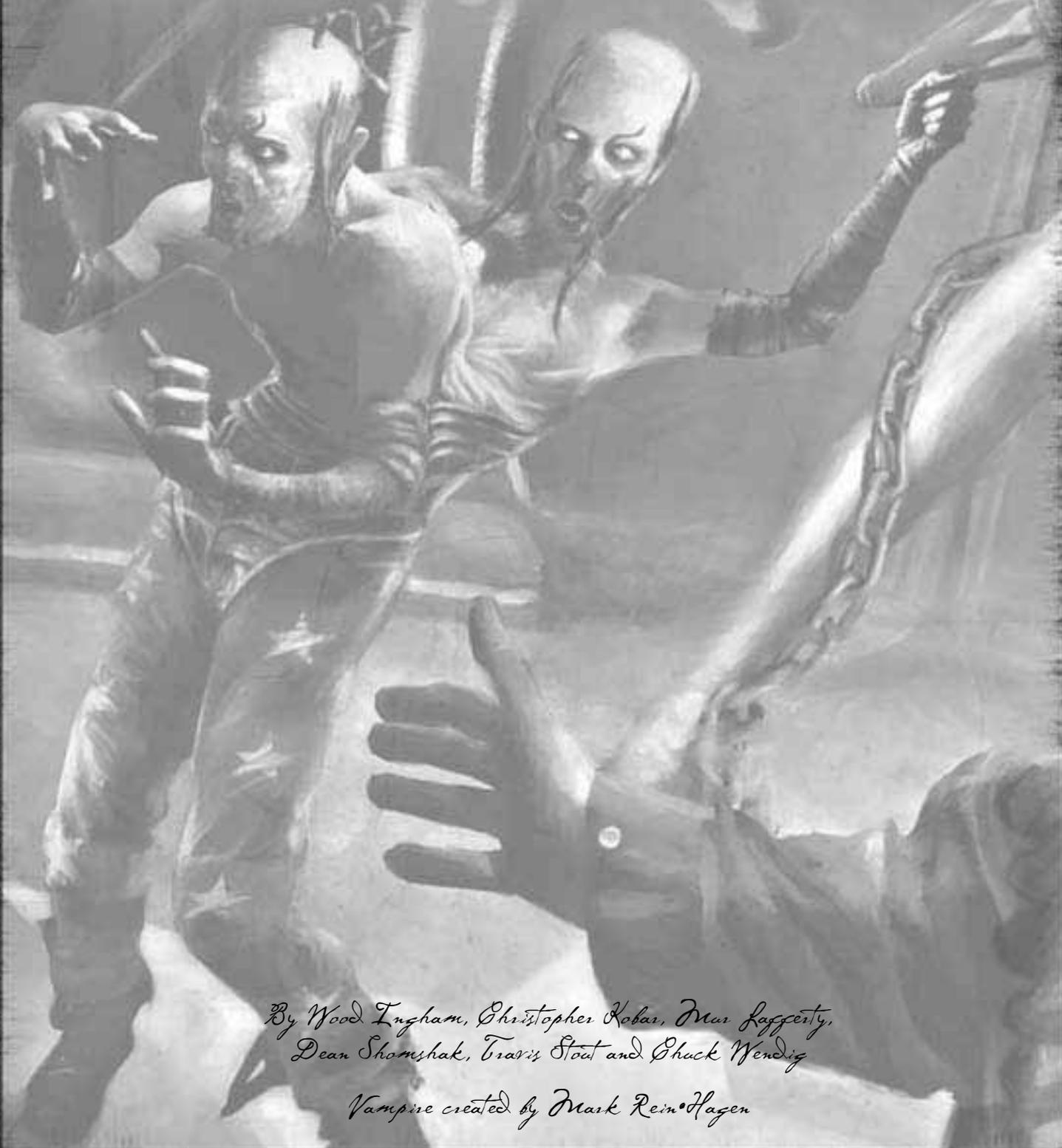


BLOODLINES: THE LEGENDARY

the World of Darkness

a sourcebook for
Vampire
THE MASQUERADE

BLOODLINES: THE LEGENDARY



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PROLOGUE:

BREAD AND CIRCUSES

by Chuck Wendig

Carlo was scared enough to piss blood. He'd heard the stories, yet here he was, in the belly of the whale.

He looked across the table, the polished mahogany catching the flicker of fire from the burning sconces. Sitting opposite of him was Gould, the motherfucker, that *cold bastard* with his dark eyes and little mouth and his hands folded tightly beneath his underarms. All around them was opulence: cherrywood bookshelves stacked with rare texts, an original Otto Dix (the one with that awful trench warfare, with the blasted wasteland and

all the corpses) hanging above the mantle, and red satin pillows in every corner. At the far end of the room, a dog rested its head on a nest of those pillows. It was a skinny hound that obviously had to fight for every morsel in this godforsaken household. It stared at him with those hollow eyes. Quietly, Carlo said a little prayer to himself.

"Uncomfortable?" Gould asked.

"Maybe," he said, trying to contain his spite. It was easier if he just didn't look at the sonofabitch. "We've both heard the stories."

Gould shrugged. "Could be just that. Stories. Legends."

"Hope so. They can't really eat people. They just can't."

"As I said, probably just a story. Besides, at the very least they certainly have good taste." He gestured toward the gilded tray that sat between them.

Upon the tray were three clay bowls, each filled with a different draught of blood. Earlier, one of the fat monsters in a double-breasted suit came and brought out the tray, and explained that the first dish was a homeless woman's, the second was from some corporate tycoon, and the third was squeezed from a young boy. "I've always heard they had refined palates."



"Blood is blood," Carlo said, dismissing it. "I just want to get this over with."

"Prince Claudia seems to put a great deal of stock in these gentlemen. They've honed both their tastes *and* their arbitration skills to a fine edge. Or so she says." He dipped a finger into the boy's blood and suckled it like a lollipop. A wild look flashed over his eyes for a moment. Carlo had seen that look before. The Lords hid madness behind their calm veneers.

Carlo snorted. "Yeah, they're First Estate, you're First Estate, I'm not gonna get shit out of this deal. We both know it."

"Listen, I slighted you at Elysium. In front of the wicked gossips, no less. That's got to be worth something. Whether it's worth what you think it's worth, well, let's just hear what Jubal Macellarius has to say. We can all agree to be reasonable, I hope."

"Reasonable," Carlo scoffed. "Yeah."

The parlor doors swung open, and as if on cue, Jubal Macellarius came strolling in.

To say Jubal was fat was an understatement on par with calling the ocean wet. The man's body was an eye-opening topography of uneven shapes poorly concealed beneath greasy white skin. He had stuffed himself into a thin cotton robe, red as the Devil's blood. The robe fluttered open as he walked as the sash was untied. He flaunted his nudity with little care. Bits of blood and something else hung dried in his chest hair.

Over his shoulder, Jubal had slung a thick sack, looking like some vile Santa Claus: fat, drunk and overfed from eating all his elves.

He smiled broadly, lips stretching from cheek to bulbous cheek.

"Boys," Jubal greeted with a sweep of a plump arm. He giggled girlishly. "Truly a delight to have both of you supping at my table. Welcome to the estate. I know myself and my associates hope you are warm and comfortable on this bitter winter's evening?"

"Sure," Carlo said, shifting nervously in his seat.

"Of course," Gould answered. "Thank you for your hospitality."

"Is the Vitae to your liking?" Before they could answer, however, he pressed a thick finger to his lips, lost in a moment's reverie. "The homeless female,

you'd think her blood would be somehow crass, boorish even. And yet it's among the finest I've tasted. Sweet like *crème brûlée*, but not overmuch." He kissed his finger gently.

"The aperitif has been excellent," Gould said.

Carlo didn't even know what an aperitif was. He just gave a lazy thumbs-up. "Yeah, excellent."

With that, Jubal snapped his fingers. Another obese man came in through the side door, wearing a suit similar to the one who had brought the tray in the first place, except this fellow didn't look quite as stout. He took the tray, and in its place set down a small silver brazier with a cone of incense in the center. He lit it with a long match (Carlo flinched, but he noted that Gould simply frowned), and covered it. Spires of smoke drifted upward. Carlo smelled... apples? No, *apple pie*. He forced in an awkward breath, enjoying the odor. It almost relaxed him, but not quite.

Jubal spoke. As he did, he whirled around the room, moving swiftly enough to intimate that he was lighter on his feet than his egregious body mass indicated. The sack remained over his shoulder.

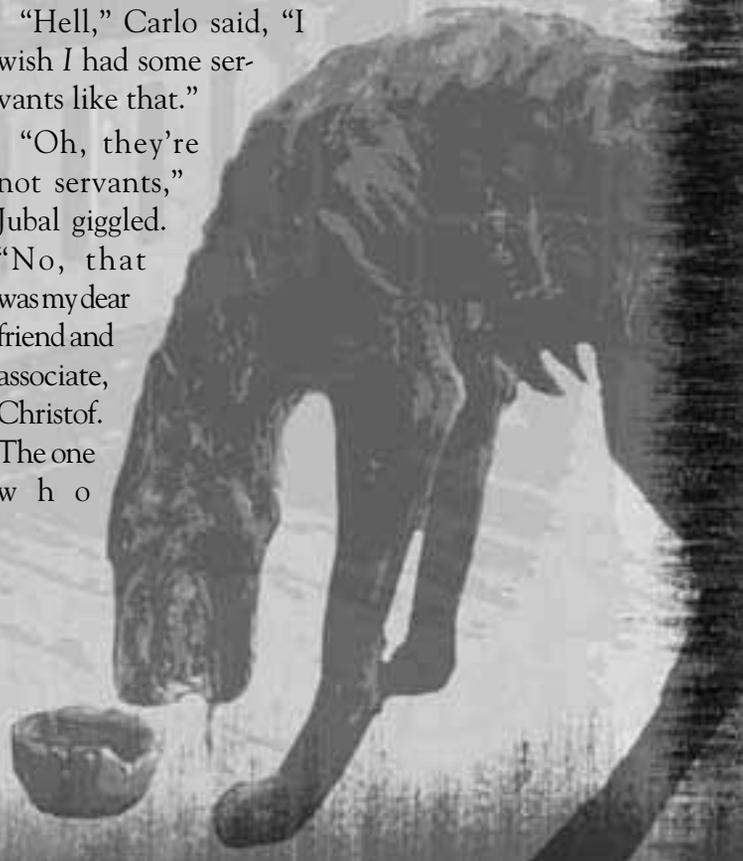
"Thank you, Christof," Jubal said, snapping his fingers again. "Leave the blood for Caesar."

The other man took the tray of Vitae bowls and set it down in front of the dog. The animal stretched languidly, and padded over to it and lapped delicately. Then the man retreated from the room.

"Hell," Carlo said, "I wish I had some servants like that."

"Oh, they're not servants," Jubal giggled.

"No, that was my dear friend and associate, Christof. The one who



brought in your food was Geoffrey. Both relatives and bearers of the Macellarius name.”

Carlo didn't know what to say. A chill climbed his spine, and he wasn't sure why. Gould was quiet, too, staring forward with his lips pursed and arms still crossed.

“But that is neither here nor there,” Jubal said, still a hurricane of movement, the robe blowing a breeze onto Carlo every time he passed. He smelled rancid meat with every circumnavigation of the table. Jubal gesticulated as he spoke. “The reason we are here today is a matter of negotiation, is it not?”

“Yeah,” Carlo said. “Gould over here decided that he would say something that wasn't too nice —”

“I know the situation intimately,” Jubal interrupted, “no worries about that. I've seen the tapes from the security cameras. While your bodies

are little more than an ugly smear blurred together, your voices were quite crisp.”

“What I said was perhaps uncalled for,” Gould conceded.

Carlo's brow darkened. “And I want something for it. Territory. Some personnel. Maybe money. I dunno, *some damn thing*.”

“Would you tithe your reward to the Church?” Macellarius asked.

“No, this is for me. Doesn't have anything to do with them.”

“Not devout, are we?”

“What's that got to do with anything?”

Jubal waved it off. “Nothing, really. Idle curiosity. You're both familiar with gladiatorial combat? You know, Rome, the Colosseum, all of that ancient silliness?”

“Is this more of that idle curiosity?” Carlo asked.

“No, *this* is relevant.”

Both Carlo and Gould conceded that yes, they know of what he spoke.

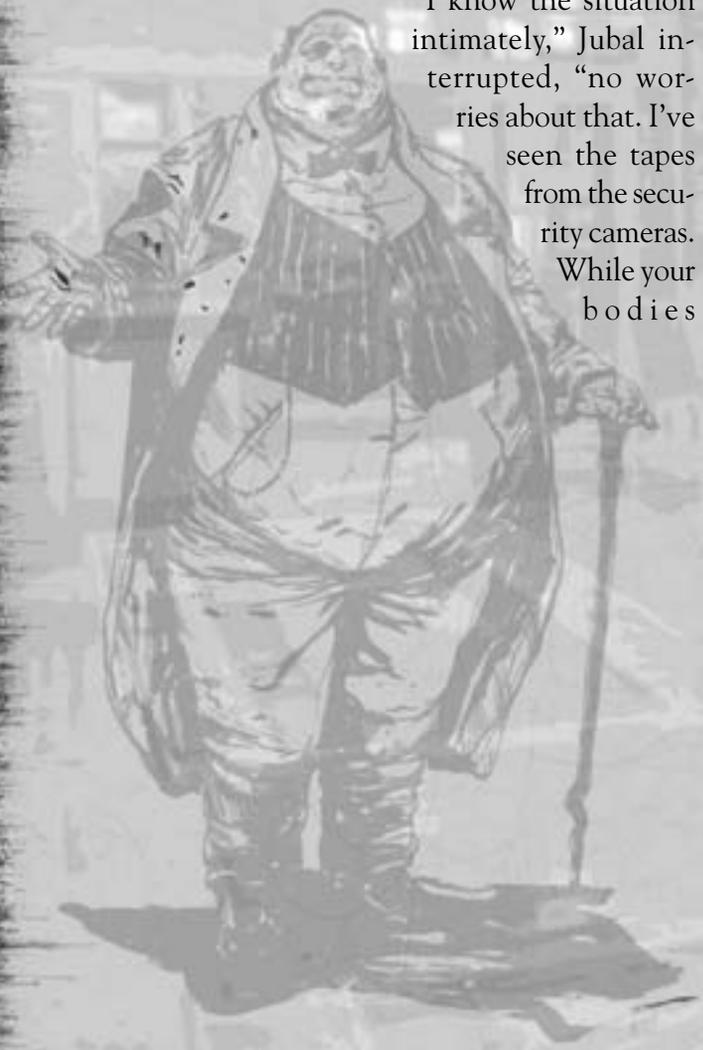
“Good.” Jubal set the sack down on the table and upended it. The first thing that rolled out was a wooden stake. After that, a rusty camping hatchet. Carlo's eyes widened as he saw a few feet of barbed wire, a can of chemical mace, and a set of brass knuckles. “Normally, I like to arbitrate over a cup of blood and a slice of meat, and discuss things like civilized compatriots. Tonight, alas, I do not have the time. Important guest later this evening, a true *locus consularis*, the Hierophant of the Circle of the Crone. So, we must cut to the quick.”

Carlo stood and backed away from the table, hands up. “What the fuck? What kind of bullshit is this?”

“No ‘bullshit,’ I'm afraid,” Jubal said, finally closing his robe and tying the sash in a wide-looped bow. “Tonight, it is the survival of the fittest. Whosoever claims the top of the food chain gets what he deserves. Whoever falls to the other's hand... well, he *also* gets what he deserves.”

“You're kidding,” Carlo said, half-laughing at the absurdity of it all.

“Hardly,” Jubal said, plucking a curl of gristle from his chest hair and popping it in his mouth like a kernel of popcorn. His jowls worked as he chewed. With that, he began to withdraw backward from the room, a ghastly grin on his podgy face.



“Gould, let’s tell this fool that Claudia would never—“

But then Carlo saw. Gould had already picked up the hatchet and the stake and was moving around the side of the table. Suddenly, his dark eyes reminded Carlo of a shark’s. Black, empty, hungry.

“Goddamn!” he cried, jumping for the knuckles as Gould leapt. The two crashed to the ground, the chair tumbling atop them.

* * *

The sounds in the other room finally died down. Jubal held the little mirror up and picked at his teeth with a toothpick made from a fingerbone. He eased a red, stringy fleck from between a cuspid and an incisor, and flicked it away.

Sighing, he set the mirror down and went back into the dining room.

It looked like a bomb had gone off. The table lay on its side (a pity, but tables could be replaced), and only splinters remained of one of the chairs. The incense burner was on the floor, ash spilling out. Clucking his tongue, Jubal kicked it out of the way.

In the other chair sat Carlo.

A length of barbed wire was wrapped around the stretched cheeks of his wide-open mouth, binding his head to the back of the chair. A stake — not the one Jubal had included in the bag, but a shaft of wood from the destroyed chair — jutted awkwardly from the Kindred’s breastbone. Bits of his face were bitten off: the nose, an ear, a flap of cheek.

Gould sat in the corner, slumped next to Caesar the dog.

“I did it,” he mumbled, a bubble of blood growing and then popping upon his lips. His chest heaved, and suddenly he dropped to all fours and puked up a gush of red. In the fluid splashed bits of Carlo.

Jubal smiled warmly and ambled over to his new protégé. He stroked Gould’s dark hair. “You won’t always have to throw it up. That is, of course, unless you want to.”

Gould burped, and looked like he wanted to die. He stared shamefully down at his own fibrous regurgitate.

“Worry not. Christof will clean it up; that is his job. You did very well tonight. If you wish, you’re free to eat the rest of him and dust him to ash. If not, we will dispose of him properly. Your decision.”

Gould rubbed his eyes. “I’m good, thank you.”

“Understandable. Well, dearest Gould, we’ll make it official later tonight with the others attending, but I’d like to be the first to welcome you to the family.” Jubal bent down — no small feat for a man whose physique represented the bulge of several misshapen pumpkins — and kissed Gould on the temple, savoring the tang of fear and desperation.

“Thank you, *summus* Jubal.”

“The pleasure is mine. You’ll m a k e a fine addition to the lineage.”

Jubal paused, and rubbed his chin. “Though to be honest, you’ll look much better with a little extra *weight* on those skinny bones.”

Jubal cackled, shaking his head at the joy of it all!





Introduction

Hey, never let it be said that we don't listen to you.

Feedback from **Bloodlines: The Hidden** was good, but in the spirit of constructive criticism, we realized that you'd like to see a little more about each bloodline. While this means numerically fewer bloodlines per book, it also means more information on each bloodline per book. In creating this volume of the series, we increased the word count per bloodline by almost 50 percent.

The common theme among the Kindred in **Bloodlines: The Legendary** is that each is somehow known outside of its local domain or region. Each has a reputation — a legend — that precedes it in many cities and domains. Some are legendary among the Kindred alone. A few may be legendary among mortals or other supernatural creatures, in one way or another.

“Legendary” can mean a variety of things. In this book, however, legendary does not often mean “totally bad-ass!” Rather, it means worthy of talk, of memory and of fear. Some of these bloodlines draw on traditional vampire concepts and folklore, known to mortals and other monsters in the World of Darkness. Others involve legends that aren't necessarily associated with vampires. Still others are simply legendary among the Kindred (or the Kindred of a particular region).

Bron: These Kindred are tied to the questing aspects of the legendary Holy Grail. The bloodline often appears in one of two primary aspects, that of the Christian Grail hunter (Joseph of Arimathea; the classic Arthurian knight) or that of Bran the Blessed (a Celtic folk hero).

The Carnival: This bloodline is effectively a nomadic cult of carnival freaks. Their Discipline allows them to contort themselves, do strange things with their limbs, and eventually even “absorb” another vampire into their bodies to create a monstrous sort of conjoined twin.

Children of Judas: These Kindred are fascinated with suicide, and have ties (obviously) to Judas, the original betrayer, who killed himself in despair over his treachery. They're more than a little morbid, and they have the ability to prod victims to depths of misery and despair.

Galloi: This Nosferatu bloodline can abate some of its fearsomeness, but its members must bathe in their own blood.

Gulikan: These vampires have an amazingly acute sense of smell. They're a Daeva bloodline, so that refined sense of smell has actually turned into an olfactory addiction. They have a significant element of exotic mystery about them, as well, making them an interesting “visitor” bloodline.

Kuufukuji: The Hungry are... complex. On one hand, they're ascetics, monks and contemplatives. On the other hand, their origin story associates them with prostitutes. A balance of opposed principles punctuates their Discipline, as well, which focuses on understanding and controlling the Beast.

Macellarius: These vampires are natural gluttons, gorging themselves on human flesh and growing corpulent in the process. The bloodline supposedly has its roots in ancient Rome, and where other Kindred find them, the Macellarius accumulate both power and success.

Melissidae: Individual members of the Melissid bloodline build discrete hives of minions, whom they brainwash into losing sense of self. You'll see a strong insect theme here, both among actual bees and people who swarm around the vampire.

Players: This bloodline of Kindred actively upholds the pop-culture aspect of vampires. The

shallowness of the bloodline makes for individuals of storied depth (interesting themes include loss of identity, delusions of what vampirism is, etc.). The fact that they're predicated on what *others* think vampires are offers a self-aware twist on vampires as a whole and the bloodline system in general.



Bron

*The king is the land, and the land is the king. We are Damned, and so too is our kingdom damned.
Only through the blessed Grail that cursed us may we yet find peace.*

Legends of the Holy Grail have existed in one form or another for more than a thousand years. Before Christian doctrine presented the tale of Christ's sacred cup, Welsh stories spoke of vessels that restored the dead to life, and Norse tales depicted enchanted cauldrons that produced endless bounty. Stories of magical cauldrons, chalices and cups with similar life-giving properties can be found in the mythologies of the Celts, the ancient Greeks and even as far abroad as the Chinese. In medieval Europe, epic romances were written about brave, worthy knights who sought the religious enlightenment of the Grail.

Through the shadows of these tales came the Bron, an ancient bloodline of indeterminate origin. The Bron were once mighty kings, lords of the night who ruled the British Isles with an iron fist. Somewhere in the murky depths of history, obscured by time and the torpid dreams of elders, one member called down a terrible curse on his line for daring to seek the divine power of the Holy Grail for himself. Modern Bron disagree vehemently on whether this progenitor drank from the Cup of Christ or whether the true nature of the Grail lay further back in time, with Bran the Blessed and the enchanted cauldron that returned the dead to life, but the repercussions of the curse reverberate into this very night.

The Bron are a bloodline in exile, forever unable to attain the rulership that is their destiny. The curse laid on the bloodline's founder causes the land itself to rise up against any Bron who attempts to claim domain. No matter whether the domain is in the heart of the city or the depths of the wilderness, the land will not accept a Bron as its master. For any Ventrue, being unable to rule securely within one's own domain is a terrifying and horrific prospect, but to the Bron, who still remember the glories of their ancient kingdoms, it is quite possibly a fate worse than Final Death.

Forced to skulk on the edges of Kindred society with no domains to call their own, Bron often choose nomadic Requiems rather than bending knee to elders and suffering like servants in others' realms.

These wandering "Fisher Kings" are a part of the bloodline's sacred Grail Quest, undertaken in the late Middle Ages and continuing to this night. The Bron



reason that the Grail cursed their founder, and so, if it is found again by a worthy Kindred, it can be used to lift the curse and allow the Bron to rule once again. That this was this same monumental hubris that brought down the curse on the line in the first place has not gone unnoticed by more cynical Bron.

With such a clear and obvious (if somewhat unrealistic) goal before them, one would think the Bron would present a focused and unified front to the rest of Kindred society. Sadly, as is often the case among vampires, the Bron are as split by ideological disputes as any other group of Kindred.

The main point of division among members of the bloodline is the very nature of the thing they seek: the Holy Grail itself.

One camp, aligned with the Lancea Sanctum, states unequivocally that the bloodline's founder was cursed for sipping from the Cup of Christ, the Holy Grail, as it has been portrayed for nearly a thousand years. Another group, tied strongly to the Circle of the Crone, insists just as adamantly that the curse laid upon their line is far older than the kine's Messiah, and that the "Grail" was actually one of the magical cauldrons of Welsh and Celtic myth, which had the power to restore the dead to life and is believed to be an inspiration for the earliest Christianized Grail stories and a decidedly pre-classical Kindred creation myth. Still other members of the bloodline espouse more radical theories, claiming that the Grail is actually a metaphor for an enchanted stone that fell from the heavens or even the mortal bloodline of Christ.

Whatever the truth of the Bron's curse is, it remains clouded by the Fog of Eternity and the simple lack of records from time past. With no clear direction or focus, the Bron continue to wander, modern Percivals pursuing a quest that has brought down kingdoms and consumed lives for two millennia or more. The Bron are a tragic legend of the Kindred: Princes without domain, Damned to eternal pauperism until they satisfy a quest that may have no solution.

Parent Clan: Ventrue

Nickname: Fisher Kings

Covenant: The majority of Bron choose between the Circle of the Crone and the Lancea Sanctum.

Those Bron who fall in with the Sanctified espouse the Christianized doctrine of the Grail, albeit filtered through the dogma of Longinus. According to the Sanctified Bron, the Cup of Christ is both the antithesis of, and the counterpart to, the Spear of Longinus. In a sub-sect of this liturgical theory, there is a gender difference, too — the Spear is the male and the Grail is the female. While the Spear represents the Kindred's ordained role as executors of God's vengeance, the Grail is God's gift to those of the Damned who serve Him most loyally. The Fisher Kings of the Lancea Sanctum believe that God grants a vision of the Holy Grail to those Kindred with whom He is well pleased as a signal of His forgiveness and mercy. To truly be worthy of achieving the Grail Quest, the Sanctified Fisher Kings must prove themselves as worthy as Sir Galahad. The difference, of course, is that while Christian knights were expected to be chaste, pious and humble if they were to prove worthy of attaining the Grail, Kindred are expected to be exemplars of God's terrible vengeance against those who stray from the path. Sanctified Bron are often nomadic scholars, crisscrossing the globe in search of any sign of the Grail's passage while leaving a bloody trail of gruesomely slain sinners in their wake.

The Bron who ally themselves with the Circle of the Crone take a different tack in their beliefs regarding the Holy Grail. The Grail, these Bron say, is not the Cup of Christ at all, but rather the cauldron described in ancient Celtic and Welsh mythic cycles, such as the *Mabinogion*. The early Christians, and the Lancea Sanctum after them, co-opted legends of the magical cauldron that could raise the dead, just as many pagan holidays and myths were Christianized to strengthen the early Church. Members of the Circle of the Crone branch of the bloodline search for the enchanted cauldrons of Cerridwen and other mythic figures, believing that, with the proper ritual, the Bron can repair the flawed magic that blights them with undeath and restore themselves to true mortality.

Other covenants claim far fewer Bron vampires. Among the Invictus, the Bron are nearly unknown, as the nature of their curse places them at a bit of a detriment among the power politics of the First Estate. The few Bron who join the Invictus tend to end up in subordinate roles such as Sheriff or Hound, dwelling in the Prince's personal domain at her sufferance rather than claiming territory of their own. If the curse on their line ever ends,



though, it seems certain that many Bron would flock to the Invictus' banner to re-assert the rightful leadership the bloodline has been denied.

The Carthian Movement offers little to attract the Bron. The Carthians tend to be more interested in temporal politics than spiritual matters, and they seldom have access to unique occult lore that might aid in the Bron's quest for the Grail. "Heretic" Bron, who espouse radical new theories about the nature of the Grail, sometimes find a home in the Movement but usually out of a shared sense of ostracism than any commonality of ideology and beliefs.

Although many Bron harbor a quiet optimism regarding the Ordo Dracul, few Fisher Kings actually enter the Order. Members of both factions claim this is because the Fisher Kings focus almost exclusively on the Grail, which can become an obstacle on their road to the Dragons' brand of enlightenment. On the other hand, elders of the bloodline hear tales of the potent Blood masteries the Ordo Dracul possesses, and they cannot help but wonder.

Appearance: Bron vary widely in appearance, depending on their approach to the Grail Quest. Elders of the line tend to be conservative in their dress, usually favoring dark suits with severe lines. Truly ancient members of the bloodline may still dress as the questing knights of old, at least within the privacy of their own havens. Many Bron were once members of secret societies sometimes connected with the Grail, such as the Templars or their descendants, the Freemasons; these vampires often wear the accoutrements of those orders.

Physically speaking, Bron have no common, unifying features. Due to the bloodline's origins in the British Isles, most elders are of Celtic, Welsh or Anglo-Saxon descent, but, in modern nights, the bloodline spans all ethnicities and body types.

Haven: Many Bron are nomads, wandering from domain to domain to follow the trail of the Holy Grail and keep the effects of their curse at bay. Such nomads find temporary havens wherever they can, or travel in modified vehicles that serve as traveling havens. More sedentary Bron lair wherever they can find a place to sleep the day away, often on the fringes of the city or in a domain unclaimed by local Kindred. The rare, lucky Bron who have a local patron tend to make their havens in libraries and museums, places where tidbits of Grail lore might fall into their hands.

Background: In modern nights, most Bron choose their childer from the ranks of scholars and academics. Ideally, a Bron chooses a childer who specializes in the lore of the Grail (whether Christian or pagan, as the case may be), but such scholars have become progressively more rare in recent years. Many Bron Embrace scholars who

focus generally on early Christian theology, Celtic history and myth or medieval European history, and continue the Grail-specific instruction during the first few years of the fledgling's Requiem. Some elder Bron, especially among the Sanctified, prefer to Embrace soldiers, police officers or political activists, believing them to be the knights of the modern world. These traditionalists carefully study their prospective childer to ensure that they hold to the appropriate virtues.

Acolyte Fisher Kings, on the other hand, often Embrace those whose interest in the Grail is more mystical than historical. Occultists, New Age gurus and, in particular, educated devout pagans form the bulk of the bloodline's representation in the Circle of the Crone. As the Celts believed in the perfection of the warrior ideal, from time to time Bron Acolytes also Embrace mortals with exceptional physical prowess. Unlike Sanctified Fisher Kings, pagan Bron focus more on raw, physical potential than knightly virtues. Boxers, outdoorsmen and survivalists are among the "warriors" sometimes Embraced by Fisher King Acolytes. Because the pagan myths of magical cauldrons are closely tied to the British Isles, most Bron Acolytes hail from that region, and many still dwell there.

Character Creation: Young Bron very often favor Mental Attributes and Skills. The Grail Quest in modern nights has become one of research and study, not riding across the countryside with sword and lance. Older Bron still show a preference for Physical Attributes and Skills, but even newly Embraced Fisher Kings usually prize their Physical abilities. Social Attributes and Skills are usually of the least importance — artifacts and manuscripts don't care how well-mannered you are, and there's seldom anyone to talk to in the ancient ruins Bron sometimes explore in their search.

Beyond the basics of Attribute prioritization, Bron frequently diverge based on their covenant and preferred method of pursuing their quest. Sanctified Bron usually have Merits like Languages: Latin, Status: Lancea Sanctum and Contacts in the academic world. Fisher Kings in the Circle of the Crone, on the other hand, might speak multiple ancient languages, especially various forms of Gaelic, Welsh and Old English, with Allies and Contacts across the occult world.

Scholarly Bron usually devote effort to Skills like Academics, Computer and Investigation, with a smattering of Politics and Persuasion to help them gain access to the research materials they need. Merits like Fame or Status in the academic world help them gain after-hours access to the most exclusive research libraries in the world, but these Merits come with perils of their own in the form of recognition outside those circles. Haven, Herd and Resources ensure that the Bron's Requiem is disturbed as little as possible by the vagaries of night-to-night unlife. Fisher Kings who

actively pursue the Grail likely have dots in Academics, but complement it with Survival, Firearms, Larceny and Intimidation to better survive their wanderings. Merits such as Resources, Herd and Retainer are especially important to questing Bron, and many seek out Gangrel Mentors from whom to learn Protean.

Bloodline Disciplines: Animalism, Crochan, Dominate, Resilience

Weakness: In both Christian and pre-Christian Grail legends, the motif of the symbiotic link between the health of the land and the health of its ruler is common. In some legends, the health and prosperity of the land waxes and wanes with the health of the king, but in others, the land itself rebels against a ruler too weak or unhealthy to rule. When the founder of the bloodline was Damned by the Grail, this mystical connection was twisted and corrupted by the curse of undeath.

Whenever a Fisher King claims a domain, her own cursed nature causes the land to reject her as a fit ruler. Within a few nights of claiming her domain, the Bron finds that tasks that should be relatively simple become arduous and complicated. When she wishes to feed, she encounters mortals only in large groups in brightly lit areas. When she tries to project her influence on the kine within her domain, she finds them listless and unresponsive. When she tries to find her way back to her haven before dawn, she loses all sense of direction and becomes lost in a maze of streets that should be familiar. The Bron experiences one of the worst nightmares of any Kindred: she is weak and vulnerable even within the heart of her own domain. The true nature of the Bron's unique weakness is not fully understood — the Sanctified claim it is God's way of forcing the Bron to strike out on their own and fulfill His commandments, while some Acolytes believe that the Bron's stewardship blights the spirit of the land itself, creating a wound deeper than the Kindred can see.

In rules terms, whenever the Bron attempts any Physical or Social action within the bounds of his own domain that involves the domain or its mortal inhabitants in a significant fashion, the 10 again rule does not apply to his roll. In addition, any 1's that come up on the roll are subtracted from the successes achieved. Examples include feeding, canvassing a neighborhood for information or climbing a wall in an alley. This weakness does not affect combat taking place within the Bron's domain or the Fisher King's interactions with other vampires or supernatural creatures. Naturally, this weakness also affects certain Merits, such as Allies, Contacts, Herd, Retainers and possibly even Haven (primarily Location, but potentially Security), though these are not the only Merits subject to the Bron weakness.

The exact manner in which the Bron claims his domain does not matter. It might be territory granted by

the Prince through subinfeudation, domain seized by the Bron's own strength and cunning or even his own haven. As long as the Bron claims the area — whether in word or action — and the local Kindred accept his claim, the curse takes effect. Some Bron deliberately avoid claiming territory of their own, but this carries its own perils. A wise or lucky Bron might find a powerful patron who requires services he can offer in exchange for feeding rights in the patron's territory, for example, but the natural paranoia of all vampires means this arrangement seldom lasts long.

Finally, as a Ventrue bloodline, all Bron are more prone to paranoid delusions and other derangements. The Bron suffer a -2 penalty on Humanity rolls to avoid gaining derangements after a failed degeneration roll.

Organization: The deep schism that divides the Bron precludes them from having much internal organization. Neither the Circle of the Crone nor the Lancea Sanctum boasts a large enough Bron population to support any kind of bloodline infrastructure. Given the nomadic Requiems of most Fisher Kings, even finding all of them would be an impossible task, let alone organizing them. Across most of the globe, the closest thing the Bron have to an organization is the custom that those members of the bloodline actively engaged in the Grail Quest are given deference and aid by those who are not pursuing the Grail. In the past, this tradition cut across covenant lines, but the rift between the Circle of the Crone and the Lancea Sanctum has widened considerably over the past few centuries. Some Fisher Kings might still honor this tradition for a member of "the other side," but a Bron Acolyte who asks a Sanctified for shelter while pursuing a rumor about Cerridwen's magic cauldron takes her safety into her own hands, and vice versa.

Concepts: Enlightened occultist, grail historian, independent archaeologist, itinerant monk, Masonic conspiracy theorist, modern Celt, neo-pagan coven leader, nomadic Marchog, radical feminist, self-styled Galahad, skulker on the fringe of society

History

Like much of Kindred lore, the history of the Bron varies greatly depending upon the teller. While each individual Fisher King imparts his own take on the bloodline's foundation, the greatest disparity is the schism between Sanctified and Bron Acolytes. Throughout the centuries, the ideological clash between these two factions has ranged from scholarly, if impassioned, debate to outright physical conflict. Modern times see the conflict vary from domain to domain, ranging to either extreme. Nomadic Bron tend to be extremely cautious when meeting fellow bloodline members in new territories, at least until they understand the state of the local "scholarly debate."

The Christian Grail

After the Crucifixion and the cursing of Longinus, many of Christ's mortal followers fled Judea in fear for their lives. The kine scattered across Europe, many bearing sacred relics of their Messiah's last days on earth. The greatest of these relics, the Holy Grail itself, was brought to England by Joseph of Arimathea and his brother-in-law, Bron. Along with their families, these two men became the guardians of the Grail, holding it in trust for the day a worthy would come to receive the blessing of enlightenment and healing the Grail offered. Joseph was dubbed the Grail King, since he had borne the Grail on the journey from Judea to Britannia, while Bron was named the Fisher King for the fish that was the symbol of God's bounty and of the early Church.

Kindred scholars struggle to find an accurate date for Bron's Embrace, but even the kine's documents from that era are sketchy at best. Few Kindred writings from the early decades of the Common Era survived the fall of the Camarilla, and those writings that did are seldom

concerned with the genealogies of obscure bloodlines. The best estimate Sanctified theologians can make is that the Fisher King took in a nocturnal pilgrim one dark night somewhere between AD 50 and 75, and the reward for Bron's hospitality was to be brought into the fold of the Damned. Naturally, scholars of the Lancea Sanctum claim this Kindred pilgrim was one of their own, but few clues exist as to the identity of the Fisher King's sire.

To the pious keeper of the Cup of Christ, the Requiem was a blasphemy. The Fisher King refused to accept the Damnation that had been laid on him, and, against his brother-in-law's counsel, Bron ascended the Grail Tower, lifted the sacred chalice to his lips and drank deeply of the blood of Christ. The Grail had the power to cure any ill and undo any wound, no matter how grievous, and Bron fully expected to be restored to life by the divine blood. He was sorely disappointed. The following text, discovered by Sanctified archaeologists in AD 1765 and purportedly written by Bron himself, describes the result of the Fisher King's rash act.

As I drank deep of the Blood of the Lamb, it seemed to me as though the Grail grew not empty nor even less full. Thou couldst drink from that sweetest of cups until the End of Days and thou wouldst taketh away not a drop, for such is the bounty of our Lord. The Blood burned my throat like liquid fire, and as I drank I did perceive that the candles about the altar dimmed and the tower grew blacker than the blackest night. The earth shook with the force of the wrath of the Lord, and I knew then that I had displeased Him.

The Grail fell from my nerveless grasp, and I fell to my knees as if stricken, pleading with the Lord God Almighty to forgive my trespass. The Blood spilled forth from the Grail in an endless river of crimson, and the Beast that writhe in my soul did stir and cry out for a taste of the Blood. It was then that I heard the voice of the Lord, and it did crack the air like thunder and howl in my mind like the Red Fear.

Thou hast drunk from that which was not meant for thee. In thy arrogance, thou hast set thyself above the lord your god, for to him alone is given the judgment of men's souls. Know thou bron, o fisher king, that thy damnation is twofold. Thou art a childe of longinus, damned to the hunger of thy blood, but also hast thou tasted the blood of my son, which was not thine to drink. For thy sins, thou art doubly cursed, for the bounty of my generosity shall be denied thee, and all those who would have thee as their lord, for ever until the end of days.

I abased myself before the voice of the Lord, pleading with Him to forgive my trespass. The Blood of Christ flowed about me like a pool, yet I dared not rise to right the Grail. At length, the trembling of the earth lessened, and the Lord spoke again.

Thou hast sinned against me, o fisher king, but know that i am a merciful god. Thy damnation is complete, but this blessing i shall give thee: shouldst thou or any of thy

line prove his worth in my eyes and seeketh the holy grail, he shall find his way to this place and be tested. He who passeth the test may drink from the grail and be healed, he and all the scions of thy accursed line. Remember this, and know that i am merciful.

With those words, the presence of the Lord departed. The earth ceased its quake, the candles flared to life and the Grail Chapel fell silent as a tomb. I rose to return the Holy Grail to its place upon the altar, but as I watched, the Cup of Christ faded from my sight until it was naught but a ghostly image of itself, which soon vanished altogether. I was unworthy now even to look upon my holiest of charges. In shame, I left the chapel. I have not returned since, though nightly I pray to God to grant me the wisdom to prove my worth. I remain here in my brother's castle, guardian now of his bones as well as the Grail. I shall remain here until Judgment Day, if I must, waiting for the Lord to give me a sign.

The Bloody Path of Bran the Blessed

Five hundred years before the birth of Christ, the legendary hero Bran the Blessed ruled a kingdom in what is now Wales. Bran was a giant of a man, “too large for ordinary houses,” according to the stories set forth in the *Mabinogion*. Despite his epithet, Bran was a bloody ruler, fierce and implacable in battle. His name, which meant “Raven,” was said to have been given to him because he provided a feast for the carrion-birds whenever he went into battle.

According to the Bron historians of the Circle of the Crone, the history of their bloodline begins during the fierce war between Bran’s people and the Irish king Matholwch. Bran’s sister, Branwen, was Matholwch’s wife, though he treated her as little more than a slave. When Bran learned of his sister’s treatment at her husband’s hands, the Welsh ruler flew into one of his terrible rages, gathered his army and sailed across the Irish Sea to avenge the slight on his family’s honor. Ancient tales say that Matholwch was terrified by what appeared to be a forest coming over the sea, so numerous were Bran’s warships. When the Irish king saw Bran himself wading across the sea in the lead, Matholwch wisely sued for peace before he and his kingdom were destroyed.

As part of the concessions of the peace agreement, Matholwch built a

sions

great palace large enough for Bran to dwell in and passed the rule of the Irish kingdom on to his son Gwern. The conflict might have ended there, but several of Matholwch’s lords refused to bow before the invaders and engineered a plan to murder Bran and his Welsh soldiers. The Irish lords hid themselves and many of their soldiers inside sacks of flour bound for the kitchens of Bran the Blessed’s castle. Thus able to sneak past the hundreds of Welsh soldiers who guarded the castle, the Irish soldiers waited until nightfall to cut themselves free, and would have murdered everyone in the castle, but they were discovered by Bran’s cousin, Efnisien, who heard the flour sacks whispering to each other in the dark. Guessing the treachery at hand, Efnisien threw the sacks into the fire, roasting the Irish soldiers alive. Efnisien himself took this tale to Bran, and the giant king declared the peace forfeit and marshaled his forces to attack Matholwch.

Knowing that he could never defeat the more-numerous armies of Bran the Blessed, Matholwch had made a terrible bargain with an ancient witch who dwelt on a rocky island in the Irish Sea. The hag, whom some say was one of the Good Folk and some say was something less describable, gave Matholwch two items: a spear made from a strange, dark metal, said to be able to pierce the armor of the gods themselves, and an enchanted cauldron filled with blood that boiled even when no fire burned beneath it.

Any dead man stewed in that pot would be returned to life to fight on the side of



the Irish. The price Matholwch paid for this cauldron is unknown.

The subsequent battle raged for many weeks, and the Welsh were nearly wiped out. The Irish suffered no casualties, and every Welsh casualty only served to swell the Irish ranks. With his bloody cauldron and his ensorcelled spear, Matholwch seemed invincible. After almost two solid months of fighting, Bran's spies learned of Matholwch's cauldron and its terrible restorative powers. Bran consulted with his priests and magicians, and, after long days of fasting and prayer, they hatched a plan to destroy the cauldron.

The next dawn, Bran led his soldiers into battle personally, and met Matholwch on the field. The two kings battled savagely from sunrise to sunset until, just as the last rays of the sun vanished over the horizon, Bran's sword clove Matholwch's helmet and bit deep into the Irish king's skull. At the same instant, Matholwch's spear pierced Bran's side, deeply wounding the giant. Matholwch fell dead, and Bran, sorely hurt but not yet dead, collapsed atop his foe, feigning death. Matholwch's lieutenants were fooled, and, gloating that Bran the Blessed would fight for Ireland by the next dawn, they dragged him off and cast him, still living, into the cauldron.

Immediately, the Irish knew they had been tricked. The ever-boiling blood went still and cold in the space of a heartbeat, the spell of resurrection shattered by the presence of Bran's living soul. With a thunderous crack, the cauldron split in two, and Bran emerged, bathed in blood and forever changed. The cauldron's sorceries, rather than restoring the dead to life, had brought undeath to the living. Bran emerged from his bloody baptism a Damned creature of the night, lusting for the blood of the living. His body rejuvenated and his hurts healed (all save the wound from Matholwch's enchanted spear), Bran fell upon the Irish soldiers within Matholwch's castle and slew them all. The Welsh army, inspired by the sight of their king risen anew, rallied and drove the remaining Irish into the sea.

With the Irish soldiers defeated, Bran the Blessed took control of Matholwch's kingdom, solidifying his rule over the mortals. In life, Bran had been a great king, but in his Requiem, he lacked the sacred connection to the land that made a true king. Under the rule of the vampire king, the land withered and sickened. Crops died, cattle grew sick and produced no milk and the people cried out to the gods for justice. Bran refused to see this, and even went so far as to Embrace childer and grant them domains throughout his kingdom, spreading the blight even farther.

The mortal lords who served Bran finally took the initiative to deal with their undead king. While the sun was high one midsummer's day, they entered Bran's sleeping chambers on the premise of bringing tribute to

the king and struck off his head with an axe. According to the histories of the Bron Acolytes, after the beheading, Bran's eyes opened, and the king spoke with "the voice of the grave." He told his lords to burn his body but to carry his head back to Wales and bury the skull facing south, to protect his home against invaders. Then he spoke to his childer, and though they were scattered across his kingdom, each one is said to have heard the voice in their dreams that day.

Bran laid a *geas* on his childer, commanding them through the power of the Blood to renounce their thrones and leave their lands forever. They belonged to the dead, and the dead did not rule the living. The childer were offered one chance to redeem themselves and reclaim their thrones: find the witch who crafted Matholwch's cauldron or learn the secret location of another cauldron made by the same hag. Only by learning the secrets of the cauldron can they find the path back to true life and reclaim their blessed kingship.

Society and Culture

For the most part, the Bron lead isolated, nomadic Requiems. They come into contact with other Kindred infrequently, and with others of their own line even less often. When a group of Bron does congregate into a coterie, it is almost always to pursue some key facet of the Grail Quest. Even Bron who do not travel tend to dwell apart from their brethren, out of necessity (often, the only territory a Bron dares to claim is the Barrens, as even their unique curse cannot make the befouled places of the city much worse) or desire (sedentary Bron are usually bookish scholars who dislike interruption).

In the British Isles, where this bloodline is strongest, the Bron have slightly more structure to the manner in which the bloodline operates. The British Fisher Kings' organization is common to the Lancea Sanctum and the Circle of the Crone alike, a curious fact that suggests that such organization may predate the schism within the bloodline. Groups of scholarly Bron, called Ysgolorion, secret themselves within Britain's most prestigious universities and libraries, often swallowing their pride and serving as aides or Seneschals to the local Princes, as the protection of domain is denied to the Bron.

These Ysgolorion (singular Ysgolor) scour the libraries of the kine and the secret journals of elder Kindred, seeking clues as to the Grail's nature and resting place. The Ysgolorion pass the information they glean on to the Marchogion, or wandering knights, who engage in the active fieldwork of investigation. Although the Marchogion often speak grandly of their Grail Quests, very few of them are actually directly engaged in a search for the Grail. Too much information has been lost, and the Grail has been too well hidden to make such a search practical. Instead, most of a Marchog's time is spent looking for artifacts and tomes, clues that

might point to other clues that may eventually point to the Grail.

Depending upon their age and prestige, Marchogion pass through Britain anywhere from once a year to once a decade. Younger, inexperienced Marchogion return more frequently, as they often aren't as capable as their elders, and the Ysgolorion don't wish to lose years worth of accumulated discoveries because a careless young coterie overestimated its abilities. Older Marchogion undertake longer pilgrimages and more important quests. Beyond this partnership of convenience, the Bron observe no higher authority. In many instances, Marchogion and Ysgolorion are as likely to carry on protracted, decades-long feuds as they are to exchange information or advance the progress of the Grail Quest.

Because of the deep divide between the branches of this bloodline, most Fisher Kings think of themselves as members of their covenant first and members of their bloodline second. Sanctified Bron celebrate their own versions of Good Friday and Easter, venerating the role of the Grail more than the role of Christ (and, according to some, more than the role of Longinus himself, a fact that has led Inquisitors to the havens of the Bron on more than one occasion).

Bron Acolytes sometimes focus on the worship of ancient gods and goddesses connected with magical, life-giving cauldrons: Bran is one such deity, as is the Celtic goddess Cerridwen. In places where Bron Acolytes gather in numbers, or even the rare domains that have Bron Princes, a ghoulish rite may occur on the winter solstice every 10th year. A Kindred from within the domain — preferably one who has earned recognition for protecting the Masquerade or defending Kindred society from some external threat — is selected and brought before the assembled Kindred at Elysium. From dusk until just before dawn, Kindred of the domain honor the hero, praising him and granting every luxury they have to offer. Revelers supply vessels of any exotic vintage he desires, along with whatever blood-borne intoxicants the hero might wish, and even the hero's longstanding rivals may publicly declare any feuds or grudges to be things of the past. Just before sunrise, the throng escorts the hero to the southernmost border of the domain, where the Prince drives a spear of rowan-wood into the hero's side. The hero's head is removed with a single stroke of a sharp blade (to need multiple strokes is considered a terrible omen), then buried facing southward before the body crumbles to ash. According to the Acolytes, so long as the head remains undisturbed, it will protect their domain from outside attack, just as Bran's head protected Britain.

Legends

The Bron have been the subject of many tales, myths and rumors throughout their history. Some of these

stories have been tales of the quest for the Grail, others have been rumors hinting at dark secrets possessed by the bloodline or the perceived truth of their origins.

The Canticle of the Sepulchre Knight

The Canticle of the Sepulchre Knight covers a period from AD 1230 until 1350, approximately. In total, this work comprises seven volumes in its original form, each recounting one of the pilgrimages of Sir Godfrey la Rochenoire, a Sanctified Bron, in search of the Grail. Of particular note is *Chanson IV*, which recounts what may be Sir Godfrey's closest brush with the Grail during his century of questing. In AD 1267, Sir Godfrey and his coterie set forth from Avignon, bound for Wales. While crossing the English Channel, their ship was banked in by a thick fog that even the senses of Sir Godfrey's Mekhet companion, Jean-Pierre du Bois, could not penetrate. Their ship languished on a windless sea the entire night, and, just when it seemed dawn would break on the horizon and doom them all, the ship ran aground on a white, sandy beach. A castle loomed out of the fog above them, and the Kindred fled to take refuge from the sun within the castle's walls. The lord of the castle introduced himself as Alain le Gros, and he seemed to know the vampires for what they were, for he led them to a dark, windowless chamber below ground and bade them rest for the day.

At dusk, Sir Godfrey and his coterie followed their host to the castle's chapel, where the knight experienced a most peculiar vision. An exquisitely carved crucifix of marble hung above the altar, with an equally intricate statue of Longinus piercing Christ's side with the Holy Lance. Blood wept from the statue's wound and fell into a great chalice of gold and jewels. The chalice was set upon a stone altar, over which the blood had flowed in strange patterns, which Sir Godfrey and his companions likened to pagan icons. Three women dressed in the habits of nuns attended the Grail: one young and comely, one of middling age and plain appearance and one elderly and repulsive.

Sir Godfrey demanded to know the meaning of what he perceived as a pagan spectacle surrounding the Holy Grail, but Alain le Gros only smiled sadly and made no reply. Again, Sir Godfrey asked his question, and yet once more and again he received no answer. Thus insulted thrice over, Sir Godfrey was overcome by his wrath, and made as if to strike le Gros in his frenzy. The Grail women, seeing violence about to be done in the holiest of chapels, tore their hair and wailed. A baleful light, pale as the moon but harsher than the sun's forgotten rays, poured in through the stained glass windows and rendered Sir Godfrey and his coterie blind and insensate.

When the Sanctified knights returned to themselves, they found themselves lying in state in their makeshift

haven aboard the vessel that had carried them from the shores of Normandy. The last rays of the setting sun had vanished over the horizon, and their sailors informed them that they would soon be landing on the English shore. Of the strange fog that had beset their ship for an entire night, the sailors professed no recollection. And yet, this was no mad dream shared by Kindred made torpid by the sun's rays, for when Sir Godfrey arose that evening, he found his right hand severed cleanly at the wrist, as if by the sharpest blade on God's earth. It is recorded in other historical documents of the time that this wound never healed and that Sir Godfrey bore the mark of his impiety and failure until, according to other tales, he met Final Death in Paris in AD 1384.

Secrets and Mysteries

The Bron are a secretive bloodline, and despite the legends that surround its members, few outside the line know much about them for certain. The history and organization presented in this section can be used as a source of rumors or stories told about the Bron. One or more of these truths might be the gospel truth in your chronicle. As always, Storytellers, use what you like and modify or throw out the rest.

One Truth: The Bron are reclusive enough that few Kindred have ever met one, let alone two. In some domains, the very idea of Bron belonging to both the Lancea Sanctum and the Circle of the Crone is laughable. Depending upon who tells the tale, any rumor of Bron belonging to another covenant is either a case of mistaken identity caused by foolish pagans worshipping a saucepan or Christianized oppressors stealing the true faith of the people for their own purposes.

No Truth: In modern nights, radical new theories about the nature of the Holy Grail have been put forward by folklorists and theologians. In an era when *The Da Vinci Code* has become a pop-culture icon ("It really makes you think"), it's no wonder many Kindred, especially neonates and young ancillae, whisper that the Bron are looking in the wrong place for their Holy Grail. In fact, these Kindred say, the bloodline's founder *did* stumble upon the truth sometime during the 1500s and went mad with grief when he learned he had been searching for a bundle of genealogical documents and ancient scrolls proving that Mary Magdalene was Christ's wife and the mother of his child. In despair, the Bron told none of his childer (or, in some versions of the story, destroys the Grail documents to hide his failure) of his discovery and greeted the next sunrise.

Belial's Bron: According to this legend, the Bron are indeed seeking the Holy Grail — and probably other religious relics as well — not to lift their curse or restore their humanity, but to destroy them. Once, in the distant past, perhaps the Fisher Kings' motives were pure, but during the Middle Ages the bloodline

fell in with the Poor Knights of the Temple of Solomon, better known as the Knights Templar. The Templars were acknowledged as Europe's foremost Grail scholars at the time, and it was even rumored that they knew the location of the Cup of Christ. They were wealthy and powerful, but that wealth and power corrupted the order, and they fell into idolatry and Devil-worship. The Church discovered the Templars' blasphemies and executed almost the entire order. The Lancea Sanctum did much the same to the Bron members of the order. Despite these purges, a few mortal and Kindred Templars escaped and began a long, arduous search for the lost knowledge of the Templars, including the location of the Grail, the Spear of Destiny and other sacred relics. In some versions of this tale, the Bron are the secret founders of Belial's Brood, while in other versions the Bron are merely the Brood's allies.

Crochan

In both Christian and pagan myth, the Grail possesses miraculous powers of healing. According to some legends, those who drink from the Grail retain this healing gift even after they attain the Grail Quest. The Bron embody this myth through their Discipline of Crochan, from the Welsh word for "cauldron," which allows them to harness and manipulate the power of Vitae to regenerate their undead flesh. This Discipline is not without its dark side, though. Just as the Bron are Damned, Crochan is a cursed version of the Grail's healing power that can both give life and take it away with equal facility.

Crochan is essentially an enhancement of a vampire's innate ability to heal wounds through the power of Vitae. Therefore, a Bron may not spend Vitae to heal wounds in the same turn he uses a Crochan power, even if his Blood Potency allows him to spend more than one Vitae per turn. This restriction applies only to the Crochan user; if he targets another Kindred with one of the powers of Crochan, that vampire may spend Vitae for healing in the same turn. Likewise, this Discipline affects only creatures who possess the ability to use Vitae to heal their wounds. Crochan does not affect other supernatural creatures' powers of mystical healing, such as a werewolf's natural regeneration. In most cases, this means that Kindred and ghouls are the only valid targets, but the World of Darkness is a vast and mysterious place, and strange creatures lurking in the shadows may well be capable of harnessing the power of the Blood.

Despite the many drastic differences between the Sanctified Bron and the Acolyte Fisher Kings, Crochan is common to both branches of the bloodline, differing in minor, cosmetic applications only. The Sanctified often accompany the use of Crochan with fervent prayers and the laying on of hands, while the Acolytes prefer elaborate chants in Welsh or Manx Gaelic and

savage bloodletting rituals. Many Bron Acolytes “sacrifice” the Vitae required to power this Discipline by slicing their wrists, breast or even throat, and letting the blood spill onto the ground. (Mechanically, this is no different than spending a Vitae by simple act of will; the Bron suffers no additional damage or blood loss, and the time required to activate the Discipline does not increase.)

Crochan is notably less common among the rare few Invictus and Carthian Bron. Some Invictus find the very idea of playing with the power of the Blood to be foolishness worthy of an especially reckless Dragon, while some Kindred of the Carthian Movement view Crochan’s ability to manipulate the Vitae of others to be a gross violation of another Kindred’s personal rights. The Dragons, for their part, note the similarities between Crochan and the philosophy behind the Coils of the Dragon, and ponder over many troubling questions in their unbeating hearts.

• *Swift Flows the Blood*

All Kindred have an innate ability to heal wounds inflicted on their undead bodies through the power of Vitae, but this healing takes time for all but the most minor hurts. The most basic level of Crochan allows the Bron to speed this ability, though she must take care that she does not starve herself into frenzy or torpor in her haste.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Medicine + Crochan

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character’s blood resists her efforts to quicken its flow, and in fact the blood becomes more sluggish and unresponsive. For the remainder of the scene, during any turn in which the character wishes to spend Vitae to heal her wounds, she must spend an *extra* Vitae to shock her sluggish system into responding. Only one extra Vitae must be spent per turn, regardless how much Vitae the Kindred uses that turn for healing.

Failure: The character gains no additional ability to channel Vitae toward healing. She may try again in subsequent turns, however.

Success: For each success on the activation roll, the character may add one to her effective Blood Potency for purposes of determining how much Vitae she may spend per turn, but only for purposes of healing injuries. The character may not activate Disciplines, augment Physical dice pools or use her increased rate of Vitae expenditure for any other purpose. The character’s maximum Vitae per turn as granted by her *actual* Blood Potency is not restricted in this manner (assuming, of course, that she has the ability to spend enough Vitae

to activate this power and perform some other action in the same turn). Other traits derived from Blood Potency, such as the character’s maximum Vitae, feeding restrictions and Attribute maximums, are unaffected. This power cannot increase the character’s “virtual Blood Potency” above 10.

For example, Cecilia has a Blood Potency of 4, allowing her to spend two Vitae per turn. She activates Swift Flows the Blood, and her player rolls four successes. This gives her a “virtual Blood Potency” of 8, increasing the total number of Vitae she may spend this turn to seven. Only five Vitae can be spent on healing wounds — her player spent one Vitae to activate the power, and the final Vitae may be spent as Cecilia’s player wishes within the normal rules.

Exceptional Success: The extra successes are their own reward in this case.

If the roll succeeds, but the virtual Blood Potency increase does not increase the character’s maximum Vitae per turn (for example, if a player whose character has a Blood Potency of 2 gains only a single success), the power of the Discipline allows the character to spend one additional Vitae on healing. This power is an exception to the rule that a character may not spend Vitae to heal in the same turn that she uses a Crochan power.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	The Bron pours her own Vitae into a chalice or cauldron and drinks the Blood while activating the power.
-1	The Bron has used this power since the previous sunset (cumulative).
-2	The Bron has used this power within the past hour (cumulative).

•• *Blight of the Fisher King*

According to early Grail mythology, the Fisher King was one of the keepers of the Holy Grail. Cursed by a festering wound in his side, the Fisher King could not be healed until a worthy Grail-seeker asked the proper question and attained the Grail. Through the use of this power, the Bron agitates another Kindred’s wound so that it heals only with a great deal of effort.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult + Crochan versus subject’s Resolve + Blood Potency

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Not only are the target’s wounds not rendered more difficult to heal, one health point of the most severe type of damage the victim has suffered is downgraded by one level of severity. Aggravated damage becomes lethal, lethal damage becomes bashing and bashing damage is healed completely. When

downgrading this damage, downgrade the rightmost Health point of the most severe type of damage.

Failure: The target's ability to heal his wounds is unaffected. The character may try again later (though successive attempts against the same target in the same night incur a cumulative -1 penalty; see below).

Success: For the remainder of the scene, the target must spend one extra Vitae to heal his wounds. Healing two bashing wounds or one lethal wound costs two Vitae. Aggravated wounds are not normally affected by this power (but see below). Depending on the target's Blood Potency, he may have to spend the requisite Vitae over multiple rounds to manage even the most basic healing; in that case, healing occurs when all the necessary Vitae is spent.

Exceptional Success: Per a success, but the curse lasts until the next sunset. In addition, if the victim spends Vitae toward healing an aggravated wound while under the effects of this power (whether he is the victim of this power on the first or the second night of the healing process), the cost is increased to six Vitae over two nights.

The Bron must touch his target in order to inflict this curse (see "Touching an Opponent" on p. 157 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*).

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier Situation

- +2 Power is turned on a vampire with whom the user has a blood tie (see **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 162).
- +1 Target has tasted the user's blood in the past night.
- 1 Target has been the victim of this power earlier in the same night (cumulative; applies whether the earlier use succeeded or failed).

... Bitter Humours

After learning to both slow and quicken the Blood's healing properties, the Bron learns to twist it, turning his enemy's own attempts to heal against her.

Cost: 1 Vitae, plus see below

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult + Crochan versus subject's Resolve + Blood Potency

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The subject is not affected and is immune to any further uses of Bitter Humours for a week.

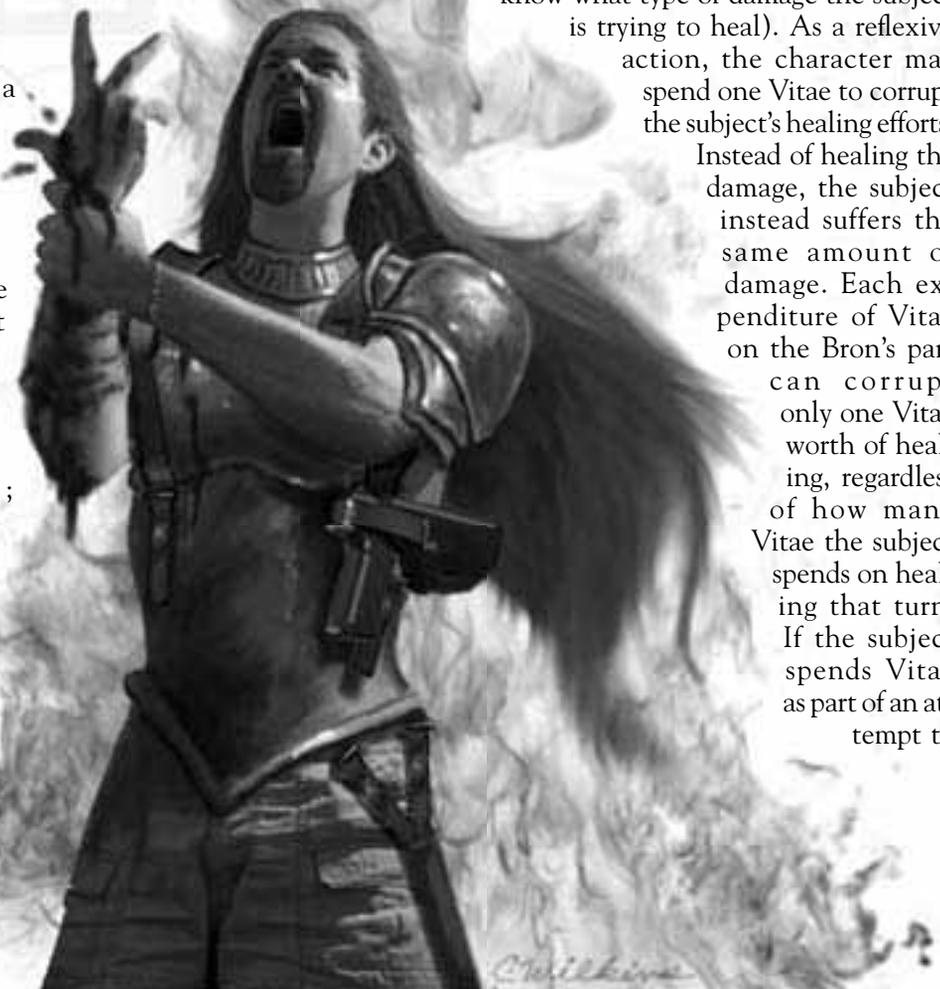
Failure: The character's player loses or ties the contested roll, and the subject's ability to heal himself is unimpeded.

Success: The character wins the contested roll. For each success the character's player rolls, she may "twist" one attempt by the subject to heal himself by spending

Vitae. As long as the character remains within five miles of the subject, she instinctively knows whenever the subject spends Vitae to heal himself (though she does not know what type of damage the subject is trying to heal). As a reflexive

action, the character may spend one Vitae to corrupt the subject's healing efforts.

Instead of healing the damage, the subject instead suffers the same amount of damage. Each expenditure of Vitae on the Bron's part can corrupt only one Vitae worth of healing, regardless of how many Vitae the subject spends on healing that turn. If the subject spends Vitae as part of an attempt to



heal an aggravated wound, he merely loses that Vitae and must spend another on the healing process.

For example, Angelica uses *Bitter Humours* against her rival, Manuel, and succeeds on the contested roll with four successes. After a conflict outside Elysium, Manuel spends one Vitae to heal a point of lethal damage. Angelica is instinctively aware of the attempt and chooses to spend Vitae to thwart Manuel. Manuel loses the Vitae he spent toward healing that point of lethal damage and instead suffers another point of lethal damage.

Later that evening, Manuel spends two Vitae to heal four points of bashing damage in a single turn. Angelica is once again aware of this attempted healing, and chooses to spend another Vitae to twist Manuel's healing attempt. Manuel suffers two points of bashing damage thanks to Angelica's curse, but heals two points of bashing damage with his second Vitae (as Angelica can twist only one Vitae worth of the subject's healing per Vitae point she spends).

Exceptional Success: The character wins the contested roll with five or more successes. In addition to instinctively knowing when the subject attempts to heal himself with Vitae, the character knows the severity of the damage being healed. In addition, it is possible, though difficult, to cause the subject to suffer aggravated damage with an exceptional success. In order to inflict a point of aggravated damage, the subject must spend all five Vitae to heal the wound during the course of a single night. The subject also must not spend more than one Vitae per turn on the healing process. Finally, the Bron must spend a Vitae of her own to corrupt each expenditure of Vitae (for a total of five Vitae). If all of these conditions are met, the subject suffers a point of aggravated damage instead of healing one. Note that attempting to inflict damage in this fashion is mutually exclusive from spending Vitae to force the subject to lose a Vitae spent toward healing an aggravated wound. The Bron must choose one effect or the other when he spends his Vitae.

Bitter Humours works only on Kindred, not on any other creature that has a regenerative or healing ability. As well, this power requires the character to touch her target in order to inflict this curse (see p. 157 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). The target of *Bitter Humours* suffers under the curse until the following sunset, or until the curse's power is discharged.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	Power is turned on a vampire with whom the user has a blood tie (see Vampire: The Requiem , p. 162).
+1	Target has tasted the user's blood within the past night.
-1	Target has been the victim of this power earlier in the same night (cumulative, applies whether the earlier use succeeded or failed).

•••• Restoration of the Maimed

According to legends, the Grail has the capacity to heal grievous wounds, even regenerating lost limbs or restoring health to those stricken with palsy or disease. Vampires echo this power after a fashion, in that, upon rising for the evening, their bodies always return to their condition at the moment of the Embrace. Through this Crochan power, the Bron is capable of channeling the Blood's ability to recreate lost muscle, tendon and bone to rebuild lost limbs or heal limbs made useless by sickness. The character infuses her Vitae with this restorative power and drains the requisite amount into a vessel (traditionally a chalice or cauldron, depending on the user's covenant, but any suitably large container will do). The Bron then immerses the stump of the limb to be restored in the Vitae concoction as the mystic restoration generates new flesh, sinew and bone, recreating the lost limb. Bron Acolytes often set a fire beneath the cauldron to boil the Vitae, but this is not necessary to use the power.

Cost: 2 Vitae to restore a hand or foot, 3 Vitae to restore an entire arm or leg.

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Medicine + Crochan

Action: Extended. (A total of 10 successes are necessary for a hand or foot, 20 for an arm or leg. Each roll represents one hour of mystic ritual and effort.)

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The limb is not regenerated, the Vitae spent is rendered inert and useless and the character may not attempt another use of Restoration of the Maimed to restore that limb for one month. She may use this power to restore other limbs, however, and another Fisher King may attempt to restore the same limb during this month.

Failure: The limb is not restored, and the Vitae spent is rendered inert and useless. The character may try again if she wishes.

Success: Progress is made toward the restoration of the limb.

Exceptional Success: Considerable progress is made toward the restoration of the limb.

Restoration of the Maimed can be used to accelerate the innate reversion a Kindred experiences every night or may be used to restore limbs lost permanently, such as pre-Embrace wounds or wounds the character spent a Willpower dot to render permanent.

This power may also be used on others, even mortals and those who do not automatically revert to predetermined states. Restoration of the Maimed is notably less effective for mortals and their ilk; whenever this power is used on any character other than a vampire, the resultant limb is cold, clammy and not entirely under

its owner's control. Fingers twitch spasmodically, arms hold themselves at awkward and uncomfortable angles and similar minor, involuntary movements afflict legs and feet restored with this power. In addition to unnerving others, these strange tics cause the subject to suffer a -1 penalty on all Physical dice pools made with the new limb. Should the mortal ever be Embraced, the penalty is removed.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	Power is turned on a vampire with whom the user has a blood tie (see Vampire: The Requiem , p. 162).
+1	Limb was lost within the last week.
-1	Limb was lost more than one year ago (cumulative).
-2	Subject is not Kindred.

••••• *Stolen Blood, Stolen Life*

A common theme in myths about artifacts or individuals with miraculous healing powers is the concept that life cannot be generated spontaneously. To heal one subject, another subject must suffer or die. The Bron exemplify this concept in the Vitae cost of their Discipline, but Bron who have mastered Crochan take it to another level altogether. With the final, most potent power of Crochan, the Bron can literally steal the blood of anyone nearby and use it to heal his own injuries.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult + Crochan vs. Resolve + Blood Potency

Action: Extended and contested. (One-10 successes; each roll represents one turn of stealing blood.)

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: No Vitae is stolen, and the subject is immune to further uses of this power for the rest of the night.

Failure: No Vitae is stolen.

Success: For every success rolled, the target loses one Vitae and the character gains one Vitae. If the

subject is an animal, werewolf or some other creature whose Vitae is more or less potent than normal, the character gains more or less Vitae as appropriate. If the subject is not a vampire, the subject suffers a point of lethal damage, just as if the character had fed from her directly.

Exceptional Success: Extra successes are their own reward as a more significant amount of Vitae is stolen from the target.

To use **Stolen Blood, Stolen Life**, the Bron must be within five yards of his target and have a clear, unobstructed line of sight to the target. With a simple act of will, the character begins the process of stealing the target's Vitae.

No visible cues occur suggesting the target's blood is leaving her body and traveling to the character — the transfer is entirely mystical in nature. A Kindred using **Aura Perception** (see **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 120) to read the character's aura sees bright, crimson streams of light flowing into the character's aura, but unless he also reads the victim (who has the same crimson streamers flowing out of her aura), she receives no indication from whence the strange streamers are originate or what they mean.

Vitae stolen in this manner may only be used for healing or for fueling Crochan powers.

Note also that using this power to feed doesn't free the character from any moral obligations resulting from his actions, such as killing a vessel, causing harm and so on. See pp. 181-186 of **Vampire: The Requiem** for more information on **Humanity and Morality**.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	Power is turned on a vampire with whom the user has a blood tie (see Vampire: The Requiem , p. 162).
+1	Target has tasted the user's blood within the past night.
-1	Target has been the victim of this power earlier in the same night (cumulative, applies whether the earlier use succeeded or failed).

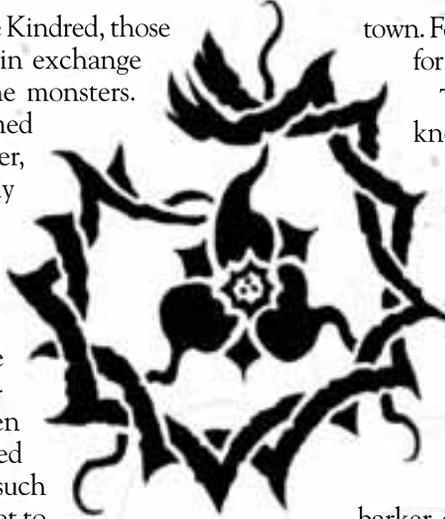
The Carnival

*Look at me and know what it truly means to be cursed! What is it you feel?
Revulsion? Horror? Pity? No matter, for you cannot turn away, can you?*

Of all those once born of woman, the Kindred, those who have shed the coil of mortality in exchange for an eternity of Damnation, are the monsters. The Kindred are unliving souls doomed to shadow and a feast of blood. However, even among monsters, some inevitably stand out as distinctly horrific.

One bloodline so embodies the twisted curse that all vampires suffer that the bloodline's very presence is a thing of unprecedented disgust, a vile reminder of just how inhuman the Kindred really are. Yet paradoxically, even the most disciplined Kindred, entranced by their own inability to comprehend such cruelties of Embrace, find it difficult not to stare at these piteous mockeries of flesh and bone. These Freaks are renowned for their grotesquery, each singularly deformed to the extreme, and put to shame their mortal sideshow counterparts. So accursed is the Freaks' Vitae that it literally twists and reshapes the corporeal shells of all new members, forever warping them into forms that mimic the most egregious congenital defects suffered by the kine. No alteration is too dramatic, leaving many Freaks severely handicapped.

For all the additional pain and inconvenience they must endure due to this bizarre lineage, the Freaks possess an uncanny degree of strength that few outsiders, to their misfortune, can guess. Although largely shunned by the greater Kindred community, the Freaks share a tremendous bond with others of their ilk. Few coteries — most often simply referred to as Carnivals — are as tight-knit as theirs — and with that intimacy comes power. The Carnival may not partake in the highly visible movements of the Danse Macabre, but a Carnival, despite its public face, is always more than a mere sideshow. The Freaks' ability to turn their seeming physical limitations into unexpected advantages provides these monsters a unique edge, allowing them to enter places no other Kindred or kine can penetrate and, just as effectively, escape from places and situations that would be impossible for others. Those witnesses unfortunate enough to see a Freak putting on the Show — the bloodline's signature Discipline — are in for an unpleasant surprise. Unable to pull their attention away from the disturbing display before them, they are open to all manner of inimical activity instigated by the bizarre vampires. Wise Kindred avoid the Carnival if they hear that it has come to



town. Fools soon find themselves much worse off for the experience.

The Carnival claims its founder was known at the height of her celebrity as Anulka, the Bohemian Mermaid, a sideshow freak who toured Europe with a small circus during the 18th century. Legend has it that Anulka was treated worse than the trained animals and was kept locked in a cage for most of her adult life, an object of ridicule and fascination who earned the owner of the circus enough lucre to forgo any consideration of Anulka's release. The malignant barker came to a just end at the hands of a blighted Kindred named Hagal, who is said to have taken pity upon the exploited Anulka, a creature even more repulsive than himself. Hagal took her as his own child and, with her assistance, usurped control of the circus from its financial overseers.

Upon Hagal's mysterious demise, Anulka created childer of her own, fledglings whose bodies underwent traumatic transformations as the full power of their sire's Vitae infused them with her utterly warped psychology. Freaks like their creator and, therefore, unwelcome even among Kindred society, these childer cleaved to one another as family, and their circus became a traveling horror show, its formerly human oddities both its greatest attraction and its darkest secret.

In time, the circus became too great a threat to the Masquerade — at least that's the story most Kindred tell — and was destroyed in a night of bloodshed and fire. Not all the Freaks met their ends, however. Those who survived fled. Later, some established their own nightmarish Carnivals with their own twisted broods. Tonight, a small number of these vile bands survive. A few provide the darkest of entertainment for other vampires, putting on the Show in Elysium in return for feeding rights or other favors. Other Carnivals travel from domain to domain to survive, playing to Kindred and kine alike as the Freaks pass through each domain, using the Show to maintain the First Tradition even as they reveal the true horror of the Requiem.

Parent Clan: Daeva

Nickname: Freaks

Covenant: Rarely is the Carnival welcome among the covenants. Even rarer is the Freak who wishes to belong to these often insular societies. Few Kindred have any desire to associate with beings who so blatantly embody the hidden horror that lurks within every vampire. The Freaks' deformities are too painful a reminder of just how far the Kindred are from the mortals they once were. For the most part, the Freaks stand outside the covenants, forming

their own exclusive Carnivals — essentially a bloodline and covenant in one. The Freaks don't necessarily hold any particular antipathy toward one covenant or another, however. They reserve their spite only for those who actively move against them, either collectively or as individuals.

The Invictus rarely opens its doors to the Carnival, unless the First Estate wishes to employ the Freaks, officially or otherwise, usually as objects of entertainment intended to add a dash of grotesque fancifulness to Elysium. Freaks are too visibly distorted for the First Estate. They resemble everything the Kindred upper crust detests. On the other hand, those Freaks who do cozy up to these powdered wigs, even if in a servile manner, can learn a great deal. Most Kindred peacocks are unable to recognize the scheming intelligence behind the eyes of a vampire with no limbs, and fewer still would deign to consider such a vampire a potential threat.

Generally, the Carthians are not much different from their dynastic cousins. Some Carthians may give lip service to lofty ideals such as equality and inner worth, but these pretenders want no more to do with a band of deformed blood-drinkers than with a pack of Lupines. The Freak who does find acceptance is still likely to face social stigmatism, making any political ascent a Herculean task, indeed.

The Kindred of the Lancea Sanctum view the Carnival in two distinctly opposing ways, depending on the personal doctrine of the believer. Some Sanctified see the Freaks as creatures doubly Damned and, therefore, worthy of pity and charity. This is fine, for nothing is an easier score than taking advantage of the foolishly naive. Some Freaks have used this attitude to exploit the Sanctified, even joining the covenant's ranks for a time in order to reap the greatest benefit.

The danger lies in the covenant's other view of the Carnival. Even the most doted-on charity case eventually meets with a Priest who is convinced that this bloodline is nothing more than a blasphemy that should be expunged from the world, the sooner the better. Worse, some Zealots are of the mind that the Freaks are touched by the Devil, their deformities proof that the Adversary has put his own mark upon them. These Sanctified make it a personal crusade to cleanse the city of the Carnival, and, given the overall attitude of most vampires toward the bloodline, the Sanctified rarely find too much opposition to their witch-hunt.

The Circle of the Crone is perhaps the most open to these aberrations, though the Acolytes certainly do not go out of their way to extend the Freaks any invitations. Should a disaffected Freak wish to



become an Acolyte, she will likely find a place made for her at some table. Still, few Freaks are drawn into the ranks of the Acolytes, especially since the bloodline's physical form makes it difficult to properly participate in the covenant's rituals. On the other hand, the covenant's belief in learning from pain is occasionally appealing, given that most Freaks are in some degree of constant pain anyway.

The only covenant that gives the Carnival real pause is the Ordo Dracul. It is rumored that at least one Freak has been initiated into the Order's ranks, but, for the most part, the only role the Dragons have reserved for the bloodline is that of curiosity. The Dragons' interest in how Vitae can cause gross transformative changes in Kindred makes the Freaks more likely subjects of study rather than peers.

Appearance: Physical deformities are the defining characteristic of the Carnival. What a Freak looked like prior to joining the bloodline is largely irrelevant after her Vitae has been fully transformed into that of her new family. It might be worth noting that a character is Caucasian, French, full-bearded, large-breasted, etc., but all this falls by the wayside when compared to the horrifying changes the Carnival's blood wreaks upon the bone and sinew of its newest members. Exactly how the individual's body will change is anyone's guess. Each change is unique, and no factor seems to play a determinate role in the hideous transformation. The only certainty is that the Freak is severely deformed, with some Freaks being so altered that they become virtual invalids. It is easy to see just how hellish the Requiem of a Freak can be. More on what qualifies as an appropriate deformity can be found in the discussion on the bloodline's weakness, below.

Haven: A Freak's haven primarily falls into one of two categories: mobile or established. A number of Freaks are nomadic, spending only a brief time in a location before moving on. Therefore, many prefer a mobile haven, one that allows the Carnival to pack up at a moment's notice, should trouble rear its ugly head. Given the treatment most Carnivals receive among their fellow Kindred, mobile havens are almost a necessity. Depending on the size of the Carnival, the Freaks may use a station wagon, SUV, van, truck, RV or even bus as their four-wheeled sanctuary. In some cases, the Carnival may employ more than one vehicle; in these instances, the entire group hits the road in a caravan. In some parts of the world, actual wagons, drawn by steeds usually fortified with the blood of their undead masters, are still employed for this purpose.

All conveyances share aspects in common. First, rarely does a Carnival have the funds for something new. Motor vehicles are usually at least a decade old and held together with as much spit as welds. At least one member of the Carnival often possesses the mechanical know-how to

deal with the regular maintenance required to keep the vehicle moving. Not only are such rolling heaps of scrap metal inexpensive to obtain, they tend to offer substantial advantages over newer models. Older vehicles are usually heavier and sturdier. They offer far more protection from minor accidents and rough roads. Older vehicles also go unnoticed far more so than glittering new coupes just off the assembly line, affording the Carnivals the veil of the Masquerade.

Finally, although older vehicles do require frequent repairs, the work is relatively simple and requires only basic tools. *De facto* mechanics can find parts in most junkyards on the cheap. Compare this to the downtime required to fix a newer car, and an older car makes perfect sense. Almost universally, these vehicles sport blacked-out windows or at least some means to keep out the sun, as well as sturdy locks. More than one Carnival also uses menacing dogs to guard the caravan during daylight hours, which is usually not too much of an attention-getter given the Freaks' preference for parking in out-of-the-way spots, such as junkyards, abandoned industrial zones and similar places. (For more ideas on mobile havens and survival on the road, see the **Vampire** supplement **Nomads**.)

Despite the safety that mobility offers, some Freaks choose the protection of something more permanent. The greatest advantage to this is that the Carnival can establish an enduring sideshow, which in turn creates a reliable herd for the Freaks to feed from without having to face the unknown night after night. The downside, of course, is that the Freaks have to find some degree of acceptance among the city's other Kindred, even if only on the surface.

Again, the Freaks' reputation precedes them, and few Princes are willing to permit the Carnival to set up shop in their domains. Even if only a fraction of the heinous stories told about this bloodline are believed to be true, suffering the presence of the Freaks is out of the question for all but the most sympathetic, apathetic or scheming Kindred lords. However, given that most vampires who have clawed their way to the top of the Kindred social order probably qualify as the latter, some Princes have admitted the Carnival, albeit usually with special restrictions to ensure that such mercy does not come back to haunt them.

Urban havens are usually established in places that afford the Freaks both privacy and drama. For them, the haven is not only where they hide away from the sun but also a stage to be used to lure curious kine into their grotesque company. Forsaken warehouses, factories, tenements and similar structures prove to be excellent havens. Inside, the Freaks do quite a bit of remodeling, even if it's not apparent to visitors. Numerous hidden passages, escape routes and redoubts are created, along with areas where the foolhardy can gather to gaze upon

the outlandish feats of the Carnival, unaware that they have walked into a trap.

Part boudoir, part salon, part theater, part bunker and part charnel house, a Freak's haven is her domain in the truest sense of the word, a place in which no one else, living or otherwise, can find comfort. Even welcomed guests have a hard time stomaching the disturbing blend of showmanship and nightmare evidenced not only in the demeanor of the host, but in the furnishings and decoration that pay homage more to Bosch's infamous *Garden of Earthly Delights* than to Barnum's big top.

Background: Contrary to popular belief, most of the Carnival is made up of individuals who in life were not deformed horrors, or at least not outwardly. Freaks understand full well what it means to be an outcast, and few wish to visit the curse of undeath upon those already bearing the difficult hardship of pariah. Instead, Freaks tend to select childer from among those mortals whose inner nature is already far more warped than their outward appearance would suggest.

Some Freaks feel that the Embrace is a just punishment for such cretins and enjoy watching their newfound progeny struggle with the harsh vicissitudes that the Requiem brings. Other Freaks recognize in their marks just how uniquely suited they are for unlife among the Damned. Unlike many celebrated mortal freaks, those who join the Carnival are rarely models of morality and compassion. The painful and often crippling changes wrought by the Vitae of the bloodline upon the new Freak's body works into the psyche with similar force. Very few have the fortitude to hang on to their humanity when they are savaged by the curse of the Carnival in addition to the breadth of difficulties they already face as vampires.

People already accustomed to a lifetime of perversion and atrocity are far more likely to survive the transformation that will occur when they are finally ready to inherit the telltale legacy of the Carnival. In the bloodline's infancy, true freaks — those deformed by birth, not Blood — were the norm. Tonight, they are the exception outside of the ranks of the Carnival's elders. Although some Freaks relish the relative power that undeath has provided them, others see their Requiems as Hell on Earth, for they have been denied the one escape possible from their tragic conditions. Still, the rare childe is conceived who is already intimately familiar with what it means to be a freak.

Character Creation: Aside from the matter of the precise nature of the deformity the character suffers, a player should consider how the character compensates for that flaw, even if indirectly. A Freak whose legs completely withdraw into his torso still needs a way to get around. This could mean a board with wheels, a carriage pushed by a Retainer or simply a much greater reliance upon his arms for propulsion, using them literally as replacements for his missing limbs.

For obvious reasons, Physical Attributes are tremendously valuable to the Carnival. Feeding is difficult enough without having to deal with such things as vestigial hands, malformed jaws, oversized and useless feet and so on. To overcome these afflictions, the character should consider at least one Specialty that counterbalances his weakness. Athletics Skill Specialties are especially common among Freaks. For example, a "Lobster Boy" ancilla whose hands are too horribly deformed to be used for most ordinary tasks might specialize in Foot Dexterity, enabling him to use his toes in place of his fingers, while another Freak cursed with backward-jointed knees and condemned to travel on all fours might specialize in Scrambling or even Climbing.

Despite the emphasis on physical capability, few Freaks rely on might and agility alone to make it through the night. Mental and even Social Attributes can be the character's real forte. Allowing others to fall prey to the false assumption that the bodily handicaps so evident are indicative of other personal shortcomings is a hallmark of this bloodline. Because few Kindred wish to spend enough time around the Carnival to learn the truth about the Freaks' inherent strengths and weaknesses, Kindred are often easier to manipulate, usually to their detriment.

Freak characters don't trust their bodies alone to reel in the dupes. Most Freaks have at least one trademark gimmick, stunt or talent they use to ply their audience to enhance the Show. Fortune-telling, driving nails into their head, sword-swallowing, magic acts: all are popular. Practically the only thing these bizarre vampires won't do to enthrall an audience is play with fire.

Emphasis on Expression, Persuasion and Subterfuge is particularly appropriate for these characters — anything that aids them in putting on a show. Ultimately, a Freak character has to be playable, and that means he must be able to hunt, find safety from sunlight and not spend every moment fleeing from hunters, whether Kindred or kine. A well thought-out combination of Attributes, Skills, Specialties and Merits, along with a bit of luck and camaraderie can see even the most sorely deformed to victory, even if it is only one night at a time.

Bloodline Disciplines: Celerity, Majesty, the Show, Vigor

Weakness: Not only does all Freaks suffer the standard weakness of all Daeva — their lusts and perversions grow particularly dire, given their frequent activities — but each Freak also suffers a unique curse of deformation that leaves the rest of the parent clan looking unblemished by comparison.

When a character joins the bloodline, the player must make a decision. The character's body is warped in a manner that either is guaranteed to vex onlookers or imposes severe physical handicaps on the Freak. If the player chooses a freakish mien, the character acquires

the Nosferatu clan weakness, per p. 111 of **Vampire: The Requiem**. If the player chooses a physical handicap, that character's Speed is reduced to one-quarter of its standard value (round down) after any adjustments are made (as with Celerity, for example).

Storytellers should work with players to devise appearances that both serve the interests of the players and, at the same time, fittingly impair the characters to a degree justified by the mechanics of the weaknesses. See the sidebar, "Typical Deformities," for some suggested manifestations of bloodline weaknesses.

Note that a Freak cannot possess the Crippled or Deformity Flaws (p. 219 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). The character will certainly be deformed, but the player gains no benefits from it, per the rules for Flaws.

Organization: The Carnival is not just a bloodline but a full-fledged society akin to the Invictus or the Carthian Movement. True, the Carnival is admittedly too small both in number and reach to claim to be a covenant, but, for all other intents and purposes, the Carnival functions as one. Its members share a number of customs and practices along with a body of lore unknown to outsiders. They have their own pecking order and their own brand of justice tailor-made for the Carnival. Most important, they stick together. Few, if any other, Kindred suffer as these misshapen creatures do, and that suffering binds them together in a way that even Blood cannot.

Each Carnival — the term refers to the bloodline as a whole as well as to an individual coterie — is led by a single Freak, who is responsible for ensuring that the entire group is safe from sunlight, discovery by mortals and Kindred harassment. In return for this leadership, this Freak receives a payment from each member of the Carnival who wishes to put on her own show. This Privilege, as it is called, usually consists of a Vitae tithe, ensuring that the Carnival's leader can spend his time guaranteeing the safety of the Carnival, rather than looking for sustenance. Freaks who have spent at least a year or so with the Carnival usually enter into this agreement; those who have spent less time have to wait until they have a little more experience under their belt first. The Carnival also attracts a few benighted Kindred unrelated to the bloodline proper who wish to join its twisted ranks, as well as a number of kine who handle all the sundry tasks necessary to the safety of the Carnival as well as the success of the Show.

The bloodline's roots may be in Eastern Europe, but the Carnival's greatest numbers are in North America. Here, the circus and, later, the carnival found their greatest popularity, and, here the Carnival continues to exploit this historical fact. Although few ordinary carnivals and sideshows remain in business tonight, the Carnival continues to serve the very powerful, albeit mostly unspoken, need of the kine to witness oddities,

blasphemies and outright horrors of humanity in what seems to be a safe environment. Whether as a traveling show that quietly advertises ahead of its arrival in order to drum up a crowd or as a semi-permanent spectacle that holds regular shows for a steady stream of the curious, the Carnival finds no lack of an audience and, thereby, no lack of a fresh supply of blood.

Concepts: The Alligator Lady, The Astonishing Merman, The Frog Man of Borneo, The Girl With No Face, The Human Skeleton, The Irish Leprechaun, The Missing Link, The Rubber-Skinned Woman, The Two-Headed Man, The Vampire Worm of Old Spain



SAMPLE DEFORMITIES

Skin Afflictions: Scaly or rough skin of a reptilian or elephantine appearance; excessively loose skin.

Hirsutism/Baldness: Excessive hair or baldness.

Missing/Extra Limbs: Completely or partially lacking arms, legs, hands or feet, as well as possessing extra limbs, wholly or partially.

Deformed Limbs: Any variety of disfigurement of the arms, legs, hands or feet, which can include altered shape, fusion or hyper-extended joints.

Deformed Torso: A trunk that can bend in any direction and is often forced into an unnatural position by default.

Emaciation/Obesity: Condition leaving the Freak almost impossibly slender or large.

Facial Deformation: Shrunken head, pinhead syndrome, extra ears, missing lower jaw or any other grotesque abnormality of the head.

Many other deformities exist and can be used, provided they are severe enough or are used to simply add more horror to the Freak.



History

Among carnival folk exaggeration, confabulation and outright lying are accepted as part of any tale, for even a whispered legend among close associates is as much a part of the Show as one broadcast onstage to a rapt audience of rubes. The story of the Carnival is no exception, and the Freaks would have it no other way. For them, the origin of their bloodline is just another reckoning intended to entertain first and answer questions second. Even accepting its likely inaccuracies, most agree that, as told tonight, the narrative is probably not too far off the mark from the actual events that gave birth to this frightening brood.

Anulka was a Slovak girl born in 1742 with the misfortune of having her legs fused together, a condition named sirenemia because of the victim's resemblance to the mythical siren. Anulka, rejected by her mother at birth, was taken in by the Church, which wholly expected the

infant to die within days. To both surprise and horror, the child did not perish, and, though afflicted with pain and numerous attendant complications, the freak of nature survived God's cruel joke. As she grew older, her caretakers treated her with increasing harshness but, afraid that the girl was a divine test, the nuns did not dare to visit harm upon her. Instead, when Anulka experienced her first menses, she was expelled from the orphanage and handed over to a local businessman in exchange for cash.

Although the entrepreneur promised the sisters that the young woman would be well taken care of, he, in fact, had no such intention. Rather, he acted only as a middleman for Josef Gensch, the manager of a small circus that traveled through Bohemia, Austria, and Germany. Gensch knew a money-maker when he saw it, and, in Anulka, he saw a small fortune. Once he had her in his possession, any pretense at hospitality ceased, and the deformed girl was thrust into the inhuman world of the early sideshow. Sharing a filthy, straw-strewn cage floor with an imbecilic albino, she was turned overnight into just another spectacle for the show.

Towners — those locals who were lured to the circus — would come each day to gawk at the advertised

Mermaid of Bohemia for a few pfennigs and would fill Anulka's ears with words that were more injurious than her living conditions. She was spit on, insulted, threatened and degraded each day, her only solace the quiet hours of the night when she would pray to God for salvation. To add to her agonies, Gensch grew fond of having Anulka brought to his quarters now and then to satisfy his deviant lusts. In her mind, she was being punished by the Almighty, perhaps for the sins of the mother she never knew, for her life was as bad as any Hell could conjure up in her imagination. Any hope that God might rescue her finally died under Gensch's slimy affections. The Mermaid of Bohemia no longer prayed to Heaven, but instead begged for Death to ease her torment.

Her pleading did not go unheard, and one fateful night Death did answer her call. The circus had been in the town of Linz for only two days when Hagal, a neonate Kindred, paid a visit to the traveling show. Prowling through the throng of circus-goers, Hagal remained among the wagons and tents after the public had been sent home and the showmen and rousties found rest after their long day's work. The interloper



noted one wagon in particular — the office, or the circus leader's wagon — for from within emanated the sounds of pleasure and pain, emotions that stoked the young Kindred's bloodlust. The wagon's door was locked, but Hagal was too caught up in the moment to care, and tore the barrier from its hinges. Inside he found Gensch and Anulka, the former forcing his "mermaid" to provide him the basest of pleasures, to her clear distaste. Unable to control his own sense of arousal, Hagal launched himself upon the stunned circus leader and satisfied every one of his own monstrous urges, relishing the heavy splash of blood that filled his maw. Anulka sought only to flee, but her condition made that all but impossible. Instead, she could only cower in terror from the demon before her. In those brief moments before Hagal turned on her, she came to a simple yet fortifying conclusion. God had cursed her for the sins of her parents and had abandoned her to Hell. Now, the Devil had come to ease her suffering and offer her his own brand of salvation. Her darkest prayers had been answered. With that, her fright vanished.

Sated with Gensch's blood, Hagal eyed the deformed woman before him. As one who bore the curse of Damnation, Hagal knew what it meant to be feared and hated and abused, and a glint of his lingering humanity rose to the surface. What finally decided the fate of the freak was Anulka's utter lack of fear of the blood-soaked vampire, who surely could destroy her with nary a thought. She seemed at peace, even excited at her expected demise, a reaction that caught Hagal by surprise. Here was a creature truly fit for the mantle of the Kindred, a creature who was already comfortable bearing a horrible stigma without complaint. Imagine what she could be with the power of Vitae at her command! Without further hesitation, Hagal opened her neck and let the lifeblood given her by God spill out onto the already bloodstained floor. In place of God-given blood, Hagal gave his child his own accursed Vitae, inflicting upon her the full weight of the Embrace.

Together, Hagal and Anulka seized control of the circus, using the power of their Vitae to enslave key members of the group and put them in charge. The circus continued on its route as if nothing had happened, stopping in the usual towns and putting on the show, as the circus always had. However, this time, the circus collected blood as well as money from the locals, providing the circus' undead masters everything they needed to survive. When the show returned to Prague, the circus' owners — three merchants who bankrolled the enterprise and put Gensch in charge of day-to-day affairs — attempted to re-assert their control by installing a new overseer and seizing their share of the profits, but the Kindred would have none of it. Hagal and Anulka visited each of the owners in turn, impressing upon each one the need to immediately dissolve his relationship with the carnival, which worked precisely as desired. Now in full control of the circus, the haunting duo set out to put on a show that would exceed any other in history.

For more than three decades, they did what they set out to do. The small circus gained a reputation throughout Europe as a show not to be missed, and their regular route expanded to include larger and more distant locales. Unfortunately for the circus' owners, the circus also gained the unwanted attention of certain influential Kindred, who grew concerned about the rumors of midnight "vampire shows" that circus-goers could see with the purchase of a special, high-priced ticket.

While the circus was performing on the outskirts of Strasbourg, that town's Kindred Prince received word from his own spy that the rumors were indeed true. Hagal and Anulka were putting on a special exhibition in the middle of the night for a small audience that included not only blood-drinking but also a display of their vampiric powers, a flagrant violation of the First Tradition. Enraged, the Prince commanded his Sheriff to drag the outlaws to his court to answer for their crimes. With the help of some backup, the Sheriff did manage to get his hands on Hagal, but Anulka escaped the notice of the Sheriff's enforcers. Hagal was summarily tried, convicted and executed by Strasbourg's Prince. Anulka was convicted *in absentia*, and her circus was ordered destroyed in the hope that the punishment would flush her out of hiding.

Instead, Anulka was only driven away, finding refuge with the aid of a Retainer. Her sire and her circus were gone, but her will was unbroken. She retreated to her homeland and founded a new organization, something that would be less obvious and more able to move at a moment's notice. Instead of a full circus, she operated a small traveling carnival and created her own brood of childer to assist her and enhance the outfit's appeal. To her surprise, her progeny eventually began to change, becoming true freaks like her, each unique in his or her disfigurement. Anulka had become the progenitor of her own foul bloodline — she was a Freak and her family was the Carnival.

By the mid-19th century, the bloodline claimed more than two dozen members, and the original Carnival had spawned other Carnivals. However, the nature of the Freaks and of Kindred society at large meant that the Carnival had to remain a largely secretive and limited lineage. Princes and Primogen were still extremely wary of any news of the Carnival and wasted little time in investigating such reports. This environment led to a few Freaks making the arduous journey to the United States and signing on with one of the numerous small circuses that had become so popular there.

At the end of the 1800s, with the waning of full-fledged circuses, and their replacement by an even greater number of carnivals and sideshows, the Freaks found their niche. American Kindred nursed far less paranoia than their European counterparts, and the relatively wide-open country made it far more difficult for antagonistic Kindred to pursue the Carnival, let alone even hear the rumors about their true nature.

Tonight, the Carnival remains true to its origins. A mostly closed society, the Carnival clings to the fringes of Kindred society, putting on the Show and surviving. Concentrated in North America, where the bloodline surpasses three dozen members, the Carnival still claims family in Europe and parts of the Mediterranean. Rumors of at least one Carnival in the Far East have also been heard, but so far they remain just that.



CARNIVAL LINGO

The Carnival has its own special vocabulary that helps not only create a greater sense of community among its members, but also helps them conceal their activities from Kindred and kine. A complete lexicon is impossible to provide here, but a few of the most frequently used terms and those that differ in meaning from their ordinary carnival usage are given here.

Ballyhoo: The words or actions used to lure Kindred or kine to the Show.

Blowoff: The last part of the Show, when the Freak satisfies his hunger by drinking the blood of his victims.

Hole: An individual Freak's performance space.

Mark: A mortal targeted to become victim to the Show.

Mooch: A mark who is particularly easy to victimize.

Nut: The expenses required for the regular upkeep and defense of the Carnival.

Privilege: A payment, usually in Vitae, paid to the Carnival's boss for permission to put on a Show.

Office: The boss's personal haven, whether a room, a wagon, an RV or something else.

Straight Up: Honest.

Tip: The audience for any given Show.

Additional words can be found on some of the extensive lists of special carnival terminology available on the Internet.



Society and Culture

The Carnival looks to one Freak for leadership, variously called the boss, the Man, the Front Office or simply Management, though such titles are usually used only for the benefit of outsiders. Within the Freaks' own Stygian tents, any pretense at formality is seen as just that —pretense. Despite the casual nature of the Carnival's internal politics, this individual holds enormous influence. Management's word is rarely disobeyed.

Those rare Kindred who understand the inner workings of the Carnival speculate that this obedience has more to do with some innate servility that every Freak feels, perhaps an unseen aspect of their line's weakness, than because of any real superiority of the boss.

The Freaks laugh at this supposition. Their deformities and social stigma do not compel them to servility. Because they have only each other to protect against the worst the Requiem can throw at them, they have few other options. So long as the Front Office does not command them to waltz into a blazing inferno, they are usually satisfied to follow orders, even if grumblingly. The alternative — each Freak for himself — is too terrifying to consider.

The boss's primary function is to protect the Carnival from any and all danger. If he fails in this regard, his tenure will likely be dramatically short. Allowing the Carnival's wealth to be swiped is just reason to depose the leader, usually with a hearty beating. Permitting one of the Freaks under his aegis to suffer Final Death is inexcusable. Tales of bosses being literally tarred, feathered and left to burn in the morning sun are commonplace and probably not over-exaggerated.

There are three tiers of social standing underneath the Man: troupers, greens and punks. Troupers are those Freaks who have been with the Carnival for at least one full circuit of its usual route, in the case of a traveling Carnival, or who have been with the Carnival at least a year, in the case of an established Carnival. These Freaks have essentially proven themselves and are accepted as full members of the Carnival, with all the rights it offers. Most importantly, troupers are permitted to put on their own private shows and may keep whatever profits they take in as a result. In exchange, they must pay Management a Vitae tithe, known as the Privilege, with precise terms set by the Carnival's leader. Among this social caste, those Freaks who have meted out punishment to Kindred who intended to or succeeded in visiting harm upon the Carnival are especially respected. The "pinhead" who beat the Sheriff's lackey into torpor for trying to set fire to one of the group's trailers, while lacking wit, will be held in great esteem by the bloodline. Aside from these rare few, most troupers are judged by the quality of their acts. The "Frog Boy" who simply squats on a stage has nothing on the "Two-Headed Woman" who is able to sing a two-part harmony and put on a comic argument with herself. A Freak seeking greater recognition among her peers need only work on her performance until it surpasses expectation.

The greens are those Freaks who have yet to qualify as troupers, by dint of little time spent with the Carnival. Because greens cannot put on their own shows, they either perform as part of a trouper's act — and have no claim to the profits received — or they refrain from performance entirely and instead assist in whatever capacity they are permitted. It is important to note that Freaks do not accord status based upon the nature of one's deformities. A double-bodied Freak has no more or less inherent status than one who suffers from "lobster" hands. Merit, not disfigurement, is what matters most to the Carnival.

The third rung of the Carnival's ladder is composed of those curious Kindred who desire to keep company with the bloodline, for whatever reason. Punks often work

as skills during performances or otherwise engage in offering personal protection or assistance to individual Freaks. Some of these Kindred are used as gaffed, or fake, freaks or perform talent acts — sword-swallowing, marksmanship, magic shows and so on — with all profits going to the Carnival's manager.

Most Carnivals also claim a few mortals, in addition to the Kindred, as part of the family. Although mortals hold very low status, the various roustabouts, talkers, skills, joint men, advance men, blood dolls, and soon-to-be-corpses the Freaks have successfully lured into their twisted spectacle are important to the Carnival's overall success and survival.

Central to the Requiem of every Freak is the Show, a term that has a double meaning in the Carnival. On the one hand, "the Show" refers to the actual performance that a Freak puts on for an audience with the intent of taking audience members' valuables, blood included. "The Show" is also the name of the line's unique Discipline that enables a Freak to better gain the attention of the crowd and become even more shockingly deformed before their unblinking eyes. Because the best acts also lead to greater prestige in the eyes of the Carnival, the Show, in both senses of the meaning, is of paramount importance. A Freak will go to nearly any length to make his act better, including stealing another Freak's ideas, putting his unlife at risk to obtain some prop or the secret to a particularly spectacular trick and even breaking the Traditions. Freaks spend a great deal of time rehearsing the Show, perfecting every nuance of the performance and testing its effect upon the audience. The latter is accomplished by peer review, dry-runs before the roustabouts and the use of select "test audiences," who rarely ever see the light of day again.

Competition among the Freaks for the best Show can be fierce, but only rarely does such competition lead to physical attack. Usually, the battle for prestige literally takes place on the performance stage as well as via carefully placed rumors and accusations. Snide comments, pointed jabs and ghastly bits of slander always seem to accompany every Freak who seeks to climb this social ladder. The most original act will be labeled a rip-off and will be cruelly deconstructed by the invisible naysayers who hope to put the most avant-garde Freak in her place.

Most accusations and gossip can be put to rest by a simple compliment paid by a boss, but this is very hard to come by. Instead, the exchange tends to eventually die down to a murmur after enough time has passed. In those rare instances when a Freak decides to take the competition to another level and actually engages in sabotage or violence, all bets are off and it is Management's job to step in as quickly as possible to put an end to the conflict. The Carnival maintains its own refinement of the Masquerade: never let outsiders see

our problems. Freaks who violate this rule can expect a punishment they will never forget.

The Carnival does its best to skirt the scrutiny of other Kindred not by actually hiding from view, but by simply not making waves and by staying uninvolved in local politics, at least openly. The Carnival chooses to pitch its tent away from the Rack and other places frequented by or likely to be the favored domain of other Kindred. Management also often makes a gesture to the Prince as soon as possible that is intended to test the waters, as it were. In most cases, a ghoul or sometimes a Freak Kindred gathers information on the next city on the route.

If a city Kindred's hostility toward the bloodline is apparent, the Carnival will move on or entirely bypass the spot. When the Prince shows a bit less antagonism, the Carnival usually offers some kind of favor or kick-back in addition to a guarantee that the Carnival will not be a drain on the local herd and will abide by any Traditions or decrees the Prince wishes to make known, which often include limits on how long the Carnival can stay, where its members may go and so on. Once given permission to set up shop, the Carnival will locate the best place to do so and send out a few of its Retainers to gather a crowd.

It is never the Carnival's intention to broadcast its presence openly and have long lines of curious kine waiting to see the Freaks. Rather, they target very specific groups that are likely to keep the existence of the Carnival secret. Typical marks are shut-ins, jaded subcultures, the ill and others who seek some kind of deviant charge to put a spark back into their lives. The Carnival also courts certain criminals, the deranged, military veterans and other people who have seen atrocity firsthand and have gained a taste for such things. The enticements used to lure these unwitting victims to their doom vary. The ballyhoo can include spirited argument and persuasion, promises of monetary gain, an offer of narcotics or nearly any type of appeal suited to the particular mark being played.

The Show itself typically entertains a group of five or more kine per performance, with as many as a dozen being the practical outer limit. During the Show, the Freak will identify one or more rubes who would most satisfy her inhuman cravings and will use some sign to indicate that individual's identity to her assistants. As the Show progresses and the audience is unable to tear its eyes away from the Freak, these assistants will rifle through the pockets, purses and backpacks of the gawking fools, taking anything of value. The assistants will also remove those kine the Freak has pointed out, using whatever force is necessary, and take the prey to a separate area, where they are secured for the blowoff.

When the Show is over, the remaining audience is shown the exit and returned to the streets to carry on as before, though likely now haunted by nightmar-

ish visions that they will never forget. The blowoff comes when the Freak descends, in all her grotesque hunger, upon the immobilized marks set aside for her bloodthirsty purposes. Sometimes, if the Freak does not require a great deal of Vitae and if she has enough kine for the blowoff, some or all of these unfortunates are left alive and released. However, just as often, their lives are forfeited, and they are given a Show that no mortal would ever wish to see.



THE KEY TO THE MIDWAY

Kindred who seek to join the Carnival, whether they are already Freaks or would-be punks wishing to hit the road with the bloodline, are traditionally put through a cruel little game that tests the prospective member's suitability even as it provides the Carnival no small measure of entertainment. There is no real way to win the game, but those who don't perform well are usually going to find that their request for membership is turned down.

The prospective Freak is nonchalantly approached by a trouper and given a task that sounds challenging, but certainly not beyond the prospect's abilities. Similar to the notorious snipe hunt, the task involves procuring some object, contacting some individual or traveling to some place that doesn't exist. The prospect also learns that successful completion of the task is of critical importance to Management, and ultimately to the Carnival as a whole, even if that is not apparent.

The prospective Freak or punk then goes to work, and the Carnival sits back and enjoys the charade, a thing of special beauty because none of them know how the game will play out. Often, if the task requires travel, they use some means to keep tabs on their little rube. Sometimes, they just wait for him to report on his progress and find in his updates all the comedy they had hoped for. Only on the rarest of occasions will the Carnival interfere if the prospect finds himself in real trouble, and usually then only if that trouble can find its way back to the Carnival. This game continues until the Carnival is ready to move on to the next town or until the test no longer provides enough entertainment to the troops.

If the prospect outright refuses because the test sounds too difficult, any chance he had to join the Carnival is gone. However, if he refuses because he has seen through the ruse, his application for membership is greatly enhanced.

Sometimes, outsiders endure variants of the game for the purpose of simply getting them off the Carnival's back. Nosy Sheriffs, curious Dragons and others can bring dangers no Freak wishes and so they will be met by the Man, who will lead them on their own wild goose chase, giving the Carnival time to either cover up its activities or pack up and scam.



Carnival Justice

"Yeah, it's true, I tell ya. I heard it from this holy-roller bitch who knew the bastard, spent time in Barcelona as a neonate or something. Yeah. Hey, shut up already, will ya? You want to hear the story, don't cha? Okay, then zip it and let me tell it.

"See, it happened sometime around 1800 or something, I think. Anyway, the date's not what's important. It was a long fuckin' time ago, alright? The Prince of Madrid, or somewhere else near there — it was a Spanish city, I know that much — was minding his own fuckin' business — you know, knocking heads, stomping on neonates, playing high-and-mighty — when he hears that the Carnival has just pulled into town. Of course, the first thing that he thinks is, 'Oh shit, not a bunch of Freaks messin' with my turf,' of course. I mean, do ya blame him? So he decides to send his kid out to see if the rumor has legs and then come back and give him the lowdown.

"Well, junior's never heard of these Freaks before, so he's all juiced to track 'em down and see what the commotion is all about. He's a self-important fuck just like his old man, buying into the whole vice-Princely power-trip thing, so he figures he's gonna just waltz in and lay down the law on the circus mutants. Well, after a bit of screwin' around — the kid couldn't find his ass if wasn't attached — he finally finds someone who points him in the right direction, and he marches on out to meet the weirdoes.

"Sure enough, they turn out to be exactly what daddy told him they were, and he nearly pukes himself having to look at them. Well, any thought of playing lord and master go out the window as his stomach turns, and he runs back to pops and gives him the dirt on the Carnival. You know, he saw how fucked-up they were, all deformed and shit; most of 'em shouldn't have survived birth like that, ya know?

"Fuck 'em. They should just be set on fire. At least no one would have to see that kinda shit anymore.

"Anyway, the Prince thinks about this, probably calls all his cronies together to waste more time, and finally announces to everybody that unless the Freaks formally request his permission to squat in his town, they'll be destroyed. So, he sends his idiot son back to the carnny camp to tell 'em how it is. The chief Freak, the fuckin' ringleader himself, does a little dog-and-pony show for the Seneschal, saying how most of his coterie can't make the journey to Elysium because of their condition and that kinda crap, which is bullshit if you ask me. The prick shoulda pushed it, but he wussed out and said it was cool if only the leader of the Freaks came back to court to speak for the whole motley crew.

"Well, to make a long story short, things didn't go too fuckin' well for the Freaks. The Prince decided that

enough was enough, and he wasted the midget fucker on the spot. Betcha it was funny as shit to watch Tiny Tim beggin' for mercy. The Prince then ordered the whole Carnival to be wiped out by any means necessary. Of course, the best method was fire, so he passed on the order to a bunch of kine fuck-ups and told them to do the dirty deed just before the sun set the next evening, so they'd all die in their sleep.

"Thing is, the head Freak didn't come to Elysium alone. Another Freak somehow fuckin' squeezed his ass into court without anyone noticing a thing, and he saw the shit go down. He rushed back to his circus pals faster than possible and told them the whole story. So, instead of just leaving town immediately, the Freaks decided to do one last thing before they high-tailed it out of Madrid or wherever.

"A few of them went back to town, somehow broke into the Prince's own goddamn haven, and kidnapped him! No shit! And remember, it was still night, so it wasn't like the Prince was a pushover or anything. These little monsters actually managed to take him out of his haven and back to the Carnival without anyone being the wiser.

"Okay, I don't know exactly what happened next. Only the Freaks know that. But here's how it all shook out. The Carnival was gone by sunrise, and so the mooks sent to torch 'em out never found shit and figured it was just as well.

"But it didn't take a genius to figure out that something bad had happened when the Prince was discovered missing. Now, here's the kicker. Really, this is some fucked-up shit. About a year later, the same Carnival turns up in France or something doing its usual shit. But this time, they have a new attraction. In a cage is a new Freak, one with no arms and no legs and moves by wiggling its scaly body like a snake. And you know what? It was called the Vampire Worm of Old Spain, and guess what? It had the Prince's face. No fuckin' shit. Somehow, those Freaks turned the Prince into a Freak himself and now he was just another act in their little nightmare world.

"That, my *compadre*, is the plain fuckin' truth."

Secret Origins

A fragment of the journal of Hieronymous, Ordo Dracul philosopher:

Jul. 17, 1739

The Great Work has consumed me. I am depleted in mind and body, and I know no more how much further I can go with this effort. Already, my progress has moved not an inch further for over a year, and I fear that I am going in circles. I feel more and more the call of sleep, of a lassitude that will claim me for the ages and from which I might one night rise again, though my past work be forgotten. My student grows restless, eager for his master to triumph as in nights long past, but it seems not to be. If I do not dismiss him, he

shall become more foe than aid, pitching his ambition against me and tempting my meaner instincts. This I must avoid at all costs. Although my knowledge of the Coils ordinarily places me beyond such urges, ennui gnaws at even that achievement nightly.

Jul. 18, 1739

It has happened: a discovery. I am renewed, and the Great Work can continue. The Man within me is once again awakened to possibilities that just a night ago remained unseen.

Subject Four (Gustav, I have come to call him, though I know it is a petty conceit), has changed. He has not been provided *Vitae* for six nights, and tonight I chose to give him the very first draught from the variant I had already forsaken as worthless on account of its impurities. Surely, its exposure to the crystalline dust that accumulated in the cabinet after the failed experiment of Jul. 7 should have rendered it so, yet tonight is proof that a new path has been opened. I must re-examine all my notes from before and tomorrow recreate that so-called failure.

Upon consuming only 19 drams of the variant, he convulsed in a way that I initially mistook as fatal, the result of a toxic concoction. I was done with him, so no matter. The convulsions continued for at least two minutes, however, followed not by death, but something else entirely. In utterly astounding fashion, he let out a loud gasp as his arms began to withdraw inside his torso. There was no attendant expansion of the chest or abdominal cavity, which should have been the case, no matter how outlandish the activity, but there was not. Rather, the limbs just seemed to melt into him as he screamed in pain (surely, it must hurt; I forgave him his noise). When the transformation was over, a change unlike any other I have ever witnessed, only his hands remained. These too were different: distended in asymmetrical fashion and apparently useless to the subject. A careful examination with saw and scalpel afterward revealed that the entire length of the arms that had previously existed, along with all muscle and skin, had entirely vanished. It was as if the subject had been born with this deformity.

Aug. 3, 1639

So far, eleven entirely different results have occurred with fourteen subjects, all the result of the same batch of variant. Only the instances of the missing legs, the shrunken head and the skeleton-like emaciation have been repeated, in one case each.

Tomorrow, I shall endeavor to isolate the differentiator, focusing on the missing legs first. I imagine it is either related to ethnic background, diet prior to the Embrace or some mental desire or fear on the part of the subject. The latter will require the greatest attention, given its difficulty. There is much progress to be made if the nature and value of this transformation is to be better understood. What it might offer our kind I cannot yet estimate.

The Devil's Menagerie

In the 1940s, in Oklahoma City, somewhere in the vicinity of the stockyards and left to its own devices by the Kindred powers that be, stood a Carnival like no other.

Led by a hideously deformed vampire who claimed to be the King of Freaks, the Carnival went far beyond the usual spectacle put on by the bloodline. Not only were there the usual assortment of Freaks — both living and unliving — and the assorted roustabouts and hangers-on typical in other Carnivals, but there were also other creatures that normally kept their presence a secret to humankind.

One of the featured acts was the Werewolf Boy, a young man who was said not, as would be expected, to merely suffer from an extreme case of hirsutism, but was an actual lycanthrope, a Lupine. The act consisted of the youth undergoing a complete transformation from man to werewolf before the startled audience, with his bloodcurdling howls carrying over the sounds of all the other acts and putting a fright into livestock miles away.

Another popular attraction was the Astounding Gabriel, Mentalist and Illusionist. Each evening, this placid gentleman would perform a series of increasingly incredible feats, including mind-reading, levitation and conjuration. The finale of his performance included the most unbelievable trick of all. The conjurer called for an assistant to bring a chest onto the stage. Then the conjurer turned his back to the audience and tossed a baseball into the air above their heads. Whoever was able to get his hands on the ball was permitted to name one object that resided in his home and was small enough to fit inside the chest. After the object was described, Gabriel sat upon the chest and concentrated for a few moments. Then, to the delight of all, he would open the chest and, from it, retrieve an object fitting the exact description given him. He would even permit the member of the audience who named the object to come on stage and examine the object to be sure it was his. Finally, the conjurer allowed the astonished participant to take the object with him, as it was, Gabriel noted with a knowing smile, "his anyway. I'm a magician, not a thief."

The most disturbing oddities of all left their audiences with nightmares to last a lifetime. Such acts included bloody dismemberment, cannibalism and, in one instance, a live birth by a woman of enormous girth, with two very different, but each singularly blasphemous, children issuing from her loins. Audience members were hypnotized and openly eviscerated, if some reports are true, and the effects of numerous Kindred Disciplines were freely demonstrated for the sake of the show.

The King of Freaks seemed a particularly wicked fellow, his gaze captivating all who looked upon his disfigured form, and his voice sounding as if it rose up from the throat of Old Scratch himself. Under the King of Freaks' leadership, nothing was too profane, too impossible or too dangerous.

The Carnival disappeared from Oklahoma City sometime during the early 1950s. For a time, various rumors placed the King of the Freaks and his show in other cities, mostly west of the Mississippi. These rumors stopped entirely for the next 50 years, with most Kindred speculating that the Carnival met its just end. However, only last year, word was heard in Elysium that the Astounding Gabriel's show was seen in Pittsburgh and whispers that a Freak claiming dominion over all his kind began to spread in New York. Perhaps the Devil's Menagerie has been biding its time, honing its act for its next performance.

The Show

The Freaks *know* their bodies, frightening though they may be to others. In fact, these Kindred have become so familiar with their deformities that they have literally become addicted to that which makes them different. Just as a woman who gets her first piercing on a lark and a year later has two dozen all over her flesh, the Freaks are obsessed with making themselves even more grotesque, exploring the limits of their forms and delighting in the extremes they can discover. While this certainly proves personally satisfying to the Freaks, even more importantly, they can put on an ever-more spectacular Show. By displaying themselves in the most shocking fashion, they are able to captivate an audience, whether a small crowd or a single onlooker. The more fascinating their performance, the less viewers find themselves able to tear themselves away from the Show — and the more helpless they are. Once captivated, they are easy targets for the Freak, no matter what she may have in mind.

• Geek Trick

The classic sideshow geek's spectacle involves doing something painful, disgusting or otherwise personally discomfiting — driving a nail into one's face, swallowing billiard balls and vomiting them back up, chewing glass. Freaks who master this basic level of The Show have no problem subjecting themselves to the indignities or pain such Geek Tricks can involve.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Stamina + Intimidation + The Show

Action: Instant

For each success on the invocation roll, the character can spend a single turn ignoring any pain that affects him (effectively negating wound penalties or penalties associated with damage, such as those that might affect Crúac or Theban Sorcery rituals). This Discipline doesn't affect the actual occurrence of the injury at all — wounds still open or the nail remains embedded in the Freak's face. Naturally, Geek Trick doesn't actually heal wounds or affect dice-pool penalties after its duration, though the Freak may choose to invoke the power again.

•• *Contortion*

Many Freaks suffer from physical deformities involving misplaced, strangely oriented or unnaturally flexible limbs, backs and digits. Contortion allows a Freak to either further enhance these deformities where they already exist or create them where they do not.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Strength + Athletics + the Show

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Freak actually succeeds in contorting her physique, but the resulting configuration of limbs, bones and so on is not what she anticipated. Instead, her body is contorted in a way that is excruciatingly painful, so much so that she suffers two points of bashing damage that cannot be healed until the following evening, when the effects of this disastrous transformation have vanished. In addition to the actual damage, Storytellers should feel free to afflict the Freak with other appropriate penalties that might reflect the nature of the horrid physical warping.

Failure: The Freak fails to effectively contort herself, for better or worse.

Success: The Freak is able to make a significant alteration to one part of her body that involves the bones and muscles, so as to allow the body to be flexed in a way that was previously impossible. The Freak experiences no discomfort, and the alteration remains until the Freak desires it to end or the sun rises, whichever comes first. Examples include a Freak who can bend her knees in any direction (the better to achieve a certain stance for a better view), one who can touch her elbows behind her back (the better to fit into a narrow gap) and one who can flip her legs over her head (the better to hide somewhere small).

Exceptional Success: The Contortion is so complete that the Freak is able to repeat *this specific contortion* at will (no roll or Vitae expenditure required) for a number of nights equal to the number of successes.

In no case can Contortion be used in a corrective way or in a way that provides the Freak remedy of the burden of her unique weakness.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier Situation

- | | |
|----|--|
| +2 | The Contortion involves range of motion already capable by the body (bending forward at the waist, touching elbows behind back). |
| -2 | The Contortion involves range of motion to which the body isn't adapted (backward-bending knees) or that actively requires breaking bones, tearing ligaments and so on (folding one's ribcage in half, tremendously distending one's jaw). |

••• *Spider Crawl*

At this level of showmanship, the Freak learns to change her body in ways that are truly no longer in the realm of humanity. Spider Crawl allows her to grow countless, almost invisible hook-like hairs on the palms of her hands and the soles of her feet that can be used in the same fashion as a spider's in order to permit the scaling of most surfaces with ease.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Dexterity + Athletics + the Show

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The hook-like barbs that are necessary for climbing form only partially, causing pain and discomfort for the Freak. For the remainder of the scene, the Freak suffers a -3 penalty to any dice pools that involve use of the hands or feet (though a successful use of Geek Trick, above, will abate this for a time).

Failure: No effect.

Success: The Freak is able to climb surfaces as easily as a spider. The surface being climbed must possess some irregularity in order to be climbable — glass and some other artificial materials are too smooth for Spider Crawl to work effectively. The Freak can climb just as easily on ceilings as on vertical surfaces, and similarly on poles or other objects. Movement occurs at half her normal rate.

Exceptional Success: The Freak is able to move with unprecedented ease, permitting her to move just as quickly when climbing as when moving on the ground.

In all cases, the Freak must have bare hands and feet to use this power.

•••• *Rubber Skin*

Freaks who have mastered The Show to this degree are able to not only contort their bodies in unusual ways, but can actually compress and stretch their bodies into shapes that are downright grotesque. Rubber Skin permits the Freak to literally squeeze through a narrow pipe, reach across a 10-foot space to grab a set of keys and even pass through the narrow space under a closed door. During the transformation, the Freak's body defies its normal spatial limitations and can be forced to adjust to the wishes of its owner.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Dexterity + Athletics + the Show

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The effort to alter her body is so great that the Freak is overcome by exhaustion, which makes any further physical activity severely difficult. For the remainder of the scene, the Freak suffers a -3 penalty to all dice pools that involve a physical Attribute (though a successful use of Geek Trick, above, will abate this for a time).

Failure: No effect.

Success and Exceptional Success: The Freak is able to coax her body into changing as desired, allowing her to compress or stretch as needed. The change lasts only a single scene or until the Freak chooses to return to her normal form, whichever comes first. She may alter her body to such a degree that she is able to do the following things, depending on her success.

Limits of Body Change

Feat	Success	Exceptional Success
Squeeze into cylindrical shape	8" diameter	2" diameter
Squeeze under obstacle	4" space	1" space
Stretch body	100% increase in length	300% increase in length

Note that none of these applications of Rubber Skin change the Freak's weight, though the Freak may choose to alter her density. A 350-pound behemoth who invokes Rubber Skin to shrink herself down to a two-inch-by-one-foot cylinder still weighs 350 pounds.

..... *Siamese Twin*

Named for the famous 19th century twins Chang and Eng, this power enables a Freak to fuse the flesh and bone on one area of his body with the flesh and bone on another part, or on another Kindred! The Freak could join his legs into one large, mermaid-like "tail," he could cause his arms to seem to melt into his torso, and he could even temporarily connect his body to another vampire's, even if that Kindred were an unwilling participant. Obviously, this latter usage can lead to some very horrific, not to mention dangerous, situations. However, when used with another willing Freak, the Carnival is able to put on a Show that cannot be matched.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Dexterity + Medicine + The Show

Action: Instant. If the target is an unwilling Kindred, the action is contested, with a Dexterity + Stamina roll made for the target to avoid being made a "Siamese Twin."

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Freak's attempt at fusion goes horribly awry. He accidentally slips up and succeeds in fusing himself in a way that was not only unintentional, but is also extremely crippling and possibly quite painful. The Storyteller should determine whether the nature of the erroneous fusion is painful (-3 to all physical dice pools and -2 to all other dice pools except degeneration rolls, though a successful use of Geek Trick, above, will abate this for a time) or crippling (reduce the character's Speed to 0) and apply penalties as befits the result. The consequences of this failure last the duration of the scene.

Failure: No effect.

Success: The Freak achieves his goal. If the intent was to fuse one part of his own body to another part of his own body, the fusion succeeds without further complication.

This alteration remains for the duration of the scene or until the Freak chooses to end it, whichever comes first.

If the Freak had aimed to fuse part



of his body to another vampire, the fusion succeeds as desired, but lasts only so long as the target desires: should the twin wish to break the connection, that character's player must succeed at a Stamina + Composure roll that results in more successes than the Freak achieved in making her Siamese Twin roll. No matter what the case, the connection automatically breaks at the end of the scene.

Exceptional Success: The fusion now lasts until the Freak wishes to end it. In the case of an unwilling twin, that character suffers a -2 penalty to the Stamina + Composure to break the connection between the two.

Siamese Twin has benefits that go far beyond a mere physical connection. When connected to the other vampire, both twins are able to communicate by thought alone. In addition to this sharing of the minds, both twins have access to the 10 common Disciplines (see pp. 115–141 of **Vampire: The Requiem**) of the other for the duration of their union. By spending one Vitae per Discipline they wish to access (plus any costs associated with the Discipline itself), a twin may use that Discipline as if it were his own for the remainder of the scene or until the vampires are no longer Siamese Twins, whichever comes first.

While joined, the Freak who initiated the connection may also steal one Vitae from his twin each turn as an instant action by succeeding at a Stamina + Composure roll. This does not count toward the creation or enhancement of a Vinculum. The other twin is unable to tap into the Freak's own supply of Vitae. Should either vampire suffer enough damage to be destroyed while joined, the surviving twin will suffer a number of points of aggravated damage equal to the dead vampire's Blood Potency, and the connection is immediately broken.

Obviously, two vampires frenzying while joined has dire circumstances for both. In fact, at any time while joined, if either twin enters a frenzy, he will direct his bloodlust at his twin before turning it on anyone else.



GAWK

(Dominate ••, Majesty ••)

The first thing every Freak learns to do is capture the attention of an audience. The ballyhoo may draw the audience to see the Show, but the quality of the performance keeps the audience prisoner. Gawk enhances the audience's degree of fascination to such an extent that people are literally unable to perceive anything besides the Show itself. Succumbing to tunnel vision of sorts, those who fall victim to Gawk fail to witness the roustabout going through their pockets, or feel his fumbling hands or smell his sweat. They are so transfixed upon what the Freak is doing that, short of outright injury, they ignore all sensations — whether visual, audible, tactile or otherwise — and focus all their attention on the Show before them. Gawk affects all individuals close enough to the Freak to recognize the nature of her deformity by sight.

Cost: —

Dice Pool: Presence + Expression + Majesty versus subject's Composure + Blood Potency

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive.



Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Freak's performance is not only unimpressive and utterly fails to capture the attention of the audience, but actually causes them to suspect that some kind of chicanery is at work. Some might rightly feel they are the intended victims of a trap and act accordingly, while others might simply come to believe they have been cheated by the Freak and desire to leave immediately. The intended target is immune to any use of the Freak's Gawk for the remainder of the evening.

Failure: No effect.

Success: The affected individual is entirely focused on the Freak's actions for a full turn and can perceive no other stimuli, unless directly generated by the Freak or her performance. If the Freak wishes to maintain the mesmeric Show, her player must engage in the contested roll every turn with the subject's player.

Exceptional Success: The Freak's performance is so captivating that the subject is unable to fully break the spell even after the performance has ended. For the remainder of the scene, so long as the Freak has not left the subject's field of vision, the Freak enjoys a +1 bonus to other uses of The Show against this particular subject.

Gawk can be used successfully only against those who can see the Freak's performance. The lighting and conditions do not have to be perfect — in fact, dim illumination is often part of an act — but the particular nature of the Freak and her deformity must be readily apparent to the intended target.

Each roll represents one turn of performance, during which the Freak does nothing that isn't part of her act or that can't be worked into her act, at the Storyteller's discretion. Should the Freak stop her performance for even a single moment, the spell is broken. (Don't even bother with the contested roll.)

This spell is broken only if the target suffers one or more points of damage, regardless of the type. An explosion nearby would not break the spell, for example — at least not directly. (The Freak will probably be startled and that would cause her to halt her performance, which would end the spell.) Those subject to this power can be pawed, held, trussed-up, stripped and thoroughly searched, all without being alerted to the fact. The spell continues until the Freak's performance ends or the Freak's player fails in the contested roll.

Kindred are as susceptible as kine to Gawk. Mortals who have at one point consumed a point of a specific Freak's Vitae are immune to that Freak's attempts to use Gawk. Other Freaks are immune to the use of Gawk.

Children of Judas

Look upon what you have wrought and feel the weight of your soul's despondency

In some parts of the world, people who commit suicide are said to come back as vampires. This legend may have some connection to the bloodline called the Children of Judas. Where the Children of Judas dwell, suicides increase — and some of these suicides become Children of Judas themselves.

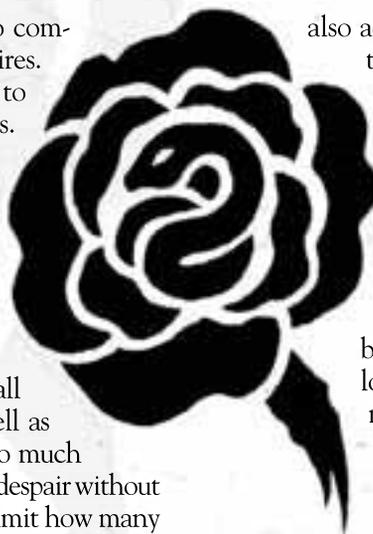
Many Kindred hate and fear the so-called Suicide Kings. A cynic might suggest the Kindred hate and fear most other Kindred, but the Children of Judas endure extra suspicion. The Suicide Kings bring the siren call of self-destruction to other vampires as well as mortals. Perhaps this bloodline receives too much blame: Kindred can feel horror, remorse and despair without any help. The Damned may not want to admit how many of them choose suicide. When their fellows destroy themselves, it's more comforting to blame an outside force than to suggest they had reason for such self-loathing.

The Children of Judas emerge from the Daeva clan. The Succubi slake their own desires by arousing the desires of others. The Suicide Kings gain the power to arouse the darkest, most enigmatic and perverse desire of all.

No one's sure when the Children of Judas originated. The legend connecting vampires with suicide dates back to antiquity. Despite the bloodline's name, however, members do not claim that their lineage began with Judas Iscariot, the disciple who betrayed Christ. Rather, they see a spiritual connection to the traitor disciple: Judas destroyed what he should have loved most, and killed himself in remorse. Many Children of Judas feel they, too, have betrayed what they love and destroyed themselves. They know all Kindred eventually must feel this self-hate as well.

The bloodline calls its alleged founder the Hanged Man. As a mortal, the Hanged Man supposedly lived in the Balkans during the late Middle Ages. The story goes that the Hanged Man was a vampire-hunter. After he retired, a vengeful vampire massacred the vampire-hunter's family, then Embraced the hunter when he tried to hang himself in grief. The Hanged Man pursued his sire for decades before destroying her, then joined the Lancea Sanctum for an unlife of penance and renewed service to God. He is said to have destroyed himself in the 18th century, in an attempt at martyrdom.

Over the centuries, the Hanged Man sired a number of childer who sired childer of their own. The bloodline



also adopted a number of Daeva who fell prey to self-disgust or who wished to add the Children of Judas' power of Despond to their cruel schemes. One legend of the bloodline, however, says that Suicide Kings may arise spontaneously. If a Daeva Embraces a mortal who's dying from an attempt at suicide, the childer supposedly bears the Judas taint and shall inevitably make the transition to the bloodline without any help. Some Kindred loremasters believe the Hanged Man was merely a noteworthy case of such spontaneous emergence, in a bloodline that may be as old as the Kindred themselves.

Parent Clan: Daeva

Nickname: Suicide Kings. (Female Children of Judas may be called Suicide Queens, but the bloodline as a whole always receives the masculine nickname.)

Covenant: Children of Judas join the Lancea Sanctum in greater numbers than any other covenant. The bloodline's reputed founder joined that covenant, and the Suicide Kings certainly excel at leading Kindred and kine to sorrow and contrition. A significant fraction of Suicide Kings join the Invictus, however, to skulk among that covenant's large Daeva contingent. The doctrines of the Carthians, Acolytes and Dragons rarely hold special interest for the Children of Judas, and those covenants show little special interest in recruiting these Kindred.

A higher percentage of the Children of Judas prefer to remain unaligned than is usual for Daeva — especially among Suicide Kings whose lineage is known to other Kindred. The hoary vampires who lead the covenants may see a Child of Judas as a useful ally, but younger Kindred tend to fear the heralds of despair. Neonates and ancillae often hint to a known Suicide King that she might be happier in another covenant, preferably one in another city. The youngsters have not yet accepted that despair is both an intrinsic part of the Kindred's curse and perhaps their only solace. These youngsters also do not realize that happiness may not be a Child of Judas' goal.

Appearance: Many Children of Judas share the attractive and stylish appearance the Kindred associate with Daeva. The bloodline's habitual Embrace of suicides, however, forces the Children of Judas to draw

from a more finite and less beautiful sample of the mortal population. Thus, many Suicide Kings (or Daeva who could potentially join the bloodline) look quite ordinary — though they may improve their appearance as much as possible through makeup, personal grooming and stylish clothing.

Haven: Children of Judas, just as other Daeva, often design their havens to indulge their sensual appetites and lure their prey. The Suicide Kings' obsession with sorrow and despair, however, may lead to odd touches: anything from a floor-to-ceiling print of Munch's "The Scream," to the polished skull of the Judas' first kill sitting on the mantelpiece.

A Child of Judas who attempted suicide as a mortal often keeps reminders of his search for self-destruction. For instance, one Suicide King might keep coils of rope in his closet, while another Judas might have a medicine cabinet stuffed with bottles of sleeping pills. A third Judas might keep a selection of small, sharp knives on a tray next to her bathtub.

Background: Similar to other Daeva, Children of Judas are drawn to the beautiful, the cultured and the elegant. The Children of Judas feel just as strong an attraction, however, for the desperate, the grieving and the self-loathing. From the widow who can't imagine life without her husband to the PCP-addled thug who waves a gun at the cops, the pain of the desperate and grieving draws the Children of Judas like flies to rotting meat. And, if a Child of Judas should witness someone actually attempting suicide — why, the compulsion to Embrace becomes terribly strong. The Suicide Kings, therefore, come from every level of society. They may have any mortal age from teens to senior citizens. Both genders and all races are well represented.



Character Creation: As a true cross-section of humanity, Children of Judas may have any balance of Attributes and Skills. After the Embrace, however, they often try to develop their Social Attributes, Skills and Merits so they can play the predatory games of seduction their Daeva appetites demand. Nascent Children of Judas often seem like second-best Succubi, preying on mortals who seem particularly vulnerable to emotional manipulation.

Bloodline Disciplines: Auspex, Despond, Majesty, Resilience

Weakness: As for all Daeva, it costs two Willpower points for a Child of Judas to resist her Vices. Children of Judas are also fascinated by the despair that draws other Kindred and kine to self-destruction. A Child of Judas might not want to make another person's emotional pain worse, but she can't help wanting to draw it out into the open and savor it. Admittedly, some Suicide Kings do try to make grief and depression worse, but individual Children of Judas can choose how cruelly they satisfy their thirst for despair, just as the Kindred can choose how cruelly they satisfy their need for blood. Satisfy it they must, though: a Child of Judas who resists a chance to explore another person's emotional pain loses a Willpower point, but gains a Willpower point for indulging her desire. Fortunately, the Daeva weakness does not double the Willpower penalty for the bloodline's unique, specific Vice.

Organization: The mortal Slavs of southeastern Europe have a legend about vampires called Children of Judas, so other Kindred presume the bloodline remains most numerous in that region. However, Suicide Kings are found wherever mortals feel despair. The Children of Judas seldom congregate in numbers larger than three or four. Indeed, more Children of Judas than that could cause such a rise in the suicide rate that mortals could not help but notice. At least, that's what many Kindred believe. So many Suicide Kings pretend to be ordinary Daeva that their numbers are hard to estimate, even for them.

One of the more widespread and persistent rumors about the Children of Judas says their founder faked his destruction, but actually left the Lancea Sanctum to join the secret society called VII. According to this rumor, the line's founder sired a secret lineage of Children

of Judas who all pose as ordinary Daeva. These undercover Children of Judas use their powers to drive other Kindred to self-destruction. Of course, no one has any evidence that such a secret lineage exists, and even the existence of VII is half-rumor. When Kindred who seem secure and content with their lot suddenly decide to meet the sun, though, it's common for a few Kindred to bring up tales of hidden Suicide Kings.

Concepts: Abandoned spouse, dentist, desperate housewife, disgraced cop, downsized executive, grief counselor, hospice caretaker, old person who didn't want to be a burden to her children, petty crook, picked-on teen, prostitute

History

The Children of Judas don't know much of their history. Neither does anyone else. Many Suicide Kings hide their true bloodline from all but their childer, broodmates (if any) and (of course) sires, so it's hard to say whether or not a Suicide King was involved in some bit of Kindred history. Even the rumors of Children of Judas involvement tend not to travel far, because most Kindred simply don't care about events in distant cities. The few tales Children of Judas tell about themselves have clearly been adjusted to make the stories better legends, with none of the loose ends and awkwardness of real history.

The Romance of the Hanged Man

Despite speculation that the bloodline began in antiquity, most Children of Judas believe their lineage began in kingdom of Serbia, during the 13th or 14th century. Most versions of the story say the founder's name was Janko — South Slavic for “Jack,” a hint that the whole story may be nothing but myth. This particular Janko was a vampire-hunter who earned honor, wealth and a knighthood by destroying several undead in a 20-year career. At last, he caught and destroyed his most elusive quarry, the Daeva who slew Janko's older brother and made Janko a hunter in the first place. Family honor satisfied, Janko married and settled down.

Unfortunately for Janko, the Daeva (whose name remains unknown) had faked her destruction to end the hunter's pursuit. After several years, however, she found herself bored. Over the centuries, all pleasures had palled, and she realized just how much only by comparison with the excitement of her long duel with Janko. The fear when he caught up to her, the triumph when she escaped him — she had not felt anything so strongly before, or since. She missed him. She — loved him.

When the Daeva found her old nemesis married, with four children, jealousy consumed her. When Janko returned from a few days' journey, he found his entire family slaughtered and drained of blood. Grief gave way to rage and, finally, despair. He wanted to find the vampire and avenge his family, but he was not a young man anymore.

Mad with grief and guilt, he made a noose and tried to hang himself. Although he was a great warrior, he was no hangman; instead of breaking his neck in one quick jerk, the noose slowly strangled him. As he swung, dying, the Daeva appeared. This had not been her plan. She cut Janko down and Embraced him. When he rose again, she explained why she saved him. She loved him for his hatred. Now he had the power to resume his hunt, and their Dance of Death could begin again.

Janko pursued his sire for another 20 years. One version of the story says the long hunt ended with his sire grown weary of their dance and wracked with despair — in fact, the first full display of Despond. Another says she stopped running and enthralled her childer into one night of passion before Janko cut off her head.

After this resolution, Janko joined the Lancea Sanctum. He loathed his existence as a vampire, but believed suicide was a mortal sin. He had sinned once this way already, and undeath was his Damnation. If he tried to destroy himself again, what worse punishment might God find for him? The Sanctified said vampires were part of God's plan. Janko wanted to believe them. During the centuries, he became an important figure among the Sanctified of the Balkans. His Discipline of Despond became well-known and feared by the Kindred. Janko, now called the Hanged Man, built a reputation as an Inquisitor who never failed to bring other vampires to penance for their sins. He even sired a few childer, reputedly all mortals driven to suicide for their crimes — the Hanged Man would not let them off so easily. They, too, would do penance with their unives.

By the 18th century, the Hanged Man grew weary of inquisition and spent more and more time on theology. Around the middle of the century, he called together all his childer and their childer who dwelled nearby, and delivered a sermon to them. He named them the Children of Judas, the Hanged Man of the Bible. Similar to Judas, they were suicides, and would be instruments of suicide. Similar to Judas, they and their childer were damned, but their Damnation served the glory of God — for a time. The Embrace merely delayed their self-destruction. When they completed their long-averted suicide, they would join Judas in Hell — and him. Then the Hanged Man poured oil on himself and set himself on fire, screaming the Lord's Prayer as he burned. The local Bishop declared him a martyr. For a century thereafter, the Sanctified of Belgrade held a yearly blood feast in the Hanged Man's honor.

The Immolation of Danzig

In 1795, a fire destroyed more than a dozen Kindred in the city of Danzig (modern-day Gdansk). The tale of the fire spread throughout Europe's Kindred because the immolation was supposedly a suicide-murder. According to the sole survivor, a ghoul, the city's Nosferatu Primo-

gen, who was also a member of the local Invictus' Inner Circle, set the fire. He invited the other Inner Circle members to a special Elysium. When they arrived, the Nosferatu delivered a rambling speech about the sins of the Kindred, the decadence of the Invictus and his anger at futile centuries spent playing the treacherous and petty games of the Kindred. While he spoke, servants locked and barricaded the doors. They did not know why; they merely followed their dread master's orders.

The surviving ghoul said that as the angered Invictus tried shouting down the Nosferatu, the Haunt tipped a barrel of lamp oil onto the floor of the room and fired the oil with a torch. The assembled Invictus went mad with terror and turned on each other when they could not batter their way out. The servants unblocked the doors as quickly as they could to save their master from the flames, but were too late. The ghoul survived, ironically enough, by climbing up a fireplace chimney after his master's immolation. He reached the room above and made it out of the house with severe burns. Invictus who had not attended the meeting questioned the ghoul using Dominate and Auspex before he died of his burns, and were convinced his story was true, or at least honestly told.

Naturally, the Kindred sought an explanation and evolved conspiracy theories. For several years, the competition between Danzig's Invictus and Lancea Sanctum had been especially fierce. The destruction of most of the Inner Circle greatly weakened the First Estate. Suspicion naturally focused on the Sanctified. The Kindred came to believe one of the Sanctified Daeva was a Child of Judas. (Perhaps the Daeva was already known as a Child of Judas, but most Kindred didn't initially realize the bloodline's significance. Perhaps the Daeva hid his bloodline but was somehow exposed. Perhaps there never was a Suicide King at all, merely a panicked rumor. When stories of the Kindred move between cities and through centuries, important details get lost.) The accusations, assassinations and counterattacks between covenants continued for years and left the Circle of the Crone as Danzig's dominant covenant for the next century. Such a convulsion, apparently wrought by a single Suicide King, inspires fear and hatred to this night. Whenever a Daeva becomes known as a Judas, someone always brings up the Immolation of Danzig.

The lone ghoul's somewhat confused account of the Nosferatu's rant included one element the vengeful Invictus neglected to investigate. The story says they found *one* Child of Judas among Danzig's Sanctified. The ghoul remembered the Nosferatu speaking of *three* "terrible women" who condemned him for his sins. At least, some modern accounts of the Immolation mention this detail. Kindred histories change in the telling — the three women might be an addition from the 19th century, when they emerged as the most important figures in Judas legendry after the Hanged Man himself.

The Sorrows

In the 19th century, Children of Judas began trading stories of three mysterious figures called the Ladies of Sorrow, or the Dolorae. Some Children of Judas believe the Dolorae are children of the Hanged Man, looking after the rest of his lineage and bringing more Kindred into the bloodline. Other Children of Judas believe the Sorrows are spirits called to this world by the immolation of the Hanged Man. Whether the Dolorae come from God or the Devil is also disputed.

According to the stories, some Children of Judas encounter the Sorrows when these Judas think they can escape their bloodline's curse of anguish and achieve some great happiness. The Dolorae warn that the Kindred never experience true joy, and the Children of Judas are particularly condemned to know every facet of grief. Shortly thereafter, circumstances wreck the Suicide King's chance at happiness and plunge him into despair: other Kindred learn of his true bloodline, perhaps, or the mortal who seemed ready to accept him for what he was dies in a tragic accident. The Sorrows appear again to say, "I told you so."

Other stories say the Dolorae visit Suicide Kings who contemplate their own destruction. In some stories, the Sorrows pull the Judas through her own dark night of the soul, and teach her to accept her destiny as the herald of despair. In other stories, the Sorrows encourage the despondent Judas to make his suicide an example and lesson to other Kindred, as the Hanged Man did.

Still other tales describe the Dolorae as defenders of persecuted Suicide Kings. One story (told in many variations, each set in a different, distant city) recounts how a Prince who called a blood hunt against a Judas was visited by the Sorrows, went mad and destroyed himself. Another story has a Sanctified Bishop condemning a Child of Judas, then turning around and proclaiming her a true servant of God after a visit from the three sisters.

The Sorrows are also said to induct despairing Daeva into the bloodline or Embrace suicidal mortals. The Sorrows can do this whether the tale's teller believes the Sorrows are Kindred or spirits. No Suicide King ever seems to say that he himself was Embraced or inducted by the Dolorae. It always happened to a Child of Judas his sire knew in another city, or the like. The stories agree that the Sorrows can appear anywhere in the world, a point in favor of the theory that they are spirits.

In fact, no Child of Judas can *prove* she met the Sorrows at all, and hardly any Children of Judas claim they did. The Sorrows may be entirely mythical. Students of Kindred mythology would like some documented account of the Dolorae from before 1845, the year Thomas de Quincy published his poetic essay collection, *Suspiria de Profundis*. This now-obscure English author described his visionary encounters with the three Sorrows, and

how the griefs he endured in his youth prepared him for wisdom in later life. Many Children of Judas accept the connection to de Quincy, but they believe he did in fact encounter the Dolorae and later chose to reveal their existence to the world. Certainly, de Quincy's experiences of loss and the horrors of opium addiction would have made him a prime candidate for Embrace into the line, but, for some reason, the Sorrows let him live out a full lifespan. No Judas believes the Dolorae Embraced the aging author and faked his death and burial. Some Judas, however, repeat de Quincy's admonition that one may learn from sorrow, however painfully.

The Suicide Kings also use the titles de Quincy gave for the three sisters. *Mater Lachrymarum* (sometimes called the Madonna), Our Lady of Tears, embodies the grief that expresses itself in wailing and shrieks, demanding an answer from God. *Mater Suspiriorum*, Our Lady of Sighs, teaches the grief too deep for tears, when the heart is crushed by helpless despair. The third sister is *Mater Tenebrarum*, Our Lady of Darkness. The most terrible of the Sorrows carries madness and horror, when despair overthrows reason completely. She, of all the sisters, is the greatest apostle of self-destruction, against whom the mightiest Kindred or kine struggle in vain.

Other Kindred who hear of the Sorrows dearly hope they are a myth — just some fable a Suicide King cribbed from a drug-addled essayist. Knowing the World of Darkness, however, some Kindred suspect they can't be that lucky.

MEET THE SISTERS

Madonna moves with uncertain steps, fast or slow, but still with tragic grace. Our Lady of Sighs creeps timidly and stealthily. But this youngest Sister moves with incalculable motions, bounding, and with tiger's leaps. She carries no key; for, though coming rarely amongst men, she storms all doors at which she is permitted to enter at all.

— Thomas de Quincy, "Levana and Our Three Ladies of Sorrow," *Suspiria de Profundis*

Society and Culture

The Children of Judas prefer not to dwell near each other. Aside from the Masquerade-endangering rise in suicide rates a Judas colony could cause, the Suicide Kings are not immune to each other's



drive to explore another creature's despair. Sires can resist prodding their childer's emotional pains. Most likely, they already know every trauma in a childer's past (and inflicted some of them). Other Children of Judas eventually want to know what brought a fellow Judas into the bloodline. The Children of Judas are more intimate with shame, grief and despair than most Kindred, but even the Children of Judas don't like to keep revisiting old pains, especially under the influence of another Suicide King's Despond or the Revelation power of Majesty. Sensible Suicide Kings tell their childer to grant other members of the bloodline the courtesy of leaving them alone.

When Suicide Kings know they must dwell in the same city and can't avoid each other forever, they prefer to learn each other's traumas as quickly as possible and get it over with. The result looks a lot like group therapy. Older Children of Judas call it the Via Dolorosa; younger Children of Judas, steeped in a culture that treats strong emotions with irony, call it the Sobfest. The assembled Children of Judas mingle their blood and drink it, while everyone who knows how uses either Revelation (see **Vampire: The Requiem**, pp. 129–130) or Doomed to Fail (see below). Shared Vitae extends the effects of each Discipline to the entire group. Everyone recites the events that caused them despair, both as mortals and as Kindred.

No one enjoys this Sobfest, but they have the consolation that the other participants feel just as bad. Over time, Suicide Kings become used to such confessionals and no longer feel much embarrassment about revealing old griefs and insecurities. Then again, for the Kindred, all emotions fade with time. To be sure, a few elder Children of Judas come to enjoy the Via Dolorosa because it's a chance to feel *something*. For younger Children of Judas, the shared embarrassment of revealing and learning each other's traumas builds an odd camaraderie they seldom acknowledge except with jokes about each other's griefs and humiliations.

The Suicide Kings' shared experience of suffering creates a surprising loyalty. They know how other Children of Judas feel. The dislike shown by other Kindred also encourages solidarity. For all the Children of Judas' apparent cruelty, they almost never fight each other or try to sabotage each other's plans.

The Anatomy of Suicide

People who have never felt the urge to commit suicide often think it comes from simple sadness. The Children of Judas know better. Sorrow plays a role, but there is nothing simple about suicide. The desire to die, to kill yourself, is a complex emotional state with many possible causes and many possible expressions. The Children of Judas know them all, and are entirely too willing to teach.

The Worst Feeling in the World

People feel sorrow for many reasons, ranging from a TV show being canceled to learning they have an incurable

disease. Most episodes of grief, however, do not make people kill themselves, even when their sorrow is extreme. On the other hand, most suicides don't seem to have much reason to be sad. Why does one man kill himself because his girlfriend left him, while another man sees his wife and daughters raped and murdered but soldiers on?

One element that separates suicidal depression from ordinary grief is the feeling of absolute isolation. Poet Sylvia Plath, who herself committed suicide, called that feeling "the bell jar." You feel trapped in your own head, cut off from everyone else. No one loves you or understands what you're going through. People prove it when you try to say how you feel and they tell you to *cheer up* or *don't make a big deal about it*. Yeah, that's really useful. If you died, maybe at least they would regret your loss. It's a poor way to connect to other people, but it seems like all you have left.

The wise men say to know yourself. You wish you could forget yourself, because there's something about yourself you despise. Maybe it's the way you need another person so much, and that person is gone. Maybe it's your pride, which won't let you forget how you failed to live up to your ambitions. Maybe it's a sexual desire that your faith or upbringing tells you is wrong. The possibilities are legion. If only you could kill that hated part of yourself . . .

Very often, you hear the message to die from other people, too. You know your isolation and self-hatred aren't all in your head, because other people take the time to tell you your shortcomings. It may start with childhood taunts on the playground, but doesn't end there. From the boyfriend who dumps you to the supervisor who tyrannizes you, a thousand casual or calculated insults and rejections let you know you aren't good enough and people don't like you. After a while, it can be easy to believe them and stop fighting to exist.

The thought of suicide comes with a feeling of terrible inevitability and finality. "You'll feel better tomorrow," people say. You know you won't. This is your life. You will *always* be alone, *always* have to live with your losses and failures and *always* lack the power to change your life and who you are. You know your future, and it doesn't get better.

But you have one alternative to helpless misery — one way to take control. Perhaps you can even strike back. Suicide often has elements of anger, defiance and revenge. In some cultures, declaring that you kill yourself because of another person can shame your enemy into his own suicide, set your family on a blood-feud against him or simply terrify the entire community with the thought you might come back as an angry ghost — or a vampire.

Varieties of Suicide

As Children of Judas teach their childer and students, suicide can take many forms. Some people kill themselves in hidden ways, perhaps hidden even from themselves. Other people destroy themselves for reasons that aren't obviously connected to grief. Not all despair comes from personal issues such as the death of loved ones or isolation

from other humans. Sometimes the despair isn't even painful. In some cases, the abandonment of self-preservation brings courage and even serenity.

“Voodoo Death”

Anthropologists report that in some societies, people can die because they broke a taboo, were cursed by a sorcerer or simply argued with another person. The person stops eating and retreats from his friends and family. A few days later, he dies. The anthropologists call this “voodoo death” for reasons that no doubt make sense to them.

Voodoo death is a kind of suicide because the victim cooperates in his own demise. He's so convinced of his death that he makes it happen through malnutrition, dehydration and sheer nervous exhaustion. The community helps him along, first by drawing away from the “living dead man” and then returning to mourn him and help him plan his own funeral.

Only primitive tribes suffer from voodoo death — or do they? In the “developed” world, some people still get sick because they think somebody cursed them. Medical examiners also find cases in which people seem to die of disappointment or a broken heart — they just “lost the will to live,” with no medically explicable cause of death. The death rates among people fired (or forcibly retired) from jobs they held a long time, old folks sent to nursing homes against their will, recent widows and widowers and other people who suffer shame, loss and helplessness suggest that voodoo death may not be so rare after all.

Honor Suicide

People who live by strict codes of conduct may kill themselves from shame if they break those codes. The samurai of old Japan would kill themselves if they failed their lord. Modern soldiers and police sometimes commit suicide after public disgrace. They have shown themselves unworthy in their own eyes and the eyes of their peers. Only death can expiate their shame.

Grave insults may provoke honor suicide as well. A Roman gentleman who felt his reputation irreparably damaged by slander, insult or humiliation could ask the state for permission to kill himself. In some cultures, suicide was also a legitimate alternative to a more humiliating fate. The Jewish zealots on Masada are the most extreme case, but warriors from the Roman Empire to World War II Japan have fallen on their swords rather than surrender.

Protest Suicide

Sometimes suicide can shame the people in power. In the past, Chinese officials sometimes killed themselves to protest the policies of their superiors. Sometimes this really did force reform, and the official was declared a god to pacify his ghost. In recent decades, Buddhist monks and other protesters have set themselves on fire over government policies. The hunger strike, used so successfully by Mahatma Gandhi, is nothing less than a very slow suicide meant to force a government's hand.

Medical Suicide

The “Suicide Doctor” Jack Kevorkian became notorious for supplying sick people with devices they could use to kill themselves. The Hemlock Society publishes a manual of painless suicide methods. They didn't invent the idea of death as an escape from disease or infirmity, though.

Medical suicide comes closer to a rational choice than any other form of self-destruction. Some people *do* know their future holds nothing but pain and debility, and any life they have renders them helpless under constant supervision from doctors. These sufferers want to spare themselves humiliation and physical discomfort, and spare their families the expense and stress of a long, drawn-out death.

Very few people actually choose the “final exit,” though. In some cases, people procure the means of suicide, then don't use them. Having taken control of their lives and deaths, they don't feel so helpless anymore, and so decide they'd like to live a little longer.

Death By Cop

Some people want to die, but they can't quite do the job themselves — so they find help. Every police officer knows about “death by cop,” in which a perpetrator commits a brazen crime, won't surrender and must be shot. The suicidal intent seems especially clear when the perp brandishes a gun that isn't loaded or runs at the cops. Particularly in inner cities, where suspicion and hatred for “the man” runs high, death while committing a felony leaves you with a better reputation than an overt suicide. At least you went down fighting.

“Death by john” is a more horrifying form of disguised suicide. Suicide rates among prostitutes are very high, and the murder rate is high as well. Experienced hookers know to stay away from some men, but some prostitutes take clients no matter what the warning signs of danger are. The other hookers know their sister doesn't want to live any more, and she's looking for the man to do her in.

Who knows how far this form of suicide extends? A person who takes crazy risks again and again may be an adrenaline junkie or just not have much sense — or maybe he truly doesn't care if he lives and wants to die in a way that leaves him with a good reputation.

Addiction

Drugs can block the inner torment that leads to suicide. Alcohol, tranquilizers and narcotics can dull the mind; cocaine, amphetamines and other stimulants supply ersatz energy and confidence. So often, though, a drug becomes just a slower or less direct means of death. In the long term, alcoholism or drug addiction can kill by damaging the body or clouding the mind so the person falls prey to some accident. And is every fatal overdose really an accident? Maybe not. Addicts often show a perverse bravado about the danger of their habits and say that yes, they *do* prefer dying from their drugs to living without them.

Suicide Bombings and High School Shootings

The Middle East has given the world the most aggressive of all forms of suicide. Whether the suicide bomber straps on TNT or drives a car filled with explosives, she wants to kill the enemy so much she'll die to do it. Suicide bombers come from a culture steeped in pride and vendetta, in which humiliation demands retribution — and many people feel the West has humiliated their culture for centuries. At least, that's the explanation experts give.

On the other hand, most suicide bombers are young, and adolescence often features an overblown sense of victimized pride. Instead of cultural grievances, the fad for suicide bombing may spring from the same roots as the shootings in American high schools. Several times now, a teenage boy (in one case, two) has taken guns to school and shot several teachers and classmates. Sometimes the attack ended with the boy turning the gun on himself. Afterward, the signs of suicide were clear to see: the sense of isolation, of being hated, of hopelessness and of wanting to strike back at the world and be noticed.

Religious Suicide

The promise of going to heaven as a martyr touches on another version of suicide: self-murder as a religious sacrifice. In ancient India, elderly Brahmins gained honor by immolating themselves as sacrifices. The Jain sect considers the taking of any life to be sinful in some degree. Supreme piety consists of starving to death, so no creature shall die to sustain your life. Christianity has its own tradition of dying for the faith as well. Martyrdom isn't supposed to be suicide. The martyr prefers faithfulness to self-preservation because she knows her soul, the real person, will not die. However, who knows what actually is in another person's heart? Who knows whether an apparent martyr acts out of faith and courage or desperation and shame?

Murder

Sometimes people decide their inner pain really *does* come from other people, and they can kill the pain at the source. Thus, most murder victims are relatives, lovers or apparent close friends of their killers — the people who have the greatest power over the killers' hearts and can cause the greatest pain. Most murderers confess promptly, ready to take their punishment. Back when murder convictions meant certain execution, confession was as good as suicide. It still takes the killer out of his old life and identity, though prison is hardly an improvement over psychological pain. Then again, death is an even worse "solution" to the despair felt by suicides.

The Killer Meme

Suicide is contagious. One high school student commits suicide; others follow within the next year. Young Palestinians' enthusiasm for suicide bombing makes it the strangest fad in the world. On some South Sea islands, after a person drowns, his friends report seeing him in the water and asking them to join him — and

sometimes they do. Religious suicide occasionally consumes whole cults, such as the Jonestown, Heaven's Gate and Solar Temple mass suicides.

Most people find suicide unthinkable most of the time, and most cultures discourage suicide. One additional factor leads to suicide: it becomes thinkable because other people have done it. What's more, it seemed to work. The other suicide *did* make people sorry she was gone, or he *did* strike back at people he hated and he thought hated him.

The Children of Judas can rouse all the varied emotions that lead to suicide — the grief, the shame, the bell-jar isolation, the hopeless abandonment of self-preservation and the rage at a hostile world. Perhaps the most evil aspect of the Children of Judas' power, however, consists of making suicide thinkable. To convince a person that he is better off not existing is deception most foul. For this, the hatred other Kindred direct at the Suicide Kings is entirely justified.

The Ethics of Despair

Children of Judas are compelled by their blood to explore suffering and inflict it, often leading to their subjects' deaths. Children of Judas who want to avoid a swift degeneration into the Beast's madness need some way to justify such cruelty. Much of the bloodline's tradition consists of philosophy about when to inflict the misery of Despond, why and how severely. The ethics of Suicide Kings often draw heavily from the beliefs of the Lancea Sanctum, even the ethics of Children of Judas who belong to other covenants or to none.

Inquisitors and Executioners

Between Auspex, Majesty and Despond, the Children of Judas are well suited to uncovering sins and punishing them. Some Children of Judas indulge their need to explore pain by searching for crime and punishing the perpetrators. In the Lancea Sanctum, pious Children of Judas may force other Kindred to account for violating the Traditions of Longinus. A few Sanctified Children of Judas can even declare their bloodline openly, because other Kindred fear being called to repent their own sins — and they will repent, with wailing and gnashing of teeth at their own worthlessness.

Princes may find their own uses for a Child of Judas. A Suicide King makes an excellent Hound. She can cripple the Prince's enemies through bouts of depression or perhaps even drive rivals to self-destruction while the Prince's hands appear clean. Such an ill-worker is most effective when least known. A Judas who works as the Prince's executioner hides not only her bloodline but also her office, completely. Of course, other powerful Kindred may want to keep a secret Judas on retainer as well, though Judas and employer both face execution themselves if the Prince learns what they're doing.

Suicide Kings can also turn vigilante. Sanctified Children of Judas easily justify driving mortal evildoers to suicide as part of their mission to be God's scourge on the world. Other Children of Judas may simply feel that by forcing pain on criminals, the Suicide Kings prevent the suffering those criminals would inflict on innocent kine. Despond can drive a guilt-stricken robber, drug dealer or rapist to confess to the police (especially if backed up with timely use of Revelation) — or his suicide can end the problem completely, with no evidence that could endanger the Masquerade.

Teachers and Testers

More than one mystical tradition says wisdom and salvation come after grief and fear. Fire-and-brimstone preachers terrified their audience with damnation to lead members to the joy of salvation. Psychoanalysts speak more clinically of displacements and defensive reactions. Likewise, some Children of Judas believe they can teach through suffering. They may speak theologically, of contrition and humble submission to God. Young or secular Children of Judas may speak psychologically, of complexes, repression and traumas. Either way, Children of Judas think Kindred and kine must confront grief, anxiety and self-hatred to overcome them. No one wants to face his own flaws and pain. Despond gives someone no choice.

A Child of Judas may seek out mortals who suffer great anguish, to help them move beyond the suffering. Such a course demands great care and sensitivity, lest the Suicide King live up to the bloodline's nickname. Simply forcing the subject to dwell on his grief and trauma is not enough. The Judas may need Auspex to read the subject's mind and past or Majesty to persuade him to talk. Majesty also provides a brute-force method to cut through the bell jar of depression and engage the subject with another person. Beyond Disciplines, however, the Judas needs facility with Empathy, Persuasion and other Social Skills, to convince the subject he can end his pain without ending his existence.

As for *how* to move beyond that anguish, every case is different. A person who dwells on grief for a lost loved one might need convincing that it's no betrayal to care about someone else. Someone who despises himself for not living up to his image of what he'd like to be needs a dose of realism, as well as pride in what he can do well. The helpless needs a way to take control of something in her existence. Religious Children of Judas have a slight advantage in that Christianity and other faiths offer their subjects ready-made models for a new life. Still, the Child of Judas must still take care that in leading a subject to God, she does not lead him to new guilt and demands for self-punishment.

On the other hand, a Child of Judas may feel some people need a little more pain in their existences. The arrogant, the self-indulgent, the callous — perhaps a bout of self-hatred would give them more sympathy for the people around them. Children of Judas who follow this program

care a bit less about guiding their subjects through their bouts of Despond or, at least, Children of Judas use phrases like "Get over yourself" a good deal more.

Either way, malpractice remains a danger. A Judas might go too far or misjudge a "patient," resulting in suicide. In that case, the Judas may still be able to give her subject another chance at personal growth — but as a vampire. An important fraction of the bloodline came to the Requiem by this route. Not many of them would recommend such a course for other mortals who find life too much to bear. When faced with a mortal who chose self-destruction, though, the temptation to grant the Embrace can be too strong for a Judas to resist.

Theology of Judas

Some Children of Judas see an even deeper purpose to their power over the soul's darkest urge. In the Hanged Man's final sermon to his childer, he pointed out that the Crucifixion was a suicide. God Almighty became incarnate for the specific purpose of dying on the cross, and, through this sacrifice, the race of humans was redeemed from sin. In modern parlance, the Crucifixion was death by cop, with the Pharisees, their supporters and Pilate as the manipulated executioners. And Judas helped set the suicide up through the kiss of betrayal.

The Suicide Kings also like to point out how *odd* Judas' role is in the story. Christ knew Judas would betray him. Christ said so, at the Last Supper. Why would Christ have brought Judas into his circle at all unless it was to perform this very deed?

And what about the kiss that identified Jesus to the priests and soldiers who came for him in Gethsemane? Jesus was a public figure. Half of Jerusalem could recognize him. Again, did Jesus plan this visible act of betrayal?

Mystical Suicide Kings believe he did. They suggest the divine plan required humanity to show itself at its worst. The callous bureaucracy of the Romans wasn't enough. Even the jealous anger and rejection by God's own priests weren't enough. God needed to die because of the most wretched, contemptible crime possible, betrayed by one of his hand-picked disciples, someone who knew better, for mere money. Only through a supreme crime against God could God deliver a supreme act of forgiveness.

And what of Judas himself? Several times, the Gospels describe Jesus speaking to "the disciple He loved most," without saying who this was. The Suicide Kings suggest this disciple was Judas. Peter denied his Lord three times. The other disciples bickered and dithered. Judas loved Christ enough to accept the duty of betraying him.

What a terrible duty! Judas went down in history as the worst sinner since Adam and Cain — faithless, greedy and too much a coward even to face the consequences of Judas' betrayal. He killed himself instead, and so missed his chance to ask his resurrected Lord's forgiveness.

Or maybe that was part of Jesus' purpose, and God's. The gospels say Jesus took on humanity's the burden of sin — but he did not sin. He remained stainless, a pure sacrifice of God, by God, to God. The Suicide Kings argue that if Christ took on the burden of sin, he passed it to someone else: to Judas, perfect in sin as Christ was perfect in virtue. Judas, who stayed in Hell. Judas, the co-Redeemer, the *other* Son of God.

Even the Lancea Sanctum, whose members explore many unorthodox interpretations of scripture, find the Hanged Man' exegesis too radical for comfort. For one thing, his explanation distracts attention from Longinus, who was transformed into a vampire by the blood of Christ.

The Children of Judas don't deny Longinus his transcendent roles as their own sin-eater, apostle of their Damnation and instrument of God's wrath. Just as Judas the co-Redeemer, however, the Kindred can do more than frighten mortals with their bad example. Judas theologians believe that just as the saints can shorten a sinners' torment in Purgatory by giving out excess merit, the Kindred can redeem individual sinners by accepting damnation in their stead.

The Hanged Man said he would join Judas in Hell as minister and comforter to the lost souls. Judas theologians say all Kindred can do the same, and should. Christ gave his blood to mortals for their salvation, and mortal priests repeat this act with every Mass. When the Kindred take blood, they can ask God to give them the mortal's damnation. When the burden of the Kindred's own and transferred sins grows too heavy, they can follow the example of Judas and the Hanged Man, and discharge their burden to Hell.

Mystical Suicide Kings call this practice the *auto-da-fé*. It is the second great ritual of the bloodline, though practiced much less often than the Via Dolorosa. Some Children of Judas fetter themselves so they cannot escape the burning touch of the sun. Others immolate themselves, as the Hanged Man did, so other vampires can watch and feel the awe and terror of serving God with all one's being. Even secular Children of Judas, who don't accept the theological contortions of their fellows, admit the *auto-da-fé* makes an appropriate end for Suicide Kings.

Despond

Few Disciplines inspire such fear and hatred as Despond, and with good reason. The Kindred play the Danse Macabre in part to distract themselves from the horror and futility of their own existence. Despond strips away the distractions. Kindred who feel its power can no longer hide from the awful truth that they are dead and Damned, with the Beast as their personal demon to torment them — until something destroys them, or they do the job themselves.

Actually, Despond affects mortals worse than it affects vampires. The Kindred have years, decades or centuries to

grow accustomed to anguish and self-loathing. The Beast rages against its own destruction, or maybe the vampires' supernatural natures help them resist Despond. Mortals succumb all too easily to the lure of self-annihilation.

The few Kindred who choose to learn Despond find the learning most unpleasant. To crush hope in others, they must explore their own despair. To set the lure of self-destruction, they must feel that lure themselves. Many among the Children of Judas — perhaps most — already walked that path as mortals, to its terrible ending. Other Kindred seldom want to touch the void, and be touched in return. Those who can resist the call of oblivion learn to make that call themselves.

For greatest effect, a user of Despond must speak to her victim. A minute is good; five minutes or more are even better. Through well-chosen phrases, she can prod her victim's regrets, self-doubts and sorrows and send the message: you should not exist. The more she knows about her victim, the greater Despond's power. Even without killing words, however, a vampire who knows Despond can send whispers of despair into a victim's mind. Either way, the vampire must see her victim directly. Despond has no effect over the phone or through a recording.

In most cases, a target of Despond does not immediately recognize that he was affected by a supernatural force. Once he recovers, he may wonder at the depth of his sudden despair. He might even connect his anguish to his conversation with the vampire. Mortals, however, don't expect mind control. The very suspicion seems insane (giving the person another reason to feel depressed). The Kindred know better, so using Despond on them can be dangerous. A vampire who's in too much of a hurry to converse with her target, but who doesn't want the weakness of a silent attack, can simply snarl out a few cruel or menacing words to rouse the target's grief or self-loathing — but the victim definitely knows the vampire tampered with his mind. Even the most skeptical or unwary mortal can't deny he felt an alien touch in his thoughts.

Despond cannot actually force another person to attempt suicide. Despond's lesser powers merely work on grief, anxiety and self-loathing already present, helping these feelings overpower the conscious mind in various ways, for a limited time. For Kindred or kine already troubled by thoughts of suicide, however, one use of Despond may push the sufferer over the edge — though he might do the deed nights or weeks later. The more times a victim suffers from Despond, the more likely he will seek suicide.

Storytellers should never decree that a player's character destroyed himself because someone else used a Discipline on him. For other characters, Storytellers may want to base their resistance to despair on their traits or roles in the story. For a simple system, you can decide that, assuming no one intervenes to prevent the suicide, a Storyteller character commits suicide within the week if

a use of Despond achieves more successes than the higher of the character's Resolve or Composure.



STANDARD MODIFIERS

All Despond powers use the same set of suggested modifiers, based on how long the character can speak to his victim and his knowledge of the victim's psychology.



Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	Character knows both his target's Vice and Virtue.
+2	Target is a vampire with whom the user has a blood tie (see Vampire: The Requiem , p. 162).
+2	Target suffers from melancholia or some similar, severe derangement.
+1	Character can converse with his target for at least five minutes.
+1	Character knows his target's Vice or Virtue.
+1	Character knows a significant anxiety, self-doubt, shame or perceived failure of the target.
+1	Character knows at least one traumatic or sorrowful event from the target's past (the Embrace doesn't count).
+1	Target suffers from depression or a similar, mild derangement.
+0	Character can speak to his target for a turn or less. Afterward, the victim knows the character tampered with her mind.
+0	Character can speak to his target for at least a minute; afterward, the target might not realize the character tampered with her mind.
-2	Character cannot speak to his target.

Despond grants the Children of Judas one small, additional power. Any Child of Judas who has at least one dot in Despond recognizes any other Child of Judas who knows the Discipline. This acts as an additional bit of information from Predator's Taint, the Beast's instinctive recognition of a competing predator. The Suicide Kings also instinctively recognize the mystical taint left by their special cultivation of despair.

• *Self-Doubt*

Everyone has moments when they wonder if they're good enough — not just whether they can succeed at a task but whether they should even try. For a moment, the vampire's target feels utterly worthless and incapable of doing anything right. She dithers briefly in a fit of doubt and despair.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Presence + Intimidation + Despond versus subject's Composure + Blood Potency

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The subject does not feel the sudden loss of nerve and does not lose a turn of action. What's more, she becomes immune to the character's Despond until the next sunset.

Failure: The character loses or ties the contested roll. The subject feels nothing.

Success: The character wins the contested roll by getting the most successes. The subject loses her next turn of action as she struggles against her sudden certainty of failure and personal worthlessness.

Exceptional Success: The character wins the contested roll with five or more successes. The victim loses her next turn of action, and suffers a -1 penalty to all non-reflexive actions for the rest of the scene, as she struggles against her own feelings of failure.

Suggested Modifiers

Standard modifiers apply.

•• *Doomed To Fail*

People caught in deep depression find it difficult to act. Every choice or action seems futile. What's the point of trying anything when you're doomed to disappointment? As a character develops his skill at Despond, he can set the whisper of Self-Doubt nagging constantly. The target suffers anxiety, doubt and pessimism about her ability to succeed at anything, in a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Empathy + Despond versus subject's Composure + Blood Potency

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The subject does not feel depressed, suffers no penalty and is immune to the character's Despond until the next sunset.

Failure: The character loses or ties the contested roll. The subject does not feel depressed and suffers no penalty.

Success: The character wins the contested roll. As long as the character concentrates on maintaining this power, his victim suffers a -2 penalty to all actions.

Exceptional Success: The character wins the contested roll by five or more successes. In this case (and only in this case), the victim suffers the power's effect for the rest of the scene, without any need for the character to concentrate. The Suicide King can engage in combat, leave the scene or otherwise engage in whatever activity he wants.

Doomed To Fail works on line of sight. If the attacking character cannot see his target any longer, the power's effect stops (unless the attacker's player rolled an excep-

tional success). While concentrating to maintain the effect, a character cannot engage in any other activity that challenges his mind or body. He can walk across the street but not climb a wall, make small talk but not craft a witty *bon mot* or remember someone's name but not remember his business dealings for the last year. In rules terms, any action that would demand a dice roll breaks the character's grip on his target's mind.

If any character believes she is under this power's influence, her player can spend a Vitae to attempt a reflexive Composure + Blood Potency roll (whichever Attribute is higher). If the roll fails, the character remains affected by Despond and she spent the Vitae for nothing. If the roll succeeds, she can throw off Despond's effects for a turn. The target can use that turn to run away, attack the character or cause a ruckus that prevents the character from concentrating any longer. If she cannot escape the character or prevent her from concentrating, Doomed to Fail resumes its full effect a turn later. If the roll is an exceptional success, Doomed To Fail ends immediately and the character is immune to further uses of this power for the remainder of the scene, though the Child of Judas may invoke it again in the future.

Suggested Modifiers

Standard modifiers apply.

••• *Dark Night of the Soul*

As her mastery of Despond advances, a character can plunge her target into a despair so profound he no

longer cares about anything else. The victim struggles to muster the will to do anything but brood on his own failures and misfortunes — and, perhaps, seek relief in drink or drugs. Even protecting his own existence seems futile, though a fight is one of the few things that can break the target out of his dolor.

A skilled user of Despond can also create more precisely tailored forms of despair. A person who loses the desire to exist may attempt reckless actions he would never contemplate otherwise. On the streets, people talk about robbers or muggers who seek “death by cop,” and prostitutes who take clients everyone else can see are dangerous. Higher social strata have their own forms of self-destructive risk-taking, from taking up “extreme sports” without proper training to telling the boss what you really think of him. Any deed that makes other people wonder, “Is he *trying* to get himself killed?” can happen because of Dark Night of the Soul.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Persuasion + Despond versus subject's Composure + Blood Potency

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The target feels great! He felt a little blue for a moment, but shook it off and counted his blessings. The target regains a spent Willpower point, if this is possible.



Failure: The target does not feel any depression because of Despond.

Success: For the rest of the scene, the target's player must succeed at a reflexive Resolve + Composure roll to attempt any feat challenging enough to require a dice roll. Failure on this roll indicates that the feat occurs at a -3 penalty. "Any feat" includes defending himself from attack. If a victim of Dark Night of the Soul faces combat, however, that single roll suffices to keep him fighting through the entire battle.

Alternatively, the attacking character can suggest a particular self-destructive course of action. Dark Night of the Soul cannot make a target consciously seek extinction but can remove most of the target's sense of self-preservation. For the rest of the scene, the target effectively has a very specific, additional Vice that involves taking dangerous chances. For instance, a target who's anxious about money might impulsively try robbing a bank using nothing but his outthrust finger in his pocket. Other people can try to talk the victim out of his bout of self-destruction, but resisting the new compulsion costs the target a point of Willpower, just like any Vice.

Exceptional Success: The effect of Dark Night of the Soul lasts until the next sunset.

Suggested Modifiers

Standard modifiers apply. Suggesting a course of action that's out of character for the victim but isn't immediately self-destructive and might distract him from depression, such as persuading a teetotaler to get drunk, gives a -1 modifier to the attacker's dice pool. Nudging the target into an actively self-destructive course of action takes a -2 modifier. Of course, a course of action that accords with a Virtue or Vice of the target partly counters this penalty with a bonus. (See the modifiers on p. 48.)

•••• *Melancholy*

As a vampire's mastery of Despond grows, she can induce a longer-lasting state of depression in her victim. Such a long-lasting effect — an actual derangement — demands a great effort of will from the character.

Cost: 1 or 2 Willpower, spent before the roll is made (see below)

Dice Pool: Presence + Expression + Despond versus subject's Composure + Blood Potency

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The target does not feel depressed and is immune to the character's Despond until the next sunset.

Failure: The target ties or exceeds the number of successes rolled by the character, and so the target suffers no effect.

Success: The character rolls more successes than her target. For each success rolled, the target suffers a derangement for one week.

Exceptional Success: An exceptional success returns one of the spent Willpower points to the character.

The player must spend all requisite Willpower points before she makes the roll. Remember that a character may spend only one Willpower per turn (see p. 95 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**), so she may need to begin this process at least one turn before bringing it into effect. For one Willpower, the character attempts to inflict a mild derangement: usually Depression, but Inferiority Complex is equally possible, at the character's discretion. For two Willpower, the character attempts to inflict a severe derangement such as Melancholia or Anxiety. Storytellers may permit other derangements if they seem appropriate as expressions of grief, shame, humiliation or other emotions that could lead to suicide. If the subject already has a given derangement, it costs only one Willpower for the Child of Judas to attempt to exacerbate that derangement to its more debilitating state.

See the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, pp. 96–100, and **Vampire: The Requiem**, pp. 188–192, for descriptions of derangements.

Suggested Modifiers

Standard modifiers apply.

•••• *The Earth Rejects Thee*

When a character achieves full mastery of Despond, the Discipline takes a strange and terrible turn. Death no longer ends pain. At this Discipline's greatest power, Despond can reach beyond death to deliver the Embrace to a suicide who is really, truly dead. As long as the body remains intact, a master of Despond can call the suicide's spirit and force it back into the flesh the spirit spurned, to rise again as a vampire. A suicide remains susceptible to the Embrace until the next sunrise. Thus, a mortal who kills himself during the day can be Embraced the next night, long after the body has cooled. Some Children of Judas see a connection to the old religious prohibition against burying a suicide in consecrated ground.

Cost: 1 Willpower (see below)

Dice Pool: Unlike the other powers of Despond, The Earth Rejects Thee does not involve dice pools. If the victim meets its requirements, the power always works. As with any other Embrace, passing undeath to a suicide costs a dot of Willpower *in addition to* the Willpower spent to activate this Discipline power. At the sire's discretion, the Discipline's added power may repair some damage to a suicide's body, such as slit wrists or even the broken neck of a properly conducted hanging (though some sires leave these imperfections in order to keep their childer humble). This power cannot restore lost body parts, such as brains blown away by a shotgun blast. If a suicide's self-inflicted wound would have destroyed a vampire, or at least instantly forced him into torpor, the body is too damaged to sustain the Embrace.

Action: Instant

GALLOI

WITH BLOOD I BRING YOU BEAUTY.

Vitae contains undeniable power. Each drop offers new potential. The Kindred understand some of this potential — it feeds them, stirs their spiritless limbs and gives life to dead magic. That's only a fraction of the possibility, though — the Vitae channeled through a Damned vessel offers a world of secret, untapped strength for those desperate enough.

The Galloi know this. These vampires believe themselves to be prime examples of what the Blood can truly do. The Kindred of this bloodline come from the Nosferatu, those monstrous creatures fearsome in flesh and spirit. The Galloi believe that the Blood has reversed this curse. They claim that Vitae not only feeds them and empowers them but has also literally made the fiendish beautiful once again, if only for a time. To re-form his gruesome carcass, the Galloi bathes in blood, immersing himself completely within it. Once he withdraws from his bath, his monstrous flesh is replaced with an eerily perfect figure. Others call this bloodline the “Pretties,” a bitter sobriquet illustrating the alarmingly unnatural beauty of these monsters. The Galloi do not discourage the epithet.

The bloodline has carried the knowledge of the ritual bloodbath since the primeval nights before Rome's birth. The Pretties do not question from whence the power or wisdom comes. Revering the goddess Cybele, these blood-smearing cultists act as her voice among the Acolytes of the Circle of the Crone. The goddess' worshippers long ago bathed in blood and gore to gain her favor, and her children (both Kindred and kine) do the same tonight. Those who do not know her wisdom — even those within the Circle itself — can be made to understand. It's easy to show them the way, to reveal her veiled power through the offers of blood. The Pretties can grant Cybele's favor to others, for a time. Of course, there is always a price.

Parent Clan: Nosferatu

Nickname: Pretties

Covenant: With few exceptions, the Galloi belong to the Circle of the Crone. Moreover, many Galloi make particularly zealous Acolytes. A small minority of this bloodline makes their homes among the Invictus or the Carthians, eschewing any kind of spirituality and enjoying cosmopolitan Requiems of politics and power.



Only the most marginal Galloi ever end up in the ranks of the Ordo Dracul or the Lancea Sanctum, however. Those Galloi who end up in the Order do so to understand (or exploit) their own mystic proclivities. The rare Galloi who becomes Sanctified generally does so to rebuke his own “heathen sins” and to find a new Requiem as one of God's cursed children.

Appearance: A Pretty's appearance is dictated in part by his weakness (see below). When freshly bathed in blood, the vampire appears eerily beautiful, his form almost unearthly: skin like virgin porcelain, lips the color of fresh blood, long, delicate limbs and wide, bright eyes. Perhaps more importantly, the vampire appears androgynous. The creature appears not so much *without* gender as possessing both male and female aspects — roundness of breasts, a subtle musculature, an Adam's apple upon a wine-stem neck. Many Galloi accentuate this gender ambiguity through fashion, wearing severe suits or overt configurations of *haute couture*. Some wear clothing that shows a surprising amount of skin, thus confusing the issue more. Others sport hairless bodies, shaving themselves bald or wearing wigs and penciling in their eyebrows.

When the vampire has suffered time away from his bloodbaths, however, he looks truly monstrous, like a skeleton swathed in rotten cloth. His skin becomes etched in deep wrinkles, and, sometimes, bones poke through frail flesh. At this point, the gender-ambiguous appearance also fades — the vampire's original masculinity or femininity becomes more obvious beneath the monstrosity.

Haven: Most Galloi favor modern (even minimalist) havens located in places of desperation. The Galloi realize that they have much to offer the hopeless. The Galloi can bring youth, beauty and other advantages to those who need them most, and that puts the Galloi in a position of power. Therefore, many Galloi establish havens near artist communities, within seedy neighborhoods, even among the struggling middle class. The Galloi obviously prefer to dwell within the cities, with the rest of the Kindred, though some Galloi enjoy the comforts and opportunity of more remote existence.

Some Pretties choose to dedicate their havens as shrines to the goddess Cybele. Cybele's temples used to be

underground; such subterranean sanctuaries represented the dark and earthy womb. In homage, particularly ardent Galloi choose havens beneath the ground, such as abandoned chambers off abandoned subway tunnels, the cellars of old houses or neglected bomb shelters. Even these subterranean dwellings tend to show off the vampires' bizarre tastes in fashion, art and décor.

Background: Potential Galloi often hail from desperate situations. The desperate seek answers and control, whether they realize it or not. The Pretties offer answers and control. Sires drag their childer into new misery and give them new perspectives on suffering from within the bloodline. Simultaneously, though, Galloi give hope where none existed before. They grant beauty where only ugliness thrived. They present a different reality in which fleeting solace lies in the shadows, proffered by secret gods, and where Blood is the key to all doors. The Circle of the Crone, and Cybele in particular, has the answers to life, death and everything in between. When the Galloi find a wretched-enough soul deserving of truth, they may groom him for the bloodline and eventually Embrace him or act as his Avus to allow him entry into this primeval lineage.

Character Creation: Some Pretties value sharpness of mind, whereas others rely upon keen social wiles. Thus, individual Galloi tend to be particularly dominant in either the Social or Mental categories (both Attributes and Skills). Few Galloi devote any attention at all to the Physical, and, as a result, many vampires of this bloodline appear winnowed or gaunt. Favored Skills include Intimidation, Investigation, Occult, Persuasion and Socialize, the better with which to ply the Pretties' cultic trades. Galloi often favor Social Merits, as well, and often have high Allies and Contacts, with Herd coming in a close third.

Bloodline Disciplines: Majesty, Nightmare, Obfuscate, Taurobolium

Weakness: The Galloi are called the "Pretties" for a reason. Some Nosferatu might be monstrous, eerie or freakish in subtle ways, but few of them would be called *beautiful*. This bloodline, on the other hand, is beautiful, in a manner of speaking — if the vampire bathes in her own blood.

A Galloi must spend a number of Vitae equal to her Blood Potency and mix it with water, perfumes, oils and other arcane emollients. She must then immerse herself beneath the surface for a full hour. If she does this, she emerges from the bath changed. No longer hideous, she is a creature of alien beauty, a figure featuring the bizarre auspices of both genders. This beauty lasts for a number of nights equal to 10 minus the vampire's Blood Potency.

If she does not immerse herself in another appropriate bloodbath before that time runs out, she wakes up the following night with a mien more unsettling than that

of other Nosferatu. Her appearance becomes skeletal, her body a set of bones draped with a shriveled veneer of chalk-white skin. She also emits an odor of moldering earth and putrescence. Mortals within five yards of her are subject to a Stamina + Composure roll to avoid nausea. Worse, when in this state, the vampire suffers from the Inferiority Complex derangement (mild), or Anxiety (severe) if she already has the mild version (see p. 98 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). The derangement and desiccated corpse-form transform into beauty once she again bathes in blood.

The paradox is that, even when beautiful, the vampire *still* suffers from the normal Nosferatu weakness. The creature's looks are now *too* perfect, and such perfection is disturbing. As such, the vampire's dice pools in social situations (specifically those based on Presence or Manipulation Attributes) remain hampered. The 10 again rule doesn't apply, and 1's subtract from successes. Note that the latter part doesn't affect dramatic failure rules. Also, the weakness doesn't apply to pools involving the Intimidation Skill, the Composure Attribute or the Nightmare and Taurobolium Disciplines.

Organization: The Galloi bloodline doesn't have much in the way of formal organization. This bloodline's hierarchy is that of the Circle as a whole, and many among the Pretties aspire to leadership roles among the Acolytes. The Galloi tend to feel that they are more dearly committed to the precepts of the covenant than the *hoi polloi*, and, therefore, consider themselves deserving of authority. (Those who don't respect the hard-earned accolades of Galloi among the hierarchy will, at the very least, intimately learn the tenet that "tribulation brings enlightenment.") Ambitious individual Pretties often seek to become Hierophants of the local covenant. The key advantage of this is that the Hierophant essentially sets the local focus of the Circle's worship. In this way, the Pretties can establish Cybele as the core divinity of the Circle's veneration. The Galloi grant Cybele favor (and in return, purportedly gain advantage themselves) by "enlightening" others with regard to her celestial power and dominance.

Individual Galloi broods occasionally follow minor rules of organization, some spoken, some not. Unspoken is the fact that Galloi do not operate alone. They almost universally support one another in discrete domains (braving a temporary itinerancy when necessary), for such a collective helps them establish ascendancy within the local Circle. The bloodline also celebrates holidays specific to Cybele. The Galloi tend to celebrate in these festivals and revelries only with each other. Other Acolytes participate in these veneration only by invitation, which can be either easy to obtain or hard to come by depending upon the Pretties' political or religious agenda. The vampire who orchestrates these ritual celebrations is generally the eldest Galloi

in the region, though not always and is called the *archigallus*. Occasionally the *archigallus* is simply the Kindred who has carried that responsibility for the longest time, whether new elders have graced the domain or otherwise.

Concepts: Art dealer, burn victim, club owner, dominatrix, Harpy, makeup artist, pawn broker or fence, pimp or madam, public eccentric, record producer, transsexual

HISTORY

The Galloi claim an extensive history, and believe that their lineage goes back nearly 8,000 years, to the Neolithic city of Çatal Hüyük, considered by some to be the first city in the world. In this city, archeologists have found a number of voluptuous fertility statues that some believe represent early worship of the goddess Cybele. Being adherents of this goddess and accepting that vampires are far older than some Kindred claim, the Pretties accept on blind faith that they must've been present in that prehistoric city, acting as corporeal liaisons between Cybele and her human consorts.

The Galloi insist that they have played some role in the spread of Cybele's worship since that prehistoric time. The Greeks (and later, the Romans) colonizing Asia Minor found that worship of this goddess was prevalent. Legends suggest that when the Greeks first denied Cybele the veneration she demanded, a great plague swept across the city-states. To relieve themselves of the pain, humans cut at themselves in attempts at evacuating the poison from their constricting bodies. The Galloi claim that the blood the humans spilled went *somewhere* — into the Galloi's thirsty mouths! — and, potentially, that they took the blood as champions of Cybele rather than passively waiting for the Greeks to cut themselves. Once the Greeks allowed the Cult of Cybele to worship, however, the plague disappeared as if it had never existed. The Galloi claim that their attentions turned from the Greeks to the populace at large, thereby abating the "plague." From Çatal Hüyük to Phrygia, from Greece to

Rome, the Galloi claim that they were among the priests and pious who cultivated reverence of this bloody *Magna Mater*, Cybele.

This interpretation may well have some grain of truth. Among the ancient cultists were a number of Kindred, and these vampires certainly helped foster the religion's growth.

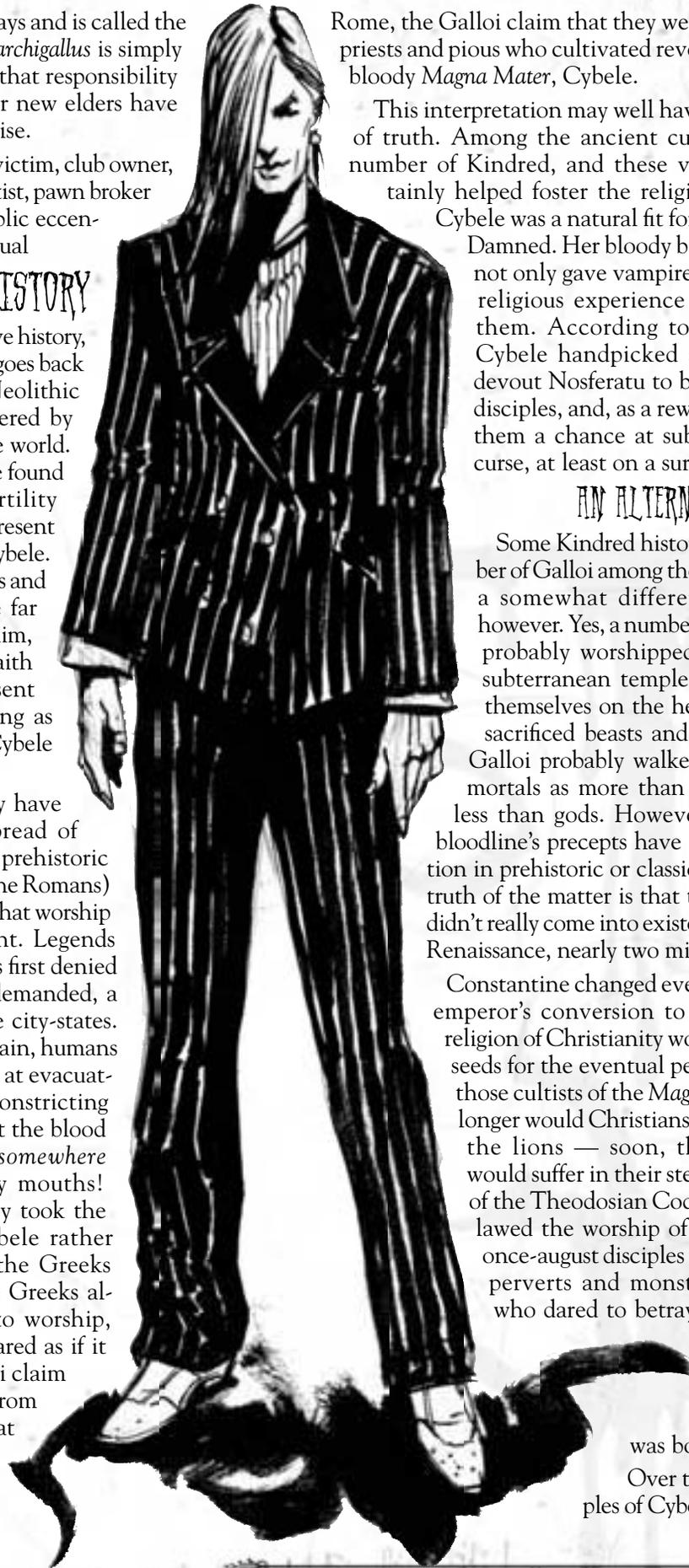
Cybele was a natural fit for many of the Damned. Her bloody baptismal rites not only gave vampires an ecstatic, religious experience but also fed them. According to the Galloi, Cybele handpicked a number of devout Nosferatu to be her chosen disciples, and, as a reward, she gave them a chance at suborning their curse, at least on a surface level.

AN ALTERNATIVE VIEW

Some Kindred historians (a number of Galloi among them) maintain a somewhat different position, however. Yes, a number of Nosferatu probably worshipped at Cybele's subterranean temples and gorged themselves on the heady blood of sacrificed beasts and zealots. The Galloi probably walked among the mortals as more than humans and less than gods. However, while the bloodline's precepts have their foundation in prehistoric or classical times, the truth of the matter is that the bloodline didn't really come into existence until the Renaissance, nearly two millennia later.

Constantine changed everything. The emperor's conversion to the nascent religion of Christianity would plant the seeds for the eventual persecution for those cultists of the *Magna Mater*. No longer would Christians suffer among the lions — soon, the heathens would suffer in their stead. An edict of the Theodosian Code in 391 outlawed the worship of Cybele. Her once-august disciples were branded perverts and monsters, demons who dared to betray the ways of God. The mother was dead. The father was born.

Over time, the temples of Cybele were razed



(or worse, looted). Any friezes depicting the sacrifice of bulls or the castration of her priests were destroyed and buried. Imperial soldiers captured her worshippers, and if they did not convert as Constantine had, the edict demanded they be burned alive or stabbed with swords. Those Kindred who followed her also became victims of this pogrom, though not always at the hands of mortals. Other Kindred whose fortunes rose with the Empire had gained power. Cybele's Damned fled the civilized world and retreated into shadow. Their time was done. They took refuge in fallen temples and abandoned mountain posts, and they managed subsistence Requiems for centuries.

The Dark Ages followed the fall of Rome and the rise of the Church. During this time, Cybele's vampire adherents lurked in the night as hideous hags, finding sustenance at the edges of civilization. Some Kindred were able to form small followings and observe their rites, evading the notice the Church. Most of the survivors found a home, if temporarily, in the pagan kingdom in the region now known as Lithuania. Many Kindred, however, met Final Death or succumbed to torpor.

The humanism of the Renaissance helped dampen the fires of religious zealotry and open the doors for new ways of thinking. Old ideas were new again; enlightened modes of thought emerged from the fallen world of classical civilization. Ancient concepts synchronized with new desires to form a more progressive zeitgeist, resulting in a renewed interest in mysticism and occult ideas. Magical texts and blasphemous ideas were given room to breathe. Sensing this, Cybele's Damned crept out of the shadows to see what this world could offer them.

Galloi who had slumbered hostile centuries away in torpor and then rose to find times more hospitable to them. He sought to appease the vampires of the *Magna Mater* and gain their favor so he might be initiated into their wisdom. He took it upon himself to steal a trove of Phrygian artifacts from a cabal of sorcerers in the town of Kaunas. Velnius was a repellant figure, his right arm twisted into an arthritic claw. None believed he would be successful in his task.

He was successful, but barely. According to the legends of the bloodline, he did not encounter mortal magicians when attempting to recover the artifacts. Instead, he found himself surrounded by a herd of monsters – creatures with human bodies and animal faces. He stole the items and fled on foot, chased by a horde of nightmares. Velnius was “struck down” on the road out of Kaunas and left for dead.

Legend states that Cybele came to him then, and rained blood upon his crippled form. He lay there for several days and nights, protected from the sun by Cybele's might and grace. When he rose again, his infirmities had healed. His arm was no longer deformed, and the reek of the grave had abated. Indeed, he barely recognized himself, having seemingly become an androgyne with long hair and perfect skin. He returned to the waking elders of Cybele's cult and showed them what had happened to him, how the goddess had granted him favor.

REBIRTH

The story goes like this:

Velnius, a young Lithuanian discovered a hidden coven of Nosferatu,



Velnius was the first true Galloi, though few Galloi believe the myth literally. Still, his story (a pagan parallel of Paul's conversion to Christianity on the road to Damascus) is told among the Pretties as an example of one who was truly "blessed" by the *Magna Mater*.

THE LEGACY OF CYBELE

The Cult of Cybele still exists tonight in a handful of domains. In some cities, the cult is little more than a meager cadre of vampires struggling to compete in the *Danse Macabre*. In other domains, cult members hold a great deal of temporal and spiritual power, guiding the actions of local Acolytes while claiming any number of political positions within the region. Universally, however, regardless of size, this particular cult's presence is always shepherded by Kindred of the Galloi bloodline. The Pretties *are* the Cult of Cybele, in spite of the other Kindred or kine within its ranks.

SOCIETY AND CULTURE

The Galloi are an inscrutable mix of the modern and the ancient. They favor contemporary dress and progressive art, and yet call upon quasi-civilized rituals and traditions. In a Pretty's haven, a dusty chair made from dried skin and the skulls of sacrificed bulls may sit beside a sculpture by the futurist Umberto Boccioni. The vampire may listen to Philip Glass or *Le Tigre* while translating monarchic records of Phrygian kings. The Galloi are creatures of wild dichotomy: They are dead, but they venerate fertility. They are both monstrous and beautiful, and feature the characteristics of men and women. They straddle the opposite ends of time, immersing themselves in the past while participating in the present.

THE CULT OF CYBELE

Cybele is a bloody fertility goddess of the Phrygian pantheon (Rhea in the Greek pantheon) who was the mother of all the gods. She holds sway over birth and death as well as resurrection. Worshipers revere Cybele as a creature of great beauty and terrible retribution, a wild monster-goddess who demands love from her devout in the form of gore-stained celebrations and orgiastic frenzies. The blood spilled in her name makes the earth fecund and her cultists blessed. The Galloi are the modern-day adherents of Cybele, spreading the veneration of the goddess to both Kindred and mortals alike.

As members of the Circle of the Crone, the vampires of this bloodline adhere strongly to the core Acolyte precepts, punctuated by the Galloi's own interpretations. Creation is power, to be sure — Cybele is a fertility goddess, and, therefore, many Pretties raise animals, tend gardens and even steal and raise mortal infants. Core Galloi philosophy, though, maintains that

creation shouldn't be unfettered or undertaken without meditation. One doesn't simply raise a dog or water a plant because the covenant demands. No, the vampire must honor the act of creation and give the creature or plant the reverence it deserves. A living thing is a blessed being, grown with the consent of the goddess. For this reason, after several years of looking after pets or plants, many Galloi sacrifice the beings they raise, as a show of this reverence by giving the creations back to the goddess.



BLOODY TIMES

The "Days of Blood" (March 15th through 25th) comprise the Pretties' holiest of festivals. These 11 days and nights are devoted exclusively to the worship of Cybele and her castrated consort, Attis. The Days do not have many formalized practices tonight. Mostly, the festival involves 10 days of orgiastic celebration. The Galloi dress exquisitely, wearing elaborate costumes, dresses and other finery. They often commit self-mortification, whipping one another with barbed flails, biting at one another, even going so far as to incur genital mutilation (in observance of Cybele's fertility connotations and their own sexual impotency). Some sacrifice any number of sacred animals (bulls, rams, raptors), then consuming the blood and bathing in it. Others sacrifice mortals, but most Galloi find this practice both dangerous and outmoded.

The Galloi usually share tales of Cybele and Attis, either recounting legends or singing personal stories about how the goddess has blessed them with blood and beauty. By and large, the Days of Blood are for the Pretties only. The vampires of the bloodline sequester themselves away from the rest of the world for these 10 days, usually in one of their bathhouses (see p. 58), provided one exists locally, and do not emerge until the festival is complete. On rare occasions, highly prized mortal thralls, in addition to closely aligned Kindred members of the cult, partake.



The Galloi also accept that tribulation brings enlightenment. Forcing arbitrary trouble on another, however, isn't helpful. It's sadistic. The Galloi favor a system of reward. They prefer to bless those who need blessing — they offer succor in times of crisis, help others foster their dreams and can make others beautiful. Reward is often enough trouble on its own, for few truly understand the consequences of such desires. Beauty comes with complications. With it, one can no longer dwell in the shadows. Money can be a similar burden, as can a successful career. Every fortune brings new misfortune, and the realization of *that* is enlightenment. Moreover, when the Galloi put themselves in the positions

of offering such fortune (such as through favors or through the Taurobolium bloodbaths), they also give themselves the power to withdraw those fortunes at their own discretion. This is another manner of delivering illumination to fools. One can only realize his true self when he is given everything, and then it is all taken away. What's left is raw, bare and bloody. Only then is he ready to understand and worship.

DUTIES AND TRADITIONS

The Galloi observe a few precepts that all members of the bloodline generally uphold, unless regional custom varies.

Galloi hate to be alone. They know that power exists in numbers, so they gather together in domains. If a city has one Pretty, it probably has two or more. Most domains that Galloi call home support three to six Pretties, almost always attached to the Circle of the Crone. If a Galloi finds herself alone in the city, she may make a desperate attempt to bring others into the fold (either through the Embrace or as an Avus) or may leave the city to find others of her kind.

The Pretties in a domain often bind themselves together via a Vinculum in deference to the power of the Blood. They realize that a complete Vinculum can exist only on a one-to-one exclusive basis, and, as a result, may attempt "second-drink" Vinculums with one another, thus fostering a strong communal connection.

In some domains, vampires of the bloodline separate into two cliques. The *cannophori* (reed-bearers) are responsible for maintaining the bathhouses, sacred vessels and other relics, as well as providing animal sacrifices. The *dendrophori* (tree-bearers) maintain libraries and ancient texts, and often tend to elaborate gardens. Galloi do not choose to which "society" they belong. The *archigallus* of the local bloodline determines this, when appropriate.

ADMITTANCE TO THE CULT

The Cult of Cybele is not restricted to the Galloi. While the Pretties believe themselves to be the most favored children of the bloody goddess, they don't automatically restrict others from worshipping at her altars and in her baths. Indeed, the Cult of Cybele is a faction of the Circle of the Crone that occasionally rises to prominence in certain domains. The cult upholds the same tenets that all Acolytes advocate and adds other precepts and rituals to the core ideologies of the Circle. In some cities, the cult stands as a zealous alternative to the Circle, offering a place for those Acolytes seeking more "extreme" or alternative devotion. In other regions where the Galloi have more power, the cult is indistinguishable from the Circle because a Galloi

Hierophant has established dominance and dogma over the local Acolytes.

MEMBERS ONLY

Some radical Galloi cells don't allow others to join them in worship of Cybele. These Pretties maintain that no other vampire can offer the goddess proper veneration, and, thus, other Kindred are kept at arm's length and out of this exclusive group.

Those Damned who aim to join the Galloi in worship of Cybele rarely do so lightly. The bloodline offers a number of trials, some legendary in their awfulness, to test a vampire's devotion. Typically, most of these trials involve either social or physical ordeals (or a combination of the two). Male Kindred may be required to castrate themselves, whereas female Kindred may have to mutilate their own feminine features (breasts, genitals). Usually, such wounds are then burned with fire, to keep them painful and lingering. Alternately, a vampire might be required to abase himself at Elysium or in front of prominent Galloi. Once the Pretties together have determined that a candidate has successfully broken himself down and has reached a state of subservience to the cult, they will begin his teaching and initiation into the mysteries of Cybele.

MORTAL ADHERENTS

Few Galloi are content to let worship of their goddess remain accessible to only Kindred. Mortals have belonged to Cybele's cult since ancient times, and the vampires of this bloodline see no reason to disturb that trend.

Of course, the Tradition of the Masquerade impedes the involvement of mortals unless the introduction of those mortals to Cybele's cult occurs subtly and gradually. The Galloi seek out desperation. They might find it among self-help groups, religious services, methadone clinics, even on the streets or casting couches of Hollywood. The Galloi seek out addicts, the ugly, the powerless, the sexually confused. The Galloi watch these poor, vulnerable souls and, like spiders, they patiently move in for the kill. Except here, the "kill" comes in the form of an offer. What the human wants, the Galloi can provide, whether it's youth, beauty, money, whatever. Perhaps she offers the benefits of the Taurobolium, or maybe she's connected enough to offer the mortal unique opportunities (recording contracts, book deals, sexual re-assignment surgery).

Of course, these desires do not come free. Often, the mortal is required to accept a Vinculum to the vampire. If not that, then she must offer something else to the Pretty: a future favor, an influential ally, even a child.

Should the mortal attempt to renege on the deal, the vampire is quick to remind her that what is given can be easily taken away — or worse.

Mortals of particular promise (or who become deeply enthralled) end up as more than just connections or pawns: they make up the living contingent of the cult. These mortals not only devote their faith to Cybele but also perform menial work that the Pretties themselves don't wish to handle, such as cleaning up after animals, disposing of old and rotten blood or scouting new locations for temples.

Most of these individuals are allowed to have semi-normal lives outside their servitude to the cult. They can go home, hold a job and eat dinner with the family. Such normalcy has a time limit, however. As is often the case with ghouls, cultists often become addicted to the vampires' Vitae. Attempting to maintain a mundane existence becomes a doomed effort, over time. When this happens, Galloi regnant accept service on a full-time basis. At this time, the thralls become known as *korybants*. Their full transition into the cult often comes at a steep price: many Galloi mutilate or remove their cultists' sexual organs, and *korybants* wear clothing that crosses the spectrum of sexual identity. They are expected to serve the vampires hand-and-foot, bringing them blood, entertaining them, even providing the first line of defense if the Pretties face threats. Needless to say, full-fledged cultists are usually quite mad.

All of this behavior comes very close to breaking the Masquerade, even more so than the normal creation of ghouls. If these practices don't shatter the Masquerade outright, they bend it beyond a reasonable point. Although the wise Galloi never claim to be vampires — many often tell their mortal servants that they are demi-gods put upon this plane to enact Cybele's will — they do flaunt their monstrous natures more than they should.

Concerned about the integrity of the Masquerade, many Princes refuse to allow the Cult of Cybele to take root in their domains. Consequently, many Galloi tend to gravitate toward domains where the Acolytes have already consolidated power. In these places, the Pretties can occasionally influence the powers-that-be to allow the Galloi's particular iteration of Crone veneration. Of course, some Acolytes at odds with a domain's current regime may attempt to find Galloi outside the city and invite these Pretties to help them wrest political control from the dominant hierarchy.



MEGALENSIA

April 4th is Megalensia, one of Cybele's holy days. On this night, the Galloi celebrate the day the *Magna Mater* was said to be revealed to the mortal world. Megalensia is, to the Galloi, a day

of mirth and festivity, less severe than the Days of Blood. All Kindred may partake in the festival, regardless of their covenant, clan or bloodline. The Galloi offer games of sport, music and a banquet of blood.

In reality, the Galloi use this holy days as a celebration and a pulpit. The celebration demonstrates to other Kindred that the Galloi are not monstrous fanatics and that joy can be had in service to Cybele. Then again, unless the Galloi hold specific social or political power in a city, few vampires bother showing up to this strange celebration.



HIGH ART

Why does this ancient bloodline cling so dearly to the modern? For creatures who continue to venerate a Phrygian blood goddess and believe that their history runs all the way back to one of the first known cities in the entire world, it seems peculiar that they make every effort to appear contemporary and cosmopolitan.

The reasoning behind this look and attitude is multifold. Perhaps the primary reason is simple narcissism. The Galloi are a Nosferatu bloodline, and they believe themselves fortunate enough to appear outlandishly beautiful in spite of their curse. Flaunting this bizarre splendor seems a natural response, but the pagan robes of ancient religions offer little in the way of exhibition. Moreover, modern *couture* allows the vampire to dress in whatever styles flatter her androgynous body. Beauty is extremely important to these Kindred, and they seek to showcase it whenever and wherever possible.

In the Pretties' minds, modern art and fashion are little more than drastic re-interpretations of the past. The Pretties, like much of the art that hangs upon their walls, are vehicles for ancient traditions, re-imagined for the contemporary world.

The final reason for this adherence to fashionable trends is pragmatism. The Galloi see themselves as the mouthpieces for the Circle of the Crone. The Acolytes, according to many Pretties, don't do enough to strengthen their ranks and consolidate power. The Kindred of this bloodline seek to change that and see new vampires accept these old traditions. The Acolytes have a lot of competition. The Invictus offer temporal power to neonates. The Sanctified hang their hats on the dominant patriarchy of God and Heaven. The Carthians promise terms young vampires can wrap their heads around because they've experienced them in the mortal world. The Dragons offer a chance to transcend the cycle of Damnation and dependency. The Pretties know the Circle needs an edge, and they think that they're it. They pursue the latest, greatest trends in fine art and fashion, and they make sure everybody knows. The Pretties attempt to be trendier than the

trendiest First Estate Daeva and offer themselves as stark contrasts to the stodgiest Sanctified Priests. To the Pretties, fashion and art are as much tools as elements of expression, and the Pretties wield these tools with facility.

Not all Galloi are so consumed with this contemporary edge. Certainly, a number are content to wear dark robes or subtle dress, and dwell in austere, minimalist havens. It's important to remember, though, that these vampires are highly communal. They bond together, and as such, *act* together. If three dress themselves to the nines in the latest Vivienne Westwood ensembles, and the fourth is content to wrap himself in a cultic shroud, his broodmates will likely "encourage" him to conform to the others.



THESMOPHORIA

Thesmophoria (November 1st through 3rd) is the Day of the Beautiful Newborn. This three-day period celebrates the fertility granted by Cybele.

On the first night, local Galloi abscond with a newborn child. Some Galloi take these infants from hospitals or hospice care while other Galloi brusquely abduct children from private residences. The infants are too young to consciously remember such trauma, but Cybele herself only knows what this wicked ceremony wreaks on the child's mind or body. They keep the child for the full three nights, feeding him or her only their Vitae. At the end of the third night, they return the child to his or her parents.

Or, at least, *most* Galloi do. Some keep the child and attempt to raise him or her, whereas others offer the child as a sacrifice to Cybele. But these actions are to be considered unorthodox.



BATHHOUSES

Bloodbaths are central to many Galloi Requiems. The act of bathing in blood and offering those baths to others is part of their legacy and legend. If the Pretties dwell in a city, it's a good bet they operate a bathhouse somewhere in the region.

The local Galloi customarily keep the bathhouse, known as a *caldarium* hidden. It's never public or easy to find. They don't even make its presence known, and usually openly deny its existence. For this reason, many Kindred (and mortals "in-the-know") assume that these strange places are little more than myth, the product of scurrilous reputation. Only those willing to follow the faint trail of clues have any chance at all of gaining access to the Pretties' bathhouse. A rundown prostitute hears from her pimp that "some bitch" on Vine Street visited one, and the visit made those switchblade scars disappear. Maybe some artist hears from his Oxycontin

connection about "this place" where the artist can get his muse back, if he wants it badly enough. Uncovering the location and gaining entry requires working through byzantine channels. By the time someone has found the *caldarium's* unlisted phone number, he's had to talk to seven go-betweens, track down a street address marked on the ceiling of an opium den bathroom and figure out a password from a rebus printed up as a nightclub flyer. Only then *might* he receive a pre-recorded phone call directing him to a different phone number, which he can call and then plead with the voice on the other end for a way in.

The Galloi establish these *caldariums* off the beaten path, such as in a room in a dubious motel, in the sub-basement of an old brothel or behind a bankrupt amusement park. Such places are unlikely to be stumbled upon, and, if they are, the interloper is probably no one anyone will miss when he turns up missing come sunrise. It's worth noting that some Galloi put their bathhouses in *very* obvious places, as few expect such blatancy. The Pretties might establish the *caldarium* in a penthouse of a posh condo development or maybe even below a popular sex club where the local Damned feed.

The bathhouses themselves act partly as physical manifestations of the Pretties' own personalities. Some Pretties make their *caldariums* sterile, spartan affairs, all concrete floors and simple stone tubs. Others design elaborate affairs offering Persian tile, velour mats and soft music, not to mention ornate tubs of brass, porcelain or marble. Most Pretties make some effort to mark the bathhouse with art or other ornamentation honoring Cybele, though some favor a degree of austerity that eschews even sacred iconography.

A *caldarium* is usually staffed by *korybant* cultists, and at least one of the local Galloi can typically be found here at any given point in the night. In this place, the vampires generally invoke their ritual blood magic (the Taurobolium) for others. The Galloi wash those they care to bless in the Galloi's own Vitae, pouring it upon the blessed or filling up an entire tub with blood, water and a number of strange herbs and reagents. The air in the *caldarium* grows thick with the heady scent of warm blood and spices, inciting lusty pangs of hunger in most Kindred. The blessed may luxuriate in their baths or stand in the showers for as long as they wish. The blood usually runs out a local drainage system (though some Galloi allow the blood to coagulate upon the floor and dry into the tile or stone). Each tub is generally paired with a smaller basin of cold, fresh water, which the Pretty uses to clean the subject.

Some Galloi are more exclusive than others. Some Galloi allow other Acolytes to come to and take part in the baths freely, a perquisite of membership in the Circle, whereas other Galloi make access to the bathhouses as tortuous as for any non-Galloi Kindred. Usually, this

decision comes down to whether or not the vampire feels that the local Acolytes are devout enough. Many of the Circle seem content to provide little more than lip service to the actual gods and goddesses, and that sort of worship doesn't sit well with most Galloi. The tenets and ideals of the covenant are important, but equally important is the active veneration of gods and spirits (Cybele chief among them).



BLOODBATHS, HUNGER AND FRENZY

Galloi bathhouses are bloody sites. Although the blood spilled often contains a number of other elements and ends up being unusable as "functional" Vitae (useless as sustenance, does not cause a Vinculum), the sweet scent incites any vampire's hungry Beast. Vampires in these places gain a +3 dice bonus in resisting hunger frenzy because *caldariums* are places of decorum and protocol. On the other hand, a -2 penalty also applies because the bathhouses provide constant reminders of blood and hunger. The cumulative modifier is then +1 to resist frenzies. Vampires are subject to other modifiers (such as penalties for starvation) as normal. The Galloi themselves can ignore the -2 penalty (only in their bathhouses) because they have become acclimated to the environment, thus allowing them a full +3 bonus in resisting frenzy. Storytellers should indeed make thirst a matter of dramatic impact for Kindred visiting a *caldarium*.



LEGENDS OF THE CSEJTHE

In the year 1575, a young Hungarian countess married a brash and stubborn boy in the small town of Cachtice. She was Erzebet Bathory, he Ferenc Nadasdy. She was said to be an exceptional youth, fluent in a half-dozen languages, graceful in dance and beautiful beyond compare. Nadasdy, on the other hand, was less extraordinary. While by no means weak, he did not possess the lion's share of Erzebet's gifts. The two were not well matched, but the marriage was a marriage of much convenience orchestrated largely by the boy's mother. At the time, the man was the one with the power of choice and destiny. Ferenc chose his destiny to be war, and only a few years after the wedding, he left his bride behind to pursue life as a warrior and a leader.

Bathory (she chose to keep her own family's name out of stubbornness) grew bored and restless. She languished in her castle, taking care of the family's business while her husband was away in battle. Such duties required little from a girl so smart and well-bred.

One of her primary tasks was to keep the servants in line, a job she came to relish with sadistic zest. She punished those who disobeyed terribly. She poked needles through

the lips of chatterboxes and peeled away the fingernails of lazy and clumsy girls. She locked some in rooms naked while snow blew in from open windows. She ordered others left outside to starve for days on end. Erzebet saw her husband as he returned for a few days here and there. They had enough time together to conceive several children, few of whom entertained her beyond a couple of months. When Ferenc left again for war, she would return to her pet project of brutalizing and tormenting the servants.

Time passed, and Erzebet grew older. Before she knew it, she was in her early 40s and her beauty was waning. Then she made a discovery. Upon beating one of the servant girls, her nails raked the wif's chin. Blood spattered upon her hand, and the crimson fluid left her skin soft and supple. Erzebet believed that the blood even helped diminish her deepening wrinkles. After that, Bathory took her abuse of the servants to a diabolical level. At first, she simply cut them and washed herself in their blood. Over time, that was not enough. She took to hoisting them in cages above her, and had male servants stab upward with sharp spears. The blood rained down upon the countess, and she felt rejuvenated and young once again.

Erzebet Bathory was caught, eventually, but not before hundreds of servants perished at her expense. She was royalty and could not be punished with death, so she was locked in the highest tower of her own castle, trapped in a cold room with a tiny window. As time went on, age and ugliness consumed her. Her hands grew arthritic and bent inward. Her face became etched with cavernous lines. Her figure shriveled. One night, years after her isolation began, she died.

The bloody countess' death was not permanent, however. Under the light of the moon, a figure came to her, a shadow with yellow eyes and a wide smile calling himself Kupol , the Lord of the Ladies. He granted her a favor in return for a commitment. If she would serve him in undeath and act as the Devil's agent in this horrible world, then Kupol  would allow her to stave off death for a time. More importantly, she would be made beautiful once again, more so than she had ever been. Erzebet agreed, and the Devil called Kupol  cursed her with the Requiem.

Legend suggests that Bathory is still out there, siring many monstrous childer. She and her "babies" are wretched beasts — until they bathe in blood, that is, at which point they reclaim their lost beauty and appear as beauties to all who see them. They call themselves the Csejthe (pronounced *tsee-AY-thay*), after the family castle in which Erzebet died and was reborn. Their focus in this ugly world is only to make it uglier, for then they are all the more beautiful in comparison. They invoke the name of Kupol , pray to it and act in accordance with its silent wishes. They are debauched and depraved, predators of the most grisly order. Rumors

swirl around them, and some believe that they are a driving force behind the bloodthirsty cells of Satanic Kindred calling themselves “Belial’s Brood.”

The Csejthe have heard that others are out there like them, disfigured beasts who bathe in blood to find unearthly splendor, but these wayward Kindred are little more than pretenders. If Bathory and her children find them, they will be butchered like beasts, their blood made to fill the tubs of the Csejthe vampires.

TAUROBOLIUM

During the nights of ancient Phrygia, Rome and Greece, adherents were initiated into the Cult of Cybele through a grim and gory baptismal rite called the *Taurobolium*. During this rite, the novitiate stood at the bottom of a small pit, beneath a wooden grate. The cultists then brought in a bull wreathed in garlands of flowers, his horns sheathed, and decorated him with trinkets of gold and jewels and led him to stand above the grate. Each cultist had a spear and one cultist, the *archigallus*, held a knife. With the spears, the adherents stabbed at the bull again and again, so that his hot blood rained down upon the novitiate. The *archigallus* then severed the bull’s genitals and threw them into the pit.

The initiate bathed in the shower of hot, gushing bull’s blood. According to custom, he covered himself completely in the warm fluid, even tasting it with his tongue outstretched. Foul with gore and fluids, the man emerged from the pit no longer an initiate, but a true child of Cybele.

The vampires of the Cult of Cybele’ performed a similar rite, but neonates were not washed in the blood of a bull standing above them. They showered in the Vitae of a mortal, himself often castrated or similarly mutilated. At times, several mortals were sacrificed in a single ritual, and the vampire exalted in a frenzy of gluttonous hunger while confined in the earthen pit.

The *Taurobolium* signified a kind of rebirth in the initiate (whether vampire or mortal). The muddy pit represented a womb, while the showering of blood symbolized the gush of fluids that accompany a child wriggling free from his mother’s body. The novitiate was metaphorically reborn into new wisdom — he had become a child of Cybele.

The Galloi of modern nights have their own form of the *Taurobolium*. With it, they cover another in their Vitae and grant him the temporary blessings of Cybele. This blessing comes in the form of physical rejuvenation. The blood makes the subject appear younger and more vibrant. Scars and blemishes disappear, and the subject’s skin seems to give off a faint radiance.

Unlike many Disciplines, *Taurobolium* is a single power that gains in intensity as the Galloi becomes more adept with its use. As the vampire becomes more

capable, she can grant the subject greater refinements to his appearance. This also requires more effort on the part of the vampire, however. At lower levels, the Galloi can sprinkle a little blood on the subject to achieve a small effect. At higher levels (and stronger effects), the vampire might be required to pour her blood upon the individual or actually have the subject bathe in a tub full of the Vitae.

Cost: Variable per level of use. At •, Galloi must spend 1 Vitae. At levels •• and •••, the vampire must spend 2 Vitae. At levels •••• and •••••, she must spend 3 Vitae to enact this power.

Dice Pool: Presence + Occult + *Taurobolium* versus the subject’s Composure + Blood Potency (assuming the subject resists)

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive. The subject may choose at the time of invocation to resist this power.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Vitae burns the subject like acid, causing a number of lethal damage points equal to the Galloi’s Blood Potency.

Failure: The vampire’s Vitae fails to impart the blessing. The Galloi expends the Vitae, but nothing happens.

Success: The subject gains a dice bonus to all rolls involving Presence and Manipulation. This bonus is equal to the level of *Taurobolium* invoked by the Galloi. This benefit lasts for a number of nights equal to the Pretty’s Blood Potency level.

Exceptional Success: The vampire gains the dice bonuses as granted by a normal success, and also regains a Willpower point as her self-confidence soars.

Note that the level of *Taurobolium* invoked requires a progressively greater expenditure of Vitae. Using the first level costs 1 Vitae, and the Kindred can sprinkle the blood over the subject’s head.

The second and third levels of this Discipline require 2 Vitae. The Kindred pours the blood from a vessel (an urn or jug, for instance) over the subject’s head and shoulders.

The fourth and fifth levels of this Discipline cost the Galloi 3 Vitae, and demand that the subject bathe in the expended blood. Note that this expenditure of blood isn’t enough to fill an entire tub. The blood is mixed with oils, salts, water and other additives to compensate. The subject must completely immerse herself in this pagan concoction.

When the subject emerges from the *Taurobolium*, her skin bears no mark or blemish. She possesses an androgynous beauty or a mysterious nobility. Features that previously may have been unattractive or odd instead seem exotic. In some cases, subjects even acquire a fleeting semi-nimbus, appearing as if in ‘soft focus.’

The subject must be naked when the Galloi invokes this Discipline. The subject must also keep the blood

upon her flesh for a full hour before the player makes the roll to invoke the blessing. If the subject washes the mystical Vitae off before that time, the Discipline automatically fails and the Vitae is wasted.

The Discipline's benefits last for a number of nights equal to the Galloi's Blood Potency, but the Galloi can end the Discipline prematurely by spending a Willpower point. Doing so requires the subject to make a Resolve + Composure roll. Failure causes the subject to suffer a physical pain as her skin re-aligns itself and painful headaches, which inflict a -1 penalty to all Physical and Mental dice pools for the following 12-hour period. Dramatic failure means the subject suffers the Depression derangement for this duration as well (if she already has that derangement, she develops the severe version, Melancholia).

The Pretty can choose to invoke this Discipline at a level beneath her capability. For instance, if she has Taurobolium •••• but doesn't want to involve the subject in a full bath, she may choose instead to invoke the first level of the power. That level requires sprinkling and less Vitae, but also grants less benefit to the subject.

The subject does not gain the Presence or Manipulation bonus to any dice pools affecting the Galloi who granted her the blessing.



LEGENDS OF THE TAUROBOLIUM

The blood that results from the Taurobolium ceases to be useful as vampiric Vitae. The blood cannot stimulate a Vinculum, cannot be used in the Embrace and can create a ghoul only with the appropriate Devotion (see below). That doesn't stop a number of legends that persist about the mystical Vitae of the Taurobolium. Are any of these legends true? Are they the result of secret Devotions hidden from the rest of the bloodline? Are these legends merely lies perpetuated by Pretties who wish to maintain a certain mystique? Whatever the case, what follows are a few of the rumors some may hear about the blood of the Taurobolium.

- If fed to an infant, the blood may foster a whole bloodline of ghouls.
- If used to water a plant, the blood will cause the plant to thirst for human blood.
- The taste of the blood can be used to enslave Lupines and other fiends.
- The blood has restorative properties if mixed with the appropriate reagents.
- Those who drink the blood may become vehicles for prophecy.
- Those who drink the blood — or even *touch* it — become slaves to the Circle of the Crone.
- Animals that drink the blood will die and be reborn seven nights later as loyal servants.



DEVOTIONS

The Taurobolium is useful on its own, to be sure, but this is not the limit of the Discipline's application. Many Galloi have learned to couple Taurobolium with other Disciplines for additional mystic results.

CONSENT OF THE MAGNA MATER

(Majesty •, Taurobolium ••)

Taurobolium changes the user's blood. The vampire's spilled Vitae becomes imbued with properties above and beyond that of other Kindred. The Galloi suggest that the difference is that this blood carries the blessing of the goddess Cybele. By and large, this blood becomes useless outside the Taurobolium. The blood cannot be used in the Embrace, doesn't provide sustenance to vampires and, in general, can't be used to create a Vinculum. However, Damned who know this Devotion can use the blood to create a ghoul.

Ghouls created using the blood that results from this Devotion are different from ghouls created by the usual practice. Although the standard ghoul rules apply (see p. 166 of **Vampire: The Requiem**), the ghoul also goes through a few other changes.

First, the ghoul becomes eerily attractive, much like a recently bathed Pretty, becoming almost genderless in his appearance. His skin turns smooth and pale like marble, his eyes grow ringed with gray and his limbs appear lithe and delicate. Thus, the ghoul suffers the standard Nosferatu weakness (dice pools based on Presence or Manipulation are exempt from the 10 again rule, and any 1's that come up on the roll subtract from successes), but this social failing is due to alien splendor, not fearsome disposition.

Second, this alien beauty has an effect on those around the ghoul. Those mortals near the ghoul (within 10 yards) suffer a -1 to all rolls involving Composure. These mortals are more likely to become easily frustrated and drawn to temper or, similarly, give into their lusts or other dark proclivities.

The third and perhaps strangest effect is on the ghoul's fertility. Most true servants of the Galloi are infertile — they are mutilated in a way that their reproductive organs do not function. These ghouls, however, are quite the opposite. Any time the ghoul engages in any sexual act that could end in reproduction, a pregnancy results. Every instance of sexual intimacy to climax results in pregnancy. Male ghouls impregnate every woman with whom they have sex, and female ghouls become pregnant from any instance of sexual intercourse. This is true even if either partner normally has non-functioning reproductive systems (from vasectomies, tied tubes or other biological conditions).

If the ghoul goes a time (month or more) without the Galloi's Vitae in his system, he reverts to being a

“normal” mortal without any of the aforementioned modifications. If the ghoul is a female and was with child, the fetus dies in a bloody miscarriage.

Cost: 2 Vitae; must be poured into the mouth of the mortal. (Note that creating the ghoul also requires the vampire to spend the standard Willpower point.)

Dice Pool: This power involves no roll to invoke.

Action: Instant

Note that this Devotion is required only for the first drink that creates the ghoul (that is, the one coupled with an expenditure of Willpower). After that, the Galloi may keep up the ghoul's persistent condition via the normal taste of Vitae without this Devotion.

This power costs nine experience points to learn.

BLESSING OF THE CAPTIVE EYE

(Obfuscate ●●●, Taurobolium ●)

With a drizzle of blood on a subject's brow, the Pretty can change the way that mirrors, cameras and other reflective media capture that individual's visage. When seen in a mirror, photograph or onscreen from any kind of camera, a mortal's form appears blurry or warped; her face is especially disturbed. Vampires, on the other hand, experience the opposite effect. They no longer show up obscured in mirrors or upon photographic media and, in fact, appear quite crisply.

Cost: 1 Vitae (must be sprinkled upon subject)

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Stealth + Obfuscate versus subject's Composure + Blood Potency (if subject is unwilling)

Action: Contested; instant if subject is willing.

On a successful roll, the described effects take place. Mortals become obfuscated in mirrors and photographic media, whereas Kindred now show up in mirrors and photographic media. An exceptional success allows a +1 bonus to Stealth rolls (for mortals) and a +1 bonus to Persuasion rolls (for vampires). Failure indicates nothing happens, and a dramatic failure causes the sprinkled blood to burn the subject with one lethal point of damage.

The effects of this power last for a number of nights equal to the Galloi's Blood Potency score. The Pretty may end this power prematurely by spending a Willpower point.

This power costs 12 experience points to learn.

ENLIVEN THE FLESH

(Majesty ●●, Obfuscate ●●, Taurobolium ●●)

Many come to the Galloi seeking youth, and the Pretties can offer a reasonable simulacrum. The price may be something simple, such as a token of appreciation. Or the price might instead be a taste of the Galloi's blood, forcing the subject one step forward on the path to Vinculum. Regardless of what cost the Kindred exacts



from the subject, this ability allows for the subject to effectively turn back the clock on his physical features, appearing far younger than he truly is.

Cost: 2 Vitae (must be poured on the subject from a sacred vessel)

Dice Pool: Presence + Subterfuge + Taurobolium versus Composure + Blood Potency (if resisted)

Action: Contested; instant if subject is willing.

Success on the activation roll indicates that the subject's form makes both a real and illusory shift toward a younger body. (The "real" shift comes from the blessings of Taurobolium, which helps smooth out wrinkles and blemishes; Obfuscate and Majesty help the subject appear more spry and rejuvenated.) For every success on the Devotion roll, the subject appears five years younger. If three successes were achieved and the subject was a 50-year-old man, he would then appear 35: his bald patch would shrink, his gut would recede, the gray in his hair would darken. Note that this power does not make the person appear as he or she actually did when he or she was younger; Enliven the Flesh simply grants an illusion of youth.

Failure on this roll indicates that nothing happens, whereas a dramatic failure causes the subject to appear to *gain* five years in age, and he also suffers a -1 penalty to all dice pools involving Presence or Manipulation. Exceptional success indicates that the subject may add a +1 bonus to all dice pools involving Presence or Manipulation.

This power can be used only to reduce one's age to approximately 15. It cannot go below that, for that would likely require more drastic physiological changes. This power provides the same results for vampires as it does for mortals.

The effects of this power last for a number of nights equal to the Galloi's Blood Potency score. The Pretty may end this power prematurely by spending a Willpower point.

This power costs 18 experience points to learn.

TRANSGRESSION OF ATTIS

(Majesty ••, Obfuscate ••••, Taurobolium •••••)

The Pretties are known for their blessings. They can grant beauty, youth and success. However, few Pretties know of this Devotion, which literally allows the vampire to take a subject and change his gender. Men become women, and women become men, whether the individual is mortal or immortal. The power is temporary

unless the subject is willing to sacrifice enough of himself to make the change permanent.

Cost: 3 Vitae (must be mixed with water and sacred oils, in which the subject must bathe for one full hour). This power also requires the *subject* to spend a Willpower point. The Galloi may not spend this point on the subject's behalf. If the subject doesn't spend the point, the Devotion fails automatically.

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult + Taurobolium versus subject's Resolve + Blood Potency (if unwilling)

Action: Contested; instant if subject is willing.

Success on this roll indicates that the subject transforms to the opposite gender. He has all the requisite physical parts to appear as a woman (or a man, if the subject is female). A doctor or other medical professional examining the subject with a Wits + Medicine roll must subtract the successes made on this Devotion from the dice pool to determine the difference. An exceptional success grants the subject +1 to all rolls involving Subterfuge when attempting to "act" like the other gender. (At the Storyteller's request, the subject may be required to occasionally roll a Manipulation + Subterfuge roll to fake the mannerisms of the new gender.)

Failure means all costs are paid but the Devotion is unsuccessful. A dramatic failure causes the subject three points of lethal damage and causes the subject to affect an unsettling aspect for a 12-hour period. During this period, the subject suffers a -1 penalty to all Social rolls.

This gender shift lasts for a number of nights equal to the Galloi's Blood Potency. However, the subject can choose to make this gender change permanent by spending a Willpower *dot* in addition to the Willpower point. This dot must be spent within the first three hours after the Devotion was invoked, otherwise the change cannot become permanent (though the subject may make another attempt if he can convince the vampire to perform the Devotion again after the effects of this one expire).

The gender shift grants the subject a reasonable facsimile of the physiology of the new gender. For all intents and purposes, the individual is of the changed gender. The only limitation is reproductive capability. The subject has zero reproductive capability — men may not impregnate women, and women may not become pregnant. Legend suggests that some Galloi of particularly potent blood have figured a way around this, but few, if any, are aware of precisely how.

This power costs 33 experience points to learn.

Gulikan

*To truly understand a thing, one must draw in its truest essence,
the unadulterated and revelatory vitality that declares the thing's singular nature.*

For a few, rare Daeva, the seemingly wealthy realms of sight, sound and touch remain empty of promise, unable to satisfy the Daeva's unique lusts. The most perfectly formed human figure, the most hauntingly melodic *ostinato* or the purest Xian silk offer these hedonists nothing in comparison to that which they crave. Even the flavor of the most exquisite Vitae, while certainly welcome, is only an echo of the one thing that can calm the special hunger within. These Succubi would forgo all of these luxuries, if they could, if only they could possess and consume the essential scent of all things, most especially things of the living variety.

For this legendary bloodline, odor is all that matters. Cursed with a sense of olfactory perception so acute that no scent can escape their notice, these Kindred are unable to deny themselves the ecstasy they experience by consuming certain scents. Of course, while many odors of interest might fascinate these peculiar vampires for hours on end, none is as arousing as that produced by the living. The hunger that compels most Kindred to fixate on the flavor of still-warm blood spilling down their throats gives way to a similarly insurmountable need to savor the aroma of that blood instead. In a fashion not unlike a wine connoisseur relishing a new vintage, the Gulikan try to draw from Vitae every last drop of its aromatic soul, before they finally drink out of necessity.

While the Gulikan have an astonishing facility for detecting and recognizing scents, a singular talent for producing scents surpasses this ability. Certainly, such sensualists are capable of creating aromas that would put mortals in a similar line of work to shame, but the Gulikan's possession of the means to capture and exploit the essential scent and *supernatural power* of Kindred Vitae has made this bloodline a legend among the Damned.

The Gulikan (roughly translated as "rose-blooded") first appeared on the bustling market streets of Constantinople. Five years after the Great Schism between the Byzantine and Latin Churches, a Daeva named Eumathius offered as a gift to a deathless luminary a pomade that exuded an almost undetectable scent that caused others nearby to act as if held sway by the potency of the elder's blood. Eumathius went on to produce other aromatic products for the ancient vampire

as well as for various Primogen and other prestigious Kindred; these scented products became nothing less than symbols of status in undead society.

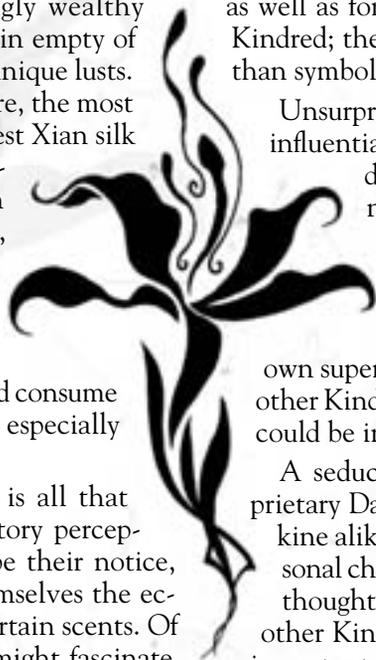
Unsurprisingly, Eumathius became an extremely influential figure in his own right. What his clients did not recognize until too late was that the numerous pomanders, oils, balms, soaps, powders and perfumes produced did not actually enhance the seductive power of the wearer. Rather, they extended the range and insidiousness of Eumathius' own supernatural irresistibility. Unlike the Vitae of other Kindred, the potency of Eumathius' own Vitae could be inhaled as well as consumed.

A seducer extraordinaire, Eumathius' used proprietary Daeva charms as well, causing Kindred and kine alike to fall prey to the master Perfumer's personal charisma. Countless mortals, including many thought to be the puppets and loyal playthings of other Kindred, as well as a dozen or more Kindred important in their own right, became Eumathius' unwitting thralls.

Using his new-found dominance, Eumathius succeeded in winning permission to create a brood of his own, one that inherited its founder's unusually aromatic Vitae as well as the inability to resist tracking down and relishing particularly captivating scents. For more than a century, the Perfumer and his rose-blooded offspring relished their place in society, all the while expanding the scope of their regency by luring more individuals into their invisible traps.

The Gulikans' ruses came to a near end when Eumathius' own weakness led him to violate the Prince's law, breaking the Masquerade in a fashion that was certain to earn the Perfumer a judgment of Lextalionis. He did not meet Final Death, however. Using all his guile and discipline, the master of fragrances managed to replace the Prince's favorite tobacco with one of Eumathius' own construction. By the time Eumathius appeared before his sovereign to answer for his crime, the Prince was already so entranced by the specially prepared *shisha* that he dealt with the accused in a manner that stunned his advisors. The verdict left the Perfumer in a position that enabled him to continue exerting his unseen influence on his peers.

Tonight, the Gulikan continue to toil away in the same tangle of streets that once housed the greatest



concentration of renowned perfumers in the world. Modern-day Istanbul is quite a different place from the magnificent city it once was, but, for the Gulikan, it remains home.

Their aromatic wares are no longer limited to only the local market, however. Tonight, high-ranking Kindred in Elysiums across the globe prize Gulikan aromatics. Those Kindred who purchase Gulikan products are well aware of the source of their power, but given their purchasers' distance from the source and the great unlikelihood that they will ever encounter the actual perfumer who produced the goods, the Kindred feel safe enough to use the scented goods in order to profit from their legendary efficacy. A cologne that makes even the most intransigent mortals want to surrender their blood to a Kindred certainly has its value, even if the suicidal urge ultimately derives from another vampire's Vitae.

A few Gulikan have

actually turned their backs on their traditional trade and found their niche exploiting the small advantage that accompanies their horrid weakness. Offering their services as bounty hunters to Sheriffs and other Kindred needing to track down the living and unliving, these Gulikan command exceptional fees, and deservedly so. Those who choose this line of work dwell nearly anywhere, ever on the trail of someone who crossed the wrong vampire. The extraordinary exploits of a few of these Bloodhounds have only further cemented the bloodline's legendary standing, making them as feared and yet as indispensable as any of the Damned.

Parent Clan: Daeva

Nickname: Perfumers or Bloodhounds

Covenant: As most Daeva, the Gulikan are most commonly found among the ranks of the Invictus. The First Estate produces the bulk of the Gulikan's customers, and the Perfumers are most comfortable among these elite, able to profit both from the sale of their wares and the hidden web of thralls that they weave nightly. Powdered, oiled and garbed in only the most expensive, scented wardrobe, these olfactory *wunderkinds* are as much a part of the Danse Macabre as any who want to climb the Invictus ladder. If more than one Gulikan makes his home in the same domain, the competition is fierce. Nothing poses as great a threat to a Gulikan's plans as another Perfumer who plies her own goods in the hope of wielding power over the local Kindred. Consequently, each Gulikan seeks to gain as many allies in the Invictus as possible in order to win over the competitor's customers and pawns. Only in Istanbul, where the bloodline is strongest and established rules of competition based on ancient guild customs exist to govern their practices, do Gulikan suffer each other's co-existence.

In some domains, the Lancea Sanctum is an attractive alternative to the Invictus. The Sanctified make use of incense and other perfumed products for a variety of purposes, giving a cautious Perfumer a chance to sway an entire congregation. The only downside can be a rigorous set of obligations that demand precious time better spent perfecting the next scented concoction.

The Ordo Dracul has few Perfumers among its number. For most, the outlook of the Ordo Dracul is far too esoteric, and the limitations on to whom the Gulikan may market their wares and in what capacity are all too commonplace.



The Carthian Movement is popular with those Gulikan who adopt the Requiem of a bounty hunter. The nature of Carthian politics allows the Gulikan to pursue prey that might otherwise be off-limits due to their social connections.

Until recently, the Circle of the Crone has never been a popular destination for the rose-blooded. In the past half-century, the Perfumers have taken a sudden interest, finding in Crúac a possible means to greatly expand on the possibilities inherent in their own special Discipline.

Appearance: Despite their parent clan's infatuation with physical beauty, the beauty of scent draws the Gulikan to their future childer. Many Gulikan select their progeny literally with eyes closed. Others, of course, rarely ever discern these distinguishing odors and judge the Perfumers on visual appearance first. For this reason, and for no other, most Gulikan at least make an effort to appear to fit in with their chosen peers, whether powdered and diamond-draped Harpies or a rustic congregation of Sanctified White Robes. Those whose Requiems consist primarily of playing bloodhound tend to be the exceptions, caring little if anything about appearance. For these Gulikan, their own hedonistic expeditions into the invisible world of aroma leading them to their prey matters far more than what the Gulikan wear or others' opinions of them.



AN EVER-PRESENT SCENT

A habit that truly sets the Gulikan apart from other Kindred is *sniffing*. Kindred do not breathe, but the Gulikan habitually sniff the air in order to detect every odor they can. So ingrained is this practice, due to their bloodline's weakness, a Gulikan make a concerted attempt to stop this activity for longer than a few moments. A successful Resolve + Composure roll allows the Gulikan to stop sniffing for a full scene, so long as he does not speak during that time. Any use of speech requires the Gulikan to inhale and expend air, a sensation that makes it impossible for the rose-blooded to resist sampling any passing scents.

Naturally, this habit, along with the Gulikan's legendary status, makes it nearly impossible for the Gulikan to mask their identity most of the time. Some Kindred might eventually be able to put two and two together and recognize the incessantly sniffing vampire for what he is. Among the kine, this habit can also prove troublesome, as police officers, as well as many ordinary citizens, especially those in the underworld and those who live on the streets, will assume that the Gulikan uses cocaine or some other inhaled substance.

The fact that the Gulikan may visibly savor the odors they encounter only makes these weird hedonists that much more noteworthy, further complicating their Requiems.



Haven: Perfumers need proper space to produce their wares, not only in terms of actual square footage and security but in terms of geography. In times past, Perfumers were primarily located in districts where the atrocious aromas wafting from the maceration vats and distillation tanks, not to mention the simple stores of herbs, oils and other pungent ingredients, would not disturb those with the wealth and influence to cause economic harm, the same people who consumed the Perfumers' products with unremitting fervor. Even Gulikan who possess the most technologically advanced equipment still have no desire to draw undue attention should a spill or other accident take place. The smallest of inadvertent releases could result in all kine within 10 blocks to come swarming to the supernatural aphrodisiac!

Consequently, those rose-blooded who pursue Ortam almost always locate their havens in the Barrens, far from prying eyes and noses, as a precaution. They usually select large spaces, in order for the resident Gulikan to be as distant from the fires and heat needed in his work, with the personal sleeping chamber typically fireproofed, just in case. Intruders will be hardpressed to resist being overcome by the powerful fumes — from the sickly saccharine to the utterly noxious — that assault them upon entering a Gulikan's haven, which is more laboratory than workshop. The master will require a constant supply of ingredients that are unavoidably used up with each use of Ortam.

Gulikan working as Bloodhounds have no need of such quarters but still prefer to bed down far from the wash of human odors that drenches most of the city, in order to keep temptation at bay as much as possible. Of course, when hunting, Bloodhounds dive into that sea of sweat, flatulence, rotting food, soiled garments and every other source of human effluvia in order to indulge as only Gulikan might.

Background: Although a childe is ultimately selected because she possesses a scent that the sire must claim for his own, only the dimmest Perfumer would adopt as his apprentice an individual whose wits leave something to be desired. Ortam is as much a technical exercise as an art. A prospective childe must master fundamental mathematics, a broad knowledge of herbs and related chemistry and an ability to carefully balance all the ingredients in a way that produces the exact result desired. Therefore, a childe's merit depends not merely on her ability to be a companion or thing of desire but also on her potential as an exceptional student and useful assistant to the sire. College graduates, some skilled laborers and those with a demonstrated flair for creative prowess are highly prized.

Many Gulikan still harbor ancient biases and also prefer their protégés to be of a middle- or upper-class upbringing, ensuring that the fledgling will be able

to fit in well with the bloodline's usual patrons. In Istanbul, most who are Embraced are also of local birth, with mortal bloodlines stretching far back into the city's earliest nights. Beyond the Bosphorus, this degree of pedigree becomes less important. Bloodhounds who sire tend to focus much more on survival skills and take as their childer cops, streetwise types and even mortal bounty hunters, guaranteeing that the new vampires can hit the ground running. A fledgling Bloodhound's will not have access to the acute olfactory ability of the bloodline until his blood is potent enough; until then, he must rely on far more mundane means of tracking.

Character Creation: It almost goes without saying that Gulikan who fill the traditional role of Perfumer are best served by having at least some capability in Crafts, specializing in Perfume Manufacture. Similarly, Intelligence and Manipulation are both crucial for the ambitious character, enabling her to not only excel in producing effective aromatic wares but also in surviving and mastering the complex *Danse Macabre*. Bloodhound characters will want to emphasize investigative and combat abilities. Investigation, Brawl and a high Wits and Composure are essential boons to finding and capturing prey.

Mechanics aside, every player should put some effort into imagining the World of Darkness from the perspective of one who literally "sees" with her nose, rather than her eyes. Imagine the smell of rain-soaked pavement, the foul stench of trash Dumpsters, the acrid burn of fear, the reek of unwashed humanity, the scent of gunpowder and, of course, the tang of mortal blood. Numerous tricks, from closing one's eyes during the game to burning incense or scented candles, can be helpful. To play a Gulikan requires some understanding of just how different the world is when odor, not form, defines that world.

Bloodline Disciplines: Celerity, Majesty, Ortam, Vigor

Weakness: Similar to all Daeva, the Gulikan find it especially difficult to resist the hedonistic urges that all vampires indulge now and then. Whenever a Gulikan has the chance to satisfy her Vice but chooses not to do so, she loses two points of Willpower, rather than gaining one by partaking of the pleasure.

Compounding the clan weakness is the Gulikan's particular craving for certain rarified scents. Every member of the bloodline favors the scent of one type of mortal in a way that goes far beyond mere interest. Whenever the character detects this special scent, no matter how far away the source of that scent might be, the character must do all she can to locate the source and, ultimately, possess that scent until nothing of it remains. The fragrance distracts the character to the degree that she finds it difficult to concentrate clearly on anything else until she can have the scent for herself.

What this means in game terms is that from the moment the character has detected that scent and until the moment when she has finished consuming that scent the character is subject to a -1 penalty to all dice pools. Worse, until the Gulikan finds that particular target, she can drink the blood of another only by expending a point of Willpower. Only the blood of her special victim will otherwise satisfy her desires.

Once the character finds the kine exuding the scent, the Gulikan cares only for savoring the scent as long as she can. This means she may literally press her nose into the skin of the mortal and bask in the odor that drew her in the first place. Unless she is in a frenzy, she will try to forestall the inevitable drinking until the last possible moment, enjoying the fragrance until hunger or expediency overwhelms her lust.

Gulikan are prone to kidnapping their victims and keeping them alive as long as possible, often curling up against them night and day in order to be immersed in the intoxicating scent. However, because the need for blood grows inexorably, such situations are usually short-lived. In the end, the Gulikan will take the victim's blood, until nothing remains.

If, for some reason, the character is unable to locate the source of the scent or to possess the individual, after three nights she may spend a point of Willpower to overcome the gnawing desire for that particular scent, though she will never forget it entirely.

The precise type of person whose scent is uniquely irresistible to the character can be nearly anything. Pregnant women, murderers, opium addicts, Native Americans, people fearing for their lives, borderline suicides, diabetes sufferers and so forth all are appropriate. The target group should be common enough that they might show up regularly, but uncommon enough so that, unless the character went to a specific place known to be populated by such people — a hospital, prison, orphanage, head shop and so on — he'll have no certainty that they will make an appearance. At the beginning of every game session that a character is not currently fixated on a particular individual's scent, the player rolls Wits + Composure. A success indicates that the character detects and fixates upon a new special scent. If the target group selected is unusually common in the vicinity of the character, the Storyteller might apply a bonus to the roll. On the other hand, if the group is likely to be uncommonly scarce — for example, in the Barrens near the character's haven — a penalty should be applied.

Organization: Traditionally, the bloodline is organized in a way not unlike a medieval guild, with masters, journeymen and apprentices. A master is technically any member who has learned the fifth level of Ortam. Once the Gulikan achieves this accomplishment, he customarily relocates to another city so as to not

jeopardize the monopoly held by his former master, usually his sire.

A journeyman are a step below this august rank and is deemed to be any Gulikan who has demonstrated the third level of Ortam. Because journeymen represent potential competitors, sires often withhold knowledge of the third level of this Discipline for extended periods of time. This often forces the least of the bloodline, the apprentices, to leave their original masters in search of others more open to their apprentices' advancement.

Given the small size of the lineage, this structure gives the Gulikan a sense of community that crosses the globe, a situation that promotes the sale of Ortam wares far from a Gulikan's home domain. For example, a journeyman in one place sells an item he is yet incapable of producing. He contacts a master Perfumer in a far-off place and acts as the middleman, selling the master's products in his own domain, sending most, but not all, of the profits back to the more learned Gulikan. In addition, the journeyman might provide the master information about the buyer, usually for an additional cut of the profits, so that, one night, the master use as he pleases the influence he has acquired over the oblivious customer.

Gulikan in Istanbul observe this organization rigorously; elevation to the next rank, particularly to master, comes with great ceremony. Elsewhere, such formalities often enjoy far less obedience, though any Gulikan who wish to advance their understanding of Ortam never entirely ignore the formalities.

Only the Bloodhounds dare to turn their backs on the long-standing customs of the bloodline. Bloodhounds need only their own company and someone willing to provide their few wants in exchange for unprecedented tracking services.

Concepts: Avant-garde artist, creepy assassin, drug lab scientist, dutiful bloodhound, fashionista, iron-fisted perfume empire matriarch, leather-clad biker, New Age hippie, respectable member of the gentry, reverent priest

History

Eumathius' distinction as the founder of the Gulikan bloodline is the result of the ancient Perfumer's collaboration with a renowned alchemist, Symmachus Khimara. This alchemist reputedly spent the latter years of his unnaturally long life attached to the household of the Patriarch until Khimara was beheaded for lecherous crimes against the lofty cleric's own family.

From this learned scholar, Eumathius discovered the means of not only extracting the *essence vitale absolue* from traditional sources — herbs, grasses, hides, fruits, minerals — but also from those substances that typically do not yield up their fundamental scents so easily, such

as metals. This alchemical art depended as much on occult formulae as on the so-called scientific method. Using these new techniques, Eumathius was able to wring from his own blood its secret odor, the very scent of Damnation.

The final step that forever set him apart from other Kindred was his discovery, again with Symmachus' aid, of how to amplify an object's essential scent to a degree that is otherwise impossible. Eumathius eventually succeeded in magnifying his own *essence vitale absolue* to such an extent that even the slightest whiff of his odor would permeate the mind and body of all who smelled it, even at great distances.

Using this potent scent as a foundation, the master Perfumer then began to construct his greatest and most terrifying contribution to the world: the Discipline of Ortam, which allows the user to produce aromatic wares that affect all who smell them as if under the spell of Kindred Vitae. Eumathius also produced balms and salves that emulated the supernatural effects of other Disciplines, especially Majesty. These balms allowed those Kindred without formal knowledge of such Disciplines to wield them by proxy.

With these occult achievements under his belt, Eumathius tested the limits of what could be accomplished by selling his wares to various kine, at first, and later to other Kindred. The results exceeded his wildest expectations: overnight he went from a largely unknown ancilla to the highest tiers of Kindred society. Despite a few close calls on the road to stature and lasting influence, Eumathius attained heights that most Kindred can only envy.

Legends suggest that the master Perfumer succeeded in ensnaring the Prince, in addition to a host of prestigious Kindred dignitaries in the city. Some Gulikan believe that only the great deal of time required to concoct the powerful aromatics prevented Eumathius from orchestrating his own ascent to the throne of Constantinople. Despite never having made that final move, the founder of the Gulikan continues to preside over his lineage as one of the city's most respected and powerful Primogen; unknown to his peers, his power extending far beyond the Bosphorus.

During the mid-15th century, after the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks, the Gulikan first set foot outside the gates of Byzantium's capital. With the victorious army came a handful of Kindred whose influence on the existing society of the undead shook it to its foundations. One consequence was a strict prohibition against the formerly widespread practice of procreation, especially against certain bloodlines that the new powers-that-be deemed a particular threat to their own authority.

Even Eumathius' own stature was not enough to protect his lineage from these new laws, and so some

of his progeny departed for domains where they could establish their own broods and exert their own influence over local affairs. To be sure, this exodus included only a half-dozen Gulikan. Most remained behind despite the unfavorable atmosphere. However, by the 18th century, Perfumers were found in a score of domains that stretched from the Middle East to North America. In each domain, the bloodline zealously practiced its traditional customs and the Discipline of Ortam.

For most of the past 300 years, the line's growth has been minimal. The threat of competition from skilled childer discourages most Gulikan from serving as Avuses to their offspring and other Daeva, and Princes remain reluctant to accept newcomers into their domains. The legends of the Perfumers have also made it difficult for them to find sanctuary in new cities.

The last few decades have seen a turnaround for the bloodline, however. Breakthroughs in technology have allowed the Gulikan to produce their wares faster than ever. Dramatic improvements in communication and commerce enabled by the achievements of the information age have improved the ease with which the Perfumers can dispense their goods far beyond the borders of their home city. Perfumers have Embraced many childer, especially individuals who have an grasp of modern innovation that many elders lack, to assist in the bloodline's business. An increasing number of Succubi, enticed by the legends of the Gulikan as well as the promises of structure that apprenticeships would bring to their frequently unstable Requiems, occasionally petition the Perfumers to become apprentices. The Ordo Dracul and the Circle of the Crone are particularly fertile grounds for new members of the bloodline. Those covenants emphasize a methodological exploitation of Vitae, very similar to the way the Gulikan use their own Discipline.

Society and Culture

An informal but undeniable social division clearly exists between the Perfumers and the Bloodhounds. The former view the latter as little more than failures who tarnish the incomparable pedigree of the "true" Gulikan. Only those who learn Ortam and consequently produce scented wares of the utmost quality and efficacy can call themselves Perfumers. These elitists make up the vast majority of the bloodline and, as the original Gulikan, have much more of a sense of tradition and culture. In fact, it is not inaccurate to say that the Perfumers possess an authentic society of their own beyond whatever social strata they recognize as part of a covenant. On the contrary, the Bloodhounds effectively eschew that society and seem satisfied by the community offered them by covenant and coterie. Beyond alliances and acquaintances that serve expediency, survival and shared purpose, these two types of Gulikan rarely mix and have little in common.

Apprentice Perfumers

A Perfumer's Requiem depends on her place in the bloodline's guild-like hierarchy and by the degree of success she achieves in disseminating Ortam-augmented goods on clientele both living and unliving. An apprentice's nights often involve carrying out the numerous demands made upon her by her master as well as by any journeymen who might reside within the city. Except for the most menial, tedious or impossible chores, which are often left to mortal thralls, an apprentice serves as messenger, gopher, assistant, student, companion and deliveryman for her seniors.

Free time is rare in most cases, but that doesn't mean the opportunity for personal pursuits and intrigue doesn't exist. On the contrary, an apprentice frequently undertakes errands that require travel — almost always within city limits, of course — providing ample opportunity for private divertissement and business. While the apprentice's place is to deal with her master's customers, even an infrequent visit to the Judex's haven to drop off a cedar briefcase of velvet-couched phials of scented oils offers a chance to learn a bit about First Estate politics and to secure some measure of trust, and possibly even confidence from the Invictus exemplary.

Openly exploiting this kind of relationship to advance her own place in the Danse Macabre would earn a frown or worse from her master, but cautiously working her business contacts for future use is a no-brainer for all but the densest apprentices. Ultimately, the job of the apprentice is to aid her master in bolstering his acclaim and power. A wise apprentice avoids taking credit herself, even when deserved. Selflessness is the watchword of these hardworking neonates, and, so long as they hold true to that virtue, their places in the bloodline are secure.

Journeyman Perfumers

An apprentice who has served well and faithfully learns the secrets of Ortam. Those who have pleased their masters beyond expectation eventually master the third level of this prized Discipline. Upon mastering the third level, an apprentice is officially recognized as a journeyman of the lineage and, for the first time, enjoys relatively free rein to pursue whatever work pleases him.

A journeyman may change masters at will; however, because finding another to accept her service can be onerous, most journeymen remain with their original masters. While the journeyman continues to assist the master and claim little credit for himself, he may also follow his own inclinations and produce perfumes, colognes, oils, salves, pomades, talcum and other scented wares as he sees fit. He may even distribute these products, either to his master's customers or to customers of his own.

Due to the nature of such occult trade, however, few masters wish to compromise their own influence over their buyers. Therefore, the journeyman must locate and nurture his own customer base. Often, a master will forbid sale of a journeyman's wares to other Kindred, restricting the lesser's influence to the mortal demographic. On the other hand, in cases where the bond between master and journeyman is strong, the senior Perfumer may actually direct his journeyman to ply his trade among a certain segment of Kindred society, or against particular Kindred. In this way, the Gulikan master can increase the scope of his power using his student's skill with Ortam as a proxy for his own where time or circumstance make it difficult for him to do it himself.

Apart from all the work the journeymen perform on behalf of their masters (which might include nightly oversight and instruction of apprentices, if any), most journeymen ultimately establish their own clientele. Via this conduit, the journeyman's own sphere of personal influence can gain him a place among the Kindred elite. Every master realizes this when elevating an apprentice to the rank of journeyman or when accepting the service of a foreign Gulikan — it is the nature of the Beast, so to speak. The master's only real means to forestall the night when full-scale competition develops between his journeyman and himself is to hold back

the greatest powers of Ortam as long as possible. Perhaps forever.

A journeyman knows this, and the savvy seek ways to coax their masters into revealing the final secrets of the Perfumers' signature Discipline. Demonstrating trustworthiness is obvious, but is only the first step. Given the political proclivities of many Gulikan, it is not beyond consideration for a journeyman to employ far less honest means to achieve his end. Bringing his own master under his sway emotionally, whether through ordinary seduction, the judicious application of Majesty or even the formation of a Vinculum, is certainly one way to increase the likelihood that his master will divulge more than he may have been prepared to give up. Some journeymen — those exceptionally skilled in the arena of intrigue as well as those who only believe they are — might forgo such subterfuges and force their masters into handing over this precious knowledge.

Playing the Danse Macabre to this purpose can be a masterstroke in every sense of the word for the journeyman with the acumen to pull it off. On the other hand, failure to pull it off can mean far worse than merely being prohibited from any further progress with Ortam. The Gulikan bloodline, the same as the guilds of old, does not take kindly to egregious treachery. Punishment is swift and often final.



Master Perfumers

When a Perfumer succeeds in demonstrating her facility with the fifth level of Ortam, she has proven herself a master Perfumer. Outside of Istanbul, this almost always means that the new master must remove herself from her long-time haven and locate a new domain where she can establish herself, far from her former master. All journeymen understand this custom, even if the master never states it outright.

Most elder Gulikan consider a new master remaining in the same domain as one's former mentor a direct challenge. Given the elder Perfumer's likely access to greater resources — social, political, economic and supernatural — few newly minted masters wish to face this kind of competition, especially when they plan to forge alliances and win over customers. Although very rare, when these types of confrontations do take place, they are rancorous affairs.

Setting up shop in a new city is difficult for any Kindred. The Perfumers face a special challenge: Legends follow them wherever they go. Some Kindred believe the most frightening of the stories and view the arrival of any Perfumer as a threat to their own power.

Few Princes risk permitting Perfumers to linger any longer than a few nights, fearing their legendary ability to subvert even the most cautious elders to the Gulikan's cause. Many Princes refuse even that brief a stay. Other Princes and Primogen take the stories with a grain of salt, and, though they remain wary of these "Turkish skunks," these powerful Kindred are also intrigued by the possibilities suggested by the legends. If the Gulikan's perfumes have the efficacy suggested by rumor, then, risk aside, would they not offer an ambitious Kindred a sudden advantage in the Danse Macabre? What's more, anything truly new and unique that a Kindred dignitary can acquire, especially something as sensual and personal as perfume, can go a long way toward making him the center of attention, at least for a time.

Prestige, of course, is of tremendous importance to those Kindred who hound the halls of Elysium in pursuit of companionship, entertainment, reputation and power. Any vampire sporting a Gulikan cologne might become the talk of the town, a boon that even the dullest Kindred can turn to her immediate advantage. A master Perfumer might never truly acquire the local Kindred's trust, but the promise of excitement and a conversation piece few others can acquire is too enticing for reputation-hungry Damned to deny. A few Kindred ignore all the stories they hear about the Gulikan and other bloodlines of legend, until those Damned have seen the Perfumers for themselves.

The dominant Kindred in small domains may have only heard of the Perfumers in the most bastardized retellings of the most common legends. How these Princes and Primogens view masters of Ortam petitioning to reside in their domains will depend on the version of the stories they have heard, and whether they believe them or not.

Once the new master finds a suitable domain, his first order of business is locating a proper haven. As mentioned above, Gulikan frequently prefer havens in the Barrens, though a master may wish to have other digs closer to the Rack for the convenience of feeding and entertaining guests. This secondary haven also serves as a storefront, where the Perfumer can display small samples of his wares and conduct business transactions. Some Perfumers even hold regular salons or word-of-mouth parties, where mortals or Kindred can come to test the samples and then purchase those that strike their fancy.

The nascent master also requires equipment and supplies. Depending on her financial resources, this can mean a shop reminiscent of a medieval alchemist's or of a 21st-century Parisian factory. The time it takes to purchase everything necessary to create Ortam products can vary greatly, but, until the shop is complete, production remains limited. Storytellers should require Perfumer characters to spend the requisite time and money to organize their production facilities prior to allowing them to actually create Ortam wares. This need not be formalized with mechanics, but it should require more than the player simply saying "Okay, I just buy the stuff I need, and now I'm going to create some perfumes." Obtaining some of the equipment might be difficult, especially in terms of cost and delivery. Acquiring many aromatic supplies might be even more time-consuming, given the rarity of certain herbs and other sources of scent.

When the Perfumer has all she needs to produce her wares, the next step is to seek out customers. Whether she begins with mortals or with Kindred depends on her own preferences and personal goals.

Generating business among the Damned is a precarious thing. Even those who have not heard the stories of the bloodline are going to be wary of accepting anything from another vampire, even if they are the ones who ask for it. Kindred are paranoid by nature, and something as simple as a bottle of *eau de toilette* might function as a Trojan horse. The Perfumer, therefore, must assuage her customers' fears by whatever means possible. Armed with charisma, Majesty and the power of her own scent, she embarks upon a mission to vanquish any concerns about her intentions and turn skeptics into fervent customers.



THE PERFUMED CITY

Istanbul is perhaps the only place where a Perfumer, upon reaching the lofty status of master, need not necessarily relocate. Instead, the new master claims a domain to exploit as he sees fit. How these allocations are made is up to a trio of the eldest Gulikan, the Syndics. Eumathius stands at the head of this triumvirate, with his most trusted childer equals beneath him. This trio dictates all bloodline policy, including not only how a Perfumer can market his wares but also ceremony, requirements for advancement, procedures for petitioning for membership in the bloodline and how duties are divvied up among the ranks. This Syndics even serve as a quality control board, permitting themselves to test anything created with Ortam by any Perfumer and to disallow further production of any product that fails to meet their self-declared standards. The Syndics also possess full authority to punish any Gulikan who violates their rules, power that is limited only by the Prince's prerogative over the Traditions.

Perfumers who are refused by their masters the knowledge necessary to advance their mastery of Ortam and, therefore, their place in the bloodline's hierarchy, are permitted to petition the Syndics for a hearing. This, of course, means travel to Istanbul, a difficult prospect in the first place. Those who do make the trip are given an audience — when convenient for the Syndics — and their case is heard. Should these petitioners be able to demonstrate their worthiness for advancement — which usually requires producing an array of Ortam wares taking as long as a year's worth of labor under the supervision of Istanbul's masters — they *may* be rewarded with the instruction they seek. Frauds, upstarts and those lacking the requisite *bona fides*, however, may face any sort of punishment for their arrogance and temerity. Only when the bloodline's hierarchy has truly failed one of its own is that Gulikan's petition deemed appropriate.



Bloodhounds

Not every Gulikan clings to the bloodline's traditions and practices the art of the Perfumer. Because joining the line is voluntary, most Gulikan at least set out with the intention of doing so in the first place; however, a harsh master, disillusionment, ineptitude and a sense of boredom can all quash the desire to spend eternity crafting the next new scent. These Gulikan forgo any further progress with Ortam and instead focus their efforts on the more run-of-the-mill pursuits of the Damned. Whatever these activities may be — manipulating the kine, learning other Disciplines, making money, pursuing the arts or just relaxing and enjoying what few joys the Requiem

offers — the Gulikan's peculiar weakness is always present and always overwhelming. Rather than let it destroy any hope of achieving his personal wants, a Gulikan who has cast off the robe of the Perfumer need not also throw away the advantage offered by his flawed inheritance. By selling his services as a smeller extraordinaire to others who could use that ability, a Gulikan can profit financially and socially, certainly improving his conditions and enabling him to better eke out some pleasure from his Requiem. Of course, the only reason someone would pay handsomely for the aid of a keen sense of smell is to use it to track down someone or something, and so it is this tracking that these Gulikan sell.

Most Bloodhounds offer their services locally, to Kindred and kine alike. The dangers of travel are well-known and having a preternatural sense of smell does little to diminish most of those dangers. However, just because a Gulikan has chosen the path of the iconoclast does not mean he has entirely given up on wanting the creature comforts that other Gulikan relish. A comfortable and secure haven, regular and reliable companionship and a sense of community can only be had by staying put. A Bloodhound will sometimes attach himself to a single Kindred, often the Prince, and serve as the personal or “bonded” tracker for that individual alone. A Prince with a loyal Bloodhound at his side has much to crow about, as few individuals can hide long from these extraordinary hunters. Other Bloodhounds prefer not to bind themselves too closely to a single vampire, but, at the same time, don't wish to whore themselves to just anybody and end up being accused of backstabbing a former client. A Bloodhound can avoid the worst of these ethical dilemmas by offering his tracking services to only one or two covenants or clans. At any rate, some Bloodhounds care nothing of ethics and are perfectly okay with running afoul of their own customers at times and will take whatever job they can, hunting down anyone at all, so long as the pay is good. True mercenaries often find that their stay in a city ends up being much shorter than they had imagined, as eventually they accept the wrong job and piss off the wrong Kindred.

When the heat becomes too much or if tracking the same folks all the time just doesn't cut it anymore, some Bloodhounds hit the road as nomads. These bounty hunters go from domain to domain taking jobs hunting down troublesome mortals and dastardly Kindred, often vampires who are the target of a blood hunt. This kind of existence can prove exhilarating; many Bloodhounds become addicted to this never-ending hunt, a perfect vocation given their nature. The road can be very unforgiving, however. Without good advance intelligence and a solid invitation, entering a new Kindred domain comes with its own slew of problems. The only advantage the Bloodhounds have in dealing with these things is that their keen sense of smell is especially

good at alerting them to approaching danger. Even in a completely foreign place where the language is alien and the geography is confusing, the smell of a human or vampire bent on murder is basically the same wherever one goes. See **Nomads** for lots of ideas for an on-the-road chronicle with a Gulikan character.

Legends

Tales of the rose-blooded have been around for more than 500 years, bolstering the bloodline's claim to pedigree, but also damning them by exposing the insidious secret of their legendary perfumes, tobaccos and other wares. How much of these tales is truth, how much is mere embellishment and how much is outright propaganda is known only to the Gulikan themselves.

My Kingdom for a Rose

Eumathius, the first Perfumer, was as ambitious as anyone caught up in the Danse Macabre. Obsessed though he was by his quest for the perfect scent, he was even more desirous of power over those around him. A staunch believer in the ideals that define the Invictus tonight, Eumathius sought more than anything to ascend to the heights of Kindred society and then to ensure that his position was unassailable. Similar to every megalomaniac, he dreamed of seeing even the Prince bow to the Perfumer's whims, however outrageous such a fantasy might have been. Even as Eumathius toiled away at producing fragrant soaps, colognes, incense and oils for his hungry clientele — many of the most august unliving personages of the time — he strove for those greater heights and did everything he could to climb the ladder of status and recognition. Already his work had earned him substantial notice, which in turn gave him entrée into the most select salons in Elysium. From where he stood, his ultimate goal was no longer just a dream, but within his cold grasp.

Just as others who are consumed by the quest for power, Eumathius' ambitions did not shape only the social and political aspects of his Requiem. His craving colored all his thoughts and drove him to increasingly take chances that less single-minded Kindred might think twice about. For the most part, the consequences of his risky actions were small and contained. An accidental death here, a minor screw-up there; nothing that couldn't be resolved with quick thinking, a little attention and a bit of damage control.

This was not the case when, finally, the power-hungry Eumathius went too far. Eager to secure the loyalty of a powerful merchant family that had ties to Venice, Spain and China, the master Perfumer decided to put on a show of his most powerful products for the family in their own home. Drunk on his soon-to-be success, Eumathius not only allowed the family — including men, women and children — to sample his specially crafted

collection of fragrances, but he demonstrated their powers as well. As the astonished kine watched — and smelled — he showed how he could command those under the spell of his wares to do anything he wished. When he caused one of the patriarch's sons to kill himself before his horrified relatives, Eumathius stepped over the bounds of the Masquerade. To try and cover up his crime, he only compounded it by feeding the dead man a bottle of his most potent oil, which succeeded in replicating the Embrace. When the mortal went nearly mad upon re-awakening as one of the undead and succumbed to frenzy, the show was over and Eumathius fled. The poor fledgling was destroyed the next night when word reached the Prince, and Eumathius was summoned to answer for his egregious violation of the First Tradition. After an initial inquiry, he was paroled for a month while his fate was decided, though he was kept under house arrest. His fate was sealed, and all he had worked for was lost, or so it seemed.

The Prince of Istanbul was a habitual user of tobacco and enjoyed only blood more than the warm draft of scented smoke entering his throat and escaping through his nose. Eumathius knew this and set to work on creating a new product that might save him from the doom that awaited. He concocted a powerful tobacco so subtle and so fragrant that the Prince would be unable to deny himself the pleasure of its flavor. When the tobacco was completed, the Perfumer smuggled it out of his prison with the help of a Retainer and, using all his political pull, arranged for the tobacco to be made available to the Prince.

When the time came for Eumathius' fate to be announced, he was returned to the Court where he faced an assemblage of the Prince, the Primogen and the city's other unliving elite. The Prince sat upon his throne, water pipe beside him, quietly smoking in thought as he gazed coldly at the Perfumer. The second that the Prince allowed the smoke to escape from his throat, however, Eumathius was silently elated. He smelled his own tobacco and could now only hope it had the desired effect. Finally, after long consideration, the Prince arose and pronounced the Perfumer's fate to all. Eumathius was innocent of the crime he had been accused of and was free to go. A gasp of astonishment went up from the crowd, but the Prince paid it no heed. The tobacco was everything Eumathius hoped it would be, and, by virtue of its power, his unlife was spared.

It is said that to this night Eumathius continues to supply the Prince with his own special tobaccos, keeping that most powerful Kindred in Istanbul subject to the call of Eumathius' blood. Contrary to expectation, this coup earned him tremendous esteem by friend and foe alike and contributed to the greater prestige and influence the Gulikan were to earn.

Sherilyn

Sherilyn's blind as a bat, now. Not that it matters, really. She's never needed a cane or someone to guide her, and she's never bumped into anyone or anything, as far as I know. But I'm telling you, she can't see a thing. Nothing at all. And that's not the worst of it. Not only can't she see anything anymore, but she's also stone deaf. Yup. Go ahead and pull the trigger of the loudest piece you can find right next to her, and she won't flinch. Even weirder, I don't think she can even feel anything anymore. Yeah, that's right. Sounds pretty fucking weird, sure, but it's gotta be true. I hear she got knifed by some asshole at Dylan's last month — sliced in the forearm, a good, deep cut — and she didn't seem to notice at all. Okay, that's not true. She did notice, but she didn't act like it hurt at all. I mean, yeah, sure, we can heal that shit up nice as hell, but I mean, hey, it still hurts, you know?

So, anyway, it's basically like she just lost her sight, her hearing and her ability to feel things. Just like that. And it wasn't like she was always like this. I mean, a couple years ago I know she could see. Hell, she came to that concert with us and she dug the tunes — even sang along with the lyrics, so she could definitely hear at the time.

It just seems that ever since she began hanging around with those stinkin' Skunks she's lost all her senses, at least those three. Now she's become as creepy as the rest of those guys, like a fuckin' cocaine hound, always sniffin'. It's like she's trying to either keep the snot in her nose, or she's getting off on something that she smells, something the rest of us don't notice at all. She forgets to turn the lights on now, too, I guess cause she can't see a thing, so it doesn't really matter whether there's any light. And she doesn't even talk much. Instead, it's as if she's zoning out all the time, high as a kite or something, like a street huffer.

Anyway, she's still Sherilyn, of course, but the girl's just too strange now. I mean, you'd think I could hang with nearly anyone considering my own problems, right? But that girl, well, it's just too much now. Hope she likes her new pals; she can keep 'em. I mean, I guess I'll still kick with her now and then, you know. She's still looks great in jeans, and she smells like fuckin' heaven. Damn, she does smell good.

Bloody Rumors

The Gulikan and their use of Ortam are fodder for countless rumors that carry on the blood-tinged air of Elysium. Some are merely entertaining; others serve as object lessons. However, some are outright scary, if true. A few of the more recent of these last kinds of rumors follow.

Somewhere out West, there's something going on that should worry all of us. It's those Perfumers, the Gulikan. It is no longer just a rumor or myth; it's confirmed. They can create a *Vinculum* without ever having a single drop of their *Vitae* pass the lips of the subject. The bloodline has discovered a way to forge a blood bond by using only the scent of their *Vitae* to seduce and ensnare us. Worse, there is no clear way to know what scent might be responsible. Be warned.

— Abe Caulfield, Invictus Pursuivant

I still don't know what's happened. I haven't aged a day in the past 20 years, but that's impossible. I mean, the only thing that's changed is my addiction to those cool cigarettes I found in Istanbul after graduating college, but aren't cigarettes supposed to kill you, not make you live longer? Weird as hell. I have been smoking them pretty much regularly ever since, but besides the health of my bank account — they're expensive, man, even though I buy them through the Internet now — my body seems fine. In fact, better than fine. I'm stronger than I was when I was 20 and can go all night now. I figured I'd be a candidate for Viagra, by now, but Gail's not complaining. Sarah didn't either, and neither did — Anyway, unless doc says otherwise, I'll keep puffing away on these things. Have you ever tried one? No? What the hell? Here, it's better than a clove, seriously. I swear you will love these things. Here. Need a light?

Mike Duchamp, unemployed auto mechanic

She just hovered over the body like she was stoned or something, sniffing like a dog, getting real close, like nothing else mattered. We didn't have a lot of time, if you know what I mean, so I'm telling her to hurry up and just drink her fill, but she just ignores me and keeps smelling the guy like that's all she wanted.

When the sirens came, I started freakin' out, you know? I'm yelling at her to finish the guy now so we can scam, but she doesn't break his skin at all. Just keeps sniffing. Finally, I bug out, grab her by the arm and haul her into the car. I was worried that's she'd lose it 'cause she didn't get to fill up, but she didn't. She just let me push her into the passenger seat and stayed there while I got in and gunned it. She even looked satisfied, and I know she was hungry after all that we'd been through.

Anyway, finally I ask her about it, and she says she's fine. Fine?! I ask her what she means. Isn't she hungry? Doesn't she need something before we hit the sack? And she just says 'no' like everything's cool. Then, and this is real weird, she says 'I had enough, I'm full,' just like that. I don't know what to say, but she's calm as an angel, and the next evening she doesn't go nuts or anything. She was telling the truth. I don't know what the hell she did, but it's like she didn't even need to drink the blood at all, like she just needed to smell it to feel okay. Now that's some serious shit.

Harper, unaligned Gangrel

Garlic. Just like the legends, that's right. Put it around every door and window, inside your car and, of course, on yourself. Forget those garlic pills, the scent is probably too weak. Use the real stuff, cloves and all. It works, I'm telling you. The monster hasn't come near me since I started doing that. It must drive him crazy or something. Maybe he's just got a sensitive nose. I don't really care. Just do it, because it works. That's the only advice I can give you, really. Short of that, pray to Allah he forgets about you.

Derya Ozergin, mortal



ACUTE SMELL, AUSPEX AND OVERPOWERING STENCH

Gulikan characters who learn the first level of Auspex, Heightened Senses, are truly astonishing. Their already extraordinary sense of smell doubles again, allowing them to greatly expand not only the range of their olfactory perception but also to recognize even greater subtlety in the scents they detect. The flip side to this seeming benefit is that unwelcome scents become not only unpleasant, but can be downright dangerous. A sudden odor of certain chemicals or other foul aromas can literally "blind" the character's sense of smell for a time, usually the rest of the scene, during which the Gulikan can detect no scents at all. This unexpected absence of olfactory stimuli can lead to derangements such as Paranoia and Xenophobia.

At the Storyteller's discretion, certain powerful odors might be so strong that the character suffers temporary physical harm as if actually struck. (Beware: Never use this as a punishment for the player or character.) Storytellers should limit these situations to a single point of bashing damage, reflecting the stunning effect of nauseating, potent or acrid smells. Although this is treated as bashing damage, track it separately from any actual injuries. Olfactory "damage" cannot, therefore, cause a real wound to grow worse or be exacerbated by those effects that worsen wound categories.



Ortam

The Gulikan would be little more than a family of Bloodhounds were it not for their development of Ortam. Instead of providing the bloodline with essentially a new collection of supernatural powers that they can directly wield, Ortam is really an alternate method of employing certain Disciplines that the Perfumer already knows and certain powers of the Perfumer's own Vitae. Ortam permits a skilled Gulikan to create all manner of fragrant products that not only produce supernaturally irresistible scents, but also transmit the effects of the Perfumer's power to those who smell these products. Kindred and kine are accustomed to being cautious of things they see, hear and feel, but few Kindred and kine

maintain vigilance against a light, pleasant scent that is carried on the night air. This assumption of harmlessness makes Ortam so effective.

Ortam can be used two different ways no matter how many dots a character possesses, as follows.

Essence Vitale Absolue

The first and simplest way the Gulikan use Ortam is as a stand-alone Discipline that allows the Perfumer to produce what is called the Essence Vitale Absolue, nothing less than the essential, supernatural scent of the Kindred's own Vitae. The Perfumers then use this essence to infuse nearly any appropriate item — soap, oil, lotion, wax, powder, resin, tobacco, incense, cloth, paper, alcohol, salve, etc. — so as to turn that item into something not only fragrant, but also capable of subjecting those who smell it with the power of the Perfumer's Blood.

Individuals who smell cologne produced in this fashion, for example, would be affected as if they had actually tasted a quantity of the vampire's Vitae and are subject to some of the same effects they would suffer had they actually imbibed the blood. They may become addicted to the smell of the Gulikan's Vitae, craving the scent as strongly as those who drink Kindred blood. In fact, their craving will make them much more likely to taste Vitae if presented with it, for they will clearly detect that the two are ultimately one and the same. A Perfumer who wears a perfume of Essence Vitale Absolue can literally have mortals following her like lapdogs, desperate to smell her scent and willing to do anything so as to have access to the fragrance.

Cost: 1 Vitae per dose created

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Crafts + Ortam

Action: Extended (five successes; each roll represents one full night of laboratory work).

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The attempt to craft the essence fails spectacularly. The Storyteller chooses an effect: either the Gulikan loses her sense of smell for a week (due to overstimulation in the laboratory) or she suffers three points of lethal damage in a painful lab accident.

Failure: The Gulikan is unable to create a fragrant essence.

Success: The Perfumer creates a potent Essence Vitale Absolue from her Vitae. She may apply this essence to any reasonable object or render it in any suitable form (an oil, a cologne, a pastille, etc.).

Exceptional Success: The character creates an uncommonly strong Essence Vitale Absolue from her Vitae. The character has a choice: she may choose to increase the duration of the essence's functionality or she may increase its strength. If she chooses to increase the duration, the Essence Vitale Absolue remains effec-

tive for a week instead of a single night. If she increases its strength, those individuals who resist its effects suffer an additional -2 penalty on their resistance dice pools, but the essence functions only for a single scene instead of a full night.

An individual subjected to the scent of the Essence Vitale Absolue is treated as if he had consumed a point of the Gulikan's Vitae (except that he gains no sustenance from it). That is, the target experiences the heady rush of drinking Vitae, and may well become addicted to the scent and taste of Vitae. Additionally, one who smells the scent is considered to move one step toward a Vinculum with the individual Gulikan who crafted the essence. (Note that the third and final step confirming the Vinculum may not come from Essence Vitale Absolue — the last step must take the form of the standard draught of the vampire's Vitae.)

One who inhales the scent and wishes to resist is entitled to a resistance roll. The player rolls $\text{Resolve} + \text{Stamina} + \text{Blood Potency} - \text{the Gulikan's level of Ortam}$.

Additional Resistance Roll Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	Target has an existing Vinculum to another Kindred.
+1	Target has tasted the Gulikan's blood within the past month.
+1	Target has succeeded on a resistance roll against this Gulikan's Essence Vitale Absolue already (cumulative to a maximum of +3).
-1	Target is one or two steps toward a Vinculum (toward the Gulikan or any other Kindred).
-1	Target has failed a resistance roll against this Gulikan's Essence Vitale Absolue already (cumulative to a maximum of -3).
-2	The target has a blood tie (see Vampire: The Requiem , p. 162) to the Kindred who created the essence.



BUT VAMPIRES DON'T BREATHE

While vampires don't actually breathe in the sense that mortals do, Kindred obviously have to inhale air in order to speak. Many other situations also require vampires to "breathe," such as tracking a rival by scent, inhaling a bouquet of flowers at Elysium or savoring the tang of blood and fear in one's prey. As mentioned above, many Gulikan do, in fact, test the scents around them very frequently.

The upshot of all this is that vampires aren't inherently immune to Gulikan powers simply by dint of being vampires. If a character specifically states that he's not breathing, then fair enough — but hold him to that. The Kindred are creatures who exult in sensory stimuli, and more than a few even thrill to the risk that certain environments impose on them. No, a Kindred's not going to drown — but he may catch a tantalizing scent from the Kindred standing next to him.

Fragrant Devotions

(Ortam •, varies)

Ortam may also augment another Discipline, effectively enabling the Perfumer to create a multitude of Fragrant Devotions. Ortam becomes the vector by which a Gulikan may deliver a Discipline's effects. By investing a Discipline with a conjunctive knowledge of Ortam, the Gulikan may activate Disciplines based on the subject's inhaling of the Gulikan's scent, rather than seeing her or otherwise imposing a physical presence.

Not all Disciplines can be matched with Ortam effectively. Only those Disciplines that amplify or otherwise

augment the Gulikan's own innate ability to influence the thoughts and feelings of others can be used in this way. Any character who smells the Gulikan's scent becomes susceptible to the effect.

Majesty is perfectly suited for this marriage of supernatural Disciplines. A victim may walk into a chamber smoky with incense, only to find herself Entranced by the absent Gulikan. Celerity, for example, could be used with Ortam to any effect — the resulting fragrance would have no effect on those who smell it. Dominate, likewise, doesn't work, because it requires eye contact (though Gulikan who have Conditioned their thralls suitably might make use of a Fragrant Dominate Devotion; see p. 127 of *Vampire: The Requiem*).

The Disciplines that make the basis of a given Fragrant Devotion must also be ones that the Perfumer using Ortam knows. Making a scented lotion that conveys the full power of Dread, for example, is possible only if the Perfumer has already mastered the second level of Nightmare.

Learning a Fragrant Devotion costs a flat three experience points. This grants access only to that single Discipline power in the form of the scent-based vector, however. Additional Discipline powers and effects will cost an additional three experience points per Fragrant Devotion. Existing Devotions may be made into Fragrant Devotions as well, at the standard three-experience-point cost after purchasing the base Devotion.

Making a Discipline power or Devotion into a Fragrant Devotion adds one Vitae to the cost of that power. This does not change the action type of the Discipline or Devotion or have the effects of the Essence Vitale Absolue. All Fragrant Devotions do is change the method by which the Discipline power takes effect.

KUUFUKUJI

YOU ROOT AT YOUR PREY LIKE A HYENA. YOU HAVE NO CONTROL; YOU ARE NOTHING BETTER THAN AN ANIMAL.

The Nameless Man walked the roads. He saw the greed in the world, and gave his possessions away. He saw the hunger in the world, and gave his food away. He saw that the only thing he could control in the world was the Man. Penniless and hungry, he became the Master. Then he was Embraced. And very little changed.

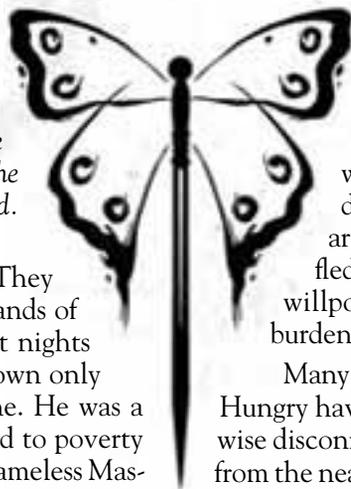
So go the legends of the Kuufukuji. They claim to be an ancient bloodline, thousands of years old, originating during the ancient nights of East Asia. As the tales say, a man known only as the Nameless Master founded the line. He was a monk, the head of a monastery dedicated to poverty and service to a local village. After the Nameless Master was Embraced, he continued to preach the concept of poverty and fasting to his childer. This extreme rule forced the Hungry to control their Wassail, and even gain power from the loss of Vitae.

Kuufukuji dwell in remote communal havens, usually on the outskirts of a town or city, much like the monks of nights long past. The Kuufukuji's havens are nigh-inaccessible, and the Kuufukuji have a reputation for being strong warriors and hermits. Still, some Kindred seek them in modern times, since rumors of the Kuufukuji's existence have stretched to claim that their diminished need for blood and their supreme control of the Beast has helped the Hungry reach Golconda — or at least bring them closer to it.

Mekhet factions in some cities deny the Kuufukuji's existence entirely. In other domains, where a monastery or temple of Kuufukuji is known to exist, the Mekhet downplay the Hungry's power, claiming that their near-religious desire to avoid feeding will cause the Kuufukuji to die out. While their numbers are not what they once were, the Kuufukuji are still very much active. They do not argue with others of their parent clan, however, as their mastery of the Man leaves them needing no affirmations from outsiders.

The Kindred who have managed to convince a Kuufukuji to train them have nearly always fallen prey to their own Wassail, and met their merciful ends at the hands of the Hungry monks overseeing their training.

The Hungry follow the Traditions the same as any other Kindred. Few substantiated acts of Kuufukuji diablerie exist, even when they are forced to slay a childer who threatens the temple with Wassail. Although



their temples, libraries and martial arts schools are commonly run by mortal agents or ghouls (or open only at night), the Kuufukuji take great pains not to violate the Masquerade. As for childer, well, no Kindred wants her bloodline to die out, regardless of the rules. Neonates are hard to come by, as the Hungry must find fledglings worthy and possessing of enough willpower to be able to handle the constant burden of fasting.

Many vampires who have encountered one of the Hungry have assumed they are mad, stoned or otherwise disconnected from reality. This impression stems from the near-constant state of meditation that a Kuufukuji must maintain in order to survive the constant hunger. Kuufukuji of tonight can be seen as anything from powerful wise women to haughty charlatans.

Childer who do not bend to their sires' will and undergo the training necessary to attain Shihai — the “Discipline of Control” — often try to flee the monastery. If they manage to escape without their superiors or sires finding them and correcting the childer's errors of judgment, they find themselves tied to a feeding pendulum. If they grow too hungry, they lack their bloodline's strength to control the Wassail. If they frenzy and feed too ravenously, their bloodline's weakness incapacitates them. These miserable childer may be hunted by either their own bloodline or a Prince's forces before they can spiral out of control.

Parent Clan: Mekhet (though some misguidedly claim Daeva)

Nickname: The Hungry

Covenant: While many Kuufukuji prefer only the companionship of others of their bloodline, some Kuufukuji do ally themselves with covenants. The organized obedience that permeates the Invictus appeals to many Kuufukuji. From the time of their Embrace, the Hungry must know obedience, or they are forced to exist in a tormented state until they are exterminated. One must show deference and respect to one's sire: the clear hierarchy of the Invictus fits the dojo mentality quite well.

The Lancea Sanctum considers the Kuufukuji to have great potential for heresy, as the Hungry rely only on their own powers of self-control to personify the Beast, rather than acknowledging the power of God.

The Lancea Sanctum follows God faithfully, but its members are shackled with the need for blood — but the Kuufukuji are not burdened by this need. Do they still need God? The Hungry do not seek guidance to the realm of spirituality. They're already at their destination. This makes them dangerous to the Priests of some parishes.

Although vampires of the Circle of the Crone and the Ordo Dracul also acknowledge religious influences, the Hungry are drawn toward these covenants more often than the Lancea Sanctum. Those who follow the Crone often relate to the Acolytes' philosophy of challenges paving the way to enlightenment. One of the Kuufukuji's core philosophies, after all, involves constant struggle for command of the Man and control over the part of the Kindred that is the Beast. Those who follow the Ordo Dracul appreciate that covenant's emphasis on learning, mastery of the Man and the Beast and respect for elders, all of which are frequently taught by sires of the bloodline as well. The Hungry sometimes become philosophical siblings with those who learn the Coils of the Dragon, finding solidarity in their small victories over the blood hunger.

Some neonates find themselves drawn to the Carthian Movement, thinking that with their fledgling powers they can help bring about the changes that local chapters of that covenant desire. These Hungry sometimes try to teach their meditative powers to their fellow Carthians, often with disastrous results. Many elder Hungry look down on the Carthian Movement, mainly because one of its most basic rituals involves the exchange of possessions, and the Kuufukuji do not allow their neonates to own anything but the clothes on their backs.

Appearance: Until the last couple of hundred years, the Hungry consisted only of East Asian Kindred. As European and later American influence reached East, the culture of the East also affected the West. Although the bloodline still sees relatively few white, black or Middle Eastern Kuufukuji, Asians

don't make up one hundred percent of the population anymore.

The Hungry tend to look regally undead. Refusing to spend Vitae to force their bodies to have the appearance of living humans, they suffer the consequences of skin color that ranges from palest white to a nearly blue tint.

As numerous Kuufukuji hail from a monastic background, many tend to dress in monk's robes. They favor the stereotypical favorite color of the Mekhet: black. Hungry who have taken the bloodline West commonly adopt the local dress to blend in, but continue to favor understated colors and simple clothes. Some Hungry have built temples under the guise of martial arts schools or museums that allow them to retain their preferred method of dress. The bloodline emphasizes the exclusion of worldly things, including personal vanity and belongings — rare is the Hungry with more than a few changes of clothes, if that. They also tend to either shave their heads or wear their hair tightly braided.

Haven: The Hungry prefer havens that are somewhat remote. They do need access to Vitae, of course, but, ideally, they occupy temples on the outskirts of villages, retaining the image of the roles they held in life: that of monks of the solitary monastery who must send acolytes into town from time to time to acquire food.

The handful of Kuufukuji who have trickled into large Western cities such as San Francisco and Vancouver, aim for discreet apartments that they turn into sparse temple-like domiciles. These Kindred find themselves leaving their Requiems of poverty behind, preferring to do more than merely survive. Their funds, taken from either victims or allies persuaded to do business for them, are spent only on the Kuufukuji's safe havens and on nothing else. These Kuufukuji still exist in the simplest way possible.



Still others have taken refuge in existing temples or martial arts schools, slowly and covertly killing or Embracing the owners and assuming new ownership.

Background: A thousand years ago, Kuufukuji Embraced only monks. The Nameless Master gradually Embraced the monks of his monastery, and the bloodline spread from there. Tonight, in the best-case scenario, the childer chosen by most older Kuufukuji come from acolytes in a monastery or students in a martial arts school.

If a Hungry sire is not presiding in a temple or martial arts school, she commonly searches for possible childer with personalities that reflect a strong will and powerful mental acumen. A star student who spends a great deal of time alone fits the bill. An avid follower of Eastern thinking is also a prime target for Embrace. Some sires search for people who remain calm in the face of great stress. Some Hungry even test the boundaries of the Masquerade and purposefully create crises for potential childer in order to watch how they react. Those who panic or hide their eyes fail to make the cut, but those who act in a calm and precise manner are often cultivated further.

Character Creation: Only those with strong presences can join the fellow Hungry in a journey to the perfection of the Man. Weaker-willed characters crumble under the weight of the balance that the journey seeks to maintain. Members of this bloodline have strong Composure and Presence. Manipulation comes in handy for high-ranking Kuufukuji. In addition, most Kuufukuji favor Physical Attributes and Skills, as martial arts come to play an important role. Kuufukuji never hide themselves behind a high-tech safety net of surveillance cameras, electric locking mechanisms and guns. The body is the most reliable weapon a Kindred has; it is always available and cannot be confiscated or corrupted. Although some players treasure Mental Skills for Kuufukuji, most players place these Skills third, knowing their characters will meditate and study ancient texts later in unlife.

Social Skills that are vital to the Hungry are Empathy, Expression, Intimidation and Subterfuge, allowing a Kuufukuji to present the balance within while testing the balance of others.

As martial artists, the Kuufukuji find that Brawl, Athletics, Stealth and Weaponry come in handy the most. In nights gone past, the elders did not allow their childer to learn Firearms, but even the oldest Kuufukuji admits these nights that such knowledge can be useful, so the elders neither condemn nor condone learning such Skills.

Even those who fast need sustenance at some point, and many Kuufukuji keep a herd for their own use and that of their childer. Fighting Merits such as Fighting Style: Boxing and Fighting Style: Kung Fu fit well with this bloodline, and the strongest Hungry have Meditative Mind.

Bloodline Disciplines: Auspex, Celerity, Obfuscate, Shihai

Weakness: The Kuufukuji have regrettably left behind the open and beautiful gardens commonly found at temples and monasteries, as they cannot appreciate them in the dark as they once did in life. Therefore, they retain the weakness of their parent clan, the Mekhet. The Kuufukuji are even more sensitive to sunlight than other Kindred and take great pains to protect themselves by choosing heavy black clothing and old, established temples that have elaborate labyrinthine basements. Their gardens are still sophisticated, but are decorated with flowers that, like the Kuufukuji themselves, come out at night.

Control is paramount for a bloodline that is dedicated entirely to the mastery of the Man. The Hungry were, from the beginning, beings devoted to a simple existence, and even as darkness and Damnation became their lot, they remained devoted to the simple Requiem. Although they lost much of the human compassion held by monks, the Hungry still devoted their time to meditation upon the nature of Damnation and the mastery of the Beast. Part of their existence included finding a way to continue dwelling in poverty as they had in life. The elder Hungry would command their childer to feed only when necessary, and never to excess. As their physiology became accustomed to functioning with much less Vitae than other Kindred, their weakness became rooted in the utter satiation of the hunger.

Although the obvious weakness of the bloodline lies in the danger of surviving on the edge of Wassail, a greater danger to this bloodline comes when they drink. Drinking to excess reduces the Kuufukuji's power, making them unable to use their Disciplines. Unfortunately, "excess" to a Kuufukuji means drinking to maximum Vitae. The Hungry must always be at least a little famished: a Kuufukuji cannot have more Vitae than her maximum Vitae (as determined by her Blood Potency) minus her Blood Potency. Thus, a vampire with a Blood Potency of 1 and a maximum Vitae of 10 cannot use his Disciplines if he has more than 9 Vitae. A vampire with Blood Potency of 7 and a maximum Vitae of 20 cannot use her Disciplines if she has more than 13 Vitae. This weakness is worst for the neonates, as they are the least likely to be able to withstand Wassail. In frenzy, they seek to satiate themselves and end up feeding to their maximum Vitae, crippling themselves. Kuufukuji call this state "the Overbalance," as their hunger is satiated, but they are powerless to call upon their Kindred powers. This reality makes the desire to rein in the Beast doubly important for the Kuufukuji.

There are, of course, easy ways to eliminate minor quantities of Vitae, but wasting Vitae after feeding to excess is considered more shameful than the feeding itself. If the Kuufukuji is to glut himself, then he damn

well better use the Vitae for a better purpose than simply making himself look more human for a short time.

Organization: The organization within the Kuufukuji is formal, following the hierarchy of Japanese dojos. The Soke leads the local chapter, the inheritor of the Nameless Master's mantle. Each city has a Soke, and on the rare chance that one Soke should meet another, they are considered equals in rank, regardless of age. Sokes are ostensibly responsible for all the Kuufukuji in the domain; a Soke inherits much of the role of Primogen as it is observed on the bloodline's level. The punishment the Soke metes out to those who cross her is usually more terrible than a Prince's sentence.

Below the Soke will be any number of Sempai, Kindred of enough age and experience to be considered teachers and masters themselves. They must also be obeyed by any of the Hungry. The Sempai, and the Soke, are the only Kuufukuji allowed to sire childer (within the Prince's decree, of course). Any lower-ranking Kindred who breaks this Tradition will see his childer destroyed and suffer punishment himself. Although still leading an unlife of poverty, the Sempai have greater freedom within the domain to hunt, perform services for the Soke or other Kindred and interact with mortals, as long as the vampires do not violate the Masquerade.

The majority of the Kindred in a dojo or temple refer to themselves and each other as Gakusei. This emphasizes that everyone is a student, and may remain so for years. The unlife of a Gakusei largely involves strict adherence to the rules of the bloodline, obedience to the Soke and devotion to the Disciplines and meditation. Some Gakusei who can be trusted to control their Beast sufficiently serve as Kuufukuji liaisons and messengers in the domain. If a Gakusei is invited to hunt with a Sempai, this invitation is considered a great honor, and likely a hint that a promotion is imminent. Most Gakusei feed on animals, captive mortals or ghouls in elaborate rituals designed to quash the predator's desire. Obedience is the best stepping stone to the honors of Sempai.

Having only three levels of bloodline hierarchy both limits infighting and adequately serves the small number of Kuufukuji in a given domain. Playing politics to graduate from Gakusei to Sempai is considered the lowest form of disrespect for both one's Kindred siblings and the Soke. If a Gakusei disrespects the Soke, the Gakusei is likely to find himself out of the temple — and likely out of the domain, if Princely edict reinforces the bloodline's ostracism.

Every Kuufukuji, from Gakusei to Soke, calls his sire Sensei as a term of respect and honor. Even the Nameless Master had a sire, and all sires must be honored.

Solitary Kuufukuji call themselves Ronin, but the local Soke probably refers to them as trouble at best and prey at the worse. A Kuufukuji without a master is a dangerous thing indeed.

Concepts: Eastern mystic, martial arts student, monk, nomad, prostitute, sage priest, sin-eating martyr, street urchin, understanding Primogen, wandering confessor



THE HUNGRY WHORES

A few factions of Kuufukuji around the world claim that their parent clan is Daeva, insisting that a prostitute Embraced the Nameless Master, making her an arguable predecessor of the bloodline, if not its progenitor.

Whether this is true or not, Kindred of these factions do seem markedly different from members of the bloodline in other cities, often having a better flair for congress with mortals than the secretive Mekhet. In addition to acting more overtly than most of the Kuufukuji, these Daeva Kindred also learn the Majesty and Vigor Disciplines instead of the Mekhet Disciplines of Auspex and Obfuscate.

The Kuufukuji of other domains say only that if one meditates and searches the soul enough, anything is possible, but no matter what one learns, the past is unchangeable.

Regardless of this internal schism, many Kuufukuji keep herds of prostitutes and use them to bring in some of the money that keeps the temples and monasteries solvent. Not very monastic, true, but being Damned is not very monastic either, and changes happen in unlife.

Although few among in Kindred society know it, the Kuufukuji who do not acknowledge the prostitute as the Daeva mother of the bloodline have been surreptitiously hunting those who do. The "Hungry Whores," as the Mekhet Kuufukuji call them, exist only in a few cities in the East, though at least one faction has surfaced in North America. This grudge is subtle and roils beneath the radar of even these Kindred, consisting mostly of character assassination and quiet vendetta rather than street brawls.

These warring sides of the same coin may essentially be two different bloodlines. They have an entangled history and a shared mystic property of the blood, but they are not the same thing. The "Hungry Whores" can fit in a chronicle as freedom fighters who wish to free a prostitute herd of the Hungry, claiming that they deserve to be honored more. Many of the of the Daeva Kuufukuji are former prostitutes themselves, who feel that during their lives they were used and tossed away. To use prostitutes as sustenance is even more degrading than sex, and these former prostitutes do not feel the Kuufukuji honor the sire of the clan by their feeding practices.



HISTORY

Several different Kuufukuji factions that currently reside in Asia each claim that their country held the birth of the bloodline. Chinese Kindred claim the Nameless Master was a Taoist who rivaled the wisdom

of Lao Tzu, Japanese Kindred claim he was Shintoist, and Indian Kuufukuji claim he was a Zen Buddhist. A remote faction in Korea claims that he was not a he after all, but a woman. The Japanese have the strongest claim, simply because the terminology that defines the bloodline is of their language.

Although most Kindred history cannot be verified, many of the original writings of the Nameless Master remain. However, instead of having chronicled the history of the time, he seems to have been more concerned with meditations on his own Damnation and abilities than on the world around him. Most of his writings are parables along the lines of Aesop or Lao Tzu.

Many of the parables are still told tonight, but have been altered through the years by Sokes who wished to put their own stamp on their bloodline's history. As for the history of the bloodline itself, much is lost beyond the first story of the Nameless Master.

THE NAMELESS MASTER

Regardless of the various discrepancies about the birthplace of the bloodline, the histories all agree about the beginning of the story, if not the setting. A thousand thousand nights ago, a monastery sat high in the hills above a small town. The monks would enter the town from time to time on errands and to purchase what little the monastery needed. During a journey to the town, one of the acolytes encountered a prostitute who happened to be one of the Damned. In a cruel gesture, she Embraced the monk, desiring to corrupt him with the irony of her vocation and Damnation. Horrified and disoriented with what he had become, the monk escaped his sire and stumbled back to the monastery, seeking guidance from his Master.

The Master was asleep, and the ravenous acolyte leapt on him immediately, Embracing him afterward in acknowledgement of his guilt. When the Master discovered what had happened, he picked up his underling, now his sire, and hurled the acolyte into the dawn's light.

The Master meditated on his new Damnation for three nights, and summoned his most trusted Sempai. The Sempai, horrified at his Master's transformation, was still pushed by obedience to offer his blood to the Master. After feeding for only a small amount of Vitae, the Master went back to his meditation.

The monastery continued to function, the human monks serving as a herd for the Kindred and occasional go-betweens for the mortal world and ghouls. The Nameless Master took many years to Embrace all of his monks, when they proved themselves worthy. He demanded all continue to fast, feeding only from the herd of mortal monks and occasionally from the town.

During this time, the Master drilled his underlings in martial arts and meditation beyond what they had

studied in life. Their vigilance evolved into a Discipline by which they could control the Beast, useful for those who stay so close to Wassail.

The Nameless Master sent his Sempai into the city to inform the Kindred that the new Prince would receive all Kindred at his temple to discuss the city's new monastic rule, which would supersede that of the extant social structure. The existing Prince, whose clan varies according to the teller of the tale, reacted to the insult predictably. The Nameless Master met the Prince in a rice field — the Master the paragon of composure, the Prince in a rage. The story of this battle was placed in a parable for the future, and became the pillar that illustrates the Kuufukuji mantra of control of the Man. The Nameless Master pushed the Prince into frenzy, and took advantage of the blind rage to easily defeat him. Never one to do things halfway, the Master placed heavy stones upon the Prince's body to secure him to the earth to await the sun.

The usurpation had its stumbling blocks, as the Master at first tried to force all Kindred in the city to follow the ways of his monks and fast. The chaos and destruction that followed in the wake of those frenzies showed the Nameless Master that the ways of the Kuufukuji were not the ways of all Kindred. Assured of his bloodline's unique power, he lifted the ban on feeding, and the city's Kindred society (and the horrific violence that had plagued the mortals) returned to normal.

The monastery grew, despite the fearsome rumors that circulated in town about monsters that dwelled in the hills around the temple. Young men would come to study under the Nameless Master, or desperate parents would abandon orphans at the doorstep, and the population grew. The practice of fasting allowed the herd to flourish, maintaining the illusion of a functional monastery.

The Nameless Master continued his study and meditation, looking for new ways to contain the Beast. The Nameless Master would sometimes travel to neighboring cities, asking to meet with the Princes to interview them regarding the Beast and whispers of Golconda. All members of the Princes' retinues who challenged the Nameless Master met with tightly controlled violence that easily bested them, and the Nameless Master always received his interview. He discovered that vampires with many years' experience on him did not have even an inkling of the knowledge that he had discovered, and he returned home, frustrated but gratified.

THE MASTER'S FINAL BALANCE

After many years passed, messengers, both kine and Kindred, reported that a plague of demons threatened neighboring villages. The kine locked themselves behind closed doors. The "demons," raiding brigands calling themselves the Kamigami, swept through the



towns, slaughtering peasants, burning down homes (and more than a few Kindred havens) and looting whatever was left. The Kindred in the Nameless Master's village readied for the Kamigami's assault.

The Kamigami met with considerable resistance in the Nameless Master's village, the Kindred having prepared themselves and the Kuufukuji having terrorized the ranks and slaked their thirst on the commanders. After several nights of battle, the Nameless Master and the leader of the Kamigami, a mysteriously potent individual, declared a sudden death fight with their troops watching. The two commanders met in the same rice field in which the Nameless Master had beaten the former Prince, and the Master stood on the spot where the Prince had burned.

The leader of the Kamigami was stronger than any Kindred the Master had encountered. The Kamigami leader seemed immune to the Master's subtle attacks to upset his balance; then, suddenly, the Master felt a noise — that is how he described it to his Sempai later. The noise touched the outside of his consciousness, and the Beast within him stirred.

In an instant, the Master knew his opponent was coaxing the Master's Beast from him; an outside force

disrupted his balance. The Master could not accept this, but, the more he fought, the more insistent the noise became. He remembered his own teachings that stated that sometimes to make someone stop pulling you, you must push. He allowed the Beast to come voluntarily for the first time in his unlife.

The carnage that followed shamed him. The loss of control, not the destruction, gave him disgrace. His own existence nearly ended, but his feral nature managed to overcome the Kamigami leader, who had apparently asked for more than he could handle. The Nameless Master drank deeply from his rival, committing diablerie and falling into the Final Balance.

When he awoke weeks later, the Nameless Master discovered that his town had been ravaged by the Kamigami. The Master's own Kuufukuji had been at a loss with his unexplained torpor, and the Kamigami took advantage of the Kuufukuji's disruption. The Kamigami destroyed the town and burned the Nameless Master's temple. Only the Kuufukuji's secret basement havens had saved them.

The Nameless Master is said to have wept blood at the destruction of his herd and the town he had ruled. He chose his three most trusted Sempai, those who had

stood watch over him in torpor, and commanded them to travel to one of the surrounding villages that still survived and capture a temple. They were to take over the temple slowly, Embracing the monks and keeping the rest as ghouls or a herd. The Kuufukuji could no longer afford to keep their bloodline confined to one ruined temple.

The Nameless Master ordered his remaining monks to rebuild the temple and gather a new herd from the surviving kine in the ravaged town. The Master himself meditated for the same amount of time he had been in the Final Balance, without food, and then he fed lightly and left the temple. He followed the trail of the Kamigami, looking not for revenge but for knowledge. The Kuufukuji were mastering the art of balance and control, but the Kamigami leader had powers that the Nameless Master coveted.

Information about the Nameless Master is spotty following the reports of the fight with the Kamigami. The Sempai began expanding the bloodline, always carefully capturing monasteries and Embracing the leaders. The Nameless Master's disciples rebuilt the temple, making it a massive stone and wood structure with many underground areas to house the Kindred. The Nameless Master never returned.

Differing temples claim that they have the Nameless Master in their histories, who returns to the temple and teaches them further powers of the Shihai, but no one existing tonight has personal memory of his return. Some Kindred believe the Kamigami destroyed the Nameless Master; other Kindred say they welcomed him as the new warleader. Most Kuufukuji believe that he was indestructible, and he slumbers in torpor in a temple in the East.

SOCIETY AND CULTURE

The Kuufukuji tonight remain stoic Kindred, dedicated to the service of their Soke and their private meditations on the Beast and the Man. Spurred on by the tales of the Nameless One, they often find a place among city hierarchies, and many Sokes claim monasteries or other tenurial domains as Regents. Other Kindred often seek the Kuufukuji out for their even-tempered, rational advice in many domains, but, at other times, the Kuufukuji fall out of favor with Kindred who consider the Hungry haughty, arrogant or aloof, lording their lesser dependence on the Vitae over the rest of the "gluttonous" Kindred.

In the East, Kuufukuji are more likely to be honored. Many Kindred societies have heard the parables of the Nameless Master, and, even if these Kindred do not necessarily follow these teachings, the Kindred respect the wisdom of an elder. The Kuufukuji temples are more numerous here, and have spread from Japan to China, Korea, India, Tibet and Thailand.

In the West, the Hungry are less numerous, and, therefore, less respected by Princes. Other Kindred are frankly baffled and incredulous when they hear about the practice of fasting. Indeed, many assume the Kuufukuji are simply eccentric.

The Hungry often comprise insular coteries, with one Soke, a few Sempai and handful of Gakusei. Some Sempai travel, searching for a temple of worthies to take over and teach how to balance the Man and Beast within, but these temples are not as common as they were centuries ago. It is more difficult to find a remote temple, monastery or even simply a martial arts school that doesn't have modern technological hurdles or other threats to the Masquerade.

Thus, tonight's traveling Sempai is more likely to claim an abandoned building on the outskirts of a city as a haven and petition for the right to Embrace Gakusei (or, in some cases, Embrace now and ask forgiveness later). The Sempai gather a herd, usually one of prostitutes, and use them as food and funding. These Kuufukuji ignore the kine who don't cross their paths, or occasionally cultivate them as potential childer for the future.

Non-Kuufukuji who wish to study under the Hungry are often welcome in Kuufukuji temples. Non-Kuufukuji are expected to conduct themselves in the calm manner of the Hungry, though these non-Hungry need not fast (indeed, only the most zealous Kuufukuji Soke would require it). Although a vampire not of the bloodline cannot learn the control that comes with Shihai, most Kindred leave the temple with a stronger sense of the Man within.

Dealing with others of the clan is often difficult, as many Mekhet either consider the Kuufukuji dangerous ideological zealots or deride the quest for a Golconda that they consider mythical. Some Mekhet may attempt to ingratiate themselves with or interrogate the Kuufukuji, wishing to wrest the secret of their control out of them, but the Hungry may well meditate through the interrogation or answer each question with parables. The Kuufukuji teach only those who come to them humbly to learn.

Cases do sometimes arise in which a Gakusei turns on a Sempai, or even his Sensei, and either fights him or commits diablerie. The Hungry do not like to acknowledge such dissention, and deal with these wayward Kindred in the quietest way possible. Such transgressors have been known to disappear during the light of day or are required to voluntarily take on the Final Balance. Some strict temples retain traditional outdoor gardens for the sole purpose of conducting executions within the security of their own havens, where the Kuufukuji can watch and see what disobedience and rebellion delivers.

ESCAPEES?

In the nights since the Nameless Master spawned the first of his line, some speculate whether there have been some Kindred who resented the Embrace and subsequent forced obedient existence. The Kuufukuji insist that all who disobey either toe the line eventually or face their Requiem away from the support network the Hungry's monastic culture represents.

Certainly, a more than a few escapees have defected from the bloodline's ranks, as it were, through the years. Those who evaded capture or their sires' authority were the wise ones, the ones who discovered that they had to submit for some time while they learned what it was to be a vampire in general, and one of the Hungry in particular.

The successful deserters often learn what they can of the Shihai Discipline, understanding its usefulness but shunning the overall mindset of poverty and meditation upon the Man and Beast. These Kuufukuji can occasionally be somewhat unstable, preferring to flirt with their Final Balance instead of fasting, and find themselves less successful when trying to use the Discipline, as allowing their Vitae to dwindle is not something they are comfortable with.

The pendulum of balance does not refer only to fasting and gluttony. Escaped Kuufukuji can often be found almost thriving, dwelling extravagantly. Many do what they can to make as much money as possible, and maintain the most modern, beautiful apartments with stylish accoutrements. If they can afford something — and sometimes even if they can't — they acquire it. Leaving poverty behind makes one more likely to indulge in the greatest of avarices.

The noble sense of wisdom that many Kuufukuji possess comes across only as carefree arrogance in these callow Hungry. They, more often than not, claim to have found Golconda, or at least be closer than most, even though they have barely any control over their temporal wiles. Many of these Hungry honestly believe they are close to Golconda because not only do they have the powers of their bloodline, but they also have given up the poverty that shackles the Kuufukuji. These exiles claim to be bound by nothing.

FEEDING RITUALS

Because the mindset of the Kuufukuji is centered on fasting, when they have to feed, they feed in a solemn and ritualized way. The Hungry do not simply grab a quick bite from the herd when they feel frenzy or torpor threaten. Every drop of blood imbibed is done so with formal ceremony.

SESSHOKU

Although the Kuufukuji are utterly dedicated to fasting and self-control, they must feed, of course. They

consider feeding to be a somber, ritualized affair. During life, they would limit themselves to bland rice and broth, the premise being that even if they had to eat, they could make it bland enough to not enjoy it.

The Kiss makes this mindset obsolete. No matter how bland they'd like it to be, the passion that comes with the Kiss affects the Hungry the same way it affects every other vampire. Thus, the Sokes have created a ritual that surrounds feeding that forces Kindred — or the Gakusei, anyway — to avoid the Kiss.

Those of the Hungry who have determined that their Vitae is too low let a superior know. The Hungry reports this notification with his eyes on the floor, as the vampire is admitting that he must indulge his Beast. Only one feeding occurs per night. If another Kuufukuji decides she needs something after the Sesshoku, she must wait until the following night.

The Soke holds the Sesshoku at midnight, the hour of the Beast. The Kuufukuji meet where the bloodline's herd lives. Each Hungry who must feed wears the traditional all-black robe of the monastery, with a dark hood added: the Man has a face, the Beast does not. They gather in the most hidden or remote section of the home and extinguish all light but one candle. This solitary light represents the spark of humanity that the Kindred must return to after succumbing to his Hunger. With several Sempai, and often the Soke, watching, the vampire steps forward and chooses a member of the herd. A Sempai bleeds the kine, catching the blood in a carved wooden bowl, which he then hands to the supplicant. The Gakusei feeds in silence, and only as much as he dares. If the elders believe he's had too much, they strike the cup from his lips and may even punish him.

The Sempai do keep track, however, of which Gakusei request frequent feedings. On some occasions, the Sempai deny their neonates feeding and observe them. In the same vein as the Salem Witch Trials, the neonate is then Damned either way: if he was truthful in his need, he either frenzies or succumbs to a starved torpor; if he was deceitful, he is punished. Both ways are unlucky for the Hungry, and the test does make all Hungry adhere to fasting until absolutely necessary.

Prostitutes, ghouls and candidates for the Embrace make up the herd. A Soke keeps a mortal in the herd for years sometimes, watching her closely to find her proper role within the temple (either remaining a Lick, serving as an aide or ghoul, becoming one of the Hungry or simply dying from the strain).

HANTO

Higher-ranking Kuufukuji are permitted to hunt. Their ranking indicates that they have exhibited sufficient self-control to withstand the overwhelming passion of the Kiss. They also are permitted to look for

prospective herd or ghoulish candidates, as well as possible inductees into the bloodline. Sometimes a Sempai allows a Gakusei to accompany her to test his self-control during a hunt. This serves as an informal preliminary test to see if he is Sempai material.

If a Sempai has found a candidate for the Embrace, he must always have another Kuufukuji with him during the act. Apart from Toshi's Chouka, described below, this is the only time a Hungry is allowed to drain a mortal of all blood. Thus, the Hungry risks the Final Balance when doing so, and instead of giving the bloodline a new member, the Hungry could likely rob it of himself.

Even the bloodline's exiles often choose not to Embrace alone, unless they have completely forsaken their previous philosophies.

TOSHI'S CHOUKA

Once a year, the Soke allows the Kuufukuji to indulge their Beasts. This is a relatively new ritual, brought about quite by accident, and no Kuufukuji can adequately pinpoint exactly when or where the practice began. According to a common legend, one temple's Soke, Toshi, had enforced the fasting so strictly that too many Kuufukuji frenzied, others went into torpor and half of the temple destroyed the other half through rampage or diablerie. The frenzied Kindred destroyed Toshi in the coup.

While cleaning up the carnage, the surviving Sempai came up with the rules for Toshi's Chouka, the night of excess.

Held during the shortest night of the year to give the Beast the least amount of freedom, Toshi's Chouka is a grand hunt for all Kuufukuji. The Soke goes through the herd and selects those she deems frail, ill, unfit or otherwise unlikely to last much longer.

The Hungry release these unfortunates with a head start, after which the Kuufukuji are free to hunt them. Some Sempai who appear to be on the hunt are secretly serving as chaperones, watching for Overbalance, violations of the Masquerade or any other indecencies. Toshi's Chouka is also another subtle test, seeing who lets go completely and who still exhibits control while allowing himself to experience the freedom. Very little eludes the eyes of those watching.

A sensible Soke informs the Prince of Toshi's Chouka, even though it falls the same time every year and the Prince should expect it and be ready. The Soke respectfully asks the Prince that no one hunt the prey of the Kuufukuji, with a not-so-subtle hint that during this one night, the Soke cannot be responsible for his Kindred if they see the insult of another vampire stealing their yearly banquet. Most Princes spread the word, especially if they value the Kuufukuji's counsel. If a Prince sees this hunt as breaking whatever laws he has set up in his city,

Toshi's Chouka has the possibility of igniting a factional conflict between the bloodline and the powers-that-be in a given domain. On the other hand, a Prince is free to decree that the Hungry conduct Toshi's Chouka within the borders of their own tenurial domains or other conditions of acceptance.

LEGENDS

Kuufukuji might appear conceited to Kindred who have never met nor heard of the Hungry. Even though they would consider themselves humble, they do come across as the withdrawn keepers of a secret that others could not even begin to understand. Other Kindred are occasionally annoyed by the Kuufukuji's calm exterior, or intrigued by their near-constant meditative state or outright threatened by their perceived aloofness. The Hungry do not have many close acquaintances, but this does not trouble them.

They fit into a chronicle as foils to the characters if the characters react emotionally to the Hungry or as wise mentors if the characters show an openness to the ideas behind Shihai. A savvy Prince might take a local Kuufukuji into his service. An even savvier Kuufukuji might be Prince herself.

The Storyteller can easily fit a Kuufukuji into a chronicle built around the search for Golconda, as the Hungry do represent a step along the way to deliverance. They could also represent the wrong path, as they clearly have not yet reached it — they must still feed regularly and they can frenzy.

Kuufukuji characters can fit within most chronicles; they usually join with other, non-Hungry vampires to serve the purpose of a spiritual journey in which they may test themselves. The Hungry may be aiding the group out of orders from their Soke, or Sensei or even the Prince. The spiritual journey within is the core motivation for a Kuufukuji, but this doesn't mean she is not driven by the baser emotions of revenge, fear, hatred and love. This merely means that she places these things as a different priority than most vampires, and does her best to stifle some of the stronger emotions. There is no guarantee that she will succeed in this.

The Kuufukuji weakness is directly connected to their strength — the hungrier they are, the stronger they are, and the more they feed, the closer they step towards the abyss of Final Balance. A Storyteller can modify this weakness, giving the Hungry a check to make sure he isn't feeding too much, for example. Another option would be to focus the character so much on controlling the hunger frenzy that he ignores the other manifestations of the Beast entirely, making it all together too easy to frenzy from fear or anger. However the Storyteller tweaks the weakness, it still must be connected to the fasting that is intrinsic to this bloodline.

REPORT OF BEAN, GANGREL HARPY TO PRINCE BRADY DUNN

“Damndest thing I ever saw. I couldn’t get my mind around it.

Dude looked like he hadn’t fed in days, and there was this kid, see, she had fallen or something, hit her head. I mean, blood was everywhere. I saw it happen and saw him and figured well shit, I just missed out on a meal, cause this fucker is gonna take it for sure.

But he just sat there and watched her bleed. I saw him lick his lips once or twice, but he didn’t move to do anything. Hell, the gulls were moving in on her faster than he was.

I told him, ‘Buddy, if you’re not going to take a bite, let someone else have a go.’

He looked at me, and I swear I saw pity in his eyes. Pity! For me! Well that kinda got me pissed, let me tell you.

He stepped aside and sorta held his hand out at her, like he was a fuckin mater-dee showing me to a table. So I took him up on it.

I don’t know, maybe I was having a harder time of it than I thought, maybe it was cause he pissed me off, but once I started feeding, there was no stopping me. Guess I hit frenzy, I don’t really know. Next thing I know, I’m on the ground with his foot on my head, grinding my face into the pavement. And he was talking to me.

He said, ‘I know you cannot control the Beast within you, but you must beat it. Think of your Beast as lying down on the ground, much like you are now, and the Man restraining it, much like I am now,’ or some such bullshit.

‘What the hell are you talking about?’ I said. I mean, I’d just fed, I was mad as hell, and this guy still took me out. How the hell?

Then he said he was, like, this vampire who didn’t need to feed, and how he had conquered the Beast inside him. He didn’t offer me any ideas on why he was Mr. Perfect Vampire la-de-da, but just said he pitied me again.

So what do you think? Asshole, or should we bring him in for questioning? I’m thinking that either he had fed before and just wanted to fuck with me, but there might be a truth to what he says. And if he’s found Golconda, then it’s only right that he should tell you. Think of the power you could have . . .

Right. I’ll see if I can bring him in. Better let me take Wednesday and Thumper with me, though. Can’t be too careful around this one.”

A PARABLE FROM THE MASTER’S LIPS

One night the Nameless Master walked the roads between the cities. He held his head down, contem-

plating the nature of Man and Beast. A ghoul accompanied him, as much for conversation as sustenance, for the Nameless Master liked to think aloud.

Along the road, he met a kine. He was an old man, closer to death than birth. He pulled behind him a cart of rice. The Nameless Master stopped and greeted him, and asked to sit and share a rest alongside the road.

The man was frightened of the monsters that the night commonly held, but he joined the Nameless Master, eager for company in the dark and wild woods.

“I am called Hou,” said the man.

“I have no name,” said the Nameless Master.

“How can you have no name?” Hou replied. “You had a mother, didn’t you? What did she called you?”

The Nameless Master thought back to the many decades it had been since his mother had named him. Then he shook his head.

“I am only two things: I am a Man, and I am a Beast. They constantly war with one another, and I can focus on nothing as trivial as names,” he finally said.

Hou did not know what to say to this, and so he said nothing. They stared into the fire for a bit, and the Nameless Master broke the silence.

“Is that to feed yourself and your family?” he asked, pointing at the cart.

“Yes, I spent too long in the field today and was forced to travel after dark. I’m taking the food to them,” Hou replied.

The Nameless Master nodded. “Then we are somewhat alike,” he said. He reached out with a long finger and stroked the hair of the kine, a young man not much older than a boy. “I, too, am carrying my food with me.

“I spend much of my time meditating on how the Man is separate from the Beast,” he continued as Hou scrambled to his feet. “I often forget that the Man must also be compared to man. Our spirits are reflected in a warped mirror, different yet undeniably the same.”

Hou began running down the road, leaving his family’s bounty behind, but it was too late. The Nameless Master was on him, breaking his neck.

Out of deference for the lesson Hou had taught him, the Nameless Master fed from the dying man, enough to sustain him for the rest of the night’s journey.

“I also must remember that the Beast does have a place. It is the Beast that makes our Man stronger. Thank you for the lesson, Hou. I regret that you will not live to learn yours.”

SHIHAI

All vampires work to control their Beast. The Embrace robs them of much of the human experience, but

few Kindred wish to fall into an existence of merely feeding, killing and sleeping. The Kuufukuji are more concerned with this than most, since they are closer to their Beast than most Kindred. The Hungry's weakness, developed through constant fasting, has led them to control their feeding, making sure their Vitae does not achieve a state of improper balance.

Shihai, the signature Discipline of the Hungry, deals with the control these vampires work nightly to attain. Controlling one's own Beast is only the first step. Once a Kindred touches her Beast and begins to understand it, the Kindred can slowly learn to control the Man, and then the Man and Beast in others.

• ROOTS TO THE EARTH

Mere nights after the Embrace, neonates learn how to suppress the Beast. This power is vital to the survival of the vampire, as Kindred are very susceptible to the Wassail early in their Requiems.

When learning this power, the Kindred assumes a meditative state for a full 24 hours, eschewing sleep and feeding while he looks inward to explore his boundaries. After discovering the state of his soul, he enjoys greater protection from Wassail as he forces his body to adapt to less and less Vitae.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: This power involves no roll. While active, this power grants Kuu-

fukuji a +5 bonus on rolls to resist Wassail (but not other forms of frenzy). The benefit of Roots to the Earth lasts for the duration of the night.

Action: Instant

•• SATE THE TIGER'S HUNGER

The Kuufukuji may turn her body into a literal prison for the roiling wiles of the Beast. She uses her own body as a bulwark against Wassail.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: This power involves no roll. As the Kindred feels the onset of Wassail, she may invoke this power, immediately forcing the Wassail to subside. The Beast takes its toll, however, and the Kuufukuji suffers three points of lethal damage as she dissipates the rage through her physical form.

Action: Instant

••• TRAP THE TIGER'S FURY

Using this power, the Kindred becomes able to abate all forms of frenzy by broadening her understanding of both the Beast and herself. Her physical body becomes the lightning rod through which the frenzy channels, leaving her worse for the wear but certainly in control of herself.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: This power involves no roll. This power functions like Sate the Tiger's Hunger, above, but Trap the Tiger's Fury expands the vampire's ability to mitigate all forms of frenzy, not only Wassail. This doesn't make the Beast any happier, however,



and the dismissal of a frenzy still inflicts three points of lethal damage on the Kuufukuji.

Action: Instant

•••• THE OUTSIDE EYE WITHIN

The character can study the Man within another vampire and determine that vampire's Virtues or Vices, learning the state of his ultimate balance. With this information, the Hungry can determine how best to influence her target to frenzy or to calm his Beast.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Wits + Empathy + Shihai versus subject's Resolve + Blood Potency

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character learns nothing about the target, but the target is aware of the violation of her privacy that the character just attempted. The character cannot use this power again until the next night.

Failure: The character learns nothing about his target and cannot use this power on this target until the next night.

Success: The character learns either the Virtue or Vice of the target. He also gains a +2 bonus to his Persuasion, Socialize and Intimidate dice pools with regard to the individual whose soul he has observed for the remainder of the night. The character cannot use this power on the same target until the next night.

Exceptional Success: The character learns both the Virtue and the Vice of the target. He also gains a +4 bonus to his Persuasion, Socialize and Intimidate dice pools with regard to the individual whose soul he has observed

for the remainder of the night. The character cannot use this power on the same target until the next sunset.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	The power is turned on a vampire with whom the user has a blood tie (see Vampire: The Requiem , p. 162).
-2	The target is currently in a state of frenzy or torpor.

••••• CALM THE STALKING TIGER

In a refinement of Sate the Tiger's Hunger, the Kuufukuji becomes able to soothe the urges of another's Beast. The Hungry channels the fury of another into his own body, suffering its depredations but otherwise abating the threat of its presence — for a time.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: This power involves no roll. The Kindred cages the Wessail or frenzy of the target within the character's own body. The Beast rages and howls, inflicting five points of lethal damage on the Kuufukuji as the character forces the frenzy to subside.

The Kuufukuji must know either the Virtue or Vice (or both) of the target whose frenzy he wishes to terminate.

This power works not only on vampires, but also on werewolves in the throes of death rage (see **Werewolf: The Forsaken**, pp. 173–175). Whether the Kindred may imprison the frenzies of other creatures that have the inclination to rage is up to the Storyteller, but this power should work in all but the most frightening circumstances.

Action: Instant

Macellarius

*My my my, the bell has rung. It's time for the first course!
Say that you will dine with me?*

The Macellarius are as much gracious hosts as they are grotesque gluttons. Make no mistake — these Kindred are Ventrue down to the marrow in their dead bones. Spawned in the nights of mad, decadent Rome, the Macellarius come from the oldest of money, cherish their ancestral roots and are desperate to rise once again to the top of the ranks like so much clotted cream. They simply see themselves as Ventrue with — rarefied tastes. These vampires find nothing wrong with preserving their unique predilections. Providing the Kindred with an epicurean pedigree is the Macellarius' natural duty, an essential obligation that few Kindred are willing to indulge. Oh, sure, the curse is a curse, it's awful, *bloody* awful, but that doesn't mean one cannot attempt to enjoy those staid moments caught in the throes of this ceaseless ennui. There's nothing wrong with indulging in one's own hungry proclivities from time to time, is there?

Unfortunately, few others see it that way. The Kindred whisper about those of the Macellarius lineage, muttering about their unspeakable appetites and ruthless initiative. Everyone knows that these obese, unsightly creatures do not merely drink blood. They swallow it by cheek-stuffed mouthfuls, consuming it in gulps and gobbles. They drain body after body, even going so far as to *bottle* the stuff, seeing themselves as gourmandizing vintners of exceptional draughts of Vitae.

Worse, most "Gluttons" don't stop there. Many of these vampires carry the already gruesome act of consumption one step further, *eating* the bodies of their victims. The Damned can't eat food, not really, but some among the Macellarius *can* — provided that the food is the raw flesh of a mortal body. The Gluttons who partake in this peculiar delight do so with great abandon, forcing countless gobbets of human meat into their withered guts. They swallow the bloody chunks whole, and bask in the resultant power.

Long have they dwelled on the fringes, waiting in the periphery of the Danse Macabre, content to host their parties and dine upon death. But, recently, their hungers have pushed many of them out of the darkness and again into the world of the other Kindred. The Macellarius are thirsty for more, salivating for another taste of temporal power and unworldly pleasure. Will



the other Kindred stand in the Gluttons' way? Or will Kindred society welcome these gluttonous powerbrokers back into the fold?

Parent Clan: Ventrue

Nickname: Gourmands / Gluttons

Covenant: The Invictus is a natural home for the Macellarius. These vampires associate themselves with that most distant of vampiric covenants, the Camarilla, and, therefore, the Invictus is of particular attraction to this bloodline. (The Sanctified are too concerned with spiritual nonsense to be of use to most Macellarius.

They are far too interested in worldly pleasures to find any comfort within the Lancea Sanctum.)

The Acolytes of the Circle make too much trouble for themselves, while the Carthians don't know the taste of true power. A rare few Gluttons have gone to the Ordo Dracul (some have a deeply experimental nature and may believe themselves to be more "evolved" than other vampires due to their sometime ability to consume human flesh), but most Gluttons stick with the First Estate. The Invictus does not punish the cutthroat spirit of hungry vampires, and, in fact, encourages such behavior. The vampires of the Macellarius believe themselves to be ideal covenant members — better than most, if not the finest of all.

Appearance: The most obvious characteristic that the vampires of this bloodline share is obesity. The Kindred of the Macellarius are unavoidably obese (see "Weakness," below) — 200 pounds is essentially the bare minimum for the Gluttons. Many tend to Embrace larger childer, as well, meaning that several of the lineage are abhorrently fat, bloated to sizes of 400 pounds or larger. Beyond the size of these vampires, most Macellarius dress well and are groomed impeccably. They have tailor-made suits of the finest Thai silks and Egyptian cottons, and most are accustomed to wearing makeup (blush, lipstick) to appear more "human."

However, not all Macellarius are so well-kept; many who begin to grow mad begin losing touch with the bloodline's signature style, and grow disheveled and unkempt.

Haven: The "families" of the Macellarius tend to own large swathes of land outside the cities, and most make their homes in these places. Many own vineyards, manor houses, luxuriant farms or other sumptuous estates. From here, the vampires exist like tumors

— establishing their own blood supply and swelling in number. Not all of the bloodline stay away from the city lights, however. Many younger Macellarius seek out the sprawling urban blight and its many hidden delicacies. Such Kindred tend to make their havens in upscale suites and townhomes, often near places that offer the vampires their most favorite sensory stimulations — the smells of a fish market or a steakhouse, the sight of little children playing on a playground, the sounds of cattle and hogs being butchered and rendered.

Background: Most Macellarius vampires were once mortal hedonists, epicures, even artists. The bloodline seeks those of especial taste, curiosity and *hunger*. They might be chefs, restaurateurs, butchers, writers, painters, even event planners. All Macellarius must exhibit a deep and personal commitment to good taste, manners and breeding.

Meaning, of course, that most vampires of the bloodline begin wealthy. Only a rare few “lower-class” individuals were ever allowed into the bloodline, and those who were accepted were tolerated either because they showed some rare taste or because the Embracing vampire (or Avus) was feeling cruelly ironic that day. Luxury and prosperity are of deep significance to the Macellarius. These vampires are used to having nice things, and their tastes (palate and otherwise) grow only stranger and more specific as their Requiems deepen. Possession of wealth is admittedly only a stepping stone to a true gourmand’s existence — but it is a necessary step, nevertheless.

Also, while it seems petty, a vampire’s girth goes a long way toward illustrating his suitability within the Macellarius lineage. Frankly, the fatter the better. Obesity to these creatures is no grotesquerie, but is instead the watermark of sophistication and refinement. Size is no detriment — the greater the body mass, the more affluent the vampire. Fat to them is merely a collection of sweet meat and suety tissue.

Plumpness reveals a Kindred with prurient taste. Simply put, Rubenesque vampires are more likely to be chosen for this bloodline than any other; one’s own physical magnitude is equally an expression of one’s own personal power and style.

Ultimately, no matter the life once led, all Macellarius are invited into the blood because they demonstrate an unswerving commitment to fulfilling their abnormal hungers.

Character Creation: Macellarius are likely to sport high Social Attributes and Skills — these are their tools



and weapons. Similarly, Social Merits are common, as well. A Glutton may have high Stamina but low Dexterity (a direct reflection of her obese body), and may also have lower Resolve and Composure scores to show how poorly a Macellarius gives in to her baser urges.

Bloodline Disciplines: Animalism, Dominate, Gustus, Resilience

Weakness: The Damned of the Macellarius suffer from the Ventrue weakness, suffering a -2 penalty to all Humanity rolls meant to avoid acquiring derangements after failing the initial degeneration roll.

However, the Macellarius suffer from another malady, this one physical. The vampires of this lineage grow larger upon inclusion into the bloodline. Their flesh swells and distends as the dead fat within the body multiplies painfully. The vampire, over the course of three nights, gains an additional 100 to 150 pounds upon her frame. This weight is uneven and (to others) unpleasant. The fatty flesh is lumpy, greasy and sits poorly balanced upon the Kindred's bones. The fat shows everywhere, as well — neck, midsection, limbs. The vampire's bloated, newly corpulent body is hard to manage.

Thus, in all dice pools involving Dexterity, the 10 again rule does not apply. Additionally, any 1's that come up on the roll subtract from successes gained. Finally, the vampire's Speed is forever at a -1 penalty. (Note that this weakness does not increase the vampire's Size for mechanical purposes; no Health levels are gained from the weight.)

Additionally, for every year spent as a vampire, the Kindred grows even fatter. Macellarius vampires gain a pound per year to their already considerable bulk, whether active or in torpor.

Organization: Every Macellarius household has three significant positions of power: the *summus*, *medius* and *imus*. The *imus* is generally a neonate, responsible for setting tables, bringing plates, arranging décor and other more menial tasks. The *medius*, normally an ancilla within the bloodline, is responsible for the food. If mortals will be sitting at the table, the *medius* prepares (or has someone prepare) mortal victuals. If vampires will be dining, he procures the blood most appropriate for the situation. He even goes so far as to feed the animals of the estate (usually horses, hounds, raptors). The *summus*, always an ancilla or elder, is the host. While all Macellarius are committed to social duties during every dinner event, the *summus* is the one most responsible for comfort, conversation and administrating business. Even if the guest-of-honor (called the *locus consularis*) is actually going to be the final course of dinner, the *summus* still does his best to make the victim feel at home and at ease. These three roles generally only come into play during those times when the family is entertaining; otherwise, the eldest of the house makes all the rules, whether he is the *summus* or not.

Ultimately, this means that most Macellarius havens are home to three or more of the blood. They stick together; family is important, after all. Where there is one Glutton, there are at least two more, equally friendly — and ravenous.

Concepts: Cultured drug addict, deranged socialite, event planner, exquisite gourmand, Master of Elysium, repulsive Harpy, serial cannibal, sous chef, venture capitalist, wealthy hedonist

History

It is said that the Macellarius origins go far back indeed, all the way to the decadent nights of ancient Rome during the Age of Augustus. As fires burned in braziers and opium smoke filled the air, three families were considered the *crème de la crème* of the Roman outpost of Rimini. These three families (Labrusca, Mellitus and Pulmento) did not belong to any political world — instead, they raised horses. Some of the finest steeds found in Rome came from the breeding stock of these three families, and raising horses allowed them all to live extravagant lives of wine, food and wealth. They were a competitive lot, holding several events and parties a month in an effort to “one-up” the other families. They would produce the strangest, most egregious of meals (baked flamingo tongue, geese stuffed with roasted hummingbirds, sow udders peppered with dates and nuts) and provide endless streams of alcohol (wine and beer of limitless flavors). When they were done gorging, the families would take some time at the local vomitorium, making room for more. Gluttony was no sin; gluttony was tradition.

One man among these families was of particular eccentricity. The patriarch of the Labruscas, named Encolpius, perpetually sought out new tastes and sensations. He tasted minor poisons such as aconite and hemlock to experience their effects. He ate organs of animals that none would consider — and he did not always consume the animals cooked, either. Perhaps the most unusual habit Encolpius took to — and the one that would eventually ensure his immortality — was drinking blood. He had heard rumors that the barbarians of the north took part in such practice, and that it purportedly “gave them power.” Encolpius was a man seeking much power, and if drinking blood would grant him such puissance, then he saw no reason not to try it. And so he took to drinking blood — animal at first, and later the blood of slaves — and he was certain that it granted him an unexpected vitality. Whether the blood did or didn't is a matter of legend, but what drinking blood *did* do was attract the attention of a Ventrue vampire called Juvenal.

Eternal Gluttons

Juvenal cursed Encolpius with the Embrace, seeing unusual potential in this strange man. He was connected, well-mannered, well-bred and ostensibly hosted

the finest parties and orgies out of the three *equite* families. And he had good taste, above all. Over the subsequent decades, Encolpius would prove his mettle amongst the Kindred of the Camarilla. He hosted lavish Elysian affairs, managed to attain a number of strange Vitae vintages and was instrumental in helping Juvenal arrange various alliances with foreign vampires. Encolpius was the ideal host.

Unfortunately, he was also drastically overindulgent — he stuffed himself with too much blood, swallowing it with sodden hunks of mortal food (which he would, of course, regurgitate before too long). He was irrepressible, spoiling himself with every urge that assailed him. He was lusty, crass and prideful. Over the years, he began to Embrace others within his family, regardless of cost or consequence to himself and others. He was on a slippery slope, and his behavior eventually began to lead to his own lunacy.

Over time, his Blood changed. Not from conscious effort — Encolpius repeatedly punished his body with pleasure. His form had to adapt, to swell and grow past its already obese form. His stomach yearned to be able to digest the things he crammed inside it. Nobody really knows when it was that he began to eat human flesh (a habit he demanded of his childer, as well, or so the story goes), but he ate, regardless, and that grim penchant stays with the bloodline tonight.



THE BOOKS OF ENCOLPIUS

Aside from being the “gourmand” that he was, Encolpius was also a fervid writer, detailing every taste and experience he encountered. Vampire legend suggests that his books — of which there are reportedly hundreds, spanning nearly a millennium in time — are full of historical detail about the Kindred who might otherwise be lacking from “common knowledge.” Many have tried to hunt down these books, suspecting that they lie locked away somewhere in the hands of the Macellarius family.

Were anyone to find these books, they’d likely be disappointed. Encolpius did write at length over a period of countless centuries, but these accounts were marred with inaccuracies and contradictions as he floated in and out of torpor. Moreover, his books were glaringly self-centered, speaking only of his own exaggerated exploits.

It’s said that many of his books can be found in his tomb, where the monstrosity large Encolpius sleeps in undisturbed torpor.



Bloated With Sin

The fall of Rome was not good for the Gluttons. Rome provided them with both comfort and opportunity. The Dark Ages — and the resultant Catholic

madness — was unkind to the Gluttons. Such deadly dogma forced them to the edges of civilization. They became the swollen kings of distant outposts and podgy monsters living in collapsing manors away from town. They fed, of course — those wandering nearby were food, for sure — but they were forced into the same darkness that the rest of Europe shared. For nearly a millennia, these hungry vampires dwelled this way, like leeches in murky ponds, waiting for victims to come along with that sweet blood and marbled meat.

Modern Nights

Only in the last couple centuries have the Macellarius encroached again upon Kindred civilization. For so many years, the Macellarius were little more than legend — the fat aristocrats from fallen Rome, the greedy cannibals from the road less traveled. Over time, they emerged and brought more to their line — young, dynamic blood — and have once again taken small roles in Kindred society. The Macellarius enjoy the sinful comforts of the modern Requiem, and are glad to have the Invictus as their lord and partner.

Very recently, within the last 10 years or so, the bloodline has become almost surprisingly involved with Kindred politics. Many Macellarius have taken ancillary roles suitable to the blood — tenders of Elysium, Harpies, occasional Primogen. Few Kindred trust the Macellarius directly, for the legends about them persist even now. Most are affable, with warm smiles and hearty laughter. But that callous hunger for blood, meat and power is always concealed in the darkness of their eyes (and illustrated by their engorged bodies).

Society and Culture

The vampires of the Macellarius blood are ostensibly unified in their plans and desires — most of them are cut from the same cloth. Those who don’t show the proper reverence for the family’s practices are simply disallowed access to the bloodline. Those who are allowed to commit themselves to this powerful and indulgent family enter into a world of pomp, circumstance — and devilish excess.

Rarified Tastes

The senses are everything, to the Macellarius vampires. That which piques their senses is worth pursuing, no matter the cost. One Macellarius may swoon at the smell of butter cream, where another may bask in the sight and sound of a pack of dogs tearing flesh from the bones of a still-living mortal. The family encourages pursuit of these sensations, regardless of what they may be, because, without these experiences, what is the Requiem but a ceaseless parade of unpleasant nights?

Out of all the five senses, however, taste is the most important. That which graces the palate, over the

tongue and down the throat, is paramount. Most Gluttons believe themselves to be gourmards of the highest order — no mortal could ever be the kind of meticulous connoisseur that they believe themselves to be. They do not accept that their taste buds have died with the rest of their bodies — no, the Macellarius simply understand that, as a vampire, it simply takes a little *more* to excite the mouth.

Blood, then, is of obvious interest to this Damned family. Clearly, Vitae is important to all vampires — it is life, and, without it, a Kindred is little more than a moldering corpse. But the Macellarius vampires take the importance of Vitae several steps further. Blood isn't mere sustenance. Blood is a new realm of taste, an infinity of endless flavors meant to be savored and appraised. Every living vessel is the chance to sample a new essence, no matter how mundane or bizarre. The blood of a white elk may not provide a great deal of sustenance (if any at all), but the taste is exquisite! The essence of a frightened child is sharply piquant, whereas the blood of a woman caught in the throes of pleasure is a hot wave of coppery sweetness, like honey poured over pennies. What of the taste of a treacherous priest? How bitter is the blood of a spurned husband? The Macellarius want to know them all.

Many collect these flavors in some fashion or another. Some Gluttons are content to keep journals of their experiences — cataloguing the tastes the way wine tasters or scent detectives do. Does the blood have a hint of cranberry? The tang of gunmetal? Is there a smokiness behind the flavor or an earthy aftertaste that lingers? Quite a few Gluttons don't find such cataloguing suitable, however, and endeavor to "save" the taste in some fashion or another. One Glutton might place a few drops of the lingering Vitae in a glass phial with a handwritten label. Others actually bottle the blood and keep it in a cellar, as one might keep vintages of exceptional wines. In this way, they are able to hoard these tastes and "remember" them once in a while.

Of course, few Gluttons speak of the fact that the Vitae of individual vampires tastes differently, too. Each Kindred carries a unique recipe hidden in the Blood — a pastiche of clan, history, personality and other inscrutable factors. The blood of the Damned is perhaps the sweetest of them all. Most Macellarius are wise enough to stay away from this forbidden delicacy; a rare few, on the other hand, find themselves hopelessly addicted. Some go even further, and hunt the blood of other creatures. Occasionally, a Macellarius has lost a limb or an eye trying to retrieve the potent Vitae of a Lupine. Other Macellarius have faced threats against their sanity and souls attempting to taste the blood of powerful occultists.

It isn't just blood, though. From time to time, the vampires of this bloodline still consume food (for, as inhuman as they are, they enjoy revisiting their lost

humanity often). Yes, they puke the food back up in a hot gush of blood and undigested matter, but even that, in its own way, is a perfectly palatable experience.

Of course, those Gluttons who are at all knowledgeable in the bloodline's Discipline (Gustus) tend to enjoy eating another type of "food" altogether — human flesh. The meat of mortals, like blood, is unique to each person and opens up a whole new doorway of appetizing pleasures. The flesh must be raw, of course; cooked meat comes up the same as any other victuals. But the Gluttons see nothing wrong with that. Blood soaks into muscle, skin tastes of salty sweat, hair has the zest of many oils. Swallowing flesh gives the vampires power. Their dead bodies break the flesh down aggressively, and invigorate their own bodies with pleasure and power.

Some Gluttons grow addicted to this sensation, much as some become fettered by the taste of Kindred blood. Although the Macellarius take some comfort in the fact that eating human flesh has fewer consequences. And its taste is truly exquisite.



THE PRESS

Grape juice for wine is squeezed from the fruit by a wine press. (Few bother stepping on the grapes, anymore; it's simply not efficient.) One "enterprising" Macellarius vampire invented a similar device — except this one crushes the blood out of an animal, mortal or vampire. Hiram Macellarius formulated what he calls "the Press." It's a stainless steel device, alarmingly minimal in its construction. Two metal spiked plates are driven together by a turn-key handle. The Press is not automated — it requires that Hiram or one of his childer actually grab the turn-key and exert pressure upon turning it. Whatever body inside the press is crushed, like the aforementioned grapes. The blood and fluids run off the lower plate and into a small trap. The trap is then emptied into a bottle below using a basic spigot. So far, only one of these devices actually exists — though Hiram has offered to make more, for the "right price."



Feasting Parties

Most Macellarius are not content to keep their rarefied tastes to themselves. Many, in fact, see one of their jobs as educating the unwashed masses. And, so, you have the "feasting party," a banquet-style event that is generally unique to the Macellarius bloodline.

The local Macellarius hold one of these banquets about once every month or so — they would have more, were it feasible, but these parties are not casual affairs. To the contrary, these festivities are elaborate events, neatly scripted and scrupulously organized. The Macellarius spare no expense in sending out invitations, preparing

the “meals” and decorating their estates (or Elysium; it’s worth noting that many Gluttons are chosen as Masters of Elysium). Some banquets are small, quiet affairs — a thrall cellist in the background, soft candlelight, a comfortable close setting with a few upper-crust Kindred. Other banquets are the definition of intricate, featuring dancers and musicians, poetry readings and dozens of guests from all walks of life and unlife.

All in all, the Macellarius host a number of feasting parties, each with different themes:

Guest of Honor: Some feasting parties are meant to fete one Kindred or another for some manner of notable service (let it be said that the vampire in question usually belongs to the Invictus). The guest (called the *locus consularis*) is seated at the head of the table and the event more or less revolves around him. He is given first taste of all the meals, adorned with roses or other flowers and toasted constantly throughout the night. (An extreme variation of this event is one in which the *locus consularis* is actually eaten at the end of the party, consumed by all vampires present. The guest of honor is still given a rather exciting “send-off,” however, and isn’t usually aware that the party will conclude with his demise.)

Masquerade: The Macellarius seem particularly fond of masquerade parties, with the attendants in masks or costume. These parties are rarely small affairs, and are often the most lavish parties the family will throw. They spend months in preparation — lining up the right vintages of Vitae, decorating, procuring “entertainment.” Perhaps the most arduous part is putting together the guest list, which is a task of such unfathomable precision that the people who are invited are often left to wonder why, and the people who aren’t are forced to ponder why in the world they’d been snubbed. Macellarius masquerade parties are events to make or break one’s reputation, and they often give a number of neonates (or ancilla with unfulfilled potential) the chance to make a name for themselves.

Tasting Party: The masquerades may be the bloodline’s biggest draw, but their tasting parties are easily their own personal favorite. Few are invited to these elite affairs, which consist of a number of vampires sampling various draughts of blood. Usually 10 or 20 different “vintages” are on hand — everything from the mundane blood of an average mortal to the unconventional tastes of strange mortals (albinos, hemophiliacs, hermaphrodites) or stranger creatures (magicians, shapechangers, the demonically possessed). Some serve the strange bloody “milk” called *lacrima* pulled from mandragora (plant ghouls), as well. Invitations to these gatherings are rare and normally highly prized. One popular variation has a number of victims who are forced to imbibe/inject/inhale any number of illegal substances; the Kindred then get together and taste the deliciously tainted blood, gladly suffering the

effects of whatever hallucinogen, upper or downer is swimming in the blood.

Arbitration: As a sign of faith to the local Invictus, the Macellarius have recently begun offering their own estates as the sites for arbitration between two Kindred parties. When lines of territory need to be drawn or when a new Sheriff or Seneschal must be elected, the Macellarius usually offer to host such negotiations. Not all parties are comfortable with this (the Macellarius are clearly one-sided, belonging almost universally to the First Estate), but the members of the bloodline push as hard as they can to get their way. Those Kindred who don’t allow the Macellarius the privilege of hosting arbitrations will surely find themselves scratched off any guest lists for the foreseeable future.

Wakes: The Gluttons are well aware that the Requiem is not eternal. It pretends to be, of course; but even the dark and hardy flame of a vampire can be snuffed out under the right (or wrong) circumstances. Therefore, the vampires of this lineage hold funerals and wakes for those allies and acquaintances who suffer Final Death. But such events aren’t meant to be somber. The vampires treat a wake like any other party — except the wake becomes an event of grotesque excess, featuring acts of indulgence so raw and gluttonous that they spit in the eye of eternity. The Gluttons use such shows of intemperance to demonstrate just how little they’re concerned with the final end and how *much* they’re concerned with enjoying every single night. Gallons of blood are consumed, poor mortals are cut to shreds (their skin and entrails hung from the rafters like so much ribbon) — the Macellarius are even known to ride their prize stallions through the party, the poor beasts bending under the weight of those corpulent bodies. All put together in an effort to cheat death and court what little “life” they have.

Regardless of the type of gathering, the Gluttons always treat the event with the utmost of respect. Moreover, every party is host to a full seven-course dinner (featuring various foods if mortals are present or a number of blood types if vampires are the guests). If the guest-of-honor is to be eaten, he is consumed as the final course, the *secundae mensae*. The centerpiece of every Macellarius festivity is food, hence the name “feasting party.”

MANNERS

The Macellarius think themselves supremely well-mannered. And, in a way, they are. They adhere to very strident codes of conduct — the meal begins when the host unfolds his napkin, the right hand must always place the goblet back in the exact spot, the knife and fork should be placed on an empty plate at 10 and four o’clock, respectively. And yet, others find the Macellarius’

manners most appalling. When eating, the Macellarius tend to earn their sobriquet, the "Gluttons." They gorge, gobble and swallow. They stain their shirts with blood and bits of fat. They force air up through their throats and conjure belches that smell of rotten blood and corpse breath. But all of this, to the Gluttons, is natural — the expression of a good meal, an exclamation of delight and adulation. Where others find the Macellarius disgusting, the Macellarius believe themselves to be the pinnacle of good manners.



Ambitions

The Gluttons aren't merely hungry for food — they're hungry for power, as well. Temporal power is a true delight to these fiendish socialites — spiritual wealth and supernatural strength are all well and good, but the reality of 2,000 years ago is still the reality of today: *money makes the world go round*. Money is how the vampires afford their lavish (and gruesome) habits. Food, drink, blood and song are the end results for the Macellarius, and the means to that end is wealth.

The vampires of the Macellarius may be overindulgent and, in many ways, out of control — but the majority are still shrewd businessmen, salesmen and money managers. They have a glut of "old money" to play with, but the Gluttons' excessive Requiems begin to drain the well before too long. So, the majority of the bloodline attempt to stay sharp and dynamic in their worldly dealings. Many in the Invictus become staid and stagnant, comfortable in their timeless security without ever tasting the possible splendor afforded to such brilliant creatures. The Gluttons generally choose not to make this mistake. They grab hold of as much as they can — whether flagons of blood, parcels of real estate or off-shore accounts — and do whatever they must to maintain them.

As a result, the Gluttons have a reputation for being somewhat — ruthless. Within the vampire world and outside, the Macellarius maintain utter courtesy when called for, but they will tear their opponents to pieces (whether, figuratively, in the stock market or, literally, on the dinner table) if they feel that their holdings are threatened. The Macellarius understand keeping strong relationships, of course, and attempt to hold onto their alliances for as long as possible. But if an opportunity is simply too sweet to ignore, or if they find that their "friends" aren't upholding their end of the bargain, the Gluttons will descend upon the weak like a sea of ticks, bleeding the bastards dry.

Amongst the Kindred, the Gluttons never used to have any great aspirations. By and large, they've stayed away from the mainstay of vampire politics for centuries. Recently, though, that has changed. Many Macellarius Damned have once again sought to worm their

way into the local power structure, helping the Invictus gain a respectable (and hopefully indomitable) "market share" among the vampires. For the most part, the Gluttons are content with acting as Harpies or Masters of Elysium, as such positions are ostensibly right up their alley. Though rumor tells of a Glutton Prince in power who rules his city like a vomitous parade of blood and circuses, distracting the fools with so much repugnant "playtime" that they can't see just how fat the spider in the center of the web has truly grown.



EQUITES

During the dawn of the bloodline — when it was in fact three mortal families instead of a single vampiric one — the Macellarius were renowned Roman horse breeders. Their horses were used in races (both with chariot and without), ridden in war and sold to important senators and merchants as symbols of pride. At the time, the families specialized in a number of finely bred Arabian horses, including the rare Iberian breed.

Curiously, horse breeding is one of the elements of the original mortal families that has carried over to the modern bloodline. The Gluttons recognize that horses are not only graceful, unique creatures but also symbols of pride. Many Macellarius see fit to still raise horses on their vast estates. Some Macellarius breed horses for selling, others for show and a rare few for the flavor of the animals' blood. Of course, the Gluttons have specialized tastes in all things, and aren't satisfied with breeding *normal* horses. No, far better to cultivate a number of rare breeds (the Mulassier, Lipizzaner and the legendary Akhal-Teke) instead. Even Macellarius who don't raise horses often have a number of equestrian-related artwork around their manor houses.

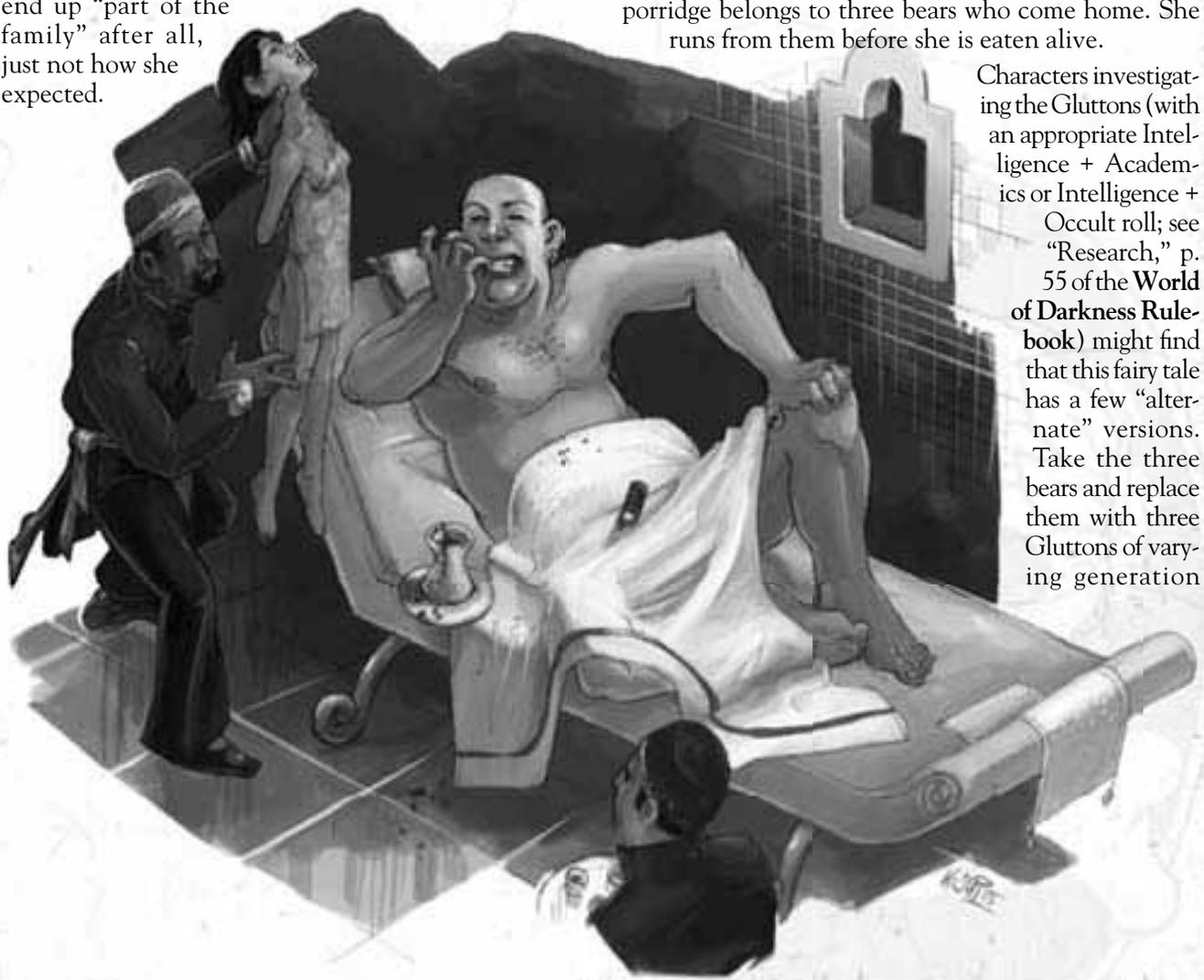


Epicurean Dynasty

When the time comes to expand their happy family, the Macellarius *prefer* to do so by Embracing suitable candidates. It's easiest in this way to truly find individuals compatible with the Gluttons' grotesque *carpe diem* attitude. Such candidates for the Blood are often wealthy and socially well-connected and exhibit an unhealthy love of temporal sensations (food, drink, sex, pain). Bodily girth is certainly considered — contenders needn't be morbidly obese, but should at least look at home in a Botticelli painting. Curiously, few Gluttons bother putting such individuals through any kind of testing phase. Some Gluttons go so far as to make ghouls of such candidates, but most Gluttons harness a grim spontaneity and Embrace, whether prudent or not. They generally hold to the theory that the Requiem is best served by a sick kind of *joie de vivre*, and they see the Embrace in the same light. (However, note that

the Macellarius Embrace only rarely, and, when they do, they prefer to go through all the proper channels and have the act blessed by the Prince — hopefully an *Invictus* Prince.) It's worth noting that there are descendents of the original three families (Labrusca, Mellitus, Pulmento) around, and, occasionally, the Gluttons will bring these mortals into the fold under the single Macellarius banner.

That's not to say that the bloodline doesn't have its number of outsiders. Most Gluttons are more than willing to hear a Ventrue's plea to join their estimable "family." Those Ventrue who wish to be considered must prove their devotion to the bloodline's gastronomic desires, usually through some kind of test. Such a trial might require the vampire to eat human flesh (regardless of the resultant regurgitation), drink the blood of a dope fiend or help the Macellarius plan their next feasting party. If the entreating vampire is found fitting, the family will provide her with a suitable Avus to shepherd her into the blood. If she is found wanting but with potential, they will let her go and help to groom her from afar. If the Ventrue, however, is beyond hope and has wasted their time — well, let's just say she may end up "part of the family" after all, just not how she expected.



Legends

The Macellarius are the patron saints of vampiric excess. They aren't just voracious bloodsuckers — they're goddamn *cannibals*. The legends about these bloated Kindred paint them as cancerous tumors, vicious Machiavellians and loathsome hedonists. Not many of the Damned have met a Glutton — but most Kindred have certainly heard the tales. Should you choose to include this bloodline in your story, you can hint at their legends in a number of ways.

Fairy Tales

The Gluttons are straight out of some of the darkest fairy tales. Once upon a time, the Macellarius lived on the fringes of civilization, waiting for foolish mortals to take the wrong road and seek succor and shelter from the patient vampires. This is the meat of some of the most frightening children's stories. Take Goldilocks and the Three Bears, for instance. Young hungry girl wanders into an unknown part of the woods and finds a house — there she finds three porridge bowls and tastes all of the food. We know the end of the story — the porridge belongs to three bears who come home. She runs from them before she is eaten alive.

Characters investigating the Gluttons (with an appropriate Intelligence + Academics or Intelligence + Occult roll; see "Research," p. 55 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*) might find that this fairy tale has a few "alternate" versions. Take the three bears and replace them with three Gluttons of varying generation

(*summus*, *medius* and *imus*) who have set a trap for the young girl by leaving out porridge or soup befouled with bad blood. In some tales, she barely escapes the clutches of these three plump and ghastly men. In other, harder to find tales, she is captured and cannibalized — an object lesson that teaches one to keep to the road.



HOME OF THE DEAD

The Macellarius family is a very old bloodline — and while it doesn't Embrace all too often, it still has nearly two millennia's worth of vampires to consider. Of course, the majority of these creatures met their Final Deaths long ago in their reckless pursuit of culinary hedonism; still, many Marcellarius linger on, most doing so in the disturbed "comfort" of torpor. The family keeps these torpid elders, waiting for the day where they awaken. Whenever possible, the slumbering Gluttons' own descendents keep these elders nearby — usually building elaborate tombs, sarcophagi or funeral parlors in which to reverently shelter these comatose beings. In the event that one of these ancient creatures awakens, the local Macellarius throw a feasting party unlike any other — putting on the most perverse Grand Guignol possible.



Mythology

Legends about cannibal spirits and hungry gods aren't hard to find. Local Native Americans might speak of regional human-eaters (the heart-eating Wendigo, the shadowy Tamanous, the toothless "Raw Gums" creature). In Asia, they tell of "hungry ghosts" or the "starving dead." All around the world, you have flesh-eating witches (Baba Yaga, Cailleach, Guaxa) and consumptive monsters (Jack-in-Irons, rakshasa, the anthropophagi). Greek and Roman mythology certainly had their gluttons — Bacchus, for one, was a consummate eater and drinker, a debauched divinity. (Many Macellarius have artwork depicting Bacchus in a number of situations, actually.)

All of these entities are essentially divine versions of the Macellarius vampires. While some might deny the existence of such beings, it's hard to deny that vampires put a lot of stock in the mystical and legendary. (They are, after all, supernatural creatures themselves.) The Circle of the Crone, in particular, may believe that the Gluttons are driven or even possessed by such divine figures, and the legends could support this. (This mythical connection may even lead the local Acolytes to try to recruit one or more Gluttons to the Circle.)

Historical Accounts

History, while arguably more "accurate" than myth and legend, can still deliver awe and fear. In fact, history

being "true" lends such fear more credence — it's harder to brush off the facts than it is to dismiss a fable.

The Gluttons never show up in any official history as vampires. By and large, they don't show up in any major account at all. They're there, however, for diligent characters to find. It's recommended that a character accumulate 10 successes on a Research roll (see p. 55 of **World of Darkness Rulebook**). If the character devotes enough time to this exercise, he may discover a few first-hand sources buried deep enough in old, out-of-print history books that hint of the Macellarius.

Consider, for example, a brief tale of a knight and his squire traveling home (possibly Germany) from the Crusades. The knight and his squire unexpectedly find a small castle along the way. Tired, starving, half-crazed from exposure, they stop at the castle to see if it's occupied — and it is. Three women, unusually fat for this era, invite them in and immediately begin to pamper these wayward souls. The women bathe them, tell them stories and, most importantly, feed them a dinner fit for three kings. At the end of the dinner, the knight and his squire feel woozy, and pass out. They awaken as the fat women, fangs from ear to ear, descend upon them. The knight manages to escape — probably grabbing a torch off the wall and waving it over them — but, as he flees, he hears the hungry sounds and watches as they tear the squire's midsection apart. As if they were nonchalantly bobbing for apples.

Consider that some of this information (or other news regarding the Gluttons) might also be gleaned from other vampires, especially Invictus Kindred. Characters may learn information about the Macellarius through the appropriate Socialize, Persuasion or even Intimidation rolls. (Bonuses should be granted for strong roleplaying.)

Variables

You may want to use this bloodline, but feel that these Kindred might need some adjustment to fit into your story. What follows are a few ideas on how to tweak these Gluttons:

Alternate Origin: The Macellarius may think their origin is buried in the heart of degenerate Rome, but what if they're wrong? Perhaps their origins are surprisingly local, or not that old. Or maybe they were not vampires among the Camarilla, but were instead servants of the Crone for centuries. Maybe the Macellarius were once *poor*. (Different origins could be uncovered by characters and used against the local Gluttons in an effort to gain power — but that would be a dangerous gambit, indeed.)

Different Weakness: The Macellarius might just be fat because they Embrace plump mortals or invite obese Kindred into their ranks. The Marcellarius might have other weaknesses applicable to them, instead. Their hungers may drive them to have a weakened resolve

Whisper Down the Lane

From: anon74@karabin.org

To: anon22@fraser.edu

Subject: You Owe Me

I did what you said. I had dinner with our "friend." We got it all worked out. He and his First Estate buddies are staying in Old City. They won't go proxy-buying all the townhomes and storefronts down by U. Penn, and we'll still get to keep our boundaries without Claudia getting pissed.

But Jesus – don't send me out there again. How much do you know about these guys? Have you heard the stories? Brand tells me these monsters have been hanging around since Rome? Is that for real?

All I know is, I drove out there – always a shaky proposition, I don't like leaving the city, even if it is only out to Chadds Ford. The place was – interesting. Some vineyard out there – not growing anything, just so many hundred rows of dead vines. I go to the front, and there's a whole host of domestics working this place, and every one of them has that kind of hazy look we've all seen before. They retire me to the parlor, this room filled with animal heads and red velvet and other pretty nonsense, and it doesn't take long before they come in. Three of them, each fatter than the next. One guy and one woman were big, but nothing out of the ordinary. They didn't have much to say. But the other guy – our friend – was fucking hideous. He must've been 450 pounds, and even though he carried it like it was nothing more than hot air, it was still freakish. I wanted to talk turkey, he wanted to have dinner.

Don't have dinner with them. Just avoid it if you can. Seemed well and good, glasses of the red stuff, various snifters of different "flavors," as he called them, and that's fine. I wasn't too hungry, I drank my drink and thought that was it. Bullshit. They didn't just drink the stuff, they practically shoved those glasses down their big flabby throats. They *guzzled* it. And there were seven courses of this, seven long courses of watching these gelatinous bastards burp blood up onto their chins and cravats. And the seventh course

They eat. They eat human flesh. I had heard the stories, but fuck, I've heard a lot of stories about a lot of things. Most of them aren't true. But this? I felt sick just watching them. It was just a leg. A naked human leg – male, by the hair on it – set in front of them on a silver serving dish. They wolfed it down like it was a pork tenderloin.

The sick shit was, they were awfully polite about it. Asking me if I wanted any, offering me little forkfuls, sending for more blood (like I could even drink anymore). But then at one point, I said something off-hand, maybe a little rude about how one of them had a little piece of ligature or whatever on his sleeve. I don't know if it was the face I made or the way I said it, but all three of them got this look. Like I'd just interrupted a pack of hyenas from chewing on a gazelle. Our friend frowned, and told me I was being rude. Then he said, "Consider yourself lucky this isn't *your* leg I'm eating."

Then the mean looks disappeared, and they were all pleasantries and laughs and bloody belches once again. When dinner was over (four hours later, I know I'm immortal, but Christ), we went back to the parlor and did our business. I still feel half-sick from the whole affair, you know?

So, next time we have to work some stuff out with those pricks, you do it. And try not to end up getting hacked to pieces and put in a freezer.

M.

against Wassail. Or perhaps their rarified tastes cause them to only be able to feed off of one “type” of person (decided at the time of character creation) such as priests, the wealthy, the poor, little children.

Variable Discipline: Gustus may only be a legend. Vampires consuming raw meat? Impossible. (If the Discipline is just a legend in your game, it’s probably one that the Gluttons promote themselves to maintain that aura of horror about them.) Instead, they might have Majesty or Nightmare to complement their desires for fear and awe. (It’s not impossible that they might have one of the more aberrant Disciplines, like Protean — after all, the Gluttons consider themselves consummate predators, and those lovely claws might do them well when hunting for food.)

Gustus

The obese vampires of the Macellarius bloodline are masters of epicurean bliss, and it seems only fitting that their warped blood provides them with a mystical outlet for their gourmandizing sensibilities. Simply put, the Macellarius are pigs — ravenous bloodsuckers of bloated flesh and fat. Normal vampire bodies aren’t meant to withstand the gluttonous punishment these creatures put upon themselves, but, with Gustus at their disposal, their digestive capabilities become grossly impressive.

• Pound of Flesh

The Gluttons have gustatory desires unlike other vampires. One of these desires is the unusual hunger for human flesh. Normally, a vampire could stand such cannibal consumption for a time, but their bodies would eventually reject the bloody chunks without having broken them down. This ability allows a Macellarius vampire not only to circumvent that problem — thus allowing him to break down the fleshy gobbets — but also allows him to turn that “food” into Vitae. The meaty bits within are “digested” by acidic blood in the Glutton’s gut, which are then processed into useable Vitae.

Cost: 1 Willpower per pound of flesh consumed

Dice Pool: This power doesn’t require a roll. (However, if the vampire is attacking another in the hopes of biting off flesh, he must first make a successful grapple attempt and then make subsequent bite attack rolls. See p. 157 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** for information biting as an attack.)

Action: Instant

For every four mouthfuls of flesh eaten in this way, the vampire gains a single point of Vitae. Eight mouthfuls constitute a full pound of flesh. In other words, if the vampire consumes eight or fewer mouthfuls of blood, she must spend a single Willpower point to will her body toward the act of unnatural digestion. For every subsequent pound of human meat consumed in this way, she must spend another Willpower point. If she

doesn’t spend the Willpower, she eats the meat but quickly vomits it back up.

Only raw, human meat provides the sustenance of Vitae. If the meat is cooked, it will be regurgitated without any value. The meat must not be dead for more than 24 hours — after this period expires, the meat can no longer be consumed in place of Vitae.

Vampire flesh *can* be consumed, but only by Gluttons with a Blood Potency of 7 or higher. Lupine meat is potent for Gluttons of any Blood Potency level — each mouthful yields a full point of Vitae (so a pound of flesh would grant the vampire eight Vitae). The meat of a mage is no different than the meat of a normal mortal.

This power *may* be used during a hunger frenzy (Wassail), but not during any other type of frenzy.

Turning meat into Vitae is a pleasurable experience for the Gluttons. Some become addicted to the sensation. Every time the vampire eats human meat, he should make a Resolve + Composure roll. A dramatic failure means he becomes addicted to the sensation, and must make further Resolve + Composure rolls whenever drinking blood not to seek out mortal (or vampire) flesh to eat, as well.

•• Gorge

Upon joining the bloodline, the body of a Macellarius vampire swells and bloats with so much dead fat, but this is of little practical use to them. At least, not at first. Once gained, this ability allows the Macellarius to harness that excess flesh for a limited time, storing Vitae in the dark pockets of rotten adipose tissue below his skin. In this way, the Glutton can go above his normal capacity for Vitae for a shortened period of time.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: No roll required.

Action: Reflexive

Once activated, this power allows the Glutton to add his Stamina to his Vitae capacity. For example, if he has a Stamina of 3, his Vitae capacity goes up by 3. Note that this extra potential is not immediately filled with Vitae, however. The Glutton must do that all on his own.

The power lasts for a single scene. Once the scene is over, the extraneous Vitae capacity disappears. If the Macellarius still contains any Vitae beyond his normal maximum, however, he heaves the Vitae back up painfully. Each point regurgitated in this manner causes one point of bashing damage.

••• Befoul

When hunting for victims, many Kindred actively go out into the world and search for them — stalking the mortal pulse through nightclubs, alleys, parking garages and the like. The Macellarius, especially the younger set, do this as well. But some prefer another way.

These Gluttons prefer to sit like plump spiders at the centers of webs, waiting for sustenance to come to them. While of course this applies to the mortal herd that a Macellarius has built over time, they still enjoy the invigorating thrill of the hunt — they just want the prey to come to them. Many Marcellarius lure hapless mortals to their estates, often invited for dinner or called upon to make a sales or repair call. (“Unfortunately, the master of the house is available only after 6 P.M.”) And then, in the tried-and-true tradition of the family, the Macellarius feed their guests (it would be inappropriate to let them go hungry).

With this ability, the Gluttons can place a single drop of Vitae upon the food and poison it. The poison is slow acting and nearly tasteless. It doesn’t kill the victim; it instead acts as a soporific, lulling the mortal into a languid, sluggish state. Once this happens, the vampire can move in, slow and confident, like the plump spider.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Strength + Medicine + Gustus – subject’s Stamina

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The poison has the opposite effect on the victim. He becomes wild and enraged. Whether mortal, Kindred or otherwise, assume that the victim enters an anger frenzy (see pp. 178–179 of *Vampire: The Requiem*).

Failure: The victim gains more successes on the contested roll. The poison does not take effect; the victim remains fully in control of himself.

Success: The victim becomes groggy and disoriented. Each success inflicts a cumulative –1 dice penalty to the victim.

Exceptional Success: As a success. The extra successes are their own reward.

The poison takes effect 10 minutes after consumption. The effects last for one hour per success. Every hour, the victim’s dice penalties decrease by one until no penalty remains and she has returned to her normal state of mind and body.

This poison may be used on vampires, but only by having the vampire consume the blood of the affected mortal. If a Kindred drinks the blood of the victim, she becomes subject to the same effects and dice penalties that affect the mortal. Of course, this means that should the Glutton consume the Vitae of the victim, the Glutton will become poisoned as well. The Macellarius know this. They not only accept this, but often enjoy the sweet indolence and foggy-headedness that comes part and parcel with using this ability.

Note that blood ties do not affect the implementation of power against the Kindred, as the poison must first be processed through the mortal’s body and does not require a second “vampire-specific” roll on the part of the Macellarius.



•••• Disgorge

The belly of a Glutton is a terrible cauldron, a fleshy grotto where Vitae burns and roils. For the most part, the vampires of the Macellarius are civil enough — almost frighteningly so — but when one has truly earned their ire, they can summon the contents of their awful stomachs to discharge upon their enemies. The eruptive spew is an agglomeration of burning blood and rotten stomach lining, and the vomit sears the flesh of all touched.

Cost: 1 Vitae per point of aggravated damage (though the vampire cannot invest more than his maximum Vitae per turn as determined by his Blood Potency)

Dice Roll: No roll required to activate the power. However, unless the victim (or object) is prone or otherwise unaware, the vampire must succeed in the vile attack. Aiming the horrid vomit requires a Dexterity + Athletics roll. Only one success is required on this roll — if the vampire succeeds, the vomit does the full aggravated damage. Extra successes do not grant additional points of damage. An exceptional success, however, reflects an effective aim, causing the victim to be stunned and unable to do anything other than make reflexive actions for the subsequent turn. Failure indicates that the attack misses, whereas a dramatic failure means that the vampire has retched the burning blood onto himself, and suffers all the damage.

The vomit projects for a number of yards equal to the vampire's Strength times two. Thus, if the Glutton's Strength is 2, the discharge spews up to four yards.

The Glutton can use this power to harm or destroy an object. Simply ignore the object's Durability; the aggravated damage destroys the object's Structure points. If all Structure points are overcome, the object is totally destroyed. (For further reference, see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, pp. 136–137).

•••• Puissance of Flesh

Blood and flesh contain power; the Gluttons recognize this. Locked in the fibers of muscle tissue, hidden in the crimson depths of blood, flows the essence of the victim. Those Macellarius who have advanced their digestive capabilities to this level not only understand this, but have learned how to unlock that essence — and appropriate it for themselves. After swallowing a mouthful of the victim's flesh, the Glutton can use the victim's power as if it were her own.

Cost: 2 Vitae

Dice Pool: Unless the victim is prone, the Glutton must first succeed on a successful bite attack (see p. 157 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). If successful, during the subsequent turn (after swallowing the meat), a Dexterity + Empathy + Gustus roll is required.

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The bite is successful — but processing the flesh is not. The Glutton immediately vomits up the gobbet of meat and his own foul humors, suffering a point of lethal damage in the process.

Failure: The Macellarius swallows the meat, but it has no effect.

Success and Exceptional Success: Provided the bite attack was successful, as was the roll to use this level of Gustus, the Glutton may apply and spend his successes in the following ways:

Cost	Result
1 success	Add +1 to any Attribute
1 success	Gain 2 points of Skills possessed by the victim
1 success	Gain 1 Willpower point
1 success	Heal 1 point of bashing damage
1 success	Gain +1 Speed
2 successes	Heal 1 point of lethal damage
2 successes	Gain +1 Size (and the concomitant health level)
3 successes	Heal 1 point of aggravated damage
3 successes	Gain 1 point of a Discipline possessed by a Kindred victim

The Glutton can spend his successes in any of combination of the above parameters. However, he may not “buy” Skills or Disciplines that the bite victim did not herself possess. Moreover, the Glutton cannot increase his own Skills or Disciplines above the victim's own level. (This does not apply to Attributes or other Traits, however.)

Example: Jubal Macellarius successfully bites a hunk of meat from a Gangrel's flesh. Jubal gains five successes on his activation roll. He chooses to spend three of his successes to gain a single point of the Gangrel's Disciplines. The Gangrel possesses Protean 3 and Resilience 2. The Glutton's own Resilience is already at a 2 — but he (obviously) possesses no Protean. His only choice is to gain the first level of Protean, Aspect of the Predator. Jubal has two successes left. He spends one to temporarily acquire two points of Skills the Gangrel possesses. Again, Jubal can choose only from what the Gangrel possesses, and so the Macellarius adds +1 to his Survival score, and +1 to his Brawl. The final point remains; Jubal spends it to recover a single point of the damage he suffered previously in the fight with the Gangrel.

The effects of this power last for one scene. This ability may not be used in conjunction with the first level of Gustus (Pound of Flesh). If used on a vampire in which the Glutton has a blood tie (see p. 162 of **Vampire: The Requiem**), the roll to activate is at +2 dice.

Melissidae

Hush, now you should n't struggle so.

This is for your own good.

A handful of Kindred still exist tonight who, during the late 19th century, participated in the destruction of the Melissidae.

Those who witnessed the pogrom still talk about the Melissidae, even tonight, and the stories grow in the telling. The Melissidae, they say, could vomit swarms of wasps. They say that Melissidae had a sting, imparted with no more than a brush of the lips, which could send you into an ecstasy of pain. They swear that the Melissidae behaved like the “Queen Bees” of ersatz hives that were populated by mortals who had been twisted into near-mindless drones and forced to submit to a hive-mind by a unique power of the blood. The one thing these elders agree on, however, is that the Queen Bees’ blood was sweeter than anything any of them will ever taste again. It tasted like honey.

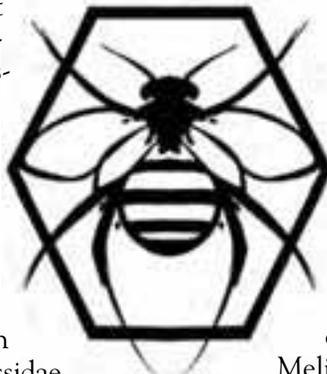
Yes, they still talk about their fallen foes. However, when asked exactly why the Melissidae were destroyed, these elders become somewhat vague. The Queen Bees must have done *something*. After all, Kindred from five clans and many covenants and nations each, entirely independently, pursued the Queen Bees’ destruction. Charges or no charges, rival Kindred enthusiastically pursued the Melissidae, who soon vanished, gone but not forgotten. Now they’re a cautionary tale for the Kindred, a fount of wild tales about insects and drone-people and blood like honey.

The enthusiasm of the Queen Bees’ pursuers proved inadequate, however. The Melissidae were not completely destroyed. The Melissidae still rule their hives, even tonight.

They keep much quieter than they used to, these nights. They have developed ways to hide their hives and ways to mask their mindless servants.

In the back of every Melissid’s undead brain, she feels an itch, a chattering, rustling presence: the beginning of a hive-mind. Hungry, it needs to grow, it needs to control, it needs to surround itself with drones and workers, so that it can find comfort. To be alone in her own head fills a Melissid with a sense of panic.

This panic drives the Melissidae. The Queen Bees don’t just want control, they *need* it. They have no choice. A few Melissidae, repelled by a realization of what they’ve become, try to escape. For those who



have their powers, though, it’s too easy to use them, to give in to temptation. A little push there, a twist here. One thing leads to another, and soon the Kindred finds herself surrounded by slaves. She’s become the slave master.

The Melissidae force their herds to be insects and believe, in the creation of a perfect community formed in imitation of nature, that they are acting in the interest of the common good. At some point, most

Melissidae develop the power to erase individual thought from a mortal’s brain, forcing him to share consciousness with the Queen Bee’s other mortal thralls. The Melissidae believe that mortals must exist like this. The mortals, as drones, occupy their proper place while the vampire occupies hers, and this is harmony. If the kine need to learn to accept this — and they generally do — then the Melissid has a duty to ensure that they take up their rightful place. It’s all for their own good.

People need to love each other. The Queen Bees make them love each other. Workers and drones need authority. The hive is right, the hive is good, the hive is love, the hive is everything.

It’s all a lie, of course. No common good survives in the hive. Drones and workers exist to provide sustenance for the queen. The Melissidae do not imitate nature so much as they mock it, the all-giving, life-loving mother of the hive replaced by a dead, hungry monstrosity.

The Melissid social experiment is an exercise in sociopathy. It’s not about social concern or about the common good or about love. It’s about control. The irony is that the need for control imprisons the Melissidae. *It controls them.*

Parent Clan: Ventrue

Nickname: Queen Bees

Covenant: The Melissidae tend not to agree wholeheartedly with any of the five major covenants, but this doesn’t stop them sometimes finding some common cause. Due to their heritage, however, they usually find it best to keep their bloodline hidden. It’s useful for a Melissid to have allies, and quite a reasonable number of Queen Bees have made at least a show of joining one of the covenants, and not always because they respect the covenants’ philosophies. For some, there’s safety in numbers, and that’s all.

If a Melissid in modern nights wishes to claim allegiance with a covenant, she more likely than not chooses the Invictus, for the simple reason that its strict, stratified social order has at least some commonality with the Melissid vision. Melissidae may maintain hives that look like religious communities, and these sometimes find sympathy with the Lancea Sanctum. A few Queen Bees — those whose hives resemble communes or socialist cells, for example — might take cover inside the Carthian Movement.

Very few Melissidae have joined either the Circle of the Crone or the Ordo Dracul so far. Both covenants have strict ideas about what a vampire should be, and it's very difficult indeed for a Melissid to even pretend to have the commitment to that sort of vampiric vision. Although elders in each of the five major covenants had some part in the bloodline's attempted destruction, the Melissidae who know about the purge don't seem to hold a grudge. On the other hand, many Melissidae don't know about the purge, either because their sires never thought it important enough to tell them, or because some of the Queen Bees found out about only it in the minutes before they were destroyed or forced into torpor.

Appearance: Whatever or whoever Queen Bees may have been in life, in undeath they all have this in common: they are always meticulous. Their obsession with control manifests itself in an attention to clean, fastidious lines. However they may dress, whether in hippy chic, socialist minimalism or the attire of a Republican housewife, it's always perfect and, as Humanity diminishes, this perfection itself becomes excessive, freakish, somehow *wrong*. A Melissid may have too-perfectly coiffed hair, so styled and sprayed that it's immobile, or cut very short. Pants and skirts bear razor-sharp creases, blouses are whiter than white, scarves and ties are knotted just so, shoes are clean, jewelry is tasteful and minimalist. Makeup is flawless, whatever style the Queen Bee affects. After a while, they all look like mannequins.

The sense of unease created by this attention to sartorial detail is compounded by the way the Melissidae move. The more their Humanity erodes, the more they move like insects, their absolute stillness punctuated with brief, twitchy movements — the quick, repeated click of a tongue against the teeth, the crack of knuckles as the hands clench, the cocking of the head to one side, a sudden flutter of eyelashes. Insects surround them. Few Kindred feel at ease to see a single bee or a wasp crawl out of an immobile Melissid's nostril or mouth and fly away.

Haven: The havens of the Melissidae also tend to house their mortal drones and, therefore, tend to be quite sizable, places with enough space to accommodate a dozen or more people comfortably. For example, some Melissidae have



created hives in derelict stately homes, factory units and call centers. The Melissidae are too few to make many generalizations, but, whatever their hives are like, whether cult compounds, remote villages, monasteries or New Age communes, the havens are always clean. Everything occupies its proper place, even in those places where things might not be expected to be. It can seem quite peculiar to see a junkie commune's drug paraphernalia neatly arranged or the accoutrements of an S&M dungeon placed with the precision of military kit laid out for inspection.

Despite the cleanliness and order of these places, inevitably, insects congregate in huge numbers. A wasps' nest hangs under the stairs of a perfect suburban home, but the inhabitants do nothing. A row of beehives sits in the back lawn of the monastery. Ants' mounds surround the sorority house. The bugs are always there. They don't bother the inhabitants, who allow the wasps to settle on hands and the ants to crawl up legs without flinching.

Background: The Melissidae are almost all female. It's not that the bloodlines observe prohibitions against Embracing men. However, the Melissidae are naturally drawn to Embrace women, simply because it feels right to them for a Queen to be female. They are the mothers of their hives.

Other than gender, no other single criterion affects how the Melissidae select childer. The Queen Bees Embrace whosoever they choose, and choose, more often than not, based on nothing more than personal whim.

Melissid childer almost always join the bloodline. Some are forced to do so. Some, by the time their Blood matures, have themselves been so tightly bound (via Vinculums or with conditional uses of Dominate) that they could hardly choose otherwise. Some don't realize that they have an alternative. Most, however, simply metamorphose into full members of the bloodline one night without even realizing.

Queen Bees have likened becoming a full-fledged Melissid to emerging from a chrysalis, like changing from a soft, empty maggot into something colder and hungrier. A new Melissid feels her Blood turn to honey; she feels a clawing need, the second consciousness hatching in her mind. At that point, she's a Queen Bee forever.

It's hard to imagine an "ordinary" Ventrue electing to join the bloodline, and certainly no tales have so far surfaced regarding a vampire approaching the Melissidae with the intention of joining them. Having said that, should a situation arise in which a vampire does ask to join the Melissidae, it's likely that she'd be accepted immediately, no questions asked. A Melissid Avus would assume that the transformation of the Catechumen's blood would take care of any questions of attitude. In most cases, she'd be right.

Character Creation: Melissidae normally prioritize Mental and Social Attributes and Social Skills. Physical Attributes and Skills often fall low among priorities.

Many Queen Bees have at least one dot in Animal Ken, and several, at some point in their unlife, have learned Beekeeping as a Specialty.

Mental Merits are extremely common. Melissidae who still dwell in their sire's hives usually have at least one dot in Herd and Haven. Those Melissidae whose relationships with their sires are good often have a dot in Mentor. Retainers are rare for new Melissidae, as any servants they have probably serve their sires directly.

Bloodline Disciplines: Animalism, Auspex, Dominate, Resilience

Melissid Animalism works differently from the Animalism practiced by most other Ventrue, focusing on the manipulation of insects (see p. 110).

Weakness: The Melissidae suffer the standard Ventrue weakness, a -2 penalty on rolls to avoid gaining derangements after degeneration checks. Among the Melissidae, Obsessive Compulsion is often the first derangement gained. Like all Ventrue, Melissidae find it increasingly harder to avoid falling into madness when their Humanity slips away.

And slip away it does. The hive-mind sees to that, and demands company as the madness takes over. Like a swarming insect, a Melissid feels comfortable only when surrounded by the drones of her hive, or, if she hasn't yet developed the ability to create a hive of her own, the hive of her sire. If separated by 100 yards or more for more than an hour from an individual drone of a hive belonging to her or to her sire, or from another Melissid, a Queen Bee becomes edgy, panicky and powerless.

A Melissid isolated in this way suffers a -1 penalty on rolls to avoid fear frenzy for every hour she has been isolated. (So, after two hours alone, the penalty is -2, and after four-and-a-half hours alone, the penalty is -4, and so on.)

Also, after the first hour, an isolated Melissid becomes distracted by the growing buzz in her mind. Removed from her hive, she feels the itch of control again, and insecurity takes root. Until she comes into the company of at least one drone again, she suffers a cumulative -1 penalty to any mental dice pools.

The Melissidae don't consider their hive-mind to be a weakness. To the Queen Bees, the hive-mind is their identity and their strength.

Organization: Tonight, maybe a dozen or so Queen Bees remain active, mostly in the United Kingdom. The handful of Melissidae in the United States seem to have kept to the East Coast, though rumors of mortals behaving like insects and vampires vomiting wasps have sprung up among the Kindred as far afield as rural Colorado and the San Fernando Valley of California.

Melissidae society, such as it is, boils down to a single principle. A lone Melissid builds a hive of mortal drones, one at a time. She decides at some point to take a child. The Melissid neonate becomes a privileged member of

her sire's hive, and is allowed free rein, though she is expected to act as her sire's agent in the world outside. When the childe has become experienced enough to create her own drones, she is cut loose and ordered to build her own hive elsewhere.

Melissid neonates are not usually obliged to remain with their sires. While most Melissidae, overcome by the mounting panic that accompanies separation from the hive, choose to stay with their queen, some, out of disgust at what they have become or out of hatred for their sire, choose to strike out on their own. If other Kindred find themselves having any contact at all with a Melissid, she's probably a Queen Bee without a hive of her own — whether she has a home with her sire or is truly alone — either because her sire is no more, or because she has found the will to strike out or because she cannot bear to be reminded of her own potential.

Concepts: Abbess, cult leader, dominatrix, faithful wife of a philandering politician, female executive trapped by the glass ceiling, lady of the manor, most popular girl in school, New Age hippie guru, socialist demagogue, sorority leader, the perfect housewife, unrequited lover

History

The Melissidae are the afterbirth of an ambitious, well-intentioned, stillborn social experiment of the Enlightenment. Their history begins with Catherine Dalrymple, who was, in the late 18th century, a notorious figure: a political theorist, a poet, a naturalist, a libertine, an atheist, a feminist, a Sapphist, an adventuress. Born in 1753, Catherine was the daughter of James Robert Dalrymple, who had fought alongside Charles Stuart in the 1745 Jacobite Rebellion. Catherine lived much of her early life on the run. James, disenchanted with the Church and the society that had brought about the war, took pains to give his daughter a classical education and a strong sense of self, one not defined by any faith or nation. Growing into a remarkable woman, Catherine's powerful personality brought her into contact with many of the significant people of her age: Rousseau in his paranoid last years, the Radical Dissenters (who included Richard Price, Joseph Priestly and Mary Wollstonecraft) and Thomas Paine.

Catherine, a keen naturalist, had decided quite early on that the human condition could be alleviated through an imitation of nature. In particular, she was intrigued by bees. A beekeeper like her father before her, Catherine wrote that "of all the Communities of the Natural Kingdom, that of the Honey Bee is surely the most harmonious, most beneficial to the common weal of its Constituents; were Man to begin Imitation of the Bee, the Ills and Injustices of Society would be one day perchance eradicated, a memory."

Breaking with the Radical Dissenters, Catherine returned to Scotland in 1789, where, re-occupying her father's long-deserted home near Kirriemuir, a small town

near Dundee, she attempted to live by her principles. She founded a communal society, intending to work along the structures of the bee hive, with herself as queen. She wrote: "I see myself as a New Melissa, a follower of that old Melissa of Myth; Whereas the First Melissa domesticated the Bees and gave Honey to the World, I shall tame the Soul of Man and give to the World the sweetness of True Peaceful Society."

Some 20 men and women were convinced to join in Catherine's great experiment, which, in honor of the mythological figure, she called the Order of the New Melissa. They agreed to hold all their possessions, and their relationships, in common, a decision which, when it became known to the outside world, shocked many. Priests delivered condemning sermons in kirks across the glens. Several wealthy individuals of the nearby town wrote outraged letters to Parliament.

In the end, the Order of the New Melissa proved a disaster. It lasted six months before, torn apart by simple human nature — jealousy, privacy, selfishness, disaffection at Catherine's leadership — the last of the Order left Catherine alone at the house at Kirriemuir.

The few biographers who have recounted the tale of Catherine Dalrymple concluded, using the evidence of her last writings, that she probably committed suicide some time around February 1790. There is no memorial for her in any cemetery; the historians who care assume that she was buried in an unmarked, unconsecrated grave, as was the way with suicides. She's an odd footnote in a bright, vibrant period of history. Most living people — including a lot of students of Enlightenment history — haven't even heard of her.

Her fame among the dead, however, is still growing.

It so happened that the Order of the New Melissa had attracted the attention of some of the more revolutionary Kindred in Britain. Around the time that Catherine's mortal hive began to fall apart, a Carthian Ventrue named Mary Walton Stoke arrived at Kirriemuir. Impressed with Catherine's force of personality and idealism, Stoke began to influence the members of the Order of the New Melissa in such a way that its swift, acrimonious dissolution became inevitable. This wasn't deliberate — far from it. Stoke's intention was to revitalize the ailing group and use it to create a working community — and a herd — of much greater size. However, Mary Stoke, although in her own way idealistic, had never been a perceptive individual, even when mortal, and, consequently, as a vampire, her understanding of mortals was very poor indeed. They quite simply never seemed to do what she wanted them to, even when under her direct psychic domination. The mortals outwitted her at every turn.

Shortly after the last of them left, Stoke appeared to Catherine, the only mortal whose behavior she had been able to predict, and Embraced her, by this time as much out of spite and frustration as out of admiration

for the woman.

Catherine appeared initially to come to terms with her new condition, and Mary Walton Stoke was able to display her new child in the court of the Lady of London three years later. Shortly afterwards, things began to go wrong. The madness common to all Ventrue began to grip Catherine tightly. She behaved strangely, her obsession with insects overtaking her to the extent that she developed phenomenal influence over swarms of insects. She could be seen at night, surrounded by swarms of wasps.

Catherine committed diablerie. Apparently, one of her first victims was her sire. By 1803, Catherine had been declared the quarry of a blood hunt in London.

Catherine fled to Scotland and to her father's home, and there that she decided to recreate the Order of the New Melissa. This time, she reasoned, she would not fail, for she had the power now to make her workers behave as they should. She could make them believe that she was right. She could make them love her. She forced mortal thralls to behave as the drones she had wanted while living. She wanted to be a Queen Bee so badly, so very badly that, gradually, her will, changing her Blood, made it come true.

It was for their own good. It was better this way.

By the time another vampire met her, some 20 years later, Melissa, as Catherine now styled herself, had changed. She really was, in her own way, the queen of a hive, a herd of mortals whose individual minds had been wiped away, replaced by an implacable, nightmarish hive-mind, with Melissa as queen. She had created childer of her own, and these childer of Melissa, these "Melissidae", had a need, a hungry desire, to be the queens of their own hives. They surrounded themselves with swarms of insects, allowing them to live inside their bodies. The Queen Bees' Vitae tasted like honey. And they grew in number at a frightening rate.

By 1860, Melissid hives had arisen across Britain. There were a few in France and even some in the United States. Somewhere between 30 and 40 Melissidae were active. In 1862, some influential members of the Invictus in London decided that the Melissidae needed to be destroyed. Elders of the Lancea Sanctum followed suit in 1863, and, by 1870, the Princes of nearly every domain in Great Britain, representing all of the major covenants, had declared the Melissidae anathema.

Why? Breaches of the Traditions were claimed, but, in the end, it may have all boiled down to one fact: the Melissidae reminded the venerable monsters of the covenants of what they really were.

The insects, the powers, the hives were — are — really just affectations. Other vampires are just the same. They're all Queen Bees, really: waxy, hungry, dead things who control and rape to get what they need. Some Kindred, even Princes, resort to violence and blood hunts to avoid coming to terms with that truth

about themselves.

When the "last" Melissid was destroyed in Edinburgh in 1881, the Kindred of Scotland believed that they really had ended the line. While the French Melissidae had been entirely wiped out, two had escaped in Britain, both in torpor. A single Melissid survived in the United States (also in torpor, somewhere on the Eastern seaboard).

While these three vampires slept, the stories surrounding the Melissidae grew. They're better known now among the Kindred than they were a hundred years ago.

Few of the Kindred suspected that the Melissidae had survived. Although Melissa herself was never actually accounted for among those destroyed, there were three separate accounts of her end (one of the five Kindred still walking tonight claims that he diablerized her). Each of the isolated domains of Britain thought themselves rid of the Queen Bees. In fact, none of the three vampires thought to be Melissa was in fact she, and so Melissa lay hidden in torpor until 1957, when she was the first of the line to come to herself. The other two survivors followed her, in 1960 and 1965. Melissa's blood appears to have been still potent.

As Melissid numbers grew, Melissa herself became increasingly elusive. The last time any of Melissa's brood — or anyone or anything else — saw her was 15 years ago. She might have been destroyed. She might be in torpor. She might still be out there, as mad and hungry as ever.

The Madonna of the Wasps

There's a friend-of-a-friend story currently going around among the night-people of Scotland, and the story goes like this: someone who knows someone who came across this village somewhere in the glens, around Perthshire or Angus, which was under the control of something terrible, and he was the only one who got out to tell you the story.

The details vary, depending on which version gets told. There's the one about a coterie of nomadic Kindred who found themselves attacked by dozens of mortals, who were acting in concert without exchanging a word, and they carried on, closing in, no matter how many of them got killed, and they had dogs, and when the dogs went for them, some of the animals burst open, and swarms of wasps flew out, and only one of the coterie escaped.

Here's another one: one inexperienced vampire, hearing the other story, curious, found a bastion of anthills in a row on the outskirts of the village. Each anthill was the size of a grown man, and, as the neonate passed them, he found himself surrounded by ants, which seemed to know where he was going, which behaved with an eerie intelligence. And he couldn't go anywhere, and they swarmed over him, and they ate him, and he was conscious the whole time. That one should be taken with a pinch of salt. After all, if he was alone,

who heard the story?

An only slightly more believable version concerns a Lupine whose pack was given an audience with a woman, a vampire or some other kind of revenant, styling herself as a Madonna of the Wasps. Again, only one Lupine got away, after the waxy-faced black-clad figure, a woman with faceted eyes like an insect, turned his packmates against him. But who listens to werewolves?

In fact, sensible Kindred are probably best served by believing none of these stories; why should any vampire want to leave the safety of the city, anyway? Sensible Kindred remain in Edinburgh. Wild stories are just that: stories.

Society and Culture

The Melissidae have no cultural framework to speak of, at least not in the way that some other bloodlines do. The Melissidae are solitary, on the whole. Traditionally, what society the Queen Bees have works like this: the elder Melissidae remain in their hives, surrounded by their mortal drones, who tend to their needs, supply them with Vitae and bring more drones into the hive. These drones are bodyguards, ancillary staff, lovers and food. After a period of time, which could be anything

from a few decades to a century or more, every Melissid comes to the realization that her hive can grow no larger. Some Melissidae are simply unable to admit any more individual drones into the hive, while other Melissidae might not have reached the capacity of their powers but realize that they risk the Masquerade if their communities grow any larger. When this happens, a Melissid chooses to take a childe.

Some Melissidae prefer to leave their hives themselves, one last time, and Embrace the first likely person (which could be the first person they speak to who mentions politics or religion, for example, or the best-looking person they come across). Others send their drones out, perhaps even using their powers to possess one of their servants, and have them abduct a potential candidate. In cases like this, the criteria for the candidate could be specific (a lecturer in politics, who is a woman under 40, not wearing glasses), general (a young woman with red hair) or just in the wrong place at the wrong time (the first woman they meet). Others are targeted, lured in and then imprisoned until the sire chooses either to Embrace the victim, or — if she isn't satisfactory



— suck her dry.

New childer are incarcerated. They're often tortured, or brainwashed or simply left alone, tended to by the drones of the hive, until such time as the childer begin to see their captors' point of view. Then the childer are let out. This could take weeks, or decades.

The majority of childer who haven't been subjected to Vinculums or brainwashed could leave at any time, but, given their trauma, most are so psychologically damaged that they don't want to leave, becoming dependent on their sires, an effect not unlike Stockholm syndrome. By the time the childer have entered into the bloodline's full heritage, this, along the fear of being separate from the hive, keeps all but the very few whose wills have not been completely broken in check.

Caught in a twisted co-dependent relationship with her sire and the silent, blank drones of her sire's hive, a Melissid neonate finds herself used as her sire's chosen agent. Technically, the childe has free rein to do what she wants, but, every so often, her sire expects her to run an errand or perform some kind of task. Given the Ventrue capacity for madness and the elder Queen Bee's self-imposed isolation from society, these errands are often bizarre (see the sidebar below). Disobedience courts the wrath of a mad vampire with completely trustworthy Retainers.

Consequently, one or two Melissidae find themselves on the run, either because they can't go back or because their distaste at what they have to do or their denial of what they are outweighs their fear of being alone. Some simply want to do things their own way.

Sires aren't persistent in pursuing errant or disobedient childer, and rarely stop them from striking out on their own. Sires quite reasonably expect the Blood to do the work of creating a new hive queen. It does. The temptation is always too great. So far, every single rogue Melissid has ended up like her sire: a Queen Bee in a hive full of mortals under her control.

Hives

The Melissidae do uphold the Masquerade (or they do until they've driven themselves too mad to care, at any rate). Although it might appear difficult to hide a group of mortals who have been so twisted, when they behave like insects it's actually surprisingly easy. People don't ask questions. People are isolated, particularly in the cities.

Hives can take on different disguises. They're still hives, but if they look like something familiar, no one notices. No one says anything. People see what they expect to see. They're too polite to pry.

A perfect housewife lives in a suburban house with her perfect, loyal husband, her perfect, virginal daughter and her perfect teenage son. The husband's an accountant, the daughter's a cheerleader, the son's on the swim team and they all get on so very well. And, at night,

Mom can be seen tending the roses in the garden, and her hair is flawless, her clothes are spotlessly clean and her smile is fixed like the Mona Lisa's.

An expensive and discreet dominatrix keeps a dungeon in the middle of town. Her clients think that the silence and submissiveness her receptionist and her silent, masked assistants display is just part of the role they play, part of what you pay for. Every so often, a client doesn't leave. He didn't tell anyone where he went that night, and, after a while, the police just add him to their list of open cases. The domme's other clients notice that she has a new assistant. They don't say anything.

The Marxist collective squatting in the house on the corner of the terrace seems harmless enough. They sometimes go out to protests or sometimes hold socialist meetings, but, on the whole, they're just a bunch of ineffectual student activists. They'll grow out of it. A new one joins them every month or so. No one sees the leader, but they know he's there.

The cult only has a few members, and it's not like they're stockpiling guns or stealing babies, so why bother them? It's a free country. They're odd, with their fixed smiles and their strange way of talking, and the way they always defer to the woman who leads them, but lots of religious types are like that. If the way they stare at you freaks you out, do what everyone else does — leave them alone.

The sorority is exclusive. It only lets the right people in. They don't talk about the hazings, but then that's the way with sororities. The president and her clique are beautiful, and they're stylish, and everyone lets them run the show, because it just seems right for them to do so. No one questions it.



YOUR SIRE WANTS . . .

Melissid sires often ask their more active childer to do things that seem frankly bizarre. This isn't to say that they're not without a purpose, just that the sire hasn't told them what the purpose of these actions might be. This could be because the sire doesn't consider the childe trustworthy enough to be party to her plans, but it might just as easily be because she simply hasn't thought to explain. For example, a sire might ask her childe to:

Vandalize all the phone booths along one main street in the nearby area.

Obtain three fresh human fingers.

Steal a jar of honey from the larder of a specific individual.

Spray-paint a full description of a local priest's misdemeanors in the sanctuary of the cathedral.

Catch half a dozen stray cats, and bring them to the hive.

Extract the canine teeth from every corpse in a (specified) local mortuary.



Out of Control

A Melissid has the power to make people do what she wants. Whether she wants the power or not. The ability to change people's minds, and all she has to do is use it, just a little. A little push there. A twist here.

It's a temptation, and an easy one to give in to.

As her Humanity withers like a moth on a light bulb, she starts with these small violations, and works up to larger ones. And, eventually, she reaches the point where she doesn't even blink at dehumanizing people — even people she once knew or loved — to the extent that they feel like insects. And there's still a lot farther to fall.

It might begin with dressing them up; like a child with dolls, she starts to experiment with the way they look. Then she makes them do things they wouldn't normally do. Maybe — just for the experience — she possesses one, watching through his eyes as he goes out and burgles a house, or starts a fight in a bar, or kills a stranger or kills a relative.

Maybe she makes her drones do things to each other — sexual or violent acts, or torture or she makes them act out Greek tragedies with real sex and violence, for her entertainment. Perhaps they're made to form bloody or obscene *tableaux vivants* in her living room. Maybe she starts seeing what happens if she gathers bees or wasps to make a hive inside her slaves' bodies.

She's in control, in total control, and there's the temptation, always the temptation, to go a bit farther each time. She begins to cease to pretend that what she does is for the good of her workers. They become toys to her. And if she breaks a few, she can, she thinks, always find some more.

When a Queen Bee degenerates this far, it's hard for her to uphold the Masquerade — and the likelihood is that she doesn't even care anymore.

The Melissidae are a double perversion: what works for wasps and bees, what is a natural miracle in the insect world is a twisted evil in the world of people. Melissa's tragedy was that she never understood that, even when alive. To have a vampire, a dead thing that should never exist, at its center is a thing that makes even some Kindred elders quail.

The intentions of many Melissidae are initially good, but their condition makes it impossible to avoid perversion. Their way is paved directly to Hell.

You Know This Story

"Beehive hairstyles. From the '60s. The big bouffant, backcombed and hairsprayed until it stood up in a shining tower of hair. You know why they called it a beehive?

"Thing about beehive hairstyles, was that you

couldn't wash them. You had to sleep sitting up, and you had to keep them sprayed, so the hair was this rock-solid edifice.

"This is a true story. Back in the '60s a friend of your granddad knew a girl who had one of these hairdos, and she hadn't washed it for well over a year.

"So, anyway, the man sees this young woman at the shop where she's working, and she's ringing up whatever he bought on the till, and suddenly the man sees a little trickle of blood come from the girl's hairline and roll down her temple. He asks the girl if she's all right, and she says, in this half-asleep voice, that she's fine.

"And he says, you're bleeding, and she says, no, I'm not. And she puts her hand up to her head, and then your granddad's friend watches as a wasp, or a bee or a hornet, maybe, flies out of her beehive hair, and then another one, and another one. And the guy realizes that she doesn't feel anything. She's just mechanically carrying on doing what she was doing all along.

"The man panics and runs. He finds out a couple days later that she collapsed and died a few hours after he ran from the shop.

"It turns out that somehow, somewhere, some kind of insect had laid its eggs in her hair, and when the maggots hatched, they burrowed into her head and into her brain and made their nest there, just eating away at the top of her head until they were ready to metamorphose and fly away.

"You might have heard this story with spiders or flies. But it was really bees, or possibly wasps. And when the story got out, that's when they started calling that kind of hairstyle a beehive. But it was that man your granddad knew, years back, who saw it.

"True story."

Disciplines

The Melissidae don't have a signature Discipline, but they do use the common powers they have in uncommon ways. For example, while the Melissidae make much use of Animalism, they use it in a different way than a Gangrel or non-bloodline Ventrue. As well, they have developed a large number of unique Devotions.

Melissid Animalism

Unlike most other Kindred, the Melissidae are adept at affecting insects, specifically swarming insects, such as ants, termites, wasps, hornets and bees — the Melissidae gain a +2 bonus to affect insects instead of the standard -3 penalty as described on pp. 116–118 of **Vampire: The Requiem**. The Melissidae are, conversely, less able to affect other kinds of animals, suffering a -1 penalty for uses of Animalism that affect creatures other than insects. Swarms of insects controlled by a Melissid count as a single creature for the purposes of Animalism.

Although the standard powers gained with Animalism •, •• and •••• normally require eye contact with the animal subject, it's impossible to make eye contact with a swarm of several hundred insects. Insects don't really use sight the way that higher animals do.

There's no standard way in which Melissidae make contact with insects, but all Melissidae manage. All Melissidae who have developed Animalism • have the ability to call a single insect from a swarm or hive to them, and it's through this single insect that the Melissid will communicate with the swarm of which the insect is a part.

How this communication happens differs from Queen Bee to Queen Bee. One Melissid might simply allow the insect to settle on her body, on her face or hand, communicating with the creature through her skin. Another Melissid might open her mouth and allow the insect to fly or crawl inside, then keep it alive in her closed mouth for the duration of the power's use. Another Melissid might allow an insect to settle on her eyeball, holding the insect in her eyelashes until such time as the power's duration ends, at which time she frees the insect or kills it.

Unlike other Ventrue, the Melissidae don't need to maintain concentration when using Subsume the Lesser Spirit (Animalism ••••). When connected with an insect swarm, the Queen Bee becomes one of the swarm, and the swarm becomes an extension of her own body.

Ventrue who join the bloodline find their Blood warped to produce the Melissidae's effects in this manner.

Swarm Communion

(Animalism ••••, Dominate •••)

The nascent hive-mind inside every Melissid's head is insistent. The hive-mind demands to grow. Melissidae who master Animalism can intuitively extend the hive-mind to a group of mortals or Kindred, creating a "Swarm Communion." Confused, the victims find themselves sharing their perception, and they become vulnerable to the Queen Bees' other powers.

Successful creation of the Swarm Communion disorients its victims and allows a Melissid to use psychic Disciplines (Dominate, Majesty, Auspex, Nightmare) as if they affected a single individual.

Cost: 1 Vitae, 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Presence + Manipulation + Animalism versus the highest Composure + Blood Potency in the target group

Action: Contested

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Melissid's perceptions are flooded with fragments of thought, memory and sensory input (inflicting a -1 penalty to all dice pools) for the rest of the scene.

Failure: Nothing happens. The character doesn't realize this immediately, but may try again next turn.

Success: The target group are all connected by a rudimentary hive-mind. They're disoriented and giddy, suffering -1 to all non-resistance dice pools for the rest of the scene, and all psychic Discipline powers used on them work as if on one individual, using the lowest available trait or dice pool for resistance if one is applicable.

Exceptional Success: The target group are so under the sway of the hive-mind that its members may not spend any Willpower for the rest of the scene.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
—	Character attempts to affect two victims.
-1	Character attempts to affect three to five people.
-3	Character attempts to affect six to 10 people.
-5	Character attempts to affect 11 to 20 people.



SWARMS

Individual insects are too small to have statistical scores, while individual stings or bites normally cause no more than irritation. In the case of entire swarms of bees and wasps, however, sheer numbers make up for the minor individual damage each insect inflicts.

A swarm of angry wasps or bees inflicts one point of bashing damage per turn to anyone caught within the swarm. (If the victim is badly allergic, the damage may be counted as lethal.) A victim whose body is mostly covered by clothing (over half) takes one point every two turns. Someone wearing beekeeper's gear can escape unharmed, but the insects can find their way inside anything less complete than that. Each point of damage represents one to two dozen stings.

In most cases, a swarm's purpose is only to defend the nest. Wasps won't typically follow an intruder more than 100 yards from where they were originally agitated, making them easy to escape. An experienced survivalist will simply run flat out as soon as she realizes she's roused the hive. Wasps or bees under the influence of a Melissid vampire, however, can be as persistent as the Kindred wills them to be. So long as the vampire directs a swarm under her control to attack or follow, they do so.

Someone unfortunate enough to be swarmed by bees makes an extended Dexterity + Survival roll to sweep the insects off. Once she reaches five successes, she is free of bees. Until then, she suffers damage each turn (or every other turn, depending on how much of her body is protected by clothing) as if engulfed in the swarm. Depending on the number of bees, the extended roll may require more or fewer total successes.

Of course, the Melissid may simply redirect her swarm to continue plaguing her victim. In this

case, the extended roll becomes an extended and contested roll. The Melissid's player rolls Presence + Animal Ken; the victim's player rolls Dexterity + Survival. If the Melissid achieves five successes first, the insects torment her victim for as long as she wishes or the duration of the power she's using. If the victim achieves five successes first, he manages to swat the insects away enough to render them ineffectual for the duration of the scene. If the Melissid invokes a swarm-controlling power again, however, the extended and contested action begins anew.

A swarm under the command of a vampire can be an eerie thing to see, as hundreds of tiny bodies act in perfect concert.



Devotions

The Melissidae have developed a number of Devotions unique to their bloodline. Although based on common Disciplines, none of these powers can be learned by outsiders. Most of these Devotions depend on the unusual nature of the Queen Bees' Blood, and attempts by vampires outside the bloodline to learn these powers have failed.

The ubiquity of these powers among the Melissidae has made the Devotions easy to learn within the family. As a result, most Melissid Devotions cost fewer experience points than they otherwise would. In fact, all of these Devotions (with the exception of Body Colony and Mock Mind) don't even need to be taught. They just come to a Melissid whose powers are ripe (and who has spent the requisite number of experience points), a gift of the Blood. Melissidae often find that they possess these powers for the first time without even realizing. The idea comes unbidden, as the hive-mind suddenly manifesting a new extension of its will.

In game terms, this means that once the experience points have been spent, the Melissid character can take the power. However, its first use should be roleplayed, as the Melissid realizes, not always with delight, what she can do. The Melissid's player obviously spends the experience points, but the use of the power for the first time may elicit shock, horror or overconfidence in the character.

Royal Jelly

Dominate •, Resilience •

Melissid Vitae tastes like honey. Most Queen Bees learn early on to take advantage of this fact, manipulating their Vitae so that the sweetness is unbearable and doubly addictive.

Cost: None

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Survival + Dominate – subject's Resolve

Action: Reflexive

A Melissid can activate this power any time someone takes a drink of her Vitae. Success on the activation roll

causes her blood to become powerfully addictive, causing the drinker to suffer a –3 penalty on rolls to avoid blood addiction, cumulative with any other penalties already in effect. This penalty applies only to the character's own Vitae, and the power needs to be re-rolled for each point of Vitae consumed, even if taken by the same vampire.

Exceptional success makes the Melissid's blood so potent that not only is it addictive but that a single draught counts as two drinks for the purposes of creating a Vinculum. Dramatic failure makes the Vitae taste foul, like the smell of burning insects, and excuses the drinker from having to make an addiction roll at all. This Vitae may be used as normal — it simply tastes foul.

Learning this power costs five experience points.

Small Witness

(Animalism •, Auspex ••)

Although Melissidae learn to control swarms and hives, single insects still have potential use. Swallowing a single swarming insect, a Queen Bee imbues it with her Vitae, creating a mystical connection. She vomits the insect up and, for a short time, shares its perceptions.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Animal Ken + Animalism

Action: Instant

The Melissid swallows a single flying insect, such as a bee or wasp, invests a point of Vitae in the creature and disgorges it. Thereafter, the Melissid can direct the insect's flight path and see what it sees for a scene, at the end of which the creature dies. While controlling the insect, the Melissid may act normally, though her control can temporarily lapse if she takes another action, until such time as she chooses to concentrate on controlling the insect.

Dramatic failure causes the insect to die in the Melissid's stomach, causing her to vomit it up, along with a second point of Vitae. Exceptional success allows the Melissid to hear, as well as see, through the insect.

This power costs six experience points to learn.

Sting

(Dominate ••, Animalism ••)

With a brush of her lips, or a kiss or a lick, a Queen Bee stings her victim, causing him to experience a brief epiphany of pain so intense he's unable to do anything other than writhe and gasp.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Wits + Brawl + Dominate versus victim's Resolve + Blood Potency

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive.

To activate this power, a Melissid must first be in a position in which she can touch her victim with her

mouth. (If the victim doesn't want to be touched, this may require a roll — see "Touching an Opponent" on p. 157 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.)

Successful activation of the power causes the victim to be unable to take any action, even to speak or scream, for a number of rounds equal to the number of successes the Queen Bee gathers.

This power costs 18 experience points to learn.

Body Colony

(Animalism ●●●, Dominate ●●●)

The urban legend about the beehive inside someone's hair has a grain of truth. One source is the Melissid ability to cause a swarm of insects to grow inside an unwitting victim's body.

The Kindred implants a queen within the victim — inside his ear, in a hairstyle, in the stomach or the chest cavity, or in some other orifice, and there, the insect lays its eggs. Larvae hatch and feed on the victim, protected from physical damage by this power's magic, their presence hidden from the victim with sophisticated hypnotic barriers. The larvae stay there for weeks, until such time as they metamorphose into adult insects and erupt from the victim's body.

The result is shock and fear for those around, massive injury to the victim (if mortal) and a swarm of insects, ripe for control by the Melissid.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Presence + Animal Ken + Animalism versus the victim's Composure + Blood Potency

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive.

Failure on the activation roll simply results in the queen dying: the victim scratches in the right spot to kill the insect, vomits it up, passes it in feces, washes it off, etc.

Success indicates that the victim suffers one point of lethal damage per day — without feeling any pain — until all he has no Health points remaining. At this point, the insects erupt from his body. Note that a normal mortal will heal a single Health point of lethal damage every other day. This remains true even while he's afflicted by the Body Colony. Effectively, this just means it takes a little bit longer for the internal hive to do its grisly work.

Medical attention will reverse the effects of this power, as any competent doctor will certainly notice the nest of insects festering in his patient's body with suitable scrutiny.

Storytellers, this is some cruel, nasty stuff, so mind the degeneration checks for characters of suitably high Humanity who use this power.

This power costs 18 experience points to learn.

Honeycomb Heart

(Animalism ●●●, Resilience ●●)

The stories about Melissidae vomiting insect swarms

are only partly true. In fact, a Melissid can learn how to use her useless lungs and digestive apparatus as a beehive or a wasps' nest. Under the auspices of this Devotion, a swarm lives inside her. She can coax the swarm out at any time through her mouth and nose.

Cost: 2 Vitae

Dice Pool: Strength + Survival + Animalism

Action: Instant

Success on this power's activation roll allows the Melissid to call into herself a swarm of flying insects, usually wasps or bees. The insects nest in the Melissid as long as she wishes them to do so, and can be made to fly out of her body at any time. When released, they can be controlled as usual, using Animalism. The insects, once released, can be recalled if their host wishes, if called back within a scene. Otherwise, the Melissid must activate the Devotion again.

A Melissid with a swarm inside her cannot counterfeit life using Vitae and cannot eat food, as long as the insects remain within her body. When she dismisses the insects, the Melissid regains these abilities.

This power costs 12 experience points to learn.

Hive Induction

(Animalism ●●●●●, Dominate ●●●●)

The Melissidae are known among the Kindred for the ability to imbue Conditioned thralls with their own hive-mind. Like insects, Melissid slaves know what the others know, think what the others think and work as more than a simple team. This power's effects go far beyond simple Conditioning, the subjects of the power becoming unable to function as individual human beings. Individuals' personalities submit to a group-mind under the control of their Kindred queen.

Cost: 5 Vitae and 3 Willpower to create the initial "hive-mind" of three members; 2 Vitae and 1 Willpower for each subsequent member introduced to the hive-mind.

Dice Pool: Presence + Intimidation + Dominate versus Composure

Action: Contested and extended (requires five successes, each roll representing one complete night of effort on the part of the Melissid using the power).

The character must confine in a small area (a locked room, for example) three thralls under the effects of Conditioning. (The character needs already to have accumulated nine successes on Conditioning each victim.) Next, the character must spend what could be several nights imbuing her victims with the hive's group consciousness, through a process of dehumanizing orientation. This process strips away any vestiges of individual personality. The Melissid's player makes one roll for each night of concentrated effort (no going

to Elysium and coming back later that night to Dominate the thralls), opposed by the highest Composure of the group. No bonuses for the level of Conditioning already achieved apply to this roll. When the Melissid's player accumulates five successes, the creation of the hive-mind is complete, and the victims, their memories and individual personalities more or less erased by the process, share one mind, becoming drones under their Melissid mistress's direction.

Further members of the hive-mind must also be Conditioned (again, the Melissid's player having gathered nine successes or more), and must be confined within close proximity of current members of the hive-mind until, overwhelmed by this Devotion's use and behavioral cues, the new member loses his own individuality to the hive.

Drones, when in peril, can raise a telepathic alarm signal. Any other drones, their Melissid sire or any other Melissidae associated with the hive (such as childer of the Melissid queen) can perceive the alarm. If such an alarm is made during the day, when the hive-queen sleeps, the queen's player may roll Humanity to awaken (see **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 184).

The Melissid, as queen of the hive, has the power to contact any member of the hive telepathically and can use Possession on any member of the hive-mind without making eye contact (and with the benefit of the Conditioning bonus), as long as one member of the hive is within the Melissid's line of sight. It is often necessary

to do this quite frequently, if the character's hive is to escape discovery, since hive members are unable to operate fully in human society.

Social and Mental Skills for hive drones are reduced to zero; Social and Mental attributes are reduced to 1.

Any mortal or Kindred can see that a drone is plainly, terribly wrong with a successful Wits + Empathy roll. When seen working in concert, the silent co-operation of members of the hive disturbs and offends.

It is possible to break the hive-mind's hold. If isolated by more than a mile from the rest of the hive for more than one week, the individual's telepathic link fades. At this point, the victim can attempt to shake off his Conditioning (see **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 128). A former hive member would, in all likelihood, suffer from severe psychiatric trauma, and is unlikely to be able to function again in society, since much of his memory has vanished or been subsumed. What memories and shreds of personality remain conflict with fragments of repressed memories and thoughts from the other members of the hive.

To turn a mortal into a mindless drone is monstrous: Kindred with Humanity 3 or above will be required to make degeneration checks every time they use this power.

A Melissid can maintain a hive with a number of drones equal to the square of her Blood Potency, plus 1. For example, a Queen Bee with Blood Potency 2



can maintain a hive with five drones. If she had Blood Potency 5, she could maintain a hive of 26 drones. Hives of above five or six members become very difficult to hide.

Only mortals and ghouls are subject to Hive Induction. This Devotion will not work on other Kindred at all.

This power costs 21 experience points.



HONEY TRAP

A young man goes on a date. He takes the girl home, and is invited in for coffee. He thinks he's going to score. They go inside a quiet house. The girl says that no one else is in, and they talk for a while. They make out.

A low, honey-sweet voice says a word. The girl ceases to talk in mid-sentence, stiffens. Her face goes blank. Other blank-faced people come into the room, grab him roughly. They carry the young man down to the basement, chain him up. The girl helps them. She pays no attention to his screams.

After a while, after he's given up screaming, a slight, pale, waxy figure appears and begins her work. She pays no attention to his protests. His training begins.

A few nights later, another drone joins the hive. It's not the first time it's happened like that.



Mock Mind

(Auspex ●●●●, Dominate ●●●)

Since the Melissadae's re-awakening, they have taken care to hide themselves, and their hives. Some Melissidae have learned how to create a false "mask" personality, which they can bestow upon their diligent drones.

Cost: 2 Vitae

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Empathy + Dominate

Action: Instant

Successful activation of this power enables the Melissid to imbue a drone with an entirely fake but wholly convincing personality, constructed from lingering fragments of identity subsumed by the hive-mind.

Dramatic failure causes the personality created to take hold of the drone so strongly that, on the moment of its first activation, the personality becomes the drone's real personality. If this happens, the drone, believing himself always to have been this new person, won't actually know what's happened to him and cannot be returned to the hive-mind. A drone to whom this happens can be very dangerous. He might realize that huge chunks of his history are missing and begin to investigate. More likely, he suffers a psychotic episode and becomes an immediate and significant liability.

This false personality can, once installed, be activated or de-activated with a telepathic cue from the drone's queen or from another Melissid with this power attached to the hive (such as one of the queen's childer). When activated, the drone's Social and Mental Attributes and Skills return to the levels they held before his induction into the hive-mind.

The mask personality fools mortals, but has no aura; attempts at telepathic scanning using Auspex or similar powers find that beneath the surface, there is literally nothing.

PLAYERS

I AM CURSED TO WALK IN A WORLD OF DARKNESS
UNTIL I FIND THE ONE WOMAN WHOSE LOVE SHALL SET ME FREE.

Since the publication of Polidori's *The Vampyre*, mass media has created their own images of the undead. Some Kindred find these glamorized, romantic reflections of themselves insulting; others find them funny, though their laughter often has a hollowness or bitter edge. Few books and fewer movies or TV shows capture the ugliness running through the Danse Macabre.

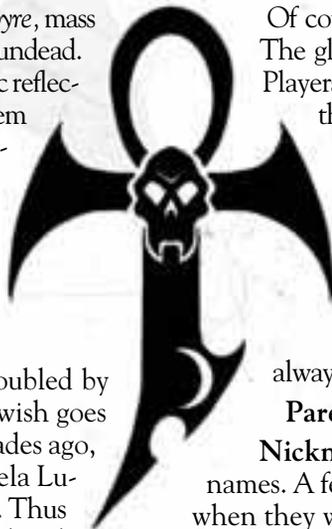
A few Kindred, however, love these images. They wish they were the vampires they see in the movies: beautiful and powerful, stylish and deadly — and untroubled by a ravaging Beast. For some Kindred, this wish goes all the way back to their mortal days. Decades ago, when “sexy movie vampire” still meant Bela Lugosi, at least one foolish mortal got his wish. Thus began the Players, one of the most mocked and scorned bloodlines in the World of Darkness.

The Players yearn to stalk through the night as dark gods of lust and blood like the Daeva, whom the Players see as closest to their movie-vampire ideal. Unfortunately, the Players are Mekhet. They're good at hiding, eavesdropping and running away. Well, whoop-de-do.

Still, the Players are *very good* at hiding — from other Kindred, the kine and especially themselves. Like movie stars, rock gods, sports stars and supermodels, they create magnified images of what they would like to be, or what other people would like them to be. Who sees the real person behind the glitz? Who even wants to, really?

Through sheer desire for the superstar glamour they saw embodied by the Daeva, the early Players wrought a change in their blood. They can learn the supernatural allure of Majesty. This Discipline, and the talent for Obfuscate that comes from their Mekhet heritage, lets the Players pose as the charismatic creatures they long to be. Dracula, Lestat, the Lost Boys, Angel — and them!

The bloodline quickly spread beyond its original obsession. The glamour the Players see in movie vampires is not far from the glamour of celebrity entertainers. They, too, attract fawning mortals and can get away with nearly anything. Players use images of celebrity to draw in mortal prey. The Players want more than blood. They want *fame*. Oh, how they want it — the power to step into a room and become the instant center of attention. The power to stand on a stage, and have the audience love them! Even if the stage is just a table at a nightclub, and the audience a few star-struck college students.



Of course, it doesn't work out the way they want. The glamour always fails. Kindred see through the Players' poses most easily, but even the most enthralled and bamboozled mortal eventually sees through the illusions. The demon queen the mortals loved more than life is just a bimbo on a perpetual liquid diet. The brooding, tormented anti-hero is just a self-centered whiner. The star athlete never played sports, and the supermodel never trod the runway. The Players don't give up, though. There's always another mortal to enthrall.

Parent Clan: Mekhet

Nickname: Wannabes, Posers and less printable names. A few Players call themselves the Lonely Ones when they want to exploit vampire-lifestyle groupies.

Covenant: So far, most Players are unaligned. Connections through sires and broodmates help a great deal in joining any covenant, and the Players are too new to enjoy the benefits of undead nepotism. The lineage began among Mekhet with little knowledge of Kindred society, and many Players still get more ideas about vampirism from movies than from other undead.

The Wannabes who learn about Kindred society often find the Carthians the most accessible, due to the covenant's strong ties to the mortal world and contemporary culture. On the other hand, the pomp and grandeur of the Invictus appeals to the Players' sense of drama: beyond a doubt, the Invictus seem like the glitterati among the Kindred. The Acolytes, Sanctified and Dragons are too arcane to appeal much to Players, and leaders of these covenants often despise the Wannabes for their obsession with image and the cutting edge of pop culture.

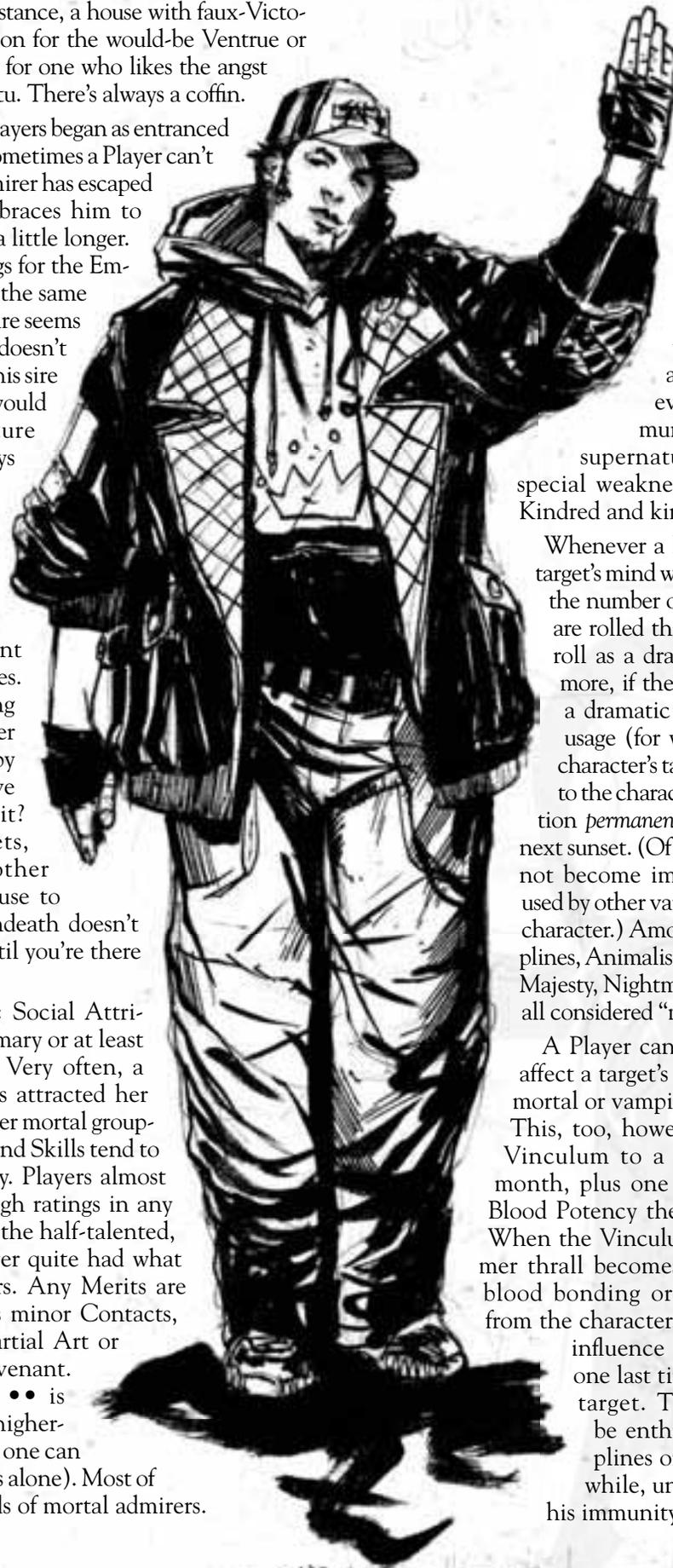
Appearance: Wannabes come in every race. Male and female Players are equally common. Almost all are young in mortal terms, however, and at least moderately attractive. Street-chic fashions (often a few years out of date) such as velvet shirts or tight vinyl miniskirts and bustiers are common, while some Players prefer meticulously ripped T-shirts and jeans. If it was in one of last year's mega-blockbuster movies, though, Players will wear it. Wannabes are especially recognizable by their gorgeous, immaculately gelled and blow-dried hair.

Haven: Players often dwell in lofts or condos with the décor dutifully copied from fashionable magazines or TV shows. Some Wannabes imitate the styles of other

vampires, though: for instance, a house with faux-Victorian gingerbread nailed on for the would-be Ventrue or a derelict church's crypt for one who likes the angst potential of the Nosferatu. There's always a coffin.

Background: Many Players began as entranced groupies of their sires. Sometimes a Player can't accept that a mortal admirer has escaped her power, and so Embraces him to keep the illusion going a little longer. Sometimes a mortal begs for the Embrace because he wants the same glamour and power his sire seems to possess — the mortal doesn't realize it's all a fake and his sire is the last person who would set him straight. Future Wannabes are not always ensnared by Disciplines or Vinculums, either. They may simply want to be cool, sexy vampires, or they might see how the Player affects other mortals and want that power for themselves. The prospect of staying young and pretty forever is a powerful lure all by itself. So what if you have to drink blood to do it? Compared to the diets, plastic surgery and other stratagems celebrities use to prolong their looks, undeath doesn't look that strange — until you're there and it's too late.

Character Creation: Social Attributes and Skills are primary or at least secondary for Players. Very often, a Player's charm or looks attracted her sire to her out of the other mortal groupies. Mental Attributes and Skills tend to be tertiary or secondary. Players almost never start out with high ratings in any Skill: in life, they were the half-talented, the also-rans, who never quite had what it took to become stars. Any Merits are also low-rated, such as minor Contacts, the rudiments of a Martial Art or minimal Status in a covenant. Striking Appearance •• is possible, but not the higher-rated version (at which one can become famous on looks alone). Most of all, Players gather Herds of mortal admirers.



Bloodline Disciplines: Auspex, Celerity, Majesty, Obfuscate

Weakness: Like all Mekhet, the Players take an extra point of aggravated damage from sunlight or fire. Players also suffer a more peculiar and frustrating weakness: a Wannabe's victim eventually becomes immune to the Wannabe's supernatural influence. This special weakness applies equally to Kindred and kine targets.

Whenever a Player tries to affect a target's mind with a Discipline, count the number of 1's rolled. If more 1's are rolled than successes, treat the roll as a dramatic failure. What's more, if the character ever suffers a dramatic failure for Discipline usage (for whatever reason), the character's target becomes immune to the character's mental manipulation *permanently*, not just until the next sunset. (Of course, the target does not become immune to Disciplines used by other vampires — just that one character.) Among the standard Disciplines, Animalism, Auspex, Dominate, Majesty, Nightmare and Obfuscate are all considered "mind-affecting."

A Player can regain the power to affect a target's mind by placing that mortal or vampire under a Vinculum. This, too, however, is temporary. A Vinculum to a Wannabe lasts one month, plus one month per point of Blood Potency the character possesses. When the Vinculum wears off, the former thrall becomes immune to further blood bonding or mental Disciplines from the character. A Player can regain influence over a mortal target one last time by Embracing the target. Then the childe can be enthralled through Disciplines or Vitae again — for a while, until the childe regains his immunity once more.

Organization: The Players are too new to have evolved any formal ranks, titles or institutions of their own. If a city hosts several Wannabes, they might gather in some trendy location to preen, try out cool taglines on each other and engage in competitive flirting. Players often try to steal away each other's mortal admirers — possibly to feed on them, but sometimes just to show who's coolest. Wannabes often brag about the important Kindred they know: "As I was saying to the *Ventrue Primogen* last week . . ." Stories about brooding contests are slanders.

Instead of creating a culture of their own, Players immerse themselves in mortal institutions and subcultures in which they can indulge their lust for the trappings of fame. Trendy bars, nightclubs and other nocturnal entertainments are their favored haunts, as well as parties held by and for the beautiful, rich and at least semi-famous. The intrinsic limitations of undeath keep Players from pursuing real fame, but some of them find roles in the lower ranks of the entertainment industry. What does it matter if you tell jokes poorly, miss notes or mumble your lines? You can *make* the audience applaud!

The lineage began in Los Angeles, the glittering, mad heart of media illusion. Players remain most numerous in southern California. In recent decades, however, they have appeared in other cities with strong media industries such as New York, Vancouver and London, with rumors of Wannabes as far away as Hong Kong and New Zealand. Now they are spreading out even farther. A Player could take up residence in any city in the Western world, and maybe beyond.

Concepts: Bartender with a screenplay at Universal, body double for J. Lo's foot, celebrity's bodyguard, child star who grew up, failed actor, last year's boy band member, movie geek, over-the-hill model, professional Dracula impersonator, sports non-star, stalker, third-rate stand-up comic

HISTORY

The Players don't have much history of their own. They've been around at least 60 years, and maybe 80 — but no one cares much how the bloodline began, not even them. Wannabes have not been involved in any great events of Kindred history. The Players repeat stories of broodmates who appeared in big-budget movies or who modeled once for Christian Dior. Most of all, Players tell stories about themselves: this one brags about her *fabulous* night with Brad Pitt, that one boasts how Robin Williams wanted him as his opening act. Some of the stories might even be true.

No one doubts the Players began in Hollywood. Their history is a spinoff of Tinseltown's. When Hollywood began, the new moving pictures didn't have stars. To the surprise of the studio entrepreneurs, audiences wanted names for their favorite actors. They wouldn't settle for

"the Biograph Boy" or "the Vitagraph Girl." In a few years, movie actors went from anonymous hirelings to America's new royalty. Millions idolized them and wanted to become them.

The studios quickly transformed the stars' real identities into simplified, mythic icons. A lovely young actress named Olive Thomas was dubbed "the Ideal American Girl." At 20, she naturally married another star, Jack Pickford, "the Ideal American Boy." The studios gave Theodosia Goodman, a tailor's daughter from Ohio, a new life story along with a new name: she became Theda Bara, a supposed French-Arabic temptress as much of a femme fatale as the sex queens she played. Thousands of would-be actors flocked to Hollywood in hopes of joining their idols on the silver screen. Hadn't the comic actor Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle been a mere plumber when Mack Sennett discovered him? Anyone might become a star!

The stars began living like royalty, too, spending their new fortunes on fine clothes, jewels, cars, mansions and parties on an epic scale. In 1920, Olive Thomas' suicide introduced the Hollywood scandal, complete with drugs and rumors of adultery. In 1921, Fatty Arbuckle was accused of raping and killing a starlet at a drunken revel. Other stars were exposed as heroin addicts. The bluenoses howled at Hollywood's debauchery, but, to many fans, the sex, booze and drugs were just part of the grand, glorious illusion.

Vampires didn't take long to invade the cinema. *The Secrets of House No. 5*, perhaps the earliest vampire movie, was made in Britain in 1912. The first full-length vampire movie, *London After Midnight*, came in 1927. In 1931, Universal Studios released its version of *Dracula*: Bela Lugosi's portrayal of the infamous count set female viewers shrieking and swooning, and sealed the image of the sinister yet sensual vampire aristocrat into pop culture forever. Many other actors would play vampires in the coming decades, but none would equal Lugosi in the popular imagination. Female vampires appeared too; they followed the lead set by Theda Bara, as well-endowed, predatory sexpots. In the 1970s, male vampires became man-pretty again with film and TV portrayals of Dracula by Frank Langella and Louis Jourdan. *The Lost Boys*, in 1987, turned its vampires into leather-clad teenage punks instead of caped noblemen, but they remained amazingly good-looking. From then on, most TV and movie vampires were Hollywood heartthrobs with fangs, from Catherine Deneuve in *The Hunger* to Tom Cruise in *Interview with a Vampire*.

Most Players believe their line began after 1931, though some point out that Lugosi first played Dracula on stage, in 1927. They are quite sure the first Player split from the Mekhet clan by 1940. Some Wannabes believe their progenitor was an actor Embraced by a Mekhet for reasons unknown. Others believe the first Players were movie fans that found real vampires and begged to join the *Danse Macabre* — but most Wannabes just don't care. The First Player doesn't affect *their* Requiems in any way.

FROM THE SOURCE

Any vampire who cares enough can contact the Kindred of Los Angeles and ask them about the Players' origin. The Angeleno vampires say the Players descend from a Mekhet called John Milford, or Melford, or possibly Melton; reports differ because he preferred to call himself "Count Yanosh Maldor." His sire never took the blame for Count Yanosh, and many Angeleno Kindred think John Milford came to town already a vampire. Count Yanosh habitually dressed in a tuxedo and opera cape, and imitated Bela Lugosi's accent (badly). He associated with the city's Daeva as much as they would allow, and with movie stars as much as he could get away with. In 1973, the Prince of Los Angeles ordered Count Yanosh destroyed in a blood hunt: Milford's attempt to make himself the "technical advisor" for *Scream*, *Blacula*, *Scream* was one Masquerade breach too many. "There's really no story here," the Angelenos insist. "He was just a jerk who got what he deserved."

DARK SPECULATIONS

Now and then, other Kindred find the lack of information about the Players suspicious. The Angelenos' story seems too prosaic. And why don't more Wannabes know even that much? True, many Players show no interest in learning more Kindred tradition than they must — but your bloodline's origin and founder are such basic information. Perhaps the Players' origin holds some dark secret that *someone* wants to stay hidden.

For instance, maybe the first Player cut some sinister pact to gain an aptitude for Majesty and pass it through his Vitae. The entire lineage might owe their Blood and souls to the Devil, an ancient Daeva blood-witch or some other supernatural force of terrible yet unknown power. Some night, the pact will come due and all the Players must pay — or find someone else to pay in their stead.

Or maybe the first Player *stole* the power. Some elder evil might bide its time to rise and wreak vengeance on all who carry Player blood. Terrible shall be the reckoning when that night comes!

A few Kindred think the Players are too obviously insignificant. No bloodline, these Kindred declare, could be so shallow and lacking in power. Especially a bloodline from the Clan of Secrets. These vampires suspect the Players are pulling a gigantic con job on the other Kindred, as pawns or a front for some darker power.

Not a few Wannabes eagerly accept such suggestions, even the speculations that leave them doomed. Being doomed is more glamorous than being the scion of an undead movie buff who wanted a Discipline so much that he passed that longing to his childer.



DARK SECRETS?

Storytellers can give the Players a secret origin if they want. The text mentions a few speculations

that can offer a starting point. If you want to do this, first ask yourself: So what? How will this affect Wannabes in your chronicle?

If you set your chronicle in Los Angeles, any mysteries in the Players' origin can easily affect modern characters. The bloodline's founder might be active as one of the city's ancillae, available to answer questions or suppress such inquiries. Any secret influence over the Players is probably centered on Los Angeles as well.

To affect Players outside Los Angeles, any secret in the bloodline's past probably needs some supernatural way to affect Kindred at a distance. For instance, suppose the speculation about a pact with the Devil is true: Every 10 years (or whatever), a Player must find a soul to send to Hell, or go himself. Giving the Embrace fulfills the terms of the pact, by forcing it on someone else. A Player could learn about the pact when her sire tells her she has a month before the Devil takes her. What does she do? Does she enthrall some hapless mortal to sign a pact, offering himself to the Devil in her place? Does she Embrace a childer herself? Does she disbelieve her sire and do nothing? Every choice has consequences that make a good story, whether the pact really exists or is just a delusion of the character's sire.

You don't have to give the Wannabes a dark secret history, though. The Players look like a joke — but where vampires are concerned, even the jokes have teeth



SOCIETY AND CULTURE

The Players are disorganized in the extreme. They do not attempt to impart special traditions to their childer. Players have no distinctive offices or tokens of prestige. The bloodline's continuation depends entirely on its members' shared obsession with celebrity.

The bloodline does have a loose gossip network. Players like to brag about the stars they've met (and fed upon), memorabilia collected and other celebrity-related achievements. Players brag to anyone willing to listen, but especially each other. If a Wannabe knows a broodmate in another city (most likely her sire or childer), the Wannabe makes sure to tell him how Robin Williams — Robin Williams! — laughed at one of her jokes. That Player may repeat the brag to other Wannabes, just to show how in-the-know he is.

The gossip network is patchy, though. It doesn't reach all Players, and no member of the network receives all the gossip. Because of this, news, rumors and suggestions about ways to be part of showbiz travel slowly through the bloodline.

MAKING OF A PLAYER

Similar to many vampires, Players tend to Embrace mortals who share their attitudes and interests. The

Wannabes attract mortals as star-struck as themselves. A Player usually leaves a bedazzled mortal with mild anemia and a proud conviction that she spent the night with a minor celebrity. Sometimes, however, the vampire and vessel feel a stronger attraction. A Player who craves the illusion of fame can find a devoted would-be groupie hard to resist. The lust to associate with someone famous renders a mortal especially susceptible to a Player's pretenses, so these people make especially convenient vessels, too. The Player gets a steady source of blood from his "fan," and the mortal thinks a star is in love with her. It's a sweet little bit of co-dependency.

The Player can't maintain the charade forever, though. He can't give his "fan" the perks of being close to a real celebrity: no backstage passes or visits to the studio, no screen test, no lavish gifts or valuable memorabilia. Even the dumbest mortal eventually figures out she's dating a fraud. At this point, only Disciplines or a Vinculum can keep the mortal bound to the Player — for a while — with the Embrace as the final gambit to preserve the illusion of star and fan a little longer.

On the other hand, a mortal "fan" may well figure her "celebrity" lover is actually a vampire — before the glamour wears off. A mortal who's thinking clearly would see a vampire couldn't also be a movie star, pro athlete, supermodel or other highly visible entertainer. Real celebrities need to do things during the day. A mortal who craves association with fame, though, might not think too clearly even if the Player hasn't twisted her emotions through Disciplines. The mortal thinks being a vampire is all nightclubs, romance, cool clothes and cooler powers — because that's what the Player himself wants to be. The Player has struggled against the Beast, longed to see the sun again, cut himself off from mortal friends and family and cursed his need for blood. He knows the Embrace is no gift. For a Player who's vain, maybe a little stupid and definitely addicted to images and wishful thinking, however, it can be hard to resist your Number One Fan when she's on his knees begging for the Embrace and babbling about immortal passion. Whether from neediness or being caught in their own self-aggrandizing illusions, the Wannabes sire childer more often than most vampires.

As usual with the Kindred, the Embrace seldom results in eternal devotion. Once the childer becomes immune to her sire's Disciplines or Vinculum, disillusionment set in quickly — say, after the childer's first frenzy. At that point, the Player has a childer who knows he's deceived, exploited and Damned her, but whom the Prince insists the Player train in Kindred ways. (Assuming the Prince hasn't run them both out of town for an illicit Embrace — one reason such a new bloodline has spread so quickly.) Once a childer figures out how her sire bamboozled her, they both usually want to break off their relationship as soon as possible.

The childer, of course, begins as an ordinary Mekhet. Her victims do not become immune to her Disciplines or

Vinculum. She also lacks the Players' knack for Majesty. Some Player scions decide they'd rather stay ordinary Mekhet. If they want to learn Majesty without activating their bloodline's special curse, they accept that progress will be slow. Quite a few nascent Players, however, simply don't know they have a choice: their sires knew little and taught less. For many childer, the lure of supernatural charisma proves too strong. They, too, crave the illusion of celebrity — and when a childer acts like a Player, her Vitae easily changes once her Blood Potency rises high enough, beginning the cycle again.

PLAYING THE STAR

The Majesty power of Awe is a Wannabe's chief technique for faking celebrity, but it isn't enough by itself. Awe just makes you the coolest person in the room. You also have to dress like a star and talk like a showbiz insider. Most Players find this easy. A Wannabe who gets her hands on some money can also buy jewelry, a suitably flashy car and other trappings of fame. Mostly, it's all a bluff: you attract people through supernatural charisma, and tell them it's because you're an actor, sports hero, model or what-have-you. This is usually good enough to get a one-night stand and a decent feeding. Some Players stay with this simple game all their unlives. They tell other Wannabes about their big plans that will pay off any night now, but it's just blather.

Players who pose as Kindred of other clans, or vampires from their favorite movies, likewise rely heavily on props, speaking patterns and bluff. The Daeva or Ventrue Wannabe carefully copies the typical clothes and mannerisms of those clans — perhaps even specific Kindred. The would-be Daeva speaks languidly of the cruel games of seduction she's played; the faux-Ventrue talks about high finance and power-plays in Elysium. A "Lost Boy" Wannabe combs and sprays his hair into spikes, wears black leather and practices sneering and swaggering; a "Blade" fan never appears without wraparound sunglasses and a trench coat. The Wannabe plays a double Masquerade: she poses as a really cool vampire posing as a mortal.

Kindred of other clans do not always consider a Wannabe's imitation of them a form of flattery. When the Daeva Primogen sees a Player copying his outfit, he may think the younger vampire seeks to assert a connection to him and his status — a rank the Player does not possess and does not deserve. Wannabes have met Final Death because an older vampire felt mocked or exploited by a clumsy, overeager Player. This is one reason many Players avoid Elysiums and other Kindred social events, and associate strictly with vampires as young and powerless as themselves.

VICARIOUS CELEBRITY

Most Players don't settle for playing celebrity as a way to catch an easy meal. They want to be close to genuinely famous people, basking in their glamour. Once again, Maj-

esty offers the simplest strategy. The glitterati are as easily enthralled as any other mortal. Get close to one, turn on the supernatural charisma, and you might get invited to a party — or home to bed, and a chance to feed on the blood of a media god. You might even join the celebrity's entourage, or become her regular lover — for a while.

MEETING THE FAMOUS

The problem lies in getting close to the celebrity. Part of an entourage's job is to control access to the star. A Player can troll through the clubs in hopes of meeting a celebrity, but the Player can increase his chances in several ways.

One is to become a stalker. Hang around a chosen celebrity's home. Send letters saying you're the celebrity's biggest fan and you want to meet her. Search the news for scheduled public appearances. Find out where she shops. Wherever you think she'll go, be there, ready to apply the Majesty.

The strategy has disadvantages. Rich and famous people hire security guards to protect them from stalkers. The local police take a dim view of stalking, too. A Player risks attracting too much attention from the wrong

sort of mortals. Nevertheless, quite a few Wannabes become stalkers: it goes with the celebrity obsession.

More cunning and patient Players look for circumstances in which a star might come to them. For instance, celebrities often hire limousines, especially when they're traveling. A Wannabe can buy a limousine, place his name in the phone book ("Night service our specialty") and hope a star and his friends call up and hire the Wannabe. In some places (the Las Vegas strip, for example), a freelance limo can simply park at the curb and wait for customers. Most of the time, you'll just be hired by a middle-aged couple from Duluth who want to put on some swank for an evening, but now and then, a famous entertainer will want a limousine on short notice — and there you are. Judicious use of Awe can ensure repeat business, too.

What else does a celebrity want? High-class liquor? Drugs or prostitutes, most discreetly delivered" (Heidi Fleiss wasn't the first "Hollywood Madame.") Catering? Cleaning? Pet care? If a Player can find a way to run a business like this — or at least gain the assistance of one, as an Ally — she might wangle a meeting with any number of glitterati.

A more ambitious Player might become a spiritual advisor. Some celebrities find that money, fame and fall-of-Rome hedonism just aren't enough, and try to find something Meaningful. The Beatles turned to transcendental meditation.
John Travol-



ta and Tom Cruise chose Scientology. The latest Hollywood fad, however, is Jewish Kabbalism, with Madonna as the most famous convert. A Player could hook up with a Hollywood guru as a way to meet stars — or become one. A small group of people could easily mistake Awe for the charisma of a spiritual master. A few minor displays of other Disciplines could easily cement a Wannabe's position as guru to the stars. He just has to lie about the source of his mystical powers. Naturally, Princes deeply dislike this strategy due to the risk to the Masquerade.

JOINING THE ENTOURAGE

Actors, rappers and other celebrities go about town with a group of other people. Some are bodyguards. One might be an appointment secretary. The entourage may also include the star's Significant Other of the month. Some of the people, however, are just hangers-on. These are often rich, young people who like the glamour of hanging with a celebrity. In return, they feed the star's ego and help pay for the drinks and parties. As an extra benefit, they get to enjoy the star's excess or used-up groupies (the "cast-off trim," in Hollywood parlance).

A Player can use Entrhancement to become a star's lover of the week, and maybe manage a few months. Other Wannabes will envy his success. Explaining why he's never available during the day is the Wannabe's problem.

It may be safer just to become a friend and member of the entourage, with no obligation to show up at any particular event but a perpetual invitation to do so. Being in the entourage helps a Wannabe meet more celebrities, for the bragging rights of knowing them (or feeding from them), collecting memorabilia — and lining up the next patron when the glamour wears off the current celebrity friend.

Or maybe it won't wear off. Who knows? Maybe an entertainer will want to keep the Wannabe around without the false emotions of Majesty or the Vinculum. Some Players hope for more in their Requiem, to the point of revealing they are vampires. Some stars are compassionate (or gullible) enough they would pity vampires and try to ameliorate their cursed existences. Some celebrities are so jaded that taking undead predators as lovers gives them a thrill. Either way, such a dangerous liaison probably won't work out the way a Player wants.

A CAUTIONARY TALE: LANA TURNER AND JOHNNY STOMPANATO

Lana Turner, the "Sweater Girl," had many husbands and lovers, so it was not entirely surprising when she took up with Johnny Stompanato, former bodyguard to gangster Mickey Cohen, part-time operator of a gift shop and full-time gigolo. Their passion for each other was extreme, obsessive and dangerous.

Lana liked the "happy aches" Johnny gave her. He also threatened to cut her face if she didn't obey him completely. Their S&M romance ended when Lana's teenage daughter Cheryl, terrified by Johnny's latest threats against Lana and her family, stabbed him in the stomach. He died. The jury accepted that the murder was self-defense.

Entrhancement and the Vinculum both create strong passion. Neither entertainers nor obsessive fan Wannabes, however, are models of emotional stability to begin with. The Daeva select and train childer to manage and exploit lust and obsession. The Players do not. Vampires often hurt the ones they love; mortals do, too — and fire, sunlight or stakes are all readily available.



SLAVES OF HOLLYWOOD

Some Players want a long-term, closer connection to celebrity. They aren't satisfied with a few nights, or a few months, with a famous entertainer. Nor do they want to be mere parasites, using their Disciplines and Vitae to hold a place in a star's entourage. They want to be *in the game*, real participants in celebrity culture. Being undead presents certain obstacles — but also presents certain opportunities, if a Wannabe is willing to break the Masquerade. As vampires, Players can offer services that would be difficult, if not impossible, for any mortal to supply.

The obstacles are obvious. Anything a Player can do for a celebrity, he must do at night. The ineluctable truth is that mortals comfortably stay active for 15 to 18 hours at a stretch, while Kindred are limited, on average, to 12 or less — and though the glitterati may take a more casual attitude to bedtime than most people, they seldom adopt a truly nocturnal lifestyle. Any job a Player takes probably must be part-time.

The Masquerade, however, is less a concern than it might seem. When movie stars, pro athletes and other entertainers reach a certain level of fame, they live in a world as insulated from normal humanity as the Kindred. These celebrities' mansions have high walls and armed guards at the gates. The celebrities go from home to limousine to studio to fashionable nightclub to home again, shielded by their entourage. These celebrities encounter ordinary people only when they want to, and their security thinks it's safe. Publicists and lawyers guard their images, so the public doesn't see too much — at least, too much that isn't staged as carefully as any scene on film. A vampire can hide within this cocoon of protection and concealment, by becoming part of it. A celebrity's staff stands ready to hide drug use, sexual adventures and other scandalous behavior (as well as perfectly innocent details of daily life that are simply nobody's business). They can also hide that one of the boss' staff drinks blood and doesn't come out in the daytime.

Tell-all books by former employees remain a worry, at least to some Kindred who see a Player letting a celebrity

friend in on the big secret. Players have two responses.

In the first place, eccentricity is normal in “show people” and their friends. Let some security guard or valet say Joe Famous has a vampire on staff, and Joe Famous can instantly produce a platoon of mortals who sleep in coffins and drink the occasional sip of blood, but are fun guests at parties and quite mortal. If that isn’t enough, the star’s image-manipulation machine can trash the tale-teller’s reputation.

In the second place, anyone who would knowingly hire a vampire likely has *other things* he keeps secret, too. Prosecutable things. The celebrity’s staff already knows they could face indictment as accessories to their employer’s activities. They also know that if they try to turn State’s Evidence, their employer has little to lose by trying to kill them — and has a supernatural assassin on call. All in all, these Players think the Masquerade is safe with a few celebrities in the know. Or a few dozen . . .



PLAYERS IN LA-LA LAND

This section chiefly applies to Players who reside in Los Angeles. No other city has so many Players eager to work for celebrity entertainers, or so many entertainers who would hire Players. Hollywood created the Players; it was only a matter of time before Hollywood found a use for them. According to the Players’ gossip network, *at least* a dozen famous actors and actresses have Players in their entourages, with more Players taking this path every year. At least one studio is in on the secret, too, and *recruits* Players for its top stars. Every major studio has been named as “the one,” though never with proof. The gossip is also uncertain whether this studio is secretly owned by Kindred or simply knows of their existence and sees them as one more resource to exploit. Kindred in other cities hope it’s the former — or that the whole story is just Players trying to puff up their own importance.

A few other cities have large entertainment industries, most notably in the United States, New York and Las Vegas. In other cities, Players have fewer opportunities to latch onto celebrities, and a mortal culture less forgiving of a star’s peccadilloes. In Los Angeles, marital infidelity and a stint in drug rehab are just part of celebrity glamour: you have to get into wanton murder or child molestation before careers are ruined and there’s time spent in jail. In most other cities, the cops and district attorneys are more willing to investigate and prosecute. Still, a Player who perseveres might hook up with the star player of a local sports team or find some other local celebrity who could use a vampire’s help.

Not all Players can use these stratagems. They only work for smart, savvy Kindred, and most Players start out as neither. The Wannabes’ gossip network is also patchy enough that many Players have not heard how such things are done. In time,

though, an ambitious, hardworking Wannabe can develop the skills and mentality to become a real Player in show-biz.



GHOULS

Perhaps the greatest service a Player can offer is access to his Vitae. In most branches of the entertainment industry, youth is everything. A pro athlete pushes retirement at 40. A model can be over the hill at 25. Actors and actresses don’t have it quite so bad, but they know the older you get, the fewer roles become available — especially the lucrative starring roles. Better not mind becoming one of those character actors who gets listed sixth or seventh or tenth when the credits roll . . . Or worse, going on *Hollywood Squares*.

The temptation can be especially strong for a child star, whose career has an even shorter time limit. So often, a child star’s career ends at puberty, and he becomes a realtor, a homeless bum or a guest on *The Surreal Life*. Even if a Player balks at ghouling a child, the *parents* probably won’t. (Don’t think about the complexes fostered in a child whose parents insist she drink the blood of a re-animated corpse.)

A vampire can keep an entertainer young — not just looking young, *really* young, and no plastic surgery required! She just has to drink the vampire’s blood every month, and either she or the vampire makes the effort of will to preserve the supernatural taint that keeps her a ghoul.

Of course, the third drink of Vitae creates the artificial love of the Vinculum. For other Kindred, the Vinculum turns a ghoul into a willing slave as long as the vampire chooses. A blood bond to a Player, however, lasts only a few months. After that, the Player no longer has any supernatural hold on the ghoul’s emotions. The balance of power shifts. The ghoul knows exactly what she wants from the Player: a continued supply of Vitae. The Player’s position is more uncertain. He can’t ask for too much, especially if the ghoul knows that other Players exist. Quite possibly, two Players could get in a bidding war for a celebrity ghoul, giving her the strongest position in the negotiations.

As time passes, a Player slowly regains a measure of power over the ghoul. The more years of deferred aging pile up, the greater the ghoul’s incentive to keep her domitor happy. Eventually, she will owe her very life to the vampire (though she could still seek another Player as a replacement domitor). On the other hand, eternal youth eventually becomes impossible to explain away, even with dubious procedures in Switzerland. At least, that’s what other Kindred guess. No one in this young bloodline has kept a celebrity ghoul long enough for such complications to arise — as far as other Kindred know.

The lure of prolonged life and youth isn’t limited to actors, models, athletes and other performers. The

money-men in the back room want to live forever, too. For a few months, a producer or studio head loves the Player with a helpless passion. Then his mind clears. He is once more a very rich man who knows more about the Kindred than the Kindred want. The Player can receive wealth, willing vessels, invitations to all the best parties, whatever she desires — or some very bad men can visit her at high noon and take her into the famous California sun. Her choice. Admittedly, no one claims this has actually happened yet. It's just something other Kindred worry about when they look at the Players' drive to be part of show-biz.

Longevity isn't the only benefit to a ghoul. Vitae also passes on a small capacity to learn Disciplines. A single dot of a Discipline, however, could be a godsend to some entertainers. A smidgen of Celerity or Vigor could push a second-string pro athlete to the top of the league. One dot of Majesty won't help an actor on screen — but Majesty sure helps convince a producer or director to hire you. Awe could help mollify a cop who catches you driving 40 miles over the speed limit. One dot of Obfuscate is useful to hide a pocketful of cocaine.

BODYGUARD TO THE STARS

Even though a Player can only act at night, for those 12 hours he's a heck of a bodyguard. Auspex helps a Player spot danger before it becomes immediate; Celerity helps him act first and take down an attacker. Expending Vitae on Physical Attributes makes the Player even more formidable. Obfuscate lets the Player bring a weapon anywhere or stand guard without being noticed at all. Mere mortals won't do him much harm with guns, chairs and other improvised clubs, or fists. Once an attacker's caught, a touch of Confession can reveal why the attack took place. Sure, most people who seem threatening turn out to be overexcited fans or garden-variety star-stalkers — but once in a while, an attack might come from a serious enemy. Show-biz sometimes crosses paths with organized crime and people get in over their heads. If a mafioso wants to threaten a producer through an attack on one of his stars, well, an undead bodyguard can make sure the star doesn't suffer for someone else's problems.

PANDERING

What happens when you give people more money than they imagined and treat them as living gods? They enjoy themselves, and don't let trifles like public morals or the laws get in their way. Actors, rock stars, athletes, the British royal family and other millionaire entertainers take drugs, sleep around, get in fights with paparazzi and generally misbehave because *they can*. Undignified or illegal recreations can still harm a celebrity's career, though, so the smart ones hide their decadence behind high fences, closed drapes and locked doors. Some Players stand ready to help the celebrities enjoy themselves

without fear of prosecution.

For instance, every celebrity knows the paparazzi are part of the publicity machine that keeps them rich and famous. Still, they *do* get in the way when you feel a sudden hankering for a hit of heroin or oral sex with a prostitute. No problem; your helpful Player stands ready to sally forth and procure whatever you want. A mortal servant could do the same — but a mortal servant couldn't shake trailing paparazzi — or cops — using Obfuscate. A really skilled and experienced Player could deliver three leggy blondes, a Chinese acrobat and a goat to a star's mansion and the lurking paparazzi wouldn't notice a thing.

Now and then, a party guest parties a little too hard and dies of an overdose. The public forgives much, but not a dead body in the house. All Kindred necessarily develop some skill at moving and hiding corpses; again, the Players' knack for Obfuscate renders them especially good at this. A skilled Player can even make the dearly departed seem to walk out the door under her own power, get in her car and drive away. What a shame that as soon as she got home, she stuffed enough coke up her nose to kill a camel.

Or maybe someone dies from rougher trade. The Fatty Arbuckle case was only the first suspicious death in the midst of Hollywood revelry, and Tinseltown has seen more than a few actors, actresses, directors and assorted hangers-on murdered outright — some solved, some not. In some of the unsolved deaths, though, the chief suspects were other Hollywood luminaries. Which may explain why the cases were not solved. Most Players would be glad to help a star escape the consequences of one careless or intemperate moment. As vampires, Players have been in that position themselves — and that star will be their best friend forever, without any need for blood bonds or Majesty. Especially if the Player is smart enough to keep the photos in a secure location.

A Player can offer an even greater service to a star with anger management issues or dangerously extreme S&M proclivities. A star can live out the most extreme fantasies of sex and violence with a vampire as a partner. Strangling won't hurt a lover who doesn't need to breathe. A bit of impulsive gunfire only stings, and even stabbing with a butcher knife isn't too serious. Just so long as the celebrity doesn't keep any wooden stakes or gasoline in the mansion . . . This is also valuable for a "method" actor who expects to play a psycho pervert killer (not that uncommon a role these days). Why imagine what it's like to torture, rape and kill someone, when you can do it? And the victim gets up afterward, no harm done that a quick drink of Vitae won't heal.

Then again, a celebrity might want to have her fun outside her mansion's security, and with someone who doesn't heal the damage afterward. A Player who develops great skill at Obfuscate can offer an unbreakable

alibi. Using the Familiar Stranger, a Player can make sure that no matter what a star does within the sight of one or two people, 10 or 12 people can honestly remember seeing her miles away at that time. This is about the greatest joy a Player can imagine: a famous entertainer, idol of millions, asking the Player to *be her*, if only for a few hours.

A celebrity might simply want someone dead: an inconvenient ex-boyfriend, an executive who won't let him out of a contract grown onerous, a blackmailer, whatever. Or maybe it's just some tribal vendetta within the industry, like two rappers who "got beef" with each other. A vampire who can move unseen makes an excellent assassin.

Not every secret desire is illegal, though. Some are simply unfashionable. For instance, by the 1940s, the sexual escapades of Errol Flynn could no longer shock Hollywood. His Nazi sympathies were another matter: the Warner Brothers' publicity machine kept very those hush-hush. Some political, social or religious ideas are still so controversial they could damage a career. A celebrity who admitted to al-Qaida sympathies would receive a firestorm of abuse from across the nation. (The Dixie Chicks got in trouble for less.) A Player could stay close to a star simply by agreeing with some unpopular opinion she must not express in public. Vampires know all about keeping secrets from the world. A Player might be the only person a celebrity could trust to never, ever write a career-destroying, tell-all book and flog it on the chat shows.



A CAUTIONARY TALE: BOB CRANE

Pandering to a star's kinks can spiral out of control and lead to dangerous obsessions from either party. Bob Crane and a groupie-cameraman called John Carpenter (not the well-known director) became obsessed with filming each other having sex with anonymous women. *Lots* of anonymous women. Enough though public knowledge of Crane's "hobby" could have trashed Crane's career. Crane tried to quit the game. Shortly thereafter, he was murdered in a Flagstaff motel. Partner-in-porn Carpenter was acquitted, but remains the chief suspect.

Once the sordid tale came out, Hollywood showed its usual compassion and good taste by making it into a movie: *Auto Focus*.



DON'T EVEN THINK IT

If all these potential services worry Princes and other guardians of the Masquerade, one service provokes terror and rage. Any Player who secures a long-term relationship with a famous mortal can expect a visit from the Prince's Hound or maybe a summons from the Prince herself. The message: *do not Embrace the*

celebrity. Famous faces and the Masquerade do not mix. Any Prince who thinks about the possibility reaches the same conclusion: an Embraced celebrity must be destroyed. Celebrities are watched too closely to hide what they are, and they are too well-known to drop out of sight — assuming they would even try.

A celebrity might be trusted to keep the Kindred's existence a secret. A famous person saying vampires are real and she knows a few of them can be covered up: it was a nervous breakdown or a joke. A famous person saying she can prove vampires are real because she is one is simply too great a danger to allow. It's safer and less trouble to explain away her disappearance.

AGENT

Most of the time, Players use Majesty to dazzle their prey and feed their egos. Supernatural charisma can be turned to other ends, though. For instance, you can persuade anyone to talk to you. That's a useful talent for an agent. Admittedly, most agents need to work during the day — but a Player could become part of a team of representatives. A lot of Hollywood's negotiations take place informally, at parties, at night: the Player charms his way into a party, buttonholes a producer or director and dazzles him into agreeing that a particular actor would be perfect for his next movie or agreeing to hear the Player's screenwriter "friend" pitch a script. In Hollywood, 10 minutes with an überproducer like Jerry Bruckheimer or Steven Spielberg can be worth millions — and a Player can get you those 10 minutes.

A clever Player might try creating his own celebrity. The world has no shortage of actors, singers, comedians and other entertainers who have talent but haven't received their big break. A Player who knows how to meet the "suits" that award contracts can create breaks for his partner. This is far from sure-fire, but a Player with a small herd of hopeful unknowns or semi-knowns — "talent," in Hollywood parlance — has a chance of guiding one of them to fame and fortune, and riding her coattails to the top.

Whether the Player's new star feels any gratitude is another matter. Show-biz is full of celebrities who didn't repay the people who helped them become rich and famous. A Wannabe who spent years cultivating an entertainer, hoping to reach fame by proxy, might take such a betrayal badly enough to frenzy. It's happened to mortals in the same position . . .



A CAUTIONARY TALE: DOROTHY STRATTEN

Actress Dorothy Stratten's career began when her photographer boyfriend sent pictures of her to *Playboy*. She became a Playmate, which led to small movie roles, then bigger ones. Stars don't

need low-rent pornographer boyfriends. Enraged by being left behind, Stratten's ditched boyfriend killed her.



I DID IT MYYYYY WAY . . .

A few Players try to break into show-biz for real. They don't want just to hang around entertainers; they want to *be* entertainers, if only for a little while. The need to uphold the Masquerade, and the intrinsic limitations of undeath, make any entertainment job difficult — but possible.

A small, short-term job can still give a Player great prestige from other Wannabes. A Player may need to use Disciplines or the Vinculum to get an appearance in a commercial or a walk-on role in a movie (don't forget the effort of will needed to be visible on film), but, with enough people in the vampire's thrall, he can do it. One rumor says the Studio That Knows About Vampires hires Kindred stuntmen for special shoots. A Player might also sit in on a famous musician's jam session and perhaps supply back-up vocals or instrumentals on a song.

Any gig that lasts more than one night, however, becomes progressively more difficult. Never appearing in daytime is perhaps the most immediate obstacle to a Requiem spent in show-biz. For instance, stand-up comics receive a good bit of work from company picnics — not generally held at night. Even if an entertainer only takes after-dark jobs, there's a lot of boring business stuff, like talking to agents, that is generally done during the day. A ghoul or mortal agent who knows about a Player's special needs could help with some of these problems.

For Players, talent is also an issue. Many of them simply don't have it. Some Players, however, merely lacked the talents to become famous; they managed small-time gigs in the lower ranks of the entertainment industry. Talented or not, a Wannabe who seeks a show-biz career may feel tempted to use his Disciplines. In some venues, this works. A Wannabe comic in a little club, a jazz musician who comes on after midnight or an actor in an off-off-Broadway bit of experimental theater might face an audience small enough to bamboozle through Majesty. Whatever the performance lacks in skill, the performer seems to make up for in raw charisma. (The Players also develop specialized Devotions that improve an audience's reaction to a performance.)

In the end, though, using Disciplines to enhance a performance can increase a Player's frustration. He *seems* great, but isn't. He can't use a small gig as a stepping-stone to larger venues and greater exposure, because larger audiences are harder to affect. Greater exposure also means greater risk to the Masquerade. He can't even try to further her career through CDs or DVDs, because Majesty doesn't record. The brass ring of success stays an inch from his hand, but he can never reach it.

The most amazing and galling event possible for a Player, however, would be a chance at fame that comes unexpectedly. For example, suppose a Player wangles an appearance in a commercial, speaking a line that inexplicably becomes a pop-culture buzzword, like "Where's the beef!" or "Whazzuuuup?" Suddenly, everyone wants him on the chat shows and magazine covers! TV sitcoms want him to appear as a bit of stuntcasting! Her 15 minutes of fame have finally come!

The brass ring just dropped in his hand, and he must throw it away — because he's not human, and that secret must never come out. No interviews, no sitcom appearances, no cashing in. He must do everything possible to turn attention *away* from himself. All other Kindred demand it. The one thing Players love most is the one thing they can never have.

DISCIPLINES AND DEVOTIONS

Players love the cool things they can do with Disciplines. Majesty is, of course, their favorite Discipline. They like Obfuscate too, but find it frustrating that the coolest powers — invisibility and impersonating other people — take so long to develop. Wearing a celebrity's face is even better than hanging out with him! Celerity is okay; it's nice to act first and mortals who attack you because you stole their boyfriend or girlfriend. It can't compare to Vigor, though: picking up a guy and throwing through a wall is just too cool! Besides, most vampire movies show the undead as super-strong. The Mekhet proficiency with Celerity ends when a Player joins the bloodline, just because generations of Wannabes worked to develop Vigor instead. Still, Players often pick up a little Celerity before making the change.

Many Wannabes don't care much for Auspex. Spotting a celebrity across a crowded dance floor with Heightened Senses or smelling what drink a potential groupie had last is nice but not terrific. The same goes for reading emotional states in auras: Players intend to *make* emotional states to order. Some Wannabes value the Spirit's Touch because they can read psychic impressions from celebrity memorabilia. (At least, they say they can; an autographed baseball or a pair of shoes worn once on set didn't associate with a star long enough to pick up a real aura.) Being able to read a star's mind sounds utterly cool to a Player, and spying on a star as an unseen spirit sounds even cooler — but few Players are old enough or persistent enough to have achieved such mastery.

Indeed, Players seldom master any Discipline completely. Instead, they like to dabble and pick up the basics of whatever Discipline seems cool — and they have a chance to learn. Wannabes seldom achieve enough respect or power to persuade other Kindred to teach them. Most Players must learn new Disciplines from their fellow Wannabes, or attempt self-study, which limits them to the most common Disciplines.

Dominate is probably the favorite out-of-clan Discipline, because lots of movie vampires can hypnotize people. Some Wannabes love grabbing a victim's chin and saying, "Look deep into my eyes — You will obey me —" often in a Bela Lugosi accent. Not many Players see any point in advancing beyond The Forgetful Mind, though: the few who did learned that their Conditioning always wears off in time. Players tell rumors of Wannabes who built real entertainment careers by possessing mortals, but no one can attach names, dates and places to these Kindred urban legends.

DEVOTIONS

The Players' tendency to learn a few dots each of multiple Disciplines gives them the potential to learn many different Devotions as well. They seldom realize that potential. The Kindred often guard Devotions even more jealously than their Disciplines. The Wannabes developed several Devotions of their own, however, and trade them quite freely. Due to the bloodline's obsessions, the price for teaching a Discipline or Devotion is usually something such as an introduction to a famous entertainer and a chance to feed one time from her.

The Players' Devotions usually involve presenting a false image. No supernatural ban prevents Wannabes from learning Devotions that do something real. They simply have more interest in the semblance of glamour, so they invented Devotions for that purpose. Or to put it another way: they don't want to become powerful Kindred; they want to play them on TV.

FAKING IT (MAJESTY •, OBFUSCATE •••)

This is actually a generic term for a whole suite of possible Devotions. Each version of Faking It enables a Player to seem like she's a master of a particular skill. She isn't, of course, but onlookers think she is, no matter how inept she might be. For instance:

I Know Kung Fu: The character imitates a few martial arts poses he's seen in movies. An onlooker, however, sees the deadly grace of a martial arts master. This may be enough to intimidate the average mortal into backing off. After expending a few Vitae on Strength and Dexterity, a Player might indeed be a reasonably competent brawler compared to the average mortal, but the Devotion makes him look like the second coming of Bruce Lee. (Though the character doesn't have to pose as a kung fu master. He could just as easily pose as a boxer, tae kwon do fighter or mean muthafuckah streetfighter — anything that could be interpreted as a high Brawling score.)

King of Comedy: So what if a Player tells lame jokes with bad timing? To anyone affected by this devotion, she seems like a laff riot! An hour later the character's audience may be scratching their heads wondering how the Player made such dumb jokes seem funny — but who can explain comedy?

Stylin': A Player can seem to strut like a supermodel dressed at the height of fashion, even if her clothes came from Kmart and she stumps along like a pig farmer in a mucky field.

Each version of Faking It takes the basic aura of charisma granted by Awe and refines it through the influence of Cloak of Night. The Devotion doesn't fool people's eyes; it fools their brains, so whatever they see seems much cooler than it really is. They refuse to see imperfections or outright ineptitude. The result is narrower than Awe, but can more easily affect large numbers of people.

Even though all versions of Faking It work the same way in rules terms, they are separate Devotions. Characters must buy each version of Faking It separately. Collectively, the many versions of Faking It are extremely popular and widespread among Players.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Expression + Obfuscate

Action: Instant (compared to Composure — see below)

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: A dramatic failure means the Player makes an utter fool of herself. Her fraud is transparent. In fact, even if the character *does* have the skill (but wants to look more impressive while using it), her audience still sees her as inept.

Failure: The Devotion fails to activate. The character does not know this immediately, though; she must guess by the reactions of her "audience." If they don't laugh, retreat or do whatever she wanted, she can try again on the next turn.

Success: The character succeeds in dazzling her audience.

Exceptional success: Damn, she's good! An exceptional success indicates the subject's Composures are considered one less than normal for determining who is affected.

The number of successes the player acquires is compared to the Composure of each person she wants to dazzle. If the number of successes equals or exceeds the target's Composure, that individual perceives the character as skillful and charismatic. If a target's Composure exceeds the number of successes rolled, that person is not affected (and may wonder why other people seem so impressed).

A character may Fake It to whoever is present (see the suggested modifiers below). Comparisons are made from the lowest Composure to highest among potential subjects. A Wannabe cannot single out a specific person in a crowd to affect. She has to try for everyone at once, and hope not many people have high Composures.

Affected people feel whatever emotion the character wanted to evoke through the display of skill: intimidated by I Know Kung Fu, hilarity from King of Comedy, lust and admiration from Stylin' and so on. The effect lasts

for one scene. During that time, the residual effect of Faking It may provide bonus dice to other Skills that seem connected to the character's imposture. For instance, the character might receive a bonus to Intimidation against people who believe she's a badass fighter.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier Situation

- Character tries Faking It to two people.
- 1 Character tries Faking It to six people.
- 2 Character tries Faking It to 20 people.
- 3 Character tries Faking It to a vast number of people in the vampire's immediate vicinity (an auditorium, a mob).

Each version of Faking It costs 15 experience points to learn.

MAKEOVER (MAJESTY •, OBFUSCATE ••)

In show-biz, you can never be too good-looking — at least if you want to be a star and not a (shudder) character actor. The same goes for modeling. Really, good looks don't hurt for any branch of the entertainment industry, especially when there are potential groupies around. So how is a poor, ordinary-looking Mekhet to achieve the look she craves? Obfuscate (The Familiar Stranger) lets you look like anyone, but it's an advanced Discipline power. Presence (Entrancement) simply

makes a specific person not care what you look like. A little of both Disciplines, however, can make people see you as yourself — only much better looking. Presence attracts them to you, and Obfuscate makes them overlook anything less than perfect about your appearance. The Makeover lets any Wannabe seem attractive, and a Player who really is attractive looks stunning.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Presence + Persuasion + Blood Potency

Action: Instant

If the roll succeeds, other people react to the character as if he had Striking Looks •• (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 117). If the character already has this Social Merit, he seems to have the four-dot version instead. The Devotion has no effect on a character who already has Striking Looks ••••; such a character is already as attractive as a person can be. Unlike The Familiar Stranger, the character cannot impersonate other people, and people who know the character well can still recognize him. Alas, the Makeover has no effect on camera images (even if the vampire spends the Willpower to overcome the Tradition of Masquerade): the character's improved appearance is all in people's heads. The effect lasts a full scene.

(Players sometimes refer to The Familiar Stranger as an "Extreme Makeover," because it can change a vampire's appearance so completely.)







One of you.

A score of me.

A score of us.

You will belong, blood and soul.

You will be mine and ours.

— Hannah Featheringay, Melusid Matriarch

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