant to examine did much to assuage my lingering grief at Mr. Zantosa's demise. Fortunately, my immediate missive to the Prince of Cleveland proved influential enough to prevent this new revenant's execution.

For several months, young "Michael Smith" (not his real name) proved an enthusiastic associate. His willing participation in all vivisection, once its purpose was clearly explained, puts the lie to claims that the younger generation of mortals has no interest in science! I am sure that his unannounced departure during the day was due to urgent and unavoidable responsibilities elsewhere.

Every test I conducted indicated that Michael was indeed a revenant. Although carefully monitored to prevent any chance of him ingesting Cainite vitae, he displayed typical ghoul characteristics, including the ability to augment muscular strength, reflexes, pain resistance and healing. Under my tutelage, he not only learned to resist the effects of grave somatic damage (i.e., Fortitude), he learned to extend his senses, thus gaining the rudiments of Auspex. A meritorious boy, indeed.

Despite claims that he felt "different" and set apart, Michael seemed in most ways a normal, contemporary American teenager. (Dr. Reage assures me that such feelings of alienation are virtually universal at Michael's age.) He displayed none of the mental aberrations which at times strained my relations with Mr. Zantosa. Michael claimed, however, that his mother was a vampire. Not a ghoul who served a vampire, but a vampire herself.

In full, Michael said that his father alone raised him in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio. He would never speak of Michael's mother. When "Mr. Smith" remarried, Michael found the changed domestic situation unpleasant and ran away to nearby Cleveland in search of his other parent. He found her, and she revealed her secret to him as an explanation for why he was "different." Her naive attempts to introduce him to Kindred society brought about the uproar that brought him to my attention.

I investigated despite the manifest absurdity of the claim: A scientist must always remain open to startling claims, at least when concrete evidence is promised. I verified the identity of Michael's father, a drugstore manager in Cuyahoga Falls. "Mr. Smith" denied any peculiarity in his first wife, but I swiftly recognized the signs of memory alteration. When I removed the mnemonic blocks, he confirmed Michael's story.

His first wife, he said, was indeed a vampire. As with so many American families, however, the birth of a child strained their relationship (which must have been rather odd to begin with), and they separated. In a praiseworthy show of concern for the Masquerade, "Mrs. Smith" blurred her ex-husband's memory, leaving him with the belief that she had merely pursued a nocturnal lifestyle whose peculiarity became intolerable. I myself find such mind-tampering morally repugnant, but when I explained my quandary to "Mr. Smith" he quite rationally accepted the importance of the Masquerade for both Kindred and kine. In a stunning display of altruism, he adopted his own conclusive solution to the problem. I salute his memory.

All that remained was to locate the former "Mrs. Smith" in Cleveland. Alas, she met Final Death the week before I arrived, executed by the same scourge who had harassed her son. (Let me tell you, I gave the self-important fool a few stern

words when I found out.) Queries among the rabble of Cleveland's Kindred, however, confirmed the identity of "Mrs. Smith" as a vampire, believed to be of the 15th generation. I must regard Michael's remarkable parentage as proven.

It appears, therefore, that two processes may generate revenants. They may be "bred up" from ghouls. Alternatively, revenants may be "bred down" from vampires. For reasons I shall explain below, I believe this can happen only among vampires of the 15th Generation.

To prevent confusion, such offspring ought to have a distinctive name of their own. The Gypsies of the Balkan region have legends of such creatures; they call them dhampirs. Although these legends are surely mere coincidence — perhaps even the result of old disinformation to protect the Masquerade — I propose using this name for the living offspring of vampires. It is a name we shall need: Michael may well be the first dhampir, but as the thin-blooded proliferate, he will not be the last.

I very much hope Michael returns to me. I must confess to a certain avuncular or even parental regard, particularly now that he is an orphan. I console myself that Michael and his father had already severed their relationship.

TOWARD A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Granted: The thin-blooded have both special handicaps and special abilities. Their appearance in the highest generations can hardly be mere coincidence. Thin Blood Syndrome is no mere disease, however; it is a change in the nature of the Cainite race. It raises deep questions about the nature of the Curse of Caine itself. For example:

Why has Thin Blood Syndrome appeared in the highest generations?

Why can the highest generations manifest new Disciplines and the prophetic or clairvoyant ability of insight?

Where do seers get their visionary information?

What is the precise nature of the power within our vitae, and the peculiar physical stasis it maintains?

How can the thin-blooded break that stasis — enough that some of them can have children?

My conclusions are necessarily tentative. I present them as hypotheses to guide further investigation rather than as definitive answers. True comprehension of the highest generations will require decades of labor. I hope we have those decades to spend on the quest.

GENERATIONAL MUTATION

Dramatic though the differences between thin-blooded and normal vampires may be, we know of other generational schisms, equally dramatic, within the Cainite race. To wit:

In the Third Generation, the Cainite race divided into clans. Caine himself had no clan. According to the *Book of Nod*, our ancestor knew all Disciplines and had no specific, identifiable weakness. He merely endured the vulnerabilities to sunlight, fire, *et cetera*, that all of his progeny now share. Legends of the Second Generation speak of them as "Enoch the Wise, Irad the Strong and Zillah the Beautiful" but do not specify any difference in their abilities. (One of my test subjects argues that Caine and his direct childer fulfill the technical definition of Caitiff. An amusing conceit.)

The division into clans parallels a phenomenon from evolutionary biology called *cladism*. In this process, one species evolves into a cluster of related species. The process occurs when geography or habitat divide the parent stock. Darwin's finches on the Galapagos Islands are the most famous example. A parent species of finch from South America split into more than a dozen new species in the islands, each one adapted to live off a different food source, in a different habitat.

Of course, no comparable process operates on vampires. Evolution by natural selection requires hundreds of generations to produce a new species. Cainite inheritance, however, is Lamarckian rather than Darwinian. Acquired characteristics very often pass to our childer, permitting a different sort of evolution that can proceed far more rapidly. Witness the phenomenon of minuscule bloodlines such as the Daughters of Cacophony. My sire also documented large-scale changes within entire clans that result from selection of childer for the Embrace and one Discipline becoming favored over others (once more, see the *Encyclopaedia Haemovoria* for details).

Legend attributes some clan origins to a curse from Caine (the Nosferatu are the most familiar example). Other clans, however, have no such legend; nor do their Discipline affinities or distinctive weaknesses make much sense as punishments for ancient offenses. I have never met Toreador who regarded their obsession with beauty as a curse. An inconvenience at times, yes, but one they bore gladly. Much clan "speciation" seem to derive from nothing more than the ruling passions of their Antediluvian founders, fixed in the Blood.

Some may consider speciation into clans suspect on grounds that we cannot prove the historical existence of Caine, the Second Generation or even the Third. Some revisionist scholars even argue that Caine is mythical and that the Antediluvians were the true First Kindred. Others go further and cast doubt on the Antediluvians too, arguing that if we do not need a single progenitor to explain the Kindred race as a whole, we do not need a single ancestor for each clan either. Be that as it may; such arguments lie beyond my competence to judge.

Skeptics may also argue that even if Caine and the Antediluvians existed, our inability to examine them and quantify their abilities renders them inadmissible as evidence for a scientific inquiry. I can only bow my head and reply that parabiological literature is scant. The researcher can only refer to what he has available — even compilations of legends such as the *Book of Nod*. The skeptic is also referred to Heinrich Schliemann's excavation of Troy, an archaeological triumph guided only by the "legends" of Homer.

(I have included the prior statements at risk of offending my patron, yet I have done so out of scientific necessity. I am well aware of my patron's — and indeed, the Camarilla's — argument against the existence of "Antediluvians," yet my work by nature requires some point of genesis for the Cainite race. Believe me, if I had the option of discarding such unpalatable theories as "Biblical curse," I would, yet nothing in my research has indicated otherwise. Until such time comes as I can cast such florid nonsense aside, I must indulge what little faith I have left.)

A more serious objection is that speciation has continued after the Third Generation. I cannot deny this. In some cases, one can trace so-called bloodlines to still-extant elders (see, for instance, my sire's case study of the obscure Kiasyd lineage and its inceptor, Prince Marconius of Strasbourg). Speciation among *every member* of the Third Generation, however, points to a fundamental shift in the nature of the Cainite race.

The second wide-scale disjunction among Cainites comes with the Eighth Generation. All vampires of lower generation can, given time, create at least one or two variations on powers within their Disciplines. Many Cainites regard this as the true measure of Discipline mastery. Vampires of Eighth and higher generations, however, lose this ability. Such vampires can manifest only a limited range of powers within each Discipline — as my sire has proved, the same range of powers, for every vampire who learns that Discipline. This mutation occurs in every clan, whenever a Seventh Generation vampire sires a childe. It must be something intrinsic to the Blood and the Embrace itself.

With two such examples before us, is it so remarkable that a wide-scale speciation should occur again? The changes at the Third and Eighth Generations both imposed limits upon our race, a restriction of abilities. The change responsible for the highest generations at least has its compensations. The Blood has lost much in power, but has gained much in versatility.

As further evidence, I point to the Caitiff. I have examined several dozen Caitiff of the 11th, 12th and 13th Generations. *Only one* Caitiff manifested an unusual Discipline — in contrast with the nearly 30 percent of my highest-generation test subjects — and she had damning black veins in her aura. She eventually confessed to reaching the 12th generation through diablerie (and, may I inform my other readers, she has met her well-deserved fate from her prince). Nor have I found a vampire of 13th Generation (or lower) who had insight. The evidence strongly suggests that Discipline creation and insight are *unique* to vampires of the highest generations.

(Is the mass appearance of Caitiff in these latter nights another aspect of generational adaptation? I believe so, but the connection is not so strong or certain. Most Caitiff — of any generation — apparently do have neglectful or grotesquely ignorant sires. Such disgraceful Kindred could hardly have trained their own childer properly in the ways of their kind. On the other hand, mere ignorance does not suffice as an explanation. In these sorry latter nights, childer of surprisingly low generation are sired and abandoned, or they run away. Yet these vampires rarely become Caitiff. What is more, many within the grisly Sabbat actively repudiate their clan culture and sire with wild abandon... but the brave souls who dare to study the Sabbat report no wholesale breakdown of clan identity into Caitiff mongrelism at every generation. The weakening of the Blood certainly predisposes the siring of Caitiff, but it seems that good training can compensate until the highest generations.)

If one grants that certain "mutations" automatically appear as the Blood weakens with each generation from Caine, one must ask: What is mutating? What, exactly, is it in the Blood that carries the Curse of Caine and how does it transform kine into Kindred?

THE NATURE OF THE EMBRACE

I am sure my readers all remember their own Embrace. I shall never forget when my sire gave me death and immortality. The Embrace is so transcendent (for both sire and childe) that few truly scientific studies of it have ever been done (I believe a number of Tzimisce study it intensely, but I would hardly call their lunatic experiments scientific). Divine or diabolical the Embrace may be — or both — but that does not mean we must close our eyes in holy awe and refuse to gaze upon it. The light of scientific truth will never strike us blind for our presumption.

Something passes to the childe from the sire's vitae, but what? Pure biology cannot explain the transformation from kine to Kindred. No virus could spread through the nascent childe's body so rapidly, or wreak such a profound metamorphosis. Nor has any study of vitae, however detailed, identified any distinctive chemical or biological agent that could cause the Embrace. In a physical sense, vitae consists of nothing more than the degraded remains of cells, platelets and other components of mortal blood. The agent that transforms mortal blood into immortal vitae cannot be material at all.

Kine science knows only about *Matter* and *Energy*. It does not accept the idea of "spiritual" entities. (And it will not, so long as my distinguished colleagues retain their influence in mortal academia. No matter how much we might enjoy a wider collaboration with our mortal colleagues, the Masquerade must come first.) We Kindred, however, know from abundant personal experience about whole other categories of being. When I project my sensorium out of my body, instantly sending it to a location hundreds of miles away, I cannot deny that consciousness may exist apart from corporeality. When I meet another such psychic traveler and tap him on the shoulder, I must even accept the existence of the soul as a vehicle for consciousness distinct from the body.

Therefore, the lack of any physical agent does not push the Embrace beyond the reach of science. The Embrace merely draws science into new fields of inquiry, into the nature of the soul and its interactions with the body. It would seem that the tiny quantity of vitae given in the Embrace is merely a physical vehicle for a spiritual agent of tremendous power.

Although no physical virus passes from sire to childe, viral infection remains a fruitful metaphor for the Embrace. A virus invades a cell, usurps its genetic predisposition, and thereby transforms the cell into a birthing chamber for more viruses, which can infect other cells in turn. Viruses are also used in genetic engineering to implant benign genes, such as a gene to make insulin. In a similar way, I hypothesize that the Embrace passes a spiritual "virus" from the sire to the childe. This transfusion of supernatural force swiftly transforms the childe's body and soul.

I need not dwell on the obvious changes to the body. The changes to the soul are equally dramatic, imposing the ferocious instincts we personify as the Beast. My ghoulish colleague Dr. Reage has made extensive study of the Beast; allow me to summarize her papers on the subject.

Dr. Reage sees no justification for viewing the Beast as a demonic force intruding on the psyche from outside. Its source is, unfortunately, all too human. Normal, properly socialized humans keep their vicious, instinctual "dark side" suppressed. No matter how heinous the acts *some* mortals may commit, *most* humans do not go about killing, robbing and raping each other — but the urges do exist. Freud dubbed these repressed instincts and personality traits the Id. Dr. Reage prefers C. G. Jung's term: the Shadow.

In the Embrace, the Shadow gains a terrible, monomaniacal power. The conscious mind can no longer fully repress it. Among mortals, the Shadow can actually evolve into a complex personality in its own right. Among Kindred, however, the Shadow seems to concentrate into hunger, rage and a primordial fear of fire and sunlight, the forces that most swiftly destroy our kind. In some ways these instincts act to protect the vampire, but the Beast's inability to plan, negotiate or engage in any sort of rational or social activity renders it deeply dysfunctional. Dr. Reage speculates that therapy on the Jungian model might help Cainites and ghouls re-integrate the Beast and thereby weaken it — but that is a subject for another paper.

On the other hand, the infected, mutated soul gains tremendous paranormal powers. Our Disciplines (so many of them explicitly psychic, concerned with influencing the mind or soul of others) can have no other source: In most cases, no physiological change at all occurs in a vampire using a Discipline. Most Disciplines do not even involve moving the Blood about. Nor is it the heart that pushes the Blood into our limbs when we heighten our physical prowess.

The viral metaphor continues: The childe's abilities resemble the sire's. One cannot deny the importance of temperament and early training in determining a childe's propensity for various Disciplines, but one also cannot deny the power of the Blood. My research subjects prove that well enough: "Carlos," for instance, knew nothing of clans, but I could identify him as a Ventrue from his inability to consume blood that did not come from a Hispanic vessel (see my previous paper on clan identification for the double-blind procedures used).

The "vampire virus," however, never replicates perfectly. Each infected soul carries less power than the soul that infected it. This culminates with the 15th Generation, where the "Curse of Caine" becomes so weak that it cannot transmit itself at all.

The "virus" can mutate, as well. I have already mentioned the oddly "pre-programmed" changes at certain generations. Rare mutations also cause new "bloodlines" to appear. Exposure to powerful, paranormal forces seems to cause at least some of these spontaneous "mutations." (The Kiasyd's founder, for instance, is said to have mutated from consuming large quantities of "faerie blood" — if one can believe such rusticism.)

The viral model also seems to explain many traits of ghouls. The "virus" can also infect the souls of living beings and at least partly mutate them. Living beings, however, seem far less susceptible. Neither body nor soul change so radically. On the one hand, although the soul can prevent the ghoul from aging, normal physiological and metabolic functions also continue. Since the ghoul's body does not transform so drastically, ghouls lack Kindred vulnerabilities to fire and sunlight. On the other hand, the ghoul receives far less paranormal power. The ghoul's domitor must even re-infect it at least once a month. Apparently, the connection to a living body grants the soul an "immune system" that eventually purges the supernatural virus.

The soul of a developing embryo, however, may be much weaker. Someone ghouled from conception — or whenever it is that the soul first manifests — might gain a permanent partial infection. (Let me repeat that unknown factors might influence whether or not this occurs.) Such an individual is a revenant. A dhampir such as "Michael" would gain the infection from his vampiric mother. If, as I suspect, a male vampire can father a dhampir child on a mortal woman, the virus would travel in the father's semen.

The viral hypothesis raises many unanswered questions. For instance, can one create an analogue to a vaccine? This would render a mortal impossible to ghoul or Embrace (though the benefit to the mortal is dubious at best). Can some process induce the permanent low-level infection of a revenant or dhampir in a mortal adult? Can one re-infect vampires to change their clan or remove Blood-borne weaknesses? I suspect that at least some Nosferatu and Samedi might like to "transfuse" to another clan, as it were, and regain their human appearance. Can the Embrace even be reversed? I myself have no faith in or desire for a "cure," but a serum to change vampires back into mortals would be a powerful yet oddly *humane* weapon against one's rivals.

UNDEAD OR UNALIVE?

The most obvious explanation for our peculiar nature, then, is that the infected, transformed and empowered soul animates the new vampire's body. Without that animating force, a vampire's body is merely a cadaver. The soul likewise prevents decay (or suspends the body at an appearance of advanced decay, in the case of the Samedi) and repairs any damage

that does not cause Final Death outright. This has been the conventional wisdom. Certainly, the body of a vampire who has projected its soul elsewhere greatly resembles a corpse. But is this view accurate?

The instances of biological activity among the thin-blooded cast doubt upon this interpretation. Even the mightiest Methuselah cannot grow his hair by so much as a millimeter. The flesh-warping Tzimisce are no exceptions: They transform tissues without any real metabolism. Supposedly, the Tremere know rites to restore a semblance of life in various ways. Until Clan Tremere consents to let Kindred science scrutinize these rites, I will presume that they do not involve any genuine biological activity either. So how can the thin-blooded break a stasis against which even a Methuselah struggles in vain?

That a *weakened* curse should permit the fires of life to flicker again, however faintly or briefly, suggests another possible interpretation: We are not cadavers animated in a semblance of life, but still-living creatures held in a deathly stasis by the Curse.

Some readers may consider this a "half-empty/half-full" distinction. We receive the Embrace when we hover at the point of death... but even for mortals, death itself proves surprisingly hard to define. The tissues of the body do not die at once and all together. Under optimum conditions, a person can seem utterly dead for more than an hour yet medical science can revive her. It appears that we Cainites truly are caught in a perpetually arrested death, neither truly alive nor truly dead.

In the thin-blooded, the Curse of Caine cannot hold the body in perfect stasis. This is no mere speculation on my part. Study of their cells shows that the thin-blooded are still at least partly alive, but with a greatly retarded metabolism.

Every Kindred scholar knows the difficulties of studying vampire tissues *in vitro*. Without constant infusion of vitae, they tend to rot or crumble into dust. With a specially constructed microscope, however, one can examine tissues while they are still in the body. I chose the inside of the cheek for initial examination: In mortals, cheek cells reproduce constantly (they are also conveniently large). Each night, each test subject had one cheek split and everted. Teams of assistants watched continuously through the microscopes. Not a night went by without at least one cell caught in the act of mitosis.

Nor are cheek cells the only ones demonstrated to reproduce. In subsequent experiments, fingernails were removed so the fast-growing cells at the base of the nail could be observed. Here too, scattered mitosis takes place in the thin-blooded.

Admittedly, cell reproduction proceeded at a much slower rate than in mortals. Processes that mortal cells accomplish in minutes, require hours for the thin-blooded. I have documented dozens of Kindred cell reproductions using time-lapse photography; I will send copies to those who are interested.

This hypothesis still has one great flaw: When the thin-blooded meet Final Death, they crumble into dust just like any other vampire. I can only speculate that however the Curse of Caine holds back the effects of time and entropy, the soul's permanent departure causes some sort of entropic backlash. I find it significant that while a dead ghoul crumbles to dust only if it has built up many decades of deferred aging, a neonate who meets Final Death a few nights after the Embrace disintegrates as thoroughly as the most superannuated elder.

Once more, these slender results suggest remarkable possibilities. Is it only the thin-blooded in whom cell reproduction continues? Or does this take place in all vampires — but at an even more retarded rate? The technical difficulties of documenting a mitosis that might take decades to complete are formidable indeed. Yet some night, somehow, the experiment must be done. Whether we Kindred exist in a state of arrested life rather than arrested death might seem like philosophical hairsplitting, redolent of angels and pins. May I remind my readers that the divisibility of the atom once seemed like an obscure trifle as well?

If nothing else, the half-*living* state of the thin-blooded renders the dhampir somewhat less miraculous. If a vampire's body tissues can revive for a short time, it becomes conceivable that they may reactivate for a long time. If a cheek cell or hair follicle can revive, then why not a womb?

I am the first to admit that it is a great leap from a few hours of hair growth to nine months of pregnancy. (The late "Mr. Smith" testified to "Michael's" length of gestation. I cannot explain why a ghoul's pregnancy should triple or quadruple in length — assuming it does not terminate — when "Mrs. Smith's" did not.) I can only speculate that the living embryo itself somehow prolongs the vivification of the womb. I regard Dr. Reage's comment never to underestimate the power of the maternal instinct as needlessly flippant.

Five of my female test subjects have agreed to try conceiving children. I know of a local procurator whose gigolos would make adequate (and, if necessary, disposable) sperm donors. I require only an assurance of continued funding to begin the experiment.

I would also like to try breeding a dhampir the other way, so to speak. For a somewhat higher fee, the procurator will permit me to retain several of his "girls" *in situ* on an extended basis. My experiments in conscious reactivation of biological function led to the final instance of anomalous biological activity. Male vampires of the 15th generation (but no others) can produce a sort of semen containing motile (and, I assume, viable) sperm suspended in vitae.

This is actually one of the easier biological functions to activate (Dr. Reage's comments on this were both cryptic and, I believe, sarcastic). On two occasions, test subjects even reported the activity as pleasurable. I leave the details to Appendix Four, as I have no desire to turn this paper into a Cainite *Kinsey Report*.

THE SOURCE OF INSIGHT

We must consider insight separately from other aspects of the highest generations. As a scientist, I cannot offer explanations for a phenomenon whose very existence I cannot prove. Most of the time, I must take the word of my seers that

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Hello. I am Wendy. Dr. Netchurch says I shouldn't tell anyone my real name. Dr. Netchurch asked me to tell you about my visions. We call them insight. Mamma said to thank people who do things for you so thank you Dr. Netchurch for keeping me safe and letting me write to so many important people. And thank you Dr. Reage for helping me with my spelling and being my friend.

Sometimes I know things but don't know how I know them. Sometimes I see whole pictures like a TV. It's always about other Kindred (Dr. Reage tells me that's the polite word for us) or about people who serve us or things one of us uses a lot. It's never about other people or stuff. I think that is because I am a Kindred and other Kindred matter most to me. If I was still a normal person then other people would matter most to me. But if I was living I wouldn't have visions at all so the point is moot. (That's something Dr. Reage says a lot. It means it doesn't matter.)

Mostly I see TV pictures of other Kindred's past, especially what they did to other Kindred or what other Kindred did to them. A lot of times these aren't nice things. Sometimes I see pictures of a Kindred's future and these are always bad things. I think a lot of us are going to die. I don't know when but soon.

I don't like seeing these pictures but I can't change channels or turn off the TV because it is in my head. I asked Dr. Netchurch if he could turn the TV off. He says no, he doesn't even know what turned the TV on. He says the insight is very important though and I should tell someone or write down my visions whenever I have them. Dr. Netchurch is very smart and a good man so I will do this even when the visions are bad.

I think I know where the visions come from. I cannot prove it because I am only one person (that's what Dr. Netchurch says) but I know for myself. After we all had the vision about Dr. Netchurch and Mr. Trimagain we all slept a long time. When I woke up Dr. Reage hypnotized me to help me remember my dreams. I also remembered what happened when I was Embraced because it was the same thing.

When I was Embraced I didn't wake up at first the way Dr. Netchurch says most Kindred do. Instead I was asleep for a whole day. My boyfriend Kevin must have thought I was really-truly-dead because when I woke up next night he was gone and I never saw him again.

While I was asleep (Dr. Netchurch calls it torpor) I dreamed I was in Seattle (my home town) but it was all dark and broken-down and rotten. Then the street broke under me and I fell into a big storm. While the wind blew me around I saw lots of things. I dreamed about lots of people and old-time cities. Dr. Reage showed me pictures from books and I think what I dreamed looked like Rome and Egypt and other places.

I still can't remember all the stuff I saw in my dreams but I think my TV pictures come from them. Someone or something reminds me of what I saw and I remember bits of it. I guess other seers fell into the storm and saw things too. When Mr. Trimagain helped us all remember together, we must have remembered lots more because many hands make light work like Mamma said.

The last thing I dreamed was that the storm blew me into another city. This was all skyscrapers of black and stone and iron. There was a parade of people all chained together walking toward a king who had a burning mark on his forehead. I got scared and looked around for Kevin but I didn't see him. I ran around looking for him until I bumped into a nice old man who called himself Captain Doshus. He said that I was early and had to go back. He pointed which way to go and then I woke up.

When I was in torpor again after meeting Mr. Trimagain, I dreamed I was back in the storm. I saw more stuff then but even with Dr. Reage hypnotizing me I can't remember much of it. Just that I saw a lot about other Kindred and the older they were the more there was to see. Dr. Reage says I was asleep for a week but it didn't seem very long to me.

I know that some of what I've seen in visions is real because other people knew about it. Dr. Netchurch calls this... independent... corroboration. I have a guess about why I dreamed about the past and future. I remember Pastor saying that God knows everything because He's outside everything, even time. When we're dead in Heaven we'll be outside time just like He is and will see the past and future like they were happening right now. That's what he said eternity really means. Being in torpor is awful close to being dead. Maybe when I was in torpor I was so close to being dead that I was outside time a little too. I'm not smart like Dr. Netchurch but he says he can't think of any better explanation so that's what I'll believe.

That's all I know. Thank you for reading this. Please help Dr. Netchurch do science as fast as he can. I don't think he has much time.

they had a clairvoyant experience. Forcing a telepathic link to share the experience is just as difficult as forcing the clairvoyant episode itself. I can only verify that they sincerely believe in its existence. (I have encountered and exposed two neonates who pretended to be "psychic" in hopes of profiting from the gullibility of others. Princes who wish to test self-proclaimed seers should contact the local Skeptic's Society; its members can give advice on how to debunk paranormal fakers.)

Once more, research subject "Wendy" provides the most interesting speculations. Wendy is ignorant, virtually illiterate and mildly retarded. She was Embraced at the physical age of 17. Dr. Reage places her mental age as between 10 and 12. On the other hand, she also has eidetic memory and can retrieve the smallest details of conversations, pictures and other complex events more than a year later. She also produces insight "phenomena" more often than any other seer (though never of sufficient detail to satisfy a determined skeptic).

Wendy believes her insight derives from her anomalous prolonged Embrace. Based on her account, she remained "dead" for approximately 11 hours before awakening as a vampire. All but one of my seers also claims that after their Embrace they lay in a death-coma for some period. So far, this and their generation are the only common factors I have found among the seers I have studied. May I remind my readers that correlation is not proof, but it lends at least some credence to Wendy's speculations.

Hoping to verify at least some aspect of this hypothesis, Dr. Reage and I attempted hypnotic regression on all test subjects who had a "delayed Embrace," whether they were seers or not. The results were inconclusive. Most subjects first remembered a conventional Near-Death Experience (NDE) as documented by numerous kine researchers. Dr. Reage has found that many Kindred experienced separation from the body, the tunnel of light and other classic NDE phenomena during their Embrace. My delayed-Embrace subjects, however, claim that they did not return to their bodies right away. Instead they experienced a period of darkness, terror and a feeling of helpless paralysis or overpowering turbulence. Three subjects also claimed they saw disconnected, dreamlike images passing too quickly for them to catch any details.

Only Wendy claims to remember any distinct scenes from this hallucinatory state. At this point, I think it best to let her speak in her own voice. By itself, her statement proves nothing. Nevertheless, I believe my patron and contemporaries will find it... interesting.

PRECEDENTS IN EARLY LITERATURE

Surprisingly, Wendy's hypothesis is not as naive as it sounds. This illiterate child seems to have independently arrived at a very old idea: In death and sleep, the soul gains a supernal wisdom and vision of the past and future. Several Classical writers attest to this belief, for instance:

- For if the Daemones be souls and spirits separated from bodies and having no communication with them, as you affirm, but according to the divine poet Hesiod,

"Are our kind guardians, walking here their rounds," why do we deprive the spirits and souls which are in bodies of the same power by which Daemones may foresee and foretell things to come? For it is not likely souls do acquire any property and power, when they abandon their bodies, wherewith they were not endowed before; but rather, we should think that they had always the same parts, but in a worse degree, when they were mixed with bodies....

— Plutarch, *Why the Oracles Cease to Give Answers*, Section 39

- Then the soul is left free to reach out and seek to comprehend things as yet unknown to it, things that have been, are now or yet to be.

— Plato, *The Republic*, Book IX

- During sleep, Aristotle says, when the soul is alone, it recovers its own peculiar nature and prophesies and foretells the future. It is in this state also during its separation from bodies at death. Certainly, too, he accepts the poet Homer as having observed this fact; for Homer represents Patroclus when he is being killed as prophesying the slaying of Hector, and Hector as prophesying the death of Achilles.

— Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Physicists*, "On God"

As any historian of science knows, endorsement of an idea by Classical authors is hardly proof. On the other hand, ancient philosophers also made some strikingly accurate guesses (Lucian of Samosata and atomic theory, for one). They are at least a starting point for investigation since, as I have said, at present we have nothing better.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Can Thin Blood Syndrome be cured? I know of one remedy, from the case (mentioned above) of the 12th-generation vampire with a novel Discipline. She found her cure through diablerie. I do not think anyone will endorse this as a solution to the problem of Thin Blood Syndrome.

I urge my readers, however, to view the highest generations as an opportunity rather than a problem. They can play valued roles in Kindred society — roles that should make diablerie seem much less attractive to them. Surely, all can see the advantage of new Disciplines in our ongoing struggle to quash the Sabbat and preserve the Masquerade. (Carlos has agreed to teach his "Sleep

Whammy" in return for contributions to the research fund.) Insight may offer valuable clues to the actions of our remote progenitors; such clues could prove vital to our self-preservation. Murdering seers and inceptors is a criminal waste of resources.

Most importantly, the thin-blooded offer a solution to one of the most intractable problems facing elder Cainites: the debility called "Methuselah's Thirst," an inability to sustain oneself on anything but the vitae of other vampires. Well enough; the eldest among us have wealth, influence and knowledge enough to pay for a herd of young Kindred "donors." Unfortunately, the elder dares not feed from any donor more than twice, lest it become blood bound (if the elder does not suffer such a bond already). Thus, feedings tend to be fatal for the younger vampire as the Methuselah takes as much vitae as it can. Many have heard rumors of degenerate elders who actually sire childer just to "fatten them up" and diablerize them a few nights later. The thin-blooded, however, cannot form blood bonds at all. A Methuselah could feed upon a vampire with Thin Blood Syndrome repeatedly, without fear of binding herself to a neonate. Surely, many of the highest generations would gladly trade their vitae for protection and tutelage.

I have heard that in many cities, princes and their scourges strive to exterminate the highest generations. May I suggest, as a scientist and a concerned member of our race, that this practice should cease. Some quote the *Book of Nod* to justify their purges, citing verses such as "Beware those who walk without a clan, for they will be our undoing." It amazes me that on the eve of the 21st century, such ancient rubbish can still rule the thoughts of so many.

POSTSCRIPT

There you have my research to date, and the conclusions I have drawn from it. I beg my readers' forgiveness for my letting speculation run ahead of data, but so many fascinating questions remain to be answered. Can two vampires of the 15th Generation spawn a dhampir, or must one parent be mortal? Will dhampirs breed true, as revenants sometimes do? What mechanism of speciation produces the thin-blooded? Can Thin Blood Syndrome be ameliorated by some means other than diablerie? Can insight be induced in other vampires? Can stronger-blooded vampires become inceptors? I plead with my patron and my distinguished colleagues for further study. Research into the highest generations may well explain the deepest mysteries of our undead condition, at last giving us true control over the Curse of Caine.

I would also like to address certain criticisms of my work. If these persons confined themselves to disputing my data and hypotheses, I would have no quarrel with them. Science thrives on such constructive criticism. Many of my critics, however, have slid into gross *ad hominem* attacks upon my sanity and my moral character. Some have even compared me to those mad butchers among the loathsome Tzimisce clan of the Sabbat.

Such insults hurt more than I can say. My research has ever been guided by a desire to improve the lot of the Kindred. Just as other branches of science have improved all our lives and unives, so may parabiology. Truth, however, does not come easily. It is never found without struggle and pain. I accept this. I ask nothing of my research subjects that I do not ask of myself.

May I repeat: *All my research subjects, Kindred and kine, are volunteers.* It is true, many protested in fear when they first heard of the experiments in which I hoped they would take part. Such is the dread which unscrupulous purveyors of superstition have wrapped around science in the popular media. Yet, when I explained the potential benefits of my work to them, and the safety precautions I would use, all eventually agreed. None were compelled in any way and I have the release forms to prove it. Many even expressed enthusiasm at this chance to part the veils of ignorance and help their fellow creatures. Not one has ever suffered pain that was not completely necessary. Very few of them have to be retired at the end of research, and even that is done in a gentle and painless manner.

My research is humane. I will open my laboratory to anyone who doubts me. It is the apostles of ignorance who should examine their consciences.

I remain most humbly and respectfully yours,

Dr. Douglas Netchurch

Childe of Trimeggian

Childe of Addemar

Childe of Lamdiel

Childe of Malkav

HARD-AND-FAST RULES

This section addresses the various game-mechanical factors that distinguish the thin-blooded from other vampires. Main subjects are listed in alphabetical order.

"ANOMALOUS BIOLOGICAL ACTIVITY"

A thin-blooded vampire can sometimes reactivate part of its mortal metabolism. Minor effects (such as growing a five-o'clock shadow, menstruating or feeling hungry for real food instead of blood) can spontaneously occur whenever a thin-blooded

vampire expends many blood points in a short time. The most common trigger is healing an aggravated wound — especially if the vampire spends a Willpower point to heal more than one health level of aggravated damage in a night. Such minor, spontaneous effects are best left to the Storyteller's discretion.

If a thin-blooded vampire *wants* to reactivate some mortal biological function for a night, she can spend a Willpower point and at least five blood points. (This doesn't suffer the doubling penalty that most vitae expenditure receives.) Being seen to spit real saliva now and then or to need a shave are good ways to protect the Masquerade or throw witch-hunters off the track.

AGING

Despite "anomalous biological activity," thin-blooded vampires normally do not age any more than their stronger-blooded sires.

EATING FOOD

The thin-blooded still cannot digest mortal food or drink, but they can at least hold it down for a few hours before they must vomit it up again (a normal vampire vomits within minutes). If Storytellers need a more definite rule, the character must make a successful Stamina roll (difficulty 7) each hour to hold down the food. If the roll fails, she throws up the food, generally amid a bloody shower of vitae.

Generous Storytellers may allow a thin-blooded vampire to actually digest food if the player expends a Willpower point and five blood points to reactivate her character's digestive system for a few hours. In that case, the vampire gains no more than one blood point of sustenance from a full meal — rather an expensive trade.

PREGNANCY AND CONCEPTION

Only vampires of the 15th Generation can become pregnant or get someone else pregnant. Deciding when sex results in pregnancy is left completely to the tender mercies of the Storyteller. A vampire who deliberately *wants* to get pregnant, or to impregnate a woman, can expend a Willpower point and five blood points to reactivate the necessary anatomy. She still receives no more than a 20 percent chance of success, even with all other factors optimized. The resulting child is born a dhampir, a self-sustaining ghoul from birth... assuming the conception, pregnancy and birth take place unhindered.

Such strange pregnancies only have a 50 percent chance of carrying to term. Otherwise, they miscarry. This rule applies whether the mother is a 15th-generation vampire or a mortal. The Storyteller really ought to make this decision according to what would make a better story, though, instead of leaving it to the fall of the dice.

Can a 15th-generation male vampire impregnate a 15th-generation female vampire? Intuition says that this can't happen — a pregnancy should require a spark of genuine life. Then again, there's something wonderfully weird (or disgusting, or horrific, depending on one's point of view) about two vampires having a baby. This possibility is left to the discretion of individual Storytellers. Characters (and their players) should *never* know the exact limits of a thin-blooded vampire's reactivated biology.

BLOOD USAGE

Kindred of the highest generations have 10 blood points, but some functions cost double the normal number of blood points. Also, thin-blooded vampires cannot necessarily expend all their blood points as they please.

14TH GENERATION

14th-generation vampires can use their last two blood points only for survival through the day, sustaining ghouls, giving the Embrace or feeding another vampire (for instance, to create a blood bond). They cannot spend those last two points on Disciplines, raising Attributes or healing wounds. This is purely a factor of generation, though, regardless of whether the character has the Thin Blood Flaw or not.

15TH GENERATION

A 15th-generation vampire can spend its last *four* blood points only on waking up or feeding another vampire (the former will never blood bond the latter, though). To use other functions of vitae, they must have at least six blood points in their system (remember, every other function has double cost).

WAKING UP

The blood point cost just to survive through the day remains the same for the thin-blooded: one blood point every evening.

BLOOD BOND

Fourteenth-generation vampires without the Thin Blood Flaw follow the normal procedure for creating a blood bond: Feed one blood point of your vitae to a mortal or another vampire on three successive occasions. Other thin-blooded vampires, however, can never blood bond another being.

CREATING AND SUSTAINING GHOULS

Vampires with the Thin Blood Flaw cannot create or sustain ghouls. Neither can vampires of the 15th Generation.

DOUBLED COSTS

This rule applies only to 15th-generation vampires, or 14th-generation vampires who actually have the Thin Blood Flaw. Any Discipline power that uses vitae has double cost; i.e., if a normal vampire would have to expend one blood point to use a power, a vampire with thin blood must expend two. This also applies to raising Physical Attributes: Each additional dot of Strength, Dexterity or Stamina costs two blood points instead of one. Healing wounds also has double cost. To heal an aggravated wound, a vampire with thin blood must burn through 10 blood points! That's very bad for the highest generations; they need to "refill" at least once before they can finish healing a single aggravated wound.

DISCIPLINES

A 14th-generation vampire cannot learn any Discipline past the fourth level. A 15th-generation vampire is limited to the third level of their Disciplines. The only ways to surpass those limits are Golconda... or lowering one's generation through diablerie.

On the other hand, vampires in the highest generations can create new Disciplines. Any vampire of 14th or 15th Generation

TERMINOLOGY AND SLANG

Just to make it perfectly clear: The thin-blooded are the vampires of the 14th and 15th Generations — also called the highest or last generations. If a vampire is 14th or 15th generation, it is thin-blooded, even if it does not actually have the Thin Blood Flaw. As far as this book is concerned, thin-blooded and “highest generations” mean the same thing. Even if a vampire of 13th Generation, or lower, has the Thin Blood Flaw, however, she cannot create Disciplines, have Insight or have the other special abilities described in this book. Confused? Don't be — instead, use this lapse in unambiguous terminology to sow the seeds of confusion in the characters. The thin-blooded are so new a phenomenon that very few Kindred have Dr. Netchurch's degree of familiarity with them — even thin-blooded characters themselves.

Other terms of frequent relevance to the thin-blooded include:

- **Anarch:** A vampire who rebels against Camarilla authority, but who doesn't join the Sabbat either. Most anarchs form small gangs with little power or purpose; this is the Anarch Movement most Camarilla vampires see. A few anarchs, however, make serious attempts to find other ways for the Kindred to order themselves. The anarchs actually comprise vampires endorsing a wide variety of social and political platforms, from would-be dictators to social democrats who want to end the Masquerade and claim kine civil rights. Many of the thin-blooded are sired by anarchs and join the movement in turn.

- **Autarkis:** A vampire who survives completely on her own, spurning (or unaware of) clan, sect and even the anarchs. Some of the thin-blooded become autarkis by default, just because they don't know about any groups they could join. When they meet other vampires, they must decide whether to join their factions.

- **Caitiff:** A vampire who does not exhibit any clan traits — neither any special aptitudes for some Disciplines, nor any archetypal physical, psychological or supernatural weaknesses. Caitiff are extremely common among the thin-blooded — but not every Caitiff is thin-blooded and not every thin-blooded vampire is a Caitiff. (Note that many Kindred label as Caitiff any vampire who does not show obvious clan traits or heritage. Storytellers are advised to remember the difference between Caitiff as a social phenomenon and Caitiff as a game mechanic.)

- **Clanless:** A more “politically correct” term for a Caitiff.

- **Unbound:** A loose social movement of anarch vampires who reject traditional dominance by elders and division into clans. Some Unbound get quite evangelical on the subject — to the annoyance of other vampires.

And here are some new terms, ones specifically concerned with the thin-blooded:

- **Abactor:** *Old Form.* Literally a “cattle thief,” a vampire who poaches on another vampire's hunting grounds. Thin-blooded vampires often become abactors without knowing it. Camarilla princes sometimes punish this behavior as a violation of the Tradition of Domain. The Sabbat just doesn't like trespassers.

- **Avetrol:** *Old Form.* An obscure word for a bastard child. Among the Kindred, an avetrol is an illegitimate childe whom the prince permits to exist, even though its Embrace violated the Tradition of Progeny. Many of the thin-blooded are illegitimate. To become accepted in the Camarilla as an avetrol, they must show some special usefulness to the Kindred in power (or acquire some really good blackmail information).

- **Cleaver:** *Vulgar Argot.* A vampire who tries to maintain a relatively normal human family life.

- **Cockalorum:** *Old Form.* A vociferous and abrasive leader of an anarch gang, or any weak vampire who acts like a big shot.

- **Comprador:** *Old Form.* A vampire who works for some other supernatural being, such as a mage, fae or mummy; or another supernatural employed by a vampire. The thin-blooded become compradors far more often than other vampires do.

- **Fluke:** *Vulgar Argot.* Any vampire with unique supernatural powers, such as Insight, a personal Discipline or a supernatural Merit. Sometimes this name applies to any vampire.

- **Homebody:** *Vulgar Argot.* Another word for a Cleaver.

- **Inceptor:** *Old Form.* The inventor of a new Discipline or founder of a distinct bloodline (often these are one and the same). In times past, only Antediluvians and their childer or grandchilder earned such a title (for instance, the Assamites regard their Antediluvian as an inceptor because they claim he invented Quietus). Applying such a rare and exalted title to thin-blooded dregs of the Cainite race leaves a bitter taste in the mouths of elders.

- **Prometheus:** Another name for an inceptor, introduced and favored by the Unbound movement.

- **Rastacouere:** *Old Form.* A vampire whose identity (clan, age or sect) is suspected of being less respectable than claimed. Example: a Caitiff who claims to be the grandchilde of a distinguished Ventrue prince.

- **Seer:** *Common Usage.* A vampire who receives visions through the power of Insight.

- **Snoop:** *Vulgar Argot.* A less polite word for a Seer. Also Psychic, Dreamer, Tattletale.

can create a Discipline, whether she is a Caitiff or not. Conversely, Caitiff of 13th or lower generation cannot invent Disciplines.

If a thin-blooded vampire lowers his generation *at all* through diablerie, she loses her ability to invent Disciplines. She may continue to develop a Discipline she already invented — and of course she can still learn new Disciplines from other vampires. (The Stoneman, a legendary low-generation Caitiff who supposedly invented several Disciplines, must have been a very successful diablerist.)

Other vampires can learn the Disciplines invented by a thin-blooded vampire. Naturally, the Discipline always has out-of-clan experience point costs, and no “normal” vampire character can begin play knowing a Discipline created by a thin-blooded vampire. Characters must play through the search for a tutor and the learning process.

Point costs aside, the Storyteller may impose whatever story difficulties she wants on learning a novel Discipline (this rule applies to learning *any* new Discipline, not just the personal Disciplines invented by the thin-blooded). Some vampires believe that learning another vampire’s Discipline requires drinking her blood. A few claim that diablerie speeds the learning process by capturing and assimilating the other vampire’s soul. Not that any vampire outside the Sabbat ever admits to committing diablerie to test the theory....

See below for a discussion of creating personal Disciplines.

THE EMBRACE

The thin-blooded differ from other vampires in two significant ways where the Embrace is concerned.

GIVING

If a 14th-generation vampire with the Thin Blood Flaw tries to Embrace a mortal human, 80 percent of the time the mortal simply dies. A 14th-generation vampire who lacks that Flaw can Embrace normally. A 15th-generation vampire cannot Embrace at all.

RECEIVING

Normally, the Embrace takes place very quickly: Less than a minute after she tastes Cainite vitae, the bloodless and dying mortal rises again as a vampire. By the 13th generation, though, the Curse of Caine has weakened so much that sometimes it takes effect more slowly. Minutes or even hours may pass between mortal death and undead rebirth. A thin-blooded childe might well remain a corpse for the better part of a night and day, only rising as a vampire upon the next nightfall. After the childe awakens, however, it takes normal damage from sunlight. The sun never destroys a nascent childe, though: An obscure Providence makes sure that the change never takes place during the day. No one knows why, though several vampires have made guesses.

More than half of all Seers had a delayed Embrace, compared to one in five for the highest generations as a whole. Once more, however, no actual rule determines when a childe has a delayed Embrace: The Storyteller has total discretion. Delayed Embrace exists to add drama and mystery to a character’s prelude.

If a character sires a thin-blooded childe in the course of play, the Storyteller must decide whether or not a delayed Embrace would

improve the story. A delayed Embrace becomes especially dramatic when the sire has the Thin Blood Flaw: Will the prospective childe revive, or is she really and truly dead? A delay also adds tension when an Embrace happens near dawn, and the sire suddenly faces the challenge of hiding the body until the next nightfall.

INSIGHT

Only the thin-blooded can have the prophetic power called Insight. What’s more, if a Seer — a character with Insight — lowers her generation *at all* through diablerie, she loses her Insight. Whatever strange power links the thin-blooded to the Great Beyond, diablerie breaks the connection.

In rules terms, Insight is treated as a Background. It is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

STAKING

Some features of the thin-blooded stay the same, even for the 15th generation. A stake through the heart affects the thin-blooded just as it does any other vampire.

SUNLIGHT

14th-generation vampires suffer aggravated damage and a normal chance of Röttschreck from sunlight. It doesn’t matter whether they have the Thin Blood Flaw or not. Fifteenth-generation vampires, however, do not take aggravated damage from sunlight. Instead they take *lethal* damage — the same sort they would take from a blade or bullet. They can soak the damage from sunlight with their Stamina, without the need for Fortitude. Sunlight still never inflicts more than three health levels of damage per turn, even with maximum exposure.

The intensity of the sunlight still determines the difficulty of the soak roll. Faint sunlight, such as twilight or a heavily overcast day, carries a soak difficulty of 3; but bright, direct sunlight still carries a soak difficulty of 10. A botch on the soak roll also still means the vampire has caught fire and automatically takes extra health levels of damage thereafter — and this fire damage is aggravated! See *Vampire: The Masquerade*, pp. 227 and 232, for the details about sunlight damage and soak difficulties.

Perhaps because they don’t take such serious damage from it, sunlight also is less likely to provoke Röttschreck in 15th-generation vampires. Their difficulties to resist Röttschreck from sunlight are always two less than they would be for other vampires.

As a result, 15th-generation vampires can endure sunlight far more than other neonates. Bright sunlight is still pretty much a death sentence, but a quick dash through a shady lobby hardly bothers them. A 15th-generation Kindred with a good supply of blood for boosting his Stamina and healing wounds can survive extended exposures to weak sunlight. This galls older and far stronger vampires, who would burn if a single sunbeam hit them.

Note, however, that fire itself still does aggravated damage to 15th-generation vampires, and may cause normal Röttschreck.

WAKING UP IN DAYTIME

Thin blood gives no advantage in awakening or acting during the day.



CREATING A DISCIPLINE

So how does a thin-blooded character create a new Discipline and become an inceptor? In a strictly game-mechanical sense, the player has merely to plunk down the requisite experience points. That, however, is only the last stage. First the player and Storyteller must agree on what the new Discipline can do. Then they must work it into the ongoing story.

THE EASY WAY

The easy way to invent a new Discipline is to give an old Discipline a facelift. Such Disciplines already exist: Serpentine has undeniable similarities to Protean, whereas Dementation has kinship to Dominate. It's not hard to design other variations upon familiar Disciplines.

Then again, assorted Vampire supplements have already presented more oddball Disciplines than any campaign could ever need. Melpominee, Mytherceria, the assorted lost Disciplines from *Vampire: The Dark Ages* — players have no shortage of candidates for what amount to unique new Disciplines. Storytellers need only say that in *their* campaign, there's no such thing as a Kiasyd, a Daughter of Cacophony or any of the other peculiar bloodlines presented in past supplements. And if some of the powers in the Discipline seem out of place, one can replace them with something that has more applicability.

THE HARD WAY

If nothing else seems quite right, the player and Storyteller can create a whole new Discipline from scratch. Here are some guidelines — but no examples. With more than 30 Disciplines in print, additional ones would serve no purpose.

Storytellers should keep in mind that *this whole system is optional!* A Storyteller does not have to allow hand-crafted personal Disciplines in her campaign at all, or can do all the work of designing a Discipline based upon a player's general statement of what the Discipline can do. In case you missed that, or you have a particularly vehement player who demands that her character be allowed to create a unique Discipline, we reiterate.

Do not create new Disciplines unless it suits the story or you suffer a burning urge to do so.

Too often, lazy players define their characters by their clans or Disciplines, and giving them the impetus to behave thus removes all sense of individuality from the character. A character should have a reason for her character's sudden acquisition of a new Discipline, and the Storyteller should suffer no qualms about vetoing a player's bid for a slew of random powers because the player thinks it would be "kewl."

DEFINING THE DISCIPLINE

First, the player needs some idea about what the Discipline will do. Each Discipline has a theme. (For instance, Presence is all about controlling other people's emotions, Auspex is a set of sensory powers for gaining information, Protean lets vampires change form, and so on.) A collection of powers with no underlying logic to connect them does not make a very good Discipline.

Do try to keep balance with the "standard" Disciplines. In fact, personal Disciplines probably should stay weaker than the "old favorites." Vampires have spent thousands of years refining the standard Disciplines to make them as powerful as they can be. Additionally, the value of a new Discipline lies in its ability to surprise, not to crush all opposition. An arms race between players to see whose character can invent the most powerful new Discipline rapidly becomes tedious. (Trust us on this. We've seen it happen and it's not pretty.)

Next, the player and Storyteller must agree upon the specific powers gained at each level of the Discipline. You need only two or three powers to begin with. After all, a thin-blooded character probably will not get a chance to master even the standard five levels of any Discipline — let alone levels six and beyond! (Remember, the higher-level powers require a generation of seven or lower.)

The first level of any Discipline is never very powerful, though it may be very useful. Look at the standard Discipline set: Talking to animals, seeing in the dark or getting a second action in a turn will not exactly make other characters fall down in reverence, but a clever vampire can achieve a lot with them. Higher levels become progressively more powerful, though exact comparisons of power level become difficult. (Is the ability to sink into the ground *really* more formidable than the ability to do aggravated damage, but less powerful than turning into a wolf?) Fortunately, one doesn't need to agonize over the order of powers within a Discipline. It's enough that the first-level power is the weakest and the fifth-level power is the strongest.

Finally, the Storyteller must decide upon the game mechanics for each power. What dice rolls, if any, does each power need? Should the power cost blood points? Most of the standard Disciplines, familiar to vampires of many clans, do not cost blood points. The more exotic Disciplines practiced by only one clan each, such as Vicissitude or Obtenebration, generally *do* cost blood points. This limits their use (and may explain why the "standards" became standard). Unique Discipline powers should probably cost blood points too, to reflect their lack of refinement. Only the most lethal or outlandish powers, or powers that never fail to have full effect, ought to cost Willpower points.

"KILLER DISCIPLINES"

Players and Storytellers may feel tempted to create a combat super-Discipline. Resist this temptation. Killer Disciplines are less fun than they might sound because they aren't good for much *except* killing enemies. For neonate vampires (and *especially* the thin-blooded), killing anyone who gets in the way is a very bad strategy. Even if a neonate has the super-mega-über-Discipline-o'-Death, the older vampires are still so much more powerful... and sneaky. Open, physical threats only offend them.

Wise vampires do not even gratuitously kill weak, powerless humans. Remember the Inquisition? The elders do — that's why they enforce the Masquerade. Modern police are no joke. If the police don't put an indiscreet vampire in jail to watch the sunrise, the elders will arrange it. Peaceful methods are safer all around.

Considerations of unlife-expectancy aside, Vampire is a *storytelling* game. Characters tend to face situations that are

tests of, well, character — not their ability to rack up a body count. A character who has no way to deal with problems except killing someone may soon become frustrating to play.

LEARNING THE DISCIPLINE

Now that the player has defined the new Discipline, the character still needs to learn it. Even the highest generations don't just blow new Disciplines out of their noses. Discovering a Discipline can become an important part of the character's story, whether in the prelude or later on in the chronicle. The player should give some reason why the Discipline appeared. Did the character deliberately

try to invent a new power? If so, what made him think he could do this? Did she study the occult? Or did he just get in a situation where he needed a certain power a whole lot and, hey presto, he had it?

SPENDING THE POINTS

At long last, the player can pay the experience points for the first level in the character's new Discipline. Alternatively, she can purchase that first dot through freebie points at character creation. A character should *not* begin with more than one dot in her personal Discipline. Later on, characters increase unique Disciplines just like any other out-of-clan or Caitiff Discipline.

STANDARD TABLES FOR DISCIPLINES

As a convenience for Storytellers, here are some common guidelines for Discipline powers that give the level of effect for each number of successes. Following this chart should help an inceptor's new Discipline stay roughly equal to the old standards.

DIRECTLY DAMAGING EFFECTS

Discipline powers that cause actual health levels of damage don't need a table. Typically, they do one health level of damage per success rolled. Second-level powers — or higher — may inflict aggravated damage.

INDIRECTLY DAMAGING EFFECTS

These powers do not actually inflict health levels of damage on the victim. Instead, they reduce his combat abilities in some other way. Scorpion's Touch (Quietus Level Two), which reduces the victim's Stamina, is an example of an indirectly damaging effect. Use this table if a duration for the effect is needed.

The severity of the effect is often based on the character's level of Discipline mastery. Severity may also be fixed — for instance, an attack that always reduces a Trait by two, no more or less.

Note that no handicap is truly permanent — at least not for vampires. If nothing else, victims can raise lost Traits again with experience points. A vampire can remove many other indirectly damaging effects if she is willing to suffer aggravated damage (for instance, putting out her eyes and regrowing them to cure blindness.)

1 success	One turn
2 successes	One hour
3 successes	One day
4 successes	One month
5 successes	One year or indefinitely

NON-DAMAGING EFFECTS

Use this table for effects that do not *directly* cause any harm. This might be some power that affects the vampire herself, changes the surroundings in some way, or that affects another person in a non-damaging way. (Dominate

and Presence are examples of such effects. They do not harm the victim; they merely change his actions and opinions. Non-damaging effects can still become terribly inconvenient for the victim.)

1 success	One hour or scene
2 successes	One day
3 successes	One week
4 successes	One month
5 successes	One year or indefinitely

AREA EFFECTS

Some Discipline powers affect an area rather than a person or object. For instance, a Thaumaturgical curse could infest an area with roaches, or a Presence effect might awe everyone within an area.

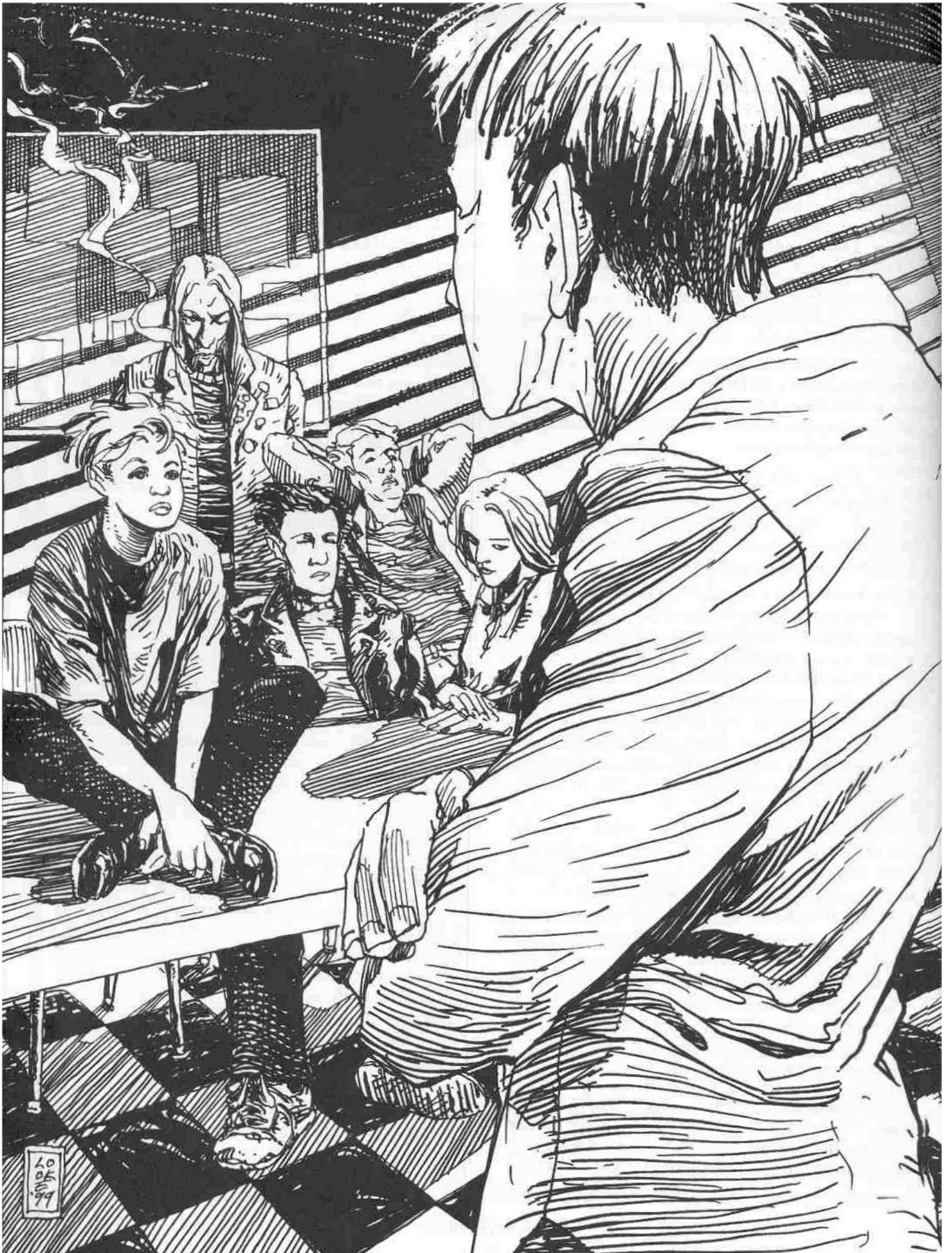
One might define an area of effect in terms of radius so that everything within a circle is affected. Alternatively, one might prefer simply to say that a power affects everything within a given area, but the vampire can define the shape of that area each time he uses the power.

1 success	1 yard radius	5 sq. yards
2 successes	2 yards radius	10 sq. yards
3 successes	5 yards radius	50 sq. yards
4 successes	10 yards radius	250 sq. yards
5 successes	30 yards radius	1000 sq. yards

MULTIPLE-TARGET EFFECTS

Some powers might affect a number of people or other targets — potentially as many as there are within range. (The Presence power of Awe and the Animalism power of the Beckoning set the standards.) In this case, the number of successes determines the number of people or other relevant targets affected:

1 success	one person/other target
2 successes	two targets, or a quarter of targets
3 successes	six targets, or half the targets
4 successes	20 targets, or almost all targets
5 successes	all targets in the appropriate area



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CHAPTER TWO: ALAS, THAT GREAT CITY

*And you will know these last times by the Time of
Thin Blood...*

— "The Chronicle of Secrets," *The Book of Nod*

The Jyhad is a millennia-old minuet. Its steps and postures are formalized down to the last turn of the ankle; the dancers thread around one another with expert grace, backs straight, eyes distant, now advancing, now retreating, now changing partners. Lately, however, one can discern a stumble here and there, not because the dancers themselves grow careless — though that accusation has been made — but because the world is shifting under their feet.

To the outsider, all vampires seem irretrievably selfish and complacent. The truth is more complex: Underneath those keen self-preservation instincts lie other, equally powerful drives that few Kindred ever dreamed they possessed before now. Do they stem from ancestral memory? From the

subconscious influence of the sleeping Antediluvians? From evolutionary programming? None can say, but whatever the cause, more Cainites fall prey to these mysterious impulses with each passing month. As long-foretold omens appear and ancient plots approach fruition, Kindred society spirals further and further into chaos, until the wildest predictions of Noddist lore become plausible.

The following section deals specifically with the thin-blooded: how they see themselves, how they see others, how they cope. The remainder of the chapter covers a wider range; it examines the Cainite reaction, not only to the thin-blooded and the threat they pose, but also to their own apocalyptic fears.

BABES IN THE WOOD: THE THIN-BLOODED PERSPECTIVE

UNDERSTANDING THE CAMARILLA — AND ALTERNATIVES

Thank you for coming tonight. Usually I don't get more than two or three people at these meetings and here we have, what, five?

Maybe you've heard a name, the "Camarilla," and you want to know what it means. Or it least what it means for *you*. I've been a vampire almost 15 years now and in that time I've bumped into the Camarilla a lot. At first I didn't know what it was either, but I kept my eyes and ears open. Eventually, I found other vampires who could tell me about it, just like I'm telling you now. I'm pretty sure that most of what I've learned is accurate.

I know that to those of you who've encountered it, the Camarilla doesn't seem to make much sense. Look at it one way, and it seems to rule the world. Look at it another way, and it's so fractured and anarchic that you wonder how it lasted a month, let alone centuries. One night, a Camarilla prince sentences another vampire to Final Death; the next, he shrugs and tells a petitioner that he has no authority to do what she wants.

CAMARILLA OVERVIEW

Let me start with a quick overview of the Camarilla for the complete beginners. First, let's get the name right. The name is *Camarilla*, not *Caramella*, *Catalina* or *Camellia*. The word means "Little Room," a place for private discussions. The Camarilla claims to be a society for all vampires, a venue where they can meet to resolve their differences and make plans for their mutual protection. Yeah, right — I can tell that some of you have already experienced the Camarilla's "mutual protection."

Each major city has a prince. A prince has four main jobs:

- He or she arbitrates disputes between vampires. For instance, he works out the boundaries between vampires' hunting territories and decrees what parts of the city are common hunting grounds or kept off-limits.
- The prince grants the right to turn a mortal into a vampire.
- The prince interprets tradition and disciplines other vampires when they violate it. As part of this last role, he has sole right to order the execution of another vampire.
- The prince oversees the Masquerade, making sure that the police and the media do

not see a vampire's indiscretions — or at least do not publicize them.

Ultimately, a prince has as much authority as other vampires believe he has. Some princes become virtual dictators to their subjects, while others become laughable figureheads. If a prince acts too brutal or arbitrary, though, other vampires will depose him and probably kill him.

A group of elder vampires called "primogen" elect the prince — I believe, as I have never cast a white or black stone — and advise him thereafter. Each primogen represents one of the vampire families within the Camarilla. The name means "first-born," which should clue you in that the Camarilla operates on a strict seniority system. The older you are, the more rights and respect you have in the Camarilla.

It's not much of a government, but then the Camarilla only deals with very small populations. Few cities have as many as 50 vampires. Such small groups don't need enormous legal codes and bureaucracies — just a judge and a prosecutor. The prince fills both roles.

You have a question, sir?

That's a good question, and I wish I knew the answer. I know about seven houses in the Camarilla: Brujah, Venture, Toreador, Warlock, Malkavian, Nosferatu and Gang-Gel. Some of these names come from the vampires' ancestor, and a few are descriptive terms, but I have no idea where the other names come from. I've never met anyone else who knew, either.

Each clan has its traditional culture, just like each tribe or caste would. These nights, most tribes are pretty loose. Younger vampires — like us — might not pay much attention to their bloodline or may even drop out completely. Older vampires take "clan tradition" very seriously, though. I'll have more to say about the force of tradition later.

• **Brujah** have a reputation as punks — you know, the sort of "nonconformists" who all rebel the same way. I've seen plenty of younger Brujah who wore their black leather jackets and body piercings like a uniform, but also Brujah who didn't fit that mold at all. According to my lineage, I'm a Brujah myself, as if I cared. The few older Brujah I've met were all college Communists, lace-cuff liberals and old-time union activists — my grandsire *still* thinks the South can make a comeback.

The Brujah have no clan-wide institutions, though it's not for lack of trying. Many Brujah want to organize the clan as a union or a revolutionary party or something, but it would take an act of God to make five Brujah agree on anything. They have more sympathy for us young'uns, though.

• **Malkavians** are even more chaotic than the Brujah. So far as I can tell, the clan



elders have no common interests at all. Supposedly, Malks are all mad: Either they only recruit lunatics or the Embrace itself drives their childer insane. I don't know; I've met Malks who seemed normal enough. The really spooky, beyond-the-pale Malks look to me like they're putting on an act to freak out everyone else. I'll say this much: I never met a stupid Malkavian. I've met some who act like idiots, but most of them scare the hell out of me in a serial-killer-I'm-going-to-eat-your-flesh kind of way.

- The **Warlocks** are the exact opposite of the Brujah and Malkavians. They have a super-organized secret society, with hierarchies and secret passwords and loyalty oaths. Like their name says, the Warlocks do real, honest-to-God magic - so they say. I never met one.

- House **Venture** dominates Camarilla politics. More than any other family, the Venture resemble the classic Dracula-clone vampires you see in movies: Old-fashioned clothes, high-toned airs, lots of money. Venture select their childer carefully and indoctrinate them thoroughly. These vampires deliberately seek power in both the Camarilla and the mortal world. While I've never heard of any actual organization of Venture, they track their lineages closely, and they all seem to know each other second or third-hand. An awful lot of princes come from this clan. I

think the name comes from their constant plans to grow richer or more influential: They always seem to be undertaking some venture or another.

- In a charitable mood, I'd call the **Toreador** a clan of esthetes. Most of the time, I call them pretentious art fags. Older Torries go on about "cweating and pweserving beauty foah the ages." Even the younger ones act nearly as stuck-up as the Venture. If the Venture are the vampire equivalent of the ivy-league Old Boy's Network, though, the Toreador are the Modern Art Ghetto: They bitch at each other constantly, but stick together out of contempt for us uncultured slobs. Okay, so I've met a few exceptions.

- The **Nosferatu** form a complete contrast to the beautiful Toreador. The Embrace changes Nosferatu, making every one of them hideously ugly. This forces them to dwell in the sewers and other hidden places. They seem to stick together, if only from shared rejection. At least, I never heard of really murderous factionalism in the clan, but then the Nossies don't talk much to outsiders.

Don't insult the Nosferatu, though: Most of them can cloud men's minds through hypnosis, so that you don't see them. We could have a dozen Nosferatu in the room with us and not know it.

- Finally, the **Gang-Gel** only seem to be a clan because everyone else says they are. They



wander like bums or Gypsies, seldom staying anywhere long. The Gang-Gels I know tell me that the only tradition they share is telling each other stories about their travels.

Everyone assumed the Gang-gel belonged to the Camarilla, even them. Lately, however, more and more Gang-gel say they don't belong to anyone but themselves and the Camarilla can get fucked for all they care. I don't believe stories about the house doing a mass walkout from the Camarilla. I never saw Gang-gel do *anything* as a group.

The Camarilla claims to represent all the vampires in the world but I know that isn't true. I know vampires who say they belong to different houses than the Camarilla seven - clans like the Ravnos and the Saturdays.

Yes, ma'am?

• Ah yes, Caitiff. Ugly word, isn't it? That's what Camarilla vampires call any vampire whose family membership they can't identify. To them it means "bastard," and they use it the same way mortals use "nigger" or "wop" or "gook." Nobody, Kindred or kine, has a monopoly on bigotry.

A TRADITIONAL SOCIETY

To understand the Camarilla, you have to realize that it isn't the sort of modern nation-state we knew in our mortal existences. It's a much older sort of society, what

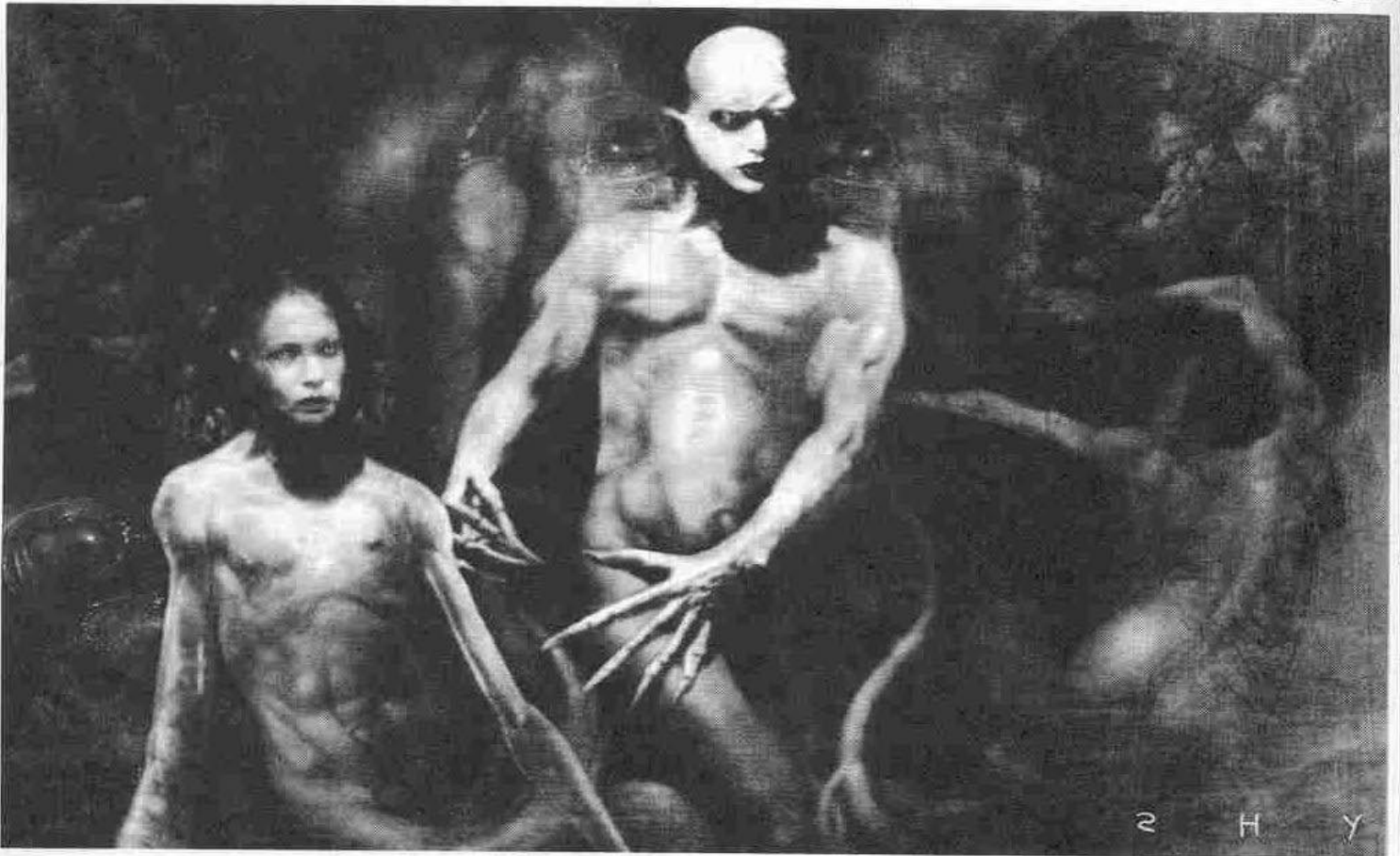
political scientists call a traditional society. The Camarilla is a government but only in the sense that the village elders in the palaver hut form a government.

I'm getting some puzzled looks. What I mean is that human tribal or village societies tend to have certain features in common, so social scientists group them as "traditional" societies - as distinct from transitional or modern societies. I think the Camarilla has many of these same distinctive features. I'll list these features of on the blackboard. We can go through them one by one and match them up with what we know - or at least what I know; please add your own comments and information - about the Camarilla. Okay? Point number one:

Ancient Custom

Unlike a modern, democratic government, the Camarilla doesn't claim to represent the will of the people. Nobody votes on its laws. It claims legitimacy based on ancient traditions laid down by Caine - supposedly the Biblical Cain, to hear these vampires talk - and the clan founders.

The so-called "Six Traditions of Caine" form the basis of Camarilla custom. Different vampires give different phrasings of these traditions, but they work out something like this: Sires rule their childer; don't sire new vampires without your own sire's permission or the permission of the oldest vampire



in the community; don't kill another vampire unless the oldest vampire orders it; don't trespass on another vampire's territory; in your own territory your word is law; and above all, don't let mortals know that vampires exist! Camarilla vampires also have rules about trading favors, respecting the peace on designated neutral ground and the proper way to petition the elders in power.

None of these rules are written down. No one may suggest that they are unjust or out-of-date and should be changed. No lawyer will help you plead your case to the prince. You have no powerful friends to speak on your behalf. If the prince or a primogen accuses you of breaking the traditions, you're pretty much screwed.

Weak Central Government

Among kine traditional societies, local authorities matter the most. The village elder or tribal chief's word carries more weight than the laws of a distant king or president.

In the same way, each prince has a free hand in managing his city and is answerable only to the primogen. That's why the Camarilla is not the world-spanning conspiracy you might think. "The" Camarilla only exists as an abstraction, like "the" business establishment. The reality consists of many local Camarillas, completely autonomous in their actions but united by common practices.

In fact, "government" is probably not the best word to describe what we're talking about, but it suffices. From what I've seen, the Camarilla is more like a secret society, with its own bylaws that it expects you to know. Basically, the Camarilla is a group of vampires who think they know what's best for you, not some global conspiracy or representation of the vampires by the vampires.

Let me qualify that. I have heard of rare "conclaves," in which vampires from many cities gather to debate the great issues of the night, but I've never heard that princes really have to follow a conclave's decisions if they don't want to. Just like human traditional societies, all the real power stays local. If you don't like a prince's decision, tough luck!

You, sir. Mr. Cargill, was it?

"Justicars?" I've only heard that term twice and both times with another word: "archons." They seem to refer to some sort of judge or overlord. My guess is that the archons are the sires of the various princes and primogen. Archons might be the same as the justicars, or maybe the justicars serve the archons. They might be emissaries or assistants.

You heard it the other way around? Doubtful. "Archon" is an ancient Greek word for a chief magistrate, ruler or president. "Justicar" sounds like a mangling of "justi-

ciar," a fancy word for judge. "Archon" seems to imply broader powers. Either way, they both seem to have authority over princes. I guess even princes sometimes disagree and need someone to arbitrate between them. I gather that justicars or archons also have some connection to conclaves, but since I've never talked to a vampire who actually attended a conclave, I don't know what justicars and archons actually do. From what I've seen, they don't do much very often.

Subsistence Economy

Mortal traditional societies live by farming, raising livestock or some other sort of subsistence economy. They don't trade much; each community provides for itself.

Now, obviously we vampires don't need to hoe the crops or chase the buffalo. Just as obviously, the Camarilla doesn't need to trade with other societies; it exists as a parasite upon human society instead.

The real similarity comes from the attitude towards land. In many (not all) traditional societies, a small class or ethnic group controls all the land and loans it out to everyone else, according to rank. Isn't that what the prince does when he divides the city into hunting grounds?

If you must enter a Camarilla city, locate the "open hunting" regions - the Camarilla's version of the village green, available to everyone - and stick to them. Poaching on an elder's hunting grounds gives him one of the typical justifications for destroying the likes of us.

KINSHIP BONDS

This is the most important factor of all. In traditional societies, you are what your family makes you. If your father is a farmer, you become a farmer. If your mother spins wool, you spin wool. More than that, your place in the family determines your rank - and because people keep track of lineages and marriages for generations, ultimately the whole society is a gigantic extended family. Father has authority over sons; older brothers have authority over younger brothers; some lineages carry more prestige than others. Grampa is an important village elder because, well, he's Grampa.

The Camarilla pays great attention to family relationships - based on who turned you into a vampire and who else he or she turned into a vampire. Your sire also has a sire and broodmates of his own. Continue this and eventually you have a whole vampire tribe, called a *clan*, all descended from a single vampire about *four hundred years ago*. Each clan's traditional character comes from the founder Embracing people who shared his interests. The childer followed the same

practice – and hundreds of years later, people say, “Oh, Toreador are all artists,” as if this were some sort of law of nature. My contacts said that the clan founders all met Final Death decades – if not centuries – ago, or just went to sleep and will never wake up again. At least, that’s the official story the elders tell.

Beyond even that, some vampires say, the founders of the clans all descend from a single, first vampire called Caine. Yes, again, the Caine from the Bible, but spelled with an “e” at the end. That makes all the vampires in the Camarilla distant relatives. I guess that’s why they call themselves “Kindred” instead of just vampires. Also, that’s where the story gets unreliable. If this is the Biblical Caine, why do vampires only go back four centuries? Some Kindred speak of a cycle, so I’m inclined to believe this vampire thing basically burns itself out every few hundred years, and then starts anew. Oh, get this: The Camarilla as an organization (or whatever) doesn’t even believe in the founders of the clans. They parade around as if their family was the most important thing in the world and snipe at each other over family rivalry, but they refuse to acknowledge the families’ founding members. Maybe I’m missing something, but that doesn’t sit right with me. Then again, they may just think the founders are all dead, and I’m misunderstanding their self-important vampire code words.

That’s the line, anyway. I can believe the part about clan founders, but not the legend of Caine. Among mortals, when smaller kinship groups unite to form a tribe they make up some mythical common ancestor to justify their alliance. I think the Camarilla did this. Only the very oldest vampires could possibly know the truth, though, and they don’t talk to the likes of us.

What does all this mean to you and me? In mortal societies, when Grampa dies the next-oldest family member takes over his job. Eventually, you might become a Grampa yourself and get some status and power that way. Among our kind, though, Grampa never dies. Odds are, Great-Great-Grampa is still around and wants to stay in charge. He takes great care that no younger vampire kills him to take his place. For a young vampire, then, the Camarilla is – pardon the expression – a dead end. You may win some rights if you kiss ass for a few decades, but you will never have a real voice in government. In European cities, vampires 100 years old still follow orders given by 200-year-old sires, who themselves bow to a 300-year-old prince.

Most of us are Caitiff and 13th Generation or higher. That means we’re at least 13 generations away from Caine, according to the buzz. Exactly how you find out what generation

you are, I don’t know, but it obviously has something to do with lineage. We aren’t good enough to join the fancy club because we have too many ancestors between us and Caine, and we can’t name them all. For us, the Camarilla is a mug’s game. Don’t even try to play.

ALTERNATIVES

The good news is that you don’t have to put up with the Camarilla. In fact, you shouldn’t. No matter how much they’d like you to believe it, the elders do not control everything.

The Sabbat?

God, no, Mr. Cargill, I certainly don’t mean the Sabbat! I don’t know much about the Sabbat, because those vampires tend to attack anyone who noses around asking questions. I only talked to an actual Sabbat member once, and she was nuts. Absolutely batshit. When she tried to recruit me, she asked if I’d like to “enjoy” – her word – a little mutual torture with soldering irons after she initiated me into the Sabbat. From what I’ve heard, by the way, Sabbat initiation involves burial and getting hit on the head with a shovel. I said it sounded great and she should meet me in the graveyard in an hour. Since she would bring the soldering irons, I’d bring the refreshments for afterwards. Once I got out of sight, I ran for my car and drove out of town as fast as I could.

I know this: The Sabbat demands more from its members than the Camarilla does at its worst. The Sabbat is some sort of vampire doomsday cult. Think of Nazi storm troopers and death-camp doctors crossed with Jehovah’s Witnesses. They say they’re all about “letting vampires be vampires”; they actively try to be inhuman monsters. Maybe so, but I never heard of any Sabbat atrocity or philosophy worse than what some mortal did or believed. I’m told the Sabbat prevents defection by having everyone blood bound to everyone else – no, I don’t know how they create multiple blood bonds, either.

If you meet the Sabbat, don’t run. That only encourages them, like running from a dog. Instead, do like I did: Seem friendly and interested, but make some excuse to leave. Then run.

The Inconnu

Yes, Ms. Bennett? Inconnu? I’m afraid I’ve never heard of that group at all. Perhaps you could tell us something about them?

Hmm. They sound a bit... detached. They don’t sound like very likely allies.

Anarchs Unbound

No, I’m talking about the anarch states. I’d like to point out, though, that *anarch* just means anyone who doesn’t toe the Camarilla line. To say it properly, you have to sneer and be at least 100 years old. It’s a good name if you want to scare an elder.

Maybe you've heard self-proclaimed anarchists telling you to rebel against the Camarilla - or at least to tweak the elders' noses. These anarchists stand out most, but they aren't very important. Why? Because they still operate in the Camarilla's shadow. They stick to their enemy like Bre'r Rabbit to the tar baby and never actually achieve anything. I have news for you: These rebels without a clue only survive because elders have more important problems. In cities where princes deputize scourges to deal with the anarchists, the anarchists are... dealt with.

You don't believe me? Visit Minneapolis-St. Paul. I did. You won't find any anarchists there. The scourges destroyed them all last year. I'll warn you, though, they almost caught me too when I came to town. Don't mess with elders. If a group of them really wants you Finally Dead, *you will die*.

Let me guess, you're an anarchist. Sorry, nothing personal. I just calls 'em as I sees 'em.

Autarkis

Getting back on topic... not all anarchists rebel so noisily. You have more choices than you might think.

Some vampires go it completely alone. Autarkis, some call them. The usual autarkis finds a small town or a suburb too remote for any Camarilla vampire to notice and takes it as his hunting ground. Sure it's dangerous, but many vampires pull it off for years.

Let me give you an example - an extreme case, I admit. I rode into this Iowa town in a cattle car, meaning to spend a night hunting, sleep for a day, then hop another train for Kansas City. I woke up the next evening in a jail cell with a sheriff and two deputies pointing shotguns and a machine gun at me. Not an Uzi, a real, honest-to-God, belt-fed and water-cooled machine gun on a tripod. Next to them, Prince Suzie held a can of gasoline and a book of matches. Believe you me, it took some fast talking to avoid becoming vampire flambé.

Turned out, Prince Suzie had blood bound the entire county sheriff's department, the mayor and the owner of a local slaughterhouse. Her pet cops had machine guns and grenade launchers, for crying out loud - and silver-loaded shotgun shells in case of Lupines. The Camarilla wouldn't call Suzie a prince (and she didn't seem very old or smart), but I've never seen a town more tightly controlled. She really is a law unto herself.

Cleavers

Other "anarchs" don't see why they have to cut themselves off from humanity the way the Camarilla insists. These vampires let their friends and relatives in on their big secret and ask them for help. Sometimes they get it, too. They hold down real jobs and even

raise families - of course, these vampires had their kids before their Embrace.

The Camarilla elders would insist that vampires can't do this, it's impossible, it'll all end in tears or a witch-hunter's stake through the heart - but I know several vampires willing to give family life a try. Other vampires in and out of the Camarilla sometimes make fun of them, calling them "Cleavers" or "homebodies," but I think they are the bravest of us. Even most anarchists won't dare to break the Masquerade so completely.

Unbound

Me? I belong to the Unbound. We're even less organized than the Camarilla, but we do think of ourselves as a social movement. We share an interest in breaking traditions and finding new ways for vampires to exist.

For instance, we reject division into clans. Even if you believe that story about Caine and the clan founders, what does it matter? Training accounts for the supposed aptitudes for various Disciplines among the clans: If you spend 20 years teaching childer how to control people's minds instead of turning into wolves, is it any wonder that they become good at one feat but not the other?

I'd bet my fangs that the various clan obsessions and foibles happen because of training, too. Once upon a time, some neurotic vampires convinced themselves they had "refined tastes in blood," or went googly at paintings and flowers, or frenzied at the drop of a hat - and they brainwashed their childer to believe it too. Then those vampires taught their own childer to believe it, and after a hundred years or so you have Clan Venture, House Toreador and the Gang-Gel Tribe.

In modern nights, we can see that "bloodline traits" are nonsense because so many young vampires don't endure decades of indoctrination by their sires. I know childer of Venture sires who can feed on any sort of person they want. On the other hand, I once met a vampire who insisted she was a Toreador but she would feed only upon handsome young black men. I found that I'm descended from one of those angry Brujah, but folks tell me I'm an even-tempered guy. The elders can call us all "thin-blooded Caitiff scum" if they want: They just can't accept that we escaped the limitations they placed upon themselves.

I even know a few vampires who invented whole new Disciplines, something the Camarilla elders say can't be done ever. Other vampires, all young and of the highest generations, have a weird, psychic insight into other vampires' activities, past, present and future. These "seers" sometimes find secrets that elders thought were buried long ago - or that the elders didn't know themselves. So much for the wisdom of the centuries.

We Unbound also reject the Camarilla's obsession with rule by the eldest. We're adults, and by God we'll be treated that way! Some of us in the anarch states try to adapt American law to our circumstances, with jury trials and popularly elected leaders. Others experiment with completely new and original social systems. We actually have more rule of law than the Camarilla does. I can't say we've succeeded in creating laws and governments for vampires, but we're *trying*.

Long ago, the Camarilla might have made sense as a way for vampires to govern and protect themselves, but the world has changed. I don't believe the Camarilla can keep the Masquerade forever. Information moves too quickly. When the mortal population discovers that we exist, we undead had better present ourselves as good citizens instead of parasites. When that night comes, I want a group ready to lobby Congress on behalf of the metabolically challenged.

Some of us Unbound even want to reach out to the other supernatural creatures who must exist. I'm sure most of you have heard horror stories about Lupines - werewolves - tearing apart any vampire they meet? I've heard rumors about wizards and witches, ghosts, zombies, faeries and even mad scientists, robots and aliens. If these creatures really exist, I want to meet them and start a

dialogue to break down whatever ancient suspicions and codes of secrecy keep us apart... more *traditions*.

CONCLUSION

Many vampires sneer at the Unbound as foolish idealists. I never saw idealism as foolish, not when I was a mortal PoliSci student and not now. Like the song says, the times they are a-changin'. The world turns crazier every night - and more dangerous.

I mentioned the Ravnos clan before. A few months ago, they apparently all went mad and started killing each other. I saw two of them, contacts of mine, ripping at each other until one chewed out the other's throat and drank all his blood. The survivor never returned to her haven. All my contacts around the country tell similar stories. I only personally know one Ravnos who survived that week of madness, and he had abandoned his clan to join an Unbound coterie.

The night before the Ravnos went mad, I had a dream. Maybe you'll think I'm a nut for taking a dream seriously. Maybe I *am* a nut - except later I met two separate vampires who told me the same dream. They both had reputations as seers.

I dreamed that a king walked out of a mountain. He had ten arms and ten heads. He cut off his heads one by one and his remaining



head swallowed them. Then a tiger, a dragon and some kind of bird, a stork maybe, attacked him. Finally, the sun came up and they all burst into flames.

My Camarilla informants told me a legend about the clan founders – a legend that the elders insist they *don't* believe. According to this old myth, some night the clan founders will all wake up. They will be very hungry after sleeping for thousands of years. Because of their incredible age, human blood doesn't satisfy them anymore. Instead, they hunger for the blood of vampires – especially their own descendants. They will eat all the younger vampires and ravage the world.

I think my dream was not just a dream. I think the king was the ancestor of the Ravnos clan. He woke up. He fought... something. Maybe other powerful vampires who didn't want to become his breakfast, maybe something else. When he died, really truly died, something *broke* in all his descendants and they went mad.

That's why I take the risk of going to Camarilla cities and giving talks like this. If any other clan founders wake up, they will seek the vampires they can identify as their "family" – the vampires in the Camarilla who *so conveniently* track their own bloodlines and insist on obedience to the eldest among them. I don't think the Camarilla will survive.

If we stay alone and afraid, clinging to the fringes of the Camarilla, we will die with it. If we work together, though – we so-called Caitiff and anarchs, whatever other supernatural beings we can befriend, and even our mortal friends and families – some of us might survive.

Thank you for your time. Oh, and Mr. Cargill? Tell your master not to bother hunting for me or the others in attendance. We really don't endanger the Camarilla; as you've seen, I want to take these unwanted vampires off your prince's hands. Leave them alone and they'll just leave.

How did I know? Really, Mr. Cargill. I did say that the vampires who shared my dream were seers. They had visions and knew things they could not know. I've never had visions, but I've learned to trust my *special* hunches and I have a hunch that you work for a scourge. Calm down, folks. Let him go. He's a treacherous coward, but if I'm right he'll receive a punishment much worse than anything you could do – if not tonight, then in time.

That's it, folks. See you out west! Hey, anybody know a good, open hunting ground? Talking makes me hungry, and I could really go for Chinese.

SELF-PERCEPTION

Thin-blooded are rarely chosen from the elite of human society; their sires don't move in such circles. Instead, they are often inner-city teenagers, cubicle slaves, starving grad students, struggling artists, hoodlums, temps, day laborers, single parents — in short, regular people. And they tend to regard themselves as such, even after the Embrace.

In the clans, a new vampire is taken firmly under his sire's wing. Centuries of tradition come to bear as he is taught the lore, ideology and etiquette. By the time he is presented to Kindred society, he has been trained to think of himself as a creature set apart from humanity. But no one performs this service for the thin-blooded. The average anarch, often a fledgling herself, is doing well enough just to teach her child to hunt — assuming she sticks around to do so (many sires of thin-blooded vampires, appalled at having produced such stunted excuses for progeny, disavow them completely).

Players of thin-blooded characters should keep this in mind. The edgy, tragically hip persona of the typical neonate may be inappropriate. Remember, you probably don't know about Caine, the 13 ancient clans or anything else associated with vampires. All you know is that you're not quite like the vampires in the books and movies. Your mind and soul still seem to be your own. As far as you can tell, you're much the same person you always were... with a few disturbing differences.

VIEWS ON OTHER KINDRED

Thin-blooded vampires' attitudes toward the sects and clans vary widely, largely because their contact with other vampires is so scattershot. Ones who know their sires tend to take their sires' views for granted until they learn something different, and so their outlook has much in common with that of the anarchs and other Kindred malcontents. However, many more thin-blooded are abandoned, orphaned or estranged. They have no idea what being Kindred is all about... and trying to learn in a vacuum can be a terrifying and confusing experience.

Consider the plight of Daphne, a thin-blooded fledgling who has her first encounter with the Camarilla when she tries to hunt in a nightclub owned by the local Ventrue. *So you just wander into my club, kill one of my customers and leave the corpse in my dumpster? Your sire ever mention this little code called the Traditions? Oh really? Escaping from that fiasco with just the clothes on her back, she settles in another city, only to run into a prowling Sabbat pack. Look, a mewling weakling. Let's set her on fire and see if she's got what it takes to join the true brotherhood. Traditions? Stop talking bullshit before you get us mad. A few nights later, smudged with soot, she emerges to find they've evidently given up on her. She flees again to Boston, figuring a vampire could easily hide there. The Giovanni have their own opinions on her little plan.*

She'll probably be dead before she ever figures it out. Still, she has good reason to keep trying. The Kindred are a savage and inexplicably hostile race, but they are also her

forebears, her family — the only ones who could possibly understand what she's going through. Besides, what's the alternative... to just keep on slinking around, night after night, in this parasitical existence and never to know the meaning of it all? This uneasy mixture of longing and fear is typical. Many a thin-blooded innocent sets out to prove to herself that she isn't the only vampire in the world, only to discover to her chagrin that *she's absolutely right*.

ASSOCIATIONS

Association among the thin-blooded, like much else about them, is haphazard. There are no Washington lobbies, no support groups, no alt.kindred.high-gen, no sewing circles, no Pulitzer-chasing journalists to evangelize their plight. How do they ever find each other? Usually they don't.

To have sired a frail vampire is generally considered a disgrace in the clans. Many thin-blooded internalize their sires' shame and refuse even to speak to other weaklings. Instead, they try to earn status by strengthening themselves (via training or diablerie) and seeking the patronage of their elders. These tactics rarely succeed. At best, such a youngster might find a prince or bishop willing to cut a deal: protection and legitimacy in exchange for eternal servitude and expendability. At worst, an infernalist vampire might consider him a willing dupe for promises of easy power.

Other thin-blooded take a more express route to respectability — they simply move to a new city and lie about themselves. This is usually Plan B or C, since a very new vampire doesn't know enough about Kindred society to believably fake clan membership or fabricate a lineage. It can also be a highly risky enterprise, depending on local attitudes. In New Orleans, an impostor is often accepted with a nudge and wink. In London, the *rastacouere* had better be prepared to undergo the genealogical equivalent of the Spanish Inquisition, administered by Kindred who are former heralds of the Royal College of Arms.

A few lucky bastards (forgive the double-entendre) are absorbed, if grudgingly, into their sires' coteries. Sometimes this happens because the sire insists — sometimes because multiple vampires in the group have sired thin-blooded childer. Sometimes, a coterie is so small and powerless that even a weakling whelp can make herself useful.

Coteries composed entirely of thin-blooded are extremely rare, but not nonexistent. As seers discover that they can multiply their clairvoyant powers by cooperating with each other, they increasingly seek out those who share the gift. In other cases, thin-blooded are forced together by circumstance or the machinations of an older vampire.

THE UNBOUND

Elders like to scoff that the whole "Unbound" movement is nothing but a pathetic attempt on the part of the Caitiff to define themselves into legitimacy. The Unbound beg to differ. They disavow the sects, the clans and the age hierarchy. Why would they seek legitimacy in a system they despise?

Sour grapes, perhaps. But few dispute that vampire legend can be interpreted to support their heretical notions. Caine *was* clanless. He didn't inherit Disciplines; he invented them. The Caitiff share these traits with him. What if they really are to be the chosen instrument of his wrath? As rumors continue to spread about new and mysterious powers, the theory attracts less and less hilarity.

Most Unbound happily extend their protection to thin-blooded who ask for it — to do any less would undermine their passionate ideology. Unfortunately, however, the movement is still quite small. Its members devote their limited resources to evangelizing among the anarchs, especially in the free state of California. thin-blooded dwelling in other areas have only a slim chance of stumbling across another vampire, let alone one of their number.

MORTALS

Many thin-blooded have little or no contact with other vampires. Instead, ignorant as they are of the Masquerade, they confide in mortals. They turn to their family and friends for help in dealing with this crisis as they have on countless other occasions. How should they know any better? Of course, telling someone that you are a vampire is never an easy thing, and not all mortals take the news gently. Still, in the absence of any other support, it might be the only reasonable choice. A few weaklings have even approached human experts in various fields — doctors, scientists, priests and psychics — for help in curing or at least understanding their new condition. The end result is almost invariably silence, whether willing, coerced or fatal, as other vampires learn of the hemovore at the local GP's office and refuse to yield the Masquerade that protects their unives.

Occasionally, a fledgling has the questionable fortune to be discovered by someone who recognizes her for what she is. Most often, that someone is a vampire-hunter, and thus hostile, but exceptions are possible. Even a soldier of the Inquisition might find his world-view sufficiently challenged by a penitent vampire who can bear daylight to decide that the matter merits further inquiry. As for government agents or Arcanum scholars, any interest such folk might take in the thin-blooded would be clinical at best. However, with patience, a chance meeting could develop into a profitable working relationship.

OTHERS

Very rarely, a member of some other supernatural race will stumble upon a thin-blooded vampire. These encounters generally go badly for one party or the other, unless the supernatural in question is also an outcast from her own species. Misery loves company.

See Chapter Four for more information on how to include thin-blooded characters in a chronicle.

STRATEGIES

Like so many neonates, thin-blooded generally don't survive long. Those who do belong to an extraordinarily



tough lot. Compared to full-blooded vampires, they have very little mystic power. Native cleverness and circumspection must take up the slack. Below are a few elementary strategies employed by the successful (and yes, the wildlife analogies are intentional).

- **Camouflage:** Let the lion strut and show his mane; but if a doe wants to survive, she freezes and blends in. Thin-blooded who persevere eventually learn that it is far wiser to stay off the streets and hide their true nature. Many become reclusive, interacting with the world mainly by proxy, using their distinctive powers only when necessary. It's generally safest to disguise oneself as a mortal, avoiding face-to-face meetings with other supernaturals as much as possible, but some thin-blooded have succeeded in taking the opposite tack, passing themselves off as neonates of the clans, or even ghouls. (The aura of a thin-blooded vampire, while pale, is often less so than that of other vampires. It can look very similar to an older ghoul's aura.)

- **Foraging:** Friends are found in the least likely places. Although the thin-blooded often suffer for maintaining their old mortal contacts, knowing someone who does data entry in a government office, for example, or a janitor at a prestigious office building, or a friend of a friend of a congressman, might come in quite handy in a time of need. Such resources are frequently overlooked by the more privileged and snobbish vampires of the clans, but bastards can hardly afford to be so picky.

Moreover, thin-blooded have a distinct advantage in their dealings with mortal associates. They are usually much

younger, much more in touch than the average vampire. Other Cainites must rely on fear, favors and the dubious emotional power of the blood bond to secure their underlings' loyalty; many haven't had a true friend since they died decades or centuries ago. A thin-blooded youngling, however, might have to work pretty hard to avoid her best girlfriend who's been leaving worried messages on her machine for the last three weeks. Additionally, vampires who feed at the Rack have a much easier time if their appearance follows mortal trends. A vampire in her baggy pants and wifebeater T-shirt of rave culture will have much more luck feeding at a warehouse party than a potent elder who still affects the silk brocades of his mortal days as a merchant prince. And she's probably less likely to be viewed as suspicious by police, as well.

- **Bottom-Feeding:** Sustenance, too, must be sought out in nooks and crannies. In a city where vampires dwell, almost every square inch of land is claimed as princely domain, private turf or both. Vagrants have no "legal" place to hunt, so thin-blooded must take their prey where it won't be missed. Some are lucky enough to persuade mortal friends to donate. Others skulk in the farthest reaches of the suburbs, or take victims most Kindred wouldn't want anyway: the diseased, the aged, etc. (Of course, *most* Kindred doesn't mean *all* Kindred. Some vampires consider the downtrodden their rightful prey, so even a careful fledgling might run into trouble.)

Assuming one can overcome the risk of discovery, the safest tactic is to collect a small group of regular vessels — a



herd, of course — and stick to it. But doing so is often problematic for the thin-blooded — they lack the skill with Dominate, Presence, Animalism, etc., that other vampires use to make it go more smoothly. Yet, a few enterprising fledglings have found cozy niches: working the night shift at a small charity shelter, for example, and feeding on the sleeping residents... or leasing the space for a free V.D. testing clinic.

• **Evolution:** Again, the youth of the thin-blooded can be turned to their advantage. While most anarchs and Caitiff are also “young” by Kindred standards, many of them have been vampires for several decades. Thin-blooded, however, are definitely children of the Information Age, and they can use that modern savvy to confound and outwit pursuers. Sure, that Tremere regent can shoot fire out of his fingers, but can he keep his cool when a live TV crew shows up on his chantry doorstep? Of course the prince knows how to bury a murder investigation, but does she know that all her tax information can be purchased over the Internet? Thin-blooded also find it much easier to blend in with the Canaille when it suits them; they know the current slang, the fashionable locales and the hot topics.

• **Running Like All Hell:** When all else fails.... Seriously, mobility is another strong advantage the thin-blooded possess. Kindred tend to become entangled in possessions, administrative duties and prestation commitments. Some of them have existed so long that their chances of running into someone they know in any given place are actually fairly high. Pride is an even more important consideration — fleeing one’s domain is traditionally considered a sign of weakness among Cainites.

But while parting is often emotionally difficult for the thin-blooded, due to the friends and family they must leave behind, they face far fewer practical obstacles. Moreover, they leave a fainter track. Their faces have never made the society pages. They don’t own controlling stock in this art gallery or that manufacturing firm. Their friends and acquaintances are as obscure as they are.

Some thin-blooded hit the road and never stop running. However, the nomad’s way is neither easy nor safe. Settling in a small town, one with no other Kindred in it, is a better solution; but except for a very few elders seeking respite from the Jyhad, most vampires find it difficult to give up the stimulating bustle of the city. Furthermore, the more remote the locale, the higher the likelihood of Final Death at the claws of Lupines and threats posed by other mysterious beings.

DHAMPIRS

Kendall sat on the curb and cried himself sick for the first time since he was a little kid. It wasn’t that he was hurt bad. There was a little scrape over his eye, a little salt taste in his mouth, and they were going away fast. It wasn’t even what had happened to Julio — well, maybe a little, but Julio knew better than to call him “faggot,” even as a joke.

It was the way he’d felt while he was doing it. Each blow had sent a little explosion of joy into his brain, the same soothing pleasure he got

from banging on his drums at home. He’d beaten his best friend to a bruised pulp and loved every second of it. He sniffed at the splash of blood on his jacket sleeve, and waited for his stepmom to remember to pick him up, and wondered if you could go crazy at the age of twelve.

Dhampirs start off on the wrong foot in this world, and things never get any better.

To begin with, the birth of a half-vampire child generally comes as a great surprise to at least one of the parents. It may be greeted with elation or superstitious disgust, but never without fear. For a female vampire, motherhood adds burden and danger to an existence already filled to brimming with both. She may have a rough time of it physically — her undead body is hardly suited to the task. She’ll also have a lot of explaining to do if another vampire catches her in maternity wear! A Kindred father may believe that his lover has been unfaithful to him (after all, it can’t possibly be *his*); but if he knows better, he must face a terrible decision. Should he stay, take responsibility and accept whatever befalls him and his new family as a result... or should he abandon his own flesh and blood?

Nor is the human parent likely to have it any easier. Just loving a vampire, knowingly or unknowingly, is enough invitation to tragedy. The additional strain of raising a baby in an atmosphere so charged with pain and uncertainty can break even the strongest spirits. Furthermore, mortal mothers of dhampirs often develop life-threatening complications during pregnancy and labor (whether due to the clash of mortal and immortal vitae, or more mysterious factors): depressed immune functioning, hemorrhaging, toxemia, etc.

With so many perils, it’s all too easy for a dhampir to end up abandoned or orphaned at an early age. Dad runs off and Mom dies at the hands of the scourge. Or Mom succumbs to drug addiction and Dad decides his child will be happier “among normal people.” That is, assuming Dad was ever told about the baby in the first place. Even if the family is intact (for now), their prospects for domestic bliss are slim in the World of Darkness. For one reason or another, many dhampirs must learn their true nature on their own, while being passed from foster home to foster home, or holding down a minimum-wage job to feed themselves and an ailing grandmother, or serving their time for assault in a juvenile detention center.

SELF-DISCOVERY

If the thin-blooded are ignorant of their heritage, then how much more so are their mortal offspring? A dhampir’s occult legacy usually doesn’t manifest until the onset of puberty; in addition to all the usual tribulations of growing up, the child must face a second layer of transformation, far darker and infinitely more mysterious.

The process varies from individual to individual. Most simply become aware, sometime during their teens, of a special reserve of physical strength that they can call upon — instinctively at first, in times of stress. They may be afraid of this power and the feral pleasure that accompanies using it, or they may be delighted to discover such a useful weapon

against a harsh world and immediately set about finding its limits. Other dhampirs bloom later. For them, mystical dabbling or a sudden encounter with a vampire might be what it takes to spark their hidden potential.

In any case, once a dhampir is fully awakened to her supernatural essence, she can never go back. The Blood forever alters her physically and mentally. Her aging slows to a crawl (which can be a real social disadvantage when it happens in early puberty). She gains a limited ability to learn vampiric Disciplines. She also gains an inner Beast, which, though mild compared to a vampire's, is still strong enough to test her heart and will. In other words, as Dr. Netchurch so aptly notes in Chapter One, she becomes biologically indistinguishable from a revenant.

(Note: *Biologically* is the all-important qualifier. In all other respects, dhampirs could not be more different from the freakish Bratovitches, Zantos, et al. Revenants have a culture of their own, a skewed outlook that they have developed over many centuries. Dhampirs nominally belong to the human world, however imperfect the fit may be.)

LIFE AS A DHAMPIR

Dhampirs come up with a great variety of justifications and strategies for dealing with their heritage. Some curse their undead parent and seek to slay him, hoping that such action can cleanse them of their own darkness; others express their hostility in a more general fashion by becoming hunters. Some decide that they must be irrevocably tainted with evil and set about finding a dark power worthy of their servitude. (Stories have begun to circulate in Mexico City about a dhampir who firmly believes himself to be the Antichrist.) Many are either unaware of their vampiric ancestry or refuse to believe in it; instead, they choose to see themselves as psychic, enlightened or touched by a cruel deity.

A tiny number have enough contact with their vampiric parents to learn whatever they may know about the world of the undead (which usually isn't much). This can be both good and bad. On one hand, the support of "someone who understands" can be of great help in weathering the disturbing changes wrought by Kindred vitae. On the other hand, if you've ever been embarrassed to let a friend meet Mom and Dad because they dress funny or make bad jokes....

Whatever the particulars, every dhampir must contend with the same dark legacy. Wielding the blood-strength is a source of exultant pleasure — a pale shadow of the vampiric Kiss, perhaps — but also of deadly temptation. Although dhampirs don't need to feed as vampires do (in fact, most profess no taste at all for human blood), lost vitae replenishes itself only gradually, and the anemic weakness and emotional letdown that result can be devastating. Some dhampirs become addicted to the rush of using their Disciplines and turn to powerful stimulants in an effort to reproduce it. Others discover a far more potent substitute: Kindred blood.

The Beast is an even greater thorn in a half-breed's side. True, a dhampir doesn't often encounter the sort of provoca-

tion that might bring about a homicidal rage; but it takes only one such incident to break up a romance, destroy a friendship or scuttle a promising career. And even petty annoyances can add up. When a 17-year-old dhampir drives home through gridlock traffic after a day of flunking his classes to find his girlfriend has canceled their date and the cat's puking on his bed, his rage may exceed anything he has ever known.

DHAMPIR AND KINDRED SOCIETY

Dhampirs are a new phenomenon in the World of Darkness. Although legends of half-vampires have circulated for centuries (indeed, in one Slavic village the entire population claims descent from a common vampire ancestor, and its citizens bear the name Lampijerovic — "little vampire" — in testament to that belief), such stories have been almost universally dismissed as folk tales. Nevertheless, for all the scoffing, some Kindred remain fascinated with the idea — particularly those who died before they could satisfy their longing for a family of their own. Secretly, lest they incur the scorn of their fellows, they experiment with the various methods prescribed by myth: charms, relics, dark Tremere arts, pacts with the devil, even true love. All to no avail.

Now, suddenly, plain old-fashioned sex appears to be doing the trick for some. The existence of the dhampir is still contested by cynics, who suspect some kind of millennial hoax, but to those who have an inkling of thin-blooded oddities, the idea is all too plausible.

At present, a dhampir who falls into the clutches of a full vampire will most likely be mistaken for a revenant or a masterless ghoul — hardly cause for joy, perhaps, but good fortune indeed compared to the lot of the dhampir who is recognized for what she truly is. To Camarilla vampires, she is the ultimate Masquerade breach: an elemental and irrevocable mingling of Kindred and kine. To vampires of a scientific bent, particularly Tremere or Tzimisce, she is also an intriguing development in Kindred biology, and thus a prime subject for experimentation (her parents can expect to attract such interest as well, since they obviously must be unusual specimens themselves). To Sabbat and other die-hard Noddists, she is an ominous portent of doom — which may not be her fault, but killing the messenger is as honored a tradition among vampires as among mortals.

A few Kindred, mostly elders who matured in times of greater religious faith, might take a more enlightened view of her emergence. To them, the spectacle of true life issuing from the withered loins of a vampire can only mean one thing: God is forgiving, and He has sent this miracle to show the Cainites that redemption is possible even for their cursed race. They may well honor her as a sort of living relic. But these Kindred are the ones she should fear most of all; a reluctant messiah is a perilous thing to be, and the same fanatics who appoint her High Priestess of their Gehenna cult tonight might decide tomorrow that she looks better atop the altar than behind it.

THE WORM TURNS: KINDRED SOCIETY IN THE FINAL NIGHTS

Wiseest and most esteemed sire —

I have a birthday surprise, of sorts, for you in this commentary. Long overdue, I know, but I think you will agree that it was worth the wait — for we have managed to contact an old source I address you thought you would never hear from again, and added his observations to the pot. Bon app'iti, and I will be expecting your additions shortly —

— Beckett

Beckett:

I hope you understand this is only a rough draft. Several important facts still require follow-up and confirmation, and politics are catching up with me again. Nonetheless, since you begged so shamelessly, I went ahead, et voila. I think you will find that my conclusions agree remarkably with your findings in Westminster. Just be sure this never finds its way into the hands of that bitch Aylsha... — Lucila

"The Signs of Gehenna" (BoN: CoS 1-88, Marrakesh Codex, Pehlavi trans.) — An Exegesis
Reliable sources for Noddist scripture are, of course, as rare as reliable Caine sightings. When found, they are without exception obtained and hoarded by the very eldest among us. Furthermore, even paleographers of unimpeachable probity and integrity disagree on authentication methodology. For these reasons, establishing a stemma for the Book of Nod, to say nothing of the apocryphal Revelations of the Dark Mother, Proverbs of the Akkadian Sage, Delphic Visions, and Overseer's Accounts, remains intractably problematic.

The Marrakesh Codex, however, is the exception that proves the rule. Although it contains only 24 of the 52 known sections of the *Book of Nod*, Cainite scholars are in remarkable agreement as to its provenance and antiquity, the latter of which was recently proved through radiocarbon dating.

Furthermore, the keepers of the three extant copies of the Codex (two of which are in Byzantine Greek, and the other — the oldest by centuries — in Pehlavi) have been notably generous, if selective, in allowing Kindred specialists to examine both microfilms of the manuscripts and the physical codices themselves. The physical examinations, in particular, have revealed an unexpected wealth of information, especially the recent recognition of Greek 1 as a palimpsest that supports several theories first put forth by Aristotle de Laurent in his famous *Notes on the Epigraphy of the First City*. However, that is a topic for a separate essay.

The following is an exegesis of "The Signs of Gehenna" as it appears in the Pehlavi translation, including my own commentary as well as that of Beckett of the Mnemosyne and Nahir of the Lasombra, both eminent Noddists. (Beckett and de Laurent have examined this prophecy at some length themselves in their *Annotated Book of Nod*, to which I wholeheartedly refer the beginning student.) Disagreements on such a subject are only natural, and in the interests of fairness, I have refrained from editing the comments even for stylistic consistency.

Codicology has dated the Pehlavi MS to ca. A.D. 530. Fourteen different scribes contributed to the work, which is an explicit attempt to assemble all the known First and Second City lore, and many of the sections, including this one, purport to have been taken directly from the fabled Ashur tablets (only fragments of which are now extant).

Slashes in the text indicate the original versification, which is evidently faithful to the presumptive Enochian version — or, at least, it bears no resemblance to known Pehlavi or Greek poetic meters.

The Signs of Gehenna (Part 1 of the "Chronicle of Secrets")

Quiet! Hear the raven's cry! / The stillness of the wind / rising hot on the street / the towers hide / the darkness of the day.

A string of symbolic allusions; the raven is a traditional bearer of omens, especially for ill, and the stagnant air just before a storm signifies looming trouble. As for the towers, possibly a reference to the hubris of Babel? — Lucila

Not possibly. Although they used to ground long since, there are those among our race who remember the Divinity of Babel's architect, whose great folly went unseen by them then until it was too late. Then was the Original Tongue split, and confusion sown among Sethite and Cainite alike. The time for confusion is clearly come again. — Nahir

Beckett — Aristotle

Beck intended to add his commentary later, yes? And let Ephraemites know that he can have a stab at it too if he likes

PHOTOGRAPHY — B

possibly, however, a physical reference to the skyscrapers of modern times. Interestingly enough, I have heard tales from a general source about wandering raven-men with an uncanny knack for foretelling doom, whatever the truth of that, we should watch our fellow supernaturals as closely as possible — they may know something we don't. — Beckett

When Lasombra's dreams come true/on the day when the moon runs as blood/and the sun rises black in the sky/ that is the day of the Damned/ when Caine's children will rise again.

And the world will turn cold/and unclean things will boil up from the ground/and great storms will roll, lightning will light/fires, animals will fester and their bodies, twisted, will fall.

This, too, is fairly typical apocalyptic imagery — plagues and natural wonders. The blood-moon and black sun suggest eclipses, perhaps unusually close together... but viewed from where? (Perhaps the site of the First or Second City?) The "world turning cold," etc., could possibly be metaphorical, but might indicate a change in global weather patterns. Given that temperatures worldwide are currently on an upswing, such an interpretation would imply that we have some time. — Lucia

To give natural cause to the night of the Reckoning is like asking the wagon to pull the milk. These signs will appear, I believe, because of the action of my grandfathers' great power. I know his might firsthand and I tell you this: When he comes his time to throw a shadow over the sun it will be done as he wills. He will see that great light to the Void, and none of our ilk will be able to stop him. This alone, all, is why we must find the other Ancients. — Nahis

The "unclean things" are generally taken to mean toxic Antediluvians, but I believe it is high time that other theories were examined. The Nosferata have long complained about the underground pollution problem, and especially when one considers the mutagenic properties of some types of industrial waste, it may be that we are dealing with the emergence of a completely new threat rather than the reemergence of an old one. The reference to dark and cold, the obscuring of the sun and moon, could also be interpreted as nuclear winter. Oh, and Nahis: Your grandsire is dead. — Beckett

So, too, our grandsires will rise from the ground/they will break their fast on the first part of us/they will consume us whole.

"The first part of us" — sobering words for elders; this seems to confirm the long-held suspicion that only the strongest blood can satisfy the thirst of the Ancients. — Lucia

On the second day, Caine will return/and call his children to the meeting place/on the site of the First City he will beckon/them, sitting on his basalt throne.

This verse has spurred at least a hundred ill-fated quests for the site of the First City. Although half the Middle East has now been dug up, scoured and otherwise explored, we still have no better guess as to its location than we did in the Middle Ages. Even advanced techniques like satellite surveillance and underground sonar have failed. If the city was indeed destroyed in a great deluge, the waters did their work well. However, the reference to the throne may yet help to narrow down the geographical area. Basalt is a common enough mineral, but northeastern Jordan and Sattlee are famous for their black basalt (see the next verse), and it has been used as a building material there since ancient times. — Lucia

One wonders why the Father would wait for the doom of the sun before calling his children together, why he would not visit "the evil of my grandfathers." That he should wish to punish his wicked progeny this is understandable; but throughout scripture he is most protective of the mortals. I cannot credit the idea that he would allow so many to die in calamity through simple hardness. Thus, I am led to believe the Father is presently trapped by some mysterious vexation and will be unable to return until noon on the second night. Other records I have seen support this theory, but regrettably I am loath-bound not to quote them. — Nahis

Personally, I am more inclined to regard this passage as mythic symbolism. The reference to a sequence of "days," which continues into the following verses, harks back to the "seven days" of Hebrew creation lore. Likewise, the Dark Father on his Black Throne is an obvious derivative of various lord-of-the-dead figures, such as Hades or the Yama Kings, who render judgments on the fate of souls. — Beckett

And Caine will call aloud the names of those to be destroyed/for their crimes are too great/and all those who have consumed the heart's blood of their sire/will be brought before the Black Throne/and made to drink of Caine's blood/and Caine's blood will eat their blood.

And the Dark Mother herself will be brought forth/and there, in the valley of Enoch, will there be a battle/a duel of Dark Father and Dark Mother/the demon queen will bite deep/the damned king will bite deeper/we will not know the thing which will happen/but the sky will tear apart, and the earth below/and the forces of Hell will pour up out of the ground.

Frequently quoted in debased form at the start of a Blood Hunt, the first verse above emphasizes a point made over and over in Noddist scripture: that Caine hates warfare and murder among his children more than any other crime. The second verse seems to be a clear reference to Lilith, whose role in our origins is hotly debated, and further implies an antagonism between her and Caine that is unique in Noddist scripture. When did they become enemies? And is "deep"/"deeper" merely a poetic structure, or does it serve to indicate that Caine is the stronger of the two and will likely prevail? — Lucita

The Baabari will disagree on that point, my dear. In their fantasies it is she who shall punish him and his children for the wrongs he did her in the Third Garden. That the scripture says she is brought forth like a criminal on a sacrifice, suggests to me that she, too, has been imprisoned although I have also heard it argued that the phrase is meant to convey her springing newborn out of the waters of the Earth. — Nabia

One shudders to think how long this supposed recitation of the condemned would actually take... Nevertheless, many Kindred take this passage extremely seriously and claim that Caine's judgment will wipe out some clans (usually the Issamites, Tremere, and Giovanni) completely. — Beckett

On the third day/there will be silence/the crows will feed on the carrion/plague will dance amongst the ruins/the last of the Wild Ones will leave this place/the last of the Moon-Beasts will fight/and fall/and the Antediluvians will make for themselves an empire of blood.

Interesting, the reference to plague "dancing amongst the ruins"... One is put in mind of images of the Danse Macabre, but this prophecy long predates that medieval metaphor. — Lucita

Again, I say we should definitely monitor the other supernaturals for signs of exodus or large-scale mobilization. Although I find it implausible that both the Sae and the Lupines could disappear completely from the Earth they have so long inhabited, the warning is well taken in its larger sense. — Beckett

They will rule with iron talons/they will wrench the hearts of all still alive/and the full sum of the earth's living will come/and live in the Last City, called Gehenna.

And there will be a reign of one thousand years/and there will be no love, or life, or pity/the mighty will be as slaves/the virtuous will be made foul/every good gift, and every perfect gift will be tainted/by the Father of Darkness, whose power will come from the nether realms.

Despite the superficial resemblance this verse bears to mortal apocalyptic traditions (thousand-year reigns, etc.), it would be wrong to dismiss these dire and bitter laments as mere poetry. Whatever else it means, the scripture quite clearly states that it is the Antediluvians who will assume control of the Last City. What, one wonders, happens to Caine? Will he abdicate once again after making his judgments, leaving the Earth to his children's depredations? Will he be killed or subjected to the Amaranth? Who is the Father of Darkness, if not Caine? Might it be that some other Antediluvian will manage to usurp our progenitor's power, perhaps with aid from the "nether realms" (i.e., Hell or its equivalent)? — Lucita

Some scholars have interpreted the verse just as Lucita says, and have come to the conclusion that the ascension of the Baabari on the Giovanni line will be the one coming to rule all in the Last City, enslaving even the other Ancients. I would respectfully point out that my grandaunt, too, matches the epithet. — Nabia

A thousand years is a suspicious number, far too neat and tidy. Obviously, it is symbolic, but whether it indicates a near-millennium or merely a period so dreadful that it seems a millennium remains to be determined. Oh, and Nabia: your grandaunt is still dead. — Beckett

When the snows consume the earth/and the sun gutters like a candle in the wind/then and only then will there be born a woman/the last daughter of Eve/and in her there will be decided the fate of all.

And you will not know this woman, except by the mark of the moon on her/and she will face treachery, hatred, and pain/but in her is the last hope.

This is one of the most confusing parts of the prophecy. According to the second verse, the sun turns black on the very first day of the Schemna. How then can it "gutter" a millennium later? Is the first instance meant to imply a temporary darkening only? I also wonder whether the scripture is really speaking of the last mortal woman ever to be born — a shuddersome idea for those who must have the living for sustenance. Perhaps a more special inheritance is implied. As to the "mark of the moon" — the moon has many faces, many aspects which are constantly in flux. My poetic instinct tells me that if the Last Daughter signifies a real person, she will somehow share this characteristic. Perhaps a multiple personality? — Lucita

I know that many among the Camillees already seek this woman to kill on command. I say to you now: Let her be! She will be moved by one ever more powerful than our Dark Father and to attempt to wrest control from that One will surely doom you. By the time the Last Daughter is born, if you yet walk the Earth, you too will be paying for sin. Only through Eve's daughter shall Eve's sin be redeemed. — Nabia

Indeed, many seek the Last Daughter, though it seems quite clear from the prophecy that her time has not yet come. Nor are there less than a hundred possible interpretations for the "mark of the moon" — everything from a physical birth-mark to Lupine blood. It is my own contention that the Last Daughter represents the higher soul of mortal man; the prophecy is trying to tell us that humanity, with all its weaknesses and contradictions, will yet be the ultimate source of salvation for the Cainites. In fairy tales, the heroine whose purity eventually conquers all is often the youngest child of the family. "La belle et la bête" ("Beauty and the Beast") is only one modern example.

— Beckett

And you will know these last times by the time of thin blood/which will mark vampires that cannot Beget/you will know them by the Clanless/who will come to rule/you will know them by the Wild Ones/who will hunt us even in the strongest city/you will know them by the awakening of some of the eldest/the Crone will awaken and consume all.

You will know these times, for a black/hand will rise up and choke all those who oppose it/and those who eat heart's blood will flourish/and the Kindred will crowd each to/his own, and vitae will be as rare as diamonds.

Clearly, some of these signs have been fulfilled already. We have witnessed the advent of vampires who cannot sire; certainly the murderers among us flourish — though it seems thus, perhaps, to all people in all times; the cities are hazardously overcrowded; and the rumors of stirring Ancients are thicker than ever, even if most remain unproven. (Chief among such rumors is, of course, the one regarding the progenitor of the Ravnos clan. I feel obliged to remind the reader that no direct account of the affair has yet emerged. However, the behavior of his children in the wake of the alleged events is certainly disturbing enough in its own right.) Fortunately, I have found no evidence of the other omens mentioned in the verse. The reference to the Crone is particularly puzzling. A Crone is often mentioned in biographies of Cain, but she is without exception killed by story's end. Could this be an archetype, a symbolic representation of Fate or long-forgotten Kindred lore? — Lucita

I agree that not all these omens have come to pass as yet. Though they say the Wild Ones walk among us again though they have not yet moved to war. As the vampires multiply, mortal kind grows scarce. Of the Black Hand that cowardly death will, however, I will say this: This passage was well known to Cainite scholars long before these books named themselves. Be not terrified of a word they hope to make themselves the instrument of holy vengeance. Let fate never again deal cowardly death along with all the rest of us. — Nalis

The verse about the clanless "coming to rule" has been under considerable debate of late. Some argue that the handful of Cainite princes who have come to power in recent years mark the fulfillment of this sign. Others, however, believe that this is a timely warning of the dangers of the resurgent March Revolt; that if we are not prudent, the unwashed hordes of disinherited children could overwhelm us all. As for the Crone, my distinguished sire claims that a tome shown him in Boston by an avowed Lilin puts forth an alternate interpretation. According to that source, the Crone was actually an aspect of Lilith (a similar claim is made regarding the Serpent of Eden) and she only feigned her death in the rising sun. I make no claims for or against the idea; I merely include it in the interest of balanced inquiry. It has also been proposed that the Crone refers to Baba Yaga, the legendary Slavic witch whom many Nosferatu claim as their ancestress. — Beckett

It is not Baba Yaga. — Nalis

Mark these signs, they are/coming! Gehenna/will be on earth.

Mark the shadow which flies/mark the dragon which rises/mark the darkness which moves/mark the shadow of the moon/mark the angel that dies/mark the maiden who weeps/mark the children Embraced/mark the Clanless who run.

Here, alas, the prophecy becomes frustratingly vague. The "dragon" has been taken by some scholars to refer to Vlad Dracul; but should that worthy yet exist, I must inform him that he is far from the only immortal to bear this epithet. Dragons, in Western culture, are frequently representative of Satanic power, as are shadows and darkness. On a possibly misleading note, however, I will mention that there was a recent account in a Midwestern American newspaper of an angel slighting, wherein the heavenly creature was found, fallen, on the roof of a bank building, and faded into nothingness shortly after discovery. — Lucita

Lucita does well to criticize this verse; the prophet is not of much aid to us here. Maidens have wept too millennia, and no dark angels perish nightly in their right against the great evils of the world. However, at the risk of repeating myself like a babbling old man, I will point out that shadows again figure prominently in the poetry. — Nalis

No one would take you for a dotard, Rashi, but I think that laying the blame for this particular omen on the Lasombra clan founder is somewhat premature. Some kindred point to the injunction to "mark the shadow of the moon" as yet another clue to the advent of the Last Daughter of Eve. They deduce from this verse that the "mark of the moon" mentioned earlier refers to the time of her birth rather than a bodily mark — perhaps a lunar eclipse? However, this theory is quickly losing ground to a new one concerning the infamous Red Star, which appeared mere months ago following all the turmoil with the Karnos clan. At the time it flared into life, or so the witnesses say, it was so close to the dark edge of the moon that it almost seemed to be within the moon's shadow. — Beckett

And there will be a time/when sire will drive out childer/when sire will abandon childer/to the sun's mercy/and there will be no mercy for the Clanless/there will be no mercy for the Clanless, mongrel though they be/upon their forgotten sires/shall be the curse of Auriel/upon their hateful sires/shall be the curse that comes of crossing Caine/upon their lazy sires/shall be the curse of the hunters hunted.

It is chilling to feel, in these words so anciently spoken, the sense of urgency that comes to us across the centuries. Now there is cause for such urgency, but we can only ask if it is too late to act. The literal repetition of a phrase, as in this verse, generally denotes intensification: There shall be no mercy for the clanless. The "curse of Auriel [Zirell]," for those unfamiliar with Caine biographies, refers to the death-angel's warning to Caine that his childer would always be plagued with warfare and murder. No surprise there. — Lucia

In bygone nights, "lonely hunted" was taken to mean the wretched, those mortals in all times and places who know of us and refuse to abide us. Now, however, the phrase is much quoted by those who wish to revive the ancient tradition of the scourge. — Nalio

"The sun's mercy" may have a different meaning for those weak-blooded childer who, if current rumor may be believed, can endure the sun's rays... but this is idle speculation. — Beckett

Those among the Clanless will have no/path to follow/no family to name/no generation to hold/no traditions to keep/no customs to give/no hospitality to give.

Why do you make these orphans?/Why do you leave them in the street?/They are the dark seed of our undoing/they will band together with those who hate us/they will follow Brujah's childer/they will make the blood run red/they are going to kill the dead/they are going to eat our kin/they will scream and bash our doors/they will cry aloud for justice.

Let every prince carve these words into the walls of his house. — Nalio

Clanless, all, they will know secret ways/
Clanless, all, they are Lilith's foul get/
Clanless, all, they are newly awake/
Clanless, all! No family, no sign, no/loyalty, no elder.

Beware those who walk without a clan/for they will be our undoing/pity them! Adopt the orphans where you can/but watch them. In them is the bad seed/of their sire.

The reference to Lilith here is unexpected and deeply disturbing, especially in light of recent discoveries about the clanless. In Nodelist lore, Lilith is frequently credited with granting Caine the ability to work his vampiric powers into any form he might choose. It is now becoming apparent that like him, some Caitiff are capable of devising completely original arts of the Blood. From what forbidden font do they drink? — Lucia

Alas, these are now too many to adopt. Though at one time these wise words of the prophet may have saved off destruction, I fear the clanless will, indeed, be our undoing, and the blame will be ours for falling from the word of our Father. — Nalio

I have heard of Lilith-cults who, encouraged by this final passage of the prophecy, now actively seek out Caitiff and weak-blooded orphans. Disturbing indeed! In any case, it is an undisputed fact that Caitiff are more vulnerable to recruitment by the Sabbat and other violent groups. My sire may call me an agnostic, but I would like to state here that I do indeed believe in Gehenna. Very real disaster looms over us, and we hardly need the action of long-dead and mythical ancestors to bring it to fruition. As the prophecy so eloquently tells us, we have planted the seed of our own doom. Natural law will ensure that we reap our reward in due time. — Beckett

HELLFIRE AND BRIMSTONE

From their outward behavior, one could easily conclude that the Kindred, as a race, are dead to the mystical. The average elder seems preoccupied with treachery; the average neonate seems preoccupied with surviving. The Sabbat, for all its talk of holy war, wastes much of its energy on pointless orgies of violence. And the Camarilla officially ridicules anyone foolish enough to believe in cannibalistic forefathers, thousand-year reigns of evil, girl-saviors or any other such nonsense.

Yet some of the same elders who naysay Caine sightings in salon on Friday spend all night Saturday procuring a victim for their Gehenna cult's winter rite. With each new omen, the ranks of these secret fanatics swell tremendously. Meanwhile, other vampires who thought they'd transcended their mortal fears of damnation ages ago find that they have overestimated themselves. More than one ancilla has been astounded recently to find her jaded sire sitting in the back pew at evening Mass, prostrated on a prayer mat at midnight or visiting Gypsy fortunetellers on the sly.

To some extent, it's only natural that elders should be troubled by the latest portents. Many were raised in deeply religious (or, at any rate, superstitious) cultures. Although they might have questioned their youthful beliefs in the centuries since, the subconscious programming remains, awaiting only the right circumstances to emerge. But younger vampires succumb to Gehenna-madness almost as rapidly. Something about impending cataclysm burns off the inner skeptic in everyone. Terror, combined with the numerological ascriptions of the millennium, drives many Kindred to acts they would have considered impossibly rash scant years before.

THE GEHENNA CULTS

A telling symptom of the general malaise: Gehenna cults are more popular than ever. Even ancillae and neonates have begun to organize (if such a term can be applied to them) their own groups. Most of the cults are tiny — fewer than a dozen regular members — and woefully ignorant; some even think themselves the only organizations of their kind. Generally, they dissolve or fall prey to enemies within a decade of their founding.

Other cults can boast a far longer (if not always more distinguished) history. The great cults of the West, some of which are detailed below, have studied the problem of Gehenna for many centuries. Studying and solving are two different things, true, but these mystic orders are still fleet of foot than either the Camarilla or the Sabbat. Furthermore, they honestly believe that when the time comes, their long years of cautious plotting will enable them to move decisively while the rest of the Kindred stand paralyzed.

THE ROYAL ORDER OF THE EDENIC GROUNDSKEEPERS Founded: A.D. 1645

The Groundskeepers seek, first and foremost, the resting-places of the Antediluvians. The cult's members

believe they can avert doom by destroying the Ancients before they have a chance to rise and slaughter their way back to strength. Unfortunately, the quarry is wily. For any one clan father, there are generally several remote sites (all jealously guarded by self-appointed protectors) that purport to be his tomb. The cult can ill afford to squander its resources for such uncertain results, and so, to date, it has made no direct attacks on any identified sites. Its members seem content to pore over the data and engage each other in academic duels; when pressed, they tell their initiates that fate rewards the patient (and in all fairness, it must be admitted that they now possess the most extensive library of Kindred archaeology in existence, which they might even allow a respectful outsider to peruse — for a price).

During the 19th century, some of the more restless members of the cult finally grew tired of their fellows' plodding, scholarly approach. Even if the beings resting in the tombs are "only" Methuselahs, they argued, killing them takes valuable ammunition away from the Ancients. A major split occurred in 1898, when these dissidents seceded from the main cult and established themselves as a separate faction. In a fit of unbridled one-upmanship, they renamed themselves "The Imperial Order of the Master Edenic Groundskeepers" and set about gathering the recruits and weapons needed for a full-scale assault on the purported tombs — all 62 of them. Their score so far: eight Methuselahs slain, three Methuselahs awoken, including a Toreador who, lost to the Beast, has since gone forth to wreak havoc in eastern Europe.

The advent of the thin-blooded hasn't impressed the Groundskeepers as much as one might expect. Both factions of the cult feel they have far more important concerns than herding a bunch of useless neonates in one direction or another — omen or no omen. Still, even the most oblivious Groundskeepers have now heard of thin-blooded with mysterious powers of second sight, and that *does* interest them. The cultists have employed similar methods in their search before, of course, but actively probing the secrets of the Antediluvians with Auspex can be a deadly enterprise; conjured spirits tell lies and evade the questions put to them; and even the most straightforward Malkavian auguries generally make sense only in retrospect.

At present, the conservative faction finds itself frozen by indecision, torn between hope and fear. On the one hand, perhaps these seers could lead the cult to the tombs of the Ancients, who could then be destroyed while still weakened (which is certainly a relative term) from the long fast. On the other hand, psychic connections are notorious for working both ways. If the thin-blooded receive their visions *directly* from the Ancients, it would not do at all to encourage contact. In fact, it might be best simply to exterminate the younglings altogether. Without the thin-blooded, there can be no "time of thin blood," and without *that*, it's just possible that the Antediluvians will miss their



cue and stay in torpor a while longer. At any rate, the cultists hardly want their enemy to gain intelligence on their plans.

The radical faction, however, too energized by the possibilities to waste time worrying, has recently launched several survey expeditions to the most likely of the remaining locations. Elite Kindred trainees provide the muscle, while a trio of thin-blooded seers accompanies each team as navigators. Whether these daring efforts might have any issue remains to be seen.

THE WAY OF THE ANCIENT LAWGIVERS

Founded: A.D. 1312

The Lawgivers (also known as Enochians) have long rejected the notion, held by some Kindred rationalists, that the Gehenna cycle is an inevitable phenomenon. They insist that the disobedience of younger Kindred is what causes the blood baths. If the Kindred will but return to the ways of the First City — by which the cultists mean that vampires should overtly enslave humanity and institute a strict hierarchy of age — then the Ancients will have mercy and bring an era of unparalleled peace when they rise again. The cult's oldest charter dates from the 14th century, but claims for the transmission of its teachings extend all the way back to the Second City.

The "overtly enslave humanity" part of the Lawgivers' credo is, of course, impracticable under the Camarilla

Masquerade, and so those of its members who belong to that sect must amass their mortal influence secretly — for now. They believe firmly, however, that as Gehenna draws nearer, the time will come to throw off the shackles of silence. When that time arrives, the cultists plan to be ready. Some devote great energy to infiltrating various national militaries. Others have retreated to the wilderness to create limited "Carthaginian" experiments, small walled towns where the resident mortals knowingly serve a brood of Cainite masters. In these controlled environments, they hope, they can learn the best methods for government and thus avoid the calamities that have hindered similar attempts in the past.

Trapped in their own dogma, the Lawgivers cannot credit the idea that the mere appearance of thin-blooded vampires might rouse the Ancients against the Kindred. However, the presence of so many bastards does reveal the lawlessness and disobedience of the vagrants' sires, and that is the real danger. Thus, the cultists are generally staunch supporters of the scourge. Any vampire youths running around loose should simply be destroyed, they say; once the slate is clean, a fresh start, supported by firm discipline from the very first, can be made.

THE SERVITORS OF IRAD

Founded: A.D. 1456

Similar to the Lawgivers in many respects, the Servitors espouse a creed of fearful slavery under the Antediluvians.





When Gehenna comes, the Servitors want to be able to prove they've done everything possible to aid their ancestors' return to power. Their present strategy for accomplishing this goal is to lead Kindred society ever deeper into ignorance and blind acceptance of gibberish prophecies, so that it will be less able to defend itself on the fateful night. Accordingly, the cultists scheme to obtain influence within the Sabbat and the Camarilla, then use that influence to sow malicious rumors and intrigues. Whenever an opportunity arises, they try to wedge the two sects into open warfare. They also keep an eye open for disgruntled members of the independent clans to offer them boons, pleasures and positions of respect within the cult in exchange for turning quisling.

Over the years, the Servitors have built up a corps of Kindred "sensitives" whose duty is to listen for any hint of marching orders from the Ancients. Although the signs of Gehenna appear nightly, the awaited signal has proved embarrassingly slow in coming. The cult's leadership—a pair of Kindred lovers, one of whom claims to be the last member of a forgotten bloodline or clan—has been accused more than once of hiding news of contact from the rest of the cult. After all, it just isn't possible that the Antediluvians have simply chosen to ignore such faithful and eager followers as the Servitors... is it?

In the absence of any clear direction from beyond, individual Servitors must decide for themselves what to do about the thin-blooded. Some roam from city to city and destroy any thin-blooded they come across in hopes of delaying the night of judgment—at least until they can figure out what the Antediluvians really want. Their fellows, going to the other extreme, do everything they can to encourage local neonates to sire prolifically. They reason that this wantonness not only provides an admirable distraction for the cunning elders who might otherwise be inspired to arm for Gehenna, but also creates a surfeit of weak, easily caught prey for the torpid forebears.

THE TWILIGHT CULT

Founded: A.D. 1550

The Kindred of the Twilight Cult seek a woman referred to in *The Book of Nod* as the "last daughter of Eve." "When the snows consume the earth," the prophecy runs, "and the sun gutters like a candle in the wind, then and only then will there be born a woman—the Last Daughter of Eve—and in her there will be decided the fate of all. And you will not know this woman, except by the mark of the moon on her; and she will face treachery, hatred and pain; but in her is the last hope."

Obviously, this woman is important, and she must be found. The question is, how? Endless debate has been given to the interpretation of "the mark of the moon." Some of the cultists say it refers to psychic ability. Others believe it means a simple, physical birthmark in the shape of a crescent moon. Perhaps she will have shapeshifter blood in her veins. Perhaps she will be born to the true Roma, whoever

they may be (needless to say, more than one tribe of Roma lays claim to the title). The latest theory, which is quickly coming into vogue, is that she may be a dhampir.

And so the cultists disperse, each to his chosen lookout. Some haunt the maternity wards; others discreetly follow the Gypsy *kumpaniyi* on their travails. Particularly foolhardy souls try to contact the Lupines and convince them of their mutual interest in the matter. Few seem to care that according to the usual reading of the prophecy, the Last Daughter is not scheduled to appear until after the Antediluvians have returned and enjoyed "a reign of one thousand years." Now, they say, is the time to begin watching. The earlier they start, the less likely they are to miss the signs of her arrival. Besides, prophecies can be interpreted in so many different ways, and the Antediluvians are crafty; who's to say that the thousand-year reign hasn't already begun?

Once they have (presumably) found the Last Daughter of Eve, the cultists must then face the question of what to do with her. Most agree that she should be protected, in any case (although cynics have pointed out that the prophecy doesn't explicitly call her the "last hope for the Kindred"); but past that, opinions diverge again. It has been argued that she must be Embraced. If she is to save the Cainites, shouldn't she become one of their number? Other cultists propose to teach her Tremere blood magic, or turn her over to human wizards for instruction in the mystic arts, or induct her into their favorite religion. A sizable contingent believes that she should simply be watched from afar—after all, the whole point of destiny is that it's supposed to work no matter what you do.

Any concern the Twilight Cult might have with the thin-blooded revolves mainly around the new dhampir theory. Members travel long distances to confirm reports of a dhampir birth, and though their intentions are rarely hostile, they can be great nuisances and trouble magnets. It has been posited that the "mark of the moon" could refer to the seers' oracular powers, but most of the cultists have rejected that idea: After all, the prophecy strongly implies that the Daughter will bear the "mark of the moon" as a mortal.

THE CULT OF ENLIGHTENMENT

Founded: A.D. 510

The Cult of Enlightenment fights a lonely battle. Instituted by vampires who, even a millennium ago, saw and feared the direction that Kindred society was taking, it pursues the near-futile task of bringing spiritual enlightenment to the Cainite race. Only by transcending the Beast once and for all, the cultists argue, can vampires be able to give up their eternal and ultimately disastrous warfare. Unfortunately, many of the cult's most influential leaders are currently in torpor. The remaining members struggle along in their quest for Golconda, but left to their own devices, they have lost the way.

Now two "prophets" have arisen within the cult, each a bitter enemy of the other, both advocating monastic retreat

as the solution to Gehenna. One of them insists that the entire cult should go into torpor and enter a heroic dream-quest under his direction. His rival lures followers one by one into the Himalayas, where she claims to have found a second Eden — complete with fruit trees that can nourish Kindred and a cave of wonders in which the shadows play out visions of the end times.

A few cultists remain skeptical, knowing that the fear of doom easily gives rise to sham and demagoguery. Withdrawing from the world in its hour of need, they say, is the *last* thing Kindred should do. However, most of the present membership has flocked to one banner or the other.

Meanwhile, the scholars of the group spend their nights trying to find the Scrolls of Wisdom — 13 scrolls onto which the cult's founders recorded all their learning many centuries ago. The documents have since disappeared: Four were stolen during the Battle of Samarkand, one was lost somewhere along the Silk Road in the 11th century, and the remaining eight were smuggled out of Constantinople just before the Turkish invasion. None of the currently active cultists has ever seen the scrolls. However, tradition claims that, among other things, they outline the events of Gehenna in unusually clear detail. The cult finances countless archaeological excavations to search for this missing lore. It has also sought the Assamite clan's help on several occasions, but the desert warriors claim ignorance of the scrolls' whereabouts.

For the most part, the Cult of Enlightenment is eager to hear the words of the new weak-blooded prophets. After all, revelation is revelation, regardless of the source. Several seers have been approached, even invited to the cult's secret meetings; thus far, all have declined. The younglings seem to be afraid, a reaction that puzzles many within the order. Are they not gentle, salvation-seeking souls, one and all? But some cultists mutter that the seers' reluctance only confirms what they themselves have suspected all along: A traitor must lurk within the ranks, some hidden evildoer who is trying — probably successfully — to subvert their holy purpose and send the whole cult spiraling into perdition.

THE ARIMATEANS

Founded: A.D. 30

The Arimatheans trace their history back to the first terrible nights after the Crucifixion of Christ. Their servants watched as Joseph of Arimathea, hurrying against the Sabbath, took down the body and laid it in its tomb; they themselves stood watch the night after the Sabbath — though they had to flee, wounded by the power of whatever divine force had been released within. Or so they claim.

A number of Kindred dwelling in the Holy Land at that time took an interest in the stories of resurrection. After all, if this man Yeshua was truly so holy as to defeat death, he might be able to impart great wisdom to vampires — most especially, the secret to breaking God's curse. However, despite the many reports of divine visitations in the days, weeks, and months following the Crucifixion (even *after* the

Ascension on the Mount of Olives), no vampire could truly claim to have witnessed one. Soon enough, most Kindred had put the whole thing down to human fabrication.

Nonetheless, a few still believed and hoped. Those few dispersed to the four winds, secretly following the apostles and sending back word of everything that happened. As they spied on the growing congregations in Rome, Lyons and Cologne, they came to hear of miracles ascribed to a cup borne by Joseph of Arimathea into the far north. The same cup the Master had used at His last meal, some said; others held it to be the cup that had caught His blood when His side was pierced on the cross. In any case, the hope of the vampires was renewed. A cup that had contained the sacrificial blood of Christ — even in a merely ritual sense — would be a powerful relic indeed for the blood-drinkers. They meant to find it and learn its secrets.

Unfortunately, they were not the only ones interested. As they moved to claim their prize, it was spirited away by mysterious guardians, whose identity and purpose even now remain unknown. But the Arimatheans were not easily deterred. They have spent the intervening millennia chasing any and all clues that purport to lead to this sacred cup, or the Grail, as it is now called. They also try to track down other relics of the Passion, for several reasons: first, to be better armed against evil; second, to gain greater insight into His suffering and sacrifice; and third, to benefit from whatever mystic attraction might exist between such objects and their most holy sibling. However, this is largely a side pursuit.

The Arimatheans credit the Grail with tremendous powers, most of which can be traced back to human legend on the subject. The Grail is the ultimate vessel of redemption and transfiguration. The holy blood within it can wash away any taint of sin, from the marks of diablerie to the Nosferatu curse to the Embrace itself. Perhaps it can even bestow true immortality or angelic powers... but all these gifts can be granted only if the seeker is pure of heart and purpose. Members of the cult almost universally despise their undead state and seek to reconcile themselves with God. Nor do they hope to earn salvation for their own souls only: If Father Caine were to drink from the Grail, they dare to believe, the whole race of vampires might be redeemed. Because of this, they pursue rumors of Caine sightings almost as avidly as Grail lore.

Since most Arimatheans refuse to sire childer (it being a grave sin to so endanger another's soul), they must increase their numbers through proselytizing. The result is a rather odd mix. Some cultists radiate holiness and steadfast purpose, while others are agonized penitents, just setting out on their vision-quests. Many adhere to very strict and bizarre purity laws, which prescribe devotions, mortifications, the precise manner in which vitae may be taken, and so forth. It is even whispered that one of the feared Seraphim of the Sabbat's Black Hand is a member of the Arimatheans.

An opportunity to spend a year among the Arimatheans would be a religious historian's delight, as their practices stem directly from the most primitive days of the Christian church. Not only that, but one of the cult's leaders claims to have been residing in Jerusalem at the time of the Passion. The Arimatheans' most sacred ritual is a version of the Eucharist in which the sacramental wine is replaced with the blood of a lamb; practitioners claim that a taste from their Communion chalice is sweeter than the Kiss itself.

Comparatively recently (that is, within the past few centuries), the Arimatheans have begun to exchange scholarship with another, much smaller, group that also studies Grail lore, but only that descended from the Celtic myths. Although the Arimatheans naturally discount any notion that the Grail is of pre-Christian origin, they recognize that these Kindred scholars are seeking the same ultimate enlightenment and healing. Relations between the sister groups have so far been remarkably amiable; whether impending Gehenna will ultimately drive them apart or bring them closer together, however, remains to be seen.

THE LILITH CULTS

Founded: Unknown

The plural is intentional. No one "true" cult of Lilith exists, whatever this or that group may claim; instead, her worship is spread out over dozens of small, disparate cults, who nonetheless share a basic philosophy and even cooperate when necessary.

Outsiders call Lilith's vampiric followers Lilins, after the Dark Mother herself. The Lilins, however, generally call themselves "Bahari" (Baham in the singular) after Ba'hara, Lilith's Third Garden — also known as the Garden of Sorrows (her first two Gardens withered long ago; Lilith herself destroyed one in a fit of rage, and the other perished at the hands of Caine and the Antediluvians, who also slew Lilith's children).

In any case, the Bahari see Lilith, first wife of Adam, as the most potent figure in the primeval drama — far surpassing Adam, Caine and even her own Creator, all of whom are recast as her treacherous consorts. More importantly, she is the truly wronged party. Thus, when the Final Nights come, vengeance will belong to her alone. She will raise the oceans and call forth her demon-children, and all who claim alliance or kinship with the husband who raped her, the God who cast her out or the lover who betrayed her shall be swept away like so many shards of broken pottery. Then a new world, Lilith's world, will take shape in the resulting void.

The Bahari, who certainly plan to survive this transition in one form or another, accordingly renounce their blood-ties to Caine and are "reborn" into Lilith's service. The Path of Lilith consists of two complementary devotions. First, the Bahari seek to suffer as the Mother suffered, thus emulating her path to transcendence; second, they help others to reach enlightenment by the same method. They reject the pallid moralism of *The Book of Nod* and study an alternate canon,



the *Revelations of the Dark Mother* — a jumbled assemblage of visions, songs, and oral tradition connected only by a single thread, the thrumming, subconscious call of the first woman: *ahi hay Lilitu*.

Although a disproportionate number of Bahari are female, especially among the Hierophants (priesthood), many male vampires have also chosen to join the cult. Lilith cults also rarely restrict worship of Lilith to Kindred only. Human mystics and other shadow-folk walk her Path. Anyone who is willing to cast the safety of illusion aside and plunge into the rendering flames of truth and pain may find a place among the new children of Lilith.

Like the Twilight Cultists, some Bahari seek the “last daughter of Eve.” However, they generally intend to destroy her, rather than aid her. In mortal legend, the children of Lilith (i.e., the monsters/demons) and the children of Eve (i.e., the human race) are eternally ranged against each other, enemies by nature. Therefore, these Bahari reason, the Last Daughter may be meant to serve as Lilith's final nemesis — the only one who could conceivably stand in the Mother's way. Others dismiss her as a fiction, just one more lie in the pack of lies that constitutes Noddist scripture. And even if she should turn out to be a real person, they argue, how could one of Eve's pathetic get hope to thwart a being who learned to outshine Jehovah Himself?

Due to their savage beliefs, the Bahari usually belong to the Sabbat when they claim any sect allegiance at all, though that sect's Noddist beliefs typically cast the Lilins as heretics, infernalists or worse. Additionally, at least a few Camarilla moles serve the cults as well. See the *Vampire* supplements *Revelations of the Dark Mother* and the *Guide to the Sabbat* for more information on Lilith, her Path and her cults.

SEER CULTS

Founded: Recent nights

This is another umbrella category, encompassing a small but growing number of groups worldwide. The appearance of thin-blooded with strange, inexplicable insight into the Jyhad has caused consternation in many circles, but among others the seers are hailed as messianic figures who could guide the Kindred into a new age of peace and wisdom.

Although some seer cults are actually organized and run by seers, more often it is an elder who holds the strings, while the seer takes a position analogous to that of vizier. Vampires of the pre-scientific era, awed by oracles of any kind and deeply moved by their sense of looming judgment, can be willing to overlook their mistrust of the vampiric rabble in their search for truth — but they have no intention of giving up control over the proceedings.

A few cults can boast of possessing multiple seers. In such cases, the seers quickly become a tight-knit, secretive cult within the cult. Their methods of divination range from the bizarre to the utterly outlandish (one group in Montreal

conducts seances around a store-bought Ouija board; another, in Paris, presents its findings exclusively in laboriously assembled collages). Still, their followers and patrons place the utmost faith in their visions.

The Heralds of the Red Star

The most famous seer cult in the world is also one of the newest. The Heralds of the Red Star, named for the star that appeared earlier this year prior to the “week of nightmares” and the great flood in Bangladesh, pride themselves on openness. All Kindred who wish to may attend their meetings, which are publicized as widely as possible within the confines of the Masquerade. Their self-appointed mission: to convince the rest of their race that the end is much closer than is widely believed, and that differences *must* be put aside *now* if vampires hope to endure.

The cult's leader, V. Harriet Bakos (the “V.” stands for *Vampiresa*, but she rarely allows herself to be called that), is actually neither a seer nor even a vampire. She claims, however, to be a dhampir — the daughter of a Roma mother and a Ravnos father. Furthermore, she often goes into fugue states, during which she raves of visions quite similar to those reported by the seers under her tutelage. In all her visions, the star figures prominently as the guiding light for some inconceivably evil being who is due to arrive on Earth sometime this year. Although only Kindred with sufficient *Auspex* can see the star, its appearance has disturbed vampire society enough that they receive this half-breed prophet with much less hostility than one would ordinarily expect (see the **Appendix** of this book for more information on Harriet Bakos, the Red Star, and the Week of Nightmares).

Those meetings of the cult that are actually hosted by Harriet or her seers tend to be mystic and theatrical, carried out with all the ceremonial flash of a spiritualist séance. The others, however, which her confidants organize and moderate, often have the feel of a UFO-watchers' convention, replete with slide shows, conspiracy theories, lectures and photocopied pamphlets. The present membership consists mainly of very young vampires — including many thin-blooded — and ghouls, but their hard recruiting has begun to pay off, and the occasional ancilla can now be seen as well (probably spying for a superior, but the Heralds prefer being spied on to being ignored).

At present, the cult has five seers, and Harriet herself has traveled all over the Western Hemisphere in search of others. While in Brazil, she was approached by a handful of vampires who supposedly belonged to a group of Tremere called “The Order of the Wurm.” The Red Star, they told her, is obviously the “eye” of this Wurm, whom they identified as “the lord of this world”; its appearance should be taken as a sign that the Wurm is about to begin its sacred mission of purging the Earth for the new reign to come. Placating sacrifices must be made immediately, for only a few would be chosen to survive.

She listened to their theories for about half the night, then sent them off with a few disparaging remarks about men and their one-eyed worms. A representative of the Tremere Council of Seven has since assured her that no such order exists in his clan, but Harriet and her followers have often felt something keeping close watch on their movements in the weeks since....

RELIGIOUS MANIAS

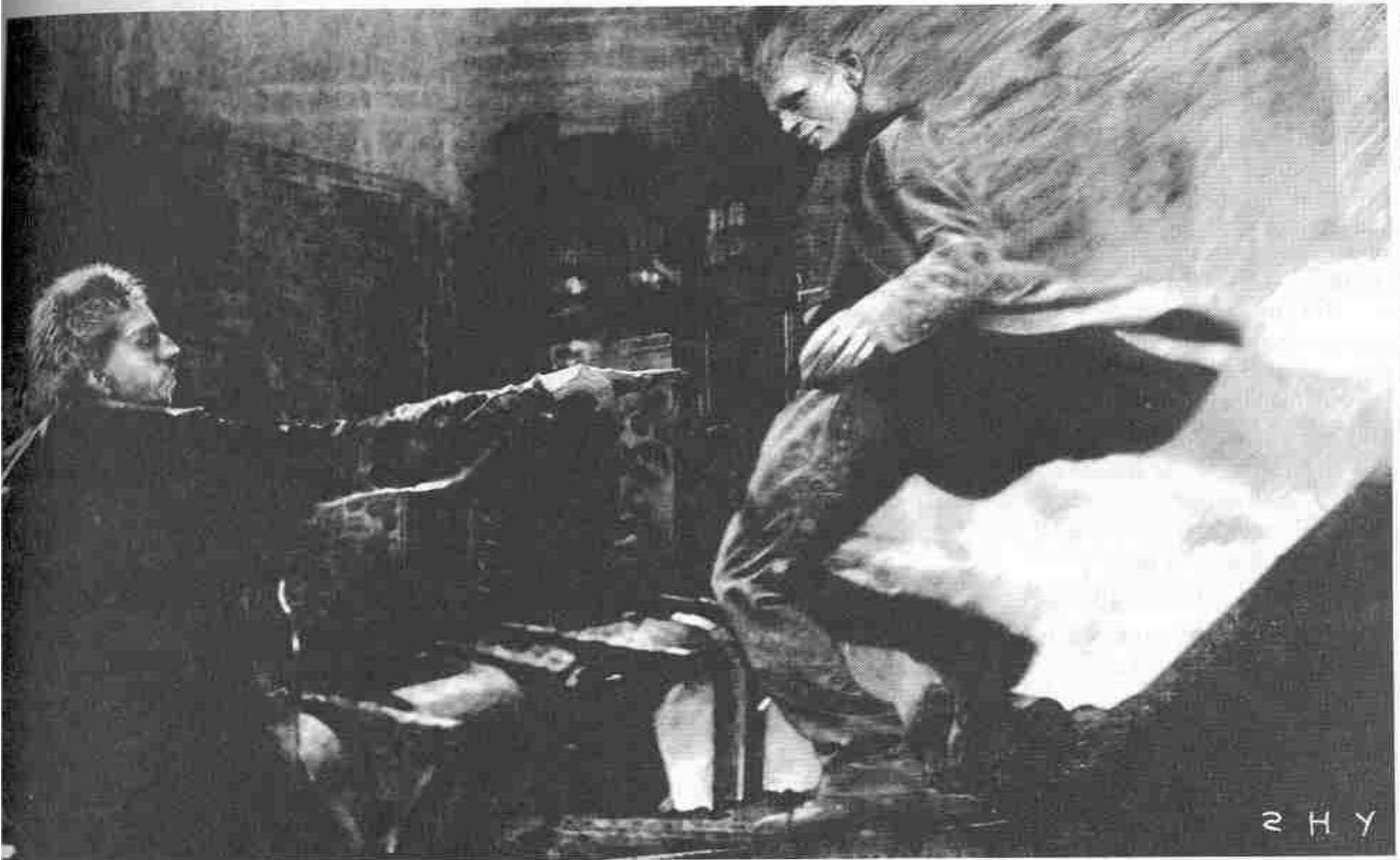
For some vampires, a cult is too much organization. Perhaps they've succumbed to the instability of the Malkavians. Perhaps they've simply snapped after too many years of repressing their feelings and instincts. Perhaps they were never much for rational response anyway. Whatever the reason, religious hysteria has invaded Kindred society like a virus, multiplying and mutating into a hundred different forms:

- **Penitential Movements:** Self-flagellation, piercing, starvation, even cursory exposure to sunlight — any kind of mortification, humiliation or mutilation might serve a vampire seeking to expiate his sins in time for the end of the world. Kindred of the Sabbat and various cults (especially the Lilith cults) also use these methods to prove the strength of their flesh and the firmness of their purpose. In either case, considerable ceremony may attend the masochism. Members of one war-pack in Mexico decorate each other with exquisite scarifications representing their past deeds, good and bad,

whereas the Methuselah Prince of Cologne demands that petitioners to his court address him as "heretic wretch" and give him fifty lashes on his naked back before he will hear their requests.

- **Imitation:** As blasphemous as it might seem, many elders take a queer comfort in adopting the trappings and outer behavior of their favorite saints and prophets. Some wear monk's robes and shave their heads. Others fast, wash the feet of the homeless, walk on hot coals, give away all their possessions, sit in sackcloth and ashes, crucify themselves upside-down, etc. More than a few have wandered into the wilderness, never to be seen again. Youngsters may scoff at the idea that a few empty gestures can cancel centuries of evildoing; but the Kindred who indulge in these practices come from an era when worldly men had themselves buried in monk's habits, in the honest hope that the Almighty could be fooled by a costume change. Besides, when doom is all but certain, a little spiritual insurance is far better than none, *n'est-ce pas?*

- **Dancing:** Some Kindred can still remember the dancing madness that seized the Rhineland during the time of the Black Plague. Claiming they were possessed and calling out the names of demons or recounting wild visions of Mary and Jesus, countless peasants jumped and whirled themselves into exhaustion for no discernible reason. The modern dancers don't usually testify to mystic revelations, but they are no less vehement in their gyrations. This mania is especially popular



2 H Y

among younger Kindred — whole Brujah Rants have devolved into inarticulate frenzies of dancing — but elders are not immune. In Boston, curious mortals were treated to a spontaneous reenactment of long-dead fertility and funeral dances at the opening of a small art gallery.

• **Weeping:** Supremely dangerous to the Masquerade, this is the most difficult mania to control; it comes and goes too quickly. Nor does it occur *en masse*, as many of the others do. One night, a Toreador ancilla suddenly starts weeping in Elysium. The next week, a Tremere primogen who hasn't so much as cracked a smile in four centuries finds himself shedding uncontrollable blood-tears at the newspaper stand. A month later, a Setite elder who barely knows either of them breaks down sobbing in the arms of her bewildered prey. One by one, the most unlikely candidates succumb, leaving a city's entire vampire population shaken.

A PARCEL OF POLICIES: KINDRED REACTION TO THE THIN-BLOODED

And you will know these last times by the time of thin blood, The Book of Nod announces, and then, in the same verse: You will know them by the Clanless, who will come to rule. If the thin-blooded knew of their prophesied role in the Final Nights, they would partly understand the venom, madness and terror that greet their arrival — but only partly.

The highest generations violate every boundary the Kindred hold dear. As Caitiff (for the most part), they defy distinctions of clan and sect; as thin-blooded, they threaten to blur even the line between living and undead — their dhampir children being, of course, the ultimate embodiment of that transgression. Yet nearly every forum in vampire society is split on the question of how to solve the vagrant problem. The argument rages in anarch rants as well as elder salons, and it shows no promise of easy resolution.

THE CAMARILLA

Yes, well. I understand that those with paranoid millennial agendas may be frustrated with the delay, but these things take time. I feel the clan has succeeded in airing a number of very difficult issues during our official debates on the subject. Look how long the Council of Trent convened, and those were human beings! Besides, we've still got a good 12 years before we have to present our recommendations to the Inner Circle at the next Grand Conclave. With any luck, most of the little maggots will have died out by that time....

— Horace, Brujah Idealist

The most inclusive political body in vampire society is necessarily the most fractious, especially when it comes to this subject. At present, sect policy is to accept any vampire who observes the Traditions and obeys the local prince (unless, of course, she should happen to be illegitimate, in which case her unlife is forfeit for her sire's sins). Nevertheless, some Camarilla Kindred argue that the thin-blooded

should be wiped out before they can join with the anarchists or the Sabbat. Others uphold the traditional view, and have declared themselves willing to dwell alongside thin-blooded who abide by the law. Most remain undecided; all they know is that these heedless young vermin are invading their turf, and they want the place fumigated somehow.

Since the Camarilla officially believes that Gehenna is a myth and Caine and the Antediluvians are either dead or hopelessly torpid, it must also dismiss any wild notions of omens or portents. Nonetheless, the thin-blooded are inarguably dangerous by themselves.

In the first place, they add to the population problem. As ever more Kindred feed, breed and squabble over territory, the chances of an irreparable Masquerade breach increase astronomically. Can a thin-blooded weakling, brand new to the night, muster the cruelty to kill his prey? Can he catch their eyes and make them forget? No? How, then, is he to stop them from telling what they have seen? Some thin-blooded can't even ghoul their vessels and thus snare them with the blood bond. And what about those childer who overturn the Masquerade completely in their ignorance, letting their parents, lovers and psychiatrists in on their little secret?

In the second place, the fledglings' bizarre powers make them a dangerous and unknown quantity. Again, the threat to the Masquerade is considerable: Kindred who can mimic the living more successfully than other vampires, and who choose to remain in human society for that reason, are all the more vulnerable for their proximity. But leaving that aside, what is to be made of these seers who can blurt out an elder's innermost secrets within a few seconds of meeting him? How are peace and civilization to persist in such a climate of honesty? As for the dhampirs — how long is *that* to continue unchecked? What if the blood-powers are passed on to their descendants? Might the Kindred eventually face an ascendant human race, powered by immortal vitae?

Public discussion focuses on these points; but under the surface, even more complex issues are at hand. The advent of the thin-blooded has awakened painful, conflicted emotions in many an undead heart. Although they would never admit it, vampires often harbor deep regrets over life not lived. They miss their dead children, or mourn children that never came to be. They contemplate nostalgically, even morbidly, the pleasures of the flesh. They look at their sterile bodies and see repellent corpses, to which they no longer feel any vital connection. They regard the light of the sun not only as God's punishment to the Cainites but also as his blessing to the mortals, and they long to be blessed again. For them, it is far too late. But now, these upstarts... here are creatures, every bit the bloodsuckers they are, to whom God has restored these gifts. *Why?*

The Camarilla Kindred, with their overt (if rather abstract) respect of "humanity," are especially vulnerable to this sort of melancholy — and the envious rage that inevitably

follows. If the Inner Circle wished to, it could easily tap into such resentment, as well as unvoiced eschatological fears, to turn sect opinion even more strongly against the highest generations. Some elders say it has already embarked on this course: It recently issued an edict condoning the reinstitution of the scourge, and rumors circulate that it plans to propose a blanket anathema on the thin-blooded, including dhampirs, at the next Grand Conclave. Could this be the first step toward a pogrom — some sort of mass Blood Hunt wherein the Camarilla Kindred would all go forth to reclaim the vitae scattered by their profligate childer?

If any Camarilla clans have reached internal consensus on the matter of the thin-blooded — an unlikely event, given the familial rather than corporate nature of the clans — they haven't come forward to say so. However, this has not discouraged the conspiracy theorists. Harpies whisper that the Malkavians are secretly gathering up thin-blooded seers to indoctrinate and train them for some unfathomable mission. The Tremere have been accused of creating thin-blooded for the express purpose of experimenting on them, a charge Vientia has vehemently denied.

THE ANARCHS

I don't care how sick her mother is, and I don't care how tight we were before. This is tough on you, huh? What about me — what about Gracie? Watchin' the two of you make kissyface at her fuckin' funeral? Go on, get out of here, if any of us catch you in the neighborhood again you're dead meat. And take the damned dog!

— Benny Zubrowski, anarch ringleader

One might think the anarchs natural allies of the thin-blooded: After all, the former are responsible for siring a sizeable number of the latter. More often, however, the new vampires are regarded as disaster magnets, invitations to the scourge, and thus driven away. Furthermore, neonates who have tried to sire and failed can become astonishingly bitter. In their disappointment, they turn on their more fortunate brethren and accuse them of hoarding occult secrets. Such rivalries have torn more than one anarch nest apart.

Anarch visionaries have finally, belatedly, realized the potential usefulness of the thin-blooded, and now try to spread a more conciliatory rhetoric. So far, however, their pleas have fallen on deaf ears. The rebels are tired. Their momentum has worn down, beset on all sides by truculent elders and recalcitrant reality. Recently, a wave of suicide pacts among anarch gang members has surfaced, groups of four or five walking hand-in-hand into the sunrise, or arranging to have their havens set ablaze while they sleep. Those who endure would eagerly welcome a new race of saviors, but convincing them to believe will be a hard task indeed.

THE SABBAT

That's what I told him. "Do I look like a baby-sitter to you?" Damn bishop. I've already played that game once — you remember that snotty kid you met when we swung by Jersey last?

And where do you think he is? Dead, of course. Three fucking years of blood and sweat, and what's the bottom line look like? A big fat splotch of red ink. We're the Sabbat for Chrissake, not the Baptist Mission for Wayward Licks.

— Yvonne, Lasombra pack priest

The Sabbat claims more Noddist scholars than even the Camarilla and the independent clans combined. From its earliest nights, the sect has looked ahead to Gehenna as the historic moment it was specially created to anticipate. Naturally, it has found rich fodder for theorizing and debate in the highest generations.

The Noddists insist that the gifts of the thin-blooded are too portentous to ignore; they must be either brought into the fold or killed. Accordingly, many prisci and archbishops have ordered their underlings to set out lures for the newcomers. Thin-blooded who respond to the invitation, however, may well find unlife in a pack too harsh to survive for long. There's no more room now for error or weakness than there ever was, and many ordinary Sabbat resent the idea that they should burden themselves with ignorant younglings just because of some musty pedant's reading of some pretentious scripture. Besides, aren't the thin-blooded supposed to be the Antediluvians' wake-up call? Sabbat like to boast that they welcome the Gehenna with no reservations — that no true warrior fears battle. But in reality, some members of the sect aren't quite sure how prepared they are to face the raging Ancients.

A bigger problem is that the thin-blooded unwittingly present a direct challenge to Sabbat ideology. The sect's whole philosophy is built around the idea that vampires are a step above humanity, and that to behave like a human is to admit one is an inferior individual. Most Sabbat have no intention of giving up this comforting delusion when their supreme hour is finally near, and they may well be moved to destroy any offending bits of reality they come across. That certainly includes vampires who take extra-long showers and can't kick their popcorn habit. Prospective enlistees beware.

ASSAMITES

Hush, infidel. I have been watching, and I know that this existence is painful for you. How could it not be? You are caught between one world and another, never to belong to either. Your baby girl... ah, for her it is even more so. I told you I have been watching. But, you see, she can be of use to me, while you cannot. Please do not worry. Soon you will be of one world again — the next — and she will be raised in the true faith. Aren't you going to thank me?

— Omer, Assamite *rafiq*

In these troubled nights, the independent clans are feared more than ever. Although they were always a danger, at least they could once be trusted to keep to their own hard-won territories. Now, however, the Assamites have thrown off the curse that once bound them. Unleashed, they promise

Dearest Herminia,

You must forgive me for the disgraceful gaps and lacunae in our correspondence. As you know, a great many pressing affairs intrude upon my customary solitude, and I no longer have the time that I should to confer with my pupils in the brotherhood. But before you think to pity me, I bid you first direct your prayers toward our poor Laocöon. After all, he is charged with the task of rousing the bodies, minds, and feelings of a good two-dozen of our kind — even more ancient than I, and at least as bitter. If he fails, the coming night will be grim indeed!

As I recall, you asked me in your last letter to explain the true secret of the Jihad. Well! What a task you set before me; is it any wonder I take a few years to answer? But never mind. As far as I know, there is no one true secret — and I would be wary of anyone who told me otherwise. There are, however, a thousand little secrets, which can be uncovered in time by the patient observer.

What is more, simple inductive reasoning will serve you as well as anything else. I will not permit you to be lazy: I still remember that brilliant young girl at the symposium! Use your head! Personally, I have found that when contemplating the Jihad, it is best to bear in mind the natural circumstances of each generation; for whatever goals and ideals one may pretend to, one is always constrained by circumstance.

Let us leave aside the Ancients for a moment, for the game is theirs in the end, and their plots are as many and diverse as the species of birds. Instead, we shall move directly to their children. Consider the plight of the Fourth Generation. Theirs is the Ambitious and almost exclusive distinction of having seen the Ancients in the flesh — of knowing their faces, their voices, their loves and hatreds. Furthermore, as they know the Ancients, so they are themselves known; yes, down to the smallest secrets of their mortal pasts. This places them in an unenviable position vis-à-vis the Jihad. After all, to whom does your sire turn when he is in need? Could you defy a god who called you by name?

Surely, as the Ancients stir, the situation can only grow worse for our unhappy ancestors. The subtle whisper of their elders' sleeping minds will grow more strident; what was a dreamy, half-spoken wish will become a demand made in the name of love, of Blood, of a debt too great ever to be discharged. How can it be otherwise? Obey they must, and will, and there is no use at all in recriminations.

We now turn to the Fifth Generation, of which I can speak with more authority. Our situation is subtly different. I have met my grandsire once, yes, but that was ages ago, and the conversation was brief. Lack of intimacy and a weaker blood-tie translate to diminished obligation, or at least a diminished sense of it. We are close enough to see the Ancients' strategies at work — close enough to serve, to rebel, to spy, to expose. Yet we are distant enough that withdrawal is also a tempting possibility. We can more easily resist our sires than they can theirs. No wonder, then, that we make up the greater part of the Inconnu.

We argue among ourselves, while we can still afford to. Some of us say that our chief duty is to survive. These elders would have us run to ground, wait for the warfare to pass away, then emerge to rebuild. With time, they say, all things are possible — even the thwarting of the Ancients — but we have done too little to date. It is too late for half-measures, and we must see this bloody cycle through first.

Then there are those who say that, unless we take an active part now, there will be no vampire race nor even a human race to reclaim in the end. We can break the long chain of domination, they say, for we alone are strong enough, both as individuals and as a brotherhood, to be our own masters.

You know my feelings on the matter, dearest Herminia.

Next, we come to your own generation and those immediately below it. Six, Seven, Eight: the self-proclaimed princes of our kind. Few indeed are aware, as you are, of how hollow that glory is. They shrug their shoulders in ignorance at the mention of the Jihad — or even dismiss it as a fiction, a fanciful ploy with which their sires try to enslave them long past their coming-of-age. Those who do believe in the Ancients stumble about in the fog of occultism, forming their cults and writing their treatises, hoarding their pages from the First Book. Yet no matter how they labor, there is no way for their ilk to know the true will of our forefathers! Thank your patron gods, Herminia, that they brought you into our fold; that you were deemed trustworthy; that you had the strength to give up fleeting worldly power for the sake of illumination. A shoddy, dawdling illumination it has been, I know. But you shall see how even a little truth can shine in the dark nights ahead.

If only we could combine the fire of your middle generations with the accumulated knowledge of mine... then victory would be almost assured. But too few of you seek, and too few of us give. Alas.

I must return to my theme. As the river of Blood wanders further from its source, it weakens, the ignorance increases a thousandfold; but at least our youngest — the Ninth Generation and beyond — are aware of their shortcomings. Most attach themselves to their superiors as servants and ministers. The remainder strike out on their own, fleeing the entanglements of Kindred society. In either case, it is survival they seek, rather than power, and their hope is as vain as that of their fathers.

And yet, Hermia, you have no doubt begun to hear the tales. Just as modern man has learned to work the substance of the elements into exquisite forms, the modern vampire seems to be devising entirely new crafts from our aged Blood. These babes, weak but endlessly inventive, clamor for recognition — and perhaps they are right to claim our attention.

Put aside natural distaste and consider with me, o my pupil. It is true that each and every nation of Caine suffers its own peculiar burden. Ask any vampire about his kin in the other clans, and he will produce a dozen hoary legends to prove that the patriarch's curse is upon them all. Amusingly enough, only the Nosferatu seem willing to include themselves in this general malediction! The Nosferatu clan is also the only one that admits to fearing its own sire... but this is a topic for some other letter. Of course, I am omitting from the present argument certain clans that are but pretenders to the name.

What, then, of these very young ones? Again, weak they may be, but at least they do not carry the flaws of their sires. They simply shrug off that tainted legacy. Furthermore, they use their power with a free hand, dabbling now in this and now in that as they please. Have they, as some of them claim, managed to earn our vampire Father's blessing?

Or is this simply a natural progression? I spoke above of a river of Blood. You know that where a river is powerful and swift, fresher from the source, only cataclysm or the action of centuries can move it from its accustomed channels; in the tributaries, where the flow has diminished to a mere trickle, changes of course are much more easy and frequent. Naturally, it is far more comfortable for you and I to believe thus, since it does not force us to challenge our pride in that which marks us as Brujah, Lasombra. We should beware of comfort!

Verdhartha tells me the clanless are best ignored, left as a sort of appetizer for the feast of ages... They can slake and slow the terrible thirst of the Ancients, and at little cost to our reserves of strength and wisdom. I must confess my disagreement, but you know I am a confirmed Noddist and can never help going over the prophecies in my spare moments.

Of late, a dream has returned and returned to me. I am with my sire, and we are making notes as we observe the moonlight passing through a crystal prism. He looks at me and says, "The moonlight is purer, but the rainbow is a promise." The odd thing is that I seem to remember really having this conversation with him. You are no doubt familiar with the Hebrew legend concerning the rainbow, that it was Yahweh's promise never to send such a flood to Earth again. Can it all be averted after all — dare I hope so wildly now, when I can hear the roar of the waters? Hermia, I must look to you to restrain an old man's fancy. Tell me I am a fool.

Nevertheless, I have begun to extend my hand, carefully, in as gentle a manner as I can manage — these young ones startle and scatter as easily as voles upon hearing the hunter's tread. If they truly are Caine's favored, their voices must be added to the symposium, and we must listen. Before you object, remember that we have patiently endured the licentiousness of Malkav's children for lo, these many years; well, perhaps our wizened oracles can be spurred into sense by a little competition!

I must have done with my ramblings and close this letter, my dear. It has been pleasant to think of your serious face, bright as polished marble in the candlelight, to imagine you squinting with your weak eyes at my terrible handwriting; but the time is too scant. You know well how scant it is. And so I know that you will forgive me, and think of me as you go about your many duties, just as my prayers go with you always. Until we meet again, I remain yours, in eternal fellowship



to bring more bloodshed to the coming decade than the past several centuries of Jyhad have seen.

The thin-blooded are in even more peril than most. The Path of Blood, which accomplished Assamites follow, holds that a vampire's blood must get ever stronger if he hopes to achieve true enlightenment. Since those of the thin-blooded generations obviously have little or no hope of ever attaining such a blessed state themselves, they should instead serve as sustenance for those who are more worthy. And who knows? Perhaps if enough of their diluted blood is absorbed, something can be learned of their unique powers. The childer of Haqim will need such strength for the battles to come, or so they insist.

GIOVANNI

Bah. Your Princeliness surely does not credit the slanders of our enemies. Of all the clans of Caine, we alone have an unblemished housekeeping record. We never Embrace without the permission of our elder, nor do we bestow our gifts upon strangers. When we are so attentive to the purity of our own Blood, why should we burden ourselves with the riffraff and dregs of other clans? Simply because I am a foreigner — what? Sorcery? Your Highness, a Necromancer is concerned only with those already dead.

— Elisabetta Putanesca, Giovanni ambassador to New Orleans

The Giovanni have not had to worry much about thinning blood within their ranks. The clan is simply too young to have multiplied to such numbers, particularly since most of them refuse to Embrace any but blood relatives. Yet, because they hold no outside allegiances, they needn't have any qualms about snatching up someone else's errant childer should they wish to do so — and they now stand accused of just that. After all, as Necromancers, it only makes sense that they should take an interest in vampires who claim to have gained supernatural insight from their brief journey into death. At least a dozen seers have disappeared from locations suspiciously convenient to known seats of Giovanni power, particularly in New England and North Africa. But the Giovanni remain close-mouthed on this subject, as on many others. All the vampires of the sects know is that, lately, a good many Giovanni have been turning up in places where they're not supposed to be....

THE SETITES

No, no, I understand. It's a pretty tight spot you're in. I've been there myself. And I sure am glad you opened your heart to a friend instead of one of those Camarilla sharks. Well, I know folks all over this country. There's this one fella, I just know he'd love to help a bright and charming childe like you. All I ask is that you take him a little goodwill present from me. Mm-hmm, it is a funny-looking box, and very old. What's in it? No, don't open it, dear!

— Lyman, Setite bartender

The Serpents, too, have given indications of being on the move. Particularly, those who hold boons from leading lights of the Camarilla are now cashing them in. The wildest rumors allege that a general pilgrimage to Ombo is under way, with the youngest leaving first, to be joined later by the elders as they finish tying up the loose ends of their various schemes. Most Kindred scoff that this is simply a new ploy, a deception, just like everything else the Followers of Set say or do, but others who know them better are disturbed by the possibilities.

Setites don't often actually introduce themselves as such — even to ignorant thin-blooded — on account of the near-universal opprobrium that darkens their name; but their influence reaches into the humblest, most unlikely places, and a young fledgling could well gain one's acquaintance without ever knowing it. The Setites are attracted to vulnerability and desperation, both of which are abundant among the thin-blooded.

THE INCONNU

On the edges of this rather bleak picture may lurk a glimmer of hope. After all, the Inconnu claim to be disgusted with the strife that divides the rest of Caine's childer. If they won't interfere on behalf of the thin-blooded, perhaps they will at least leave them in peace?

THE SCOURGE

The resurgence of the scourge, perhaps the most visible Kindred reaction to its hatred of the thin-blooded and its fear of Gehenna, is certainly deserving of close attention. The following section examines the institution in detail, from its unprepossessing origins to its modern renaissance.

THE SCOURGE IN FORMER TIMES

No one knows who coined the term *scourge*; scholars debate its antiquity. Nevertheless, surviving records suggest that the scourge was known in old Babylon, Rome, and Carthage.

The scourge's ancient duty was to "beat the bounds" — in other words, to patrol the borders of his lord's territory, driving out or killing any trespassers who might be found. Although "trespasser" was usually taken to mean a vampire who had failed to petition the lord for acceptance, the word could also be used in its larger sense; thus, the scourge's enemies could easily include aggressive Lupines or Kindred who were undesirable for any reason.

Appointments to the post were informal and *ad hoc*. Since the world was considerably emptier than it is now, vampire lords could and did claim sovereignty over vast stretches of countryside, too large to patrol fully. Such lords often did not appoint a scourge at all. Instead, they saved face by deliberately ignoring squatters — so long as those squatters kept to the hardscrabble outer reaches of the domain. Others simply saw no reason to bother with a

scourge until war broke out nearby, sending its unruly tide of refugees across their lands.

Over the centuries, especially in areas where clan warfare was rampant, the office was formalized and expanded. Some feudal-era princes kept a captain of the guard, who served as war-counselor in addition to securing the borders. Other cities reluctantly accepted the protection of a Cainite mercenary captain and his bloodthirsty (and dangerously unemployed) soldiers while still others adopted the *consigliere* and *gabellotti*. During the Baroque Era, at least two ceremonial “knightly” orders were created that were open to any Kindred who held a military commission from a recognized prince. Long-dead Kindred heroes, much to the dismay of their surviving acquaintances, were inducted into these chivalric forgeries as “honorary founding members.”

All these various officials were rarely called scourgings, since their duties went far beyond a simple patrol, and no doubt they would have taken umbrage at being addressed by that primitive title — but they were no less feared by their victims.

Still, despite the increasing pomp and bombast associated with it, the office was often left vacant or even abolished altogether. Militaries in all times and places have been expensive to maintain; and if money was of limited interest to the Kindred who served, they usually expected to be paid handsomely in favors and privileges. Even the most harassed of princes could generally only afford a sporadic “housecleaning.”

From the Enlightenment onward, particularly once the Camarilla and the Sabbat had settled into their respective European territories, the scourge gradually came to be regarded as a decorative farce, hardly worth the prestation investment. But now, as the practice of illegitimate siring reaches epidemic proportions, things have changed.

THE SCOURGE REVISITED

Even the most isolated vampires of the Camarilla are threatened by the swelling Kindred population. Competition for hunting grounds increases nightly, and, far worse, some drastic Masquerade breaches have occurred that escaped mortal notice only through Herculean clean-up efforts. Many want to put a swift and brutal end to this threat. So far, the loudest outcry has come from the ancillae and younger elders — the vampiric bourgeoisie, so to speak — who are just powerful enough to have something to lose, but cannot insulate themselves from danger with layer upon layer of puppetry, as their superiors do.

In response to the unrest, some princes have reinstated the office of the scourge. They seem to consider it a hardship assignment and usually give the post to a subject who is competent and loyal but not personally influential. (Indeed, any influence a scourge might have prior to assuming office would soon erode; influence must be maintained, and his duties would force him to spend most of his time on the

chase.) Sometimes, scourgings are required to bring their prisoners before the prince for formal judgment; but in the most beset cities, they have advance license to deal as they like with trespassers, up to and including Final Death.

This latitude has already led to a number of questionable incidents. In some cases, legitimate Kindred who simply happened to be unknown to the scourge have been killed or arrested out of hand as autarkis. In others, scourgings chasing miscreants have strayed well past their prince’s borders, resulting in virulent arguments with neighbors over jurisdiction.

Formal complaints have been brought to several princes and justicars, and a conclave on the office of scourge may convene in the near future. The question is a thorny one. On the one hand, the sovereignty of the princes is traditionally sacrosanct even though the Inner Circle and justicars claim authority to pass judgment on them. On the other, the vagabonds are acknowledged to be a universal menace, and few want them to escape justice by the simple expedient of crossing a border.

THE SCOURGE IN SABBAT CITIES

Sabbat elders are familiar with the general concept of the scourge, since it predates both sects. Most often, however, the job of securing city borders is given to an entire pack rather than to a single person. Such packs are generally made up of vampires too weak to hold their own anywhere but in the suburbs anyway, and their peers tend to hold them in low regard. Any Sabbat pack is naturally at liberty to dispose of trespassers on its turf, though many bishops and archbishops offer handsome rewards for captured thin-blooded.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

In all the Camarilla tumult, the justicars have a historic chance to expand their reach. Many vampires, disgusted with the inertia of their elders and fearful for the survival of their race, have banded into cabals to appeal for official sect recognition of the scourge. Such a move would probably place the office directly under the authority of the justicars, which accomplishes three ends:

First, trespassers could be pursued across city borders, thus settling the jurisdiction dispute. At present, a scourge whose prey eludes him must generally concede the chase altogether, or else petition the neighboring prince to call a new Blood Hunt — an unacceptable delay, especially since many princes won’t grant even a trifling request until they have carefully considered its merits and then kept the supplicant waiting for an appropriately humiliating interval.

Second, standard rules of engagement would be established for the office, thus preventing any additional fatal misunderstandings of the sort that have already scandalized the Camarilla. (A recent incident in which Amsterdam’s

scourge pursued a young seer straight into the arms of a bewildered Ventrue ambassador from Düsseldorf, then killed them both without so much as stopping to ask the Ventrue's name, is cited as the most egregious example. The horror stories accumulate monthly.)

Third, the princes would be held to a higher level of accountability. After all, it rarely takes much to tidy up for an archon's visit, and afterward things can go back to business as usual. But if the justicar's eyes and ears were *always* present in the person of the scourge, princes might be encouraged to make a more constant effort on behalf of their residents.

This reform movement is currently in its infancy, but it could easily expand out of control. After all, mired as they are in feudal politics, Camarilla Kindred have not failed to notice the rise of democracy in the mortal nations. They know the power of numbers — and now they have a cause far-reaching and urgent enough to unite them. Clever justicars can use propaganda and rhetoric to agitate them even further; with luck, a big enough stink could be raised to "force" the Inner Circle itself to action.

All the ingredients are present for a witch-hunt of epic proportions: a frightened majority; a dangerous, contemptible throng of potential scapegoats; an unscrupulous leadership eager to tighten the reins of control. It would take but a nudge here or there to set everything in motion.

MODUS OPERANDI

Technically, the scourge can't simply walk up to someone and perform an on-the-spot execution (though a few choose to overlook this impediment). Most princes are nonetheless willing to grant the scourge a limited amount of discretion in handling offenders. Taking prisoners is easy enough to justify; and if those prisoners should forcibly resist, the scourge can kill them and claim self-defense. Anyway, who really cares to question the exact manner of an undesirable's death, as long as the problem is dealt with? It's not as though there aren't enough vampires running around.

Naturally, critics point out that such a policy can and does lead to regrettable mistakes. This is one of the reasons behind the growing call for justicar intervention.

Once the scourge has his victims — assuming they survive arrest — he either dispenses justice himself or brings them before the prince to make a formal accusation. In some cities, he must also collect as much information as possible about the errant vampires: names, clans (if any), mortal and immortal associations, probable identity of the sires, etc. This encourages the scourge to conduct an actual investigation rather than a simple search-and-destroy mission (which may miss the source of the problem completely).

The matter then passes to the discretion of the prince. Generally, she will order immediate execution for the prisoners, unless other considerations intrude, such as curiosity



about strange powers or the need to extract information. As for the unlucky sires, if they are known residents of the domain, they may be granted the mercy of a hearing. Should they happen to be out of pocket, however, a Blood Hunt will likely be called against them.

THE SCOURGE AND THE THIN-BLOODED

Although the thin-blooded aren't the only victims of the scourge, they are the hardest hit. The scourge is often the first (and last) contact that a thin-blooded vampire makes with the Camarilla or, indeed, with the rest of his kind.

Thus, the scourge is bound to be a frightening apparition when she appears. She need not always be immediately lethal, however. She may want information on the location of other vagrants. She may be curious about the peculiarities of her appointed enemy, or she may have reason to seek a seer's advice. Thin-blooded who keep a cool head may be able to negotiate for their unives, if not with the scourge, then with the prince who must make the final verdict.

Unfortunately for Storytellers, the scourge is generally tied to a local jurisdiction and can't personally chase a group of characters from city to city. However, she forgives insults no more easily than other vampires. Thin-blooded who manage to embarrass the scourge by evading her will probably find themselves harassed by her contacts and agents in other cities. It's not uncommon for scourges to offer generous bounties — or better yet, persuade their princes to offer such bounty — for the capture of particularly recalcitrant foes. Some mercenary-minded Gangrel have discovered that a fine career can be made simply by rounding up any vagrants

they come across in their travels and bringing them to the local scourge for a reward.

ASSAMITE SCOURGES

Freed from the Tremere curse and anxious about the coming reckoning, many Assamites fervently pursue diablerie. Some Camarilla princes have trouble finding anyone among their subjects who is trustworthy, capable and willing to assume the onerous task of population control. A possible mutual solution is to subcontract, as it were, an Assamite to serve as the scourge — with the understanding that the Assamite will be granted rights of diablerie over the condemned. Needless to say, the Camarilla largely frowns on alliances with the *rafiq*, especially since they were specifically forbidden to practice their trade in the Treaty of Tyre; so long as the Assamite in question makes some statement of allegiance and thus technically ceases to be a *paid* killer, the sect has scant grounds for objection.

However, other Kindred in the city may voice deep displeasure at having an assassin in their midst, should they learn of it. Princes must also beware: Diablerie is only one of the Assamites' many goals. Some *rafiq* who offer their skills are renowned scholars among their own people; by capturing and examining thin-blooded vampires, they hope to gain occult secrets.

Assamite scourges sometimes offer their victims a chance to convert and be smuggled off for training in the "True Path" rather than brought before the prince. Such an option may seem quite attractive to prisoners, despite the obvious misgivings.



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CHAPTER THREE: A STAIN ON THE SOUL

*Those who came before me
Lived through their vocations...*
— New Order, "Blue Monday"

Most vampires are selective about whom they Embrace. Most childe were quite competent even in their living days, and they gain further skill under a sire's tutelage before they become free neonates. Indeed, the Embrace itself seems to enhance people's abilities—maybe it's part of the curse, or maybe the shock of becoming undead simply forces people to push themselves.

Such is not true of the thin-blooded. Odds are, their sires picked them for frivolous reasons and didn't bother with any deliberate training. They are more like average people. Thin-blooded characters can gain the competence of any other neonate vampire—if they survive—but they start play with fewer dots in Traits than "normal" vampire neonates. In general, however, character creation rules for 14th- and 15th-generation vampires remain very much like the rules for "normal" Vampire characters.

Storytellers should be aware that thin-blooded characters, under the auspices of these rules, make use of certain Merits and Flaws. Storytellers, if you do not permit Merits and Flaws in your chronicle, you should make a special exception in the case of thin-blooded characters. If every character in a given chronicle is thin-blooded, however, you may wish to negate the appropriate Merits and Flaws altogether, as the players' characters will all have that in common, thus removing the need for such mechanical distinctions.

STEP ONE: CHARACTER CONCEPT

The first step in designing a thin-blooded vampire is just the same as for a "normal" vampire—or any game character, really. First you must decide who this person is. Start with their mortal life. Who was this person before they became a vampire? What was their past, what did they do for a living, who were their friends, and so on.

Next, who Embraced the character and why? The character's sire had some reason, however frivolous or misguided, for Embracing one person and not another. In the Camarilla, vampires receive few opportunities to sire childe with their elders' blessings; as a result they pick their childe carefully. Many Kindred select a childe for special abilities or social influence she possesses. A childe may be a protégée, a lover or merely an ornament, but she also represents her sire to other Kindred. Camarilla vampires seldom feel such strong emotion that they sire a childe whom they know will disgrace them. The Sabbat also select childe for strategic reasons (at least when they aren't siring masses of cannon fodder for assaults).

The thin-blooded and their sires rarely exercise such care. For instance, they casually Embrace lovers in expectation of an "eternal" affection, or they try to save a sick relative's life by granting him undeath. On the other hand, a vampire might Embrace an enemy as a way to make her suffer. On rare occasions, vampires might even Embrace through

CHARACTER CREATION PROCESS

• Step One: Character Concept

Choose Archetype, Nature, Demeanor and general character background. Who is this person?

Choose clan (if any) and generation (if any)

• Step Two: Select Attributes

Choose primary, secondary and tertiary classes (6/5/3)

Choose Physical Traits: Strength, Dexterity, Stamina

Choose Social Traits: Charisma, Manipulation, Appearance

Choose Mental Traits: Perception, Intelligence, Wits

• Step Three: Select Abilities

Choose primary, secondary and tertiary classes (12/8/5).

Choose Talents: Your natural aptitudes

Choose Skills: What you've trained to do

Choose Knowledges: What you've studied

• Step Four: Select Advantages

Choose Disciplines (2)

Choose Backgrounds (5)

Choose Virtues (7)

• Step Five: Finishing Touches

Record Virtues, Willpower, Humanity and blood pool.

Add Merits and Flaws (if any).

misunderstandings or bizarre accidents: "Omigod, I took too much, he's *dying*! Maybe he'll get better if I put some back..."

How long did the character's sire stick around? If her sire is still around, what relationship do they have? If not, why did the sire leave? And how much did the sire explain about vampirism and the world of the Kindred? Odds are, it wasn't much: The riffraff responsible for the thin-blooded generally don't know much themselves.

So the character became a vampire... what then? How does the character feel about being undead? What has she gained and lost? What hopes and ambitions does she have, and what stands in her way?

Make sure your character has "hooks" the Storyteller can use to involve her in stories: Friends and relatives from their mortal days, to whom they still feel obligation; enemies whom they still hate (or fear); goals and desires strong enough to lead them into danger; things they have that other people want, or things they want that other people have. These are all classic hooks.

(Strangely, some players try to make characters completely without "hooks," ones who have no weaknesses and no ties to the rest of the world. What's the point of playing a character who never gets involved except when someone tries to kill him? Besides, this is **Vampire**! Your character *will* find himself embroiled in the schemes of others, no matter what you do; you might as well make sure it happens in a way you find entertaining. Storytellers love players who give suggestions.)

When you've gotten to know your character this well, deciding on her Nature and Demeanor is a snap.

Finally, consider the character's appearance. What does the character look like? How does he dress?

GENERATION

Decide whether the vampire is 14th- or 15th-generation. This will determine the size of the character's usable blood pool and Discipline limits. Fourteenth- and 15th-generation vampires have different innate limitations and weaknesses. Being 14th- or 15th-generation is a Flaw (see below for details).

CLAN

About half of all 14th-generation vampires become Caitiff. The rest, of course, belong to their sires' clans. When creating a 14th-generation character from scratch, you may decide whether the vampire has a clan or numbers among the Caitiff.

It may happen that a 13th-generation character sires a childe in the course of a story. The new vampire has a 50 percent chance of becoming a Caitiff. The Storyteller rolls a die (or uses some other random process): An even result means a childe of the sire's clan, odd means a Caitiff. Of course, Storytellers may always exercise their godlike powers and simply decide, but the 50 percent figure exists in the World of Darkness and should be kept in mind.

All 15th-generation vampires are Caitiff. No exceptions! The Curse of Caine has weakened so much that, by the 15th Generation, the Blood can no longer sustain the special affinities that define the clans.

Note: Don't pay too much attention to clan stereotypes. They are not very reliable as a guide to the thin-blooded. Vampire clan members tend to select childer who resemble themselves, just as they reflect their own sires. Thus, Toreador have a reputation as artists because, for generations, artistic clan members have Embraced other aesthetes; likewise, scholarly Tremere pick other scholars, wealthy Ventrue pick other social leaders, and so on. Although every clan has numerous exceptions, it still makes sense to speak of a "typical Gangrel" or "classic Tzimisce." In contrast, no plan guides the Embrace of thin-blooded vampires, not even in a statistical sense. The lineage may say Toreador, but the sire probably didn't know she "ought to" Embrace a good-looking artist instead of, say, the pretty but vapid barfly to whom she felt an attraction. Clan affiliation is the least important aspect of a thin-blooded character.

SPECIAL ARCHETYPES

Is the character a seer or inceptor? If so, these characteristics determine many other aspects of the character. Does she want to join the Camarilla or the Sabbat (or even know that these sects exist)? Does she rebel with the anarchs or walk the lonely path of the autarkis? Or does he ignore politics and concentrate on mortal relationships as a Cleaver?

STEP TWO: ATTRIBUTES

Nascent 14th- and 15th-generation vampire characters receive only six dots to assign to their primary class of Attributes,

but they still receive five dots for secondary Attributes and three dots for their tertiary Attributes. Since no plan guides the Embrace of thin-blooded vampires, physical, social or mental Attributes are equally likely to be primary. Remember, also, that thin-blooded vampires are still entitled to the one "free" dot in every Attribute to reflect the fact that they were once human.

STEP THREE: ABILITIES

Neonates of the highest generations start with 12 dots in their primary class of Abilities, eight in their secondary class, and five in their tertiary Abilities. Again, Talents, Skills or Knowledges may be primary. As is true for all starting vampires, at this stage of character creation no Ability can receive a rating higher than 3 dots.

STEP FOUR: ADVANTAGES

Like all vampires, the thin-blooded have Disciplines, Backgrounds and Virtues.

DISCIPLINES

The thin-blooded begin play with only *two* dots in Disciplines. They can buy more with freebie points. Note, however, that 14th-generation vampires can never raise any Discipline higher than four dots, and 15th-generation vampires are limited to three dots in each Discipline.

Fourteenth-generation vampires who belong to a clan may assign these starting dots only to their Clan Disciplines. Caitiff may have any Discipline they can justify learning.

BACKGROUNDS

Just like all starting Vampire characters, the thin-blooded receive five dots in Backgrounds. Here, positive and negative factors balance out. On one hand, their weak position in vampire society hinders them from developing the social influence that older and stronger-blooded vampires enjoy. On the other hand, they have not been dead long enough to withdraw completely from the connections they had as mortals. The thin-blooded seldom find opportunities to blood bond the mayor or control big corporations; they are more likely, however, to keep good relations with a brother on the police force, the family priest or an old office buddy.

Obviously, 14th- and 15th-generation vampires may not allocate dots to Generation. They can, however, buy dots in a Background no other vampire can have: Insight (see p.74 for the Insight Background).

VIRTUES

The thin-blooded don't get shorted everywhere. They receive seven dots to spend on their Virtues. Most thin-blooded subscribe to the Virtues of Conscience, Self-Control and Courage, as virtually all of them subscribe to the tenets of Humanity. It is possible, though extremely unlikely, for a thin-blooded vampire to begin play on a Path of Enlightenment; such characters receive only five points worth of Virtues and do not enjoy a "free" dot in anything other than Courage. Storytellers need not allow players to start thin-blooded characters on Paths of Enlightenment, however. Only the Sabbat and the

independent clans espouse Paths of Enlightenment, as do the rare, anomalous vampires who have bizarre reasons in their past to do so. Very few thin-blooded vampires have had the time or the opportunity to pursue alternate moralities.

STEP FIVE: FINISHING TOUCHES

The final steps in building a character involve calculating the Willpower and Humanity scores, spending freebie points (thus possibly getting more through Flaws) and finding the character's starting number of blood points.

WILLPOWER

Starting Willpower equals Courage rating, as for any other vampire character.

HUMANITY

The character's starting Humanity rating is derived just as for other vampire characters (Conscience + Self-Control). Most 14th- and 15th-generation vampires follow Humanity. While nothing outright forbids a thin-blooded vampire from following a Path of Enlightenment, these "alternate moralities" demand special (and often nasty) training over a course of years.

BLOOD POOL

As explained in Chapter One, blood pool gets a little complicated for the thin-blooded. They can carry up to 10 blood points, just like a 13th-generation vampire. On the other hand, they cannot use all those blood points to heal wounds, raise Physical Attributes or fuel Disciplines. A 14th-generation vampire can expend only eight of his blood points on such things. A 15th-generation vampire can expend only six of his blood points on anything but surviving through his daily sleep.

To begin, however, roll one die to find how many blood points a thin-blooded character has at the start of play.

FREEBIE POINTS

As a partial compensation, 14th- and 15th-generation starting characters receive 18 freebie points. Except for Disciplines, all Traits cost the same as for normal vampires: Additional dots of Disciplines cost more because of the thin-blooded's lack of training.

MERITS AND FLAWS

The Last Generations have access to all the Merits and Flaws of other vampires. (Admittedly, some would not make a great deal of sense. A lowly and despised 15th-generation Caitiff is not likely to wield significant influence over much domain or claim a prestigious sire.) They also have three Flaws that define them: 14th Generation, 15th Generation and Thin-Blooded. A starting character can take up to seven points in Flaws — no more. The three special Flaws count toward that total. Of course, a character can have more Flaws if the player thinks they help define the character; the character merely does not receive extra freebie points for them. Also, Merits and Flaws are subject to Storyteller discretion — Storytellers, if you don't like 'em, don't use 'em.

NEW TRAITS

With the increase of high-generation vampires in the Time of Thin Blood, certain new Traits have arisen among the undead. As always, the Storyteller is the final arbiter of whether or not new Traits are permitted in her chronicle, but these new Traits lend themselves particularly well to thin-blooded characters.

NEW BACKGROUND

INSIGHT

"You will show our prince respect, whelp!" The hairy vampire who called himself the scourge shoved Ray to the ground, which was carpeted with a fabric the young Kindred had never felt before. Ray gave him a withering glare, all it was in his power to do, given the circumstances.

Behind Ray, someone cleared his throat — a curiously mortal gesture. The woman wore a dazzling evening dress, as if this trifle prevented her from doing whatever else it was she had designs on tonight. She said, "Ah, young one. I see you have met Bernard. I am his prince, just as I am yours."

Ray tilted his head, his eyes glazing over briefly. "You're not the prince," he whispered raggedly. "You killed the old prince and took her face."

Some vampires of the 14th and 15th Generations have an uncanny, well, insight into the plots and intrigues of elder vampires. They get strange hunches and prophetic dreams, blurt out names they should not know and sometimes even see waking visions of Gehenna.

Insight is only the most popular name for this knack. Other names range from the pretentiously pseudo-scholarly, such as "Prognostication," to the casual and slangy, such as "pickin' up the vibes." Vampires with Insight are called seers (less often, oracles, Delphics or Cumaeans; also dreamers, psychics, snoops and tattletales).

Insight has its origin in the near-death experience of the Embrace. Thin-blooded vampires often spend a long time caught at the brink of Final Death and oblivion. As they struggle back to the lands of the (un)living, some new vampires see visions of the past and future of the Kindred and learn secrets of the Jyhad. When they wake up they forget most of what they saw, just as mortals forget most of their dreams, but the knowledge may return in visions or spontaneous hunches. If they ever realize what's going on, such seers can try to reconnect to the source and deliberately provoke such visions.

FREEBIE POINT COSTS

Attribute	5 per dot
Ability	2 per dot
Discipline	10 per dot
Background	1 per dot
Virtue	2 per dot
Humanity	1 per dot
Willpower	1 per dot

EXPERIENCE POINTS CHART

Many Traits have the same experience point cost to raise as for normal vampires. Disciplines and Thaumaturgical Paths constitute a notable exception. Because of the highest generations' weak blood, Disciplines and Paths of Thaumaturgy cost roughly twice as many experience points as for lower-generation vampires.

Trait	Cost
New Ability	3
New Path (Thaumaturgy or Necromancy)	10
New Discipline	15
Attribute	current rating x 4
Ability	current rating x 2
Clan Discipline	current rating x 10
Other Discipline	current rating x 14
Secondary Path (Thaumaturgy or Necromancy)	current rating x 8
Caitiff (thin-blooded) Discipline	current rating x 12
Virtue	current rating x 2*
Humanity	current rating x 2
Willpower	current rating

* Increasing a Virtue through experience does not increase Traits based on that Virtue (Humanity, Willpower)

Like all Backgrounds, Insight operates on a scale of one to five dots.

- The occasional odd feeling
- Intuitive
- Visionary
- Uncanny
- You see more of the Jyhad's movements than anyone but the Ancients themselves.

Note, however, that Insight is not an All-Purpose Magic-Answer Machine. Most of the time, Insight is vague, or the visions are obscure and symbolic. The more powerful the vampires involved, the less direct Insight will be. Even the most successful Insight only refers to Antediluvians through symbol and metaphor.

Example: While kneeling before the prince, Tisha the Caitiff has a powerful flash of Insight. She sees the prince's throat ripped open by another vampire and blurts out, "Caesar, beware the ides of March!" She doesn't know that the prince's grandsire is named Brutus. She has seen the prince's death in Gehenna, at the fangs of his own Methuselah grandsire.

What's more, Insight reveals only information about plots and conflicts driven by vampires. This doesn't necessarily involve the lead-up to Gehenna... at least, not directly. The Methuselahs and Antediluvians don't control every vampire, or even every elder. Most conflicts between vampires have no wider significance.

On the other hand, the petty wars between the elders ensure that the Kindred will not mount a unified resistance when the Ancients awaken to devour their descendants. While the Ancients do not cause every scheme and squabble, they benefit from these little Jyhads. Insight detects such minor plots, too (and causes just as much resentment among the elders whose secrets are revealed).

The spontaneous dreams, hunches and visions occur at the Storyteller's discretion. The Storyteller can use spontaneous Insight to feed information to the character and lead her into trouble (er, *stories*). The Storyteller decides when spontaneous Insight occurs. On these occasions, she rolls one die per dot of Insight the character has, at difficulty 6. The number of successes determines the clarity of the information:

Botch	Convincing but completely false information.
Failure	Nothing
1 success	A vague sense of hidden significance.
2 successes	Knowledge that a person, object or event is important. A name, face or symbolic image of a person, but without explanation.
3 successes	Hints to hidden plots, but in puzzling symbols and riddles. At least one significant detail is clearly revealed.
4 successes	Significant information clearly revealed — but not completely. Perhaps one short scene about an Ancient's activities, or someone's fate when Gehenna comes.
5 successes	Dangerous detail. One person's motives revealed in full. Major participants in a conflict identified, but without explanation.

Someone with Insight can also deliberately try to provoke a hunch or vision about a person or situation. This usually provides less detailed information and may well fail completely. In rules terms, the player of the character can make an Insight roll (one die per point of the Background she possesses), but at difficulty 8. It's all too easy to deceive oneself and mistake some stray thought for a psychic flash.

If the Insight roll gives disappointing results, the player can roll again in a later scene — but at difficulty 9. The player can try again in scenes after that, but at difficulty 10. At this point, rolling a botch becomes as likely as rolling a success. A seer can't keep begging the Great Beyond for clues about another vampire. The difficulty for deliberate Insight drops back to 8 only when a new chapter of the story begins.

A seer's player can make deliberate Insight rolls for as many subjects as she wants — so long as the subjects have no relation to each other. The Storyteller has final say over whether two queries are genuinely distinct, or just an attempt to approach a single subject from different angles.

If a character fails or botches two Insight rolls in the same scene, she becomes exhausted and unable to call upon the powers of Insight for the remainder of the story (*not* the scene). Also, only vampires of the 14th and 15th Generations may possess Insight.

GROUP INSIGHT

A group of seers can try for deliberate Insight together in order to get more information. In stark rules terms, this is easy.

Each seer makes an Insight roll at difficulty 8, and then they pool their successes. (They also pool their ones, so deliberate Insight still isn't completely reliable). To participate, however, each seer must expend a Willpower point. This expenditure does not add automatic successes to the Insight roll, though; it only lets each seer contribute to the pool of successes.

In storytelling terms, group Insight is a bit more difficult. Just gathering a group of seers may be a challenge. Even if two seers meet, they won't necessarily trust each other. In some regions, clever scourges may employ fake seers as "Judas goats" to draw real seers out of hiding so the latter can be imprisoned or slain. Gathering a group of seers can become a story in itself.

Additionally, the seers must agree on some sort of ritual to guide their attempt at Insight. Real occult beliefs provide many examples of divinatory rituals, from Ouija boards and Tarot cards to reading the entrails of slaughtered animals. Without some such ritual framework, the seers cannot pool their successes.

(This doesn't mean that the ritual has any genuine magic power. Any agreed-upon ritual will do. The ritual merely has to put the participants in a special frame of mind, in which they accept that they can pull knowledge from the void.)

At first the characters should have no idea how group Insight works. When they hear that it may be possible, or speculate about this themselves, the Storyteller can build more stories about attempts to learn how group Insight works. Characters can search for other seers who have successfully performed group Insight (or think they have...), consult occultists and magicians, or read arcane texts for guidance. If the characters decide that obtaining a group vision requires that they offer up one of their number as a sacrifice in the deepest chamber of the Great Pyramid, the Storyteller is under no obligation to tell them that they'd do as well sitting around a Ouija board.

After all this trouble, the rewards may be great. The participants may well discover one of the great secrets of the Jyhad, such as the true goal of a particular Methuselah. As with solo deliberate Insight, they can make multiple attempts — but again, the difficulty rises each time.

INSIGHT AND AUSPEX

Auspex and Insight work well together. Auspex can sometimes trigger episodes of spontaneous Insight; Insight can tell when one should use Auspex.

Heightened Perception (Auspex Level One) sometimes warns its possessor of danger, from immediate threats (such as a gun pointed at the character) to subtle threats (such as an enemy's plot to murder him). If a threat connects to the schemes of local elders, sensing the threat through Auspex may also trigger spontaneous Insight about the motivations behind the threat.

Example: Tisha senses a sniper aiming a rifle at her, just in time to prevent her head from being splattered. The Storyteller decides that, as she runs, she has a flash of spontaneous Insight: She gets a hunch that a Brujah gang lord is involved. Since she received only two successes on her Insight roll, she doesn't know whether the old Brujah actually ordered the murder attempt. He could also be "involved" because someone feared that Tisha would help him, or for some other reason.

The Spirit's Touch (Auspex Level Three) complements Insight if the object scanned has some significance in a Jyhad. Most simply, a flash of spontaneous Insight can tell a character that an object is worth examining.

Example: While Brody visits the haven of a contact in the Camarilla, the sight of a TV remote-control fills him with obscure dread (one success on spontaneous Insight). Brody asks his friend to humor him while he uses Spirit's Touch. Brody receives two successes: He sees a vision of a ring of fire around the remote, and hears a ghostly chanting. When he reports this result, his friend smashes the remote with a hammer and dumps it in the trash. She explains herself with one word, a word new to Brody: "Tremere!" But what nefarious spell did the Tremere place on the TV remote, and why?

A character can also use deliberate Insight with Spirit's Touch to get more information about people who have interacted with an object in the past. Normally, Spirit's Touch provides only basic information about a person who used an object, such as her age, gender, hair color or emotional state at the time. Perhaps the Auspex user envisions a "snapshot" of a scene in the past — but without explanation. Deliberate Insight can add details of motivation that Spirit's Touch cannot detect. Best of all, every two successes on Spirit's Touch reduces the difficulty of deliberate Insight by one (divide the number of successes by two and round down).

Example: The Ventrue primogen greatly values his icon, Caine as Prince of the First City. When Brody uses Spirit's Touch on the small painted plaque, he finds that the primogen received the icon from a middle-aged man in the garb of a Renaissance nobleman (Brody received a very good roll to get information from a hundred years ago). Auspex does not explain that the man was the primogen's sire, but Insight may. With a good Insight roll, Brody might even learn that the primogen's sire gave him the icon as a reminder of loyalty, and the primogen now schemes to become prince as part of his sire's plans.

All these results assume that the object does in fact have some connection to a Jyhad. Most objects do not — not even when their owner is hip-deep in intrigue.

Example: Spirit's Touch on the prince's heavy, brass paperweight reveals that someone used it to kill someone else. The full story is that the prince used the paperweight to bash in the skull of an Anarch leader's insulting ghoul. Insight won't detect that, though: The prince did the murder in a fit of temper, not as part of some extended scheme.

INSIGHT AND DEMENTATION

Dementation Level Three can reveal hidden information in much the same way as Insight (although Eyes of Chaos is not limited to the doings of the Jyhad). Eyes of Chaos can complement Insight much as Auspex can. For every success at deliberate Insight, the difficulty for an Eyes of Chaos examination drops by one, or vice versa, depending on which the character uses first.

INSIGHT SHOCK

One can see entirely too much through group Insight. The seers may get so much information, of such a shocking nature and perceived so intensely, that their minds shut down from the overload.

If Group Insight results in 6 or more successes, all the participants must make a Willpower roll with the number of Group Insight successes as the difficulty. If a participant succeeds at this roll, she is shaken but unharmed. If she fails, she enters an involuntary torpor (see *Vampire: The Masquerade*, p. 216 for the duration of torpor).

INSIGHT AND TORPOR

Every time a vampire with Insight enters an involuntary torpor (including through insight shock) she may experience spontaneous insight. Once more, her soul walks the boundary of oblivion and eternity, with the past and future spread before her. Just as she did in her Embrace, she forgets most of what she sees in her death-dreams... but not all of it. She may awaken with a valuable new clue to the Great Jyhad.

A seer's player might think of inducing a bout of Insight by having the character wound or starve herself into torpor. This rarely works; the Great Beyond is not so easily fooled. Because the torpor comes about through the character's own desire, it is not really involuntary. The Storyteller should use the rules for deliberate Insight instead.

After a torpor-induced episode of Insight, the Storyteller should also review how well the seer has been played. Did the player make the character's Insight an important aspect of the character and the story? (Whether the character loves his Insight, hates it, is awed by its power or is maddened by its inconstancy doesn't matter. Only the intensity of the character's involvement does matter.) If so, the Storyteller may award the character another dot of Insight (up to the maximum of 5). The character's repeated sojourn at the border of death has strengthened her connection to the source of Insight. On the other hand, if the Storyteller feels that the player has treated Insight as just another game mechanic or "kewl" power, she does not need to grant the added Insight.

LAST GENERATION FLAWS (AND MERITS)

Except for the two Flaws that define the 14th and 15th Generations, all Merits and Flaws are strictly optional. A Storyteller doesn't have to allow them unless he wants to; they can, however, add "color" to a character.

THIN BLOOD DEFINED

If a new character has a generation lower than 13th, this costs Background dots or freebie points. Conversely, a 14th- or 15th-generation vampire earns bonus freebie points in addition to the ones he receives automatically as part of character creation for taking Thin Blood. Taking either of these generational Flaws obviously precludes buying the Generation Background. Vampires of the Last Generations also may not begin play with any sort of Status.

The Last Generations also have the Flaw of "Thin Blood." For 14th-generation vampires, this flaw is common but not mandatory. Fifteenth-generation vampires have it automatically



(it is factored into their generation Flaw) and other debilities besides — but also certain advantages that counterbalance them. Other vampires can take the Thin Blood Flaw, but vampires of lower generation do not get benefits of the Insight Background or the ability to create new Disciplines.

Chapter One discusses various aspects of the 14th and 15th Generations in greater detail.

14TH GENERATION (2-PT. PHYSICAL FLAW)

You were sired just a few years ago by a member of the 13th Generation. Although you can have up to 10 blood points in your body, you can use only eight of them to heal wounds, raise Attributes or fuel those Disciplines that require vitae.

You can still use the final two blood points for other purposes, though. The blood point costs of nightly rising, creating/sustaining ghouls and creating blood bonds remains the same as for other vampires.

You cannot raise any Discipline above Level Four.

Many 14th-generation vampires also have other Flaws related to their thin blood — especially the “Thin Blood” Flaw itself.

15TH GENERATION (4-PT. PHYSICAL FLAW)

Your vitae is so weak that only six of your 10 blood points can be used for Disciplines, healing or raising Attributes. For these functions, you must expend two blood points to obtain the effect a normal vampire would achieve with one. (The cost for nightly rising remains a single blood point.) What’s more, you cannot create or sustain ghouls, create a blood bond or sire a vampiric child. You can use the remaining four blood points to survive through the day and wake up each night, nothing more.

You cannot raise any Discipline above Level Three.

The weakening of the Curse of Caine has compensations, though (which distinguish this Flaw from the Thin Blood Flaw itself). Sunlight does *lethal* damage to you, instead of aggravated damage as it does to other vampires. You can hold down mortal food and drink for an hour or so; other vampires vomit immediately if they try (unless they have the Eat Food Merit). Strangest of all, once in a while you might actually have a child the normal, human way... though it will not be a normal human child!

THIN BLOOD (4-PT. PHYSICAL FLAW)

The Curse of Caine runs weakly in your blood. While you suffer all the ill effects of vampirism, from the need for blood to taking aggravated damage from sunlight, you do not receive all the compensating supernatural powers. While you can expend blood points to heal wounds, raise Attributes or fuel those Disciplines that need them, all blood point costs are doubled. What’s more, your vitae cannot sustain ghouls or create blood bonds. When you try to sire childer, the Embrace only has a 20 percent chance to succeed. Otherwise, it leaves you with an inconvenient corpse.

OTHER FLAWS

The Last Generations are prone to other Flaws as well, reflecting the weakness of Caine’s curse and blessing upon them.

RAVAGING YEARS (2-pt. SUPERNATURAL FLAW)

The curse of Caine did not grant you immortality. You still age, just very slowly — perhaps one mortal year for every 20 calendar years. Most of the time, neither you nor anyone else would notice, but eventually you will grow old and die.

Sometimes your aging speeds up: Like a ghoul, your deferred aging can return in a rush. Whenever you heal aggravated wounds, you age a year in the course of a single day's sleep. That may not sound like much, but over the course of a century it can really add up. It gives a great incentive to avoid sunlight, fire and the fangs of one's fellow vampires.

HEMETIC (4-pt. MENTAL FLAW)

The very idea of drinking blood disgusts you and makes you physically ill... awkward for a vampire. In order to hold the blood within your system until you absorb it, you must make a Stamina roll at difficulty 8. Failure means the sudden, humiliating and *extremely* messy loss of all newly consumed blood points as you retch them out (the truly pathetic could carry a barf bag and try again). The only way to avoid nausea is to feed while frenzying: In that horrid state, with the Beast in full control, you can keep blood down. Aside from the social embarrassment frenzy can cause, however, it tends to endanger the Masquerade; you might as well phone up the local scourge and ask if he makes house calls.

CLAN WEAKNESS (2-pt. SUPERNATURAL FLAW)

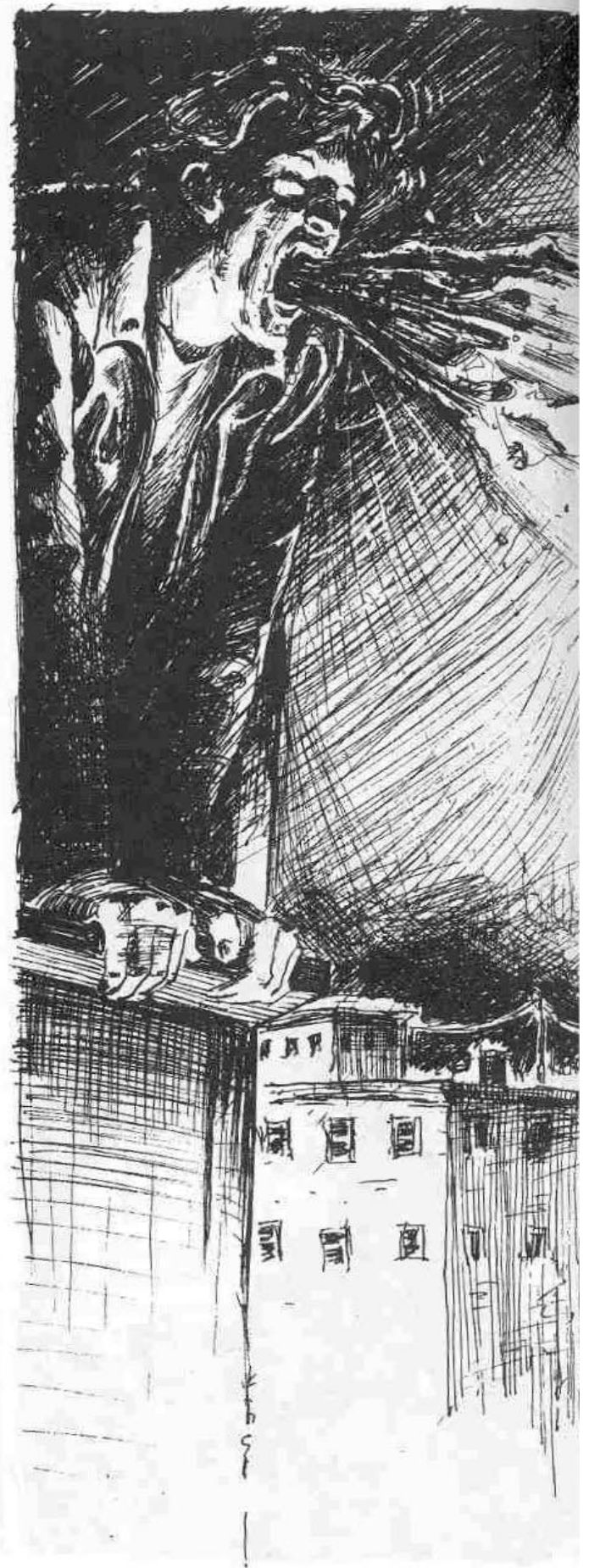
This one's for Caitiff. Even though you did not become a full member of your sire's clan, and do not get the cost break for Clan Disciplines, you still suffer from that clan's natural weakness. What's more, some Caitiff just spontaneously replicate clan weaknesses, with no connection to their ancestry. While this can help one pretend to be a member of the appropriate clan, it can be deadly if one does not know about it — or what other vampires might think. (In Camarilla territory, for instance, a Caitiff who casts no reflection — the notorious weakness of the Lasombra clan — might have to answer hard questions.)

DECREPITUDE (3-pt. SUPERNATURAL FLAW)

No thin-blooded vampire has felt the full force of this Flaw. None of them have existed long enough. In time, they will learn its full horror.

The Curse of Caine holds most vampires in ageless stasis, repairing any damage they might suffer. In your case, the Curse doesn't always succeed at fully repairing damage. When healing aggravated damage, the player must make a Stamina roll. The difficulty is 5 plus the number of levels of aggravated damage currently sustained (For instance, if you had taken 2 health levels of aggravated damage, the difficulty would be 7. After healing one level, the difficulty would drop to 6.) Failure means that, despite regaining the health level, your body still shows signs of damage. Perhaps burnt hair won't regrow or a healed wound leaves a scar. Botching the roll means losing one dot of some Physical Attribute or Appearance, chosen by the Storyteller.

You can repair this damage, if you know a skilled plastic surgeon — or mortician — who is privy to the Masquerade, but it's not easy. After all, the surgeon has to do a fair bit of cutting





100. On the one hand, you receive a difficulty of only 6 to heal the wounds caused by the surgeon. On the other hand, you might receive another botch and be worse off than before.

As the decades pass and Attributes drop, decay sets in. Eventually you become a shambling, animate corpse. At such a point, Final Death may seem a mercy.

See the 5-point physical Flaw "Flesh of the Corpse" in *Vampire: The Masquerade* for an even more severe version of this debility.

FANGLSS (2-PT. PHYSICAL FLAW)

Your Embrace malfunctioned: the Curse of Caine made you a vampire... but it didn't give you fangs! You must use a knife, syringe or other sharp instrument to extract the blood you need to survive. Very few mortals find such exsanguination pleasant, at least until you place your mouth to the wound (then the Kiss proceeds as normal). Having no fangs also removes your one natural way to cause aggravated damage.

FLAWS OF SUPERSTITION (COST VARIES)

Often, the Last Generations get their ideas about what it means to be a vampire from books and movies. That includes ideas about what can hurt them. The mysterious power of the Embrace, however, can make these delusions real. For instance, a new vampire who expects to be repelled by crosses might find herself taking real damage from a crucifix's touch. Other good Flaws of Superstition include Smell of the Grave, Repulsed by

Garlic, Cast No Reflection and Can't Cross Running Water. (See *Vampire: The Masquerade* for descriptions of these Flaws.)

Further Flaws of Superstition from European lore include:

- **Compulsive Counter** (2-pt. Mental Flaw): If you see collections of small, identical objects (such as a scattered handful of rice or marbles), you feel compelled to pick them up and count them. You can resist the obsession if you make a successful Willpower roll. The difficulty depends on how much you must count: A scattered handful of rice (hundreds of grains) gives a difficulty of only 6, but a handful of marbles (only a dozen or so) would force a difficulty of 9.

- **Repulsed by Wild Rose** (1-pt. Supernatural Flaw): As "Repulsed by Garlic," but using flowering sprigs of wild rose instead. Hawthorn, rowan and celandine also have legendary status as repellents of vampires.

- **Feeding Fetish** (1-pt. Mental Flaw): You feel compelled to bite only a specific part of the body to feed. Attempting to bite a victim anywhere else forces a Willpower check (difficulty 6). The neck, of course, is most traditional, but the legendary Armenian vampire Dakhanavar bit only the soles of his victim's feet.

- **Power Fetish** (3-pt. Supernatural Flaw): You believe that much of your supernatural power depends on carrying a specific object (the Alp, a German vampire-spirit, needed its hat). Without that unique object, you must succeed at a Willpower check (difficulty 8) to activate any Discipline power.



WARD (3-pt. SOCIAL FLAW)

A mortal whom you want to protect depends on you in some way. They need a lot of protection, too: Wards have a way of getting sucked into awkward situations, forcing you to change your own plans or even put yourself in danger. No matter how many people depend on you, however, you can take this Flaw only once.

A ward could be a relative, a lover, a friend or just about any mortal to whom one has a strong connection. Wards have no special influence or abilities they can offer in return (if they did, they would be Allies or Contacts).

Does the Ward know that you are a vampire? Keeping a Ward from knowing requires great effort. You spend a lot more time with a Ward than with a casual friend, under more demanding circumstances. Sooner or later, you have to explain away strange events and behavior: Why she never sees you during the day, or why a mugger's bullet knocked you down but didn't make you bleed. Letting a Ward in on your biggest secret endangers the Masquerade, though.

(OH YES, MERITS TOO)

The weakening of the Curse of Caine also might reduce some of the standard vampiric weaknesses. As described above, 15th-generation vampires take only lethal damage from sunlight. Some of the standard Merits are also particularly appropriate for the Last Generations (though, as always,

Merits are strictly optional.) See *Vampire: The Masquerade* for full descriptions of these merits.

- **Eat Food** (1-pt. Physical Merit): You can still consume mortal food and drink. You can't digest it, but at least you can hold it down for a few hours before you must vomit it up again. You can also still appreciate the tastes. (15th-generation vampires get this for free as an intrinsic feature of their generation).

- **Blush of Health** (2-pt. Physical Merit): You can seem still alive, with a normal complexion, regular breathing and even a heartbeat.

- **Light Sleeper** (2-pt. Mental Merit): Unlike other vampires, you wake up easily when a ruckus occurs nearby, and the Humanity limit on dice pools during the day is waived.

- **Calm Heart** (3-pt. Mental Merit): The Beast is weaker in you, giving you two extra dice on rolls to resist frenzy.

The weakening Curse suggests other potential Merits, too:

- **Inoffensive to Animals** (1-pt. Supernatural Merit): Animals usually hate and fear the undead. Most vampires need the supernatural force of Animalism to overpower this instinctive revulsion. In your case, however, animals still respond to you as if you were a mortal. This Merit does not mean that they automatically like you, only that they do not automatically *dislike* you. Dogs do not snarl and bark when you walk by; cats do not hiss, spit and run away; parakeets, in their efforts to escape your unholy presence, do not batter themselves against their cages.

The chief benefit of this Merit is that you can interact with people who have pets. The Merit also makes Animalism easier: All dice rolls involved have their difficulties reduced by 1.

- **Face the Flames** (3-pt. Mental Merit): The weakness of your Beast renders you less susceptible to blind panic when faced with fire. You receive two extra dice on Röttschreck rolls.

The Last Generations' ability to create new Disciplines and pull information from the ether might also make various supernatural Merits appropriate to some characters. A supernatural Merit might even represent the first step in a new Discipline's emergence. Existing Merits include:

- **Medium** (2-pt. Supernatural Merit): Although you can't see ghosts, you can sense their presence, hear them speak and talk to them yourself. How you get along with them is a separate problem.

- **Oracular Ability** (3-pt. Supernatural Merit): You can see and interpret signs and omens. Like Insight, this gives clues to the future and to hidden workings of the present. Unlike that Background, Oracular Ability may deal with any subject, not just the activities of vampires.

Finally, the thin-blooded generally don't know that they are not supposed to talk to strangers. As a result, they might innocently form connections with other supernaturals. **Vampire: the Masquerade** already includes the Merit, "Spirit Mentor" (a ghost who sometimes gives advice and minor assistance). Storytellers may extend this to other supernatural races as well:

- **Supernatural Contact** (3-pt. Social Merit): You know a werewolf, mage, fae, Kuei-jin, hedge magician or some other supernatural being. This does not mean that you are boon companions, only that the two of you don't follow the usual kill-on-sight policy between supernaturals. If players want a more cordial relationship between characters of different races, they must develop it themselves in the course of play. Remember that while Contacts may perform favors, they expect favors in return. What's more, your Supernatural Contact is probably just as marginalized in his own community as the thin-blooded are among the Kindred. At the very least, you both risk disgrace in your respective communities.

DHAMPIRS: CHILDREN OF THE UNDEAD

A 15th-generation vampire of either gender can have half-mortal offspring, conceived and born the normal way. In their folklore, the Gypsies call such a child of the living and the undead a *dhampir*.

In game terms, dhampirs are almost identical to revenants. Actually, they *are* revenants, except they're descended from vampires instead of from ghouls (see **Ghouls: Fatal Addiction** for information on revenants).

The most important differences between dhampirs and revenants are cultural. Revenants grow up in a freakish, monstrous subculture of vampires and ghouls. Only quite unusual circumstances could lead to a revenant growing up

among normal, contemporary humans. A dhampir probably spent most of her time among normal humans. She might not even know about her supernatural heritage. Learning about the secret World of Darkness may come as a bit of a shock.

CHARACTER CONCEPT

All dhampirs are young, without exception. The thin-blooded themselves have appeared only within the last 20 years. Most likely, a dhampir character will be the first of his kind — at least in his vicinity. Neither he nor anyone else will know what powers and pitfalls he may expect. Any dhampir may expect a turbulent adolescence, though. Many parents think that their teenager is a beast. A dhampir carries a real Beast in his soul, even if it isn't as strong as the raging Beast of a vampire.

- **Family Background:** What circumstances led to your conception? Did a one-night stand result in a pregnancy, greatly surprising all concerned? Or did your parents try to maintain a normal marriage, despite one of them being a vampire? Who raised you, and how? Was your childhood happy, troubled or horribly tragic? Are your parents — human or vampire — still around?

- **Discovery:** How did you learn that you had supernatural powers? Have you even figured it out, or do you rationalize your abilities as exceptional but mundane talents? Has your half-vampiric nature caused trouble for you? (Very likely, if you have frenzied.) How do you feel about being part supernatural: Is it a curse, a blessing, or taken for granted?

- **Knowledge:** How much do you know of the supernatural world? Assuming your parents still live (er, *exist*), did they let you in on the big secret? Or did you just think they acted weird?

- **The Future:** In general, what do you want to do with your life? In particular, what do you intend to do with your abilities? Did you enter the World of Darkness willingly, or were you dragged in screaming? Now that you're in, do you want to escape back into the illusion of a normal life?

After such basic considerations of character, you select the character's Nature, Demeanor and Archetype. (Yes, even a teenager should have an Archetype, based on her social background and what she expects from life. An Archetype such as "Professional" could be seen as a statement of intent, if nothing else.)

TRAITS

Dhampirs receive six dots for their primary class of Attributes, four dots for their secondary class, and three for their tertiary class (in addition to the one free dot in each Attribute, of course).

Then a dhampir receives eleven dots to divide among primary Abilities, seven for secondary and four for tertiary Abilities. No class of Attributes or Abilities is more likely to be primary — it's completely up to the player. At this stage, however, no Ability can receive more than three dots.

Like ghouls, dhampirs start play with one dot of Potence. They can also have one dot in any other common vampiric Discipline. Character concept should guide the choice: A self-taught dhampir will probably develop a Discipline that fits his or her personality and needs, whereas a dhampir with a vampiric

Mentor could learn one of the Mentor's Disciplines. At the start of play, a dhampir can have only one dot in each Discipline.

Dhampirs receive five dots to spend on Backgrounds. Admittedly, these aren't very good Backgrounds — not many teenagers are millionaires or have powerful political connections. Purely vampiric Backgrounds such as Generation or Herd obviously don't apply, either. On the other hand, players and Storytellers can have fun interpreting Backgrounds in an appropriately youth-oriented way. For instance, popularity in school could justify a dot of Influence, or sports success would bring local Fame (even one dot of Potence is lovely on the football field).

Just like normal humans, dhampirs receive one free dot in the Virtues of Conscience, Self-Control and Courage, and then seven dots to allocate as they please.

Willpower and Humanity are calculated normally.

Finally, dhampirs get 18 freebie points to spend on further Traits or Merits. Flaws can add up to seven more freebie points. Again, some Merits and Flaws obviously cannot apply to non-vampires.

BLOOD POOL

Dhampirs make their own weak vitae. They have 10 blood points of vitae, which they regenerate at a rate of 1 blood point per day. (A dhampir can also drink vampiric vitae to regain expended blood points more quickly, or to replace some of its own blood points with more potent vitae. A dhampir who has at least one blood point of true vampiric vitae in his veins is also technically a ghoul. A dhampir does not gain any extra powers from being a ghoul, except for the potential to learn higher-level Discipline powers.)

Dhampirs exceed their 15th-generation parents in that they may expend all 10 blood points on healing, Disciplines or raising Attributes, at normal costs. Dhampirs cannot make blood bonds, create ghouls or sire vampiric childer; nor must they expend blood points just to stay active.

Unlike a vampire, a dhampir's blood pool score has nothing to do with the amount of fluid in her veins. Instead,

THE DHAMPIR GHOUL

On her own, a dhampir can never have more than one dot in any Discipline. If a dhampir becomes a ghoul and her sponsor (or "domitor") is of sufficiently low generation, however, she can learn higher-level Discipline powers. The stronger the vitae fed to her, the more powerful her Disciplines may become... given a great deal of time.

If the dhampir ceases to be a ghoul, she loses all her higher-level Discipline powers. Even if she later becomes a ghoul again, with a domitor of sufficiently low generation, the character must re-learn higher-level powers from the beginning (and the player must spend the experience points again, too).

Sponsor's Generation	Maximum Discipline Level	Optional Maximum Discipline Level
13th-11th	1	1
10th-9th	1	2
8th	1	3
7th	2	3
6th	3	4
5th	4	4
4th	5	5

The optional maximum is provided for Storytellers who want to make relatively powerful ghouls more common. Don't assume that your Storyteller uses this option unless she specifically says so.

FREEBIE POINT PURCHASES

Disciplines/Paths	10 per dot
Attributes	5 per dot
Abilities	2 per dot
Virtues	2 per dot
Backgrounds	1 per dot
Willpower	1 per dot
Humanity/Path	1 per dot

dhampir "blood points" are purely supernatural. Dhampirs who spend every last blood point don't lose a single drop of physical blood, though they may show symptoms of anemia. They're merely exhausted, both physically and supernaturally. In a few days, the blood will regain its supernatural "charge" and become vitae again.

DHAMPIR ABILITIES AND WEAKNESSES

Dhampirs have the standard abilities of ghouls. They can use normal Stamina to soak lethal and bashing damage, but not aggravated damage. They may expend blood points to raise their Strength, Dexterity or Stamina, or to heal wounds. For lethal or bashing damage, each blood point expended heals one health level of damage. A dhampir can even try to regenerate a severed limb, although this requires spending a Willpower point and making a Stamina roll (difficulty 8). If the roll fails, the dhampir can never regrow that limb. The cost to regenerate a body part ranges from merely one blood point, for a finger or eye, to three for an entire arm or leg.

A dhampir may also frenzy, however. Dhampirs resist frenzy more easily than vampires can (their difficulties are reduced by three), but it still happens from time to time. The Storyteller decides what situations might provoke a frenzy: Living in the thick of human society, with all its frustrations, a dhampir risks frenzy far more often than most vampires ever will.

EXPERIENCE POINTS CHART

Trait	Cost
New Ability	3
New Thaumaturgy Path	20
New Discipline	20
Willpower	current rating
Humanity	current rating x 2
Virtue	current rating x 2
Ability	current rating x 2
Attribute	current rating x 5
Thaumaturgy Path	current rating x 15
Discipline*	current rating x 25

* Unlike revenants, dhampirs have no "family" Discipline set. Like Caitiff, they pay for their lack of specialization through a higher experience point cost for Disciplines. Remember, though, that a dhampir can gain a second or further dot in a Discipline only if it has become a ghoul!

As usual when frenzy threatens a character, the dhampir's player must make a Self-Control roll; the difficulty depends on the circumstance that angers or frustrates the character. For the character to overcome frenzy completely, the player must accumulate five successes. Each success rolled delays the frenzy for one turn. The player may not roll more dice than there are points of vitae in the dhampir's Blood Pool.

Dhampirs never suffer from Röttschreck.

Typical Provocation	Difficulty
Verbally harassed or threatened	3
Drunkenness or use of narcotics or hallucinogens	3
Beaten, struck or knocked down	4
Loved one endangered	4
Private humiliation	4
Total public humiliation	5
Gunshot, knife wound or other lethal damage	5
Crushing rejection by a loved one	6

DHAMPIR CROSSOVER CHARACTERS

Eventually, someone is bound to ask whether a dhampir could Awaken as a True Mage. Or also be Garou Kinfolk and learn Rites. Or become a Mummy. And so on, and so on, and so on.

Short answer: Not only no, but *hell, no!*

Long answer: Your game is your own. If you *really* want to permit a dhampir Kinfolk Gypsy Mummy Mage, that's your business. Just don't expect us to help you. Dhampirs are cool enough that they don't need to be hybridized with other supernatural races... And if all you want is an excuse for a more powerful character, you may be playing the wrong game. Dhampirs aren't *supposed* to be world-beaters.

CHOOSING DISCIPLINES

In theory, Caitiff vampires and dhampirs can learn any Discipline as readily as any other. In practice, it's not so easy.

For many Disciplines, one needs a teacher — and again, Caitiff are no exception. Thus, even though dhampirs and Caitiff of the Last Generations pay the same point cost for every Discipline, some Disciplines are easier to justify than others.

PHYSICAL DISCIPLINES

The "physical" Disciplines of Celerity, Fortitude and Potence are the easiest to learn. After all, they merely extend the vampire's intrinsic ability to boost its Physical Attributes by using the Blood. Any vampire (thin-blooded or not) can learn them through instinct — even if they are easier for some clans than others. It's just a matter of really, really wanting to be stronger, quicker or tougher — and of practice.

OTHER COMMON DISCIPLINES

The common "psychic" Disciplines of Auspex, Dominate, Obfuscate and Presence are pretty easy to learn, too. They do not require special justification. Since many vampires know these Disciplines, one can easily find a teacher. Indeed, many of these powers are familiar from popular portrayals of vampires — thanks to ancient legends and occasional breaches of the Masquerade. A dhampir or Caitiff won't actually learn a Discipline from watching cheesy vampire movies, but she might take them as inspiration, try to imitate what she sees and eventually succeed.

Protean does not require a special tutor either. Although the Gangrel remain its masters and chief practitioners, many vampires of other clans have learned the shapeshifting art. Perhaps more importantly, knowledge of Protean has seeped into legends and popular culture. Even the most ignorant child knows that some vampires can change into animals. Once again, repeated effort might lead to success.

Practice at mortal skills might help a character develop a Discipline. Books on hypnosis might help one learn Dominate; spending lots of times with animals could lead to Animalism. Most of the standard Disciplines require training at mundane Abilities to use them well. To some degree, the psychic Disciplines merely add supernatural force to natural Abilities — for instance, magnifying persuasion or command into Dominate, or unobtrusiveness into Obfuscate.

MAGICAL DISCIPLINES

On the other hand, one does not casually acquire Necromancy or Thaumaturgy. These Disciplines *do* require instruction from a vampire who already knows them, for they depend as much upon complex occult theories as upon the power of the Blood. Unfortunately, the vampire clans who specialize in such magic hold these Disciplines jealously. Nothing less than a life boon — and maybe not even that — could persuade a Tremere to teach Thaumaturgy to a vampire outside the clan.

Which is not to say that the thin-blooded can never learn magic. They can read grimoires and practice occult rituals, just as a mortal can. The innate magic of the Blood makes hedge magic even easier for vampires than it is for mortals. An occult-minded

DHAMPİR LEGENDS

Storytellers who want to read more about dhampir legends are referred to "The Vampire" by T. P. Vukanovic, in Jan L. Perkowski's *Vampires of the Slavs*.

According to the Gypsies of the former Yugoslavia, men who die and come back as vampires hunger for sex as much as for blood. Married men in particular return to their wives. The Gypsies call the child of such an unnatural union *Vampiric* ("Little Vampire"), *Vampijerovic/Lampijerovic* ("Son of the Vampire") or *Dhampir*. These might even become the child's name: *Vampir/Dhampir* for boys, *Vampiresa/Dhampiresa* for girls.

In some regions, alleged dhampirs can become highly respected members of the community. "Without him," the Gypsies of Upper Morava say, "there would be much evil."

Some tales say that a newborn dhampir has a formless, boneless body. Although the dhampir's body firms up over the next few weeks, she remains unusually fragile. (Other legends omit this detail. It may be a mix-up with legends that attribute such a jellylike state to new vampires in their first weeks after death.)

The tales agree, however, that the dhampir has an uncanny power to see vampires (many Balkan legends claim that vampires go about invisibly). This made the dhampir a vampire hunter *par excellence*. Many a supposed dhampir made a good living going from village to village to exterminate vampires.

First the dhampir would scout the village. Perhaps he would take off his shirt and peer through the outstretched sleeve as if it were a telescope. The dhampir would describe the vampire as a Serb, a Turk, a Gypsy, a snake or a cat (all common forms in Balkan legend). He might wrestle with the unseen vampire before destroying it. Killing a vampire might be as simple as shooting it, or it might require elaborate charms and procedures at the gravesite. Such dhampir hunters of vampires remained active in the area of modern Kosovo as recently as the 1950s; perhaps they still are.

Could these legends be true? Even if only a few dhampirs ever existed in the past, they could have inspired tales that self-proclaimed "vampire hunters" imitated in later centuries. After all, the Balkans are Tzimisce country. Centuries ago, a Fiend might have performed bizarre and unholy experiments that resulted in breeding a dhampir or two. And it's true that dhampirs would make superb vampire hunters, what with their ability to mimic so many vampiric powers.

Then again, dhampir legends might be just that — legends. Balkan vampire legends don't match the facts of the Kindred very well. The "invisible vampires" can walk by day; they arise spontaneously, without contagion from another vampire. People even tell stories about vampire pumpkins! Dhampir legends could arise from misunderstood encounters with the Tzimisce's pet revenants. They might even be disinformation to protect the Masquerade and delude mortals about what vampires can do. In that case, the elders responsible might have a few nervous thoughts about what *other* lies might come true in the nights ahead.

For Storytellers who want the Balkan legends to have a grain of truth in them, here are a Merit and a Flaw just for dhampirs:

PERCEIVE VAMPIRES (2/5-PT. SUPERNATURAL MERIT)

A dhampir with this Merit can always recognize a vampire for what it is. This Merit comes at two power levels.

For two points, the dhampir can automatically recognize a vampire despite makeup, Merits such as *Blush of Health* or *Thaumaturgical* rituals that let a vampire mimic certain aspects of life. *Obfuscate* works only partially. The dhampir cannot see an "invisible" vampire, but knows that one lurks nearby. A dhampir sees the false image created by *Mask of a Thousand Faces*, but still knows that the person is really a vampire.

For five points, the dhampir automatically sees through any attempt at disguise. Even the mightiest *Obfuscate* power from a *Methuselah* doesn't work: The vampire remains visible to the dhampir, its undead nature clearly recognized.

The legends also say that a dhampir can briefly let other people see "invisible" vampires too, by looking through the dhampir's shirt-sleeve or by some other simple charm. Balkan dhampirs warn, however, that mere mortals may suffer a nervous breakdown, three years of malaria or some other calamity from the shock of seeing the undead plainly. If dhampirs can share their gift (Storyteller's option whether to allow this), raise the Merit's cost by two freebie points.

(The curse aspect of the legends is obviously false. After all, mortals see Masquerading vampires all the time. Admittedly, seeing a *Nosferatu* when you weren't mentally prepared for it could put you off your feed for days.)

FRAGILE BONES (5-PT. PHYSICAL FLAW)

Some legends say that dhampirs have thin and brittle bones. Because of this, they do not live very long. Presumably, these dhampirs do not take up vampire-hunting.

For a dhampir with this Flaw, bashing damage is treated as lethal damage.

Caitiff or dhampir might learn hedge magic Paths (see *World of Darkness: Sorcerer*) or invent their own quirky Disciplines of magic. Learning such magic, however, follows the rules for creating "personal" Disciplines (see below).

"UNIQUE" CLAN DISCIPLINES

Chimerstry, Serpentis, Vicissitude and other Disciplines associated with a single clan are virtually impossible to learn without a tutor. Again, the clans that know these Disciplines seldom teach them to others. It's not impossible — no clan is truly a monolith — and for that matter, these clans might sire Caitiff themselves, who carry the Discipline in the Blood. In general, though, a Caitiff would need a mentor to teach them an exotic Discipline. Such mentors are very rare, and they generally demand favors in return.

PERSONAL DISCIPLINES

Nevertheless, the Last Generations (Caitiff and otherwise) have one source of Disciplines denied to all other vampires: themselves. For all other vampires, creating a truly new Discipline is a labor of centuries. Even most Methuselahs can't do it — only the rare few who found new bloodlines. The thin-blooded, however, can create a Discipline in mere decades — in just a few years, if they really work at it. Not every thin-blooded invents a new Discipline, but it is something they can do.

Dhampirs cannot create new Disciplines. They can, however, learn "unique" Disciplines created by the thin-blooded, if they can find a teacher.

CHARACTER ARCHETYPES

Unlike the vampire clans, thin-blooded archetypes aren't defined by Blood (the dhampir forms an important exception). Many thin-blooded vampires don't know whether they technically belong to a clan or not, nor do many of them care. A thin-blooded Ventrue probably has more in common with a Caitiff than with her own grandsire. The thin-blooded are better defined by their social roles — some chosen, some thrust upon them by their special abilities. Most archetypes can overlap.

The highest generations have no monopoly on these archetypes. Vampires do not magically know each other's generation on sight. A 13th-generation vampire can be just as much an outcast from clans and sects as any 15th-generation Caitiff. In such cases, purely social archetypes such as wannabe or autarkis may well describe the character better than some arbitrary clan. Conversely, a legitimately sired, properly trained 14th-generation vampire should probably be built around a clan archetype instead.

AUTARKIS

Some vampires, choosing to exist as complete loners, opt out of sects, clans and even coteries. The Kindred call such vampires autarkis. Many Last Generation vampires take this path.

THIN-BLOODED SUMMARY

Can the character...

14th	15th	Dhampir
Belong to a clan?		
Half the time	Never; always Caitiff	Mortal; no clan
Sire Kindred?		
Yes, unless character has Thin Blood Flaw	No	No
Conceive/carry a mortal child?		
No	Yes, sometimes	Yes
Create ghouls?		
Yes	No	No
Create blood bonds?		
Yes, sometimes	No	No
Eat food/drink?		
No	Yes, but must vomit thereafter (other vampires vomit at once)	Yes
Walk in sunlight?		
No	Suffers only lethal damage, can soak	Yes
Create Disciplines?		
Yes	Yes	No
Achieve max Discipline level?		
No; 4, tops	No; 3, tops	No; 1, tops
Have Insight?		
Yes	Yes	No

Some vampires become autarkis out of disgust. They see that both the Sabbat and Camarilla are hives of twisted, ruthless intrigue. Not wanting to be anyone's pawn, they go forth on their own.

Other vampires dwell alone because they don't want competition. In a big city, such as Chicago or London, even a 200-year-old ancilla might be a comparative youngster who must bow and scrape before much older, stronger vampires. In Piscataway or Tukwila, though, a vampire can be a law unto herself. With a few Disciplines, the blood bond and some patience, such a "Caitiff prince" can exert a shocking degree of influence over a small community. For all practical purposes, the entire town becomes her herd. Okay, so she's screwed if a pack of Lupines comes to town. Some vampires think it's worth the risk.

Some vampires don't *know* about the Camarilla, Sabbat or anarchs. Their sires never told them. They're in for a surprise.

And some vampires are just scared. They know that the world holds terrible forces that could destroy them in a blink, and they're hiding.

Autarkis vampires make suitable characters. The player must decide why the character turned autarkis. Then she has to come up with a reason why an autarkis would involve

STEREOTYPES:

Camarilla: *They defy the prince and endanger the Masquerade. They must die.*

First you have to catch me, you old fossils.

Sabbat: *Selfish cowards. We have the true freedom that comes from purpose and a loyal brother to guard your back.*

Cult Zombie Alert! *Damn, at least the Camarilla is honest about ordering you around.*

Anarchs: *Like, we know where you're coming from, man. We're all rebelling too!*

I didn't quit the big gangs just to join a little one. Fuck off!

himself with other vampires, despite his previous choice of solitude (a character who responds to every situation by saying, "It's not my problem" and walking away simply doesn't work well for a chronicle).

At first, an autarkis character probably follows purely personal motivations. A friendship or kinship from mortal days, an obligation brought about by a personal code of honor, or a narrow, shared interest in a specific project can supply a beginning. An autarkis might even work as a mercenary for whomever will pay — Camarilla, Sabbat, anarch or other. In time, however, an autarkis character might develop a deeper commitment to a coterie or some broader goal.

Roles: Autarkis vampires have explicitly rejected all political alliances. Other characters won't know how much to trust an autarkis. Then again, how much should they trust each other? Autarkis may well challenge other characters to examine their loyalties and entanglements with their sects or clans. Conversely, an autarkis might eventually ask herself why she's so dead-set on staying alone. Loyalty and independence are major themes for autarkis characters.

Character Creation: Autarkis come in every clan, with any conceivable traits. All one can say is that autarkis are never fools: A stupid autarkis doesn't survive very long.

Note that on his home ground, a "Caitiff prince" autarkis might have frighteningly high levels of Contacts, Allies, Retainers and other mortal connections, making him a more dangerous opponent than his Blood might indicate. Think of the classic horror-story isolated village, where *everyone* in town knows the terrible secret — or is part of it. Now recall what happens to visitors who pry too deeply. Such an autarkis makes a worthy adversary for a coterie, or a valuable ally.

Weaknesses: An autarkis vampire's lot is not an easy one. The flip side of being obliged to no one is that no one helps you when you are in trouble. Camarilla princes don't like any vampire outside their control. The Sabbat, for all its talk of freedom, tends to "recruit" autarkis with a whack on the head and improvised Creation Rites. Even anarchs may resent a vampire who displays no apparent loyalties. An autarkis has no Status, no Clan Prestige and, very probably, no alliances of any kind with other vampires.

Quote: *Damn you all to the Sun! I stand for myself!*



CLEAVERS

Some new vampires try especially hard to maintain a human existence. They don't want just to maintain an illusion of normality to preserve the Masquerade (if they know about the Masquerade at all); they want to keep, as much as possible, everything they had as mortals. They want to have a regular job, friends... even a family. *Especially* a family. They don't believe themselves to be monsters. In a time when so many diverse lifestyles and medical conditions find at least marginal tolerance, is a sunlight problem and a liquid protein diet really so inhuman?

Other young vampires contemptuously call such vampires "Cleavers" — as in Ward, June and the Beaver. Older vampires shake their heads and quote Caine's warning in *The Book of Nod*: "Do not embrace love." As if the Damned could really have a suburban home with a picket fence, a car in the garage and 2.3 children!

Cleavers are willing to try.

Such "families" can vary a bit. A new vampire who was Embraced after marriage and children might not want to abandon her family. A vampire might even set up a household after the Embrace. It's too late to have children the normal way, but they can adopt or use a sperm donor. If the vampire is 15th-generation, she might be surprised to learn she *can* have a child the normal way. Then again, some thin-blooded vampires are so pitifully ignorant that they don't know what's impossible. Two vampires might marry as a perpetual "Double Income, No Kids" unit. Then again, a vampire might just try to stay in close contact with her mortal parents, siblings and friends, even to the extent of letting them in on the secret.

Cleavers can be of any clan. Really, they can be of any generation, too — but Cleavers usually have not been vampires very long. They probably have no connection to the sects of their sires, or they have renounced such connections. A decently trained child would never try anything so risky and foolish.

Roles: Cleavers provide a stark contrast to the epic menaces of the Jyhad and Gehenna. Let someone else worry about the fate of the world: They have their hands full trying to hold down a job and keep a family together. Their triumphs and tragedies are small, but very personal.

STEREOTYPES:

Camarilla: *Oh, the follies of youth. They endanger the Masquerade, no matter how hard they try to uphold it.*

Listen, buddy, I pay taxes, and I've got rights. Tell your precious "prince" that this is the U.S. of A., not the fucking Middle Ages!

Sabbat: *[retching noise]*

Why hasn't someone thrown these thugs in jail? The neighborhood's not safe with them around!

Anarchs: *Cowards afraid to take a stand.*

Didn't we get enough rebellion in the '60s? Grow up, kid, and take a look at the real world.

Sooner or later, though, a Cleaver can no longer avoid other vampires' conflicts. They can't hide from the World of Darkness forever, no matter how they try. The snare may be as melodramatic as the Sabbat breaking down the door or as homely as begging a favor from a primogen.

A Cleaver may well be the only vampire who speaks and acts on behalf of humanity. Supernatural power struggles tend to spiral in on themselves and lose touch with mundane issues... this is true of *players* as well as characters. Part of a Cleaver's role is to bring the chronicle back to Earth from the rarefied heights of supernatural intrigue. They remind the other characters that vampires' little wars have consequences for ordinary people, too.

Character Creation: Cleavers need a high Self-Control. They *really* can't afford to frenzy. A high Humanity and Willpower are good ideas as well (this assumes that the vampire tries to have a real, functional family, not a ghastly parody based on terror, codependency and the blood bond). Communications abilities such as Subterfuge and Etiquette are useful for explaining away odd behavior to coworkers and neighbors.

Weaknesses: A Cleaver's greatest weaknesses are her family and all the mortals with whom she associates. Other vampires can threaten a Cleaver's parents, siblings, lovers, children and friends (this tactic may backfire if the Cleaver has a coterie of Kindred friends... a good reason to join a coterie). On a deeper level, a Cleaver holds her own humanity hostage. One frenzy at the wrong time, and he could kill everyone he holds dear. Cleavers set themselves up for heartbreak.

In game terms, family members are represented by the Ward Flaw. No matter how many mortals get involved with the vampire, the character can take the Flaw only once.

Quote: *I don't care if you're the prince of Wales, you leave my daughter alone!*

UNBOUND

Some vampires reject ties of Blood. Even if they know their clan lineage, they don't care. When they look at the clans (Camarilla, Sabbat or independent), they see tyranny masquerading as tradition. They don't want some moldy elder telling them what they can and cannot do, either with their unives or their vitae. Clan Disciplines? Hogwash! The self-described "Unbound" insist that any vampire can learn any Discipline. Nor do they believe in clan weaknesses. The high-and-mighty clan elders have only deluded their descendants into copying their own neurotic limitations. (They accept the Nosferatu as an exception. Many Unbound, however, deem it politically incorrect to call Nosferatu deformities a "weakness.") Why should Caitiff feel shame at their lack of a clan? They should be glad they escaped the brainwashing.

The Unbound irritate older vampires with their strident rejection of clan, sect and respect for elders — the foundations

of Camarilla society. Unlike the stereotypical anarch, the Unbound are not ignorant "rebels without a cause." No crude gang-banging for them! They have ideologies and plans for reform. Some Unbound preach their doctrines with missionary zeal. Others work quietly to build new vampire societies.

The Unbound are no more a unified "movement," however, than is the Camarilla. Although a few charismatic leaders have emerged, the Unbound have no party line beyond their rejection of tradition and desire for change. They can and do disagree bitterly about what sort of change is needed.

Dwelling on the fringe of Kindred society, the Unbound see things that other vampires miss. The Kindred aren't the only creatures to walk the night. Daring to attempt the forbidden, an Unbound might actually seek contacts with wizards and werewolves, ghosts and fairies... and mortals. They keep the Masquerade — for now — but surely they can make an exception for Uncle Henry, who's so broad-minded? Or old Pastor Smith, who advised them in so many other times of trouble? And if you can't trust your mother, well, who can you trust? Quite often, moving beyond the sphere of Kindred society results in an Unbound's Final Death. Once in a while, though, an Unbound makes connections that would boggle the minds of most elder vampires. If the Unbound ever organize the anarchs to strike back at their oppressors, they will not stand alone.

Most anarchs still regard the Unbound as impractical dreamers. Now that the self-proclaimed "anarch states" are under attack by the mysterious and powerful Cathayan vampires, however, some anarchs wonder if interracial diplomacy might not be worth a shot. The Camarilla certainly shows little interest in helping to resist the Asian invaders.

Only recently have many elders felt enough pique to try exterminating the Unbound. This change of attitude comes partly from the general climate of fear and partly from a suspicion that the Unbound might be right. Vampires invest centuries of ego in their beliefs: the suggestion that they spent those centuries upholding a lie comes as a bitter draft indeed. In their furious rejection of Unbound "heresy," the Kindred prove that they remain all too human.

Role: These activists deliberately challenge the status quo of vampiric society. They often do things precisely because centuries of tradition say they can't or shouldn't. Some Unbound characters become explorers, seeking the truth behind legend and tradition; others play diplomat, trying to gather vampires into new social arrangements. Every Unbound character should have a special dream or program she pursues.

Character Creation: The Unbound have nothing in common except their attitude toward "traditional" restrictions. If not an inceptor herself, however, an Unbound may well try to learn bizarre new Disciplines just to prove that she can. Unbound tend to have restless, discontented Natures such as Architect, Curmudgeon, Visionary or even Thrill-Seeker.

Weaknesses: Their special interests do not impose any particular weakness upon the Unbound. They put themselves in enough trouble already.

Quote: *Do you drive a horse and buggy? Do you write with a goose-quill pen? Then why do you follow rules set forth 500 years ago?*

WANNABE

Some thin-blooded vampires try to find a place within Camarilla societies. Perhaps they know their clan ancestry, perhaps they don't, but want to join a clan anyway because they like the clan's culture and ideals (or at least what they imagine about its culture, which may not match the truth very well). For instance, an ambitious Caitiff (or Malkavian, Gangrel, Brujah...) might innocently petition the local Ventrue Primogen to join the "club."

Such a "wannabe" usually finds himself disappointed. Even if he can prove a clan ancestry, his own clan elders often despise him as an embarrassment (few people, living or undead, like to discover a bastard in the family). Most vampires in the Camarilla regard the thin-blooded as nothing but competition for hunting territory — certainly they are no use as allies. No matter what Last Generation vampires do, they cannot expect more than grudging tolerance from the princes of the Camarilla.

Nor does the Sabbat treat them any better. The Sabbat values power above all in its members. Both childer and recruits must prove their strength — and for all the Sabbat's prating of loyalty, few Sabbat lift a finger to help a new member survive. To the Sabbat, the thin-blooded will always be handicapped. If a vampire of the Last Generations can diablerize his way to a lower and stronger generation, fine; he's proved his worthiness to survive. If not? The Sabbat does not mourn the Final Death of the weak.

Whether their goal is the Camarilla or the Sabbat, wannabes face daunting obstacles. The Camarilla obsesses about age, generation and legitimacy of siring. The Sabbat obsesses about raw power. The thin-blooded have none of these. A wannabe must work harder than any other neonate to gain equal recognition, with no rights at all. What's worse, some vampires will resent any success the character achieves.

STEREOTYPES:

Camarilla: *Fools and madmen! Do they want to bring the Inquisition down upon us all?*

Tired old vampires playing tired old games. Why do they even bother waking up at night? Some of the Brujah understand, though.

Sabbat: *Join us! What you seek — we've done it!*

They traded oppression by elders for slavery to each other.

Anarchs: *They take foolish risks for impossible dreams.*

They have the right attitude, just no sense or direction. That's where I come in.

Suppose a young Caitiff can prove that he's as good a leader as any Ventrue, as good an artist as any Toreador or (God help the world) as good an... experimenter... as any Tzimisce. Young clan members resent being shown up by an outsider. Older clan members resent the challenge to the established prejudices of generation and bloodline.

The independent clans have their own insular prejudices, and they are highly selective in who they Embrace. Yet, the Assamites, Followers of Set and Giovanni also place high value on their ideologies. An outsider who shows exceptional ability and devotion to the clan's goals might win cautious acceptance as an associate, if not an actual clan member. As yet, however, few thin-blooded vampires have even heard of these small, often reclusive, clans. That could change in the future.

The most daring wannabes, however, avoid all the obstacles to clan membership by a simple stratagem: They lie. A vampire can concoct a false lineage to make herself seem more respectable, move to a new city and present herself to the prince. Vampires have attempted such frauds for centuries; older vampires call such a liar a *rastacouere*. The pogroms against the thin-blooded have caused a sharp upturn in *rastacouere*. A *rastacouere*, however, faces an almost certain Blood Hunt if the city's elders discover her imposture. If there's one thing elder vampires hate, it is being made to look foolish.

Role: Wannabes are the outsiders looking in, noses pressed against the glass. A wannabe must have at least some reason to believe she might gain acceptance in a clan or sect — even though she might be utterly deluded. Such a character can provide a new viewpoint on a sect or clan as she tries to learn its ways and win acceptance.

Character Creation: Wannabes often follow a clan concept, at least in a diluted way. A 14th-generation would-be Ventrue, for instance, might show leadership and financial ability — but as leader of a street gang or manager of a small business. Thus, clan archetypes may guide character creation — with no reference at all to the character's actual bloodline, clan weakness or favored Disciplines.

Weaknesses: A wannabe has whatever intrinsic weakness his bloodline imposes. He also has no Status at all. If a wannabe ever wins that first dot of Status by becoming an accepted (if lowly) member of the Camarilla or Sabbat, he is no longer a wannabe. Instead, he is a sect member who merely happens to have high generation and is treated like any other neonate.

Quote: *Judge me by my deeds, not by my blood.*

INCEPTORS

In the Old Form, vampires who invent a new Discipline are called inceptors. Most vampires never manage this. Even the *Antediluvians* can't do it at will: No Ancient ever created more than one original Discipline... and even those instances are legend, not history. Once every few centuries, however, a new vampire might spontaneously generate a new Discipline — typically a sign that the vampire has founded a

STEREOTYPES

Camarilla: *Odious creatures. Sometimes almost as useful as ghouls, though. Almost.*

You gotta follow the rules if you wanna win the prize — but I tell ya, if these mugs weren't the only game in town....

Sabbat: *Weaklings. Dogs begging for scraps from their masters' tables.*

'Sfunny, I thought they said they wanted equal rights for all vampires despite age and generation. I guess they still think some generations are "more equal" than others.

Anarchs: *Get an unlife, willya? The moldy oldies will never give you a fair shake.*

And you're doing so well?

new bloodline. For thin-blooded plebes to create new Disciplines, therefore, comes as a bit of a shock to the elders.

The Last Generations themselves often have no idea that they're doing something special. Many of them get their ideas about what vampires can do from books and movies, instead of from their sires. Sometimes they try to do something they saw in a movie, and it works. Maybe it matches one of the traditional Disciplines... or maybe it's something new.

Personal Disciplines may also grow from the new vampire's talents and interests. Many of the "standard" Disciplines are magical enhancements of mundane abilities. Presence and Dominate, for instance, magnify social skills at evoking obedience, fear, admiration or conviction. The Blood might magnify a Last Generation child's other knacks or interests into a Discipline.

When designing an inceptor, one must consider whether the character knows he has done something special. A real *naif* might not realize that not every vampire can fly (or dowse for lost objects, or cause bad luck, or whatever). If the character does understand that he's done something special, does he brag and flaunt his power? Does he hide his Discipline in the fear that he'll be condemned as a freak?

On the Storyteller's side, how do other Kindred react? Not many vampires in the know can simply ignore an inceptor, at least not if the new Discipline looks useful. An interesting Discipline, and how the character decides to use it, can become the start of many fine stories.

Roles: These vampires have what other vampires want: power. It's not very much power, because of the inceptors' youth, generation and thin blood, but it's a power no one else has. Inceptors have nothing else in common; they have aspirations and personalities as diverse as mortals. Whether an inceptor likes it or not, though, her anomalous abilities bring her to the attention of more powerful vampires.

Other vampires may try to recruit inceptors as teachers or (more likely) minions. Less patient vampires might try to diablerize an inceptor (many Cainites believe that diablerie consumes the very soul of the victim, and thereby also transfers an aptitude for the victim's Disciplines). The inventor of a new Discipline doesn't just become a player in the local Jyhads — he becomes the prize.

Character Creation: Inceptors come from every clan. Caitiff might be more likely to create Disciplines just because they don't know any better!

Players have two choices in designing an inceptor. They can create a character based on some other archetype (or no archetype at all), then give the character a Discipline power that any vampire might find useful. Alternatively, they can start with an intriguing Discipline and build the character around that.

Ideally, of course, "Character comes first," rather than powers. If an inceptor's new Discipline is consistent with the character's history, personality and aptitudes, though, it's a good character. The order of the design process doesn't matter, only that the resulting character have an interesting, three-dimensional personality and motivations.

Weaknesses: These vampires have no special, intrinsic weaknesses except for their generation and thin blood.

Quote: *Oh, Christ, man, I'm sorry! I didn't know I could do that!*

SEERS

These vampires have the new Background of Insight. Seers may come from almost any walk of life or undeath. They come from every clan, and from the clanless. Through no choice of their own, however, they channel a preternatural knowledge about the doings of other vampires. Because of this, every seer faces two challenges. The greater their Insight, the more sharply they face its demands and perils.

First, how does the seer react to her hunches and visions? No matter how she feels about her Insight, she can't ignore it — even if she tries. Do the dreamlike revelations frighten the seer? Is the knowledge a blessing, a curse, or just an incomprehensible intrusion? Does Insight come from God, the Devil or some other transcendent power? Every seer must find her own answers to these questions.

A seer might have complex, mixed emotions about her power. One seer might fear her visions, but strive to have them because she believes they are warnings from God that she feels duty-bound to pass on. Another seer might delight in the knowledge she has about more powerful vampires, but try to hide his knowledge for fear of retribution. A third seer

STEREOTYPES:

Camarilla: *We must watch them. Control them. And if necessary, destroy them to keep them out of our enemies' hands.*

Don't trust them. They'll use you, break you and throw you away.

Sabbat: *They have broken the limits set by our accursed ancestors, but are too weak to exploit their gifts. We, however, are strong. . . .*

Don't trust them, either. They don't want to use you — they want to eat you.

Anarchs: *Those old Cammie farts had better watch out! Now we have powers they cannot imagine!*

Whoa, cowboy! When did I volunteer for your war?

might think her hunches come from the Devil, but matter-of-factly accept them because she is one of the Damned, after all.

The second challenge comes from other vampires. Knowledge is power in Cainite society — especially knowledge of what others are doing. Prince or primogen, bishop or archon, most influential vampires fear the plots of their elders, rivals and juniors alike. They fear exposure of their own intrigues just as much. If a seer's power becomes known, he becomes the focus of both hope and fear. How a seer chooses to use his "gift" decides what role he plays in local Kindred culture: A Cainite detective who can plausibly explain away his "hunches" will be treated very differently than a "Caitiff prophet" spreading proclamations of doom.

Seers often experience a lengthy hiatus between receiving the Embrace and awakening as one of the undead. The Storyteller can make the character's death-dreams an important part of her prelude. Of course, the Storyteller shouldn't give any information of genuine importance... but obscure and nightmarish images can establish that something *bad* is brewing, and that the seer is somehow tied to it all.

Role: A seer's role is to know too much. They are walking story hooks, spreading both awe and panic wherever they go. Among the Kindred, preserving the status quo depends on everyone keeping her secrets. Schemes that took decades of planning can fall apart in minutes when a seer can't stop herself from saying who wants to do what to whom. This tends to upset everyone terribly. The resulting scramble often includes attempts by vampires who fear exposure to destroy the offending seer. Players had better enjoy having a character who gets chased, captured, courted, threatened and manipulated a lot.

Character Creation: Of course, a seer character has the Insight background, and probably at high levels (the more information the character receives, the more trouble — er, *drama* — he can cause). For the rest, anything goes: Seers can have any sort of Attributes or Abilities. Supernatural Merits such as Medium or Oracle might be appropriate since they overlap somewhat with Insight. Giving a seer a personal Discipline as well, however, would make the character far too "gimmicky."

Weaknesses: Aside from whatever weaknesses they might have from their clan or generation, seers are more prone to Supernatural Flaws (such as Cursed or Haunted) than other vampires. No such Flaws are mandatory, though — and remember that "more prone" is very much a relative term. Such Flaws should never actually be common within a campaign; their rarity makes them more dramatic.

Quote: *Please, sir, I can help you! I... know things.*

DHAMPIR

A dhampir is a thing the Cainites believed could never happen: the offspring of a mortal and a vampire. Camarilla and Sabbat, elder and neonate, they all knew that their true blood ties came by adoption, through the Embrace. They knew that life never comes from the undead. Vampires have childer, not children.

But then, they never had 15th-generation vampires before, either.

STEREOTYPES

Camarilla: *Capture a seer, lock him in your deepest dungeon, listen to his words and let no one else know he exists. Otherwise, destroy him!*

It's a maze that goes on forever. And, oh God, in the center of the maze....

Sabbat: *How can we believe they know aught of the Ancients when they keep saying we are still their pawns? The Sabbat serves no one!*

Loyalty? Freedom? Loyalty? Then why do I see your sworn brother's blood upon your lips?

Anarchs: *Babbling lunatics! Ignore them.*

Don't you know? You're puppets too.

Vampires can't have sex — not really. They only go through the motions, usually as a ploy to take blood while their partner is distracted by passion. Only the taste of blood gives Kindred pleasure. A male vampire does not produce sperm, and a female vampire does not receive it... except in the 15th Generation.

These vampires still get no great pleasure from sex, but sometimes the reflexes of life kick in and the reproductive system starts working again. A male vampire might ejaculate — and his seed will be fertile. His surprise, however, is as nothing compared to the female vampire who learns that her mortal, male lover has gotten her pregnant.

In the Last Generation of Caine, therefore, the curse has taken a final, ironic twist. The weakest of the vampires have a power denied to even the mightiest of their race — the power to create a new life.

Even under the best conditions, such pregnancies only have a 50 percent chance of carrying to term. Half the time, the fetus miscarries and dies. Surviving children are a mixture of mortal and vampiric traits: a dhampir. Like a vampire, they convert blood into vitae. Like a mortal, however, they make their own blood. They have Disciplines, although a dhampir cannot normally master them beyond the first level. They can have mortal children of their own; sunlight does not harm them. Although they have a Beast that can drive them to frenzy, their difficulty numbers to resist frenzy are always two less than they would be for a vampire in the same situation.

Similar creatures already exist in the World of Darkness. When ghouls have children who are themselves ghouled from the womb, after a few generations the power of vitae becomes fixed in their blood. Such "revenants," however, are confined to a few freakish families — all of them thoroughly dominated by vampires (chiefly the Tzimisce clan). Elder vampires could ignore them, and have done so for centuries. Few in the Camarilla have even heard of revenants.

Most revenants grow up surrounded by vampires, ghouls and other revenants. They barely know the mundane world exists. Dhampirs, on the other hand, usually grow up in relatively normal surroundings, in the company of mortals.

Quite possibly, the dhampir knows nothing of the secret World of Darkness. But she'll find out....

Few things could surprise an elder more, by its mere existence, than a dhampir. The withered tree of Caine has borne living fruit. Is it a sign from God? Will dhampirs develop abilities no one can guess, like their thin-blooded parents? Will they breed true and spread vampiric powers throughout the mortal populace? The World of Darkness will never be the same.

Role: To the Kindred, dhampirs are the ultimate x-factor. Millennia of Kindred tradition says that such creatures could not exist. Dhampirs are still so rare that most vampires have never heard of them, unless one actually shows up in the neighborhood. Even then, the vampires might take a long time to recognize the dhampir for what it is. At first, they may well mistake it for a masterless ghoul. Thus, dhampirs have no stereotyped role among the clans and sects.

One can easily predict some common reactions to dhampirs, though. Some vampires will hate and fear them, as they might hate and fear any new thing. (This reaction seems especially plausible for Sabbat vampires. A dhampir challenges their belief in their absolute separation from humanity.) Other vampires might react with awe, perhaps seeing a dhampir as a sign of God's forgiveness: The dead have given birth; the child has the powers of the Damned without their weaknesses (or so it might seem upon casual inspection). No doubt, many Kindred will insist that any dhampir is a fraud, just a ghoul with a hidden domitor, or some elaborate Malkavian deception. No doubt, others will completely miss the strangeness, and simply ponder how to exploit this new resource.

Character Creation: The only hard-and-fast rule to keep in mind when creating a dhampir is that they are all young. Fifteenth-generation vampires have existed only for about 20 years. Any dhampir character will be one of the very first of her kind. For all any dhampir character knows, she is the first and only one of her kind. Dhampirs vary as much as mortal teenagers.

Weaknesses: Unlike ghouls or revenants, dhampirs have no favored clan Disciplines that are especially easy to learn.

Quote: *Who are you? WHAT are you? Leave me ALONE! [CRASH!]*

STEREOTYPES

Camarilla: *I don't care how you do it, bring that freak to me. I'll wring the truth out of him.*

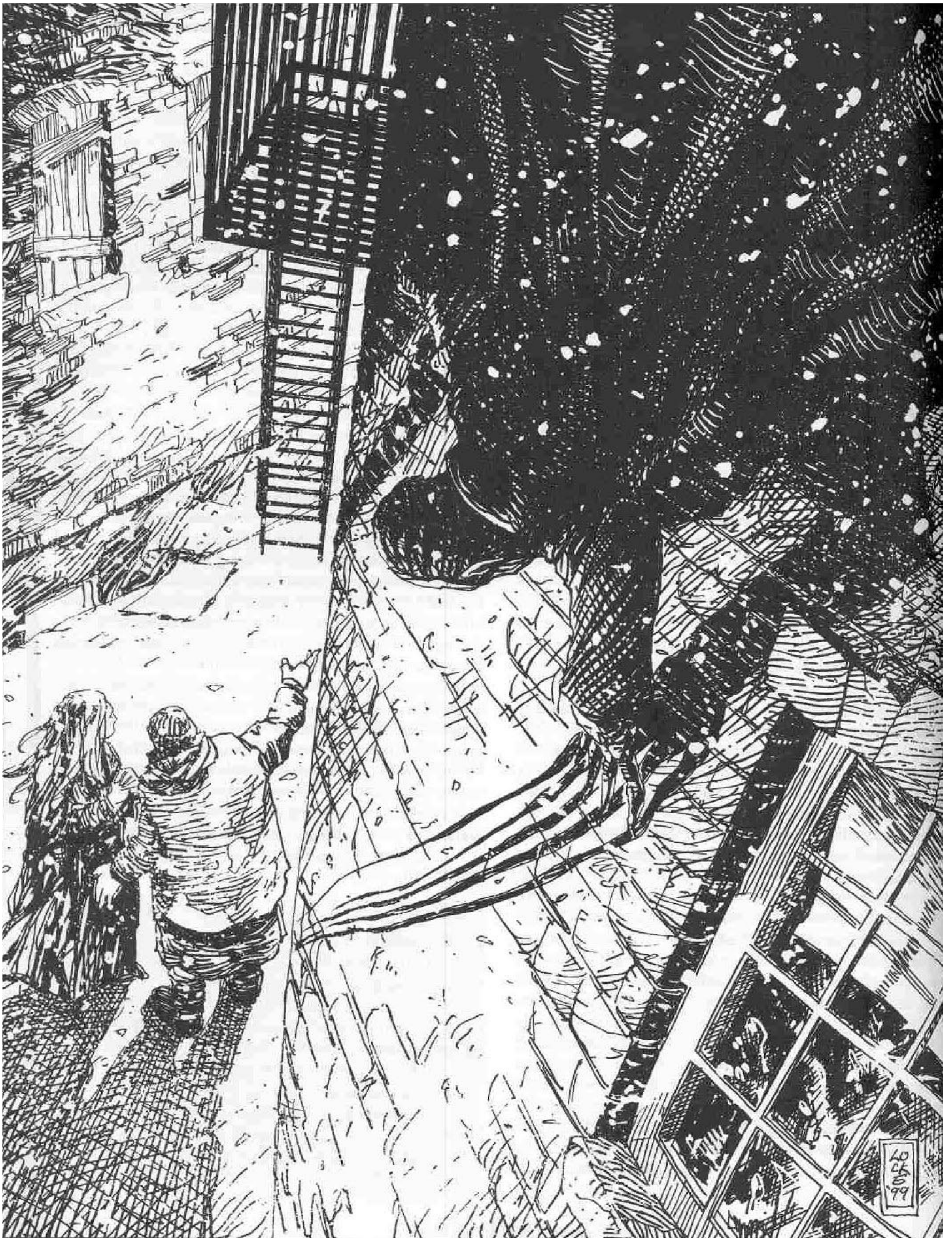
Whatever you do, *don't be noticed.* The Camaluna owns everything and everybody, and if it notices you, you're dead.

Sabbat: *Impossible! You're lying! It's bullshit and I'll cave in your fucking head for it!*

A Manson Family of psycho cultist vampires... oh god, it just gets worse and worse.

Anarchs: *Oh, this is rich. So much for the "all-knowing elders," eh?*

So what do you want from me?



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CHAPTER FOUR: WRITTEN IN RED

Let them enjoy the gentle music of the Kindred...
— “The Chronicle of Shadows,” *The Book of Nod*

A chronicle set in the Final Nights is a considerable undertaking. Players, as much as characters, have been anticipating Gehenna ever since their first introduction to the World of Darkness. This is the defining moment for the Kindred, a rare and exciting opportunity to rise above petty squabbles over territory or prestige and truly affect the course of things — for good or evil. In times of apocalypse, no one can know who or what the deciding factor will be. The most trifling, innocent deeds can set portentous events in motion. At stake is the fate of every sentient creature on Earth: not just the vampires themselves, but the mortals and other supernaturals as well.

Your player who’s been writing her own *Book of Nod* chapters and your player who feverishly combs the game stores to collect out-of-print supplements in the hope of “putting it all together” are going to be expecting fireworks.

But never fear — help is here if you need it. This chapter provides information and suggestions for Storytellers who wish to run chronicles set in the Time of Thin Blood.

THEME

The following themes are provided for inspiration. The first two are especially appropriate to chronicles with thin-blooded characters; the others, however, apply to any chronicle set on the eve of Gehenna.

- **Ignorance:** This, even more than the lack of Blood-strength, is the dominant obstacle for thin-blooded vampires.

Almost without exception, they are young and untutored. For other, more privileged Kindred, the time immediately after the Embrace is frightening, but navigable; they have lessons to learn, skills to acquire, allies and enemies to identify. It is not necessary to *like* one’s sire, or the stifling strictures of vampire society, to benefit from the support.

Many thin-blooded, however, know of no other Kindred apart from themselves and perhaps their sires (at least not to begin with; of course, it would be a strange chronicle indeed that didn’t bring in other vampires *eventually*). They have no notions of Beast versus Humanity. No one ever tells them that an individual kine life is too brief to worry about, or that mortal love can lead only to tragedy. They have little choice but to make the mistakes and try to survive them long enough to do better.

Even if they gain the opportunity to associate with other vampires, the fledglings might not find the answers they seek. The rivalries and betrayals of Kindred politics are barely comprehensible even to its old hands, and thin-blooded quickly learn that no one tells them the truth — except when it’s convenient. Moreover, once thin-blooded have made contact with Kindred society, it can be difficult for them to extricate themselves at will. Drawn to innocence like sharks to blood, the Kindred come to them, offering, threatening, wheedling. Naturally, thin-blooded with special abilities are doubly enticing to these deceivers.

In a thin-blooded chronicle, it is especially important to observe faithfully the distinction between player and character knowledge. Even a brand-new Vampire character, under the

standard rules, is assumed to have anywhere from several years to a few decades of experience as a vampire under her belt. Most thin-blooded, however, are newly Embraced. Dhampir characters, being the children of thin-blooded, also tend to be very young — teenagers or children. Their naïveté is oppressive, even paralyzing, but it also provides a unique roleplaying opportunity. Of all the Damned, the highest generations are, without question, the ones closest to humankind, as well as to their own Humanity.

• **Freedom:** This is the corollary to Ignorance. Although it's a handicap to be so unaware, it can also be liberating. The thin-blooded throw away the old rules with rare panache. They are free to explore even the wildest solutions to the problem of vampirism. They can turn up on the doorstep of the Mayo Clinic. They can sue for protected status under civil rights law. They might suffer for their indiscretions, but they can also make unexpected allies and discover novel strategies for fending off their hidebound progenitors.

This freedom is more threatening to the rest of Kindred society than most thin-blooded can even imagine. The Camarilla elders envision the destruction of the ordered society they have struggled for so many centuries to build. The Sabbat worry that if the thin-blooded are allowed to move unchecked, they will inevitably draw the notice of the Antediluvians and set off the Gehenna time bomb before the sect is ready. Both groups

frequently target even those thin-blooded who are simply trying to mind their own business. It's not always easy to be free.

Still, players should enjoy the chance to turn the conventional wisdom of the Damned on its ear. Thin-blooded vampires of distinct clans, for example, usually have no inkling of their cultural heritage and often end up unintentionally defying it. Imagine a coterie in which the Brujah collects Japanese tea sets, and the Toreador picks fights at biker bars (meanwhile, the Nosferatu, having devised a set of beautifully painted masks, is making his comeback as an operatic tenor). The highest generations belong to the vampiric demimonde. Disinherited already, they have no one to please but themselves.

• **Chaos:** For all their endless speculation, most Kindred only have the vaguest understanding of Gehenna. All they "know" is that it now looms dangerously close. Many profound changes are taking place in the World of Darkness. Is a sinister pattern to be discerned within them, or are they meaningless symptoms of the general confusion? Those who believe that the Ancients have already begun the gradual ascent to consciousness claim good reason to blame every twist and turn of modern Cainite politics on their subtle mental nudging. And what will happen as the Antediluvians become aware enough to act for themselves?

Psychologists among the Kindred have a more scientific interpretation for the widespread unraveling of clan and sect, truce and treaty. Despite their utter lack of biology *per se*, Kindred may still possess a kind of evolutionary programming, closely tied to their vampiric Beast nature; it is this programming that responds to the growing signs of the Gehenna cycle drawing to its close. Sensing that the time has come to fight or perish in the ultimate Darwinian contest, the Kindred fall upon each other with more violence than ever, abandoning all their careful constructions and plunging into mayhem that seems completely counterproductive to the observer — and even to the participants. Nevertheless, it is an entirely predictable stage in the development of the species.

Such rationalist theories have gained little ground to date. The Cainites, as a race, are extremely susceptible to delusion.

Paranoid by



nature, they find no theory too baroque or improbable to consider. Now, they look around themselves, see the disintegration of everything they relied on and conceive a burning need to find the moral of their story. This is a quintessentially human response as well — to ask “why,” even of such mindless catastrophes as flood and war. However inventive the kine may be, though, few could concoct the sorts of explanations devised by frightened Kindred.

In such an atmosphere, demagogues flourish. The scourge is only the most visible manifestation of the overwhelming impulse to impose order upon the ungovernable. Cults and secret societies of every description spring up like dark weeds to promise answers and protection. Prophets and doomsayers ride the hysteria to dizzy new heights. Religious manias are in vogue, and not only among elders; the hitherto disaffected agnostics of the younger generations also fall prey.

Thin-blooded, especially seers, often find themselves the unwilling focus of all this hysteria. Eccentrics with occult agendas supplicate them. Bloodthirsty radicals hunt them down. The younglings may well begin to feel they are the only sane creatures in a race of lunatics. The Storyteller should do nothing to alleviate such beliefs.

Stories built around millennial panic tend to share a few central elements. The great threat is often hinted at, but never shown in more than shadowy outline. Red herrings pop up constantly, and different, equally credible theories compete to explain the given facts. The world seems to be populated by an unusual number of psychotics, religious fanatics and obsessives. Odd inconsistencies and strange coincidences abound, as though the laws of nature and probability just aren't being enforced as rigidly as usual. If the Storyteller is deft at balancing chaos and intrigue, the players' characters reach a point where they have no idea what's going on, but know *beyond a doubt* that the fate of the world depends upon their doing *something*. Eventually, they will have to be let off the hook so that the chronicle can come to a satisfying conclusion, but that dangling suspense is both the chief fun and the chief frustration.

• **Fanaticism:** This theme could well be considered a subcategory of Chaos. Nonetheless, optimists can take heart: Whatever else the omens may have wrought, at least the Kindred have shaken off their apathy and inertia in response. The voices in the wilderness finally have an audience. It is a time for radical causes and sweeping reforms.

Leaders of fanatic groups, generally fanatics themselves, often harbor an unshakable belief in their own righteousness — as well as that of their cause — and they soon seduce their followers into the same outlook. In such a climate, tragic mistakes are inevitable; but so are heroic deeds. Those who have yearned to see rhetoric put into action may have their chance at long last.

• **Scapegoating/witch-hunting:** Because many Kindred feel powerless against what truly threatens them — Gehenna and the Antediluvians — they tend to take out their hostility on nearer, easier targets. Older Cainites often treat vagrant populations, especially the thin-blooded, in the same way that citizens of a

country treat its unwanted immigrants. The thin-blooded are seen as ignorant, lawless and dangerously alien — a teeming, barbarian horde, so to speak. Their mysterious powers are envied, but feared. According to the most paranoid theories, they desire nothing less than the eventual overthrow of the social order; thus, they must be suppressed for the safety of all true Kindred.

So long as they can make themselves useful, some thin-blooded may succeed in being exploited rather than destroyed outright. But no matter what they do, eventually the time of purges will come. The treatment of the Jews and the Gypsies by various nations over the centuries is perhaps the most archetypal real-world example of this phenomenon.

MOOD

Face it: There's little reason to tell a story about the end times unless you can make the players really feel it, really place themselves in the apocalyptic mindset. Mood is one of the keys to creating that mindset. Pay careful attention not just to the events you introduce, but the way you introduce them.

• **Paranoia:** This mood is the signature for any good apocalypse. It also pairs reasonably well with the theme of Ignorance above. For the thin-blooded, as for any vampire unfortunate enough to be up and about in these perilous nights, what you don't know can be a deadly danger.

It's been mentioned above, but bears repeating: Vampires are naturally paranoid creatures. Betrayal is an integral part of their culture. Most vampires are out of the decision loop when it comes to Gehenna, and so their only alternative is to theorize and conjecture. It should come as no surprise that the theories they invent are as twisted and complex as their own devious minds.

The highest generations, too, have cause for paranoia. Many of them, especially those who can still tolerate daylight and mortal pastimes, consider themselves essentially human. They remain close to the ordinary people they care about and the values they were taught in life. From their viewpoint, even a 12th-generation neonate is a menacing creature. Enemies such as the scourge constantly swoop down on them for no discernible reason, exact punishment for some mysterious offense, then disappear into the night again. Wherever the thin-blooded step, it's always on someone's toes.

Paranoia can be absurd as well as frightening. Although such a chronicle should be overwhelmingly dark in ambience, it may also give rise to some profoundly grotesque moments. The eavian whose prophetic advice the characters have been following might suddenly reveal, in hushed tones, her secret theory that the Antediluvians transmit their subliminal messages to vampires through the left fang — and then run around savagely removing the offending article from all present. A cult of vampires might decide to take a whole apartment building hostage because one of its members “saw” Caine in the lobby. But what constitutes an insane belief, when the times themselves are insane? Characters in an eve-of-Gehenna chronicle should eventually come to feel that *anything is possible*.



• **Angst:** (You knew you couldn't get away from it.) Perhaps it wouldn't be fair to say that the thin-blooded necessarily have *more* angst than their stronger brethren, but they certainly have a unique brand of it.

The central dilemma of vampirism is balancing the horrifying, instinctual Beast nature against the remaining human nature. For the thin-blooded, in some respects, the struggle is a milder one. They do not have to confront their monstrosity as immediately and as keenly as others of the Blood do. Many of them can enjoy human pleasures; those who cannot usually still retain close ties to human society and blend in far more easily than those whose attention must be divided between mortal and vampire culture. Their supernatural powers are not as strong, and so are more easily overlooked by themselves and others. The game of denial is fixed in their favor.

However, this can also be a terrible disadvantage. The closer you remain to your mortal loved ones, the easier it is for them to become caught up in the more bizarre and dangerous aspects of your existence. The more openly you walk in human society, the more likely it is that someone hostile will discover your little secret — and he may understand its significance even better than you do. Most importantly, the longer you can deny your monstrosity, the more devastating it will be when it finally escapes your control.

In other words, the special torture of the thin-blooded is, ironically enough, to be closer to humanity than other vampires. The Storyteller should try to lull the characters into complacency. Imagine the situation of a 14th-generation Caitiff. For a while, existence after his Embrace is surprisingly un-Hellish. He switches to an evening shift at the restaurant (he can even still sample the food). He brings his fiancée, his sister and, of course, Grandma in on his secret. They're nonplused, but supportive; the younger women even offer themselves as blood donors (better he should turn to loved ones than unwilling strangers to meet his needs, after all). He has no idea why he was chosen for this weird affliction, but he knows he has potential he never imagined. Perhaps he gets in a scrape now and then, but so far he's always managed to escape with his hide intact. He's thinking of becoming a stage magician.

The Storyteller lets him have all this for a while, then begins little by little to take it away. A frenzy in Grandma's house thankfully doesn't kill the old woman, but it scares her badly enough to confess to the parish priest. The vampire's sire shows up with the bad news that her illicit Embrace has been discovered, and she can be forgiven only if she destroys her own child. As for the fiancée, well, she's always told him she wanted to have a baby eventually....

And if that's not enough angst, consider the problems of raising a dhampir child.

True, much of this same angst can be experienced by standard Vampire characters, but they are often must make a quicker, and therefore somewhat cleaner, break. Among the clans, many sires insist that their childer put aside the trappings of mortality and join Kindred society as soon as possible. Before long, they are far too



immersed in the game of survival to notice their old life slipping away... at least, until it's too late. Thin-blooded, being largely orphans or outcasts' progeny, suffer no such distractions in their early years and are free to experience the whole agonizing process.

- **Horror:** Much has been written on the subject of horror in *Vampire*, but at the risk of belaboring it, a few words must be added here. For the most part, horror greets the thin-blooded in the familiar forms: Each has a Beast; the Beast sometimes urges them into monstrous actions. They spend their existences contending with the cruel irony of the conundrum, "A Beast I am, lest a Beast I become." The more Humanity they manage to retain, the more appalled they must be when the underside of their new nature surfaces.

If the personal horror is the same, however, the *external* horror is another matter. Most Kindred find their elders comparatively freakish, but to the thin-blooded, who tend to move in mortal society more than immortal, all vampires are freakish. To be hunted by a society of unabashed predators, many of whom pride themselves on their alien moral stance, is a horrifying thing indeed. Don't pass up the opportunity to demonstrate this distinction to the characters.

CONFLICTS

The Time of Thin Blood is a period of intense polarization. None of the traditional Cainite groups can stem the

growing disunity in their ranks. Most of the standard Vampire conflicts rage on with the same ferocity as always (sect versus sect, clan versus clan, generation versus generation), but a few new ones have arisen as well.

- **Thin-blooded vs. "normal" Kindred:** The thin-blooded are perceived as dangerous deviants by others of their race. At best, they are discriminated against, forced to dwell at the fringes of society; at worst, they become the targets of the scourge and other persecutors. The Storyteller can wring a surprising amount of drama from their futile search for a home. Fleeing the Blood Hunt in one city, they are probably grateful, at first, to find a more accommodating prince elsewhere; their elation might well sour once they discover his price. In return for legitimizing them, he may demand that they become his spies, or worse yet, his cannon fodder. They may be relegated to the poorest, outermost reaches of his domain. Of course, protesting this treatment no doubt brings the ax crashing down on them once more...

- **Thin-blooded vs. other vagrants:** No one knows better than the anarchs, autarkis and Caitiff what it is to be outcast. Nonetheless, they frequently turn away from their weak childer. Disgusted at their failure and fearful of the scourge's wrath, they reject the thin-blooded even more vehemently than their sires in the sects do. Sometimes, they even take steps to drive out the unwanted competition. This is one of the more poignant conflicts in the Time of Thin Blood: It makes enemies of those who should be allies (and vice versa).

• **Thin-blooded vs. mortals:** Even when thin-blooded have no inkling whatsoever of the Masquerade, that doesn't mean they have any less to fear from mortals. Quite the opposite — since the thin-blooded frequently retain their mortal ties much longer than other neonates, their risk of exposure is dramatically increased. Nor do they have as much supernatural weaponry at their disposal for fighting off the witch-hunters. Conversely, Fearless Vampire Killers who have been schooled in traditional methods of detecting and destroying the undead are in for a few surprises when it comes to the thin-blooded, something smart characters can easily turn to their own advantage.

• **Seers vs. elders:** The seers' clairvoyant talent often tells them about the plots and dirty little secrets of the Jyhad's senior players. Whether seers use that information is up to them, but since they realize, as few others can, just how important their part is in the grand scheme, they'll probably feel obliged to say or do *something* (knowing that your actions might help or prevent doomsday itself is the mother of all guilt trips). As a result, seers tend to find themselves at odds with the mighty. They must tread carefully, always leaving themselves an escape route, always seeking out allies wherever possible. If a seer makes an especially powerful enemy, she may be recruited by someone else with a vendetta against that same elder: a local anarchy leader, perhaps, or an ancient clan rival.

• **Rebels vs. collaborationists:** A common predicament is no bar to strife, and the thin-blooded themselves have many differences of opinion — especially on the subject of Kindred society. Many thin-blooded, perhaps most, long for acceptance by their own kind. Others, politicized by the harsh treatment they have received, hold that assimilation is the tool of the devil. They deliberately adopt a counterculture stance, and if they cannot persuade their fellows to join in, they may well resort to harsher methods. So those hold-outs think they'll be left alone if they don't bother anyone? Well, perhaps an anonymous letter with their address and a photograph of their little dhampir girl should be sent to the local harpy. Then they'll see how futile it is to hope for peace!

• **Cult vs. Cult:** Cults are not exactly a new phenomenon among the Kindred, but rarely in history have so many existed at once. Rather than some titanic battle between good and evil, consider giving your players a dirty little vendetta to satisfy. Even minor differences in ideology are enough to set two Gehenna cults at each others' throats; after all, the fate of the world depends on it.

CHRONICLES IN THE TIME OF THIN BLOOD

As mentioned in the Introduction, the Time of Thin Blood isn't the end of the world, only the beginning of the end. Still, the specter of Gehenna haunts all chronicles set in this dangerous time. Its menace should be obscure and yet completely plausible. As for the Jyhad, which has gone into overdrive for the occasion, it's a mystery that defies all investigation, but if the players' character hope to survive, much less to shape the course of events, investigate they must.

All this is a tall order for Storytellers — especially since no amount of poring over White Wolf supplements can yield the definitive answer to what is *really* going on in the brackish, torpid minds of the Ancients. This ambiguity is deliberate. After all, who can fathom the gods? Well, *you* can. It's your apocalypse.

Needless to say, the players should remain mystified for the greater part of the epic; the Storyteller, though, must have a clear view of the big picture. Many different clues and theories have been promulgated in the published World of Darkness material, to say nothing of the various (and often vociferous) fan communities. It is your task to pick and choose among them or create your own, then weave the elements that your players, if not your characters, are probably familiar with into a coherent conspiracy that intrigues and surprises them. What follows is a set of suggestions for building an eve-of-Gehenna chronicle from the ground up.

STEP ONE: ADJUST THE FOCUS

In part, this means making some basic decisions about mood, theme, conflicts, etc., just as you would for any chronicle. Another very important issue is scale. An eve-of-Gehenna chronicle may well tend to assume (ahem) Biblical proportions, but this need not be the case. It can just as easily confine itself to the conflicts between sects, cults, clans, etc. Once you've decided on the true scale of your chronicle, you can decide how quickly you want to reveal it to the characters. Will they suddenly be plunged into events a good deal beyond their control? Or will they gradually come to realize just how far-reaching the implications of their actions are?

STEP TWO: WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

Even if your chronicle is taking place on a modest scale, it probably helps to have at least a basic idea of what the antagonists (whoever they may be) are really trying to accomplish. The Jyhad is as arcane and many-faceted as the individuals who wage it, and one can hardly hope to show more than a part of the picture clearly in any single chronicle. Presented here are some issues for the Storyteller to consider as she builds her web of intrigue.

• **Last Man Standing:** Many Kindred think of the Jyhad as a giant game of King of the Hill, fated to end in the usurpation of Caine's patriarchy (and perhaps even his very Blood) by one of the Antediluvians. They see this same principle extending all the way down through the generations. Vampires are solitary predators; each ultimately seeks a solitary victory. In the mad race for individual power, all ties of trust, belief and even Blood itself ultimately become meaningless. The Jyhad is thus the highest expression of the Beast's brutal, selfish imperatives.

• **Holy War:** Personal ambition isn't the only driving force behind the cannibalism. Ideology, too, plays a strong role. The very word *Jyhad* refers to the wholehearted pursuit of a holy cause, and surely the Ancients are its architects. The First and Second Cities were monuments to Cainite pride, yes, but also to Cainite vision. In some Noddist legends, the Antediluvians quarrel over God, Golconda and everything else under the

moon — but most especially, how best to carry on their grandsire's abandoned kingship. Eminent Kindred scholars have identified what they believe to be the main factions of the clan founders. Details may be lost in the fog of oral tradition, but the overall picture is clear: There really was some age-old metaphysical contention, and the Ancients did take sides. No doubt, they've dreamed of their many missteps and failures as they slept. No doubt, they fully intend to get it right *this time*. . . once the heretics are out of the way, that is.

- **When the Stars Are Right:** "Holy war" or not, Kindred fears of Gehenna tend to revolve more around what the Ancients will do on first rising than around their future plans. After millennia spent in torpor, their hunger will have sharpened to a keenness inconceivable to those of lesser Blood. Their powerful Beasts will have overwhelmed all lingering traces of human thought or feeling. Like alien juggernauts, they'll range over the world to consume the souls of their childer, and who will be able to stand against them? Perhaps the last hope lies with their childer, those few who have survived with a shred of sanity intact. They must remember *something* that could help their descendants weather the disaster; but will they tell it, or do they mean to interpose the rest of the Kindred race between themselves and their sires?

- **The Generation Gap:** On another level, Gehenna serves a purpose similar to that of the redwood forest fires. Although the fire itself devastates the adult trees, the great heat also cracks open the shells of the acorns and permits them to grow. This is a natural mechanism, designed to prevent overcrowding. Just so, the feast of the Ancients makes room for the continuation of the Cainite race. The Antediluvians rise, cull the surplus population and return to torpor. Supposedly, this has already happened several times in human history (or prehistory). Gehenna is the inevitable culmination of an ecological cycle; nothing more, nothing less.

- **The Big Lie:** Gehenna is a myth, just as your Camarilla sire always said. Whatever may have actually happened in those remote first millennia, it's since been buried beyond recall in the untruths and half-truths of the Methuselaha. Not a Noddist verse, not a Lilin chant, not a page of the Brujah's history scrolls has escaped being twisted to serve the Ancients' purposes. Even now, the shadowy Kindred of the Fourth and Fifth Generations hope to use their progenies' fear of apocalypse to turn the higher generations against one another — and preserve their own place at the top of the ladder now and for all time. Go ahead — pick a lie; pick any lie. It doesn't make any difference.

- **The Fisher King:** *The Book of Nod* and other vampiric scriptures often portray Caine as a tragic figure, a sort of wounded god. His curse consists not only of the physical reality of vampirism, but also of his estrangement from God, humanity and himself. He is crippled forever by his inability to repent and forgive. And perhaps this is the problem that most deserves to occupy the attention of the Kindred. After all, Caine is the one, true source of the Blood, the one true father of the vampires. Therefore, as Caine fares, so shall the Cainites. The Arimatheans

seek the Holy Grail so they can lift it to their Dark Father's lips in the Final Nights and thereby cleanse the whole race of his mark. Proponents of Golconda say that if only they could *find* Caine to teach him, he and all he has wrought could be put back in balance. Why bother with the Antediluvians?

- **The Dark Mother:** Vampires of the sects often forget the demon queen when they lean over the chessboard of the Jyhad to ponder endgame. Others remember all too well that the queen is the most powerful of all the pieces. Caine became the father of vampires through Jehovah's curse, but it was Lilith who supposedly granted him true power. She made him; she can break him. And break him she will, for what he's done — along with his squabbling childer. Lilith evokes potent and valid terror wherever her hand comes to rest. Like Kali, the Hindu goddess, she is both the dark force of destruction and the creative principle of motherhood, wise in the great, bloody secret no man can truly understand. As her Bahari multiply, reveling, recruiting and growing stronger in the pain of a race poised to destroy itself, who's to say that the final move won't be hers?

STEP THREE: THE PRINCIPALS

Once you've decided what the Jyhad will be focusing on in your chronicle, you can set about designing the important antagonists. Some of them should remain hidden for a good part of the chronicle; after all, no conspiracy is complete without puppet masters. Nevertheless, even their offstage actions are sure to have considerable impact on the flow of events. And the players' characters will most certainly have dealings with the manipulators' allies and followers, all of whom can be created as necessary.

Flesh out your nemeses as lovingly as the players do their characters. Most importantly, know their motivations — no one, even a lunatic, exists for the sole purpose of doing mischief. Moreover, those motivations should be as epic as the villains themselves: grand ideologies, burning vendettas. By and large, they should act in accordance with their own best interests, though occasionally it's necessary, for story's sake, to have them make a miscalculation. A hint: Antagonists with tragic flaws are good deal more pliable....

STEP FOUR: THE PLOT

Although player initiative is absolutely essential to the momentum of a chronicle, it is your responsibility to capture the players' interest, to give their characters an opportunity to get involved, and then to guide their process of discovery.

The last is especially important in an eve-of-Gehenna chronicle because the sacred mystery and frantic intrigue of the end times virtually demand an investigative plot. Whatever the characters seek, be it revenge or revelation, earthly treasure or the bliss of Golconda, they can find it only by patiently collecting and assembling your clues. The following section details several archetypal patterns that can assist the Storyteller in laying out those clues.

- **The Russian Doll:** Have you ever seen a Russian *Matryoshka* doll — each doll splits open to reveal another doll

inside? A conspiracy plot can seem like that. The characters start by getting caught up in one intrigue. Eventually, they figure out who's doing what to whom — but discover that the local intrigue is just part of a broader conspiracy involving more powerful forces. When they penetrate that conspiracy, they discover a still greater power at work. Have they found the true “secret masters”? Perhaps, perhaps not.

The starting point might be a conflict between factions of a city's primogen, using the neonates and ancillae as pawns. This is the first layer, the outermost “doll.” Eventually the characters discover that one of the factions is allied with another city's prince, who wants to discredit a rival. They have discovered a deeper level to the conflict, the strife between princes within the Camarilla. That's the second “doll.” As they feel their way through this Jyhad, they learn about the Methuselahs and how they use their progeny as catspaws for their own rivalries: a third, fourth, or even deeper layer of the nested doll of conspiracies. Behind the Methuselahs lies the awful power of the Antediluvians and the Great Jyhad that drives all the other intrigues (and the characters should be so lucky to survive long enough to get this far...).

In sum, the Russian Doll model posits multiple layers of plot. As the characters penetrate layer after layer, they approach the center of the doll and the prime movers of the Jyhad. The doll is a good model for epic chronicles, since it promises great revelations and a chance to get involved with the most important conflicts in the World of Darkness. It also works well for more mystical quests, such as seeking Golconda.

The Russian doll's disadvantage is a lack of what to do for an encore after you've revealed the ultimate mysteries. The Russian Doll model works best for chronicles that have a definite ending point. It is also the best model when a chronicle cannot involve a lot of travel. As the **Chicago Chronicles** show, a major city might hold all the protagonists and antagonists of a series of intrigues, all the way back to a pair of warring Methuselahs.

- **The Jigsaw Puzzle:** In contrast, the Jigsaw Puzzle model is far less structured. Here, the characters must wait a long time before they see the big picture of the Jyhad — assuming they ever do. In a jigsaw chronicle, the characters see only the small, local intrigues. None of the clues have any obvious relation to one another. The characters have no way of knowing which events have a deeper significance. As they learn more and more about the World of Darkness, however, they find connections and patterns in events. A sinister picture starts to emerge. Eventually, they put together enough information to understand the dreadful secret of the Jyhad.

Clan and sect conflicts are particularly suited for jigsaw chronicles (although the Storyteller should be careful about applying the model *too* zealously; clan and sect members almost *never* act in perfect concert, or even in near-perfect concert). For instance, in city after city, the characters discover Tremere involvement in the local conflicts. What are the Warlocks really up to? The Camarilla-Sabbat war naturally lends itself to jigsaw treatment too, as the grand strategies of each sect emerge from a welter of smaller plots and counterplots.

The jigsaw is open-ended: Characters can always find more pieces of the puzzle. Note, however, that the characters need to have reason and opportunity to travel frequently. The players might also get impatient if the Storyteller perpetually delays the great revelation, so it may not be wise to put too many pieces in the puzzle. The Storyteller faces the challenge of keeping the players' interest while the picture of the conflict slowly assembles itself.

On the other hand, once the characters get a hint of the big picture, the paranoia flows freely. Everything receives intense scrutiny to see if it fits the conspiracy theory. And the thrill of finally putting together all the pieces of the puzzle has few equals in gaming.

- **The Chain:** The Chain model is a bit more structured than the Jigsaw Puzzle, but more open-ended than the Russian Doll. Here, each local fight, mystery or intrigue holds clues that lead to the next problem.

A chain chronicle is heavily episodic, with the strengths and weaknesses that implies. On one hand, the characters always have convenient hooks leading them into the next story. Chain chronicles lend themselves to recurring opponents; in fact, pursuit of an archnemesis might be what binds the sequence of adventures together. Chains also work well for treasure hunts where the “prize” comes in several pieces (for instance, a search for the lost chapters of *The Book of Nod*). Many television shows have used the chain as a model. Like these shows, however, a chain chronicle can sometimes lean more toward action than horror, so beware.

On the other hand, a chain can be frustrating if it doesn't seem to lead anywhere. Ultimately, there must be an end to the chain. Characters must feel that they are headed toward some sort of resolution, whether it's to catch the one-armed vampire who framed them for murder or to collect the complete text of *The Book of Nod*. The Storyteller can delay the resolution indefinitely — but unless the players feel that their characters have made some progress, they will probably get bored.

- **Combination:** One can often counteract the weaknesses of individual models by combining them. For instance, a Russian Doll plot may seem a little too tidy — and the World of Darkness might start looking a bit too completely controlled. And if it's too easy to uncover the next layer of the conspiracy, the players may legitimately wonder why other vampires of greater power haven't foiled the conspiracy already. The solution? Make the characters assemble a jigsaw puzzle of clues or follow a chain of leads to penetrate each layer of the Russian doll.

Conversely, after the characters figure out the “big picture” formed by a jigsaw of small events, or follow a chain to its end, they may find that there's yet another Russian Doll layer of mysteries behind it. What they thought was the end was only the beginning of something much bigger.

They might discover that the Camarilla-Sabbat war is manipulated by a powerful group of Methuselahs who play both sides. The dying words of the one-armed vampire might force them to re-examine past events that seemed unrelated at the time, but now look like parts of a Jigsaw Puzzle. It all

depends on how intricate you want to make your plot, the interest level of the players and the length of the chronicle.

STEP FIVE: SET THE STAGE

Once all these decisions have been made (if not before), you should have a look at the players' prospective characters. Much of how the chronicle progresses will depend on their nature and goals. Don't be afraid to disallow or encourage certain character types if you think doing so helps the flow of plot or troupe cohesion (though you should certainly make this much clear to players *before* they develop characters). Play through Preludes — with special attention to developing Backgrounds — then go back to the drawing board. Do some detail work before the next session. The design for the opening story and the initial antagonists should be based on the characters' situation, which should now be firmly established. Natural curiosity can carry them only so far, especially in the beginning; give them a genuine stake in the course of events. Even if you are counting on one particular character to provide most of the momentum for that first story, make sure you have something for everyone. It's all too easy to lose people in the beginning, and commensurately difficult to recapture them later on.

COTERIES

Several different ideas for character coterie in the Time of Thin Blood are presented here.

THE THIN-BLOODED COTERIE

When thin-blooded reach out into the night, occasionally they are lucky enough to find each other, rather than the countless predators that lie in wait. The bonds of loyalty in such a coterie are often unusually strong. After all, who else can really understand? All they have in the world is one another. To survive, the young vampires may have to share not only herds and havens, but whatever scant wisdom and experience they might possess.

The vampires of a thin-blooded coterie will probably have to devote much of their attention to survival; the search for a safe haven, where they can live in relative peace, can take up a large portion of the chronicle. However, the need for meaning will haunt them almost as relentlessly. Lacking an inherited vampire culture, they are bound to go in search of one eventually. This can end in their discovering Kindred society, or even the societies of other supernaturals; or they might fall prey to the seductive philosophy of an apocalyptic cult. Alternatively, they might create a cult of their own, modeling themselves on something they've seen in a movie or heard from mortal guru. Kindred of the major sects can only shake their heads in wonder when they encounter the bizarre un lifestyles that proliferate among the vagrants.

A highly mystical chronicle can be built, for example, around a coterie comprising thin-blooded seers (and perhaps a follower or two). On top of all the other reasons to ally, seers experience a great multiplication of their clairvoyant powers when they work in tandem. A coterie of seers might have been hand-picked and assembled by some powerful vampire with a Gehenna-obsession, or they might have found one another, having been drawn to the

same place by premonitions of the same disaster. Seers frequently travel the world looking for items, locations and people that can inspire their vision. If they share their talents with Kindred society, they are likely to attract a sizable audience, some of whom will persist in their interest even between omens; the seers might find this attention welcome or troublesome, but at the very least, it will make their un lives interesting. Of course, they will no doubt gain a number of enemies as well.

THE MIXED COTERIE

A thin-blooded character in a coterie of normal vampires is often viewed as something of a burden. He is far weaker, particularly in combat, and may need protection — especially if the scourge should happen to pay a visit. On the other hand, he can bring unique skills and abilities to the group, as well as a fresh (some would say naïve) perspective. If he has enough personal charm, he may be able to establish himself as a sort of "mascot" or "kid brother" for the coterie. If not, he should be prepared to put up with constant ribbing and even bullying.

In the present climate of prejudice and misunderstanding, the most plausible scenario for a mixed coterie is one in which the thin-blooded members are the childer of the other characters; however, it's not the only possibility. Neonates in a coterie (or a pack or gang, for that matter) are not always in a position secure enough that they can afford to disdain an outsider's help, however minute. If a member of the highest generations manages to obtain some prestation over them, they may allow him to skulk on the edges of their group, rather like a neighborhood cat permitted to eat on the porch but not to come inside. In cities that don't yet have a scourge to sniff around investigating illegitimate sirings, anarchs and Caitiff might be willing to take in a weakling childer, as long as she doesn't show definite signs of being on the run. Lastly, seers' abilities are so prized (and feared) that a character who possesses them has far less trouble than other thin-blooded finding a coterie to accept him. Of course, said coterie may well have less than entirely altruistic motives in extending the generous invitation, but unlife is full of such Faustian bargains.

Whenever and however a mixed coterie comes about, any chronicle in which it is involved is likely to deal extensively with the subject of prejudice. The coterie may struggle for acceptance among the Cainites, or it may eventually declare sour grapes and withdraw into hermitage, but while the battle lasts, it can provide the chronicle with countless little dramas. Another good point of the mixed coterie is the opportunity it provides to reverse the usual progression of things. Most thin-blooded chronicles are sure to explore the viewpoint of the thin-blooded as they gradually encounter more and more of other vampires' bizarre customs. But the trials a mixed coterie faces often end up drawing it *away* from Kindred society, even when the majority of the coterie's members are legitimate Kindred of established clans. In the first case, the process is one of assimilation, in the second, of alienation. When the two things happen at the same time — i.e., the thin-blooded in the group become more comfortable with the Kindred outlook, while the rest grow disgusted with the cruel and fearful behavior of their former colleagues — it's especially fascinating to watch.





CHAPTER FIVE: NEW BLOOD

Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free...

— Emma Lazarus, “The New Colossus”

The following templates are meant to provide inspiration, as well as to show the variety of character types that can be created with Time of Thin Blood rules. They can also be used as quick-start players’ characters, however.

CINDERELLA

Quote: *No, I can’t make it Thursday — Nicodemus wants me to delouse the rat-guardians and sweep the library. Oh, I couldn’t do that either — Nicodemus says the Toreador hate us. Anyway, just look at me....*

Prelude: You were always the shy little boy with the glasses. The other kids teased you for your bookishness, and the more they teased, the more you withdrew, until the only life you knew was in your imagination, in the tales of passion

and derring-do that most stirred you. *The Three Musketeers, Le Morte d’Arthur, The Lord of the Rings, Treasure Island...* you had devoured all these and more before you finished middle school. No one was surprised when you decided to double-major in medieval history and literature.

You were a mere 18 credit-hours away from your bachelor’s degree when Nicodemus found you. At first, you knew him only as the odd old man who sometimes came by your study carrel late at night. He repelled you personally, but his first few offhand comments revealed a deep understanding of the work of Victor Hugo, which happened to be the subject of the paper you were working on. Eventually, conversation with the strange man became a habit.

You even got into a friendly gentleman’s game: Every week, each of you would propose some odd, obscure trivia

question for the other to research, and whoever discovered his answer first was declared the winner. At first, Nicodemus beat you every time, but as you honed your research skills, you quickly caught up. You never realized that you were being *trained* until it was too late. A few months after your first meeting, while you were desperately cramming for finals, Nicodemus found you in your carrel and invited you out for a breather and a cup of coffee. It was unexpected, but you'd long since decided he was harmless. Your mistake.

Now you know the purpose for which your sire was preparing you. A huge Nosferatu warren exists under the streets of your city, and within that warren is a library, bigger than the downtown city library and the university library put together. The books date from the eighth century all the way up to last month. Pompeii-style murals, visible only to "Kindred" eyes, line the walls in a giant historical tapestry. It is truly a thing of beauty — but librarians are desperately needed, especially since a certain Nosferatu vampire recently began demanding research reports on the most bizarre and obscure subjects.

Nicodemus had marked you to become one of the library's custodians. He'd noted your intellect, your social awkwardness and your love of books, and he decided that you would never miss your mortal life above. He underestimated you. Even worse, he overestimated himself. When he Embraced you, his weak blood sparked a pitiful response in yours. Although your sire was a Nosferatu, you became a Caitiff, as his Blood left none of its disfigurements upon you.

You are so naïve, you truly don't understand why Nicodemus hates you so — but he indisputably does. He constantly insults you and belittles your intellect. He goes out of his way to make your existence unpleasant, providing you with only the filthiest, most maggot-ridden rags to wear and the scrawniest prey to feed on (you haven't yet graduated to a diet of human blood, nor are you supposed to leave the safety of the sewers till you're older, whenever that may be in a vampire context). He fills your schedule with at least as many menial chores as genuine research projects.

One night, when your *Auspex* had reached the point where you didn't need your Coke-bottle glasses anymore (squinting at old texts in the dark was wonderful practice), you threw them away. Nicodemus saw your sea-green, almond-shaped eyes in the lamplight and went berserk. He chopped most of your hair off in uneven chunks and savaged your face with a pocketknife. Many times since, he has repeated this barbering and butchery, punishing you if you dare try to heal the wounds.

Concept: You've never thought of yourself as one of the beautiful people; in fact, all your life you've considered yourself unattractive. But the truth is that you were just awkward, bespectacled and poorly dressed. Next to your Nosferatu peers, you look like a runway model, and they resent you for it. Despite the close eye they keep on you, you've managed to make a few Kindred and mortal acquaintances outside the sewer: a friendly mission worker and a small coterie of anarchists, who all keep encouraging you to grow a backbone and rejoin society. You are reluctant to do so, since you know what would happen to you if you got caught, but every so often you can be cajoled into sneaking out. You have heard wondrous tales of a power called *Celerity*, which would surely help you complete all those unfinished chores before sunrise.

Roleplaying Tips: You are a gentle soul, and you do your work dutifully and patiently, hoping that in time your usefulness will gain you acceptance. But the more you learn and excel, the more venomous your warren-mates become. You have been subjected to taunts and snide comments since childhood, and now genuine abuse, so you've become painfully shy. Flinch if people make sudden movements or try to touch your filthy body. You are a worthless creature. Although your heart dreams of adventure and noble deeds, so far you lack the courage to leave the confines of your cloistered world for long; your true Nature is almost completely suppressed. Note that you rarely enjoy the full benefit of your Appearance Attribute, since you generally walk around filthy and disfigured by your sire's mutilations. You're allowed to keep only your hands clean—for handling the books.

Equipment: Notepad, fine fountain pen (a premature graduation gift), personal library of paperback classics, hidden wad of cash from draining your old checking account via ATM



VAMPIRE

THE MASQUERADE

NAME:
 PLAYER:
 CHRONICLE:

NATURE: GALLANT
 Demeanor: RENITENT
 CLAN: CALIFF

GENERATION: 14th
 HAVEN:
 CONCEPT: CINDERELLA

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL		SOCIAL		MENTAL	
Strength	●●●●●	Charisma	●●●●●	Perception	●●●●●
Dexterity	●●●●●	Manipulation	●●●●●	Intelligence	●●●●●
Stamina	●●●●●	Appearance	●●●●●	Wits	●●●●●

ABILITIES

TALENTS		SKILLS		KNOWLEDGES	
Alertness	●●●●●	Animal Ken	●●●●●	Academics	●●●●●
Athletics	●●●●●	Crafts	●●●●●	Computer	●●●●●
Brawl	●●●●●	Drive	●●●●●	Finance	●●●●●
Dodge	●●●●●	Etiquette	●●●●●	Investigation	●●●●●
Empathy	●●●●●	Firearms	●●●●●	Law	●●●●●
Expression	●●●●●	Melee	●●●●●	Linguistics	●●●●●
Intimidation	●●●●●	Performance	●●●●●	Medicine	●●●●●
Leadership	●●●●●	Security	●●●●●	Occult	●●●●●
Streetwise	●●●●●	Stealth	●●●●●	Politics	●●●●●
Subterfuge	●●●●●	Survival	●●●●●	Science	●●●●●

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS		DISCIPLINES		VIRTUES	
<u>ALLIES</u>	●●●●●	<u>AUSPICES</u>	●●●●●	Conscience	●●●●●
<u>CONTRACTS</u>	●●●●●	<u>ANIMALISM</u>	●●●●●	Self-Control	●●●●●
	●●●●●		●●●●●	Courage	●●●●●
	●●●●●		●●●●●		
	●●●●●		●●●●●		
	●●●●●		●●●●●		
	●●●●●		●●●●●		

MERITS/FLAWS

14th GENERATION (2F)

HUMANITY/PATH

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

WILLPOWER

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

BLOOD POOL

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

HEALTH

Bruised

Hurt -1

Injured -1

Wounded -2

Mauled -2

Crippled -5

Incapacitated

EXPERIENCE

DHAMPIR WAIF

Quote: *This is her picture. She's pretty, huh? Dad used to say I have her eyes.... Oh, I don't go places with strangers. Really? Well, if you're sure you saw her there.*

Prelude: Even when you strain for your earliest memories, you can remember nothing about your mother. Dad always told you that she died of AIDS. Then he died of it himself. You got lucky — HIV-negative — but the social workers who took over your life treated you as if you were diseased just the same. Nobody wanted to adopt a gangly, gap-toothed, mixed-race eight-year-old. You were shuttled from orphanage to foster home and back again more times than you could count.

In school, you managed to fail almost every subject, but you were so willful and headstrong that your teachers usually passed you on to the next grade just to get rid of you. Although you quickly got a reputation as a bully in every school you attended, the truth was that half the time you were just defending yourself. So those boys got all upset when they found out you could shove back harder than they could. Boo hoo. Next time maybe they'll think twice.

Then one sweet day, your aunt came and got you. She said she'd been looking for you for years, but your dad had moved around so much she'd lost track. She and your uncle were so good to you, you almost felt bad about that one time when you swiped a fiver from her purse. They fed you square meals and even took you to the dentist for braces, but they couldn't give you what you wanted most of all: stories about your dead mama. They didn't know anything about her, they said. She was just some floozy your dad had picked up on the road. You didn't want to believe them, so you started going through their things when they weren't around.

Locked away in one of your uncle's desk drawers, you finally found what you were looking for: letters from Dad to your aunt. He'd written about meeting this beautiful, angelic woman who loved him and was going to help him kick the drugs and the booze. He'd even sent a picture of her, a cheap Polaroid. She was milk-white, just like you'd always suspected she must be, with hollow cheeks and a row of freckles across her nose. Still, there was a kind of wasted beauty to her.

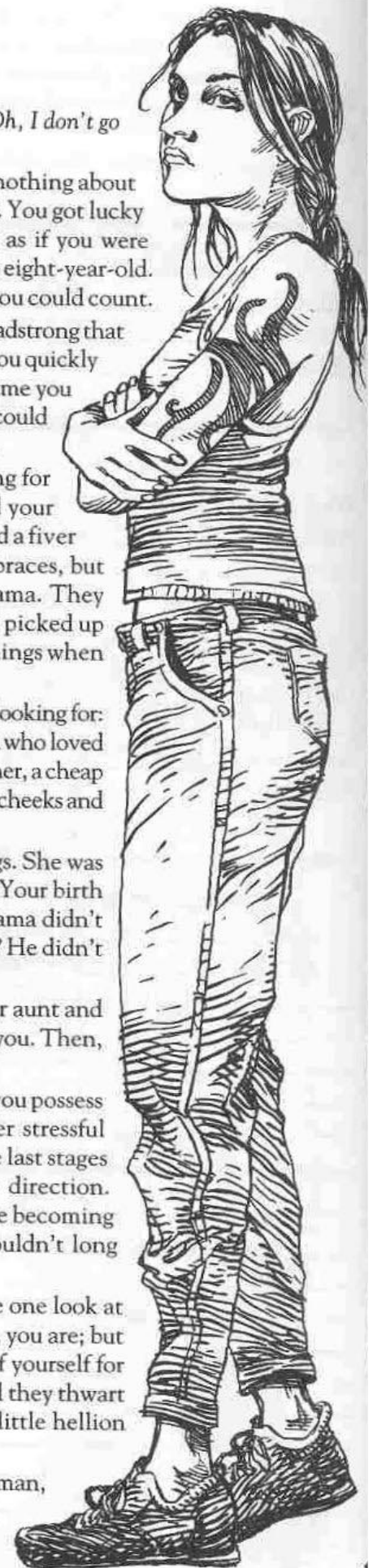
The letters got sadder and shorter. He'd tested positive. He couldn't get any gigs. She was feeling poorly. No, she was pregnant. Again and again, the letters asked for money. Your birth was described in one curt sentence, and the next sentence held an awful truth: Mama didn't die, she left. She left you, 10 days old, with your poor, sick dad. Where'd she gone? He didn't know; she used to talk about having family in Chicago.

You knew what you had to do. In your very best script, you wrote a note to your aunt and uncle to explain where you were going and why. You even forgave them for lying to you. Then, photo in hand, you got on the next bus.

Concept: You have almost no idea of your supernatural heritage. The powers you possess were developed by instinct, and you generally use them only in a fight or other stressful situation. Still, you're learning fast. In fact, a few odd things your father said in the last stages of dementia came back to you recently, spurring your investigation in a new direction. Although you don't realize it, and despite your woefully deficient education, you're becoming quite a little sleuth. The trouble is, you're likely to stumble across stuff you shouldn't long before you're ready to handle it.

Roleplaying Tips: At 13, you still haven't quite lost your baby fat. Adults take one look at your braids and your chubby cheeks and think you an innocent. And in many ways, you are; but you've also had a lot of grief and pain for such a short life, and you've taken care of yourself for as long as you can remember. Play along with the grownups, all sugar and spice, until they thwart you. Then, let your jaw harden, cross your strong arms and show them all what a little hellion they're really dealing with.

Equipment: Fading photo, fanny pack full of photocopied county records, Walkman, wicked fighting knife, phone number of aunt (who is frantically looking for you!)



VAMPIRE

THE MASQUERADE

NAME:
 PLAYER:
 CHRONICLE:

NATURE: FANATIC
 DEMEANOR: CHILD
 CLAN: NONE

GENERATION: NONE
 HAVEN:
 CONCEPT: DRAMPER WAFF

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL		SOCIAL		MENTAL	
Strength	●●●●●	Charisma	●●●●●	Perception	●●●●●
Dexterity	●●●●●	Manipulation	●●●●●	Intelligence	●●●●●
Stamina	●●●●●	Appearance	●●●●●	Wits	●●●●●

ABILITIES

TALENTS		SKILLS		KNOWLEDGES	
Alertness	●●●●●	Animal Ken	○○○○○	Academics	●○○○○
Athletics	●○○○○	Crafts	○○○○○	Computer	○○○○○
Brawl	●○○○○	Drive	●○○○○	Finance	○○○○○
Dodge	●●○○○	Etiquette	○○○○○	Investigation	●●○○○
Empathy	●●○○○	Firearms	○○○○○	Law	○○○○○
Expression	●○○○○	Melee	●●○○○	Linguistics	○○○○○
Intimidation	●○○○○	Performance	○○○○○	Medicine	○○○○○
Leadership	○○○○○	Security	●●○○○	Occult	○○○○○
Streetwise	●●○○○	Stealth	●●○○○	Politics	○○○○○
Subterfuge	●●○○○	Survival	●●○○○	Science	●○○○○

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS		DISCIPLINES		VIRTUES	
<u>CONTRACTS</u>	●●●●●	<u>POTENCE</u>	●○○○○	Conscience/Conviction ●●●○○○	
<u>ALLIES</u>	●○○○○	<u>FORTITUDE</u>	●○○○○	Self-Control/Instinct ●●●○○○	
<u>RESOURCES</u>	●○○○○		○○○○○	Courage ●●●●●	
	○○○○○		○○○○○		
	○○○○○		○○○○○		
	○○○○○		○○○○○		
	○○○○○		○○○○○		

MERITS/FLAWS

HUMANITY/PATH

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○

WILLPOWER

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

BLOOD POOL

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

HEALTH

Bruised

Hurt -1

Injured -1

Wounded -2

Mauled -2

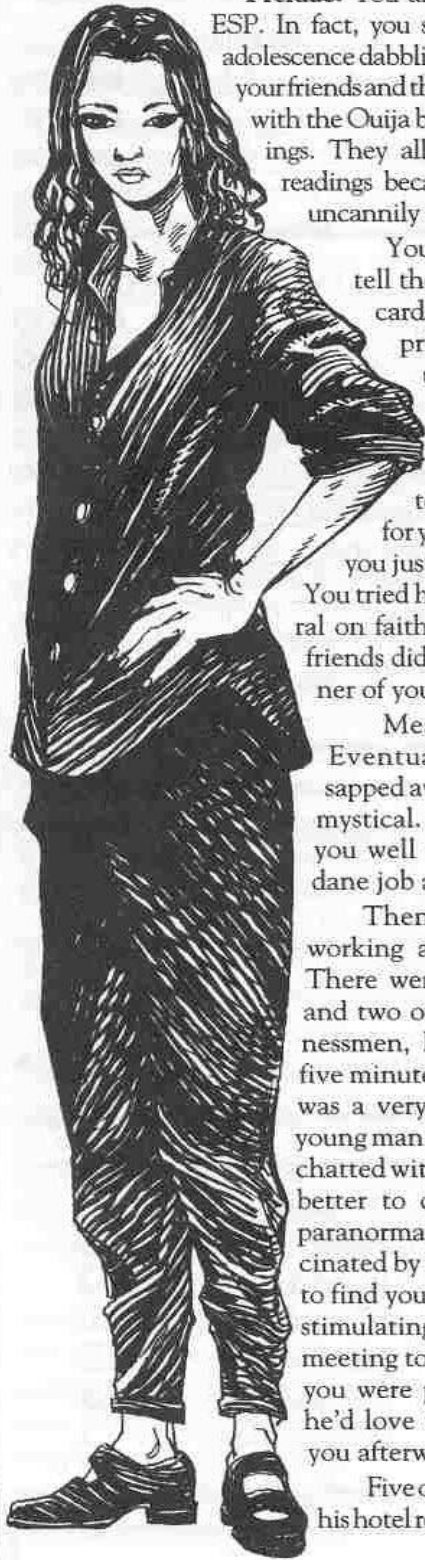
Crippled -5

Incapacitated

EXPERIENCE

S E E R

Quote: *Beware, mighty prince! Your doom is on the horizon. Three heads it has, and five legs, and two tongues. It will come to your city and befriend your enemies, who know... who know the way to... damn. Lost reception. I can try again later, should it please my prince.*



Prelude: You always *wanted* to believe in ESP. In fact, you spent a great deal of your adolescence dabbling in the supernatural with your friends and their friends, holding séances with the Ouija board and doing Tarot readings. They all wanted you to do their readings because you seemed to be so uncannily accurate.

You never had the heart to tell them your doubts. Sure, the cards usually came up in appropriate patterns, but their unadorned meanings were vague enough to fit a number of interpretations. Nor did you feel any mysterious force closing the gap for you. As far as you could tell, you just had good “people sense.”

You tried hard to take the supernatural on faith, the way all your creepy friends did; still, some skeptical corner of you kept demanding proof.

Meanwhile, you grew up. Eventually, worldly concerns sapped away all your energy for the mystical. Your people sense served you well — in a crushingly mundane job as a flight attendant.

Then, one night, you were working a little commuter flight. There were only three passengers, and two of them, bleary-eyed businessmen, had fallen asleep within five minutes of departure. The other was a very attractive, mustachioed young man with a bit of a brogue. You chatted with him for lack of anything better to do. He claimed to be a paranormal researcher. You were fascinated by his anecdotes. He seemed to find your interest amusing — and stimulating. He told you he had a meeting to go to that evening, but if you were planning to stay up late, he’d love to go out for drinks with you afterward. You accepted.

Five or six hours later, you were in his hotel room, more than half-drunk,

trying to take a Zener card test. You have no idea how well you did — not very, you expect — and the two of you went to bed together instead of finishing it, anyway. The lovemaking was amazingly tender. Eventually, an odd thing began to happen. Memories of your life came back to you in flashes, and you sensed his presence in your mind, sharing those memories. It distracted you from your physical pleasure, but the experience of connecting with another person so intimately more than made up for it. Just before you lost consciousness, he whispered the words that you’d been yearning to hear all your life: “You have the gift.”

Vague nightmares haunted you as you slept through the day and into the following evening. You woke up to find you’d been stuffed into a jumbo garbage bag and tossed in an alley dumpster.

You were naked, and you should have been freezing as well in the pouring rain. Getting some clothes proved to be a hell of an adventure; luckily, somebody finally called the cops on you, and they took one look at your cold, pallid skin and decided you couldn’t be doing this on purpose. You were taken to the police station and given a blanket and some old sweats to wear. You gave your statement, but a funny feeling in the pit of your stomach told you to refuse hospital treatment. Despite their warnings about hypothermia, you headed out to find a phone booth and get your credit cards canceled. Life, or to be more accurate, unlife, has been getting weirder ever since.

Concept: You are a born communicator. You have an uncanny knack for reading people, now supplemented by the unreliable, but powerful, force of your visions. Most importantly, you can tell who has the leverage in any situation. When you know you have valuable information, hold out for the best possible price.

You’ve been approached by a number of bizarre people since your Embrace. So far, you’ve politely turned down all offers to serve as cult priestess or messiah-for-hire. You set your own hours and come and go as you please. Sometimes a little blackmail or false enticement is necessary to preserve that independence, but you can’t really feel bad about that. After all, they’re horrible vampires who just want to use your gifts for their own evil plots. It’s even amusing to make them scramble. Most Kindred despise you as a freak of unnature, but so what? You have several princes competing to hire you as a personal adviser. Although you keep hoping your sire will turn up, the odds of that seem pretty lean. Obviously, he took you for dead, or he wouldn’t have disposed of you the way he did.

Roleplaying Tips: Act a little overconfident. You really don’t understand how much trouble you’re potentially getting yourself into. Then again, you certainly don’t want to have a bunch of powerful vampires pissed off at you either, so you usually try to ingratiate yourself with whoever seems to be in charge. You never admit that you’re manipulating anybody; everything you do is couched in terms of your “messages from beyond.” Not that you *lie* about what you see in the visions — that would be an abuse of your precious gift. You just report selectively sometimes; hey, you gotta defend yourself. Whenever you’re alone, you scribble complex diaries of your prophetic dreams. You’re sure you really do have the answer... somewhere.

Equipment: Scrying mirror, crystals, incense, velvet-wrapped Tarot deck, clove cigarettes

VAMPIRE

THE MASQUERADE

NAME:
 PLAYER:
 CHRONICLE:

NATURE: SURVIVOR
 DEMEANOR: VISIONARY
 CLAN: CATIFF

GENERATION: 15th
 HAVEN:
 CONCEPT: SEER

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL		SOCIAL		MENTAL	
Strength	●●○○○	Charisma	●●●○○	Perception	●●●○○
Dexterity	●●○○○	Manipulation	●●●○○	Intelligence	●●○○○
Stamina	●●○○○	Appearance	●●●○○	Wits	●●●○○

ABILITIES

TALENTS		SKILLS		KNOWLEDGES	
Alertness	●●●○○	Animal Ken	○○○○○	Academics	●●○○○
Athletics	●●○○○	Crafts	●○○○○	Computer	●○○○○
Brawl	○○○○○	Drive	●○○○○	Finance	○○○○○
Dodge	○○○○○	Etiquette	●●○○○	Investigation	○○○○○
Empathy	●●●○○	Firearms	○○○○○	Law	○○○○○
Expression	●○○○○	Melee	○○○○○	Linguistics	●○○○○
Intimidation	●●○○○	Performance	●●●○○	Medicine	●○○○○
Leadership	●○○○○	Security	○○○○○	Occult	●●○○○
Streetwise	○○○○○	Stealth	○○○○○	Politics	○○○○○
Subterfuge	●●○○○	Survival	●○○○○	Science	○○○○○

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS		DISCIPLINES		VIRTUES	
<u>INSIGHT</u>	●●○○○	<u>AUSREX</u>	●●○○○	Conscience/Conviction	●●●○○
<u>CONTACTS</u>	●●○○○		○○○○○	Self-Control/Instinct	●●●○○
	○○○○○		○○○○○	Courage	●●●○○
	○○○○○		○○○○○		
	○○○○○		○○○○○		
	○○○○○		○○○○○		

MERITS/FLAWS

15th GENERATION (4F)

HUMANITY/PATH

●●●●●●●●○○○

WILLPOWER

●●●●●○○○○
 □□□□□□□□□□

BLOOD POOL

□□□□□□□□□□
 □□□□□□□□□□

HEALTH

Bruised
 Hurt -1
 Injured -1
 Wounded -2
 Mauled -2
 Crippled -5
 Incapacitated

EXPERIENCE

VAMPIRE DAD

Quote: *Son, I think we need to have a talk about keeping family secrets.*

Prelude: She called herself Donna Felisa. When you answered the door that night, she smiled charmingly, picked you up and threw you across the room. When you came to, she had your wife and children trussed up like Thanksgiving turkeys. Donna Felisa explained that the Sabbat wanted your town. As the most successful real-estate agent in the area, you would locate accommodations. She regretted that you couldn't undergo the true Creation Rites, but she needed your mind clear in the nights to come. Maybe later. While your wife watched, Donna Felisa drained your blood and made you a vampire. You woke up hungry... but that's why this creature had left your family alive. By supreme effort of will, you kept yourself from killing any of them. Donna Felisa laughed. "Maybe later, when the Vaulderie has changed your loyalties," she said. If you served well, she promised, her pack would promote you from slave to equal through something called the *ritus*.

Thank God your neighbor Phil came by to return the lawnmower. Thinking nobody was home, he opened the garage door with the key you gave him last summer so he could feed your dog, Buster. The late afternoon sun shone full on Donna Felisa. She woke up just long enough to scream once before she burned to ash.

Luckily, you slept behind the workbench and the scream woke you up. You told Phil to shut the door, then go upstairs to free your family. Phil had a lot of questions. At first you tried to explain. Then you just told Phil to look into your eyes. Donna Felisa could hypnotize people; she'd shown that when she... played... with your wife. Turned out, you could too. You told Phil to forget the whole thing, and he did.

Somehow you managed to put your — life? — together again. More hypnosis erased at least some of the nightmares from your family. You talked your boss at the realty into letting you show houses at night. Actually, some clients were pleased; they had busy day jobs. Buster had to go, but a few hitches of rabbits out back gave you an alternative to feeding off your wife and your clients.

Then your wife had her nervous breakdown. You couldn't have her tell the doctor why, could you? More hypnosis, and when that wasn't enough you fed her your blood three times, like Donna Felisa had wanted to do to you.

Once more, your wife smiled when you entered the room. Then Bobby's girlfriend saw too much, and you had to hypnotize her to make her forget. That upset Bobby. Maybe that's why he tried to pound a stake into you. Hypnosis time for Bobby. Now, little Justin's teacher wants to have a word with you about the wild stories he's telling at school. And how many lame explanations have you given to your nosy next-door neighbors? Maybe they need a little look-deep-into-my-eyes, too. Hardly a week goes by without some absurd new predicament.

Sometimes, you have to laugh at your existence — because the only alternative would be to scream. And once you start screaming, you might not ever stop.

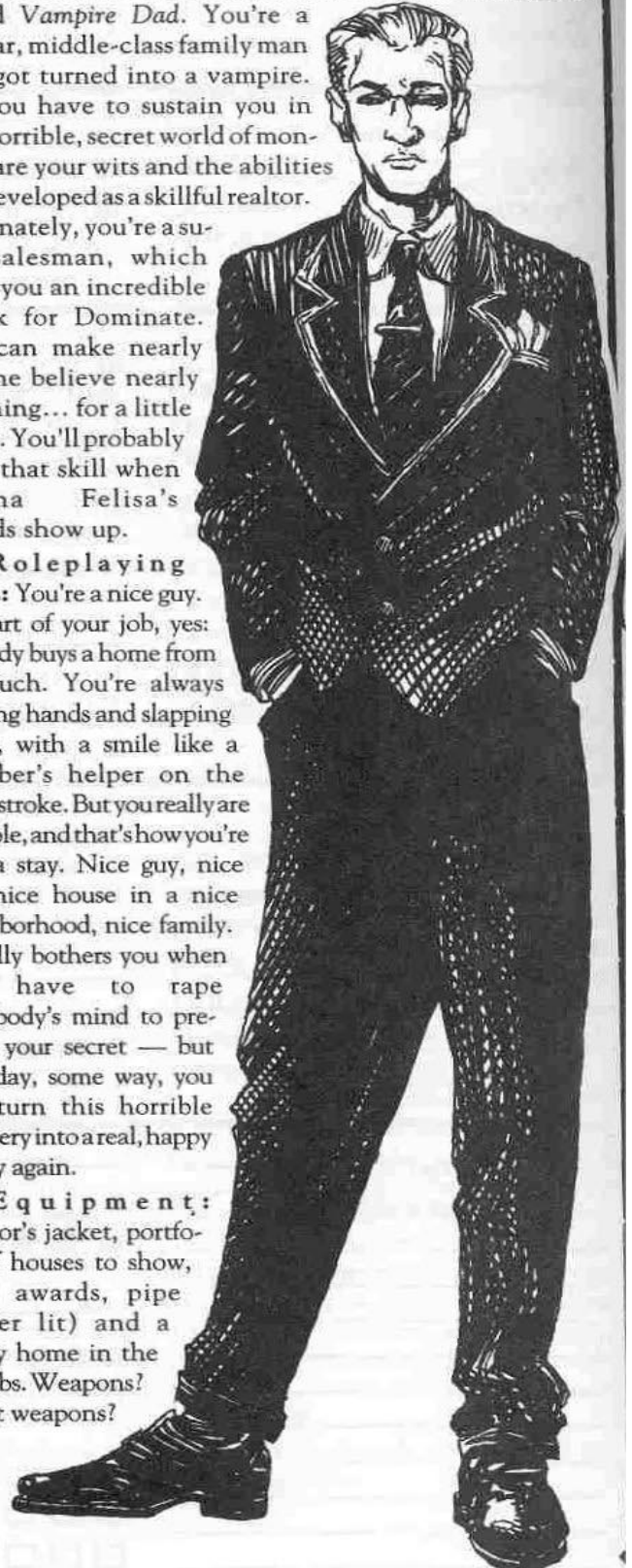
Concept: Remember those '60s supernatural sitcoms like *Bewitched* and *I Dream of Jeannie*? Your unlife might be called *Vampire Dad*. You're a regular, middle-class family man who got turned into a vampire. All you have to sustain you in this horrible, secret world of monsters are your wits and the abilities you developed as a skillful realtor. Fortunately, you're a super salesman, which gives you an incredible knack for Dominate. You can make nearly anyone believe nearly anything... for a little while. You'll probably need that skill when Donna Felisa's friends show up.

Roleplaying

Hints: You're a nice guy. It's part of your job, yes: Nobody buys a home from a grouch. You're always shaking hands and slapping backs, with a smile like a plumber's helper on the downstroke. But you really are amiable, and that's show you're gonna stay. Nice guy, nice job, nice house in a nice neighborhood, nice family. It really bothers you when you have to rape somebody's mind to preserve your secret — but someday, some way, you will turn this horrible mockery into a real, happy family again.

Equipment:

Realtor's jacket, portfolio of houses to show, sales awards, pipe (never lit) and a lovely home in the suburbs. Weapons? What weapons?



VAMPIRE

THE MASQUERADE

NAME: NATURE: *DIRECTOR* GENERATION: *14th*
 PLAYER: DEMEANOR: *CELEBRANT* HAVEN:
 CHRONICLE: CLAN: *CATIA* CONCEPT: *VAMPIRE DAD*

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL		SOCIAL		MENTAL	
Strength	●●●●	Charisma	●●●●	Perception	●●●●
Dexterity	●●●●	Manipulation	●●●●	Intelligence	●●●●
Stamina	●●●●	Appearance	●●●●	Wits	●●●●

ABILITIES

TALENTS		SKILLS		KNOWLEDGES	
Alertness	●●●●	Animal Ken	○○○○	Academics	●●●●
Athletics	○○○○	Crafts	○○○○	Computer	●○○○
Brawl	○○○○	Drive	●●○○	Finance	●●○○
Dodge	●○○○	Etiquette	●●●○	Investigation	○○○○
Empathy	●●○○	Firearms	○○○○	Law	●●○○
Expression	○○○○	Melee	○○○○	Linguistics	●○○○
Intimidation	●●●○	Performance	●○○○	Medicine	○○○○
Leadership	●●○○	Security	○○○○	Occult	○○○○
Streetwise	○○○○	Stealth	○○○○	Politics	○○○○
Subterfuge	●●○○	Survival	●○○○	Science	○○○○

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS		DISCIPLINES		VIRTUES	
<i>RESOURCES</i>	●●○○	<i>DOMINATE</i>	●●●○	Conscience/Conviction	●●●○
<i>CONTACTS</i>	●●●○		○○○○	Self-Control/Instinct	●●●○
	○○○○		○○○○	Courage	●●●○
	○○○○		○○○○		
	○○○○		○○○○		
	○○○○		○○○○		

MERITS/FLAWS

LATE GENERATION (2x)

HUMANITY/PATH

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○

WILLPOWER

● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

BLOOD POOL

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

HEALTH

Bruised
 Hurt -1
 Injured -1
 Wounded -2
 Mauled -2
 Crippled -5
 Incapacitated

EXPERIENCE

I N C E P T O R

Quote: *I'm making this up as I go along.*

Prelude: You were always underestimated. Parents, teachers, friends — none of them seemed to think you'd ever amount to anything. Truth told, you figured they were probably right. But the old hometown was going through a bit of a boom when you graduated from high school, and if a guy had biceps and knew how to use them, the construction crews wanted him. You liked your work. You didn't get to wear a sharp suit or spend the day in air conditioning, but when you put a thing in its place, it stayed. Better than that, you knew it would be there long after you'd forgotten about it.

Eventually, the work dried up. You started moving around, but the pickings were slim everywhere else, too. The jobs got worse and worse, and the union just kept taking its big bite out of your pay. Finally, you were on this one job where a section of rickety scaffolding collapsed and put three men in the ICU. It got a story on page four. You quit in disgust.

Your friends told you there was work out east, so you decided to hitchhike. You were surprised as hell when a pretty girl in an RV pulled over for you. You asked her if she wasn't afraid you might be some crazy rapist, but she just laughed.

The two of you wound up pulling off into a campground along the highway. She had a television in her RV, and you snuggled up in the tiny bed together to watch it and talk about life. She had a million stories; seemed she'd been knocking around the country for the last three years. You told her the driving would be easier split two ways. She laughed again. When you made your move on her, she told you she only liked to do it by starlight. Fair enough, you said.

You never got past first base before she was sinking her fangs into your throat. It felt great, but she drained you so low that you got really sick. Afterward, she just got up and started to walk away from you, all businesslike. Who did she think she was, leaving you here when you probably needed the emergency room? You struggled to your feet and lumbered after her, meaning to teach her a lesson — but she held you off like you were an infant. Finally, she shook her head and said she was going to do something she would probably regret.

That was how you became a vampire. She stayed with you just long enough to teach you the basics and then bid you adieu. Gangrel — whatever the hell that might be — met up every so often, she assured you, and you'd be seeing her again. You better have some good stories when you do, though.

You aim to.

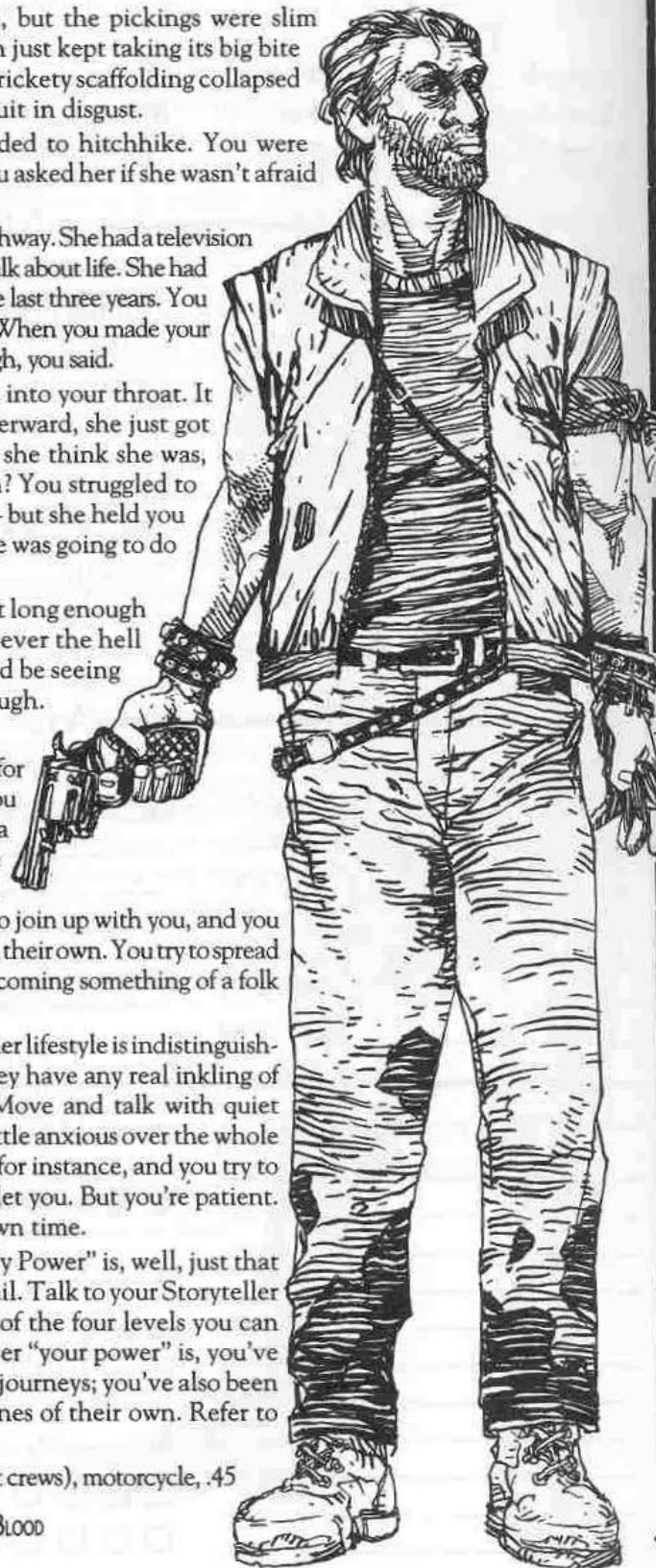
Concept: You're a pretty self-sufficient type, and you never asked for a break from anybody. Still, you can't help noticing that everywhere you go the young vampires seem to be getting a shitty deal. You have no idea why they put up with it, and you tell them so. They don't need those dried-up elders; they can teach themselves how to use their powers.

Hell, you've done it. Sometimes the brighter-eyed among them ask to join up with you, and you let them, for a little while... till they know the ropes and can make it on their own. You try to spread the message every little way you can. The dubious reward? You're becoming something of a folk hero to the Caitiff in your corner of the world.

Roleplaying Tips: You have no idea that you're Caitiff; your loner lifestyle is indistinguishable from that of the Gangrel from whom you hail. Nor, yet, do they have any real inkling of your "deviance," though they wouldn't be pleased to find out. Move and talk with quiet confidence. Exude the wisdom of the road. Of course, you're still a little anxious over the whole vampire thing — you haven't yet dared to venture inside a church, for instance, and you try to confine yourself to animal prey for as long as your self-control will let you. But you're patient. You know that the answer will have to come its own way, in its own time.

(**Note:** The Discipline marked on your character sheet as "My Power" is, well, just that — your unique power, which you, as an inceptor's player, must detail. Talk to your Storyteller and come to an agreement on what this Discipline does at each of the four levels you can attain, what kind of rolls you have to make to use it, etc. Whatever "your power" is, you've managed to teach your one dot to a few Caitiff you've met on your journeys; you've also been there as a big brother for other clanless working on new Disciplines of their own. Refer to Chapter Three for more information on inceptor characters.)

Equipment: Bedroll, backpack, union card (you still work on night crews), motorcycle, .45



VAMPIRE

THE MASQUERADE

NAME:
 PLAYER:
 CHRONICLE:

NATURE: *SURVIVOR*
 DEMEANOR: *CAREGIVER*
 CLAN: *CALIFF*

GENERATION: *14th*
 HAVEN:
 CONCEPT: *INCEPTOR*

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL		SOCIAL		MENTAL	
Strength	●●●●●	Charisma	●●●●●	Perception	●●●●●
Dexterity	●●●●●	Manipulation	●●●●●	Intelligence	●●●●●
Stamina	●●●●●	Appearance	●●●●●	Wits	●●●●●

ABILITIES

TALENTS		SKILLS		KNOWLEDGES	
Alertness	●●●●●	Animal Ken	○○○○○	Academics	●●●●●
Athletics	○○○○○	Crafts	●●●●●	Computer	●○○○○
Brawl	●●●●●	Drive	●●●●●	Finance	○○○○○
Dodge	●●●●●	Etiquette	○○○○○	Investigation	●●●●●
Empathy	●○○○○	Firearms	○○○○○	Law	○○○○○
Expression	○○○○○	Melee	○○○○○	Linguistics	●○○○○
Intimidation	●○○○○	Performance	○○○○○	Medicine	○○○○○
Leadership	●●●●●	Security	●○○○○	Occult	●○○○○
Streetwise	●○○○○	Stealth	○○○○○	Politics	○○○○○
Subterfuge	●○○○○	Survival	●●●●●	Science	●○○○○

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS		DISCIPLINES		VIRTUES	
<i>RESOURCES</i>	●○○○○	<i>MY POWER</i>	●●●●●	Conscience/Conviction	●●●●●
<i>CONTACTS</i>	●●●●●		○○○○○	Self-Control/Instinct	●●●●●
<i>HERD</i>	●○○○○		○○○○○	Courage	●●●●●
	○○○○○		○○○○○		
	○○○○○		○○○○○		
	○○○○○		○○○○○		
	○○○○○		○○○○○		

MERITS/FLAWS

14th GENERATION (2F)

TAIN BLOOD (4F)

HUMANITY/PATH

●●●●●●●○○○

WILLPOWER

●●●●●○○○○○

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BLOOD POOL

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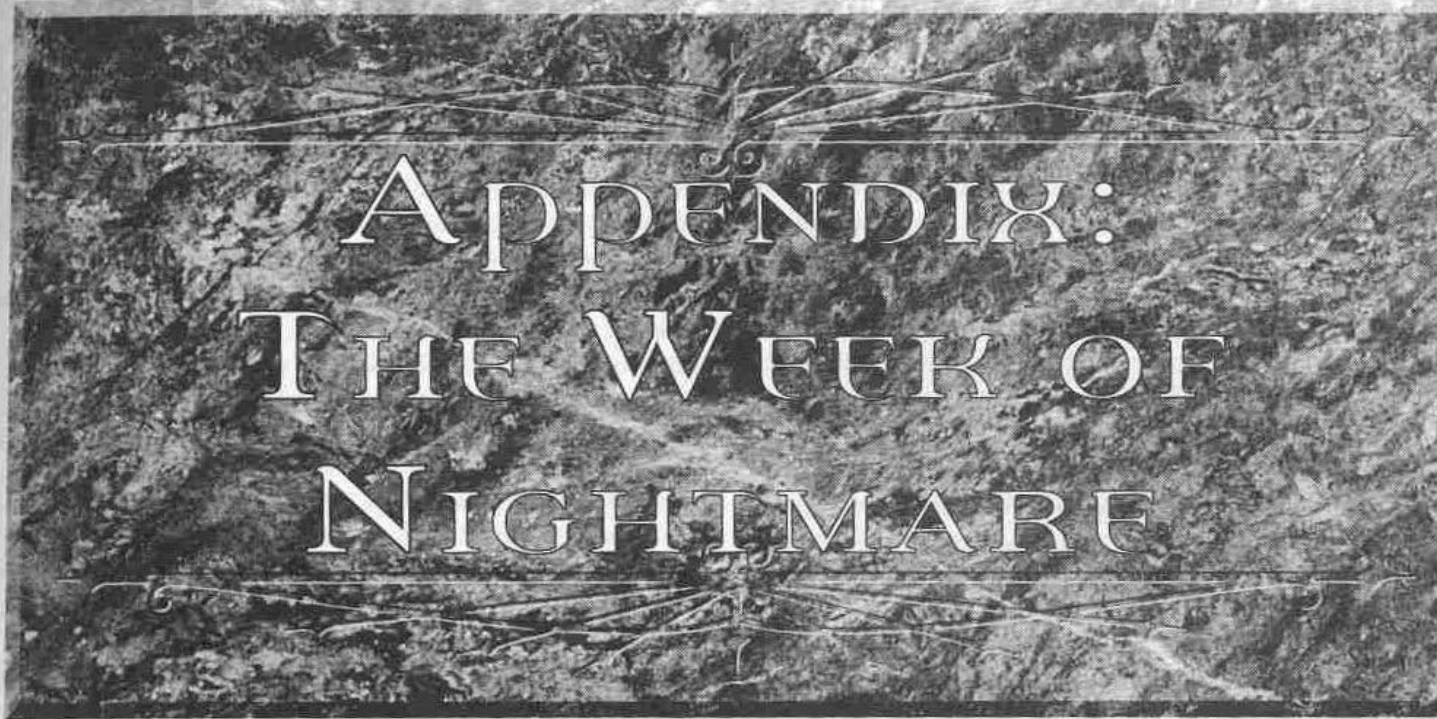
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HEALTH

Bruised		<input type="checkbox"/>
Hurt	-1	<input type="checkbox"/>
Injured	-1	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wounded	-2	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mauled	-2	<input type="checkbox"/>
Crippled	-5	<input type="checkbox"/>
Incapacitated		<input type="checkbox"/>

EXPERIENCE





APPENDIX: THE WEEK OF NIGHTMARE

*There will come a time,
when the heads of three Princes
will watch the burning of the dawn
on a pillar of white.*

—“The Awakening of the Dark Father,”
The Book of Nod

For many years, the World of Darkness has teetered on the brink of chaos. Well, it's finally happened. Vampires call it the Week of Nightmare, when Gehenna moved from a remote possibility to an immediate terror.

The end of the world is nigh — and under way already....

THE HORROR AWAKENS

The acolyte genuflected to Tieh Ju, the Iron Chrysanthemum, quickly touching his forehead to the marble floor three times. She impassively noted the slight breach of decorum but instantly forgave it. She knew her pupils. They would not hasten because of small matters. She nodded her response a hairsbreadth further than usual, granting permission to address her without her panoply of honorifics.

The acolyte did not waste words. “Revered teacher, word has come from the Court of Luoyang. The ancestor claims that the Eight Thunders Master has left her mountain.”

The Eight Thunders Master. This did not entirely surprise the Iron Chrysanthemum. She asked, “Did the messenger say which way the master journeyed?”

“West,” replied the acolyte. As she expected. All the omens suggested a resolution to the long war with the false vampires of India. Two nights before, she had felt the earth scream as a terrible, hungry power awakened and ripped itself free. Last night, she had smelled distant blood and terror on the western wind. Yes, the Eight Thunders Master would welcome such a battle. It was her way.

“Revered teacher, what do we do?” the acolyte asked. He, too, understood the gravity of the battle that must take place.

“Do?” Tieh Ju echoed. “We watch. We learn the way these events must follow. And then, when the time is right — we do nothing, and thereby confound our enemies.”

The acolyte bowed again, comforted by the familiar wisdom of their philosophy. He murmured formalities until she dismissed him, and he hurried off to spread the news.

In the time of her meditation, however, the Iron Chrysanthemum practiced calling up the demonic form and powers of her lower soul. In the Universal Way that she followed, every action had its reaction; everything balanced in the end. Nevertheless, she did not want the end to be hers....

* * *
The photos of men and women dropped to the floor as the test subject shot to her feet, staring at nothing. "Get Dr. Netchurch! Now!" Dr. Reage hissed to the orderly. Thank God she had the video camera ready.

"He split the mountain!" the woman shrieked. "The king split the mountain! He calls the princes and princesses. They run, but he sends his nightmares to fetch them!"

Dr. Reage held the woman's shoulders, heedless of her extended fangs. "Who is the king?" the psychologist demanded. "Describe the king!" The younger woman only babbled in a language Dr. Reage could not identify.

* * *

Chou Li and his four companions reclined on silken cushions and admired the way the temple, the willow and the lanterns reflected in the pool. He had just made a lotus bud and now it was Shangguan's turn. The grinning monkey-man recited his short poem, and the lotus bud opened to reveal a little toad made entirely of emerald-green jade. The frog blinked its stone eyes and trilled the last line of Shangguan's poem. Everyone languidly applauded Shangguan's creation.

Then the frog exploded. Blood from a wound opened by a shard of jade trickled into Chou Li's eye. The willow trees twisted, cracked and screamed. The lotus blossoms thrashed on their stems, and the white and golden carp leaped from the water to flop on the temple floor. The grassy earth itself heaved. The five ran for their unlives, as their favorite temple collapsed upon itself.

* * *

At the Western State Hospital, doctors, nurses and orderlies rushed from ward to ward, hurriedly restraining the patients. As one orderly held down a shrieking patient, another tightened the straps around him. Dr. Melliot reviewed the patient's chart: John Riddick, acute paranoid disorder, last medication three hours ago. As the doctor injected Riddick with the tranquilizer, the patient stopped struggling.

"The king woke up," he calmly said. "He woke up *hungry*, doctor. Now he's eating all his children and his grandchildren. They don't like it, but they can't escape his dreams." He peered anxiously at the doctor and the orderlies. "You're not hungry, are you? 'Cause if you are..." he paused dramatically, "I'm not family."

Dr. Melliot moved to the next room in the ward. Jane Kellner, catatonic schizophrenia, passive type. She sat on her bed, one arm stiffly out to her side. At least she was quiet. As he inspected her, however, she spoke. "The king walks with his nightmares. They call his children to him"

She must have heard Mr. Riddick. Of course, that was it. Dr. Melliot continued on his rounds. These poor souls were intensely suggestible, in a morbid, self-torturing way. No doubt, he thought, many other patients would rave about kings and cannibalism.

They did not disappoint him.

BATTLE OF NIGHTMARES

Schiavelli dropped the microprobe in surprise when his palmtop sounded the alarm. For 0.43 seconds, he cursed himself for his reflexive panic, then for 0.28 seconds he cursed himself for his own irritation. Then he recognized the potential for infinite regress in this self-chiding and banished it. *Be steel*, he told himself. As he keyed off the alarm, he once more felt calm and precise.

At the touch of a button, his palmtop projected a rapid series of satellite photos, MANAR telemetry data, maps and graphs onto the air. Schiavelli felt his mind slip into overdrive, correlating the anomalous readings with information gleaned over the past year from around the world, until his intuition reached a conclusion. The incident unfolding in Bangladesh was much worse than the computer analysis indicated. His little project would have to wait. Schiavelli keyed a complex sequence on his handheld computer. He walked around the corner and leaped into the back seat of a gray American sedan that hadn't been there mere moments earlier.

* * *

"The University faculty identified the language," Dr. Netchurch said to Dr. Reage. "It's Sanskrit." The vampire scientist paced back and forth, tapping his pencil in his hands. "Sanskrit! Now they're speaking in tongues!" With a savage twist of his hands he splintered the pencil into splinters and threw the remains into the wastebasket.

The psychologist watched her domitor carefully. She seldom saw Dr. Netchurch so agitated. Any frustration now could provoke a frenzy, and she could not bear the thought of his magnificent intellect overthrown by the Beast. As the scientist paced and rifled the transcripts of the seers' ravings, she selected a bottle from the refrigerator, filled a beaker with the contents, and transferred the beaker to the microwave oven.

"Ten heads... ten arms... cuts off his own heads one by one and eats them..." Dr. Netchurch muttered. As the microwave beeped, he stopped and sniffed. He snatched the beaker of reheated blood and threw it back like a shot of bourbon. "Ah!" He frowned. "Was that...?"

"The blood with the tranquilizer, yes," Dr. Reage said. "Sir, you need it. You've been... irritable."

"Yes. Yes, I have. Thank you."

"So have all the other Kindred. The ones who aren't raving."

Dr. Netchurch stopped in mid-pace. "All of them?"

"All of them. The stress mannerisms are unmistakable."

Netchurch pondered. "Give each of them 10 milligrams of Librium in blood solution," he said. "And sodium pentathol in a serum drip for the seers." He whipped off his wire-rimmed glasses. "Let's get to the bottom of this, doctor!"

* * *

Johnny Jumpup spun the girl from one arm to the other as the big band music played behind him. Sometimes, he saw a ghostly echo of the musicians around the CD player, which perched incongruously on his lord's throne. His lordship

affected to scorn “swing” and said he permitted these dances only out of sheer magnanimity — but Johnny had seen Cassidan’s foot tapping to the beat often enough! Now, however, Johnny only had eyes for the black-haired beauty who swung on his arm about the hall. He beat a quick tattoo in counterpoint to the music out of sheer high spirits: He knew from Aronwy’s flushed cheeks and bright eyes that he’d jump her bones later that night. Commoner, ha! He’d show her there was nothing common about *him*!

Even the fire in the hearth seemed to join the dance by leaping and flickering to the beat. To mortal eyes, Cassidan’s court was just a shabby, rented hall decorated with old movie posters and wedged between a pawnshop and a mini-mart. Only the changelings, or mortals under their spell, could see the marble floor, the tapestries, the golden palm-tree columns with the living crystal birds nesting among the leaves.... Nor could mortals see the Good Folk in their true forms. They could not see the pointed ears and piquantly upswept brows of Aronwy, or Johnny’s horns and hooves. To them, his open, brocaded shirt was just polyester from K-Mart. The fire itself would look like nothing but a chafing dish.

Suddenly, the flame roared up, darkening to a bloody hue as it split and coiled around itself. For a moment, two figures struggled among the flames — a man (or at least something more or less of human shape) and an enormous

cat rearing up on its hind legs. Jets of flame lashed out at random, smashing the refreshment table and setting the tapestries on fire.

Everyone ran for the door to the street. Johnny grabbed Aronwy around the waist. With an “Alley—oop!” Johnny bounced into an aerial somersault, up and over the other revelers, Aronwy in his arms. Just as the last changeling reached the street, a great puff of fire blasted through the roof of the hall.

“Are you all right?” Johnny asked his companion.

“I think so,” she replied

“*Demon!*” shouted the pamphleteer on the corner a few yards away. Johnny saw him there daily, shoving his tracts in the faces of passers-by, exhorting them to let Jesus into their hearts. He harangued the changelings every time they had a dance, and he never saw a hint of their true selves. Now, however, Johnny saw the man brandish his cheap wooden cross at—*at him?*

“*Avaunt thee, Satan, and thy harlot with thee!*” the pamphleteer roared. Light blazed around the cross. Reeking flames burst around Johnny. He leaped away from the hellfire, frantically slapping at his scorched legs. Mundanes couldn’t *do this!* Johnny ran. At least Aronwy ran with him. The other changelings scattered too, lashed by the street preacher’s fury. Behind them, cries of joy, surprise and terror arose as other mortals found their dreams coming true — and their nightmares....



* * *
Frater Siderius pounded the table, making the scattered charts, pens and protractors jump. "Didn't I tell you?" he crowed. "Didn't I say this would happen in 1999?"

"You said that *some* major disruption would happen in 1999. Just like you predicted a world-shaking catastrophe in 1979." Ashmole spoke skeptically, but he bent to look at the crystal ball again. The orb rocked slightly on its rune-struck silver plate, in mild sympathy to the violence it showed. Ashmole saw dense, churning clouds, intermittently lit with both mundane lightning and the stranger discharges of supernatural force.

Siderius drew himself up to his full five feet. "I predicted a *drastic change* in 1979," he said. "And I stand by that prediction." He tapped one of his astrolabes. "When Pluto, terrible planet of entropy and apocalypse, passed within the orbit of mystic Neptune, planet of the infinite and indefinite, a door opened and something new entered. Not a thing or being, necessarily, but a new possibility — the unimaginable become real." He snorted. "Great God, man, I confirmed my astrological findings with *both* geomancy and the Holy Qabala. How can you doubt the findings of three precise sciences? It is not *my* fault that the order neglected to discover what new phenomenon entered the world."

Siderius tapped the other astrolabe. "Now, with Pluto approaching Neptune again — outbound this time — the door has opened again. You can see the results!" He drew Ashmole to the window and pointed an accusing finger at the brilliant, red star burning in the sky. "Something else has entered. Something you cannot ignore." Then Siderius bit his lip, his ebullient mood passing in an instant. He, too, looked at the crystal ball again. "And I think that something equally great and powerful is about to *leave* reality. But not without a fight."

* * *
"The dragon rises, the crane falls and the tiger circles 'round," Wendy murmured.

"They strike at the king's nightmares," said another vampire.

"The nightmares strike back," added a third.

"Does this make any sense to you?" one ghoulish orderly whispered to another. Dr. Netchurch shushed them both.

* * *
"Hang on!" Stepperfelt shouted — quite unnecessarily, for all his passengers had grabbed the sides or mast of his skiff as soon as the wave struck. Wave after greasy black wave crashed over the little boat, sending it spinning. The Byway they followed appeared to break into spinning whirlpools, a gibbering face at the center of each one.

"What! Is! That!" one of his passengers shouted.

"It's a storm, stupid," Stepperfelt muttered. "That's why they call this the Tempest." Then he saw what his passenger meant.

Four enormous, transparent figures fought above the Sunless Sea and sent waves of turbulence in all directions. One looked more or less human... but no human ever had such long talons, or such a distended mouth full of fangs. The other three

figures flickered and shifted. One moment they looked human, the next they were a dragon, a tiger and some sort of bird — a stork, maybe? — and a moment later they took the form of grotesque, fantastic demons. The dragon and tiger clawed at the man, who lashed out at them both with his enormous talons. Then the bird swooped in, beat at the man's head with its wings, and a boom of thunder rolled across the sea.

Stepperfelt wrestled with the rudder as he tried to turn the skiff. A flash of brilliant light distracted him; the man-tiger held a javelin of white flame and hurled it at the central figure. An enormous, black shield appeared on the man's arm and the burning javelin exploded against the shield. Even from so far away, Stepperfelt could feel the heat.

Shitshitshitshit! If only... *there*. Stepperfelt forced the skiff about. Now, each wave pushed it farther from the battle. One of the whirlpools rose from the sea. At the spout's tip, a patch of gray, wavering light appeared. Stepperfelt wrestled the skiff through the heaving sea by a mixture of skill and will. Then there was no more steering, only hanging on as the vortex swept up the little boat, around and through. The skiff vanished from the storm-tossed sea and erupted from a churning black pool in the middle of a dead, decaying forest.

Stepperfelt and his passengers picked themselves up. "Owoo, who said that death was an end to pain?" one of them complained.

"Never mind that," Stepperfelt replied. "We need to find shelter. That storm will break through in force pretty soon. When it's over..." Stepperfelt sighed. "We find out where we are."

* * *
Dr. Melliot massaged his neck as the orderlies wrestled Mr. Riddick back into bed and strapped him down. Damn, this time the man had tried to *bite* him. "Let me finish!" Riddick shouted. Melliot glared at the wall and Riddick's interrupted finger painting in his own blood and feces: Four stick-figure men with huge, fanged mouths where their heads should be, and bloody swirls and clouds around them.

Riddick definitely needed heavier sedation... he and half the ward.

* * *
"Code Ragnarok. This is not a drill. Repeat, Code Ragnarok. This is not a drill." The relays carried his voice around the world and beyond, to a hundred other installations, where hundreds of men and women dropped whatever they were doing and hurried to new posts. "Analysis indicates multiple presences, force eight to 10 at the center of the disturbance. Monitor all locations for collateral activity."

Next to Schiavelli, another man and a woman gave their own commands. "Activate solettas two through five," the woman said. A thousand miles above the Earth, four refrigerator-sized, jet-black cylinders split and slowly unfolded into silver-mirrored daisies, each a mile across. At her further commands, the great mirrors turned to face the sun, bouncing the light down to night-shrouded Bangladesh.

The other man spoke into his own microphone. "We need the Storm Chasers in there *now* to cut the cloud cover.

Use all available armaments, ground and airborne, to protect them." A pause. "That's right, this is a suicide mission."

In front of the three, their operating protocols appeared on a computer screen.

>>CODE: RAGNAROK

>>OPERATIONS BUDGET: UNLIMITED

>>PERMISSIBLE WEAPONS: UNLIMITED

>>PERMISSIBLE CASUALTIES:

>>>LOCAL INHABITANTS: 100%

>>>ASSOCIATE PERSONNEL: 100%

>>>ENLIGHTENED OPERATIVES: 100%

Schiavelli typed access codes at his keyboard. A laser scanned his fingerprints and retinal patterns. A microphone confirmed his voiceprint.

Code Ragnarok. A threat to the entire world. If the weather-shapers could not pierce the typhoon, Schiavelli had another way to bring sunlight to Bangladesh and the things that battled in the storm. He typed more codes and, 600 miles above the Earth, three more jet-black satellites unfolded to reveal racks of missiles.

A few tens of thousands of lives to save six billion lives now and countless billions to come, he told himself. A rational transaction.

* * *

The cops wrestled the screaming woman into the jail cell. "Damn, how does she keep it up?" one complained.

"Drugs, probably." The other cop shrugged. "You know. Fucking angel dust. Bad trip or something."

"Hey, don't leave no crazy bitch in here with me!" the cell's other resident called. He was a purse-snatcher arrested earlier that night. "I'm tellin' my lawyer about this!"

The cops ignored him. "So who is she, anyway?" the desk sergeant asked.

"Let's see," the first cop replied. He flipped through the arrest report. "Driver's license says she's V. Harriet Bakos, lately a resident of California. She's a long way from home."

At that moment, the woman stopped screaming and began babbling. "Oh God, mother Mary, they're ripping up the sky, they're ripping up the ground! The dead call to the dead!" She began chanting, "Dragons and tigers and cranes! Dragons and tigers and cranes, oh my god!" swinging her long, lank brown hair in time to her words.

"See what I mean?" the second cop said, as he poured a cup of coffee. "Drugs."

Then the purse-snatcher began screaming. All the cops turned and saw the tiger walk out of the jail cell, passing through the bars like a ghost. All the cops drew their guns. Two of them fired. The tiger vanished, while the purse-snatcher moaned a wet, bubbling moan and fell to the floor, blood quickly staining his shirt. A crack of thunder rolled through the precinct house, and the cops felt a powerful wind swirl around them, yet somehow leave the papers on their desks undisturbed. It began to rain in the cell.



The second cop shakily lifted his Styrofoam cup of coffee to his lips — then threw it away with a cry of disgust at the worms wriggling in it. When it splashed against the wall, however, it held no worms. His partner did not notice: Having suddenly realized that he was stark naked, he was too busy hiding behind his desk. The other officers soon found preoccupations of their own.

* * *

Lt. Roderick Crowe wished his scouts would return. He wished he was in his bomber again, high above the typhoon, instead of soaking and shivering underneath it. While he was at it, he wished the storm would just go away, and take with it whatever horror had set his spirit watchers screaming even thousands of miles away.

As if these poor people don't have enough problems, he thought. Between the rain and the storm surge, half of Bangladesh must be underwater. Thousands would die, even without a rampage of the goddamn Leeches.

His air-spirit scouts appeared before him in little puffs of mist. *Metal birds attack the clouds! Bad! one spirit said. Storm coming, exclaimed another of the excitable elementals. Go home? Home come here?*

Crowe soon learned what the spirit meant. A rippling green and yellow glow blossomed in the distance to shine faintly through the storm. He sniffed and even through the storm he could smell the sharp scent of overflowing life. *Home come here!* the little elemental announced. An eruption of the spirit world into this one? The shaman had thought he'd never live to see such a thing. His heart rose. The spirits would surely aid his pack against the deathly thing within the storm.

Then his hackles rose, and he growled. Streaks of black shot through the storm. They reminded him somehow of black ice on a road, eager to claim the life of a careless driver. Something tapped him on the shoulder and fell into the streaming mud. A finger bone? He and his packmates stared at the rain of bones.

The storm of life and death surged outward and swept over the small group of warriors.

* * *

"Chains of water," Kellner said in her usual dull tone. She no longer strained against the straps. "Water holds him. That's why they called the storm, you see, Doctor?" Melliot ignored her words and jabbed her with the sedative. Dammit, he'd get this ward *quiet!*

* * *

Mujibur knelt with his family in the upper floor of the house at the outskirts of Khulna. Three other families knelt as well. Water six feet deep covered the ground floor. Together, they prayed that the gods would cool his wrath and let them live through the storm. The wail and roar of the typhoon almost masked the sound of the building next door collapsing into the flood. Mujibur knew his own shanty must be long gone.

Three of the children cried, and their mothers could not comfort them. "There are ghosts out there," one little girl sobbed. Her mother shushed her, telling her that it was just

the wind. For a moment, Mujibur thought he saw a snarling face push from a corner of the room — no, of course it was just a trick of the light from their single, flickering oil lamp.

"Papa, will we die?" Mujibur's youngest son asked for the tenth or eleventh time that night. Mujibur gritted his teeth. Wouldn't the brat stop? Suddenly Mujibur felt a burning rage slide into his soul. "Yes!" he snapped. "We're all going to die!" He snatched the handle of a frying pan from the bundle of his family's meager possessions beside him. He'd spank the child with it just once to shut him up....

* * *

When Cyprian entered, he found two cops dead and the rest in hysterics. One held his gun on the young woman in the jail cell and screamed at her to stop it. While he screamed, one of his teeth tensed and snapped. Several others had broken already. Cyprian said, "Attend me," in a low but penetrating voice. The cops all looked at him. "I require assistance." Several of the cops hurriedly straightened their uniforms. "That's right," the gray-haired man continued. "Decorum. S.O.P. Do it by the book." One man slowly walked to his desk and sat down. Under the newcomer's gaze, the other police drifted back to their posts — those who could, at least.

"Very good. Now, unlock the cell and bring the woman to me." One of the cops obeyed slowly, walking through a swirl of ghostly snakes. Cyprian held the woman's head between his pale hands and forced her blind gaze to meet his eyes.

"Sleep," he commanded, "And do not dream. Sleep." The young woman's eyelids fluttered and closed. She sagged into the stranger's arms. The snakes and other phantoms vanished. He laid her on a desk. Cyprian addressed the police again. "Thank you. Now clean this place up. When you finish, you will not remember her, or any of this." He inspected the bodies of the purse-snatcher and the two dead cops, licked his lips, then shook himself slightly. Producing a handkerchief, he carefully took the gun of one of the dead cops and pressed it into the purse-snatcher's hand.

At Cyprian's bidding, the cops lined up before him. One by one, he stared into their eyes and told them, "The criminal grabbed the gun and started shooting. Of course you had to shoot back." Each cop nodded, then returned to his desk.

Once he finished, Cyprian hoisted the girl like a sack of flour and carried her from the police station to his Lincoln Continental. He sat beside her in the back seat. "Home," he told the driver, and sighed. Protecting the Masquerade took more effort every year. *Why do I bother?* he wondered. He looked at the young woman and hoped he could find a reason not to kill her.

* * *

Lars plunged his massive blade into the throat of the last of the scrofulous, bird-headed monsters. As the battle-fever faded, the sodden werewolves looked around them. They had arrived too late to save the men and women in the orange jumpsuits. Broken guns like none Crowe had ever seen lay in the mud. In the center of the battleground sat a plastic drum with a dish antenna on top and a few dials and meters on the side, secured

by cables staked to the ground. Around it hung the sharp, cold smell of stasis and logic, an odor smelled with the soul.

One of the fallen men groaned softly. The warriors crowded around him. Everyone's ears flattened in shock as they saw the flesh melted in rivulets across the man's eyes. "Medic!" Crowe shouted. Old habits die hard. The man feebly stirred.

"Captain?" he croaked. "Secondary... neutralized... Unit positioned... Send... planes." He coughed. "We did it, Captain. We... did it...."

Crowe felt the man's pulse. He would not live long. The shaman felt the man's soul stir, preparing to leave its vessel of flesh. A powerful soul, one that could force order on the world by will alone.

A werewolf hefted one of the strange rifles and raised it overhead, ready to smash the dish antenna with its butt. "No!" the shaman commanded. "Leave it alone!"

"You know what these people are. They want us dead, sir! Two years ago, some of them killed my cousin!"

"I said, leave it *alone*," Crowe growled. "They aren't our problem. Not now, at least. And if these things attacked them" — he kicked one of the rapidly decomposing corpses of the bird-headed beasts — "They can't be all bad. I have a feeling this machine's meant to contain the damage, somehow, or to harm whatever monster we came here to kill. We let it be!" The two werewolves glared at each other for several seconds, but the younger one quickly backed down.

"I still don't like it," he muttered.

"You don't have to," Crowe snapped. "Now, we still haven't seen what's causing all this. *Move out!*"

FINAL DEATH

Tieh Ju and Chou Li watched the supernatural storm from a mile away. The mundane storm hardly bothered them.

"It is the Yomi World," Tieh Ju explained to the curious snake-man. "Hell on Earth. If nothing contains it soon, it will cover the world. In opening doors to both the Yin and Yang Worlds, the Bodhisattvas may have acted imprudently."

Around them, the Iron Chrysanthemum's acolytes swatted away the ghosts and demons. More and more, however, she felt her attention drawn to the thick, churning clouds that drenched her and her students. Something more than the battle disturbed those clouds. She extended her subtle senses and felt the aircraft moving above the clouds, pushing at them with magical breath. *The Five Metal Dragons. Of course they would be here.* She calmed her mind and felt the Way whisper in her soul. *Too soon*, it said. She turned to the serpent-man and asked, "Honored sir, do you believe you could thicken the clouds?"

Chou Li gave her a puzzled look. "They seem thick enough... Ah! They *do* seek to part! How curious." He bowed. "I will do my poor best, revered ancient, in memory of past favors to my kind." The serpent-man concentrated, then

staggered. "So strong..." he whispered. "A mighty force pushes against the storm. I do not know how long I can do this."

"I will help you," the Iron Chrysanthemum said. She deftly slit open her palms with her lacquered fingernails and laid her hands on the snake-man's shoulders. Immediately, he straightened.

"You honor me, revered ancient," he said. "I will not fail you."

* * *

"Something's fighting us!" Schiavelli heard the pilot say. "Something must be maintaining the typhoon." Schiavelli swallowed hard. Now that the moment neared, he did not feel like a hardened, precision instrument. He reminded himself that in all likelihood the masses near the battlefield were all dead already. He typed at his keyboard again, spoke words into the microphone. Thousands of miles away, a satellite received its instructions and took aim. Rocket after rocket soundlessly erupted, hurtling down toward Bangladesh like falling stars.

* * *

Crowe prayed as he fought. An elephant-eared demon had slain two members of his pack even as they killed it. Now, they fought ghosts who whispered dreadful promises and mockeries, arousing both his rage and his terror. Sometimes, he could slash them with his claws or crush one in his fangs before it faded away but for every one he — killed? — another took its place. He called on every spirit who had ever helped him or anyone he knew and begged for someone to save his comrades, if not himself.

An incredible flash of light bleached the world into stark black and white. To his amazement, Crowe felt the blast with his spiritual sense as well. It felt like the aura around the sacred places of his kind. Every one of the phantoms vanished in the blue-white glare. Then, a roar like a falling mountain hammered against the shaman. In a moment, his dazzled eyesight cleared. A hot new wind blew, prickling with unholy radiation. *No, it couldn't be...* Another bomb exploded a few miles to his left. *Nukes? Spirit nukes? Jesus H. Christ, now I've seen everything!*

The next bomb fell very close to him. He only felt a moment of dislocation as his body vaporized, and then his thoughts passed into history.

* * *

All five of the seers screamed, "He's burning! He's burning! The sun fell from the sky and he's burning!" Dr. Reage held the video camera while Dr. Netchurch struggled to paste the EEG's electrodes to Wendy's forehead. The EEG had never worked on a vampire before, but with vampires like these you never knew....

* * *

Awake but unseeing, the woman lay on the couch. Two burly ghouls held her down. Cyprian sat wearily in an armchair beside her. The sun had been up for hours; he wanted desperately to sleep, but the terrible dreams kept waking him up again. That he could not remember the content of the nightmares frustrated him even more. He might as well do *something*.

He glared at the young woman and demanded, "What is your name?"



"V. Harriet Bakos," the woman replied. "Vampiresa Harriet Bakos." *Vampiresa?* Parents these days....

"How old are you... Harriet?"

"I'm almost 20."

"Where do you live, Harriet?"

"Trailer park...."

So far, so good. "What are these dreams you have, Harriet? How do you make other people see them?"

Harriet struggled against the strong hands of the ghouls. "All dead! The three masters, all dead when the stars fell!" Her eyes shot open. The room brightened as five balls of terrible white light shone above her and rose into miniature mushroom clouds. Cyprian howled as his flesh blistered, and he ran from the room. The ghouls dithered for a few moments between orders and emotion, then hurried after their master.

Harriet swung to her feet and staggered out another door. Eventually, she found a way out of the house.

* * *

The acolytes howled and ran as the fierce white light seared their flesh, but the Iron Chrysanthemum stood her ground. Only two of the bombs actually fell close enough for their light to burn her. Chou Li stayed beside her, holding the clouds in the grip of his will. The whirlwinds of bones, blood and gore vanished as pillars of fire rose to pierce the clouds.

"A little longer," Tieh Ju whispered to the snake-man. "Just a little longer." The Way burned in her long-dead heart as the universe moved to restore its balance. The time to stop acting hurried closer, closer. She bit her own cheek and sprayed a mouthful of her blood into the wind.

Minutes later, a vaguely human figure staggered toward her through the rain. She guessed it might be male but could not be sure. Flakes of black ash covered the remains of its naked, shriveled body. One arm hung as a stump of tattered meat. Hallucinations of pain radiated from it, like the vibrating, inner light of migraine. It had survived the wrath of three Bodhisattvas and a bath of nuclear fire. Tieh Ju knew that, even weakened as it was, she could not fight it. If she tried, it would replenish its strength on her chi.

Although the thing had no eyes, only sockets oozing black blood, it turned to face the pair. Its fanged jaws worked, and it rasped out, "Blood. Feed. Hunger." It spoke Sanskrit, the ancient tongue of India. The Iron Chrysanthemum knew the language moderately well. She released Chou Li's shoulders and nodded to him. The snake-man slumped to the ground.

Tieh Ju bowed to the swaying figure. "Good night to you, brother of Zao-Lat," she said. "Or perhaps — good morning? In any case, goodbye." As the charred figure leaped at her, she sank into the ground. The figure hissed and turned to the snake-man. Chou Li consigned his own soul to Heaven...

...And, released from Chou Li's power, the clouds rolled apart from horizon to horizon. A line of four suns spanned the sky. The figure screamed as it caught fire in the quadrupled sunlight. Chou Li thought that the entire world must hear

that shrill, inhuman scream. The thing ran only a few paces, then fell. A minute later, nothing remained but a sticky ash, already dissolving into the mud.

AFTERMATH

Cyprian ripped the gate off its hinges and stomped into the trailer park, his ghouls trotting behind him. Damn the Masquerade anyway! If he didn't get some information here, after all he'd been through, he'd break some necks. The phone book indicated the Bakos family lived here. Looking around, he saw a variety of trailers and mobile homes.

Where were the people? Why were no lights on? Cyprian stopped. *Blood*. A day old at least, but no vampire would mistake that smell. He found the first body soon after.

Black paint covered the windows of the Bakos trailer. Odd, for humans. He sent one of his ghouls in first. "Two dead, sir," the ghoul reported. Then Cyprian entered.

The swarthy, sharp features of the dead woman on the floor explained the mystery. Gypsies, of course. She must have served a vampire, one of the wandering Gangrel or Ravnos — and that lump of crumbling carrion must be the vampire. Cyprian sneered. He'd heard tell of some vampires — thin-blooded, rebellious childer — who tried to return to their mortal families. Supposedly, the Gangrel and Ravnos stayed with their mortal Gypsy relations.

Gangrel or... Ravnos. He remembered the phantoms and all-too-real nightmares that had swirled around the girl, and the illusion-casting power of the Ravnos clan. What was she?

As he walked back to his car and pondered this disturbing question, a berserk vampire attacked him. It could not speak, only shriek and howl its rage. The incendiary rounds in his guards' pistols made short work of it.

Well, that explained the deaths. Undoubtedly, one of the Gypsies' vampire kin had fallen to the Beast and attacked them, killing the other vampire. That was one loose end tied up, at least. Now, if only he could find Harriet again. Cyprian saw no way around it. Whatever the freakish girl was, she had to die. He instructed one of his ghouls to stay behind and watch for her.

* * *

Dr. Melliot tossed back his shot of whiskey and slurped at his beer. Thank God he'd persuaded the director to send him to this convention. The last week made him long for the good old days of electroshock and lobotomy.

"—and all through the ward, patients babbling about a cannibal king and wild animals. I swear, every one of the damn loonies caught it." Melliot's head whipped around toward the conversation a few seats away along the bar.

"Mine acted up too. They went on and on about a rip in the world letting in ghosts and demons. Heh, anybody know if there was a full moon last week?"

Melliot rose and walked to the other psychiatrists. Elaborately casual, he asked, "The wild animals — were they a tiger, a dragon and some sort of bird?"

The psychiatrists looked back and forth at each other. Then, they turned to the bar, ordered fresh drinks and pointedly talked about the bartender's breasts.

* * *

The portly, robed and hooded figure whispered a word and traced a series of curves on the great iron door, deactivating the last of the traps. He thrust the key into the lock, turned it three times, and pushed the door open. Then, he turned to his six companions.

"So, who wants to tell him?" he said. The six shuffled and looked at the walls or at their feet.

"Oh, you tell him, Etrius," the woman replied. "We all know he likes you best."

Etrius squared his shoulders and slowly walked to the massive stone coffin in the middle of the chamber. He pushed aside the lid of the master's tomb, then stopped. The other six froze as well. There, in the chamber 500 feet below the streets of Vienna, they heard a muffled coughing sound from inside the sepulcher, and a gout of blood vomited forth, plashing against the ceiling.

Etrius stepped back. "I think he already knows," he whispered. Together, the seven shut the doors, locked them and began the long walk back to the surface.

* * *

Schiavelli allowed himself a moment of quiet pride in himself and his squad. The symposium had judged the Bangladesh operation a complete success. The bombs had destroyed all the problems afflicting south-central Bangladesh.

Investigations would continue as to whether the bombs themselves had done the trick, or whether the creatures' own struggles had done this. In any case, the world was saved for another day, and the bomb fully vindicated.

The death toll among the masses was regrettable, of course, with an estimated 1.3 million casualties. Most of these, the report said, were caused by the vampires and other beasts rampaging through the region (Schiavelli skipped over the statistical breakdown of deaths by direct assault, induced homicidal or suicidal mania, parapsychical contagion or collateral damage). The typhoon caused an estimated 115,600 deaths by purely natural means as it flooded Bangladesh. As they were designed to do, the bomb airbursts caused serious property damage and death only in the immediate vicinity of the blast, while still slaughtering the supernatural creatures many kilometers distant. Only 60,800 Bangladeshis had died from the explosions and radiation.

Shielding the masses from knowledge of the battle would be difficult but not impossible if the group used its resources efficiently. Fortunately, Bangladesh had poor record-keeping and communications. The deaths from the typhoon would conceal the deaths from other causes. Enlightened operatives would quickly remove all physical evidence of unnatural death and adjust memories where necessary. Media operatives would ensure that no one in the rest of the world paid much attention. The cleanup would take no more than a month.



* * *

Prince Marcus Vitel of Washington, D.C., addressed his fellows at a rare, secret conclave. "We have laid out all the evidence available to each of us: the faked weather satellite photos of the typhoon; the massacred villages in eastern India, Bangladesh and Burma; the reported exsanguination of the bodies; the destruction of all the Kindred in Calcutta; and the madness that led Ravnos throughout the world to attack each other. I can see only one explanation for these events."

"A Methuselah?" Queen Anne asked.

"Methuselahs wouldn't make the whole clan go mad," Francois Villon objected.

"Correct," Vitel said crisply. "If tradition is to be believed, only *one* sort of vampire can send its power throughout the entire world. Just as all the Ravnos, scattered across at least three continents, have only *one* thing in common."

"An Antediluvian," Anne said hollowly. "Jesus, Mary and Joseph, it has to be their founder!"

"But — they *must* all be extinct," Mustafa of Istanbul said. "My sire always swore that they were real and ruled us all, and he never told me the truth about *anything*."

"There's always a first time," Guilbeau of the Riviera said with a shrug.

"So they exist. So one woke up. What do we do about it?" the Prince of Amsterdam asked.

"Do?" Rome laughed. "What do you 'do' about the sunrise?"

Vitel slammed his fist against the table. "*That's enough*," he said. "I *will not* roll over and bare my throat to anyone, not to Caine himself. Back in the Anarch Revolution, the Tzimisce and Lasombra supposedly destroyed their Antediluvians. If they could do it, so can we."

The princes sat silently for a long moment. Villon eyed Vitel.

"Never mind that," Rome finally said. "What do we tell the other Kindred? 'This concludes the Elysium. Oh, by the way, the Antediluvians are real and waking up. First item on the agenda for the next meeting will be preparing for the end of the world.' I think not! We'd have a riot!"

"We say *nothing*," Vitel replied. "We tell only our primogen, other princes we can trust and the justicars. Revealing the truth to our lessers would only frighten them. What's worse, the news would make the Sabbat seem more credible."

"We maintain our authority only to the extent that we are feared," Vitel concluded. "If our childer fear the Antediluvians more than they fear us, they will cease to obey. Bid your sheriffs and scourges to crack down harder than before. We will have order!"

"And while we distract the childer with purges, we will seek ways to kill our progenitors... and build impregnable shelters for ourselves. If worse comes to worst, we throw our childer to the Ancients' fangs and hope that satisfies their

hunger." Vitel smiled. "I prepared for a nuclear war. Could Gehenna be worse?"

If any of the other princes thought so, they found it prudent not to answer, except for Villon, who whispered, "Again?"

* * *

In a daze, Harriet wandered the streets. She was aware of nothing but a terrible sense of desolation. She had seen bombs, she had seen four suns in the sky — then she'd heard a scream that went on and on, echoing through her soul. She felt as if something had broken within her; as if she had lost something precious without ever knowing what it was, and she wanted to reclaim it.

She stood before the trailer where her parents dwelled. The door hung open. She went inside. Her mother lay dead, a bloating corpse. Her father... could that scattering of ash be her father?

Harriet lurched from the trailer. Now she had a grief she could name; it pushed aside the nameless grief and the memory of the scream. She could recognize the world again. She recognized that she sat next to another dead body, a fresh one. Vaguely, she remembered seeing him before, in a... house? Yes, he had held her arms while she had struggled and raved. His gun lay on the ground nearby. When she had finished throwing up, Harriet cried. When she finished crying, she checked the gun. The clip was empty, but she took it anyway. Perhaps she could pawn it for enough money to buy a bus ticket to another town. Whoever or whatever killed her parents, she knew she was not safe in this city anymore. If nothing else, the police would want to talk to her, and Harriet very much did not want to talk to them.

She stared up at the night sky, and her prayer for her parents froze on her lips. A glittering, red star drew her gaze. As she watched, it pulsed brighter and brighter

"This is your fault!" she shouted at it. "You did this!" She knew, with absolute, inexplicable certainty, that the star was evil and that it would destroy the world.

* * *

Chou Li sat waiting for three days and nights where Tieh Ju had sunk into the ground. When she did not emerge, he burned an offering of incense to her soul and began the long journey back to China. He had a temple to rebuild. He did not care whether the new temple would last a thousand years or only a night; the prospect of building it filled him with purpose enough.

WHAT HAPPENED?

Okay, no more veiled hints and contradictory rumors. This is the proverbial *it*: The straight dope, the *truth* about a great event in the contemporary World of Darkness.

Storytellers, we've avoided setting a specific date for the Week of Nightmare to allow you to work it into your chronicles as you see fit. Those of you wishing to adhere to *Vampire's* canonical timeline and setting are encouraged to begin implementing these events *immediately* — July 1999 — as future game supplements will certainly take these events into account.

GEHENNA BEGINS EARLY

Here's what happened. The Ravnos clan originally came from India, where it inspired many legends of illusion-casting demons and deadly trickster-vampires. The Ravnos who came west with the Gypsies were merely a trickle from this mighty source — a few poor relations wandering far from home.

India also lies on the fringe of the Cathayan vampires' sphere of influence. The mysterious Cathayans, who call themselves "Kuei-jin," have fought the Ravnos for millennia over the right to exist at the western edge of the Middle Kingdom.

The Ravnos fared poorly in the last few decades. In desperation, they took a page from the Sabbat's strategy book and Embraced veritable armies of childer to hurl against the invading Cathayans. The survivors often sired large, expendable broods of their own.

In the past five years, this process resulted in the Ravnos siring large numbers of thin-blooded vampires... and, more importantly, in the Final Deaths of large numbers of Cainites, thin-blooded and otherwise.

The mere presence of hordes of thin-blooded vampires means nothing. The elders who believe they will cause Gehenna are deluded. Large numbers of vampire Final Deaths, however, *does* hasten Gehenna. They disturb the sleep of the ancient Methuselahs and Antediluvians. Thin-blooded vampires die very easily, as vampires go (yes, the Camarilla princes who think they can forestall Gehenna by exterminating the Last Generations are causing the very event they fear).

First, several Ravnos Methuselahs awakened, disturbed from their cold torpor by the incessant conflicts of the vampires warring on the surface. This helped the clan: Once the ancient vampires slaked their thirst (admittedly, on other Ravnos vampires), they made relatively short work of the Indian Kuei-jin.

Then, the Ravnos Antediluvian awoke, smelling the spilled vitae... of Methuselahs. As vampires age, they must feed upon increasingly potent blood. First, the blood of animals no longer sustains them. After several centuries, only the vitae of other vampires can satisfy their thirst. The true Antediluvians are *more than 10 millennia old*. They passed the "Methuselah's Thirst" stage long ago.

Did the Antediluvian utterly devour its childer and grandchilder, or did it merely destroy their minds, turning them into soulless vessels of vitae with no wills of their own? It doesn't matter — in India, Gehenna began ahead of schedule.

The raging power of an active Antediluvian echoed around the Earth. Worldwide, psychics, seers and lunatics felt the Ancient awaken, even though none had any idea what was truly happening. The Ancient plagued the dreams of everyone on Earth, twisting them into nightmares — but some people, living or undead, could not escape by waking up.

Other supernatural powers and principalities noticed as well and converged on the Antediluvian. They joined battle in the region where Ravnos India and Cathayan Indochina meet: the floodplains of Bangladesh.

Three of the oldest and most powerful Cathayans (known to their kind as Bodhisattvas) attacked the Antediluvian. One of them created a hurricane as both a weapon and a defense: The thick clouds blotted out the sunlight, allowing the vampires to fight through the day. The Bodhisattvas also used their powers to open rifts into strange, spiritual worlds unknown to most Western vampires. This tactic caused a second storm, a supernatural storm of colliding worlds. The battle echoed throughout all these worlds — the worlds of dreams, spirits, demons and the dead.

The world's largest and most powerful group of sorcerers also took part in the battle. These mages use magick in the form of technology to promote that technology and protect ordinary humans from the menace of the supernatural. The wizards' super-science identified vampires as the most powerful entities in the hellstorm, so they tried using sunlight against the Kindred and Kuei-jin. When they could not part the clouds to reflect sunlight onto the battle, the sorcerers brought their most powerful weapons into the hellstorm: neutron bombs, built to project a radiation lethal to supernatural beings. They worked. The bombs destroyed all the supernatural creatures except the Antediluvian itself — but the bombs and a day and night of battle with the Bodhisattvas had weakened the Ancient enough that, when the storm clouds parted, the reflected sunlight destroyed the ancient Cainite in a fulfillment of God's Biblical curse.

At that moment, most of the Ravnos in the world went mad, driven into the clutches of the Beast by the sudden backlash of hatred that washed through the fallen Ancient's lineage. It would seem that prophecy rang true — the Third Generation truly wanted to destroy its treacherous childer. Ravnos across the globe felt an insane, insatiable hunger for each other's vitae. When the murderous madness passed several nights later, very few Ravnos remained — perhaps a hundred in all the world, with no powerful elders. At a stroke, the Ravnos were obliterated.

STORYTELLING THE WEEK OF NIGHTMARE

Storytellers might want to incorporate the Week of Nightmare directly into their chronicles. Here's how the various events play out in game terms. Note that while major events happen at night, Bangladesh time, they may happen during the American or European day. For Europe, the time difference is three to six hours; for most of North America, it is more than 10 hours. Thus, midnight in Bangladesh is evening in Europe and around midday in the US.

NIGHTS ONE AND TWO: THE ANTEDILUVIAN WAKES

Most vampires merely feel edgy, anxious and irritable. Nightmares trouble their sleep, but they cannot remember what they dreamed. Seers, however, all have an episode of spontaneous Insight — with three extra dice on the roll to determine its success. They may suffer Insight shock. What's more, the Insight trance does not stop on its own. To break

free of the trance for the rest of the night, seer characters must expend a point of Willpower.

As always, the seers' visions are couched in symbolism. They perceive the Ravnos Antediluvian in the form of Ravana, the ten-headed king of the demonic Rakshasas.

Mortals suffer from the same nightmares as vampires. Mortal psychics, the mentally ill, sensitive children and visionary artists must make Willpower rolls (difficulty 6) to resist falling into a raving, nightmare trance like the seers'. They, however, see considerably less (for mechanical purposes, assume that each affected mortal has three dots of Insight).

NIGHT THREE: THE BATTLE BEGINS

When the three elder Cathayans attack the Ravnos Antediluvian, madness and chaos sweep through the supernatural world. The battle's effects on other supernatural races need not be detailed: This is, after all, a Vampire supplement.

Seers continue to rave. Mortals and many vampires continue to have nightmares. Ravnos vampires, however, "tune in" to their ancestor and receive its overflowing power and rage.

For the duration of the battle, every Ravnos vampire gains one to three dots of Chimerstry. If this pushes a character's Chimerstry rating over 5, so be it. Generational limits are waived for the battle's duration. The tide of rage and madness, however, makes Ravnos Chimerstry unreliable during this time — a few of the surviving Ravnos believe that the Antediluvian consumed all of the mystical power for itself during the struggle. All difficulties associated with Chimerstry should vary wildly on the third night, set anywhere between 1 and 10 by the Storyteller at the change of each scene.

Additionally, Ravnos vampires also become very likely to frenzy. Ravnos characters receive +2 difficulty to their rolls to resist frenzy during the third night... and with both the living and the undead all feeling edgy, the Storyteller has ample excuses for plenty of frenzy checks. While a Ravnos frenzies, her augmented Chimerstry powers do not cost Willpower points.

NIGHTS FOUR THROUGH SEVEN: FINAL DEATH AND AFTERMATH

The Antediluvian dies in the wee hours of the morning, Bangladesh time. In Europe, the time is evening; in the US, it's late morning to early afternoon.

The moment the Antediluvian meets Final Death, seers and other visionaries snap out of their trances. Ravnos vampires lose their added dots of Chimerstry.

All Ravnos, awake or asleep, *antimibu* or otherwise, hear the Antediluvian's death-scream and feels its hunger, rage and terror. Immediately, they feel a roaring hunger, no matter how much blood they have in their bodies — a hunger for the vitae of other Ravnos. In a final effort to purge the world of its childer, the Antediluvian cursed its descendants with an overwhelming, cannibalistic urge.

To resist this hunger and avoid frenzy, a Ravnos character must garner 5 successes on a Self-Control (or Instinct)



roll. Ravnos vampires of 12th to 15th Generations have a difficulty of 8, whereas eighth- to 11th-generation Ravnos have a difficulty of 9, and Ravnos of seventh generation or lower have a difficulty of 10. A Ravnos must make another hunger-frenzy check whenever she wakes up at night or meets another Ravnos (even if she doesn't recognize the individual as a clanmate — the Blood calls to her).

This blood bath continues for three nights. If a Ravnos character can survive these nights, the hunger fades as the Antediluvian sinks into the mire of legend.

FACING GEHENNA

Most vampires have no idea what happened during the Week of Nightmare. They know that nightmares troubled their sleep for several days, but they cannot remember what they dreamed about. They might know that seers, lunatics and various “sensitive” mortals fell into trances to rave about a mysterious battle (oddly enough, Malkavians were not especially affected). They might even know that the Ravnos have all but killed themselves off.

In short, most Kindred know that something big and bad happened. Many suppose it a foretaste of Gehenna, perhaps because vampires tend to see *any* disaster they can't explain as a portent of Gehenna.

This time, however, the doomsayers are absolutely correct. The Antediluvians *are* waking up, they *are* as powerful and destructive as legends said they would be, and Gehenna *has* begun. With the combined efforts of every potent force in the World of Darkness only barely able to stem the tide of the first ripple in this apocalyptic ocean, what will happen when *all* the remaining Antediluvians rise in tandem? Indeed, how many Antediluvians *are* there? When will Gehenna arrive?

Can anything stop it?

THE RED STAR

Something new has appeared in the sky of the World of Darkness. Mere mortals cannot see it at all. To supernatural creatures such as vampires or ghouls, it looks like a red star — fairly bright as stars go, but easy to overlook. To beings with at least two dots in *Auspex*, however, the Red Star looks very different. It burns as brightly as *Venus*, thus making it hard to miss, and a red haze or nimbus surrounds it like the halo of a comet. Kindred who have the *Oracle Merit* see it this way too; the Red Star also may appear in *Insight* visions.

The Red Star has nothing to do with the Week of Nightmares *directly*. Anyone who can see its halo, however, instinctively knows that it foretells evil. The Red Star's hellfire glow rouses other evils from sleep. The Ravnos Antediluvian would have awakened anyway, but the Red Star woke it a few months sooner than otherwise.

From: "Justin R. Achilli" - Vampire Developer
To: White Wolf Office
Subject: Erotica Title on Server
Date: Tue, Feb 23, 1999, 10:59 AM

For those interested, I have placed Lucy Taylor's erotica novella, *Eternal Hearts*, on the server.

First, this represents a new direction for our company and I thought a "first look" at some of the new material would interest you.

Second, some of this stuff is really hard-core, and you may want to be aware that your parents will disown you for working here.

As always, this is super-confidential and Steve will kung-fu your throat if you do the wrong thing with it. I recommend not even printing it out; just look it over on your monitor at your leisure.

Regards,
Justin

eternal hearts

chapter one

spires.

spindle-thin, ornately carved church spires rising high over her head as she lay on her back being bludgeoned.

That was the first memory that returned.

After that, blood, her blood, so much blood that she couldn't see the spires anymore, couldn't even see the preternaturally beautiful face of the man standing over her, watching the others who were slaughtering her now, relentlessly, artfully, torturously, five of them altogether, two women, three men. They took turns at times, at other times collaborated to concoct new and inventive horrors to perpetrate upon her, not as beautiful as the man who watched, but similar of feature—the diabolical mirth around the eyes, the seductive curl to the lips, a certain restrained, reptilian torpor to the movements, as though theirs was a common lineage, a similar damnation.

Raw, gleeful laughter as she writhed on the ground, her ankles grabbed, her legs parted and stretched wide, like a wishbone ready to be snapped. Then her jaws uncrunched open, mouth violated while others made use of the rest of her, fucking her everywhere possible and then, when they were bored with that, opening up new, unnatural channels they could desecrate. And the beautiful one standing over her still not deigning to touch her, not even in some vain, damaged, but already broken



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when the blood of caine
will be weak

The Curse of Caine has existed for so long, it has finally begun to weaken. Elders' blood, passed from one childe to the next for generations, no longer holds the potency it once had. Too many childe have been Embraced in the Final Nights — and reckoning must come for these illegitimate vampires. If it does not, the world may end.

Gehenna will soon
be upon you

The **Time of Thin Blood** allows players to portray the hunted childe of high-generation vampires. In addition, the Final Nights are upon us, and this book offers Storytellers a glimpse at one of the first events in the unfolding Gehenna. Rich in story and character content, **The Time of Thin Blood** is the first step toward the world's ultimate demise... or salvation.

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VAMPIRE
THE MASQUERADE

