Vampire
Storytellers Handbook

A storyteller and chronicle resource
for Vampire: The Masquerade®

vampire storytellers handbook

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introduction

These creators, makers of the new, can never become obsolete, for in the arts there is no correct answer…. But the arts are another story – a story of infinite addition. We must find order in the random flexings of the imagination.

– Daniel J. Boorstin, The Creators

Let's not kid ourselves. Being a Storyteller is hard work. More than any member of the troupe, the Storyteller must not only perform most of the preparation for a game of Vampire, he must also be prepared to throw all that work away and run in whatever direction the characters' coterie decides to head. He must be organized yet improvisational, logical yet dynamic and flexible yet fair. He must entertain the players, challenge their characters, maintain the growth of the setting that doesn't directly come up during each story, let the characters change it, adjust for their efforts and present the logical outcome to them. He must interpret rules, determine when they serve the story or when they harm it and implement them in a manner that's just, but interesting. He has to determine when a character should die or whether she "just squeaks by" because it's anticlimactic to die due to an arbitrary dice roll. He has to this – all of this – a dozen times a minute, to keep the game moving.
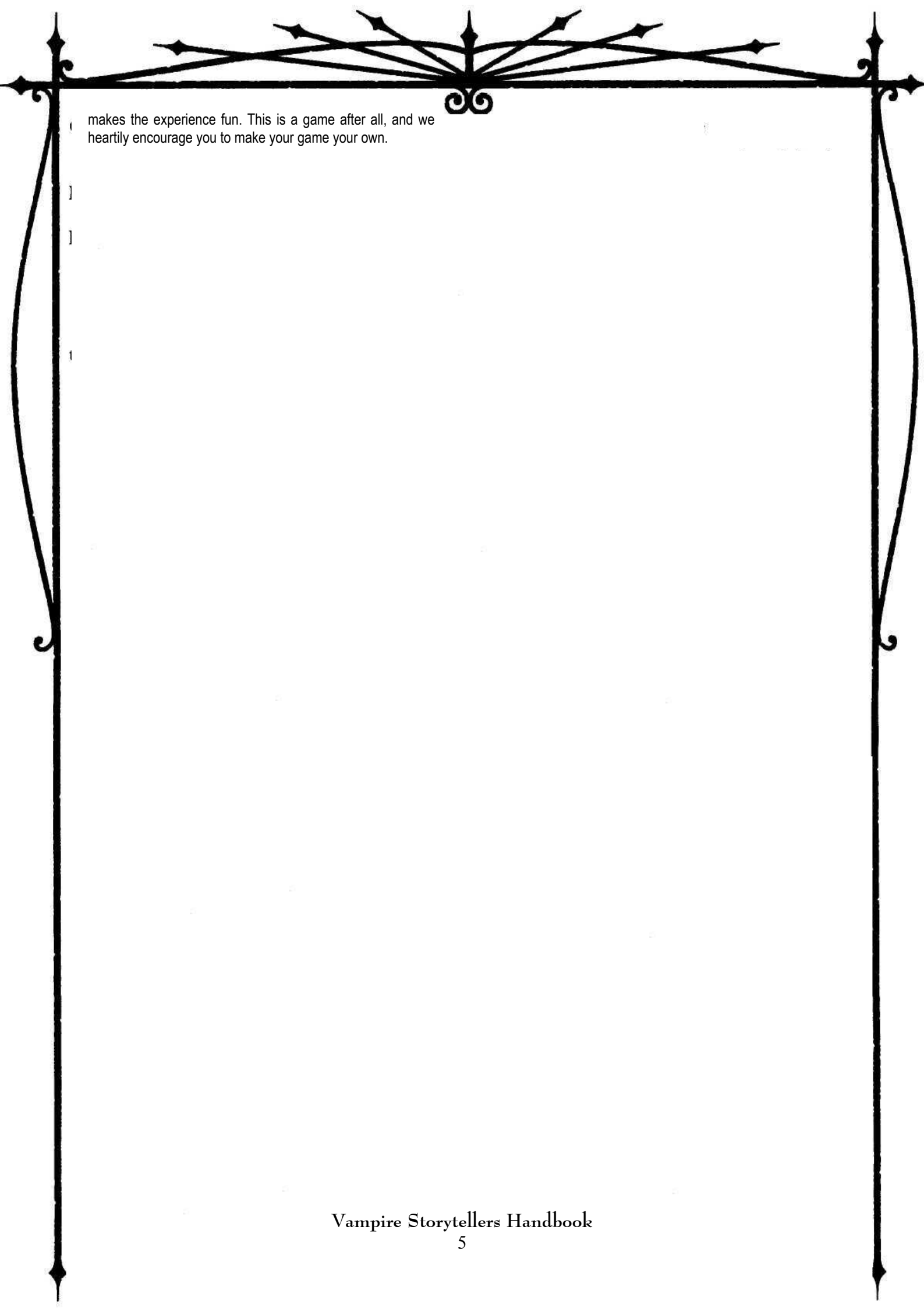
And he doesn't even get paid for it. Remind us why he does this again?

Because it's fun.

Of everyone who plays **Vampire: The Masquerade**, the Storyteller probably receives the most in return for his investments. Sure, it's enjoyable to play the game, but to be the creative force behind it is infinitely more satisfying. Every gasp the players utter as their characters encounter some alien horror is the coin of the Storyteller's realm. Every jump of shock they make when the environment spooks them is a notch in his belt. Even the players' satisfaction with the game is a direct reflection of the Storyteller's ability. The Storyteller creates an entire world and imbues it with life – or nefarious unlife, as this is Vampire – and watches it grow before his eyes.

The value doesn't make it easy, however. This book is designed to help Storytellers in their craft. It includes a myriad of ideas, bits of advice, tips and even a few secrets with which an enterprising Storyteller can frighten his troupe's coterie..The Vampire Storytellers Guide is written conversationally, as if the reader and the writers were participating in a round-table discussion about the various techniques of storytelling. This isn't a heavy-handed collection of storytelling "rules," as such a thing doesn't exist. Storytelling is an art, and our intent here is to improve your skill with your tools, not demand that you adhere to our code. That last bit is very important: Don't do what the book suggests because it tells you to, do it only if it helps your story. No two games of Vampire are alike, and the ultimate test of a rule or storytelling guideline is whether or not it

makes the experience fun. This is a game after all, and we
heartily encourage you to make your game your own.

The most important part...

When your troupe gathers to play a session of Vampire, they come to expect certain style from their Storyteller. Like a movie director or an author, the stories you create and tell reflect your preferences and personality. When we see a Martin Scorsese movie, we know that death, sex and food will be involved. When we read Alice in Wonderland, we expect to see a macabre twist to the whimsy. So it is with the stories you tell. Whether your games portray a series of modern action-adventures or complex intrigues, the story is yours.

Beneath the high-concept posturing, however, lies the fundamental principle of the game. Why have your players gathered for a Vampire session instead of sword-and-sorcery or science fiction? They have gathered to play vampires, and no matter what the details of your story are, the fact that they are vampires is constant.

More than anything else, the Storyteller should bear the characters' Curse of Caine in mind. If it is allowed to fall by the wayside, you may as well be playing... well, any other game.

This doesn't need to be heavy-handed or purple. You don't have to bring florid tirades about eternal thirst and, lo, the wretched hell of immortal damnation into the game (unless your players [or characters] want them). The act of feeding doesn't have to be an overwrought melodrama interpolated from Romantic poetry. It can be as briefly attended or as central to the game as the troupe wants, but neglecting the vampirism of the characters denies its single central point.

Vampire characters must feed on blood to survive. It need not be human, which is a strong bit of characterization for many individuals desperately trying to maintain their Humanity, but ultimately, they must all have vitae. The act of feeding itself doesn't even have to be explored (and, for the story's sake, should be handled at only dramatic or opportune times), but the ramifications should. A character who constantly uses her Disciplines or augments her Physical Attributes is going to require more blood than one who doesn't – where does she get it? In many bad Vampire games, blood is readily available from a seemingly endless string of hookers and bums. But what's the consequence? Whether a Kindred takes vitae from a bank president or a crack junkie, she's still stealing the vital fluids of a human being. Whether he is a hideous Nosferatu, a cold Tzimisce or a Ventrue inside trader, the vampire sustains his unlife among mortals, from whom he must hide and feed. Man or woman, elder or fledgling, Camarilla or Sabbat or "other," every vampire has a Beast inside that can be placated only by blood. How do the vampires in your game cope with the fact that they have become monsters.

That is the core of Vampire: The Masquerade. That is what sets the game apart. More so than any political struggle, Jyhad intrigue or duel for domain, the underlying monstrosity of all characters lies at the heart of the game – it's what makes this a storytelling game of personal horror.

...and the most important rule

Although the Golden Rule of the Storyteller System suggests that you feel free to use, abuse, change and modify any individual rule that doesn't work for you, we do insist on one heretofore unstated rule that takes precedence over all others.

Have fun.

This is a game. Some Storytellers take everything that we've written and cast it into the fire. Others stay as close to the published letter of the rules and setting as they possibly can. Most people fall somewhere in between, using what they like from the books and devising their own house rules to better suit their troupe's tastes. And they're all perfectly right.

Vampire can't possibly be all things to all people. As writers, designers and developers, we know this, because, hey, it's our job, but sometimes it's best to step back and say that outright. When the game ceases to be fun for you, close the book and come back later. When balancing the numbers becomes more of a chore than a thrill and when guessing as to the outcomes of certain plot threads becomes a matter of near-religious dogma, walk away from the table for as long as it takes to come back to that bottom line. Your books and dice and character sheets will still be there.

All too often in the hobby of games, people lose sight of that fact – they forget that games are pastimes meant to be enjoyed rather than argued over. In fact, to hear some people talk at the game shops or on the Internet, the argument is the be-all and end-all of the game. For them, perhaps it is. But for the less bellicose among us, we would do well to remember that we get from the game what we put into it. As Shakespeare said, "the play's the thing," and no where is this more true than in games, in which the "play" (if we may reinterpret the Bard's words a bit) is the whole purpose of coming together for an evening's storytelling.

Yes, you should take the Golden Rule to heart. Change! Adapt! Create! Raze and rebuild! Plot and deceive! But, in the end, make sure that it's enjoyable to do so. You're not being graded and we promise not send any legions of stick-wielding StoryFascists™ to bludgeon your game into compliance with ours.

It's your game. Have fun.

How to Use This Book

This is a book for Storytellers first and foremost, if you couldn't glean that from the title. Much of what is contained in these pages will serve players very little, as it is intended to help the Storyteller in her most daunting of tasks: the creation of worlds and the reconciling of the rules and the characters with the story.

Any Storyteller worth his salt also knows that more than anything, this book is an assembly of suggestions. Readers will note a distinct lack of hard rules and systems, for the most part. More rules don't necessarily make for a better story, and with a few exceptions, that is the tack this book takes. Crafting and telling a compelling tale is more than rolling Charisma + Performance, as experienced Storytellers know all too well. Would that it were so easy!

To that end, this book contains assembled advice and a few other secrets. We offer you the sum collection of our knowledge, insight and experience, which, hopefully, when mixed with your own, will allow you to bring truly wonderful stories to the table.

Chapter One is a functional "design document" for Vampire, including a look at Kindred physiology, the Storyteller game system and all those things that should be said but never are. It's the fundamental framework by which Vampire supplements are made, which should not only give you a glimpse as to what we do when making books, but may stoke your own fires of creativity.

Chapter Two looks at the Kindred from their point of view. It includes a few apocryphal bloodlines, details on other bloodlines (as well as making your own), three new Disciplines, a frank discussion on the importance of clan and a few other insights into the undead condition.

Chapter Three addresses the nuts and bolts of storytelling. From techniques to story considerations, it's all in here, with the intent of getting storytellers to go beyond their actions at the head of the table and get into the stories themselves.

Chapter Four covers the Storyteller's partners in his efforts, the troupe. Included are alternate character creation systems, variants on the traditional troupe composition and advice on the not-so-gentle art of dealing with problem players.

Chapter Five encourages Storytellers to think "outside the box" and diverge from dependency on printed material. It is a collection of guidelines and suggestion for alternate settings different from the established World of Darkness, suitable for full chronicles or shorter glimpses into times past – or that have yet to be.

Chapter Six provides complete crossover rules for the other World of Darkness Storyteller games, including revised-edition updates for Kindred of the East.

Chapter Seven includes the history and fate of one of the most secret sects of vampires ever to exist in the World of Darkness. Rather than give the Black Hand their own revised book, we've printed them here for two reasons. First, as their existence is one of controversy among Vampire storytelling troupes, we wanted to give the Storyteller the option of whether or not to use them. Second, affairs taking place in the modern nights have left the sect changed from what it once was, and putting these forth for the players to see may not suit all chronicles. Storytellers, use the Manus Nigrum as you see fit.

The Game as it is Played

Over the years, during the development of dozens of supplements and thousands of ideas, a distinct group of themes has evolved with regard to Vampire material. We don't expect it to leap out at you – not only is Vampire a game of subtlety (which we hope comes through in the writing), but we spend our full time with these ideas. It's our job.

No doubt, you have a certain perception of what Vampire is. In that regard, you are precisely correct. The whole point of this game and, indeed, the Vampire line is to allow you and your troupe to tell compelling stories that involve the undead Children of Caine. The other side of that coin, however, is the material that we develop that serves the purpose of keeping the game consistent, believable, edgy and mature. Those of you who have played Vampire since its inception have watched the game change significantly over the years, and you probably have a sense of how necessary this is to the health of the game. Vampire stands out among the larger body of published games as something more than just a game. If the participants want of course, it can be no more than the game – a pastime, much like a movie or book or trip to the theater. In can be much more, however – it can rise to the level of literature, provoke like a new philosophy and offer insight usually found only after prolonged self-examination. Through the stories we tell, we can learn about ourselves, the human condition and, in fact, anything that comes up in the story itself. This may be something as simple as awakening an interest in a bit of history that a certain character uncovers, or it may be as complex and personal as the sudden revelation that we're unhappy with a certain aspect of ourselves.

This ambition is what sets Vampire apart from other games on the market. It's the same ambition that leads people to brand Vampire as "pretentious" or "arrogant" in ignorance. It's not our intent to denigrate other games; Vampire can be played in the same beer-and-pretzels mode as any other. But we do want to tell stories that have greater depth than simple "adventures." The motives of characters in a Vampire story are likely far more personal, unique and complex than "kill

the monster, get the treasure, buy a castle." Of course, characters in other games can have more complex personalities, too, but these are the bread and butter of Vampire.

In the end, any story is what you make it. You and your troupe will reap the benefit of storytelling in accordance with the amount of effort you put into it. This book is full of our advice, which hopefully gives you some mileage even if you disagree completely with everything that we've said or hate one of the ideas so much that you throw it out immediately. That's fine – that's part of the creative process. If everyone had the exact same ideas for what made an entertaining or compelling story, there wouldn't be any point in telling new ones because we would have heard and enjoyed them all already. As with anything else in printed Vampire source material, everything said hereafter is subject to your implementation and approval.

To that end, we have assembled here several tenets that are key to Vampire. Whether they are meta-considerations or very specific story keys, these are the ideals we bear in mind while writing and developing source material for the game. Hopefully, these will impart a larger sense of thematic consistency to you. In the end, even if you disagree with them, they'll prompt you to adapt your own sense of what Vampire is to you and your troupe. As always, the game and stories are yours to use and tell, and they will have far more personal value than anything we can put in print.

The Big Picture

Vampire's core theme is a tripartite concept: It is a storytelling game of personal horror. Storytelling involves taking a concept and doing something entertaining with it. We all know the Ventrue are wealthy powerbrokers nonpareil, but what do they do to garner that reputation? How do the Nosferatu manage to maintain their vast information networks? How does a twisted Tzimisce acquire that reputation among others of her kind? Tell a story worth the words. A good story has "memorable antagonists, prizes worth fighting for, fascinating settings, believable goals, plot twists, betrayals, redemptions, heroism, tragedy, triumph, horror and general weirdness." If you expect your players to truly become a part of the story, they should have a desire to become involved. The best way to do this is to draw them in with a compelling environment.

The personal aspect rests upon the role of the characters. Vampire no longer takes the position that clans/sects/coteries are faceless, monolithic entities that exist only to serve some greater agenda. Sure, the Toreador involve themselves in the worlds of art and mortals, but what motivates them individually? Clans are not fraternities that gather for Spring Rush or to take over the Brujah primogen's crime syndicate. Sects are not giant companies or armed forces that unite to war with the infidels or "control" (such a vague, no-impact word) cities (even though they may say otherwise, as is the case with some particularly fervent Sabbat or Assamites).

Rather, clans are more like families, and sects are more like social societies, and when was the last time the Kennedys or the graphic designers banded together to drive the Methuselahs from the city? Focus on the individual – the intent is to show the unique nature of being a vampire, not to join an eternal, undying corporation as a pathetic servant. Nothing inherent to clan or sect membership ties a vampire to a "party line," and it's more likely for a conniving Ventrue to plot against other Ventrue than it is for him to shake his fist at a cadre of black-biker-jacket-wearing Brujah gangstaz. Princes don't just "hang out" on velvet thrones, and not all Sabbat are Molotov-tossing psychotics. The characters should exist outside the story – it's their response to the events of the plot that make the story what it is.

Concerning horror, the best Vampire stories seep with it. Without horror, this may as well be a superhero game, and that's not what we're after. Consider: All the characters are dead, yet exist in a fragile state beyond death by stealing away the life's blood of the people they formerly were, while fighting to hold back the excruciating urges of the Beast. All vampires are addicts, dedicated, above all else, to acquiring that precious fluid upon which their existence hangs so precariously. To what depths will these characters sink in the pursuit of their schemes and wants? Let's see those depths.

With those central ideas in mind, here's a "cheat sheet" of elements you may wish to consider while creating your chronicle.

- **New Twists:** Surprise your players. If we know what's going to happen in the plot, it's boring. That's not to say you need random chaos or arbitrarily motivated antagonists, but sometimes the logical conclusion isn't what shakes out of an event. Weirdness and mystery are good; they keep the players guessing.
- **Interesting Characters:** This is so critical that if you don't understand it, you're probably not cut out for the role of Storyteller. Every character has a whole personality, even if the players don't see 99 percent of it. The idea of a "generic vampire" is pretty weak; everyone is an individual.
- **Open-endedness:** Yeah, that's not a word. So what? Anyway, if you're dealing with plot, you should allow players' coteries to have an impact on their environment. This is very hard with Vampire; characters run such a broad spectrum of motivations that it's impossible to create a truly universal situation. It's not like the old days of dungeon-whomp games, where you could stick a monster in a room and every character would make a beeline for it and kick its ass, whether they were priests, elves or whatever. Many Storytellers prefer to let their players create characters before game play actually begins, so that the Storytellers may work bits of the characters' backstories into the plot. Storytelling is a two-way street, and unless the characters have a reason to be a part of the story

or believe that they're going to get something out of it, the whole tale will feel contrived.

- **Focus:** At the same time, however, your idea needs a unity of vision. Why the hell is the Ventrue gang boss hanging out with the Malkavian political hopeful on the balcony of the Brujah runway model's loft? You can't stop players from creating characters who have no business being together (check out a convention game that lets you bring your own character to the table for big laughs sometime), but you can at least bring a sense of order to the material you're outlining. A common theme for the game (which no chronicle should be without) or a mutual point of background for the characters goes a long way toward satisfying this requirement.

cool, not kewl

Vampire prides itself on being a mature venue for storytelling. The adventures of DeathRaven the Trenchcoated Celtic Immortal with silver-plated katanas who can chop his enemies into red mist at the blink of an eye (oh, and he's a vampire, too!) isn't really our intent. If you enjoy this sort of thing, more power to you, but our goal is to gear the game toward less adolescent alienation-vengeance and power fantasies.

The World of Darkness and the Gothic-Punk milieu are stylish and graceful. They combine the most evocative elements of film noir, gothic fiction, high society and low life. Present within them are the tastes and quirks of society at large. This is perhaps one of the greatest differences between the World of Darkness as it is designed and how it is played. Members of storytelling troupes tend to belong to the gaming subculture. Their manners of dress, specialized vocabulary, social habits and other minor personality details tend to be different than those of the mainstream. This isn't a declamation of gaming culture – it's a simple observation. Attend any gaming convention (or, often, any gaming store), and the truth of the matter is visible.

Vampires on the other hand, tend not to be gamers. The Masquerade stipulates that they hide among humankind, yet they very obviously differ from it. Vampires often wear designer labels and drive prestigious cars; they are almost universally lithe (to the point of cadaverous) and beautiful. Even the vampires who prove the exception to these (very general) guidelines make the point by being breaches rather than observations of the rules. The Nosferatu are so much more hideous than simply ugliness by dint of comparison. The shuddersome Tzimisce has a deadly beauty, like a shark. The Brujah drifter looks all the more earthy in his thrift-store wardrobe and tousled hair when compared to the "local" society.

Mostly, these affectations exist to draw mortals to the vampire, in addition to leading them to believe that there is nothing special about the Kindred. The supernatural attractiveness makes hunting easier, and the fact that most look (at least for the most part) like normal people makes it easier to get away with it after the fact. A Kindred who "dresses like a vampire" or insists on wearing a wardrobe that is out of line with the values of the society in which she finds herself is going to draw some unwanted attention. Consider for a moment a gathering of Kindred at an Elysium – the setting is the patio and ballroom of a prestigious local hotel. The Kindred display their subtle finery: elegant cocktail dresses, distinguished suits crafted from the finest wools and silks, sycophants condescendingly bedecked in tuxedos and other affluent "uniforms," when in walks…

...some joker in a floor-length black duster, perpetual five-o'clock shadow and a pair of mirrored sunglasses that look like they've been liberated from a highway patrolman in a bad 70s blaxploitation film. His tattered T-shirt has the name of some noisy band scrawled on it. Weapon bulges protrude obviously from beneath the coat and his long, flowing hair (raven-black, of course) has been tied back in a ponytail reminiscent of a syndicated action series' star's.

Many of the assembled Kindred collapse in laughter. Some of the more vocal ones may ask where the movie's being filmed. Any mortals present will certainly recall most of the distinguishing features possessed by the dime-store Schwarzenegger (as will the Kindred, but they're probably not going to tell the police anything when the body count in town starts soaring, though they may tell the prince). If the overly dramatic Kindred is young enough, he may have flashbacks to those dreams everyone has of being naked at school.

This is probably not his intended effect.

It's petty, but so is Kindred society. The undead place tremendous value on wit and presentation – they are like nothing so much as the aristocratic courts of France mere nights before the revolution. Their harpies are the vicious arbiters of Kindred grace, and the whole dance of undeath must be done at the height of fashion or it suffers the derision of others.

By now, some of you are thinking, "Where's the fun in that?" A reasonable response, but take it one step further.

It's fun to dress up, to put forth the best face one possibly can and to receive the admiration (or adulation) of others. Those of us born without runway-model looks or wardrobe budgets that rival celebrities' can still indulge by assuming the role of a character whom has these blessings. Or, we can take the opposite role and portray a character who actively and aggressively thumbs his nose at these preposterous conventions – this undead peacockery. Either way, we establish the predatory grace of the Kindred without resorting to comic-book clichйs or high-school symbols of alienated rebellion.

Then again, if you want the characters in your story to look like the cast of Highlander, go for it. Haute couture isn't

everyone's cup of tea, and neither is high-concept antifashion.

violence is prevalent but desperate

One of the aspects that makes the World of Darkness an appropriate setting for a horror game is the omnipresence of danger. The streets have long, dark shadows that hide robbers, murderers… and worse. In certain parts of the soaring, gothic cities, one takes one's life in one's hands just by crossing the street. Gangs prowl the blighted urban wasteland, police may well be "on the take" and look elsewhere at inopportune times, and might often makes right at the lowest echelons of society. Even in "civilized" locales, security may be a bit more brutal than it has to be, or a senator's bodyguard may have a mean streak hidden beneath his finely tailored navy suit. The presence of such violence gives people cause for fear. Insecurity breeds tension, which serves the setting by tainting even the most commonplace action with the possibility of harm. Violence serves the setting.

What violence does not always serve is the story. Vampirestories should almost always be written to favor the nonviolent resolution of a situation. Taken to extremes, a ubiquity of violence would literally cause the collapse of civilization. Why would anyone put in an honest day's work if she could simply bash her neighbor on the head and take whatever of his she wanted? Why would anyone keep a job to put food on the table if it was easier to rob the local butcher? And who the hell would want to be a butcher if everyone knew that they could cadge free steaks by stomping his teeth in and helping themselves?

Violence needs to make sense in the story. Not only should it be situationally appropriate, it should suit the participants. Granted, some characters' modus operandi is violence – that's fine. But if such characters' universal response is to beat the living hell out of anything that stands in their way, they're going to have very short unlives. They'll either pick a fight with someone who trounces them, or they'll acquire a reputation as public enemy number one and be hounded by the authorities. On the other side of the coin, very few denizens of the World of Darkness will undertake every conflict as a fight to the death. Only the most fanatical zealot, deranged maniac or fervent believer is going to lay his life on the line when it comes to combat. All too often, fatalities result from accidents, such as a gun going off or an inexperienced bravo not knowing his own strength. After all, the death of someone who readily jumps into certain danger evinces much less horror than the untimely demise of someone who never really had it coming. Sooner or later, the slavering fanatic is going to die – that's a given – but the homeless, unwed mother of two who the police find drained of blood and stuffed in a dumpster behind the Ventrue primogen's office building provides an empathetic hook.

As a side note, vampires cannot die naturally – they continue to exist forever unless something intervenes. With so much riding on the line, most vampires are loath to resort to physical violence in any but the most assured victory. Elders have not achieved their great age and vast resources by punching each other into torpor outside their favorite nightclub. Again, vampires are very subtle, and most Kindred take a greater sense of satisfaction in thwarting their rivals' schemes through counterschemes than by physically beating said rivals into submission. As social creatures, vampires have reputations, and their actions are obviously the most important contribution to these. A brute will very likely find himself snubbed by other Kindred, and if he proves too great a physical threat, they will undoubtedly combine their resources against him.

Finally, as you'll see below, the threat of violence is a far more compelling tool than the actual indulgence of it. When she pummels an enemy, a vampire quantifies her capacity for violence. If she leaves it to the enemy's imagination, that rival will imagine horrors far worse than any the vampire could actually inflict.

vampire music

Like its cousin, fashion, music plays a central role in the unlives of many Kindred. Whether they're nomadic Sabbat traveling under the guise of a touring punk band or a jaded elder who listens to Grieg's "In the Hall of the Mountain King" when he feeds in his haven, vampires often have some connection to music. It's part of their eternal unlifestyle – sex, blood and rock 'n' roll.

Music suffers from the same dependence upon cliches as modes of dress. To many people, "vampire music" is either baroque classical music or modern baroque goth music. Oh, and some Brujah stomp around to metal and industrial. Preferably at a nightclub.

The truth of the matter once again falls to the Masquerade. Vampires follow mortal trends, and the wise among them tend to accept whatever music the kine around them do, for the same reasons Kindred adopt the same appearance as the kine: It's going to make it easier to feed.

(To that end, we're going to try to avoid naming as many specific bands and as many musical genres as we possibly can. With the exception of a few staples, by the time this book makes it to stores half of the "it" bands will have been forgotten while the other half will have new albums out that make any direct quotes too dated to serve the purpose of following modern trends.)

The very idea of "vampire music" is a little fatuous. Even the songs about vampires tend to give too much away about any vampire who displays a predilection for them. If vampires really flocked to the black-draped goth clubs, it would be a simple matter for the Inquisition or other hunters to wait

outside and rub out the undead as they arrived for the evening. Sure, some vampires are vital members of that subculture, but they're hardly a majority.

The most appropriate music to use for a chronicle, then, is whatever best illustrates the theme you as Storyteller are trying to achieve. Whatever the situation, something is probably suitable. Many Storytellers favor techno, industrial, rap or metal as background music for combat (which is fine because combat takes longer to resolve than it takes to occur "in game," so something to alleviate the monotony is welcome). Some Storytellers key "signature songs" to individual characters in their games – imagine the players' response when they hear the "theme song" of a potent hostile elder but he's nowhere in sight – and encourage players to do the same. Still other Storytellers favor movie scores or other wordless music that establishes the mood of their story, so the music becomes part of the background.

The basic gist here is to consider new possibilities. While it is functional to play "par for the course" and round up those old Sisters of Mercy, Dead Can Dance and Concrete Blonde "vampire classics," that's easy. It's often very rewarding to twist the players' preconceived notions of what music is appropriate. As always, do whatever works for your chronicle.

A Moral Gray Scale

Many examples of philosophy, literature and fiction present morality as a question of good and bad. Vampire, however, eschews this approach.

When approached with a black-and-white, right-and-wrong issue, people have no room to maneuver. Vampire moves past these distinctions. It operates without a fundamental delineation of good and evil. This decision has been made intentionally. If the characters were arbitrarily forced to do only good (or, as is the case with some groups, commit themselves to doing only evil), free will vanishes completely. As the presence of such Traits as Humanity and Conscience attests, morality lies at the core of the game, and it occupies a central role in most of the stories told under it. Instead of offering a choice between good and evil, the clever Storyteller puts his players in a position to decide between equally unpleasant outcomes or to decide for themselves what the lesser of two evils will be. As vampires, the characters are Damned, and it's up to them to choose whether they support their more wicked urges or seek to attain some form of redemption.

As the game stands, there is no such thing as a "good" vampire, nor do vampires exist who have literally no capacity to do good. Even the most violent, heinous, murderous Cainites of the Sabbat at least nominally wage war against the Antediluvians and Gehenna – which would otherwise spell the end of the world. The World of Darkness is not one in which good guys and bad guys exist; it is more accurate to say that bad guys and worse guys exist. This doesn't mean that altruism and compassion don't have their place – quite the opposite! In the desperate, violent World of Darkness, these traits are rare and, by extension, more valuable.

Additionally, the sliding moral scale allows characters to grow (or degenerate) and change with their environment. More so than with arbitrary and immutable moral codes, Humanity and the Paths are themselves observed in varying levels by individuals. Over the years, perhaps an elder has grown so apart from humankind that Humanity means nothing to him any more. Instead of being a simple black hat, he may have switched Paths and become an adherent of the Path of Death and the Soul and quite morbid. Or perhaps he has let his Humanity wane, making him monstrous and selfish. Maybe he has succumbed to the Beast entirely and is lucid for only momentary periods when the Beast rests from its blind rage. Or, even more rarely, maybe the Kindred has attained the mythologized state of Golconda, having finally accepted what it means to be a vampire – which probably doesn't bode well for the mortals around him.

The varying morality of people also serves to illustrate the precariousness of the setting. In a world of absolute good and evil, one only has to worry about the evil (and, sometimes, about the good guy who's really a bad guy and just pretending). In the World of Darkness, however, the only person one can trust completely is oneself – and even that luxury has been denied to vampires, who must contend with their Beasts. Beyond the personal level, larger issues collide – the Toreador harpy's art gallery contributes money to several charities, but the person who owns the gallery is a vampire. Would it be better to eliminate the vampire, or does the Kindred's positive contribution make her presence something that must be tolerated? Likewise with the situation on the streets of a large city – should the gangs be eradicated by the police, many of whom are themselves in the pockets of other criminal interests? A million and one of these ethical questions permeate the setting, and exploring the characters' reactions to them is the crux of the game.

Without the presence of morality, Vampire becomes a dispassionate superhero game or a hack-and-slash. With an absolute right-and-wrong morality, it becomes modern fairy-tale fantasy.

The development of the importance of morality has changed the game a great deal from its inception. In revised-edition material, infernalism has only a very minor role. Dealing with the Devil has no real room for moral variance – by aligning himself with an embodiment of ideological evil, the infernalist doesn't leave much question as to his intentions. Likewise, many of the sects, clans and bloodlines seem more selfish, more fractious, less cohesive and less institutional. This is intentional, as it reflects the fact that all Kindred are individuals and make decisions for themselves rather than accepting a "party line" as dictated by their Embrace or sect allegiance. Indeed, much of the formality of such "allegiances" has been removed to make greater room for characterization at the expense of improbable conspiracies. In the end, these changes make the setting more believable

and realistic, which, by extension, makes the emotional impact of morality issues all the more resonant.

The Only Thing That Really Matters

Are you and the troupe having fun?

Yes, it's nice to have a theme and to learn about oneself and to tell the best damn story since Crime and Punishment, but in the end, this is a storytelling game, and a game is a pastime.

That's not to underestimate the medium – we wouldn't have bothered to put this book together if we didn't believe strongly in the fact that a game can have greater depth. But not everyone wants High Art, nor should they.

If your troupe is the kind that enjoys all of the high-grade mature introspection and classics-level plotting, that's fantastic. You will certainly have a rich and enjoyable game. However, if you just want to blow off steam by whacking Sabbat toadies, that's fine, too. Your taste in storytelling will likely fluctuate several times over your involvement with the hobby, and none of them is inherently "right." Find what works best for you, and run with it until you feel the desire to change.

Vampire is aimed largely at the people who want a profound and moving storytelling experience. It will continue to cater to their needs. That said, though, there's no reason you can't take what you like from the genre and turn it to your own ends. After all, that's precisely what a vampire would do with you.

chapter one: the undead

He gazed upon the mirth around him, as if he could not participate therein. Apparently, the light laughter of the fair only attracted his attention, that he might by a look quell it and throw fear into those breasts where thoughtlessness reigned.

– John Polidori, "The Vampyre"

how do vampires work?

And Other Frequently Asked Questions

Why don't vampires just destroy their enemies with Disciplines?

While it may seem simple to solve all one's problems with supernatural powers, the repercussions of the matter go beyond simply achieving a goal. Sure, a vampire elder with Potence Level Six could simply smash anyone who stood before him. A coterie of Brujah could Summon their rival until she ran out of Willpower to ignore it. It's not that these things aren't possible, they're just not done. Think of it in your own context – you could get a job and earn the money to buy Vampire books, or you cold take a board with a nail in it, beat people over the head and take their money to buy Vampire books. Which do you do?

Many vampires regard Disciplines as vulgar ways to achieve one's goals. A lazy vampire Dominates a subject into doing something for him, while a crafty vampire subtly influences his intended mark. This latter practice also leaves less trace of the vampire's presence – an individual acting of his own free will isn't going to have the Kindred up in arms by talking about mind control and other threats to the Masquerade.

Vampires do not use their powers ostentatiously or recklessly without good reason.

Obviously, this is truer of some Disciplines than others. Thaumaturgy makes no attempts to be something other than what it is: magic. Celerity is literally inhuman speed. Disciplines are, by their very nature, edges that the Kindred can use when their own faculties fail. A prince who Dominates the city's Kindred into submission will not have much respect, as the other vampires don't choose to respect her, they are forced to.

Vampires also often harbor antipathy for others who use Disciplines on them. Kindred who take cavalier attitudes toward Discipline use – Dominating vampires into telling the truth before their peers, cultivating false support through Presence, etc. – will be received poorly by other vampires. Our above-mentioned prince would very quickly find herself snubbed by primogen and harpies if she used such heavy-handed tactics. This is also the reason that many princes declare Disciplines verboten at Elysium. Even Aura Perception requires a scrutiny of the individual whose aura the vampire reads; is the Kindred really going to stand by the door and stare intently at everyone who enters the nightclub?

What, then, does this say about the content of individual games? Well, the individual stories of your troupe's chronicle

are the outstanding chapters of their unlives. On a nightly basis, they won't be compelled to divulge the locations of their shady allies' havens under pain of Dominate, but they may, if the story requires it. Disciplines are used largely "when the shit goes down," not as crutches for nightly existence.

How many vampires are there, anyway?

From a strictly Cainite point of view, probably around 40,000. The Middle Kingdom has roughly 20,000 Kuei-jin, for a grand total of approximately 60,000 – one for every 100,000 people on the planet.

Of those Kindred, the clans make up the enormous majority of the population, leaving the rare bloodlines, fallen clans and other, less-quantifiable vampires at about 2,000 vampires in total. Cities aren't likely to have more than one or two Harbingers of Skulls or Gargoyles, if they have any at all. In fact, most cities don't have any Kindred other than those of the clans – and that's precisely how the clans like it. It is, after all, better to deal with the devil you know....

Do infernalists exist outside the Sabbat?

They do, indeed. However, infernalists are rare – anyone with any sense at all knows not to deal with the Devil, or they've deluded themselves into thinking they're going to somehow come out ahead of the deal. Some elders have turned to the infernal for aid or power, and more than a few young vampires opt to take the quick route to potency that infernalism offers. In the end, though, they're Damned – twice.

Infernalism and demons have been largely left in the hands of the Storyteller as of Vampire's revised edition. Their clear-cut morality doesn't fit with the game's exploration of moral shades of gray – an infernalist is evil, pure and simple, and such distinctions tend to limit Vampire's range. In the end, however, the decision is yours as Storyteller. Many people like the menace that infernalism lends to a story, and they are encouraged to do whatever they wish with it as a device.

Does a ghoul keep all of the Disciplines she acquired if she is Embraced?

Yes. Many vampires who spent extended periods of time as ghouls (particularly Assamite apprentices and revenants) often have at least Potence, even if they do not possess it as a clan Discipline.

Can I Embrace something other than a "normal" mortal?

In theory, yes. In practice, strange things happen.

Embraced werewolves, known as abominations, are very rare. Most attempts to Embrace Lupines end in the death of the werewolf, but every now and then, something goes wrong and the wretched thing survives. Shunned and outcast by Kindred and Lupines alike, abominations often lead short, violent unlives. Most kill themselves out of self-loathing, but some go berserk and take as much with them as they can while they spiral into self-destruction. Details on Abominations may be found in Chapter Six. No accounts of other shapeshifters suffering the Embrace have been verified by Kindred, but the rumors do circulate....

The act of the Embrace shatters an individual's avatar, so mages become "normal" vampires if Embraced.

Wraiths, lacking physical bodies, may not be Embraced.

Changelings almost invariably meet Final Death if Embraced. Certain stories have passed through the Kindred community about powerful, eldritch fae vampires, but these rumors are lent little credence.

Hunters simply die – their higher power refuses to let them become one of the undead. For similar reasons, they may not become ghouls or blood bound.

Mummies and Risen can't become vampires. If a vampire attempts to Embrace them, mummies die (only to be reborn later) and Risen get angry.

Everything else becomes a vampire, as normal. Kinfolk, Gypsies, Inquisitors, etc. all become Kindred. It's up to the Storyteller as to whether or not they keep any uncommon powers they possessed before the Embrace, but we discourage it.

What's the difference between a clan and a bloodline?

Mainly semantics, with a good dose of pragmatism mixed in for good measure.

A clan, by the most rigid definition, is a lineage of vampires sharing common descent from a single, extant Antediluvian. The Salubri, whom The Book of Nod describes as having a third-generation founder, are no longer a clan, while the Giovanni, whose Antediluvian sometimes takes an active part in the affairs of the family, are now a clan.

Granted, things certainly get muddy when speaking of millennia-old Kindred who are rumored to be destroyed or not even wholly accepted as real, as with the Camarilla's common school of thought. The Ventrue's founder is believed to have been destroyed, but no one knows for certain, and you can bet no one's telling them they're not a clan anymore. Likewise, the Lasombra Antediluvian supposedly fell to diablerie around the time of the Anarch Revolt, which means that someone else may well be a third-generation Lasombra. Even the Ravnos, who recently suffered the destruction of their Antediluvian and a plague of blood-borne self-destruction are still considered a clan because they have been since time out of mind. Take it with a grain of salt.

A bloodline, by comparison, is a group of vampires that shares common characteristics, but has either diverged from an existing clan, been created whole-cloth or come into being as a result of some sanguinary parthenogenesis. The Daughters of Cacophony are suspected to be an offshoot of the Toreador (or perhaps the Malkavians), while the Blood Brothers were created for the express purpose of serving other vampires. Neither of these have the numbers nor the lineage to lay claim to clan status, and even if they did, convincing a body of 40,000 Kindred to recognize that claim would be nigh impossible.

In the long run, however, none of it matters. Stodgy Ventrue, suspicious Tremere and haughty princes may put gravity behind another Kindred's ancestry, but most vampires don't really care about another's clan – being a vampire is first and foremost in their minds and everything else is secondary.

What are Caine's Traits? What are the names of the surviving Antediluvians? Who would win the Jyhad? What's the truth about the Inconnu?

The Vampire line has well over 60 titles released. It's hard to keep a sense of secrecy when practically every book reveals some cryptic profundity.

As a game of horror and mystical intrigue, Vampire loses much of its mystery when "the truth" sees print.

Some secrets should stay that way. If we don't answer them in time, perhaps they weren't meant to be known….

How do you reconcile the changes in Disciplines in chronicles that have been running before the revised edition changed several of them?

I recommend the poof! method – just make the changes and assume that's how it's always been. With a few exceptions (Malkavians acquiring Dominate) this is unobtrusive. In an "official" sense that's how it happened; there was no gradual change.

Then, what about those Malkavians? And Thaumaturgy?

Some Malkavians still have Dominate as a clan Discipline; they have yet to be "infected." As for those who have caught the disea– er, Dementation (Storytellers, it's your call to make as to whether or not a given player's Malkavian caught it), let them keep the amount of Dominate they already possess, make them pay out-of-clan costs for future levels of Dominate, and allow them to start buying Dementation as a clan Discipline.

Regarding Thaumaturgy, it's not seamless; the magic slowly grew more obstinate between the second and revised editions. Storytellers should integrate this into their chronicles – make Thaumaturgical effects slowly become more and more difficult to perform until you finally arrive at the revised-edition system. Little continuity hiccups like this are inevitable, but easy to work around.

What happened to the Bushi? And the Gaki?

Anomalous "bloodlines" published years ago, the Gaki and Bushi are actually Kuei-jin as misunderstood by Western Kindred. Kindred of the East presents the Eastern vampires in a better context than earlier published material – if you remember the Bushi and Gaki at all, you can use them with greater ability under the Kindred of the East rules than as initially presented in now-out-of-print supplements. If you've never heard of them before, well, never mind.

What happens if my difficulty rises higher than 10?

Because the Storyteller system uses 10-sided dice, no difficulty can possibly rise over 10. Many game systems explicitly limit difficulties to 10. If you ever find yourself in a situation that, for whatever reason, would suggest a difficulty of greater than 10, you are encouraged to keep it at 10 and require multiple successes.

How many freebie points does a dot of Humanity cost? The chart on page 104 of the revised edition says one, but the character creation example says two on page 111.

Crud. It's one point.

What's the deal with aggravated damage and Fortitude?

Stated simply, you soak aggravated damage with Fortitude only, unless a specific power or effect says otherwise. That's it: no Fortitude, no soak.

Aggravated damage is serious business. Someone who can inflict aggravated damage intends to hurt another character grievously. This is not a barroom brawl, this is murderous malice. Aggravated damage is bad news. Think about the sources: sunlight, fire, angry Lupines, etc. Don't suffer aggravated damage. You'll regret it, if you survive long enough.

The best way to avoid aggravated damage is the best way to avoid all damage: Don't pick a fight. Vampire is not a game about whaling on people until they see things your way, it's a game of horror and intrigue. Physical violence is always a last resort for a vampire – picking a fight foolishly may cost a Kindred her immortality.

That said, combat is tied inextricably (and somewhat unfortunately, to some schools of thought) to storytelling games. One of the most popular house rules is to allow characters to add their Stamina to their Fortitude when soaking aggravated damage (as if it were bashing or lethal). If your games have a fair share of combat, you may wish to do this rather than have your players make a stack of

characters in preparation for their unavoidable demises. The choice is yours to make.

How can a character resist Dominate? It's very powerful.

The sidebar on page 158 of the Vampire rulebook handles this fairly completely. Sunglasses won't protect you, but not looking into the vampire's eyes will. Also, the Iron Will Merit – subject to your discretion as Storyteller – permits limited avoidance of Dominate.

Yes, Dominate is very powerful. It is intended to be. If every snot-nosed Brujah, rebellious Sabbat pack or agitated anarch could laugh off the effects of Dominate, the Ventrue and Lasombra wouldn't be very effective leaders. Dominate is usually a vampire's last resort, and having that last resort easily thwarted doesn't do the leaders of the undead justice.

Notice also that unless the vampire uses The Forgetful Mind successfully, a Dominated character is very likely to remember that something was unusual about her actions. She may not immediately suspect mind control (unless she has reason to), but she will know that her actions were… strange.

What happens when a vampire loses a limb? Does it grow back?

Severing appendages affects vampires much the same way it does mortals – a vampire isn't likely to pick anything up if she's had her hand cut off. If a vampire loses a limb, consider it gone. However, when the vampire heals the health level associated with limb removal, the limb is considered regrown. In some cases, particularly those in which the character heals the damage quickly, the limb doesn't actually regrow, but rather knits itself back to the body. For example, if an Assamite lops off a Toreador neonate's hand and the Toreador spends a blood point to heal the damage that scene, her hand reattaches itself to her arm. If the healing happens very quickly (within one turn of receiving the wound), the severed bit may never even touch the ground, as the vampiric vitae "holds" the limb in place and reattaches it. Disgusting.

Because vampire limbs reattach themselves, exquisite variants of torture have arisen in the chambers of more fiendish Kindred. More than one Tzimisce has been known to remove victims' appendages and replace them incorrectly, resulting in upside-down hands, backward-bending legs and the like.

A severed limb that is left behind or otherwise not immediately healed by the vampire takes on characteristics appropriate to the age of its former owner. A lopped-off hand from a neonate may simply seem gray and clammy while a thousand-year-old elder's severed hand crumbles to ash instantly.

Regrowth does not apply in cases of decapitation – one reason why the Inquisition employs the tactic and why duels between Kindred are grave matters. A beheaded vampire is a vampire who has met the Final Death.

What happens to a pregnant woman who is Embraced or becomes a ghoul?

Most likely, the pregnancy terminates immediately, which results in miscarriage, stillbirth, etc., depending on the stage to which the fetus had developed. Revenant mothers don't have this problem and instead produce healthy (sic, of course) revenant children.

Far less common, the fetus may become a vampire itself, though it will not continue to grow. In this case, it remains an undead, static little monstrosity, trapped forever in its mother's womb, taking blood from her like a parasite (which consumes one additional blood point per night). In particularly unpleasant cases, the fetus-vampire chews its way out of its mother's womb, existing as long as others let it in its stunted, vile, undeveloped form.

Some 15th-generation Kindred may bear living children of their own, though the rarity of such vampires (not to mention their becoming pregnant and carrying the child to term) is so great that very little concrete data exists to make generalizations about them.

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What if a vampire eats food but doesn't have the Eat Food Merit?

A vampire may consume food, but it refuses to stay down – unless the vampire spends a Willpower point each turn, she vomits within the scene (though some Storytellers may allow players to spend a point of Willpower to keep a character from vomiting). The same rules apply for drinking, as well. Note that other vampires find the practice of eating mortal food utterly disgusting – "like eating a pig's slop," in the words of one rural Gangrel – and one who makes a practice of doing so will probably earn the derision of his undead peers.

Do vampires leave fingerprints?

Yes and no. A vampire still has the ridges and whorls at the ends of her fingers that constitute "fingerprints," but her dead body does not secrete the oils that leave such telltale marks behind. This means that, while the character doesn't leave normal fingerprints, her fingers will still leave their unique marks in, say, piles of printer toner, coagulated honey, dust on a computer monitor, etc. Firing a gun does not leave enough powder behind to have to worry about fingerprints, though cordite will stick to a vampire's hands for a few nights (as it would for a mortal), which may identify him as having used a firearm to forensics experts.

Can a vampire catch a disease by feeding from ill vessels?

Generally, no, though they may certainly carry a vessel's disease if they are sloppy feeders or don't practice what little hygiene is required. Some Kindred have communicated diseases by bringing leftover blood in their mouths or on their fangs into contact with open wounds on subsequent vessels. Such vampires are sometimes known as "vectors" or "plague dogs." Other vampires rarely stand for this, as it may result in epidemics that arouse the attentions of government disease-control agencies that may come around, sticking their noses into just why the disease has become so widespread.

Some particularly virulent diseases have afflicted certain Kindred, though. Certainly, several Children of Caine have contracted a strain of AIDS so potent that it has ravaged their bodies (which drinking blood from many different sources can only exacerbate, surely). Some vampires have also suffered from flesh-eating bacteria while others have contracted what seems to be a mutation of rabies. In the end, this is the Storyteller's call for each individual situation, but it can happen.

Can a character take elder blood, use it to create a new vampire and then diablerize the fledgling?

No. Vampire blood, once removed from the vampire, becomes inert, dead blood. While it may be used to sustain ghouls or even vampires – rumors of sealed vessels of elders' blood circulate like wildfire through the vampiric community – such vitae cannot be used to create childer. The Embrace must be performed by a vampire using her own blood, which must be given directly to the prospective childe. Although the sire need not press her wrist to the childe's mouth, the blood cannot have come from storage, out of a squirt gun, from a bottle of wine, etc. – it needs to flow relatively unimpeded from sire to childe.

Thaumaturgy may prove the exception to this, but if anyone knows the ritual, they certainly aren't telling how it's done.

So, then, what happens in a "mixed-blood" Embrace?

A vampire sired by two (or more) Kindred, who must remove the victim's blood and drip both of their vitae into the childe's mouth, most often becomes a Caitiff. In cases that involve one vampire of significantly lower generation than the other, the childe usually exhibits the characteristics of the low-generation Kindred's clan. Any player who approaches you with a two-clan split in the interests of acquiring a huge set of clan Disciplines should be rewarded with the loss of all her freebie points.

To what extent does a vampire's body revert to its original form each day while he sleeps?

As static, timeless creatures, vampires return as closely to the state in which they were Embraced as possible. A simple mechanic involves considering how many health levels of damage a character sustained for a given change. If the change cause no appreciable damage – shaving, cutting one's hair, piercing a body part, getting a tattoo – the vampire's body eliminates the change during the day. Hair grows back (let your childe shave before you Embrace him…), piercings push themselves out, tattoo ink rises to the skin's surface, etc.

If the change is appreciable enough to do health levels of damage (see limb loss, above, for example), the vampire reverts to her original form once healed.

Aggravated damage, even when healed, almost always leaves a telling scar.

Do vampires have any fluids other than blood in their bodies, like saliva or tears?

Let me preface this by saying, "suspend disbelief." We are talking about creatures of fantasy, after all.

Most of the liquids in a vampire's body are replaced by blood – Kindred sweat and cry vitae. Other fluids remain fairly true to their original form. Vampires do possess "normal" saliva, otherwise their mouths would be a bloody mess. Likewise, the vitreous and aqueous humors in vampires' eyeballs aren't replaced by blood, or their eyes would be red instead of white. Other than these few examples, common sense applies. Vampires obviously do not have reproductive fluids, and when female vampires spend a blood point to engage in sexual acts, their lubrication is a thin blood.

The science of it all takes a back seat to the setting. If vampires all had red eyes and drooled blood, the whole Masquerade would be rather pointless.

How do I keep my players from running roughshod over the chronicle and destroying the plot?

One important consideration to keep as Storyteller is that you are not the players' adversary. The game exists to make both you and them happy. If your players stubbornly insist on going their own way, perhaps they don't want to play the kind of chronicle you have set up for them. The rest of this book features some very case-specific advice for handling this – it is, after all, the Storyteller's handbook.

On the other hand, the time will come when a player (or maybe the whole coterie) decides to do something so mind-numbingly stupid that your jaw will drop. This can be the result of any number of circumstances. Most often the player simply hasn't fully thought through his course of action, but in some cases, a Storyteller's lax attention to logical cause and effect convinces a player that this ludicrous action will go unpunished.

The best advice is to reason through the player's action with him. Don't be dismissive or condescending – it may be that he honestly didn't think that shooting a police officer with the cop's own shotgun would land his character on a Most Wanted list. Be the voice of reason, apply a bit of common sense, and work out the logical outcomes with the player before his character commits to the action. Many times, due to the "larger than life" nature of the stories told during Vampire games, players may get caught up in the epic tone of the game and fail to remember that the World of Darkness is a grim reflection of our own – and Storytellers are not exempt from this occasional delusion.

If the player absolutely insists on his character doing what he said he's going to do, let him reap the consequences of his actions. As a rule of thumb, no one is arraigned at night because judges don't work 24 hours a day; a character who ends up in jail will likely be discharged during daylight hours. Even if he does manage to stay awake, not erupting into a pillar of flame upon leaving the building after posting bail may prove difficult. Storytellers should have no qualms about punishing stupid courses of action with arrest, if they're illegal. Even foolishness within the realm of the law can have serious consequences – anarchs who publicly embarrass or offend their prince have earned a powerful enemy, and trying to slide under a moving train to chase a fleeing foe to the other side can only end in disaster.
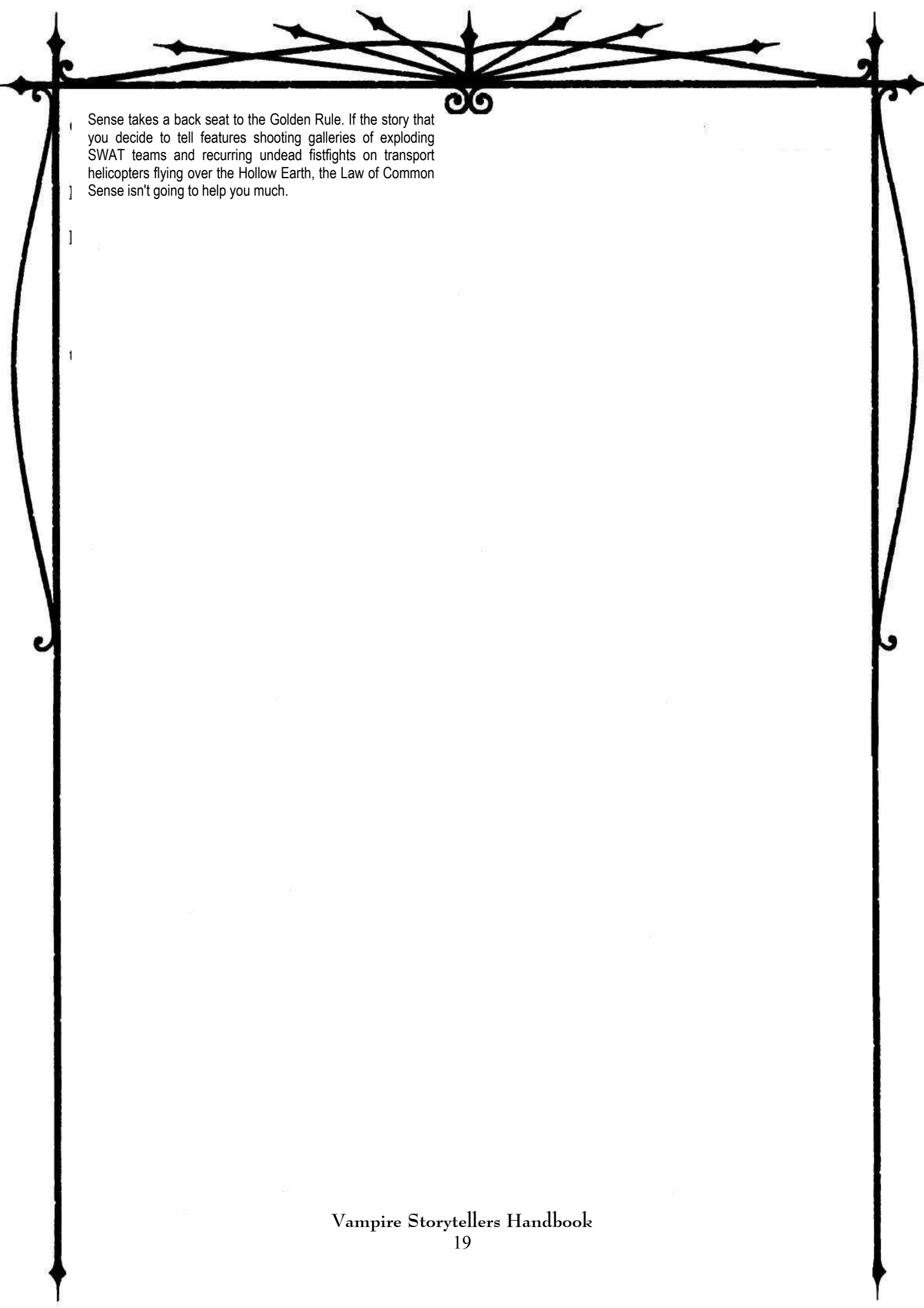
The "Law of Common Sense" is a meta-rule, much like the Golden Rule – it is not a specific game system but, rather, a principle that guides the game under less mechanical situations. Quite simply, it means that logic rules the night – cause and effect are not abstract concepts but active forces. When a character decides to undertake a questionable action, reason it out and apply the result. Is the character doing something illegal? Is some potent figure going to take offense? Is anyone watching? Is the character risking his physical wellbeing? What's the most probably outcome of the situation?

Make sure the player understands the ramifications of his character's behavior. This is important less for the observance of courtesy than for the sake of the game – if a character who has become central to the events of the plot suddenly decides it's in his best interest to set himself on fire and hopefully burn his enemy to ashes before the flames claim him, he probably needs a quick reminder that such action is rash. If, as Storyteller, you cave in and allow something implausible to happen, you have undermined the game. The players will take it as precedent and either complain that their character isn't afforded the same luxury or leave the game, as it will have lost the edge that makes Vampire so enjoyable. If the players want gritty horror and you deliver action-movie fare, they're going to be understandably disappointed.

The Law of Common Sense, then, protects the integrity of the game. Characters who fight constantly are going to have their asses handed to them on a platter sooner or later, because they're inevitably going to pick a fight with someone tougher than them. A character whose response to every threat by Kindred is to board up their her havens and burn them down is going to face a litany of arson charges. A character who insists on carrying weaponry at all times will eventually be found out and issued a summons for a 9:30 A.M. concealed weapons court hearing, if he's not arrested outright. And these are just mundane concerns – consider the reaction of a fiendish elder when a character refuses to "check his stake" before entering the elder's haven. In the end, a foolish, graceless or boorish character will be the object of social scorn, at best. At worst, he'll be nothing more than a memory.

Of course, even the Law of Common

Sense takes a back seat to the Golden Rule. If the story that you decide to tell features shooting galleries of exploding SWAT teams and recurring undead fistfights on transport helicopters flying over the Hollow Earth, the Law of Common Sense isn't going to help you much.

chapter two: among the nights

There have been two transformations: her white dress is now red, and where a girl once stood a corpse now lies.

–Alejandra Pizarnik, "The Bloody Countess"

clans are not fraternities

It happens more often than most of us would like to admit.

"Gather with your clanmates, noble Kindred – our prince shall hold court with you shortly."

"The Brujah will emerge from deliberation in one month's time to name our new primogen."

"We of the Gangrel must join forces to strike down the hated Tremere."

Bullshit.

It would be nice if every childe saw her sire as an angel, benefactor and soul mate with whom to keep company over the centuries. It would make things simpler to believe that immortal blood-drinkers followed the rules of some unwritten passbook dictating with whom and under what circumstances they could form alliances and friendships or that common ancestry or bloodline tied vampires together in some storybook semblance of eternal codependency.

But they don't, any more than their mortal counterparts do in the real world. Families fight. Siblings hate. Fathers, sons, mothers, daughters, even distant relations – they each may undergo disagreement, distrust, even irreparable division and blood feud over the course of a lifetime. Nations suffer civil wars, and "humans" – which is as reasonable a distinction as "Ventrue" – even kill each other at times.

Envision a handful of those families – four or five of the most abusive, distrustful, dysfunctional households you can find. Now assume that at least a double handful of these unfortunates (if not more) are hardened career criminals – backstabbers, bigamists, extortionists, murderers, rapists, practitioners of various and sundry less easily defined offenses. Now add to each criminal's psychological makeup periodic loss of control and unimaginably violent urges – sensations induced by an influence beyond any earthly narcotics or trauma (the Beast). Incorporate the terrible, world-spanning secret integral to their continued existence (the Masquerade) and the countless methods through which each co-conspirator – each and every single member of this "family" – might exploit or otherwise leverage that secret. Throw into the mix a price upon his head of such magnitude that would-be bounty hunters flock from the four corners of the Earth to collect (diablerie).

Now consider that each member of this incestuous, treacherous "family" has had not one, not 10, but hundreds of mortal lifetimes over which to cultivate bedroom betrayals, bitter resentment and desperate, immortal unhappiness, and you've grasped the essentials of vampiric society and interaction within the World of Darkness.

Stranger Than Fiction

Much of the time, the ancestry of any given Kindred in a particular city is undisclosed – or, more simply, unknown. Kindred address other Kindred by name first and foremost or perhaps even by station, sometimes as a means of insult or redress. ("Can you not attend to your duties, sheriff?") Elders and primogen are selected not from a seven-page catalog organized by clan, but by age, merit or simple arbitrary selection, as acknowledging one's lineage is a tipped hand, an unwarranted intrusion, an outright admission of weakness (clan-specific, rules-based or otherwise). Even the question "What is your clan?" is often considered the height of effrontery; only the most iron-fisted and tyrannical of leaders demand such disclosures from their entrants… but never for very long. (Several western demesnes, the preponderance now anarch-controlled, have been overturned from within following an ill-planned series of drumhead trials, blood-screenings and aura-enforced truthsayer sessions – it pays to tread softly around one's peers and lessers.)

Even among traditionally close-knit bloodlines, the lines of communication are not what they might at first seem. Brujah are honor-bound to aid brother Brujah, true – but for every cause-loyal crusader bellowing about bloodshed and brotherhood, at least three others assume false identities, eking out nameless, faceless unlives in self-imposed exile and forging treacherous alliances "for the (supposed) good of the clan." And all Tremere ostensibly bend knee to a centuries-old and established chain of command – but tell that to the fractured, independent rival chantries competing for favor within multiple cities, the conscripts tasked with undertakings of such secrecy that neither their activities nor identities are known to anyone but the region's pontifex and the uncounted power-mad infernalists and renegades operating in a given domain without so much as a by-your-leave from the Council of Seven.

The Balance of Power

The distribution of demographics, industries and resources by clan in Camarilla cities (and often Sabbat cities… the two hierarchies are more similar in some respects than either would like to admit) follows a reliable routine, varying with the character of each region, but reminiscent of an intricate chess game; several common openings, responses and sacrifices exist, but countless variations also surface.

Turnabout…

Educational, financial and recreational institutions comprise the three staples of any mid- to large-scale mortal community. (Larger urban centers incorporate political elements into this mix as well, but these struggles are typically subsumed by fiscal manipulation or powers beyond city-specific levels of control.)

The halls of academia have traditionally been the ripening fields of the Malkavians, Brujah, Lasombra (who have had their hooks into the clerical system [and its successor, the educational system] for centuries) and Tremere (who simply never left). These are the circles from whence vampiric society draws two of its strongest assets – a living, breathing connection to young intellectualism and the lessons of history, as well as a knowledge base that sees cutting-edge mortal research coupled with the indeterminate length of Cainite (and ghoul) existence.

The financial province is and will in all likelihood always be Ventrue-, Toreador- and Giovanni-dominated; all speculations on tradition or unity aside, no other clans uniformly wield the resources or (inter)national network of associates (some would say "old boys' club") necessary to dislodge the patricians' stranglehold in this arena. And with absolute power comes absolute corruption; the hordes of lawmen, legislators and politicians in the pockets of the wealthy are without number. This represents the vanguard of the Camarilla counteroffense – where their less civic-minded Sabbat brethren might employ brute force or a frontal assault, the adherents to de Corazon's dream have access to weapons the children of blood and fire could not conceive. Curfew, quarantine, even martial law – these are the raised fists of the Ventrue, of the Camarilla as a whole, and all pay homage to the almighty dollar.

And no urban center would be complete without the requisite array of eateries, entertainments and bars that have come to comprise its lighter (darker?) side. In this corner of the civilized world, the Camarilla is almost evenly represented; although Toreador artistes and socialites once pranced and puppeteered their way through the ranks of mortal culture, pocketbooks speak far louder than prowess in the latter half of the 20th century. Constituents from every clan and city now lay claim to a piece of the action; wherever dinner, drinks and entertainment are gathered under one roof, there is almost certainly a Brujah recruitment base, Caitiff underground, Ventrue financial presence or herd to a host of other Kindred.

…Is Fair Play

But the older, simpler nights have long left the Children of Caine behind. Once upon a time, it is true, immortals relied upon ties of tradition and bloodline – in times of yore one called upon the Brujah when pressed by matters of martialry or metaphysics, the Ventrue concerning finances or the court and so on and so forth. In the here and now, however, affiliations and identities have grown considerably more blurred.

Assamites

Doubly dangerous in the wake of the breaking of the Tremere curse, any Assassins still operating under contract in Camarilla cities often wisely do so undercover and without the knowledge or consent of their clanmates. (One cannot be persuaded or tortured to reveal what one does not know, after all.)

Most major American domains tolerate the presence of at least one Assamite "ambassador" (a covert set of eyes and ears, as well as a conduit of communication with Alamut, a politically versed spin doctor, even a last-resort safehouse for endangered operatives). It is not uncommon for scholars and sorcerers among the Children of Haqim to frequent European and Asian cities on occasion (although they rarely do so openly). No few Assamites have also found purpose among the ranks of the Camarilla as scourges, sheriffs and even keepers of Elysium.

Brujah

Much to the relief of already strife-torn Camarilla principals, the biker beat-machines and roving warmonger packs once common to the late 1980s and early 1990s are a dwindling minority; many have gone antitribu, been lost to attrition or quietly sanitized as unacceptable risks to the Masquerade. Still, the young members of the clan find safety in familiar subcultures; while the clan once Embraced bikers, punks and similar types, recent years see more and more "rebel of the month" neonates as promoted by media stereotype. Would-be rap stars, gangstaz, ravers, neogoths, straight-edge skins and the like have all found a new haven within the ranks of the Brujah.

Several Brujah intellectuals and propagandists are still entrenched in the global educational infrastructure, but these shrinking few are ineffectually torn between (active) struggle and (passive) survival. Many Camarilla younglings still committed to making a difference surround themselves with inner-city or politically-heated climates (such as revolutionary Africa and South America, where many Rabble feel duty-bound to spend years of their unlives immersed in life-or-death causes).

Gangrel

No standardized roles or responsibilities suit the descendants of Ennoia. In the modern nights, a meeting between two Outlanders can be considered a clan assembly, a storytelling circle of three or more a regional congregation, and any given straggler is as likely to lead the unlife of a civil engineer as that of a shiftless wanderer.

Contrary to certain popularized belief, the Gangrel have no "alliances" or "treaties" or "understandings" with the Lupines and are too scattered and fractious to mount any sort of unified influence or opinion. Their recent dissolution and nominal withdrawal from the Camarilla has not helped matters; the air is rife with rumors concerning uninvited Gangrel observers skulking on the outskirts of cities, even accounts of nomadic guerrillas nested deep in third-world territories led by once-Justicar Xaviar himself.

Giovanni

Two varieties of Giovanni domains are rumored to exist: family-held estates (stuffed to the gills with D1B,Giovanni descendants, both mortal and undead) and outlying regions (occupied by one renegade family member, at most). The Necromancers' feeding weakness makes it difficult for multiple Giovanni to coexist unnoticed in a city – county morgues and hospital wards can sustain perhaps one careful feeder, but beyond that health officials become suspicious and words like "CDC" and "epidemic" find their way into

urban vernacular. And what about typical Giovanni contacts, holdings and activities?

Well, relative clan populations notwithstanding, the ranks of the dead span every known sphere of mortal influence… and that influence has certainly proven more than sufficient to deter anyone who wanders too close. Giovanni outside Venice are typically so few and far between it is hard to find them should they not wish to be found. For every sewer- or morgue-skulking Necromancer, another may make her haven at a university, in a hotel or in a windowless room of a downtown office building.

Lasombra

More than one Cainite historian has theorized that the competitive, predatory nature of the Clan of Shadow is all that blocks them from falling upon their once-peers like a hard rain. Certainly the division has kept the Lasombra from mustering the unity necessary to fully dominate their Sabbat brethren, much less defeat their Camarilla foes.

These shadowy patricians' mastery of the financial sphere approaches that of the Ventrue, and their centuries-old connections with the ecclesiastic echelons more than evens the score. Where other clans might occupy a given domain in fives and sixes, the Lasombra parcel themselves out across nomadic packs and Sabbat-held cities singly or in sire-childe pairs. To engage in larger conglomeration is to invite betrayal upon betrayal; indeed, it is rumored that the clan's secretive social arm (Les Amies Noir) actually espouses dueling and ritual diablerie between rivals, if and when such claims can be backed up with token proof.…

Malkavian

It's hard to ascribe any generalized agenda or alliances to the Children of Malkav, who exhibit nearly as many derangements as there are clan members. Some believe they are angels; others, devils. Most refuse to consider that they might be mad, and others see their madness as freedom from the shackles of reality imposed on the other clans. More than a few believe they truly are descended from other clans.

Needless to say, such divergence of opinion stands forever in the way of any unified Malkavian perspective. The absolutely batty ones are tolerated (or discriminated against or outright exiled) under Camarilla and Sabbat structures; the quiet (or seemingly quiet) ones immerse themselves in circles of influence common to other Kindred (criminal, financial, occult, etc.). Many go so far as to pose as members of other clans (if and when they can determine their identities); the Toreador are most frequently imitated in this manner. (Still more embarrassing is the fact that many Toreador cannot tell the difference!)

Typically, at least one Malkavian in a given area will take up an interest with mortal science and technology… and that

can be a very dangerous combination. Prominent health-care administrators, research scientists and even political figures have all hailed from among the Lunatics, as well as several others not so easily identified.

Nosferatu

The tunnel-diggers are at a decided disadvantage in many matters regarding Kindred society; spending all your time crawling around in the sewers (and, more importantly, fraternizing with those who haven't been crawling around down there on those infrequent occasions when you do surface) tends to make it pretty easy to separate the haves from the have-nots.

From a certain standpoint, the Sewer Rats are the most informed clan in any city of sufficient age and size. Each member possesses the power to enter, travel and leave as she wishes (as well as having rigged many subterranean passages for cave-in or detonation, more often than not) and has access to a wealth of resources their more squeamish counterparts might not employ. (At least one Nosferatu, for instance – the Long Island Hag, a perverse twisted creature calling herself Lily – picks through a certain select few influential paper-shredder refuse bins night after night, Scotch-tape dispenser in hand....)

Sellers of secrets are by their very nature solitary, however, and gatherings of two or more muckrakers are as likely to collapse into how-much-have-I-learned-about-you, how-much-can-I-keep-you-from-learning-about-me one-upmanship as they are to go smoothly or amicably. They will only cooperate when mutually beneficial… and rarely at the behest of an outsider.

Still, much diversity can be found among the ranks of the Nosferatu. Although many regard their ugliness as a factor that forever limits them, these are the largely ignorant and short-sighted. Any prince or archbishop knows to maintain as amicable terms as possible with "the Kindred who know it all." Further, many Nosferatu are only identified as such with difficulty or knowledge – a fallen pack priest from Monaco was as beautiful a woman as many people have met… from the waist up… while a noted primogen was otherwise "normal" with the exception of very angular features. Assuming that all Nosferatu are immediately obvious, twisted monsters leads one to underestimate them. Surely, all are disfigured horribly, though some are more visibly scarred than others.

Ravnos

The descendants of Dracian do at least pay lip service to ties of blood – on those increasingly rare occasions when two or more temporarily unite for some common purpose, they rarely fail to boast some familial connection (whether real or invented).

The normal scheme of things, however, is somewhat less tidy. At their best, Ravnos are self-interested thieves and deceivers; at their worst, backstabbers and cutthroats. Most of the remaining Ravnos subsist in the European countryside, eking out solitary nomadic existences surrounded by their mortal kin (but a Gypsy clan supports only one or two Ravnos per family at most, tolerating only occasional intrusions). Others prowl the American coasts, lingering on the outskirts of cities as autarkis. A few (growing with each passing night's gorgio conscripts) inhabit Camarilla-, anarch- and even Sabbat-occupied cities, elbows-deep in industries such as gambling, prostitution and even confidence scams. (Indeed, a small but growing number of business-savvy Ravnos are proving a dangerous precedent....) Most claim unknown or false heritage when pressed on the subject: To be left without allies in the modern nights is a dangerous thing.

Setites

The devout Follower-of-Set presumption is no longer as prevalent as it once was. The eldest Setites still cling to their ancient communions and ancestral temples, true, but in so doing, they make themselves prime targets to foes both within and without. There are many faces to fanaticism, after all – and zealots are as likely to fall victim to other zealots as they are to unbelievers.

Although many Setite fledglings begin their tenure in the criminal underbelly of the inner city, such dirty, gritty environs are too limited and vulnerable for most purposes; many serpents eventually turn their attentions to corporate double-dealings, high-society perversions, white-collar crime and debts of several more sophisticated stripes. The dreadlocked pusher-pimp of stereotype is in reality more likely to be an antiquarian, an explorer or broker, making her haven in an unassuming apartment or office that isn't bedecked in archaic Egyptian trappings. It never helps to advertise one's affiliations when one deals with Setites, an adage that works both ways.

Toreador

The Toreador population of a locality is more likely to consist of several sire-childe (or even grandsire-sire-childe) lines than those of other clans; it is the way of these artistes to tarry and propagate rather than pick up and move from place to place. This might make them a stronger and tighter community, were the Degenerates less prone to animosity, cattiness and outright dissention. Blood feuds, fits of blind rage, lovers' quarrels – vampires are by nature passion-driven creatures, the Toreador most of all, and these are the legacy of the artisans' line.

Owing perhaps to their intimate familiarity with the mortal world, the gravity of immortality tends to weigh more heavily on these Kindred than most. The Toreador wend their way waist-deep through the cultural centers of the globe… but dark, unpleasant peripheries orbit those centers on which none will comment publicly.

Pain and pleasure intermingled; slavery, suffering and blood-sculpture; inspiration, seduction and ultimate destruction of the spirit – all these and more are the territories of the antitribu, waters into which most Toreador have been known to wander from time to time. It is precisely these forbidden dalliances, and perhaps the all-too-fleeting fancies many indulge by surrounding themselves with mortal admirers and protйgйs, that keep the Degenerates from slipping effortlessly into the madness that ensnared their progenitor's sibling so many millennia ago.

And, though they maintain the delicate fiction of gathering in the name of "amity" or "appreciation," such differences in artistic integrity keep these would-be brothers and sisters forever apart.…

Vampire Storytellers Handbook

Tremere

The blood-wizards layer false fronts (bribed officials, laundered investitures, phantom corporations) by way of covering their connections. Any given witch or warlock might keep some publicly maintained property from which to conduct meetings and negotiations, as well as two or three private holdings and at least one secure, readily mobile laboratory/sanctum facility – in addition to financial and management responsibilities to the central chantry and associated facilities, of course.

Expect at least one Tremere (neither the eldest nor youngest, typically) to assume housekeeping and recruitment duties, most often unwillingly. (Many chantries relegate this responsibility as a form of disciplinary action, which explains much of the discrimination and even subversion undergone by many neonates.) At least one or two others are often dedicated to experimentation and research (and good luck getting them to do anything more than bicker and compete with one another). Further, as is increasingly common in the modern age, more than a few have given up the thaumaturge angle entirely, cultivating political and socioeconomic arenas in their own personal pursuits of power at any price.

Tzimisce

Nowhere is the generation gap more pronounced than in the company of these inhuman Cainites. The 'old' (read: tradition-bound) Tzimisce support unlives of which Bram Stoker might have been proud. Ancestral havens and homelands, lofty peaks and solitary lieges, occasional written correspondences and would-be contenders coming to knock the king from his customary perch; all these and more are the stuff of Slavic legend. It is considered the height of ill-mannered intrusion to even set foot in a neighboring domain without soliciting consent and invitation (preferably written) from that domain's master… and even then, the aforementioned master leaves the comfort of his home only under the most desperate of circumstances.

The modern lineages of Tzimisce often have more in common with the lore of urban nightmare than their vampyr and vrykolakas predecessors. Such jaded creatures are often nothing so much as dabblers or experience junkies (aesthetic, cultural, physical) and are more likely to be found frequenting fetish clubs than Carpathian fortresses in this night and time. Still, the Tzimisce are known as enigmas, and relegating them to roles of leather sluts may earn a Kindred a stake to his heart – held by the hand of an art collector or a bishop's personal confessor.

Ventrue

The double-edged sword of the old boys' club cuts both ways; unlike the other clans, the Ventrue cling to a more meritocratic power structure (however fragile). For every elder comfortably seated atop the proverbial billionaire stash, three ancillae ply the investor's trade and 10 neonates may have thumbs in the pies of organized crime, entrepreneurialism, fraud and legitimate big (or small) business. Ghoul aides and mortal henchmen (bankrolled, blackmailed, brainwashed or otherwise indentured) fill out the balance of cleanup and dirty-work detail. Not every Ventrue movement is marked by tailored suits and stock portfolios.

Supporters of tradition, the Ventrue presence almost always consists of at least one powerbroker (of the archetypal billionaire type), one liaison (diplomat/statesman) and one corporate raider (attack-dog, frontline financial assailant or extortionist thug) in any given mid- to large-scale city, whether Camarilla or antitribu. Often, one to three other agenda-driven independents (variant by population) attend their ventures as well. Each usually maintains a concentrated financial interest disparate from those of their clanmates (or perhaps overlapping related interests – banking, entertainment, municipalities, the arts, etc.), as well as a behind-the-scenes distribution of resources (and clan-external alliances) intended to probe and suborn competitors' holdings, Ventrue or otherwise.

Surprisingly (or not so, depending upon one's experience), few Ventrue trust or want to work with one another, claims of solidarity and hospitality to the contrary. Few of them (publicly) have a choice – the eldest or most respected often mandates cooperation for the sake of appearances. And none of them will follow for one second longer than it takes for that leader to prove herself incompetent or somehow fallible.

More than ever, the modern nights have seen a very recent shift from "old money" Embraces to the new power and affluence brokers: the young and visionary. Tech-stock traders, Internet entrepreneurs, entertainment promoters and other new cultural classes have blurred the lines between artifice and finance. Whereas, scant years ago, only the Toreador made a practice of Embracing entertainers into their ranks, due to the modern commercialization of art ("Design has replaced art"), as many performers and managers find themselves among the Ventrue as they do the Degenerates.

Unforeseen Consequences

It is worth noting that these pocket societies and stereotypes are proving as dangerous to the old guard as they are distasteful to the new generation. The vampire's traditional weaknesses are anachronism, complacency, a lack of forward thinking.

Take as an example the Ventrue, arguably the most predictable targets among the Kindred. Centuries of influence in the financial sector and the so-called lions of the Camarilla comprise simultaneous strength and weakness; fiscal interdependence makes the Blue Bloods far and away the easiest of the 13 clans to flush out, track down or undermine.

Nosferatu information networks are all too frequently seeded with false rumors and subversive whispers, sometimes to tragic ends. Elder Brujah regard the embarrassingly high numbers of their fledglings fallen to ambush and treachery as something of a sore subject – cunningly crafted snares playing upon a history of belligerence and bullheaded thinking. And Toreador habits and havens, inextricably entwined in dubious matters of mortal contact, dilettantism and outright lies, represent the single greatest influx of infiltrators and insurrectionists from any camp into Camarilla cities… much to the dismay of those cities' undead denizens.

Even traditional clan traits can be exploited. Hunters and other supernatural factions in the know have tracked vampiric subjects in the past based on their feeding patterns, modus operandi, real estate records, socioeconomic strata and similar criteria. The strategy is hardly original; coteries, anarchs and Sabbat packs have been doing it for centuries. Behind the scenes of the most recent such confrontation, in fact (namely, the American Revolution), dozens of Toreador and Ventrue were starved out of their ancestral New England havens following a series of surgical strikes targeted at havens, herds and selective feeding preferences.

It's a dangerous game, judging when to hold, when to show and when to trump what's already been shown, and no one's been playing longer than the Children of Caine.

Baali

There are those whom even Caine's monsters do not name lightly.

In the earliest times, or so it is believed, one of the First Brood stood against the Thirteen. This fiendish traitor – eldest childe of an Antediluvian's errant dalliance, lowborn singing slave boy to a proto-Mesopotamian people, forged an unholy pact with those who dwelt in shadow outside the periphery of this world. In so doing, the devil-child took on something of the place Beyond, becoming something more – and less – than human. Gathering apostles from the ranks of his brethren, the first shaitan of Baal-called-Destroyer marshaled his armies and laid siege to the Second City; Blood met Blood as Caine's childer fought one another amidst razed ruins and flame-swept plains.

At length, it is whispered, the progenitor himself turned his attention to the fray – a terrible cataclysmic time in which the skies rained fire and wept blood. The battle ended as abruptly as it had begun; the 12 al'shaitani were put to death, and their demonic hordes were routed. Of the boy-thing, however, there was no sign, and the horrors that had once paid fealty to his every command were lost to the whispering winds of legend.

But this legend is fast returning to reality. The capture and destruction of a cabal of North American infernalists (and subsequent recovery of their blasphemous grimoires) has brought to Kindred attention a looming shadowy truth: The Children of Baal were not wholly extinguished by the Inquisition, as was previously believed.

The sons of the shaitan are believed to have stemmed from the sands of the Near East, where men and monsters have intermingled through the folk and fables of the region for millennia. Their sires knelt at the same shrines and venerated the same dark deities as the warrior-philosopher children of Brujah and Haqim; indeed, Cainite lore places the three conjoined bloodlines at the roots of pre-Sumerian culture. These same tales recount black citadels, fallen stars, comet-crater cities, insect-monsters, foul sorcerer-kings and all manner of similar depravities dating back to the accursed city of Chorazin purportedly laid waste in the Old Testament.

The Baali are explorers, first and foremost – students of the unknown, the unknowable, the unspeakable. Their eyes and ears glean forgotten secrets. Theirs is the secret song that has echoed through eternity since their nameless progenitor first struck the discordant chord that fractured the wall between worlds. And theirs are the steady, patient fingers that have picked at the wound ever since.

Modern nights find the few remaining Baali in something of a no man's land astride the countless factions peopling the World of Darkness. They are dying – hated, feared, hunted

By Camarilla, Sabbat and a host of other fronts, prey to a hundred detractors and divisions from within and without. They are falling, spiraling into nadir, plagued by some inescapable degeneration of spirit that claims more of their number with every passing night, doomed to a slow, steady passage from magician to monster to memory. Yet still they toil for the erosion and eventual destruction of this world, to make way for Those Who Wait Beyond.

Nickname: Demons

Sect: The Baali claim no sect, and no sect would have them. Although the Baali claim to have widely vitiated many vampires to their cause, the truth of the matter seems the opposite – unless their converts are very skilled at hiding themselves.

Appearance: When not draped with the trappings of ritual, most Baal-worshipers seem remarkably normal, even sedate, favoring nondescript clothes and subtle manners. (A few self-styled devil-rakes, caught up in the baser components of their repertoires and reputations, favor the pierced-painted-and-promiscuous image indulged by the media, but elders regard these Johnny-come-lately hellions with no small disdain.) Most are possessed of cautious, cerebral and studious demeanors, although a few have been known to wax loquacious, even eloquent, before attentive audiences – particularly when faced with possible conversion. Years of devotion to otherworldly subjects and amoral pursuits cultivate something of a cold, alien quality in these Cainites over time. Many acquire an unhealthy fascination involving insects, rodents or other vermin – an unconscious homage to the "Lord of the Flies."

Haven: The Children of Baal seem drawn to places of antiquity – libraries, temples, standing stones and long-abandoned places of power. Such locales, over the course of decades and centuries, seem to take on something of their patrons' touch. Ancient, indecipherable sigils are found emblazoned upon surrounding grassy plains and rocky outcroppings, nearby children and livestock are stillborn or hideously deformed, and similar omens of ill portent follow in the cultists' passage like malign footprints. Recently, a few Camarilla war coteries tasked with flushing out and destroying these covens have returned with disturbing tales of Baali breeding and cohabiting in insular "families." The Demons congregate with ghouls and converts of other clans in orgies of flesh, so the tales say, rekindling the ancient heresies of blood-sharing and other, less savory practices....

Background: The Baali Embrace conscripts from the ranks of artists, mystics, scholars and a double handful of more utilitarian castes (prostitutes, mercenaries, socialites, etc.). Some dwindling few fledglings – most numerous in the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern demesnes – are born as well as reborn into the line. Whether culled and educated from promising childhood careers or bred from blood-fed ghoul stock, these inhuman disciples are groomed for power from infancy and invariably rise to occupy the bloodline's topmost tiers.

Character Creation: The Baali favor Mental and Social Attributes and prize knowledge of academic, existential and occult mysteries above all other things. Some, however, follow the path of the "champions of the Old Gods" who make martialry their specialty. Most acquire an impressive array of Knowledges and Skills over the course of years spent in study and… experimentation. Natures tend to be submissive to their unknown patrons – Architect, Conformist, Judge and Martyr – though a few Baali are genuine Deviants and Monsters. Demeanors may be anything, though usually suited to proselytizing. Popular Backgrounds include Herd, Mentor, Resources and Retainers. Several of the eldest Baali adhere to variants of the Sabbat's Paths of Cathari and Death and the Soul. Most young Baali nominally observe Humanity, though their scores tend to be low; those who survive for appreciable lengths of time usually adopt a Path

to enable them to deal with their surroundings. An increasing majority of Baali younglings have flocked to the Path of Evil Revelations or the Path of Power and the Inner Voice. Those in the know claim that the Baali actually have their own inscrutable code of ethics, the Path of the Hive, but little about this is known to Cainites outside the bloodline.

Clan Disciplines: Daimoinon, Obfuscate, Presence

Weaknesses: Perhaps owing to their otherworldly natures and occupations, the Baali fear and are repulsed by religion and the trappings thereof, even more so than the rest of the Kindred. True Faith works at twice its normal efficacy against these creatures (double the effects of all failures impeding the Baali and all successes aiding her opponents); many Baali cannot bear to gaze upon or handle even the most mundane articles of religious paraphernalia, faith-born or otherwise. But do those who predate Christianity still fear the crucifix and wafer? Do age and cultural origin determine the nature of such aversions? Only the eldest Baal-worshipper would know for sure.

Organization: Only twice in recorded Cainite history have the servants of Those Who Wait Beyond risen to bear their dread lord's banner, and both have ended in crushing defeat; they have since been hunted to near-extinction. The remainder have fallen into splintered, fractious subsects. Indeed, there are nearly as many apparitions and appellations ascribed to the patron of the Baali pantheon (if there can even be said to be a single such being) as there are worshippers of those apparitions and appellations. Driven by tradition and the necessities of survival, many of the Baali cling to scattered covens of three to 13 (rarely more), led by a handful of shaitan (reclusive and mysterious arcanists) and al'shaitan (appointed loremasters and covenmistresses). To those outside the covens, the Baali appear like nothing so much as devil-worshipers. Only those inside the cult – or who have stolen its secrets without their knowledge – know the true depths of the Baali philosophy.

Quote: *The world – your world – hangs suspended by the slimmest of threads between the travesty of all that has gone before and the mystery of all that is to come. Better to spool that thread? Or to sever it entirely?*

stereotypes

Camarilla: Their tattered mortal costumes will afford them none of the answers they seek.

Sabbat: These reckless children would be the knife as well as the wound.

The View From Without

The Camarilla

It is a mistake to dismiss these dangerous apostates as mere Satanists.

– Edward Sinclair, Adeptus Septem Orbem of Vienna

The Sabbat

One could almost pity those who have fallen so far from the path to power....

– Droescher One-Eye, Tzimisce Inquisitor

The Independents

Can you conceive of mysteries so twisted they suborn even the secret-sharers?

– Hesha, Setite

Nagaraja

From a nightmare of horror and legend step the Nagaraja. A bizarre bloodline of flesh-eating witches, these vampires have been hunted to near extinction in the modern nights by political enemies and the ghosts upon whom they once preyed. A few of these monsters still prowl the darkness, but their numbers are thankfully few.

The Nagaraja have never been particularly forthcoming with their origins, but a few learned Kindred suspect that they grew out of a Middle Eastern death-cult. Whispers of an arcane connection with other sorcerers also surface when the Nagaraja are the topic of discussion. The rumors and facts concerning these Kindred are almost inseparable – the Nagaraja are too few to ask directly, and none have been forthcoming anyway. Some wonder if they are Cainites at all or, rather, a failed experiment intended to recreate the results of the Tremere.

Once members of a sect calling itself the Black Hand (but apparently distinct from the Sabbat), the Nagaraja have little impact on the modern nights. They are great compilers of evil secrets, however, and command death-magic with equal or greater ability than the Giovanni. Like all necromancers, the Nagaraja are usually attributed some vague tie with the Venetians, but nothing exists to substantiate this aside from their knowledge of the dead.

It would be misleading to say that the Nagaraja have fallen from grace, because they never enjoyed a period of "grace," but nonetheless, the bloodline has lost much. Its remaining members eke out unpleasant, solitary unlives, and many are haunted by the ghosts they once commanded. The "dietary" habits of the Nagaraja also conspire to keep them away from other Kindred, who are put off by any sort of eating, much less the consumption of dead human flesh. Still, a few dozen Nagaraja persist, gathering the unholy secrets of death sorcery and creeping among the periphery of vampire society.

Nickname: Flesh Eaters

Appearance: Most Nagaraja dress subtly, as their unpleasant weakness already draws enough attention to them: They wear whatever most people around them wear. Physically, many Nagaraja appear to be of Northern African, Asian or Middle Eastern descent. Hailing from such dark-complected stock, as vampires, these individuals often have unhealthy, ashen skin. Unlike other vampires, the Nagaraja do not have conventional, retractable fangs; rather, they have mouths full of vaguely pointed teeth. Most Nagaraja also carry sacrificial daggers, scalpels or other cutting instruments, which they use to excise the flesh that gives them their sustenance. Some rumors attribute them with a

"third eye" similar to that of the Salubri, but none of these claims have ever been substantiated.

Haven: When they have the luxury of establishing a permanent haven, the Nagaraja typically prefer to create comfortable dwellings, which may house laboratories and various "storage facilities" for their vessels. These havens usually have an inclination toward the macabre and may be found in such places as mausoleums, abandoned buildings, disused hospital wings and even high-rise condominiums. Anywhere the Nagaraja can cultivate a modicum of privacy may become her haven.

Background: The numbers of the Nagaraja are so small as to make any generalization about their backgrounds speculative at best. Some were priests or cultists in their mortal lives, and few were less than 40 years of age at the

time of their Embrace. Most seem well-to-do, the better to hide their eccentricities.

Character Creation: Nagaraja usually have solitary or selfish concepts and Natures, though their Demeanors may be practically anything. Mental Attributes are usually primary, as are Knowledges. The most common Backgrounds for Nagaraja are Contacts, Resources and Retainers, though a few twisted Mentors sometimes Embrace childer. Few Nagaraja bother to maintain their Humanity, opting instead for a variation of the Path of Death and the Soul or the Path of the Bones to keep the Beast at bay.

Disciplines: Auspex, Dominate, Necromancy

Weaknesses: The Nagaraja require raw flesh in addition to blood to survive. Although these Kindred may subsist on blood alone, their bodies atrophy if they do not partake of human meat – for every night a Nagaraja goes without an intake of flesh, he loses one cumulative die from all his Physical dice pools. Eating one point worth of flesh restores one die to these pools until the vampire has "caught up." A human body is assumed to have 10 "flesh points," which work just like blood points: A Nagaraja consuming one flesh point increases his blood pool by one. Unlike blood points, however, taking a "flesh point" from a vessel does one health level of unsoakable lethal damage to that vessel. The flesh the Nagaraja consume must be relatively fresh, though not necessarily "alive." Indeed, some Nagaraja keep stores of ritually preserved corpses hidden within their havens, and rumors of "Kindred-eaters" follow them as well. This weakness does not allow the Nagaraja to eat other foods or consume other liquids.

Organization: Until a catastrophic war with the denizens of the Underworld destroyed the sect to which they belonged, the Nagaraja congregated in the lands of the dead. Since being driven forcibly from that realm, however, the few remaining Nagaraja have made their own fates, leaving their minimal organization behind. A cabal of Nagaraja is reputed to have sought protection among the Cathayans of Korea, but this small group is suspected to be an anomaly. Ultimately, the Nagaraja are too few to have an extensive bloodline structure and exist instead as isolated, freakish loners when they can be found at all. They rarely even meet with others of their kind, as they hoard their precious secrets from everyone, including others of their clan.

Quote: *I have seen hell – and made my haven in its pits. Take your leave before I send you there.*

stereotypes

Camarilla: They are wayward children blessed with the strength of numbers, if not inspiration.

Sabbat: What kind of foolish cattle walk so happily into the slaughterhouse?

The view from without

The Camarilla

They are too few to matter – their chance at worth passed them by.

– Athosides, Tremere archivist

The Sabbat

Never heard of 'em. Never seen one. Never will. Who gives a fuck?

– Dezra, Sabbat flunky

The Independents

Look at them like piranha, isolated yet dangerous. Do they matter? No, but that's no reason to underestimate their individual malice.

– Raj, Ravnos nomad

True Brujah

In the unrecorded history of Clan Brujah, a grim secret lies buried.

The Kindred calling themselves the True Brujah claim that the founder of the clan met his death at the hands of his childe, and that all of those who call themselves "Brujah" are, in truth, descendants of this diablerist. The original childer of Brujah – the True Brujah – disdain their illegitimate cousins and harbor a resentment for their continued legacy of diablerie.

Unlike the "false" Brujah, the True Brujah are emotionally detached. A bloodline of scholars, chroniclers and knowledge-seekers, the True Brujah view the world dispassionately. Whether unearthing a hidden Cainite tomb, compiling the fragments of a long-lost manuscript or feasting on the blood of a slave, the True Brujah go about their unlives with placid contemplation. They feel no thrill or fear, but rather react to their world analytically.

The True Brujah were involved with the Black Hand before its fall, but their origins predate even that ancient sect. Indeed, when the young Brujah speak of Carthage, they are speaking of the home of the True Brujah and not the fabled utopias that spring to their minds. The True Brujah believe that their founder made his haven in Northern Africa, around which the great city arose, where the Children of Seth were mere vessels and sacrifices. Carthage was not a city of idylls but a den of blood and fire and gods who walked among men. Some of the True Brujah even claim memories of the city and must be ancient indeed.

Since the fall of the Black Hand, the True Brujah have returned to the lands of their origin, forging a loose bond with the Followers of Set. Although solitary and aloof, the True Brujah realize the value of allies, even to the extent of finding common ground with the Setites. Both groups are finders of secrets and searchers for lost lore, and though they differ in what they do with their bounty, none have any doubt that they seek similar ends.

Unlike their Setite allies, however, the True Brujah do not pursue vice and indulgence, nor do they wish to undertake the Setites' chthonic quest to raise their undead god. The Elois seek knowledge for its own sake. They choose to be erudite and sage, hoping to master their domains through craft. Few enemies are so relentless as a True Brujah, and few allies are as resourceful.

Nickname: Elois

Appearance: The True Brujah tend to dress in the styles of the time when they were Embraced, which sometimes causes them difficulties in the modern nights. The True Brujah have no particular ethnic makeup, though many of the most ancient members of the bloodline seem to hail from Persia or Mesopotamia. Younger members affect conservative modern clothing, including bespoke suits and other subtle finery. Members of the bloodline who have formed relationships with the Egyptian Setites sometimes affect Northern African styles and customs, as well.

Haven: True Brujah prefer solitary havens, as far from vampires and mortals as possible. If they possess the resources to do so, True Brujah establish multiple secret havens, sometimes in various cities around the world. They favor withdrawn mansions, estates, hidden palaces, temples and other luxurious quarters, where they may always retreat

into comfort if the burden of ages weighs too heavily on them for a time.

Background: True Brujah have been Embraced from all of the world's cultures, generally after middle age, though the bloodline does claim a few precocious young Kindred. The characteristic many True Brujah share is a penchant for learning. Most members of the bloodline are very well educated or quickly become so after their Embrace. Several are also independently wealthy, hailing from affluent families or having assets that otherwise require little attention.

Character Creation: True Brujah almost never have impassioned Natures, and their Demeanors vary wildly from vampire to vampire. Their concepts typically fall among the professional, outsider or dilettante categories, usually with some degree of scholarly bent. Mental Attributes are usually primary, though they sometimes favor Social Attributes, and Knowledges are likewise preferred. Common Backgrounds among the True Brujah include Alternate Identity, Arcane (see p.36), Contacts, Herd and Resources. Most True Brujah still uphold the ideals of Humanity, although elders of the bloodline sometimes adopt strange or unique Paths of Enlightenment, about which little is known. Those involved with the Setites are not known for their adoption of the Path of Typhon – though they may share some cultural ties, they do not necessarily share the same philosophies.

Disciplines: Potence, Presence, Temporis

Weaknesses: The emotions of the True Brujah atrophy during their nights of contemplation and study; they become cold and passionless as time wears on and they grow ever away from mortal life. While these Kindred understand good and evil on a philosophical level, they rarely feel any pangs of morality themselves. Conscience and Conviction rolls for True Brujah are always made at a difficulty two higher (maximum 10) than circumstances would otherwise dictate. Also, Humanity and Path ratings are difficult to maintain in the absence of emotion – True Brujah must pay double experience point costs to increase or regain their Conscience, Conviction, Humanity and Path scores.

Organization: While the True Brujah value their solitude, they also hold intellectual discourse in high regard. Twice per century, these Kindred gather at a location decided by their eldest and inform each other of pressing matters – the last meeting, for example, established their informal relationship with the Followers of Set. Outside of these gatherings, small cells or salons of True Brujah sometimes meet to discuss current events, philosophy, religion, politics and anything else that may affect their unlives.

Quote: *An interesting viewpoint, and one I shall consider in the future. Congratulations – I will spare your life… this time.*

Stereotypes

Camarilla: It succeeds in concept, yet fails utterly in implementation – a perfect model of Johnson and Hobbes at Voltaire's table.

Sabbat: Ten steps forward, nine steps back.…

The View From Without

The Camarilla

Sounds like a rumor made up by some elder to keep his rowdy childer in line. I don't buy it.

– Stevie "The Butcher" Reno, Sheriff of Houston

The Sabbat

Irrelevant failures, if they exist at all.

– Laika, Tzimisce koldun

The Independents

A welcome addition and a willing tool, but we shall see what they harbor in their hearts over time.

– Verdigris, Setite mistress

New Backgrounds

As some of the most useful Traits in Vampire, whether from a mechanical point of view or in the terms of describing a Storyteller character's role in a given chronicle, Backgrounds go a long way. Of course, these Backgrounds are completely optional and subject to Storyteller approval for use in her game – not every chronicle needs 500-year-old players' characters or those with the ability to call up units of Green Berets. Age and Military Force are suited more to elders than neonates and ancillae, so Storytellers are encouraged to disallow them in games that do not feature elders as players' characters.

Arcane

Gray wondered where the hell the Nosferatu who had stolen her sire's amulet could be. She knew it was a Sewer Rat – she'd seen him long enough to know that he was ugly as sin – but she couldn't describe him to anyone in any detail. Even the Kindred who knew the Nosferatu "can't put a name to the face."

Maybe it was time to give up.

Certain Kindred are inherently unknowable, and those around them often fail to notice them, let alone their undead states. Some vampires have the ability to remain anonymous. This strange ability generally manifests as a strange nepenthe, whereby the person trying to remember the Kindred experiences only a strange nostalgia, absent of any detail.

A vampire with a high Arcane Trait may attempt to vanish from view, or she may simply seem too ordinary to notice. This is not similar to Obfuscate, per se, and it certainly does not help in combative (or potentially so) situations – the Kindred won't be disappearing into a puff of smoke or lingering invisibly before anyone's eyes. If someone searches for the Kindred, their quest may well prove fruitless: Somehow, no one remembers her, or the camera was out of tape, or the guard was too far away to give a reliable description.

A vampire's Arcane score subtracts one die per dot from any dice pools used to actively search for her – most often Perception or Investigation pools. A Kindred may choose to "turn off" Arcane if she so wishes, thereby enabling others to find her, as is sometimes beneficial. This is a passive Trait, not an active one; it does not help on Stealth rolls or other overt attempts to hide from others. It simply makes the vampire hard to find, whether she's lying in the back seat of a car or hidden in a crypt three continents away.

No character may take the Arcane background if she has any Status, Clan Prestige or Fame, or vice versa. Likewise, Arcane does not have any effect for Kindred of the Eighth Generation or lower – elders are simply too unnatural to slip so easily from the minds of others.

Note: This Background is as often a detriment as it is a blessing, and it sometimes conflicts with other Backgrounds. An Arcane Kindred with Resources may well have to hunt down his stock dividends while an Arcane Mentor may prove more trouble to find than she's worth.

●	Easily overlooked
●●	Hard to follow
●●●	It takes a detective to shadow you
●●●●	Maybe he passed through here a couple years ago
●●●●●	Never heard of the guy

Age

Ivreh sighed even though he didn't need to – he had come to appreciate the irony of the act. When one spends more than three centuries as a member of the undead Kindred, one takes one's levity where one can find it. He wandered over to the chessboard, his thoughts turning to Gabrielle and their ongoing game, and moved his pawn – who represented a certain importer from Taipei – to take her bishop – the leader of a Luddite cult in Trinidad. Indeed, Ivreh had learned much more than patience since his Embrace.

You have survived as a vampire for far longer than many Kindred – enough to be considered an elder according to the fickle, deadly others of your kind. This Background is not necessarily a simple reflection of your age; it reflects the number of years you have functioned away from the slumber of torpor. If you have fallen into torpor, you may actually be older than even this Trait indicates....

Every dot of Age gives a character a certain amount of extra freebie points to reflect her greater acumen, but this wisdom comes at the expense of Humanity. Note that the progression is not linear – truly ancient vampires learn with much more difficulty than younger ones, as stasis grips them in their unchanging state.

Note: This Background is included as a Storyteller's option for elder chronicles, and is not mandatory for Storyteller characters of advanced age. By all means, create your elders to suit the story (see p. 59); this system is included to make sure players' elders start out with a common frame of reference, should you allow them.

Although this Trait may theoretically rise above 5 (for unimaginably old characters), Storytellers should give serious thought to their game before allowing it.

⊛	Annuated: 200 years or less active, +30 freebie points, -1 Humanity
⊛⊛	Elder: 200 to 350 years active, +55 freebie points, -2 Humanity
⊛⊛⊛	Hoary: 350 to 500 years active, +75 freebie points, -3 Humanity
⊛⊛⊛⊛	Venerable: 500 to 750 years active, +90 freebie points, -4 Humanity
⊛⊛⊛⊛⊛	Ancient: Active for more than 750 years (!), +100 freebie points, -5 Humanity

Military Force

The commandant suppressed a shudder while the cowled – man? – before him whispered concise, uncompromising orders. He was to pull his forces back as the guerrillas pressed the attack, redirecting the troops to a forgotten graveyard. From there, a second unit would move in from the flanks, catching the guerrillas in enfilade. During the firefight, a certain cenotaph was to be toppled and destroyed, along with anything that lay beneath it. Precisely why, it was apparently not the commandant's privilege to know....

You have accumulated some sway over a group of fighting soldiers. Whether as the leader of a populous gang or the dignitary of an entire nation, an armed force obeys your command. Although the nights of the vampiric warlord are long past, many elders cultivate some degree of military might, though they do so now with discretion and subtlety, to avoid the ire of others of their kind.

Military Force might not necessarily mean that the vampire has armed legions at her beck and call. Far more likely, especially in the modern nights, the vampire may suggest "police actions" or may influence brushfire conflicts in certain nations. A vampire may, under extreme duress, be able to enforce martial law, but such behavior attracts attention, and her influence would no doubt wane significantly afterward.

This Trait is most suitable for elders, and Storytellers should feel free to extrapolate this Background past the sixth dot for vampires who have influence over truly frightening martial power.

⊛	Surly mob: 15 poorly organized and untrained thugs.
⊛⊛	Militia: 25 functionally trained "security guards"
⊛⊛⊛	SWAT team: 40 capable fighters
⊛⊛⊛⊛	Veteran troop: 75 combat-seasoned soldiers
⊛⊛⊛⊛⊛	Elite company: 100 battle-hardened troops 6+Special weapons, greater quantities and perhaps even national armed forces.

New Disciplines

Daimoinon

These are the mysteries of the Baali, black arts torn whole and beating from the sorcerer-kings of ancient cultures and prehistoric civilizations, incoherent memories passed from tome to tongue, hearkening to times of insensate oblivion. They are sibilant secrets in which all begins to end and begin again.. and with every new night and novice brought into the circle, the telling grows shorter.

⚫Sense the Sin

The novitiate first learns the art of unmaking where the seeds of chaos are strewn - from within. This power allows the Baali to see into the heart of a person, unearthing his flaws - his shortcomings, his vulnerabilities, his exploitable weaknesses.

System: The player rolls Perception + Empathy against living or undead beings, difficulty equal to the subject's Self-Control +4. If successful, the Baali can sense the subject's greatest weakness. The depth and significance of this information are dictated by the degree of success; one success might determine a low Virtue, weak Willpower or a poorly defended avenue of approach, whereas two might yield a closely-guarded secret or conversational misstep. Three or more yields a central Derangement or formative trauma from the subject's past.

⚫⚫Fear of the Void Below

The disciple's power has progressed from the ephemeral to the tangible. Through the use of this Discipline, she may project into listeners' minds the beginnings of oblivion - the nameless, formless terrors of the night, the unknown and the inevitability of nonbeing.

System: The Baali must first employ Sense the Sin (above) to discern the tragic flaw of the target. She must then speak to the target(s), playing upon his inadequacies, the inescapable consequences of his shortcomings and the certain nothingness that must follow failure. A successful Wits + Intimidation roll (difficulty of the subject's Courage +4) drives the victim into quavering fits of tremulous terror (one success), mindless panic-borne flight similar to Rﬆschreck (two successes) or even unconsciousness (three or more successes). All effects last for the remainder of the scene. Kindred subjects may resist with a Courage roll (difficulty of the Baali's Willpower) that garners more successes than the Baali - they are accustomed to dealing with their Beasts.

⚫⚫⚫Conflagration

Through focus and force of will, the adept summons forth something of the essence of Beyond.. the briefest trickle of otherworldly power. This sinister "black fire" has been known to manifest as an imperceptible distortion of time and space, an incandescent halo of ethereal light, even the semblance of eldritch flame - all of which, of course, leave observers eerily reminded of traditional guises of the infernal...

System: The player spends a blood point. This creates a bolt of black flame that inflicts one die of aggravated damage; more blood points may be spent to increase the size and damage of the flame. Such fires are fleeting and dissipate at the end of the turn in which they are summoned, unless the Baali spends blood points over several turns, gradually creating a larger flame. The player also rolls Dexterity + Occult (difficulty 6) to hit his target, who may dodge as normal, unless circumstances prevent it. Vampires confronted with this black fire make Rﬆschreck tests as if confronted with a similar quantity of normal flame.

⚫⚫⚫⚫Psychomachia

At length the Baali, having grasped something of the nature of fervor and the frailty of flesh, takes on the power to ravage a victim's unconscious, forcing his innermost passions and perversions into palpable physical form - the stuff of nightmare.

System: The vampire, spinning the nightmare from an individual hell of the victim's own making (after using Sense the Sin, above), forces the subject's player to roll her lowest Virtue (difficulty 6). Failing this roll pits the target against an apparition summoned from her darker self, visible and material to the subject only - for instance, an abusive father, a long-dead lover, perhaps a childhood boogeyman or (for Kindred victims) even the Beast itself. A botch indicates the target has been overwhelmed and frenzies - or, worse, becomes possessed by her inner demons.

This imaginary antagonist should be wholly narrated, or assigned Traits equivalent or slightly inferior to the victim's, at the Storyteller's option. All injuries sustained by the target in such an encounter are illusory (substitute catatonia or torpor for death as appropriate) and vanish upon the phantasm's defeat or the Baali's loss of concentration.

⚫⚫⚫⚫⚫Condemnation

Calling upon forbidden pacts, forgotten powers and a legacy of blighted ritual dating back to prehistoric times, the Baali may call down a curse upon his enemies. The least of such afflictions cripple, disfigure or otherwise hinder their victims; the greatest have become the stuff of legend.

System: An Intelligence + Occult roll (difficulty equal to the subject's Willpower) dictates the length and severity of the curse; successes must be split between both these effects, as follows.

1 success	Up to one week; "No voice shall be lent your lying tongue."

2 successes	One month; "Sicken and wither, infidel… a babe's weakness upon you."
3 successes	One year; "Reap this bitter harvest – may your closest friends turn foe."
4 successes	Ten years; "Barren be thy seed and the loins of all your line."
5 successes	Permanent; "The mark of doom – all you touch or love must fail."

At any time, the Baali may choose to end the curse, though few have ever done so. Storytellers should feel free to invent creative or story-appropriate curses; similarly, abuse (including but not limited to overuse) should be met with automatic failure or distortion beyond the curse's original intent.

⬤⬤⬤⬤⬤CONCORDANCE

At this level of mastery, the Baali takes something of the nature of his true masters into his person, partially transcending his undead condition. The prices exacted by Those Who Wait Beyond, however, can be steep indeed. History depicts the priesthood of Baal as a cabal of hellish creatures – horned, taloned, insectile, possessed of the powers of flight, the ability to withstand open flame and countless other infernal investitures.

System: The most typical manifestation of this power incorporates immunity to the damaging effects of fire, though other equivalently powered assets may be available at the Storyteller's option. Most of these tributes take the form of left-handed "gifts" with unforeseen consequences (a telltale bronze tint to flame-resistant flesh; an inhuman homunculus that must be fed from a third nipple; a vestigial set of wings; visible talons or horns that cannot be concealed; etc.). This Discipline may be purchased more than once for concurrent divestments… at still greater cost to body and soul. (Indeed, the current shaitan is said to have been so gnarled and twisted by the Masters as to be no longer even remotely mistakable for human.)

Note that certain banes of the Cainite race – piety, dependency on blood for sustenance, etc. – may not be overcome by this Discipline under any circumstances. In the end, it is up to the Storyteller's discretion as to what the Baali may or may not withstand.

⬤⬤⬤⬤⬤⬤Summon the Herald of Topheth

Only a handful of Baali elders have ever attained this degree of mastery. These select few embody an understanding of the whys and wherefores of the Void sufficient to begin bridging the fissure between worlds, that someone – something – might enter through a momentary rift.

System: Although the names assigned them differ by church and culture (angel, demon, daeva, djinn, efreet, malakim, shedim and countless others), the end results are the same. Such summoned creatures vary greatly in abilities and form, but are built on approximately the following: Attributes 10/7/3, Abilities (15 points worth), Willpower 8, Disciplines (10 points worth), Fortitude of at least 3 and the capacity to heal one health level at least every other round. Form can vary wildly; though most celestial beings chafe at the notion of wearing a single shape, many adopt those common to myth and legend. Succubi, reptilian horrors, unearthly beautiful spindly creatures and bat-winged monsters are among the most often recorded shapes.

The enactment of this rite is frequently accompanied by a blood sacrifice (at least three blood points' worth) and ceremony; in some cases the being summoned may choose to inhabit the Baali. This phenomenon has led some Followers of Baal to wonder if the ranks of those clanmates are entirely their own.…

⬤⬤⬤⬤⬤⬤⬤Contagion

Not so much a means of directed curse or control as a natural extension of faith, this power infects the very institutions and inhabitants of the Baali's surroundings with a pervading sense of gloom, despair and malaise. Crime and violence soar; petty angers give rise to seething hatreds; local economies take a downward spiral; marriages end over trivial quarrels and the world, as the region's residents know it, becomes a nastier place in general. In the history of the Baali, entire towns and villages have been temporarily enslaved – mindless armies yoked heart, strength and faith to an infernal master's will.

System: Successes garnered on an Intelligence + Occult roll (difficulty 9) must be divided between the intensity and the area of the desired effect. (Sufficiently high degrees of Auspex may be able to pick up on this vague, malevolent aura; otherwise they will simply assume that times have taken a dire change for the worse.)

1 success	Immediate vicinity; ill-tempered/out-of-sorts behavior
2 successes	An office complex; civil/domestic un- rest, prejudice
3 successes	A city block; angry (even riotous) dissent
4 successes	An auditorium or apartment complex; bar-brawls, hair triggers, hate crimes, blood in the streets
5+ successes	An entire city; a throng of bloodthirsty single-minded Philistines

⬤⬤⬤⬤⬤⬤⬤⬤Call the Great Beast

No power is so feared as the one that literally awakens the Elder Gods and begs them journey to the world of men. This power has never been successfully implemented, though its formulae and incantations are known to at least one childe of Baal-Hammon who sleeps beneath the blighted earth. Truly, the powers of the beings summoned by one who must veritably be a god himself to perform the call would tear the land asunder.

System: The preparatory ritual requires a tremendous investment of time and sacrifice; veiled allusions such as "fivescore souls, plucked clean and whole" and "when three times sets the hooded sun" indicate a selective sacrificial rite spanning days, nights and dozens of victims. (Deviation or imperfection in this litany may well have unforeseen consequences, ranging from simple failure to unwelcome attention on behalf of the entity being petitioned!)

At this point, the high priest expends all of his permanent Willpower and releases his consciousness in a final, desperate attempt to breach the gulf Beyond, becoming an empty vessel, a once-mortal gateway granting passage into this reality for… why, for whatever will most effectively end the world as your chronicle knows it, of course. You're the Storyteller – what would the Devil do to your world?

Necromancy

Vitreous Path

The Vitreous Path allows a necromancer to control and influence the energies pertaining to death, what wraiths call Oblivion. Rare in the extreme, this path manipulates entropy and decay, forces that even most necromancers are uncomfortable harnessing. This path, a development of the Nagaraja bloodline (who sometimes call the power "Nihilistics"), sees only the most limited use even among skilled necromancers. Still, its powers make a formidable complement to other necromantic crafts, and those obsessed with mastery over death and souls – such as the Harbingers of Skulls – would certainly risk much to uncover this path's secrets.

Like most necromancers, Nagaraja learn the Sepulchre Path before any others. The Vitreous Path is usually their second focus of study, which at one time reflected the amount of time they spent in the Underworld.

⦿Eyes of the Dead

The necromancer employing the Eyes of the Dead can literally see through the eyes of any wraiths around her, allowing her to use the wraiths' Deathsight. Of course, if there are no wraiths present, the power is useless. On the upside, at least for the necromancers, a few of the Restless may almost always be found wandering around. To an experienced manipulator of ghostly energies, the auras of surrounding beings give off telltale hints as to their health and may indicate their emotions or desires; the necromancer can

see the energies of death and passion flowing through everyone, just as wraiths can.

System: The player rolls Perception + Occult, difficulty 6, in order to see through the eyes of the Dead around the necromancer. This effect is often disorienting, especially in areas where many wraiths are present and, at the Storyteller's discretion, can cause the necromancer to suffer up to a +4 difficulty when attempting to perceive things not in the Underworld. While employing the Eyes of the Dead, the necromancer may not always understand what he is seeing (when in doubt, use Intelligence + Occult to recognize the patterns of death in auras). Properly used, this power lets a necromancer determine whether someone is injured, diseased or dying and, also, whether the individual labors under any sorts of curses or baleful magic. This ability lasts for one scene, though the necromancer may choose to prematurely draw his perceptions back to his own body (thereby ending the power).

⦿⦿Hour of Death

Much like Eyes of the Dead, this power allows the necromancer to see with the perceptions of the Restless Dead. The difference is that this power grants the necromancer himself Deathsight instead of borrowing the perceptions of a wraith, and this vision gives much greater details. By looking at the entropic markings on a person's body, the necromancer can gain rough knowledge of how far that person is from death, how soon that person is likely to die and even what the cause of her death is likely to be. Conversely, the patterns of auras also tell when a person is agitated or excited and allow the death magician to gauge someone's feelings towards another individual when the two first meet. This is not an exact science by any means, but the power is extremely useful to give the necromancer an edge over those she scrutinizes.

Many necromancers actually use this talent to be at the right place and time to capture a newly departing soul.

System: The player rolls Wits + Occult (difficulty 7). The more successes scored, the more the character can tell about the target's fate. One success means the character can guess how long the target has to live to within a few weeks. Three successes means the character can estimate how long the target has to live and what the probable source of demise will be, as the entropic markings clearly show the wounds that will someday exist on that person. Five successes means the character can actually see where and when the event will occur by interpreting the black markings on the target's soul. While this power lasts for one scene, it can be used to read the fate of only one target at a time.

Storytellers must exercise judgment with this power, since the markings of death are typically unavoidable. Of course, if the Storyteller rolls the dice, the player has no way of knowing whether her insight is correct.

⊛⊛⊛Soul Judgment

Wraiths seem to possess a Beast, much like vampires, though their "Shadows" are often less brutish. By using Soul Judgment, the necromancer determines whether the wraith is currently influenced by his darker passions. That knowledge can be very useful, as many necromancers prefer to barter with apparitions rather than merely trying to force the wraiths into subservience. Knowing the aspect of a wraith with which the death magician is dealing means knowing whether or not to discuss matters of importance with the wraith at that time. Many necromancers take this affair one level further, dealing with the Shadow and the normal wraith in separate matters and never letting on to either just what the other half is doing.

System: The player rolls Perception + Occult (difficulty 7) and spends one Willpower point in order to discern which aspect of the wraith is currently in control. Since the wraith's higher self usually has no idea of what its Shadow is doing (although the converse is not true), the necromancer can conceal his dealings by working with the wraith's dark nature. This power also allows the necromancer to determine whether the ghost is normally dominated by his higher self or his Shadow; wraiths routinely dominated by their Beasts are known as Spectres and are exceedingly dangerous.

⊛⊛⊛⊛Breath of Thanatos

The Breath of Thanatos allows the necromancer to draw out entropic energy and focus it upon an area or person. Often, the death magician literally takes a deep breath and then forcefully exhales a fog of mephitic energy. This cloud of virulence is completely invisible to anyone without the ability to see the passing of entropy (as with lower levels of this power). The energy of this cloud is like a beacon for Spectres, and they are drawn to the entropic force like moths to flame. There is no obligation on the part of Spectres to behave themselves, and the necromancer had best have a plan for what to do with them once they've arrived - which is why most Vitreous Path necromancers also learn other paths

Once the energy is pulled from the necromancer's body, she can either disperse it over a large area as a lure for Spectres or use the mist for somewhat more sinister purposes. Channeled into an object or person, the death-mist inflicts the subject with an unwholesome, negative aspect, and may actually cause injury. Furthermore, the focused energies are tainted and eerie, and though generally invisible, they tend to cause people and animals to feel discomfort around the victim.

System: The player spends one blood point and rolls Willpower (difficulty 8). Only one success is needed to draw out the Breath of Thanatos. If dispersed to summon Spectres, the energies cover roughly one-quarter of a mile in radius, centered around the necromancer. The range increases by one-quarter mile for every additional blood point expended. As noted previously, Spectres summoned with this power are not beholden to the necromancer in any way and may well go out of their way to wreak havoc on anyone in the vicinity. This energy disperses after a scene.

If the cloud is directed toward a particular target, the necromancer must either touch the target or else direct the stream of entropy using Dexterity + Occult (difficulty 7). A target laden with entropy suffers one (and only one) level of aggravated damage; this generally manifests as illness or decay. The target's social difficulties with those unfamiliar with the touch of death - Lupines, faeries, certain mages and most normal humans - increase by 2. Furthermore, supernatural perceptions indicate the target as tainted with decay, which can be dangerous, as certain entities (such as the Lupines) have special senses to detect such taint and a rather violent crusade against those thus infected. This form of taint lasts until sunrise or sunset; a victim already plagued by this power cannot be affected again until the previous fog of entropy has dispersed.

A botch on the roll to control this power indicates that the vampire has turned the energy upon himself, and suffers all the effects of the vitriolic breath. This inflicts the usual injury and subjects the necromancer to the possibly dangerous affection of Spectres and other creatures from beyond the grave.

⊛⊛⊛⊛⊛Soul Feasting

Just as the necromancer can draw Oblivion from within, she may also pull external entropic energies into herself as a source of power. Soul Feasting allows the caster to either draw on the ambient death energies around her or to actively feed on a wraith, stealing the wraith's substance and mystically transforming that energy into a rude sustenance.

System: The player spends one Willpower to allow the vampire to feed on the negative energies of the dead. If the character is drawing the energies from the atmosphere, she must be in a place where death has occurred within the hour or in a place where death is common, such as a cemetery, a morgue or the scene of a recent murder. Generally, the necromancer can draw anywhere from one to four points of entropy from such a location, although the difficulty of all Necromancy (and all ghostly powers that must cross into the living lands) increases by an equal amount for several nights. The energies of such an area may only be drained once until the area's entropy replenishes (again, after several nights).

In cases when the necromancer feeds on a wraith, the vampire must actually attack the wraith as if feeding normally. Wraiths have up to 10 "blood points" that may be taken from them, and they become less and less "substantial" as their spirit-essence drains away. The character is vulnerable to any attack the wraith might make, even those that do not normally affect the physical world; while feeding, the vampire is essentially in a half-state, existing in both the living lands and the Underworld simultaneously. The wraith so attacked is considered immobilized and cannot run or escape unless it can defeat the vampire in a resisted Willpower roll. This power may also be used in conjunction with Ash Path Necromancy, allowing the vampire to drain power (though not sustenance) from ghosts while traveling in the lands of the dead.

This soul energy may be used to activate Disciplines, but may not be used in place of actual blood for the purposes of feeding or for other physical purposes such as healing or boosting Attributes.

Botching this power renders the vampire unable to feed through the wall of death. Conversely, he remains susceptible to the assaults of ghosts and spirits for several turns (generally, a number of turns equal to the amount of energy that could have been drawn from the area or one turn if attacking a ghost) as he hovers between worlds, unable to function effectively in either.

Temporis

Before the destruction of Enoch, the True Brujah vaunted Temporis as one more sign of their exalted position as the true inheritors of their progenitor's legacy. Now that the bloodline has re-evaluated its position, the Discipline of time-flow manipulation is seen as a survival tool rather than a status symbol (and, as such, is almost never taught outside the bloodline, not even to the True Brujah's closest allies). Temporis' true origins may never be known, as its most skilled practitioners were destroyed with Enoch (some True Brujah neonates whisper that those elders destroyed themselves while trying to summon help from the past - time works in mysterious ways in the Underworld). Temporis is a taxing Discipline to use, as it channels the very mystic forces that suspend the vampire in eternal unlife to apply similar suspensions of linear time to the immediate environment.

Botches with all Temporis powers above the first level have a terrible effect. The character suffers a number of unsoakable aggravated health levels of damage equal to the number of 1's the player rolled. Temporis takes a portion of the energy that chains the vampire's soul to an undecaying animate corpse and uses it to generate similar effects on the surrounding area. A loss of control during this process means that the vampire's unlife energy drains away. Damage sustained in such a manner can be quite gruesome, as the vampire's body literally rots away in a split-second.

Note: Several Temporis powers rely on Stamina for their activation rolls because of the above-mentioned principle on which the Discipline operates. Because Fortitude is another mystic product of the Curse of Caine, it doesn't make the vampire any more capable of channeling the energies of the stasis in which his Embrace-altered soul keeps his body. Thus, Fortitude is not added to Stamina for these rolls.

⊛ Time Attunement

Before the vampire can manipulate time, he must be able to sense its workings. Time Attunement facilitates this awareness. This power allows the character to sense time fluctuations in his immediate vicinity, whether caused by other practitioners of Temporis, mortal wizards or stranger things. Additionally, the vampire has a perfect "internal clock" and is always (barring external interference or a Temporis botch) aware of the local time, the subjective and objective time that has elapsed during a given application of his other Temporis powers and the time remaining until local sunrise. This awareness is accurate down to at least a hundredth of a second.

System: Time Attunement is always in effect. The Storyteller secretly rolls the character's Perception + Temporis to see if the character detects a time distortion (difficulty of 9 minus the level of the power in use). The range of this sensory effect is a number of miles equal to the vampire's Perception, though particularly significant events (those generated with powers of Level Six or higher) may be sensed across hundreds or even thousands of miles. Additionally, any attempt to affect the vampire's internal clock has its difficulty increased by the character's Temporis rating (though this does not apply to powers that affect the vampire's physical body or surroundings – only those that alter his perceptions of time).

Celerity is a special case, as the temporal distortion it causes is very minor. The difficulty to sense a vampire activating Celerity is determined as per any other time distortion, but the maximum sensing range is equal to the character's Perception times 10 in yards. This does allow the character to sense Celerity in the turn that it's activated (before the Celerity user's extra actions come "online"), thus giving a slight warning of potential ambushes.

The internal clock feature of Time Attunement is always in effect and requires no roll or effort. Thus, with one glance at a bomb's digital timer, the character has a constant awareness of how much time remains until detonation – even while he's driving away, screaming into his cellular phone and shooting at the enemy ghouls who are trying to stop him.

⊛⊛ Internal Recursion

This power affects a single victim's perception of time, forcing him to relive the same events over and over until the power's effect expires or something snaps him out of the fugue state that Internal Recursion creates. Although the outside world progresses normally, the target's mind is stuck in a loop of repetitive, placid events. This power is most often used to lull unsuspecting victims into an unaware state so the vampire can perform other actions uninterrupted, though some True Brujah assassins use it to passively immobilize their victims while they acquire the perfect angle from which to strike.

System: As described above, this power locks its victim's perceptions into an infinite loop of the events that occur before him. These events must be relatively benign, or at least commonplace, to the victim, and they must be ones in which he would not actively involve himself. For example, a security guard might be trapped in an endless loop of an uneventful patrol but could not be forced to relive the appearance of intruders over and over. Unless the vampire is able to telepathically probe the victim's mind and dredge up memories of such a set of circumstances, the events must have transpired within the past few minutes.

The victim remains passive and unaware of his actual surroundings until his trance is physically broken or the power's duration expires. "Physically broken" includes any loss of health levels, even if the victim feels no pain, but can also include something as minor as intense sensory stimulus. Normal conversation won't break the trance, even if the victim is being addressed, but a scream, a gunshot or a gentle nudge will.

To activate Internal Recursion, the vampire must be able to see his intended victim. The player spends a blood point and rolls Manipulation + Empathy (difficulty of the victim's Willpower). The power's duration of effect depends on the number of successes the player rolled:

1 success	one minute
2 successes	10 minutes
3 successes	one hour
4 successes	six hours
5 successes	one day

⚙⚙⚙Lapse

This power halves the speed of one individual's movement through time for a brief instant. To the victim of Lapse, the world appears to have sped up around him; it's as if the universe has its thumb on the fast forward button. Although this is most advantageous in combat situations, it's also seen a great deal of use in political manipulation – a vampire who has twice as long as her opponent to consider her next words gains a critical edge in negotiation.

System: The player spends two blood points and rolls Stamina + Intimidation (difficulty of the target's Willpower). Lapse lasts for a number of turns (or minutes, in a non-combat situation) equal to the number of successes rolled, beginning the turn after the power is activated. Multiple applications of Lapse extend the duration of the power's effect.

A victim of Lapse has his dice pools halved (round down) on all Dexterity- and Wits-based rolls, as well as any other rolls that require rapid thought (Storyteller's discretion). Any Strength-based damage dice pools are also halved, because he's moving slower in relation to his targets, though bullets and arrows that he fires retain their normal damage ratings. Conversely, his dice pools are doubled for all rolls involving physical endurance.

A character with the ability to take multiple actions (e.g. Celerity) who's under the effect of Lapse may sacrifice half of those actions (round down) to remove Lapse's dice pool penalty from the remainder of his actions. Thus, a character with five actions in one turn could take all five actions with halved dice pools, or could sacrifice two of those actions to take the remaining three normally.

⚙⚙⚙⚙Subjective Suspension

The vampire can now suspend an inanimate object in time, keeping it in a perfect state of stasis as time passes at normal speed around it. Again, this power has both combat and non-combat applications. True Brujah warriors can stop projectiles aimed at them - or gain precious seconds to get away from a bomb with a short fuse. The bloodline's historians use ritually augmented applications of Subjective Suspension to preserve fragile artifacts and ancient documents. If anything touches the object that wasn't in contact with it when Subjective Suspension was applied to it,

the item instantly re-enters normal time with the same physical and chemical properties it had when it was suspended. One True Brujah known as Ferhan is known to have single-handedly destroyed a Sabbat pack with a suspended bonfire that flared up with all its previous heat when the pack leader stepped on a harmless-looking log.

System: The player spends two blood points and rolls Stamina + Occult (difficulty 6). The vampire must be able to perceive the object that he's suspending, so the player may need to make a Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty determined by the Storyteller) to use Subjective Suspension on something that's moving particularly quickly. Stopping a bullet or other projectile that's moving too fast to be seen by a mortal eye also requires some means of superhuman perception (the Auspex power of Heightened Senses is the most common; a bullet is difficulty 8). The number of successes determines how long the object is stopped:

1 success	one turn
2 successes	one minute
3 successes	10 minutes
4 successes	one hour
5 successes	one day
6+ successes	one week per success over 5

A suspended object has all of its energy suspended with it, releasing none of it into the outside universe. A suspended bullet has no kinetic energy as far as the rest of the world is concerned and will hang in midair until the power expires. A suspended beaker of chemicals stops in mid-reaction. A suspended campfire stops burning and looks just like a pile of charred logs. However, any physical contact from anything more significant than a single raindrop breaks the suspension, returning the object to normal time in the precise condition and energy state that it was in at the moment of suspension. The bullet resumes its flight (and whomever touched it had better hope he touched the back end of the bullet, or its flight will continue right through his hand); the chemicals take up reacting where they left off; the campfire flares back up instantly.

Subjective Suspension cannot be used on any object larger than the vampire himself and cannot be used on any living (or unliving) thing more complex than a dog.

⚙⚙⚙⚙⚙Clotho's Gift

With this power, the vampire momentarily speeds up the flow of time through himself. He becomes briefly capable of feats of physical speed equal to those made possible by Celerity. Clotho's Gift, though, is a full-fledged time dilation, as compared to Celerity's boost of the vampire's reflexes and physical form. Thus, this power allows some actions that Celerity does not - most notably the application of other Disciplines that require full conscious thought. However, this

is not without cost, as using other Disciplines while Clotho's Gift is in effect taxes the vampire's unlife force past its limits. Something has to give. That something is the vampire's physical form, as the energies that empower it are sucked away for a moment. True Brujah elders tell their childer horror stories of incautious Kindred who met Final Death through accelerated applications of Dominate.

System: The player spends three blood points and rolls Stamina + Occult (difficulty 7). For a number of turns equal to half the vampire's Temporis rating, rounded up, the character gains a number of extra actions equal to the number of successes rolled. These extra actions may be taken in any way the player desires, even uses of Disciplines normally forbidden multiple applications in a single turn, such as Dominate or Thaumaturgy. However, every time one of these multiple actions is used to activate any Discipline, the vampire takes one unsoakable health level of lethal damage.

The effects of powers applied in such a manner occur at normal speed relative to the subject. A victim of Dominate hears the vampire's words as if they were being spoken at a normal rate (though eye contact is still required).

Lesser Temporis powers (levels 1-4) may be used during these multiple actions, subject to the above hazards of self-induced decomposition. However, any vampire who tries to "stack" applications of Clotho's Gift or use greater powers (levels 6+) disintegrates into ash in the blink of an eye, as time destroys her undead body.

The High Cost of Not Living

Several advanced Temporis powers inflict automatic damage on the vampire who uses them. This is because Temporis is a focused application of the arcane energies that keep the vampire in eternal stasis - and, according to some True Brujah, even more inscrutable powers. When those energies are expelled from the vampire's form to affect the outside world, they aren't there to keep the forces of time at bay and the Cainite experiences the effects of her total age in a single moment. This damage usually manifests as instantaneous aging. In extreme cases, whole sections of the Cainite's flesh may crumble to dust. It is possible to put oneself into torpor - or even meet Final Death - with incautious use of Temporis.

Self-inflicted damage from Temporis use is never soakable, transferable to another character or controllable in its manifestations (no rotting off your own hand to escape a trap). It may be healed normally. Each power's description tells whether the damage it inflicts is lethal or aggravated.

⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗**Kiss of Lachesis**

The True Brujah who knows this power has gained limited mastery over the physical age of objects and individuals. With a minor effort, she can momentarily increase the flow of temporal energy through a target, aging it decades while seconds elapse in real time. With greater sacrifice, she can absorb and nullify some of that same energy, reducing the physical age of a subject. This power does not reverse history; it merely changes the absolute age of an object or individual in terms of wear and tear that the subject has sustained. A target cannot be regressed past the point in its existence at which it came into its current physical form. For inanimate objects, this is the point of creation or assembly; for a living thing, the cusp of his adulthood (or birth, if he has not yet reached physical maturity); for a Cainite, the moment of his Embrace.

System: To age a target, the player spends two blood points and rolls Manipulation + Occult (difficulty equals the target's age in decades; minimum 4, maximum 10). The character touches the target and concentrates for one turn. The number of successes rolled determine the maximum amount of aging that can be inflicted on the subject, as depicted by the chart below. The player chooses how many successes to apply - 5 successes do not require the target to be aged 100 years. The precise effects of age on an individual living being are up to the Storyteller, but few mortals survive long with 125-year-old bodies.

To "un-age" a target, the system is the same, but the player rolls at +1 difficulty. Additionally, for every success that the player applies, the character suffers one unsoakable health level of lethal damage. The player can choose how many successes to apply. As noted above, an object's or

individual's aging cannot be reversed more than would take the target back to the moment at which it entered its current state of being. Adult humans are reduced to the time of their physical maturity (usually 16-20 years old); Spanish doubloons become as if they had just been minted. Living beings that have not yet reached adulthood can be regressed to prenatal forms, which tend to die outside the womb.

Note that shifts in age do not change a subject's mental or mystical properties. An elder vampire reduced to neonate age still has all of his Disciplines and his generation remains what it was before this power was applied - and he doesn't forget any of the lessons he's learned over 400 years of unlife. However, if his age is advanced far enough, any signs of diablerie fade from his aura - and he may begin experiencing strange dietary deficiencies.

1 success	up to one year
2 successes	up to five years
3 successes	up to 10 years
4 successes	up to 50 years
5 successes	up to 100 years
6+ successes	up to one additional century per success over 5

⊛⊛⊛⊛⊛⊛⊛Hall OF HADES' Court

The master of this power may alter the subjective passage of time within an enclosed space, letting an entire night pass in the space of a moment. This is most often used defensively or socially. The former purpose allows the vampire to enter his haven at dawn and spend what seems to him to be a few minutes drowsing and vulnerable, only to emerge fully rested at the following sunset. The latter is used to extend clan gatherings through an interminable night, delaying the need for sleep in the interests of political or social pursuits. However, there are recorded applications of this power for more martial purposes, the most noteworthy being the "adjustment" of a former Malkavian justicar's night of gambling and his subsequent demise as he walked out of the casino into a Monaco sunrise.

System: The player spends one blood point per hour of normal time that this power will affect and rolls Stamina + Occult (difficulty is equal to the number of real hours to be compressed or extended; minimum difficulty 4, maximum 10). The amount of compression or expansion is determined by the number of successes rolled. If time is being compressed, hours in the outside world are experienced as minutes within this power's area of effect; if it is being extended, an entire night in the vampire's favorite Elysium may only last an hour in real time. Hall of Hades' Court may only be applied to a single enclosed space: a cave, a haven or a building up to the size of a high school gymnasium.

1 success	double or half speed (one hour = 30 minutes)
2 successes	quadruple or one-quarter speed (one hour = 15 minutes)
3 successes	sextuple or one-sixth speed (one hour = 10 minutes)
4 successes	12x or 1/12 speed (one hour = five minutes)
5 successes	60x or 1/60 speed (one hour = one minute)

⊛⊛⊛⊛⊛⊛⊛Clio's Kiss

One of the more subtle manifestations of Temporis' higher levels, this power allows the True Brujah to reach into the past and summon events, objects or individuals. Clio's Kiss, named for the Muse of history, is the power to bypass the flow of time and bring something – or someone – forward to the present. Some True Brujah use this to observe history as it occurred; others use it to find assistance or to retrieve long-lost possessions. At least four recorded attempts to retrieve Brujah himself have met with unspeakably hideous failures. No True Brujah is known to have ever attempted to summon Caine through the use of Clio's Kiss.

System: The player spends half the character's current blood points, rounded up, and rolls Stamina + Occult (difficulty 8). The number of successes determines the maximum amount of time through which the character can reach:

1 success	24 hours
2 successes	one month
3 successes	one year
4 successes	10 years
5 successes	100 years
6+ successes	any time since the vampire's Embrace

When Clio's Kiss is used successfully, the scene that the vampire is trying to retrieve materializes around her, replacing the "real" situation and environment. All individuals within this power's area of effect – a room up to the size of a ballroom or an outdoor area of similar dimensions (Storyteller's discretion) – are affected by it. The character, however, is the only one who can interact with the summoned scene, if she chooses to do so; all other individuals are subject to watching events play out as disembodied observers, unless they have Time Attunement – though they may still affect each other normally.

If the vampire wants to remove an item or individual from the scene, permanently bringing them forward to the present, the player must spend a permanent Willpower point. The replayed scene ends. If the vampire summoned an individual,

some explanations are probably in order – the subject's bound to be confused.

This power can never be used to alter history by removing a key individual or item – time has an enormous amount of inertia, and only those people and things whose contributions to the universe were very minor and largely unnoticed can be summoned permanently. Likewise, any actions the character takes while in the summoned scene will be undone as soon as this power's application ends – time can be altered in tiny, insignificant ways by the removal of bit players, but the script stays the same once it's been written. The Storyteller is the final arbiter of what is and is not possible with this power, but a general rule is that no use of Clio's Kiss can succeed in having any noticeable effect on any part of recorded or remembered history or on the present night. It's possible to summon someone from a point close to the moment of his death if the time from which he's being summoned is after the last time at which he did anything that's remembered in the present. A manuscript that was destroyed when the Library of Alexandria burned would likewise be a valid target, if it is summoned from a point in time that is after the last time it was read. However, it's not possible to summon Archduke Ferdinand or the space shuttle Challenger. Their contributions to history were too visible and too far-reaching to be edited out of the temporal flow by a Cainite's limited mastery of time. Likewise, the previous form of a currently existing object or individual cannot be summoned.

⊛⊛⊛⊛⊛⊛⊛⊛Tangle Atropos' Hand

This agonizingly taxing power is rarely used, but some feel that the price it exacts is worth its benefits. The True Brujah elder who has learned how to Tangle Atropos' Hand may literally use his own energies to tangle the thread of time, gaining a second chance to undo his mistakes or prevent the actions of others. However, unless the Cainite takes different actions from those he took the first time those events occurred, all other participants will do exactly the same things they did before, with the exact same results – this is a true resetting of time, and the memories of the subjects are reset with it.

System: The player spends a permanent Willpower point and three blood points and rolls Stamina + Alertness (difficulty 8). Time is rewound one turn for every success the player rolls. The character takes a number of health levels of unsoakable aggravated damage equal to the number of turns' events that are undone. The character can only use this power once per scene, and its area of effect is limited to those events which transpire within his line of sight.

If Tangle Atropos' Hand succeeds, the character remains where he was when he activated this power, not in his former location (unless he wishes to resume his previous position). He retains full memories of all events that transpired in the period of time that he undid, as do any other individuals within the power's area of effect who have Time Attunement (or mages with appropriate aptitudes). Anyone without such awareness loses all memory of the events that have just been undone.

Bloodlines

In the beginning, there was Caine.

According to legend, Caine sired thrice, creating the Second Generation. In time, the Second Generation created progeny of their own: 13 in all, if the most commonly accepted accounts are true. From these 13 sprang the great clans of the Kindred, each possessed of a distinct identity, both socially and mystically.

What, then, is a bloodline, if not a clan?

Superficially, bloodlines are much like clans. They are composed of Kindred who share a common heritage, Discipline affinity, mystic weakness and (infrequently) agenda. They differ, however, in two primary areas: recognition and lineage. No bloodline has an existing ancestor of the Third Generation from whom it can trace its descent and who shares the properties of its blood. Furthermore, no bloodline has a sufficient number of members to significantly affect Kindred society as a whole - or to be granted the respect that the members of the more numerous clans garner. In short, bloodlines lack strength in numbers and long family trees, the two most important factors for maintaining "familial respect" in the Kindred world.

Creation of Bloodlines

No Cainite of the modern nights can speak with any accuracy on the first bloodline to diverge sufficiently from its parent clan to be considered an independent entity. Most scholars, however, point to the Baali as the oldest bloodline to survive to the present time. The thought that the most adaptable and enduring bloodline is one devoted to infernalism is a highly unpalatable one for many Kindred...

Bloodlines come about in four ways. The first and most common is a spontaneous or deliberate change in the bloodline's founder that is passed down to her progeny. The second is the purposeful creation of a bloodline through blood magic. The third is through near-extinction: when a former clan's third-generation founder is extinguished and his descendants are so reduced in number that they no longer possess the organization and political leverage necessary to be recognized as a clan. The final manner of bloodline creation is more political than mystic: If a sufficiently large portion of a clan renounces its clan's sect allegiance, it may be considered a bloodline in its own right, though the distinction is purely political. This last is particularly amusing to those ancients who transcend sects, who regard all politics outside the personal as "smoke and mirrors to keep childer starting at shadows."

Mutation and Self-Alteration

The most common manner in which a new bloodline comes about is when its potential founder undergoes a physiological or mystical change of sufficient magnitude that the differences between her blood and that of her "parent" clan are both noticeable and hereditary. In this instance, the bloodline has a clearly defined progenitor to whom all members of lesser generation may trace their ancestry - and, perhaps more importantly, it also has a clan from which it may claim to have sprung. This is not always a beneficial thing: The efforts of several prominent Ventrue are known to have resulted in the destruction of a few bloodlines that claimed Ventrue origin, claiming that to depart from the clan's own blood was to stain its honor.

In such an occurrence, the Cainite's deviation from the characteristics of her parent clan usually comes as a result of some profound trauma or insight. Occasionally the divergence is a gradual process, with changes occurring as the Kindred develops the various powers of a new proprietary Discipline. Most bloodlines, however, have no such unique powers, exhibiting instead a new combination of the commonly known Disciplines.

Some bloodlines that develop in this manner are never formally recognized as such and never claim a distinct identity from their "parent" clan. Most often, these are the brood of a powerful clan elder who has developed an anomalous Discipline to such an extent that an affinity for it replaces one of the "default" clan Disciplines. The Phuri Dae is one such example, a subset of Ravnos whose progenitor's relationship with the Indian spirit world led her to explore heightened realities through Auspex in exchange for the relative physical frailty conferred by the abandonment of Fortitude.

Renunciation

The second most frequent means by which bloodlines are differentiated, renunciation is less a genealogical means of separation from an originating line than it is a heuristic one. Any antitribu line is considered a separate bloodline due to the philosophical and social differences between the main body of the clan and the schismatic sect. A childe of an antitribu is automatically antitribu herself and will always be so, regardless of where her sectarian loyalties lie. Only rarely do main and antitribu lines diverge in any mystical or physiological manner, though the City Gangrel antitribu are proof that such disparity is possible. In most cases, sect loyalty is the only dividing line between the core of a clan and its antitribu. Many elders who predate the modern sects find this hilarious, as they watch tonight's childer trying to find purpose in hollow political constructs.

Creation

Another method by which a bloodline may come into being is through deliberate creation by thaumaturges or alchemists of great power (though not always great wisdom). Bloodlines created in such a fashion are usually made to serve some specific purpose, and so their members are Embraced from a narrower cross-section of humanity than would be the case with most other lineages. However, the Curse of Caine is an imperfectly understood thing, so created bloodlines are often wildly divergent from what their designers intended.

Only three such lines are known to have survived to the Final Nights, and one is rapidly dying. The monstrous Gargoyles were products of a Tremere need for expendable, loyal servants. The cliquish Blood Brothers arose as the fruits of a similar project performed jointly by Tremere antitribu and Tzimisce. The reclusive Kiasyd are supposedly an offshoot of the Lasombra line who created themselves through arcane blood-alchemy experiments. However, the Assamites and Giovanni are both rumored to have created at least one artificial bloodline each in the past millennium, and scattered specimens of these families may still exist in remote corners of the world.

Decimation

Only twice in the unreliable history of the Kindred has a clan been so utterly erased that its surviving members were reduced to bloodline status, their former power forgotten by almost all who had once witnessed it. One of these clans is the Salubri. In the nights before the Anarch Revolt, the founder of the Salubri is believed to have been diablerized by Tremere. Members of Clan Salubri were hunted to the point of extinction by the broods of the elders who destroyed their founder and only exist tonight as scattered refugees and fragments of their once-prominent line. As to the other fallen clan, it would seem none can remember its name...

It is important to note that the destruction of a clan founder does not necessarily render a clan into a bloodline. The Tzimisce Antediluvian is believed to have been diablerized during the Anarch Revolt, and the Brujah and Ventrue founders are thought to have perished millennia ago, but the lesser members of all three lines maintain their respective power structures with sufficient integrity - and still exist in sufficient numbers - to hold tight to their status as clans. The Lasombra founder's destruction is also a matter of historical record, though he allegedly perished at the fangs of one of his childer, who can now be considered a member of the Third Generation, if not an Antediluvian by literal definition. Like the Tzimisce, the Lasombra weathered the Anarch Revolt with their power and social structures largely intact, and thus they, too, retain clan status. The modern nights have seen the destruction of the Ravnos founder and much of the clan, though the survivors are still more populous than the members of any bloodline and Cainite rigidity will see that the Ravnos are, out of custom, referred to as a clan for many nights to come.

Bloodlines of the Final Nights

Independent Bloodlines

Several bloodlines swear allegiance to no sect, preferring to fence-sit or pursue private affairs away from the treachery of the Kindred population at large. The Samedi and the Daughters of Cacophony are the most truly neutral of these groups; both have members who claim allegiance to the Camarilla or the Sabbat, but no majority commitment has been made in either direction. The Gargoyles are nominally independent as well, though a proportionally greater number of these grotesque creatures serve the Camarilla, either through blood bonds or on their own terms. The Salubri, either pitiful remnants of a once-great clan or soul-stealing abominations according to one's viewpoint, eke out a pathetic existence in the cracks of Kindred society, although one Salubri brood has claimed a significant population boom after joining the Sabbat sometime in the past decade.

Several other clan-based bloodlines hold their independence. The most prominent of these, as bloodline prominence goes, are the so-called True Brujah, some inscrutable line of Tzimisce and the aquatic Gangrel subset known as the Mariners. These lines have always held themselves apart from sect affiliation, regardless of their parent clans' allegiances.

One final bloodline worth mentioning is the Baali. Though no longer as prominent as they may have been in ages past, this dedicated family of infernalists still creeps through the shadows of the Kindred world. Their exact numbers and agendas are unknown, but the few Kindred who know of them assume them to be continually undermining Cainite and mortal society alike in unending service to their dark masters.

Camarilla Bloodlines

In an odd turn of events for a sect that claims to represent all Kindred, few bloodlines claim Camarilla allegiance. The only one of any note is the Lasombra antitribu, who see the Camarilla as their best source of allies and support in their eternal vendetta against their parent clan. Persistent rumors imply that a sizeable faction of one of the independent clans has petitioned the Inner Circle for Camarilla membership, but none can say with any certainty which of the sectless this is. Speculation implies the Giovanni or the Ravnos, while the gossip of undead tongues suggests the Assamites or even a rogue cult of Setites.

Sabbat Bloodlines

If one includes the political bloodlines in the equation, more distinct non-clan lines claim Sabbat membership than hold to any other allegiance (or lack thereof). The Assamites, Brujah, Gangrel, Malkavians, Nosferatu, Ravnos, Salubri, Setites (in the form of the Serpents of the Light), Toreador and Ventrue all have antitribu bloodlines within the Sabbat, though the majority of these differ more in outlook than in sanguine manifestations. The freakish Blood Brothers, the malevolent Harbingers of Skulls and the enigmatic Kiasyd all claim Sabbat allegiance as well, though this is a matter of creator-designed loyalty in the former case and convenience in the latter two.

Extinguished Lines

The Final Nights have been no kinder to the lesser lines than they have to the great clans. At least three bloodlines have vanished from the face of the earth in the past few years, and every Cainite who knows of their disappearance wonders who will fall next.

The Ahrimanes were an Appalachian-based Gangrel offshoot composed entirely of female mystics and warriors. They were nominally loyal to the Sabbat, but only due to political legacies. This line originated with a rebellious Gangrel antitribu who attempted to break her Vinculum with Native American shamanic rituals. Her efforts succeeded partially, destroying her bonds of loyalty but leaving her with infertile vitae and a predilection for contact with the spirit world (Auspex) in place of her former resilience (Fortitude). She retreated to the wilderness to assess the changes she had

wrought upon herself. Through painful experiments, she managed to refine the process she had used to free herself, and like-minded female Gangrel began to join her in self-imposed exile. The Ahrimanes were never a numerous line, both because of their progenitor's elite feminist attitudes and because the ritual of "freedom" rendered them unable to Embrace. Gangrel antitribu in the Appalachian area respected the domains of the Ahrimanes out of convenience until mid-1998. Sometime during that summer, the bloodline simply disappeared; a nomadic pack investigating the sudden silence found the Ahrimanes' West Virginia enclave deserted. Since then, no member of the bloodline has been definitely identified as active in Sabbat territory, though occasional tales of their presence arise in Georgia, South Carolina and Florida.

Late in the 18th century, a small band of Tremere, led by the elder Goratrix, defected to the Sabbat, establishing a chantry in the Sabbat-held catacombs beneath Mexico City. They became known as the Tremere antitribu, though they always referred to themselves as House Goratrix. For nearly three centuries, the Tremere antitribu were the Sabbat's foremost thaumaturges, creating unholy creatures such as the Blood Brothers and martial paths of unprecedented power. Unfortunately for House Goratrix, something (just what that "something" might have been is still a matter of speculation) went horribly wrong one night. No eyewitnesses to the actual event have come forward as of yet, but evidence suggests that the Tremere antitribu, while meeting in their central chantry for an annual auctoritas ritus, were immolated en masse by a conflagration so sudden that they were unable to so much as move before the flames consumed them. Tzimisce forensic thaumaturges are still attempting to properly identify all of the remains found at the site, but preliminary evidence suggests that the entire bloodline was present and perished in the incident - with the exception of Goratrix, the head of the line. Scattered rumors persist that one or more lesser Tremere antitribu were out of the chantry on house business when the event occurred, but none have come forward - understandably - as of this night.

The Nagaraja were an Indian bloodline of dubious origin and odious personal habits. They were relatively unknown outside their direct spheres of influence and never numbered more than several dozen. Their demise went largely unnoticed in the greater chaos surrounding them. See p. 32 for more details on what the Nagaraja were (and still are, though their contact with other Cainites has been reduced to next to nothing in the Final Nights).

In earlier nights, occasional rumors from Egypt spoke of a mysterious line known as the Followers of Osiris. Over the past decade, the Osirians' opposition to the Setites allegedly grew into an outright war. The rumors of conflict have since stopped, and the Setites appear unchanged and as strong as ever. Most Kindred who had heard of the Osirians have drawn the obvious conclusions.

Siring a New Line

As proven by dozens of offshoots in the past few thousand years, Kindred are not immune to "evolution" or "mutation." The possibility always exists that a Cainite of sufficient destiny may establish a brood with new and unique qualities. How, then, does a Storyteller introduce such a line into her game?

Origin

How did the bloodline come about? Contrary to what some Ventrue genealogists would claim, every bloodline does have a distinct origin. While some Caitiff may have generated specific small lines, the vast majority of bloodlines spring from existing clans and are typically established by progenitors of between fifth and ninth generation. The Storyteller should also determine how the line came into being. For new bloodlines in the Final Nights, the most likely explanation is self-alteration/mutation, where the bloodline's founder begins to display Discipline affinities, physical properties or a mystic weakness that he does not share with his original clan.

Properties

How has the Curse of Caine manifested in this particular brood? Members of bloodlines share certain physiological characteristics common to all Kindred: absolute power measured by generation, an inhuman dietary requirement, a poor reaction to sunlight. However, a bloodline rarely has the same three Discipline affinities and weakness as its parent clan, though there may be gross similarities.

Not every bloodline has a unique Discipline, however, and creating a bloodline simply for the sake of new powers smacks of powergaming and worse behavior. In addition, no bloodline should have the proprietary Discipline of a clan other than the one from which the bloodline originated. A Lasombra bloodline with Quietus and Chimerstry is a little much to ask. A much more likely permutation would be a socialite Nosferatu bloodline with Discipline affinities of Animalism, Obfuscate and Presence.

Likewise, the Storyteller should ensure that the bloodline's weakness is neither crippling nor easily ignored and follows the general concept of the bloodline. A line whose members are mystically prevented from kicking dogs is rather silly, and that weakness will rarely, if ever, come into play. However, a bloodline whose members are at +3 difficulty for all Dexterity-related actions will soon become extinct from their own clumsiness. In the above example, the Nosferatu in question might have Appearance ratings of 1 that can never be raised with experience and can never be made higher than 2 with Obfuscate - reflecting their clan origins (and probably alienating them from most "mainstream" Nosferatu), but allowing them to be a little bit more active in the social arena to which they have adapted.

Purpose

No bloodline exists solely for entertainment value. While a bloodline's members may be very loosely organized, chances are that they're going to have as much contact with each other as they do with any other Kindred. Clan doesn't equate to fraternity, but any ethnic group is bound to feel a certain amount of collective loyalty. What, then, does this bloodline want? Military power? Recognition for a certain claim to its own domain? Equal rights for the less-populous Camarilla member lines, complete with a justicar ex miscellanea? A bloodline's agenda and focus is also going to color its perceptions of the clans and other bloodlines. Furthermore, this will affect its priorities for selection of new members - which will dictate what kind of characters are likely to belong to this line.

From the Storyteller's perspective, every bloodline needs a reason to be in the story. The Kindred world is colorful enough without the addition of a shotgun treatment of freakish offshoots for the sake of "drama." What role does the line actually fill in the plot? Does it have a rational reason for existence, or is it little more than a desperate attempt at individuality or cheap, no-concept laziness? Does the new bloodline actually have something to contribute to the story?

Locale

It's unlikely that any new bloodline has members all over the world. The socialite Nosferatu, for example, are most likely a localized development, perhaps numbering no more than the Nosferatu primogen of one city and her small and decadent brood that has emigrated to two or three neighboring metropolises. If they were more widespread, the rest of the world would have heard of them by now. Most bloodlines are tiny compared to the clans and their primary interest factor lies in their rarity rather than their "kewl powerz." However, within their small geographical area of existence, the bloodline's political power may be far out of proportion to its numbers, as each member of the line can easily call upon the rest of her close-knit family for assistance.

storyteller characters

Stories are about characters, and any plot line is really just a collection of chronological events centered on one or more individuals. In any type of fiction, characters are vehicles for action within the plot of a story, or they react to it. Simply, stuff happens to them, and stuff happens because of them. Communicative art forms - like movies, books, plays and music - use their characters as a format through which the screenwriter, the playwright or the lyricist voices his unique view of the story concept or idea that's being played out and revealed.

In **Vampire: The Masquerade**, storytelling is more than just the act of presenting a static set of events to an audience. It's interactive. It relies on the cooperative contribution of its participants to make it alive, resonant.. breathing, if you'll forgive a mixed metaphor. Narrative storytelling, or static storytelling in a non-interactive form - those books, films,

songs, etc. - is a convenient medium in the sense that it doesn't depend on audience participation to make it great or to make it change and evolve. It's a vision controlled by one person or by one group of them. Storytelling games, however, absolutely depend on the active give and take between the Storyteller and the audience; it's an effort shared between them.

Because it's interactive, it's a hot medium. Story evolution in roleplaying occurs because the Storyteller and the audience (the troupe) interact through the Storyteller's use of characters that show and tell the plot and skew it to their own point of view. They are the Storyteller's voice, they serve to mete out the action she describes, and they are devices she can use to illustrate the finer points of her theme and concept. Therefore, you, as Storyteller, need to make a decision about exactly who the coterie encounters, where they come from, who they know, who's pulling their strings, why they behave the way they do and what defines their motivation. Storyteller characters can either be incidental or integral to the plot, but they can and should always have a purpose. They should leave the troupe with a real sense of what you're trying to communicate.

That's not to say that, sometimes, a Storyteller character can't just be some peripheral "bit character" named Marcia, bagging liquor at the local package store. After all, sometimes even vampires want to buy something and need to interact with someone who will have little impact on their character genesis. And, if you like storytelling the minor details, these extras are the icing on the cake.

Still, Storyteller characters are excellent devices for presenting your concept and theme in a truly interactive way. You can make your story much more immersive for the participants by making these characters effective, memorable and affecting. Storyteller characters can be a frightening glimpse into the World of Darkness. Any of the residents of the Gothic-Punk world can illustrate a point - junkies and whores for desperation, police for strength or corruption, politicians for unity or treachery, and even children or workaday people for the hope that somehow survives in this hellish environment.

What can Storyteller characters accomplish; what's their function? A Storyteller can use them to achieve a variety of different story goals. They help describe a story in a way that lets the troupe touch it, smell it, taste it, feel it, talk to it, scream at it and sometimes even make love to it or murder it. They can act as repositories of important plot information for the troupe. This information might be absolutely true, completely false or, most likely, somewhere in between these two extremes. They let the coterie play with politics, fall into the trap of carefully crafted intrigues communicated in dialogue that has just the right amount of truth in its delivery. They can be the source of rumor, humor or innuendo, the catalyst for character revelations, epiphanies or propaganda. Use their voices to dish out lies that have just the right flavor of truth to make them believable. "The prince sent me," says the ghoul, with a twinge of fear but a firm demeanor. "I'm

gonna slit your fucking throat from ear to goddamn ear!" roars the madman, his eyes red in a haze of fury and amphetamines. The vampire in the cheap suit shrugs and meets your eyes briefly before whispering, "The Brujah have bought off all the detectives on the case, Фcause they don't want nobody to know shit," and looking away.

Storyteller characters can help set moods of despair, of joy, of paranoia. Their thoughts, appearance and shadowy motives set the scene in a way infinitely better than by simply giving the coterie a mundane laundry list with column headings titled "Secrets Uncovered" or "Items Found" or even "What the Harpy Has in Her Pockets." Vampire has, after all, no Discipline, Virtue, Skill, Ability or Attribute that forces the troupe to suffer boxed text read to them like their ABCs, with no thought paid whatsoever to characterization. Colorless delivery of cardboard, one-note characters is one of the earmarks of poorly cast games - it doesn't move us and it doesn't give us the impression that a person exists behind the list of Traits. Is that arrogant? Consider for a moment: We do this because drama means something to us, story integrity means something to us. We wouldn't be participating in a game that puts dramatic substance ahead of mere "power-ups" if we weren't interested in transforming Storytelling into a valid form of entertainment more lasting, more affecting and more substantial than that. This isn't a video game, in which enemies line up merely to be destroyed. This is a world populated by an almost infinite cast of individuals.

Storyteller characters provide a "show them, don't tell them" opportunity within the context of the story. They play vital roles in setting up and executing conflicts, alliances and double crosses. Troupe interaction with them can, and often does, lead the coterie to failure or success in their goals, whether these goals are for an individual or for the entire group. Secondary or peripheral characters can draw recalcitrant, shy players into the story by interacting directly with an otherwise quiet player's character. Storyteller characters can also individualize the chronicle by drawing subtext or backstory into the foreground. They, in and of themselves, open further plot developments to a skilled Storyteller (some even demand more attention!). Supporting characters help illustrate that a coterie's actions aren't static, that these actions leave ripples in the water, that they have consequences and rewards.

Or, leaving all that behind, you can just use them to help the coterie explode cars, set buildings on fire and kill their enemies. After all, not everything has to be High ArtЄ. As long as you and your troupe are having fun, the game's a success.

Allies, Antagonists and Neutrals

Storyteller characters deserve as much attention as their role in the story suggests - major Storyteller characters, with whom the coterie will often interact, should be as detailed if not more so than any given player's character. These ancillary characters can be broken down into three broad types: the ally, the antagonist and the neutral. The players will often, through their characters' actions, dictate where those individuals they come across fit into the chronicle, but sometimes an ancillary character might fall into a certain group regardless of the coterie's behavior.

Allies

Allies are Storyteller characters who are positively or favorably inclined toward the players' characters. They directly or indirectly support the troupe in their characters' collective and individual goals. They can be drawn from the ranks of other Kindred, Camarilla or Sabbat, from ghouls that the troupe has made or even from mortals whom the coterie has encountered and whom they deem worthy of notice. Basically, as a Storyteller, you can design and use any type of character who can be nudged along logically to support the troupe.

Allies don't always have to be "the usual suspects" and they don't always have to continue throughout the chronicle as the coterie's supporters. Allies can be as unusual and as dangerous as you want them to be. Not every ally is immediately obvious as such; perhaps the coterie draws some temporary allies from the ranks of an enemy - malevolent and menacing ones make for a really compelling story choice - because their goal coincides with the players' characters' goal. Perhaps this allegiance lasts for only one night, but it might last longer. The coterie may also have acquired a dangerous ally, a friend who they are not supposed to make, like a Lupine or a rival art patron, whose assistance may come back to haunt them. Storyteller characters can certainly be out for themselves - most should be, in the selfish World of Darkness -and simply see the coterie as a means to their own ends, posing as friends, only to double cross them later on in the story. Also, allies can be someone or something the coterie chooses to protect, a person with special significance to them. For example, an elderly medium may hold the secret to finding the name of the ghost who haunts one of the characters; a mortal child of one of the characters may need a bit of looking after.

Secret Camarilla-Sabbat relations often make for good stories, but allies can come from any source - from mortal law enforcement, human love interests, politicians, princes, the characters' own sires, underworld contacts, street gangs, gallery owners, celebrities, enigmatic chess masters, elders, Sabbat prisci, primogen, justicars and priests. Just remember, anyone can work with the coterie to serve a common goal or to simply provide needed emotional and dramatic diversion.

Also, the smart Storyteller should never neglect the allies who are just as they appear - characters with common goals who aren't part of some elaborate, ironic twist. A detective character may have several amiable contacts on the homicide squad, a Tremere may have fellow apprentices and any vampire may have a mortal lover who insists on "helping

out." The vast majority of the coterie's allies should be just that, unless you plan to run a game very heavy on drama and shifting alliances. Remember Occam's razor - sometimes the simplest solution is the best. When you're required to keep track of as many details as normally accompany the Storyteller's position, you'll find this fact invaluable.

Antagonists

Drama comes from adversity - a story with no conflict isn't a story, as nothing really happens - and antagonists provide that adversity. These supporting characters are hostile toward or otherwise oppose the coterie for their own, personal reasons. In fact, they want to hound them, hurt them, even kill and destroy them. And they won't always simply make the lines of their vendetta known through direct action against the coterie, either. They'll eat away at their allies, destroy their friends and family and try to bring Final Death to their childer and sires. It all depends on how badly, deeply or finally they want to make your group squirm and for what purpose.

It goes without saying that antagonists will directly oppose your player's actions in the same way that their allies support those actions. These Storyteller characters might work against the players' characters at each opportunity with a viciousness that can and does defy logic, or they may play them as subtly as a Kasparov moves his queen. The most important asset antagonists offer you as a Storyteller is the fact that they act as vehicle for dramatic conflict to occur. You can draw enemies from a variety of different sources, just like allies, and often from the same list. After all, an ally caught in the crossfire of a badly planned or motivated action can make the most interesting - and tenaciously dangerous - of enemies. Your group's backgrounds will suggest the most natural choices, as will their preludes.

Antagonists need not always be physical opponents to best in combat - in fact, among the Kindred, few will be. Rather, antagonists may be elders who conspire to keep characters from finding a vital clue, fellow ancillae or neonates who compete for similar limited resources or even someone wholly unconnected to the world of the Kindred (like a police officer or die-hard journalist). To be an antagonist, a Storyteller character merely needs to have a goal contrary to the goals of a player's character.

Just like an ally can be drawn from unusual sources, so can an enemy. Storyteller characters who might conceivably be attracted to the group and its motives may just hate them on principle or may have lost something important because of the troupe and its goals. And, perhaps the most fascinating possibility, a certain antagonist might be a conflicted antagonist. This individual may, temporarily or permanently, stand against the troupe because of something that has occurred, or because they are in disagreement with the troupe over some principle.

Neutrals

Some supporting characters don't really care about the players' characters and their aims. While each and every supporting character has her own agenda, neutral characters don't feel that the coterie will affect their aims, goals and advancement in one way or another - if they're aware of the coterie at all. Therefore, they won't necessarily harm the characters, but they won't necessarily aid them either. They have the potential to act in either capacity, as the mood or the necessity strikes them. A cunning "neutral" character might even play both ends against the middle, helping or hindering when it best suits her purpose.

Neutrals most likely comprise the largest part of the Storyteller's supporting cast, but they can also be the most dynamic element, because the actions of the troupe will likely determine if these characters stay neutrals. If the coterie acts badly or maliciously, it may quickly make an enemy out of a neutral character, while a helpful action can shift a supporting character from neutral to ally. This is particularly poignant in Vampire, where it seems every character has someone behind her, influencing her actions.

Deciding Who is What

The Storyteller needs to consider a few elements when deciding which supporting characters to use in her chronicle and how to portray them. The first is motivation. What does the supporting character value? Does she share the aims of the coterie, or does she oppose them in thought and action? What does this character wish to achieve when relating to the characters, and how do her aims fit into the Storyteller's characterization of the chronicle concept, theme and mood?

A wise Storyteller takes all facets of the story into account. Is your theme "power corrupts?" Show your troupe a prince who cares only for his own benefit and who satisfies his own desires by exploiting others through boons and one-upmanship. Support your concept with a group of primogen around the prince who each want to usurp his title. Cast these primogen as elders who use their power like the prince, to fulfill their own wants with nominal attention to the Traditions. Each strives toward individual goals and is characterized with style that is consistent - or antithetical - to other individuals encountered. The primogen becomes a veritable viper's nest, a poisonous hydra with the prince as the most potent head. Is your mood one of foreboding, loneliness, and danger? Give your prince a haven that is removed and brooding. Dress him in gray. Physically stand him away from the group of characters with which he is interacting. Paint the walls with the shadows of the lurking primogen. Even neutral characters can serve the theme. Are they agents of the prince? Are they oppressed somehow by the prince's blatant self-interest?

After you've decided why a character exists, you need to think of ways of conveying these ideas to the troupe through your presentation of these characters. Ask yourself a list of questions, not unlike the questions an actor acts herself before she approaches a new role. How does this person walk? What speech mannerisms does she use? How does she dress and what does her choice of clothing or her personal style say about her? Is her body language open and confident, shy and reticent or possibly even secretive and closed off from approachability? Then, you'll need to use a variety of acting and vocal techniques that let your troupe in on the secret. These tricks of characterization can be used to impart a variety of Storyteller character information.

Your greatest tool in the area of characterization is your own voice. It can make or break you, work with you or against you. Remember, as a Storyteller, you're almost speaking dialogue, just like you would in a play or a movie. Because Storytelling is a spoken medium, players will often identify characters based on their modes of speech. This is perfectly reasonable - an educated chronicler of Cainite history doesn't have the same speech mannerisms as the streetwise Nosferatu waif. Okay, we're not all natural vocal actors, we don't all have the ability to "speak the speech" like a member of the Royal Shakespeare Company. We're not all blessed with a gift for accents, and we're not all familiar with the myriad of shifting vernaculars, slang terms, time-flavored usages and dialects that we might be called on to present. So, how does a twentysomething white chick from the Detroit Φburbs learn to sound like a Brujah brotha Embraced in the Φhood, talkin' some shit with a Gangrel muthafucka before he does him? Moreover, how does this suburban woman learn to do it and not sound totally ridiculous? Numerous sources exist to help you with vocal characterization. Books on speech, slang and vernacular and recordings of dialects and accents are available to you. The Internet provides endless speech and language links and some even have recorded examples.

Maybe this doesn't interest you, and maybe you just don't have the time to do a doctoral thesis on Latin usage. Maybe you're just uncomfortable with "hanging that much of yourself out there" - acting is scary, after all, and it takes guts. But you are a Storyteller - if you weren't interested in that, you wouldn't be reading this book - and you'll need to portray all the denizens of your chronicle to the troupe in a manner that makes them understood and realistic.

Overcome your natural discomfort and stage fright by easing into it gradually. You can sprinkle your dialogue with little hints of an accent, with tiny tidbits of style and usage, without learning to speak in iambic pentameter. Try using simple phrases that give the flavor of being from another part of the world, even another time, instead of whole long passages of flowery dialogue, antiquated speech or ethnic slang. For example, say you're presenting a Lasombra who's a got a Cockney accent. Rather than driving yourself crazy by standing in front of a mirror and saying "Wot a lot Φo li'l bo'ls" over and over again, you can interweave your normal speech patterns with hints of a Cockney accent by, say, having this character refer to the player with whom he's speaking as "guvna." An elder may refer to mortals as "the Canaille," and younger vampires may have no idea what she's talking about. This gets the point across and stays within your comfort level. References can be drawn from the same sources as they are for more extended researched speech and can come from TV, movies or even a colorful relative or two. If you are a natural vocal actor, if you have the ability to don many different accents and personas, so much the better.

Characterization certainly doesn't stop with vocal interpretation. You'll need to describe physical traits and mannerisms. Tell your troupe what a given character looks like, what style of clothes they wear. In what setting are they first encountered? What obvious possessions do they carry? Who are the people within their entourage, if any at all? All these things say something about the person you're presenting.

Describe what the character looks like, if they're short, tall, fat, slender, bald, stylish or slovenly. What is their race, nationality or ethnicity? Do they have any distinguishing characteristics - scars, tattoos, warts, wens or facial tics? Do they drive a Mercedes or a rusted late-model Ford? Do they live or make their havens in a downtown high-rise, a country estate or an urban ghetto? What colors do they wear? Do they wear Donna Karan or K-mart? Is their clothing drawn from the latest fashions? Is it antiquated? Do they have any fashion sense at all? Do they talk with their hands? Do they smoke? Are they protected within a group, or are they alone? Are they priggishly heterosexual or flagrantly queer? Remember, the more detailed you make your description, the easier it will be for your players to visualize a character and the easier it will make interaction with them.

Some Storytellers take a cue from the F. Scott Fitzgerald school of characterization - they let a character's actions describe her. Jay Gatsby always stood away from the parties

he threw. Meyer Wolfsheim asked about "goneggtions" and ate ravenously. Instead of, "He's a guy in a designer suit," the Storyteller might say, "he stands tall, his clothes making him seem somewhat regal, and he leans rakishly against the wall." Run with this - it makes a given character more than a simple collection of adjectives.

You'll be called on to shift personalities on the fly. Say you've got a Texan Brujah antitribu, a callous Tzimisce surgeon, a loutish Gangrel archaeologist and a Norwegian Toreador performance artist. How the heck do you keep all that straight, have them talk to each other and your troupe and not bang your head against the wall? Remember, continuity is important because your players pay attention. They will remember persona shifts in the same Storyteller character, and they'll call you on it every time.

You could decide to present one Storyteller character to your troupe at a time. Now and then, however, you will find yourself in the position where you need to present them simultaneously. How do you keep from stumbling into accent freefall -that embarrassing moment when all your vocal characterization blends into one jumbled polyglot of mangled accents? Moreover, how do you convincingly and accurately keep their personalities, traits and characteristics straight?

Wise Storytellers employ a variety of tactics to avoid the hodgepodge. Take good notes while you play. Have Storyteller characters' information on cards and in notebooks, easily at hand. Enlist the services of "assistant Storytellers" to help you with the crowd scenes. Use troupe-style play, and hand off these duties to trusted players who don't mind helping you out. Try to avoid putting a Texan, a New Yorker, a Scotsman and a Norwegian in the same scene, unless your story calls for it.

Okay, now that the "what" and the "why" have been discussed, what about the "how?" Just how should a Storyteller define the Traits of her characters? Here's the secret: Power level depends on age and generation. This method is a way to keep things logical, but feel free to tweak it if your chronicle calls for it.

Attributes - Begin the character with a normal allocation of dots: 7/5/3 in her primary, secondary and tertiary attributes. Select attribute group priority - Physical, Social and Mental - as the character's focus dictates. Add two dots for each century that the Storyteller character has been undead, and then divide these pips among all of her attributes. For example, Paulette the vampire was 20 years old when Embraced in 1792. It's 2000. She has a base of 7/5/3 in primary, secondary and tertiary Attributes and gains an additional four dots to split between the whole of the nine listed Attributes.

Abilities - Begin with the base number of dots at 13/9/5 in primary, secondary and tertiary Abilities. Again, select ability group priority dependant on the purpose of the Storyteller character. Add five additional dots for every century of unlife, and then divide them among all her abilities. For example, Paulette, archon to the Ventrue justicar, has been undead for 208 years, so she gains an additional 10 dots to split between her primary, secondary and tertiary Abilities.

Disciplines -Take the square root of the time the vampire has been undead (round up) and distribute that number of dots sensibly among her Disciplines, keeping in mind the vampire's Nature, Demeanor and role within the story. For example, Paulette would have a total of 14 dots to spread among those Disciplines you believe she needs to fulfill her purpose in your chronicle.

Backgrounds, Virtues, Willpower, Humanity/Path and Merits and Flaws - These are best left to the Storyteller's judgement. Is the character an well-connected industrialist? Stock up on Backgrounds. Is the character a vagabond? Set her Humanity very high or very low and add a significant amount of Willpower. Has the character succumbed somewhat to the ennui of ages? Keep all of the aforementioned Traits low. Characters who might be expected to have numerous derangements may instead have none, as part of their backstories involve overcoming their declivities. Sometimes adopting a Path of Enlightenment has the same effect as a derangement, as any Path's precepts are so radically different from the cultural norm. Ultimately, the character really comes to unlife as these Traits are assigned.

Mortals, ghouls and other non-vampires are designed under the same guidelines, with attention to the Traits they should or shouldn't have.

Of course, you can always "shift on the fly" and make the characters up as you go along. You can modify a Storyteller character's goals and abilities through storytelling and adjust them as the situation suggests. Does your justicar need a grocery list of information from one of the characters? Does she have the Dominate Discipline? Of course she does. Not all of us are meticulously organized, and we don't have unlimited design or writing time. We can't plan a strategy for every situation our troupe might throw at us. You can let your Storyteller character act as the situation dictates and make sure that they have the necessary tools to do so, by simply giving those Disciplines, Attributes, Skills - whatever - to them at the time they're called on to use them. It's a viable option, but be careful. Your players could see this as hedging if you don't make it seem fair. If you're caught, try to have a logical explanation that will mollify them and make you seem like the you're the natural choice to chair the next committee meeting of the International Society of Justice in Storytelling. If that doesn't work, make sure they understand that playing Vampire isn't always about what's fair. It's about what best serves the story and the overall experience.

The Elders' Game

While it makes sense that the majority of the vampires in the World of Darkness would be ancillae, neonates or fledglings, more than a few older, more cunning, more ruthless and

more experienced vampires stalk the Final Nights. These monsters are the elders, vampires who have existed for centuries or more, and they play the game of Jyhad on a level that mystifies and terrifies younger, less seasoned Kindred. From their ranks rise the Methusalahs, those creatures with a millennium or more of unlife behind them, and the dreaded Antediluvians, the Third Generation clan founders whose existence is the stuff of terrible legend and ghastly rumor.

If you, as Storyteller, wish to tell a story within the world of elder machinations, you've picked a difficult subject, but it's by no means an unworkable one. You must simply approach running an elder's chronicle with a little more maturity and a lot more seriousness than you would, say, running group of neonates. The levels of intrigue and power that elders wield could be nothing like you've attempted previously. And certainly, troupe members who are experienced only at playing neonates and ancillae may have to be carefully guided through the pitfalls that character generation, character maturation and chronicle play within an elders' game will present to them.

Still, elders chronicles can be very rewarding. For players who enjoy traversing the halls of power, who like to see their characters grow and change over a longer period of time and who even fancy the idea of seeing periods of history evolve and come to life before their eyes, an elders chronicle is their best chance to do that. And, if handled carefully by the Storyteller, they aren't as difficult as they would seem at first glance.

Elders as Characters

What kind of characters are best suited to an elders chronicle? In order to answer that, you might have to ask yourself a few more questions.

What does somebody do for 300 years or more? Wouldn't mere existence, especially a static, vampiric one, despite all its possible wealth, power and pleasure, become interminable and tedious? Wouldn't everything become usual and commonplace?

Yes. Yes, it would. And if you, as a vampire, had that much time on earth, you would run a terrible risk of falling victim to that ennui and the monotony. You might turn to horrid, jaded pastimes in pursuit of mere entertainment. You might start to overreach, might stray from your power bases just a little too much in hope that something, anything at all, would make living death exciting for you again. And, worst of all, you might start to make mistakes, mistakes that could cost you your very existence.

Yet, your ultimate goal is survival, right? Of course it is. And, with survival comes risk and choice. An elders chronicle should place the pitfalls of vampiric longevity directly in the characters' way. It should sluice over them in great, delicious sanguinary rivulets of tempting decadence, decay, derision and drive. It should let them feast on the allure of power and vitae and then hit them between the eyes with the consequences.

You'll need to talk to your troupe, ask some more questions and make some decisions together. What types of characters would work effectively within an elder chronicle? What would they have to do to survive for so many nights? What sort of events have they participated in or merely witnessed? Who have they loved? What decisions have they faced? What enemies have they vanquished - or let go? Who have they tried to defeat and failed? Why did they fail? Who has hurt them?

Characters need motivation. Elder characters, in particular, are motivated by the events they have seen and participated in. They are motivated by the memories of strong loves and stronger hatreds, having long since lost those true feelings and become increasingly distant from humanity. By helping your troupe understand, define and come to terms with the variety of background information that colors their characters' existence, you help the chronicle too. You give yourself natural ideas for plot and Storyteller characters, mood and setting.

Sample Elder Chronicle Concepts

The Royal Family: Elder characters often have a social flair and a self-interested need for the acknowledgement of their accomplishments by other vampires. They grace the salons of Elysium in order to advance that standing. They tout their successes with majestic subtlety and shrug off their failures obsequiously. They never miss an opportunity to be in the right place at the right time, but they always make it seem as though the event in question and its participants come to them and not vice versa. They never put themselves in direct danger, but they play the game of advancement, making certain that the claws of failure scratch someone else's eyes out. Thus is the Jyhad a minuet, albeit one with deadly consequences for a single misstep.

Survivors: Whatever happens, whatever transpires, the undead always seem to advance and thrive. In the world of Vampire, such survival demands instincts that are not only paramount, but cutthroat. The instinct to hold onto their unlife drives the characters. In order to flourish and advance, they must have no compunction and no guilt whatsoever about the total annihilation of their rivals if it means a rise in their status, fame or stature. Such elders would work on developing formidable reputations, deserved or not, so that not many other vampires would wish to directly challenge her station.

Lancelots: Certain of the Kindred observe a purpose, a thing, a want, a need, a desire that consumes their every undead thought. Over the centuries, this grows into an obsession, taking centuries to fulfill. A quester can spend countless nights carefully plotting the manner in which her goal may be achieved. She may stop at nothing, using enemies and sacrificing allies, in order that her dream might be attained. Perhaps her quest is the protection of a person, a lowly mortal and generations of that mortal's descendants, or it may be as grand as discovering the legendary Holy Grail. Maybe the character's quest is a principle or perfecting a realm of study or Discipline. After a century or more of existence, mere survival might start to lose a character's attention. A questing character could play out centuries of chronicle time in the single-minded pursuit of her goal.

The Shepherds: These characters strive to maintain their Humanity above all else. This is a difficult concept to choose; centuries worth of long nights and the consuming drive for vitae take their toll on a vampire's lingering Humanity. The very state of being a vampire suggests - and may even require - discarding everything human. In fact, many vampires lose Humanity as they age; in game terms, they must spend experience points to counter the Beast and offset the loss. The Shepherds choose to make the preservation of their human core the primary reason for their continued existence. They fight the Beast in themselves and attempt to fight it in other Kindred. Very likely, they'll see themselves as dark angels of vengeance - possibly human, probably not humane - striving against those forces that would rob them of what remains of their reasoned, thinking selves. Consider the alternative: As Humanity wanes, so does logic, judgement

and even sanity, in the worst cases. Vampire characters with low Humanity scores fall victim to uncaring, unfeeling attitudes toward others. They suffer physical changes and even deformities. They become twisted, jaded and id-driven. An elder who sees this change in their state of being as worse than Final Death will do anything they can to stop the decline. That goal is a hard road to walk, because they'll have to war against their own vampiric desires, specifically against the need and craving for vitae as sustenance. After all, isn't taking blood against the will of a potential donor tantamount to rape or theft? They might even see the Great Jyhad, the whispered purpose of the Antediluvians, as a prophecy in direct conflict with Humanity as a core principle. They may form anti-Gehenna cabals or cults.

The Damnation Game: The damnation game provides plenty of opportunity for breast-beating and forehead-clutching, so this concept might be appealing to the method angst actors in your troupe. Like humans, some vampires are consumed by a fear of death - in a vampire's case Final Death - and all the imagined terrors that come with such finality. If Faith was a central principle to a vampire in life, he might not lose the beliefs about the afterlife he held as a human, even after he's Embraced. He might well come to believe that the Curse of Caine precludes him from any sort of pleasant resolution in the hereafter. Jaded and cynical, but still wary of the price he'll pay for all the sins he's committed and has yet to commit, he might cling to unlife like an island of safety in a sea of danger and uncertainty. If he had no faith in life, he might believe that there's no afterlife at all - this vampire will do anything to continue his existence. He will sacrifice allies, enemies, possessions and principles without a second thought, if he believes that the sacrifice will keep him going just a little longer. After all, he's cheated death once, and he may have no qualms about cheating it again.

Guardians Eternal: The elder characters share a common "guardian" concept, believing that they have something to protect or something to ward. The object of protection may be whatever you want it to be, but they meet the nights of several centuries making sure that nothing jeopardizes it - not mortals, not other Kindred, Sabbat, nothing. Perhaps the object of protection is their own mortal family and descendants, perhaps it's their sect, maybe it's a particular Kindred - whatever you think would make a dynamic chronicle. Some of the guardians might seek out those who can aid them in their goal, others might destroy anything that stands in their way. They do their best to stay standing so long as the object of their protection is safe and thrives. They may even believe that they are the only force around able to sustain it. This chronicle works well for younger characters as well, and serves as a good, short, introductory chronicle for players who tend to be more reactive than proactive (see p. 128).

Power Brokers: If you could watch the world from the darkness for several centuries, reading the money trends, watching governments come and go, witnessing the overthrow of kings, the devastation of dictators and the death and rebirth of nations, what role would you play? How much wealth could you amass? How many spies and shadowy associates could you buy and sell? This concept answers that very question. Elder characters in a power broker chronicle use the vast resources that centuries of existence provide them. They trade secrets and manipulate allies and foes because they love power and influence for its own sake. This power is of a caliber that human captains of industry, commerce and free-market capitalism can only dream of obtaining. Shiny gold and grim ambitions are the power broker's raison d'ĵtre. These vampires might toy with standing armies, whole countries or vast criminal empires. They play the game of power politics on a global scale but from the safety of a position hidden from the world at large. That's not to say that vampires, even elders, are responsible for every little thing that happens in mortal society - most couldn't care less about the Canaille who feed them or the political systems that define them. These Elders have little interest in the overall consequences that the Jyhad causes the mortal world to suffer. They care only about their own stake in the War of Ages; how many pretty baubles, interesting toys and staggering fortunes this hobby of power politics brings to them. Real power brokers, those of advanced age and prodigious "young" elders play power politics with each other. They use their vast resources to gain every advantage within the dark world of the Kindred, for it is the only thing that keeps their minds off the eternity of stasis. Elders topple each other, making allies of rivals and enemies out of comrades in order to dominate their dreadful game. They'll dress it up in clothes with designer tags like "the Great Jyhad" and "the service of Caine" or, even, "the fight against the Beast." But they'll continue the game no matter what, and they'll play to win. The power and wealth they achieve is its own best defense.. or so they believe.

This grouping of archetypes is by no means exhaustive. By all means, design your own. Let your troupe create characters with ample input from you. Remember, keep motivation and the struggle for this lengthy unlife in mind, do plenty of research, and be involved in the character design process. The concepts the troupe chooses in an elders game will enrich your chronicle with additional story ideas.

The Players

What sort of players would be particularly drawn to an elders game? It is certainly not for everybody. The levels of power at which elder chronicles operate can be staggering: Misuse and misstep on your part can easily derail a chronicle. If your players fall victim to mindless "dot-mongering," they'll waste all their time trying to one-up each other, and they'll completely walk around any story you attempt to bring to them. Playing with elders requires maturity on your part and on the part of your players. Certain players are more suited to successful elders chronicles than others.

Mature players

Well, that's obvious. Players who can handle mature subject matter in a thoughtful, character-driven manner are desirable

in any game. They are necessary in an elders chronicle, because the toys are just so much more powerful. As a Storyteller, you have to be able to trust your troupe to spin the baroque webs of intrigue that color an elder's actions, spin them believably, catch each other in their strands and still be friends when they walk away from the table. Players who just want seven levels of Potence probably shouldn't be invited to an elders game, unless you want a good deal of carnage.

Players who don't mind doing research

Playing an elder? School's in, kids. An unlife that spans centuries suggests a familiarity with the comings and goings of those centuries. Elders have been around a long time. In order to make their characters believable, players must know something about the time periods in which have lived, been Embraced and observed changes in society - both Kindred and kine. They'll have to do some research to accomplish this.

Players who like to see their characters evolve over a long period of time

With age comes change. With advanced age comes remarkable change. An ability to characterize shifts in personality, loyalties, humanity, goals and a great many other things shape a dynamic unlife. Static characters work against the fabric of an elders chronicle - static elders populate the ranks of secondary characters, but their endless nights of solitude don't make for a memorable chronicle. Therefore, players who enjoy change, who like to see their characters grow and evolve, can handle the diversity of motive that an elders chronicle can offer them.

Players who enjoy historical, political and cultural story lines

Elder vampires have observed much of history. Players who like to experience historical time periods vicariously are wonderfully suited to an elders chronicle. This type of chronicle allows its players to "live" through historical settings firsthand and allows you to explore the meaning of myth, legend and fact.

Players who enjoy Machiavellian games of strategy

These are players who don't at all mind playing "screw your neighbor," and don't mind being screwed for the sake of the story. Elder vampires have been undead for so long that they have become decadent, jaded and (worst of all) easily bored. Precious little amuses them any more, and many turn to the Jyhad as a method of coping with the infinite centuries. Players who enjoy strategy, politics, high finance and military tactics are ideally suited for an elders chronicle.

Fountains of creativity

Creation of an elder character calls for a lot of give and take on the part of the Storyteller and the player. Preludes are much longer and more involved, and character development calls for individualized play. If your player likes this individualized attention, suggest an elder character to him. Likewise, such a player might enjoy chronicling his character's years of unlife, which might give numerous opportunities for new plots (see chapter three for information on blue-booking and other chronicle aids).

Definitely not players who just like to blow shit up

Not that Elders don't blow shit up - they just blow it up for a purpose. But Brujah who spend their nights ripping people's tongues out of their heads and conducting urban warfare on the streets of their cities definitely don't survive very long. Elders rarely engage in wanton, unmotivated "bar-fight" violence. They are too insular and too interested in self preservation for that. Elders are ruthless, certainly, and they use violence as a tool. Some may even kill for the thrill, but they always expect to get something in return. As a former archon stated bluntly, "One does not achieve the august state of elder by brawling."

Elder Story Lines

We know that the length of existence that defines an elder vampire as such usually spans at least 300 years. This can be somewhat misleading. Storytellers can be tempted to think that this whole chronicle dance begins solely with 300-year-old vampires. Your troupe may elect to play elder characters who are much older than that. This sheer expanse of time can be daunting and intimidating to a Storyteller. Not only will you have to make decisions concerning theme, mood and setting, but a wholly different crop of possible problems will arise. You will need to think these through and determine what concessions you will have to make. A few possible concessions are readily apparent.

maintaining the Horror

Vampire: The Masquerade is a storytelling game of personal horror. What scares a vampire of advanced age? Determining hot buttons of fear and pushing those hot buttons throughout your chronicle is a monumental task in any horror game. It's doubly daunting in an elders chronicle - how do you frighten creatures who have not only seen it all, they have participated in it all? That's not to say they're not paranoid, depressed and depraved. They are as frightened, if not more so, by the prospect of Gehenna as the Camarilla and Sabbat rank and file are. Focus on the unique qualities of an elder vampire. Exploit the enemies they've created, their fear of Gehenna, their fear of Kindred older and younger than themselves, their fear of the Beast within or any quirk that arises out of centuries of unlife. Then, pull in tidbits from their backgrounds, sprinkle liberally with paranoia, and dish it to them cold. The most important thing is to make it personal to them. Elders chronicles thrive on personal elements, as

common themes in the form of "boss-character" enemies easily devolve into video-game violence.

Boredom

Elders have been around for centuries if not longer. They're older than the dirt they hide in, and they feel the ennui of ages wear upon them. Many turn to twisted, jaded, decadent, perverted, vile, ruthless, kinky and even blasphemous diversions, simply to keep the weight of eons at bay. The very social fabric of their existence is part snuff film, part Masterpiece Theater and part Caligula. Even these excesses won't hold their attention forever. This presents the Storyteller with a two-part problem. First, the glut of horrific content might eventually desensitize your players. The troupe might look at your chronicle like it is today's installment of the six o'clock news. Second, the characters they play could eventually fall victim to those excesses, and interesting plots may be difficult to construct, assuming the character isn't completely overwhelmed by the Beast. What interests a creature who has experienced so many centuries? Keep things interesting for them by incorporating their backgrounds early and often and offering plots that play to their archetypes. Show them the consequences of their actions. Make their mistakes hurt through loss of prestige, betrayal by progeny, loss to an enemy - in short, whatever their background and concept tells you they care about.

Torpor

Elders require more sleep than younger Kindred, those upstart ancillae and neonates. They lie in torpor for long periods of time, and when they wake up, the first part of their psyche that rears its head is the id. They want blood, and they want it now. In a way, that's pretty cool, because it gives you a chance to show the troupe that vampires are monsters and addicts. They're blood junkies because they need it to survive, and they'll do anything to get it. When torpor ends, there is no superego or ego in play, nothing to keep the Beast from ravening. That gives you a good opportunity to confront the Kindred in the face with the horror of their need, slap them in the face with the dementia brought on by their addiction and then slam them against the wall with the consequences of their actions. It presents some problems, though. You'll be faced with long periods of downtime during which you'll have to keep the story moving.

A Cast of Thousands

Elder vampires have had centuries to gather a complex network of acquaintances, allies, enemies, contacts, ghouls, servants, progeny and childer. Plus, the mere fact that they're elders puts them directly in harm's way. Elder blood is seductive. Diablerists hunger for it. The Methuselahs supposedly depend on it. The Sabbat fears and hates it. You, you lucky son-of-a-bitch, are faced with the daunting task of designing all these myriad creatures and making them fit your troupe characters' backgrounds and making them fit your theme and concept. Don't get hung up here. You can fix

the problem with the problem. So you need to design an elder rival for a certain player's character? Save yourself some time by handing the task to one of the other players. Your troupe plays together in the same chronicle; they have a handle on each other's characters, what makes them tick, what scares them and will usually be more than willing to help you out. Keep a file of specific cast members, their motivations and their own contacts, allies, foes, etc. Add your players' creations to it often.

Research

You think your players have to do a lot of research? Ha! An elders chronicle is richer, has more dimension and is much more believable if you accurately present the time periods your characters have danced through. You'll be bleeding from the eyes by the time you escape from the library or the Internet if you don't handle it wisely. Some Storytellers enlist ghost writers or friendly experts - find someone to help you with it, from other Storytellers to your own players. Know your players and their specialized knowledge. Don't be afraid to ask them questions if you believe they know something you might not. Assign the gathering of historical material for a particular character's background to the troupe member playing that character. Try, within reason, to start a library of resources you use often: atlases - both modern and historical, historical time line reference books, almanacs, "Life in the [fill in the blank]" books on historical settings, compendiums on a specific fictional place, books on names and their origins.

Resources

Imagine what a ruthless, amoral, easily bored, power-hungry vampire could collect over several centuries. Elder vampires frequently have vast, unimaginable resources on hand - money and investments, possessions, artifacts, holdings, real estate, allies, progeny and armies - for which a Storyteller must allow. You must design the artifacts and count the dead presidents (or live kings and queens). Formulate a plan so that these resources won't overrun your chronicle. Vast resources can be used to blunt conflict, and you need to keep that conflict sharp. After all, you don't want to deal with some smartass who tries to counter a problem with her haven by buying the entire city block. Resources can't solve everything. Property, or anything else for that matter, isn't always for sale. Money and power didn't keep these creatures from being Embraced in the first place, and it won't always save them now. Keep your theme in mind, and try to put elements within your plot that make these resources both blessings and curses. Let them see that resources can be a knife in their hand, but that the knife can cut them too, if they're not careful. Armies drain wealth, progeny have minds of their own and may strain at even the restrictions of a blood bond. The population of vast domains may hold a herd, but they may also hold a hunter.

Theatre of the Macabre - Possible Plot Concepts

It's not the intent of any Storyteller's treatise to tell you what your game should say. However, stories about elder vampires and how they got to be that way do present you with natural suggestions for plot archetypes. What follows is a sampling.

Elder chronicles are intrinsically suited to epic historical story lines that take place over hundreds of years. It's exciting for players to develop their characters throughout history. Pick a specific locale, one that has a compelling historical background, such as Renaissance Italy or Spain during the Age of Exploration or even the reign of Cleopatra. Try to choose one that visually represents your theme - if your theme is "power corrupts," perhaps your epic can take place in Italy under the thumb of the Borgia popes. An elders chronicle need not start during a different time period, however. The Final Nights are certainly.. interesting enough to provide a match for any elder's mettle.

A story can follow the characters' search for knowledge or artifacts, or it can give the troupe a "quest" motif that takes years, decades, even centuries to play out. A common quest will give them a natural reason to work together, and conflict rising out of this will test their inter-character connections. A quest could be for Golconda, information on Gehenna, a particularly powerful artifact, sections of the Book of Nod, case study notes from terrible experiments on Disciplines or any common thing they want.

Gehenna is a prophecy that is absolutely central to elder characters. They may fear it or welcome it, attempt to hasten it or strive to avert it. The inevitable night that the Antediluvians rise from torpor to devour their childer touches every Kindred. Stories based around the scripture of Gehenna offer you horrific elegance almost Biblical in scope and mysticism. They easily draw in all characters, because they all have a connection to it, and they all have an opinion on it. The Gehenna concept offers unique devices - Gehenna cults, with their rites and insular nature - that can be used to visually represent your theme.

Elder vampires have had hundreds of years to engage in political interplay. They gather in cliques, hold salons, form alliances, trade information, spread rumors and "blush" in feigned humility at their past victories. Political story lines set up natural conflict. Elders play with resources gathered over several human lifetimes, unimpeded by mortality. Their faƙade of civility covers the innate rage of a monster. Mix in a tenuous hold on any sense of morality or conscience. To what depths will the elders sink?

Elder chronicles can center upon the tragedy of eternal existence and the struggle to retain some shreds of Humanity. Cainites watch everyone they know die, one after the other, while they continue to exist. Death is a natural end to life. Vampires cheat that process, and a byproduct of the gambit is a compulsion that, if fully loosed on those same people, would have destroyed them a lot sooner. Friends, lovers, all the things we, as humans, take for granted, are luxuries rarely indulged in, if at all. Why love something if it will only die and leave you? This may be ruthless and logical, but it doesn't prevent it from happening; vampires have emotions, but paler than those of the living. They take lovers and flock to causes in the vain hopes of reigniting those passionate fires.

Elder Devices

Some ideas lend themselves to an elders chronicle by their very nature. What neonates may consider "another tedious Elysium" may in truth be a teeming nest of viper-like elders, hatching their plots and betraying their foes beneath a veneer of Johnsonian wit and civility.

Elysium

Elysium is a place a prince has declared sacrosanct. No violence of any sort is allowed to take place in Elysium. It is neutral ground, where elder vampires meet for discourse, socializing, decision-making and even kinky, malicious sport. The Camarilla supports strict rules of conduct, ranging from behavior to proper dress. The Masquerade is strictly enforced at all times.

While Elysium can be open to any vampire - even visiting representatives from foreign sects and clans - neonates often see it as an outdated, antiquated ideal that has little relevance to the modern nights. Therefore, Elysium is the favored playground of the elders, who sit within its often velvet-roped, curtained bowers, pursuing their own decadent ends. A prince can declare any place Elysium, but the most common locations are centers of culture such as museums, art galleries, opera houses, theaters, nightclubs, libraries or, sometimes, even a particular haven.

Elysium is usually a Camarilla device, though the Sabbat has its own "Elysia," in the form of festivals, ceremonies and numerous ritae.

The de facto "Pax Vampirica" that leaders observe often strains near to breaking, but certain Sabbat antitribu, Lasombra and those elegantly debauched Tzimisce play similar roles to those of the scions of the Camarilla. To hear them tell the tale, Sabbat elders are even more rare and wicked than their Camarilla counterparts - after all, just being and elder is dangerous in the Sabbat - and might well be attracted to the company of other monsters and fiends like themselves. Sabbat gatherings are often shrouded in occult Cainite pomp, majesty and ritual, though they may just as often be wild romps, with Blood Feasts suspended in cages and wild blood-orgies and open celebrations of the Vaulderie.

Salons

As in any social construct, vampiric society breaks down into elite cliques. These cliques are called salons, and salons are almost the exclusive refuge of elders. Salons gather in back rooms and alcoves, hotel ballrooms, theater boxes, private

havens and even at fine restaurants where no one seems to be partaking of their expensive dinners. It may be a place that has a timelessness to it, such as a 400-year-old pub with a large private vestibule, the drawing room of an old country estate, a mile castle on Hadrian's Wall or even on the Internet (after all, lengthy survival depends upon adaptability).

When elders gather, they do so out of common purpose, interest, like, dislike, goal or cause. Salons come about for any of these reasons and more. That is not to say that the vampires in a particular salon like or even respect each other. Some salons are purely for social purposes. Like the old rhyme about Boston society, in which "the Lowells spoke only to the Cabots, and the Cabots spoke only to God," so sometimes the Toreador speak only to the Ventrue, and the Ventrue speak only to the prince. The players, sects and clans may shuffle, but the societal waltz remains the same. A salon can form out of any common interest at all.

Of course, salons have a uniquely vampiric twist, which steps far, far beyond the worst human decadence. Imagine a place where senators, drug addicts, porn actresses, Academy Award winning directors, Nobel-Prize-winning scientists, garbage collectors, gardeners, gangsta rappers, royalty, arms dealers, thugs, Mafiosi, snuff peddlers, serial killers, terrorists, doctors and mewling little yes-men gather and play depraved power games with each other. Add to this a feigned civility that wouldn't be out of place at an debutante ball, then soak the vision in nightmare colors of vivisection as art, mass murder as politics, exsanguination as refreshment, and control as survival. Mortals may gut each other for banal rewards like an extra million a picture or a trophy wife with a long pedigree, but at salons, vampires will do the same for dominion over territory, passages from the Book of Nod or a more advantageous position in the coming Jyhad, and they won't even break each other's skin.

Vampire: the Masquerade isn't going to limit you in the types of salons you design and explore. Ultimately, a salon is merely a party thrown for other Kindred. Individuals' interests vary so much that the possibilities are endless. Here are a few suggestions, but feel free to add some of your own.

Patronage Salons: These salons arise purely out of social duty, to each other, or to their patron. That doesn't mean that they can't be kinky. Patronage salons sometimes gather to introduce socially a new elder into the upper echelons of the incestuous society of the children of Caine, much like an unholy coming out party. Also, these are among the only salons where vampires who have not yet gained elder status are briefly suffered. Elders may even use patronage salons to present their progeny to be subtly maligned and humiliated. The more twisted patronage salons can even be used to showcase progeny who are unusual or perhaps even taboo, such as a child, a hopeless invalid or a secret lover.

Clan Salons: Certain clans may be said to prefer their own company, such as the Tremere and even, God save us, the Tzimisce. Elders may gather in salons by clan, to plot goals, to share secret insights, to backstab each other with subtle grace and to keep an eye on their neighbors. Clan salons can be instrumental to introducing potential justicars and setting select members' feet firmly on the path of becoming primogen. It is an opportunity for the Storyteller to show the best and worst aspects of the clan. The more fiendish clans use salons as a way to show off their handiwork. Imagine a Tzimisce salon: misshapen Bratovitch servants serving human fetus blood in crystal goblets to their liege-fiends while their masters discuss with cold, clinical clarity the most efficient way to vivisect what is left of its mother. Humans and dogs rut on the floor for the fiends' detached amusement. They then discourse on what bastard beings this could create. Toreador salons, on the other hand, may exhibit the work of a daring artist or designer amid a backdrop of gossip, braggadocio and socializing. Beautiful, drugged vessels may offer their blood to stimulate the tastes of the assembled elders while a host of naked chamber musicians provides the appropriate background music. Clan salons are rare - few cities have enough elders of a single clan to host them, so guests must come from other locales to make a successful gathering. Many vampires are also loath to travel, so a clan salon must be a truly promising venture for a distant Kindred to even consider attending.

Political and Martial Salons: "Think-tank" cells can form around common politics, policy and martial aims. While the participants all have opinions on how to best meet those

goals, two opinions rarely match exactly. Here, elders fret over Kindred politics, debate it and form plans of action. They plan their part in the Jyhad and they scheme to further their gains in it. Provisions against violence are strained here, for ages-old rivals often meet, but combat is prohibited. (These rules extend to any elder vampire who enters, so even vampires outside of the host's "allegiance" must be suffered in peace.) In any event, they propose, counter-propose, argue, scream, shout and come just short of physical violence, in order to be heard. These are often a city's most common salons, where elders gather to discuss local affairs and interests.

Culture Salons: Culture salons tend to be the playground of the Toreador, although other clan elders do gather at them. They exist to launch new works of art, dance pieces and music or to discuss mortal or Kindred trends. The "cause" is often just an excuse to gather, however. Most culture salons tend to evolve (or devolve) into parties, masquerade balls and even policy discussions. Certainly, like at all salons, private matters are discussed and old scores settled. They are often very formal events; here, more than anywhere else, do the Kindred push what humanity they retain to the forefront. Baser, darker practices are largely frowned upon. Such indulgences would break the ruse. This doesn't mean, however, that their behavior is genteel. Bored with the prospect of yet another evening spent pretending to fawn over someone else's creation, the Kindred often strain the limits of their own grace and lapse into behavior that is rude, derisive and just short of menacing.

Divertissement Salons: These gatherings are the cultural salons' bitchy little crack-whore sisters. Classical culture? Forget it! Here elder Kindred indulge all the baser instincts of the Beast. Everything is played for low comedy and kink. All the horrid forms of art – from Dominated naked kine airbrushed with vitae to dissolute performance Vicissitude – is showcased here. Often, mortals are Dominated and put on display for the sick amusement of the audience, whetting their frenzied appetites for dinner later, rather like selecting your lobster before it is cooked and served. The salons resemble nothing so much as Hellfire Clubs, those 17th century secret societies where the rich and jaded gormandized and raped with equal enthusiasm, with a distinctive vampiric twist.

Scavenger Hunt Salons: This elder social club is not necessarily tied to a particular location; its members might never have met each other face to face. The host of each event provides the prize and selects the list of items, a nearly impossible selection of objects to gather, cloaking the clues in riddles. The hunt takes place worldwide, with no holds barred. The participants may directly sabotage each other or merely alert an opponent's nemesis that she is in the area. The prizes may take the form of territory, prime hunting grounds, significant artifacts or items that are so rare and dangerous that owning them would have its own consequences (read: plot hooks). This adds an element of ultimate challenge and immediacy to what could be a mundane and pointless game. After all, did not the Epicureans feast on the tongues of wrens? Isn't it the ultimate decadence to possess then destroy some precious thing that can never be replaced?

Chess Salons: Elder vampires who enjoy games of strategy often like to play chess or other games of tactics. Chess is the sport of kings, after all, and elder vampires often view themselves almost as royalty, as cunning, ruthless strategists and as possessing unparalleled martial minds. (Other types of gaming salons have been held – gambling and other games of chance, often favored by the Ravnos and Malkavians – but chess seems to be a favorite because it appeals the tastes of so many individuals.) The rules of the chess game are unchanged since its first incarnation in India, but the kings, queens, bishops, rooks, knights and pawns are all of worth something to the participants. Progeny, ghouls, Dominated herd, these all can grace the board, with the spot of the king being retained by the player himself. The stakes and the board are life-size and larger, and the pieces sacrificed are sacrificed for keeps. While kings surrounded are not kings killed, all other pieces, specifically mortal ones, may well be fair game. Still, rather than destroying a captured piece, it's much more satisfying to keep it, bind it to you and twist its loyalty, then play with it again at a later date. The most intense games, ironically, arise out the capture of human chess enthusiasts, forced to play for their lives and the lives of their loved ones. The whole game becomes a dance of danger and desperation, with the elders playing their mortal champions off against each other, the champions either gutting each other to win or perhaps even working together to best their captors, and the elders playing off each other.

downtime systems

So what do you do when the story arc or the epic segment or just one night's worth of action is completed? What do vampires do on their nights off?

Working with periods of downtime is sometimes a problem – downtime is mostly comprised of inactivity or activity without much plot structure and without definitive links to Storyteller's vision of the chronicle. Much of what occurs in chronicle downtime does so because the characters are working on character development, taking care of personal projects and business, having a love affair or two or merely retiring to their havens to drink at leisure and possibly fall into torpor for a few decades. Especially in elders chronicles, significant periods of time may pass between story installments – years, decades, centuries even – because the Elders have simply been around for so long. It's difficult to play out every aspect of a character's nightly existence. If you like that sort of thing, by all means try, but by the time your chronicle winds down you'll probably be ready for Social Security. Attending to every minor detail, while complete, often bogs down in the very minutiae from which it is made. For example, a Storyteller has an absolute bang-up idea for kick-starting her chronicle in the Renaissance, but wants to move to a first major story arc set in the 1920s. It's illogical that all the

characters would spend the entire time in torpor and not want to accomplish anything. Or, the downtime period could consist of only a few weeks where your troupe pursues personal goals. After all, the experience point rules call for the players to justify the application of their experience, and characters aren't likely to accumulate experience when "lying low" for extended periods of time. Wise use of periods of downtime helps you meet their needs for accomplishment and advancement outside the main body of the chronicle without taking too much time out of that main body to do so.

But how do you do this? Moreover, how do you do it without your troupe characters feeling cheated out of personal attention or their characters' opportunities to improve? Here are a few ideas for downtime structure, techniques and format. They can be used across the board for Vampire: The Masquerade and Vampire: The Dark Ages with elder, ancilla and neonate characters.

Maturation

As an alternative to experience points, the maturation system simulates time spent in less dramatic pursuits. Some Storytellers like to give out a modicum of additional experience for surviving through a century or more. This system reflects "subsistence experience." Characters find that buying higher levels of Traits by simply surviving is progressively more expensive, but they may still improve without having to leave the safety of their havens. A character may devote herself to the study of a language during downtime, or she might devote her attention to the global economy. In any event, maturation points are like lesser experience points – characters earn fewer of them and they aren't as cost-effective as experience points, but then, the character isn't going to be in the field or testing her skills in the crucible of real-world experience with this downtime system. She's simply reading up on a subject at her haven or perhaps corresponding with a knowledgeable ally.

Maturation points are awarded for every period of extended downtime thus:

Years of Downtime   Maturation Points

10-100	1-15
101-250	16-25
251-500	26-40

Example: The Toreador Elspeth takes a respite from hunting down diablerists and goes incognito for a century. The Storyteller gives Elspeth's player 15 maturation points to spend.

Once the Storyteller gives a player maturation points, the player can use them to raise her vampire's Traits. When using the maturation system, a Trait cannot be raised by more than 1 point for each century that passes. (This would not, however, preclude a player from also raising Traits using the regular experience rules. Maturation points are spent separately from regular experience points.)

Storytellers might also decide that increasing Traits through maturation becomes more expensive as a character grows older. Vampires are static creatures, and learning becomes increasingly difficult as the Cainite withstands the passage of time.

Trait	Cost of Raising Trait
New Ability	3
New Path (Thaumaturgy or Necromancy)	7
New Discipline	10
Attribute	new rating x 4
Ability	new rating x 2
Clan Discipline	new rating x 5
Other Discipline	new rating x 7
Secondary Path	new rating x 4
Virtue	new rating x 2
Humanity or Path of Enlightenment	new rating x 2
Willpower	new rating x 1

Example: Elspeth just spent a century of downtime taking a break from her anti-diablerist crusade. Elspeth's player spends 10 points to raise Elspeth's Presence – a clan Discipline – from 1 to 2. She also allocates 4 points to raise Elspeth's Crafts rating from 1 to 2. Nothing costs one point; Elspeth's maturation is done for now.

Maturation points unspent during an interlude are lost. Also notice that players can't increase Background Traits through maturation.

Playing Downtime "Troupe-Style"

In troupe-style downtime, troupe members take an active role in short, snapshot installments of no more than one or two game sessions. The Storyteller determines the length of the downtime – 50 years, whatever – and each troupe member's character takes a turn at being the focus of the installment. The Storyteller lets the rest of troupe assume ancillary Storyteller character roles to flesh out what's going on. This could even call for other players to portray their own characters, depending on the focus character's goals. Discuss specific goals with the focus player beforehand. Determine which of these goals are fitting and attainable. Take theme and chronicle focus into account and then just play out the high points. Some goals might not be desirable or attainable and may work against your theme. For example, if a character's goal is "to find the Toreador Antediluvian and suck it dry," the character should probably fail, while a

character whose goal is "to consolidate finances and increase my Resources through wise investment" would have a much better chance at success.

If the other players' minor characters aren't their own, you'll need to discuss these characters' goals, mannerisms and ideals briefly before they play them. You may even want to put together a short character sheet for them. And encourage them to write you notes if they have crafty ideas.

If you feel your troupe can handle playing ancillary characters on the fly, by all means, try letting them. Or, if you're a chronicle control-freak, script it if you want, but that does call for a lot of design time and kind of defeats the purpose of advancing time in the first place. If handled correctly, troupe-style downtime is an interesting and enjoyable method for handling the space between stories, because it allows everyone to be involved in it and creates a "mini-session," in which everyone has a chance to be at center stage.

Individual Session Downtime

This technique for handling downtime works much the same way as troupe-style downtime, but with only the Storyteller and the focus player participating. You determine, with the player's input, which of her goals are appropriate and attainable, and you play through the high points in a single one-on-one session. Try to keep it short, since the rest of the troupe is not participating.

You might want to try using troupe and individual-style downtime in combination with each other. This allows you to include the rest of the troupe in some parts and still allow the individual focus character to keep some secrets to herself.

POV Shift

This is a separate mini-session that gives the troupe a glimpse into their individual and collective downtime activities through the eyes of the people on the periphery. This can be played out from the perspectives of ghouls, underlings, foes, victims and allies and should indirectly show the result and consequences of the troupe characters' downtime activities. In this method, they're all playing someone other than themselves, so the Storyteller should discuss goals and determine outcome as stated above. Then, tailor the mini-session around this discussion, and create characters for your troupe members to play who show them what they have wrought. Some Storytellers might even want to try letting them create these characters themselves, within certain limits.

Chapter Three: The Storyteller's Craft

Wearing an antique bridal gown, the beautiful queen of the vampires sits all alone in her dark, high house under the eyes of the portraits of her demented and atrocious ancestors..

- Angela Carter, "The Lady of the House of Love"

This is arguably the most important chapter in this book, as it deals directly with the issues, problems and questions most Storytellers will face during the course of their chronicles. Concerns with the flow of the game, the sliding scale of fairness and even a few helpful words on making your World of Darkness believable are all contained within.

In the end, of course, nothing here is written in stone - this chapter in particular is merely a collection of advice and "metaconcepts" we take into account when we create a new Vampire book. Hopefully, you take them into account, too (even if you do it subconsciously!), because they go a long way toward lending the unique balance of gothic and punk, horror and terror, action and mystery to a Vampire chronicle.

Play Balance in Vampire

What is play balance, and what place does it have in Vampire: The Masquerade? Play balance is something people talk about an awful lot. Unfortunately, "what exactly is play balance?" and, more importantly, "what end does play balance serve?" receive a lot less airtime than, "Twinkism Level Four is so unbalanced because it does Conscience + 7 agg!"

Play balance is traditionally a term used when judging board games, and it is to board games that most thinking about game balance has traditionally been directed. A well-balanced board game allows two players of equal skill an equal chance of winning and favors the more skillful player over the less skillful one.

Board games focus on balanced results because the game exists only to facilitate competition between the players. While the mechanism of the game itself may provide some enjoyment, that vast majority of the satisfaction derived from playing comes from defeating the other player. No matter how attractive the pieces of a chess set may be, the simple act of moving them around the board loses a certain amount of its appeal after the age of six.

Wargames, which developed as a popular hobby in the 1960s, are the root of modern roleplaying (and, by extension, storytelling). While many early wargames were nothing more than military faĆades on top of normal board games, this quickly ceased to be the case. Rather than considering a game balanced if it provided equal players with an equal chance of winning, balance came to mean that a game depicted a situation with fair historical accuracy and wasn't prone to boring, one-sided play. It is in this intellectual space between Parcheesi and Panzer Blitz that the intellectual seeds of storytelling games were sewn.

Suddenly, the game was no longer an abstract tool to facilitate intellectual combat. She may not have beaten the Allies out of North Africa, but a wargamer could feel pride at having done better against Chuck from the Games Club than Rommel did against Montgomery. As simple as this might seem, this walking in the shoes of a military commander was a very primitive form of roleplaying. Suddenly, players didn't just measure themselves by winning and losing, but by their performance compared to history.

It wasn't long until wargamers decided to make up rules for the adventures of these commanders off the battlefield. They had invented a game that not only had no set objectives, but that had no victory conditions at all. While everyone was interested in having their characters garner power and live to see the next installment of the serial adventure, the act of "winning" had become impossible to define.

So what's the point of this history lesson? Why does talking about game balance in Vampire require a pedantic discussion on the roots of gaming? The point is that the vast majority of thinking about game balance has as its chief consideration something - victory - that doesn't even exist in a storytelling game. So what the hell does game balance mean in Vampire, if it means anything at all?

Farewell, Horizontal

First, put aside the idea that the rules are there to protect the players from the Storyteller. From the Storyteller, there is no protection. A fierce tiger, she strides among the players, and they are scattered before her like leaves on an autumn wind. Face it, Storytellers: You're God of your secondary creation.

The dice can no more protect characters from the Storyteller's depredations than an inmate's fists can protect him from prison guards. The player may control the character, but the Storyteller controls the whole world. A Storyteller who wants to hose a character will do so. Likewise, if the Storyteller wants a character to succeed, it shall come to pass. There's no way to get an even break against the person whose job is to decide the contents of their world.

As a Storyteller, it's important to realize this fact early on, because it forces you to temper your divinity with justice and mercy. The dice are important, because they inject unexpected results and force regular interaction between the Storyteller and the players. However, no matter how important they are to the game when it's run well, the Storyteller can't hide behind them when the game comes out badly. Ultimately, no matter how many steps you attempt to take to isolate yourself from the game in a quest for "fairness," you're still calling all the shots.

What's the difference between telling the player her character wakes up with an Inquisitor lurking within her sanctum sanctorum or making extended Stamina + Investigation rolls to determine how often the Jesuit has to pee in a pop bottle while he stakes out the character's haven? Whether you want it to be true or not, you still make the final decision on if the vampire has attracted the witch-hunter's attention and how likely the character and her ghouls are to spot him before he moves in for the kill.

Farewell, Vertical

The rules can't protect the players from the Storyteller and shouldn't protect the players from one another. Even direct physical conflict is impossible to "balance." Barring some sort of inane rule that all characters have to climb into a boxing ring and duke it out a la the Marquis of Queensberry, characters can pursue 10,000 different strategies.

Putting aside feasibility, the idea of enforced balance between characters goes against the freeform nature of the game. "A better-than-even chance of beating one of my peers in combat" is a perfectly legitimate aspiration for a character in a game where the player chooses her own objectives. Character-on-character aggression is a matter for the group to agree on, not for the rules to dictate.

It's a Dark and Unfair World

One of the most important things for the Storyteller to understand is that unlife in the World of Darkness is, as described in the books, inherently unfair. Ventrue can theoretically be limited to feeding from a single person, and Nosferatu start the game with Appearance 0 and what is arguably the weakest set of in-clan Disciplines. Meanwhile, the Gangrel in the coterie has a patch of fur across his lower back. Likewise, a Camarilla elder of five centuries' Embrace can find himself helpless to resist a witch-hunter who comes calling at three o'clock in the afternoon, while a Sabbat Lasombra on the Path of Night packs the would-be Van Helsing into a number of canning jars for later disposal, then goes back to bed. What are you to make of this?

This is not the way you must run your game - it is the underlying reality of the setting. This is the way Storyteller characters exist. The World of Darkness is a nasty place, and that means a lot of its inhabitants, even the creatures of the night, have grim and unpleasant existences. Nosferatu don't make their havens in sewers because they like it so much down there with the shit and the rats; they're exiled to the darkness and spat upon by the beautiful people of the world above. Malkavians are insane. Not "cute li'l teddy bear and bunny slippers hyuk, hyuk" crazy, but genuinely deranged. Spending eternity listening to the voices of every single being you have ever killed while feeding as the Tremere learn sorcerous powers at the cost of having some blood "on file" in Vienna is about as good a reason to shake your fist at the moon and shout, "Unfair!" as can be imagined.

How much the unlives of the players' characters resemble the baseline is up to you. If you want to emphasize just how miserable the sewer-dwelling Nosferatu's situation is compared to the Tremere's arcane opulence, then pay attention to that sort of thing. If you want to make the unfair character of the world less important or unimportant, then don't emphasize the fact that the Brujah has a short temper while the Malkavian's personal eternity will be spent suffering from severe schizophrenia, among other lunacies.

In the end, the world may be unfair, but your game is as fair or unfair to individual characters as you make it. The situation of the coterie, the theme of the game and the plots and events you as Storyteller choose to emphasize, and not the ragged black backdrop of the world, are what really decide what the world is like for the characters.

So the rules don't protect against the other players, and they don't protect against the Storyteller. Is there any point in talking about play balance at all when a storytelling game is concerned, or is it just another excuse for compulsive whiners?

Do Not Attempt to Adjust Your Television

The answer is, "Well, maybe." Certainly, there is a very good reason to balance power, but using the rules to do it is the wrong way to go about things. Humans are status-oriented monkeys way down deep. If you get a group of people together for six hours a week and some of them are demonstrably more successful at their goals than others, issues resulting from wounded egos will come up. This is true even when they're all sitting around a table playing make-believe like a bunch of nine-year-old kids.

These ego issues aren't baseless primate hooting. Everybody comes to the game to have fun. It's the job of the Storyteller, not the rules, to make sure that the game balances between the characters and is enjoyable for all the participants.

Of course, having accepted that characters need some sort of balance, the question is, balance measured against what? Ultimately, the answer is that characters must be balanced against other characters in the game. As long as the characters are not too radically different from one another and the players feel that they are receiving fair treatment, there's nothing inherently "munchkin" about a game where all the players are justicars or Methuselahs. Such a game might be run well or horribly, but there's nothing endemically unbalanced about it, because the only meaningful balance is the one that exists between the various players' characters.

Because of the freedom offered by a storytelling game, that responsibility for maintaining that balance is tossed, medicine ball-like, into the Storyteller's lap. Any open-ended roleplaying game whose possibilities were so limited that the designers could write inter-player balance into the rules would be excruciatingly dull.

Keeping Characters Even

Obviously, possessing the Ability or Discipline perfectly suited to the problem at hand provides the character with a situational advantage. However, this is something that changes from moment to moment. As a Storyteller, your real concern is the balance of play over multiple sessions. If a player is unhappy that someone else's character got spotlight time this session, they're just a git. On the other hand, players do have the right to get something out of the game - they didn't just come there to sit around and listen to other people have fun. What might be a lame complaint after one session starts to sound pretty legitimate after two or three.

Keep in mind that balance has very little to do with power differentials. It is entirely possible for a coterie consisting of two archons and a ghoul to end with the ghoul as the dominant character. Game balance, as we will discuss shortly, is a matter of far more than how many dots are on the characters' sheets. If everyone goes into the game understanding and agreeing with the idea that there will be a vast gap between characters in raw power, that's cool too.

Competition Between Players

First and foremost, you should decide if the game is competitive or not. Competition in this case can be divided into two types: competition over character specialty and trust between characters. Competition over character specialty is what it sounds like - is it okay for one player's character to infringe on another's character's specialty or "shtick"? Is it okay to learn more Thaumaturgy than the coterie's Tremere or become a better brawler than the gangbanger? This balancing of specialties happens during character generation, as the players stake out their characters' areas of expertise. Storyteller arbitration of this process can be a godsend. Likewise, a Storyteller who limits competition over character specialties should watch the experience point expenditures over the course of the chronicle and make sure that people don't deliberately or accidentally creep up on the other characters.

Don't underestimate how important character specialty is. Players invest a lot of love and imagination in their characters. Someone who wants to play the party socialite is not going to feel good about himself when the other vampires use his character as the Elysium doormat. As a Storyteller, you can certainly allow competition over specialties, but you had better be prepared for some intense rivalries among players' characters (and, in some cases, hard feelings among your players).

Trust between characters is much simpler. To what degree can players assume that it is safe for their character to trust other characters? Is it okay for a character to kill or sell out other players' characters? Again, remember people invest a lot of love in their characters. Some people enjoy spending an evening with their friends engaging in brutal social maneuvering, while other people don't. People who don't enjoy this sort of thing are very likely to develop some intense negative feelings toward their fellow players for carefully engineering a beloved character's disgrace and exile. Keep in mind that people who say they enjoy brutal competition might only enjoy it when they win.

The less competition you permit between players' characters, the easier it is to keep everyone at roughly equivalent power levels. The more competition you permit between players' characters, the more realistic the social interaction between player's characters will tend to be. Of course, realism isn't always enjoyable, and the players in a competitive game will systematically undermine efforts to balance your attention. The choice is really yours as Storyteller, but as a rule, games should either be totally noncompetitive or totally competitive. Going halfway will tend to produce either frantic arms races or games that break up very quickly due to player tension.

Whatever your decision, make sure all the players know and understand the ground rules before they create characters. Most storytelling troupes don't think formally about the issue of character balance and competition. This means that people with different gaming experiences may well have radically different assumptions regarding what is proper when interacting with other characters. If you wait for a situation where you as Storyteller have act to restore what you see as proper game balance, there are already going to be hard feelings all around. Save yourself the hardship and make sure everyone starts reading off the same page.

Game Direction

Vampire is a game with great potential. The game demands no set stories and no set objectives. Even the setting is largely open to Storyteller interpretation. This means that players without guidance will be stabbing blindly at concepts. If you're just going to free-form the game around the characters' subplots, this is fine - they make up characters, and you tell their stories, everyone goes away happy.

However, if you have a particular story that you want to tell, having the players each make up the first character that springs to mind might not produce very good results. Take

the story of a Ventrue elder's decline and fall from power. It's possible that a Gangrel loner with three dots of Animalism may come to be of equal importance to that story as an ambitious young Toreador. More likely, the Gangrel will be a perpetual fifth wheel to the primary narrative and spend his time either dealing with one of his own subplots or sullenly lurking in the Barrens training his pack of ghouled mongrels (or whatever).

If your game is going to have a set direction, make sure the players are aware of it during character generation. So much of the game balance in Vampire is situational that it's critical that players be aware of the basic theme of the game. Without that situational awareness, the players are essentially in a lottery where the winner dominates the game and the losers join the supporting cast. The whole idea of game balance is that the game is fun for everyone. While every character should have his chance to shine, you should generally try to give everyone a balanced amount of attention.

Think Spotlight, Not Statistics

As is implied above, being the focus of the narrative is far more important in storytelling than the character sheets. As Storyteller, you can focus the narrative spotlight on only one character at a time. Whenever you present a situation in which a character exercises his primary abilities, follows up on his personal subplots or otherwise interacts with the world, you are training the spotlight of the narrative on them. Generally, it's much harder to shift the spotlight in a limiting fashion (for example, to slow down a player who has gotten more important or powerful than the rest of the party). It is, however, quite easy to accidentally misaim the spotlight and unbalance the game by making one of the characters too important.

First, this is a narrative problem. The important character is in the center of things, including the plot. His player's absence or departure from the game can make play awkward. This is a problem in games where one character has deliberately been placed at the center of the narrative and is even worse unintentionally. Presumably, you choose a central character's player for his reliable attendance, but a character who becomes the accidental center of the narrative as the result of a mistake while managing the game is not necessarily so reliable.

More importantly, the balance issue is one of ego. The mechanism of play, the act of moving one's character around the game, is what makes participating in a storytelling game enjoyable. It may be a far cry from how many dice of aggravated damage the character can do, but awareness of concerns like managing the game's narrative focus is what really make a good Storyteller. Players may say "so and so has a high Computer Ability and is unbalancing," but it's really you as the Storyteller who is putting the character in the center of things by letting them log on and hack through any problem the group encounters (which is a problem in and

of itself, if you're not handling the world realistically, but that's another kettle of fish altogether).

Spotlight balance is a pain to manage. It's critical to being a good Storyteller, easy to screw up and hard to correct once it gets out of hand. The best thing you can do if the spotlight gets out of balance is downplay the importance of the narrative element to make it a subplot of the unexpectedly central character. More often, it's best to just conclude the segment in a graceful fashion and emphasize a new plot thread as the game's center.

If your game is plotted very tightly or if the narrative is planned out into the distant future, you're pretty much out of options. All you can do is try your best to make other players' characters significant and hope the narrative holds together until the conclusion or until you can redirect it. Novice Storytellers should probably spend more time worrying about if they've committed narrative favoritism than attempting to deliberately harness it for balance or plot ends. It can be done, but it's very difficult.

Honor Player Choices

This is even more abstract than the concept of spotlight time. When players create their characters, it's not an adversarial process. The players are not attempting to oppose your dastardly plans for the story (or at least they shouldn't be). Just as the players are cooperating with the Storyteller by making characters who fit the tone of the game, the Storyteller is conceding that the characters who come out of that process will be significant to the plot.

Step back to the Gangrel loner with his army of dogs. You can encourage the player to make changes in the character that bring it more in line, or you can say an armada of man-eating mastiffs is a bad idea and not allow it in the game. However, once you assent and permit the character as viable to the game, you are responsible for allowing that character to be viable. If you're attempting to maintain any balance at all among the characters, letting the Gangrel in and then having his canine minions constantly run over or killed by ghouls with pepper spray is the wrong way to go about it. This takes a character someone spent a lot of time constructing and makes them into the butt of veterinary humor. If the dogs will never work (and such things usually don't), say so up front; don't jerk your players around.

The whole thesis of this section is that the Storyteller, not the game system, ultimately dictates the rules and balance of the game. Thus, as a Storyteller, when you let a player take part in the game, you've agreed implicitly that they're worth an equal share of time with all the other characters. Obviously, some concepts are dumb, boring or completely unsuitable to the game, and you should just censor these outright. Once you approve the character, however, you've obligated yourself to make him an important part of the game. Live up to this obligation or don't accept the character.

Keep Intangibles in Mind

When trying to balance a character's place in a game, it's very easy to fixate on the most obvious and expensive parts of the sheet, typically Disciplines, Attributes and Abilities, in that order. Players do it, and Storytellers do as well. Don't let yourself get this kind of tunnel vision. Backgrounds and (if you're using them) Merits and Flaws are all important, as are all the parts of the character's backstory that don't translate into dots on a character sheet.

If you focus your attention as a Storyteller on the things that are most often used in adversarial situations (Disciplines, Abilities), then the game is going to consist primarily of adversarial situations. A little too much attention to comparative Brawl Traits and you can easily turn a unique storytelling experience into a boring carnival of slaughter considerably less fun than a bad video game. An action film that has no plot and no purpose other than to blow things up is boring - why would a combat-heavy game be different?

More importantly, this is another form of honoring the player's choices. If you let the character into the game, you have to treat them right. A player who spends all his character's freebies on the Abilities, Resources, Contacts and so forth required to be the enigmatic patron of the local art scene should get as much reward out of it as the player who blows his Brujah's wad on two extra dots of Celerity. Give the master of the art scene his exclusive parties, his cool art-related subplots, first access to Bohemian kine, the whole nine yards, and make it meaningful. Maybe the coterie's first rival is an art thief, or the plot is related to a counterfeit of a noted elder's portrait. It doesn't matter what exactly, but remember the Brujah is almost certain to completely dominate the adventure's climax if it is resolved physically. As balancer of the celestial scales, you had better be there to make sure the art lord gets something that can measure up to the starring role in the climactic fight scene.

Don't Ever Beat a Character Down

Sooner or later, in one chronicle or another, the balance of a game will become hopelessly screwed up. It can happen in any of 1,000 ways, and each of them is the result of a bunch of humans interacting. Cataloging them is pointless, but there is one rule you should never forget: Do not ever beat down a character. If the player is a problem and disrupting the game intentionally, by all means show him the door. But when the error is your fault, punishing the player for it is not an option. Redirect the spotlight, discuss the situation with the player or the whole troupe, or fold the game, but do not ever strip a character of their stuff or kick a character or player out of the game because of an error you made. Period.

Any time you take serious action to correct the balance of a game in progress, some hard feelings are probably already going around. Those hard feelings will multiply when the Storyteller starts wiping nuisances from the face of the earth. Having three Lupines rip the thaumaturge's head off at 11 in the morning, just after you realize the path you made up and let her learn is wildly unbalanced, looks exactly like what it is.

You can talk things out with the players and try to reach some sort of solution that everyone is happy with, or you can just give up and end the narrative, but don't yank chunks from or kill someone's character without permission. Players don't just randomly whack major Storyteller characters to see if it'll derail your plot, you shouldn't terminate their characters to see if it'll get your plot back on track.

Using Theme, Concept, Mood and Setting

Vampire: The Masquerade discusses all manner of possible chronicle themes, conflicts and plot hooks in the Storytelling chapter, specifically on pages 257-267. It would be redundant to restate those possibilities here. Let's begin by assuming you've thought about this; you've made decisions concerning the creation of the flesh and bones of your chronicle. With brief consideration to what theme, concept, mood and setting are, and how they work to tell your story, we need to discuss the techniques you can use to engage your troupe's senses in ways that make it all relate back to your central ideas. It's all well and good to talk about mood and setting, but what the heck are they? Why are they so important? How do you communicate them?

Theme and Concept

Have you ever really sat down and wondered what the difference is between theme and concept? At times, they're used interchangeably, but that's not really true or helpful at all. They both embody story ideas, but they work in two very different ways. When you seek to make effective, impacting decisions on what the whole framework of what your chronicle is going to say, think of theme as the central ideal that you're trying to communicate. By comparison, concept is the sensory representation - the taste, feel, look, smell and sound, if you will - of these ideals. Neither theme nor concept has to be singular. Your chronicle can incorporate a variety of different themes into one big story line and can use a variety of sensory pictures to communicate those themes. Using theme and concept isn't exactly easy, but if you keep these differences in mind, it becomes a much less arduous task, because just understanding this gives you strong inferences on why they work and why they're important. Simply stated, theme is your message and concept is your look. Consider an example: Let's say your chronicle theme centers around the struggle between Humanity and the Beast and all the detachment that the state of being vampires forces upon the troupes' characters. You can communicate this by structuring a sensory concept that drives home the point that vampires are addicted to vitae, that they're blood junkies, and that junkies loose touch with all the mores and values that sustain people who aren't addicted to something. Drench your players' senses with scenes of Storyteller neonates indulging their addiction like heroin addicts cooking up in a shooting

gallery; depict a vampire's detachment from her former life by choreographing interaction that physically huddles her apart from the rest of her group. Describe the smell of blood to her by comparing it to the smell of smack being cooked in a spoon over a candle. Equate the touch of the Kiss to a hypodermic needle piercing a vein. Make the taste of vitae consumed seem like the numbing, medicinal flavor of snorted cocaine deadening the back of a character's throat. Contrast this with glimpses of former mortal lovers who disappear around corners, onto subway trains and into taxis just before the troupe characters physically touch them. Make the sensory input represent your theme, and use all the sensory power of your imagination to communicate it.

Mood

Mood relates to concept and theme, but it layers concept - the five senses representation of theme - with the emotional clarity that helps you show these ideas, rather than just tell the coterie about them. Players get bored when faced with a tedious list of chronicle chores, and it doesn't matter if everything looks cool and communicates an ideal. Mood takes concept and punches it in the face, it allows you to draw from your troupe an emotional response about what their senses are telling them is happening. It helps you to take a conceptual stimulus and make it personal to your troupe's individual characters by making them joyous, depressed, lustful or enraged. Clever Storytellers can employ numerous techniques for doing this, from using music with lyrics in keeping with your concept that symbolize your theme, to convening the game in the dark with only candles to light the room. Expand the example above by adding the emotions: Describe how the Kiss makes them feel by comparing it to the numbing euphoria of MDMA coursing through their brains. Symbolize the loneliness of their state by comparing it to the post-orgasmic detachment of two addicts screwing while stoned. Have a character smell the sweat of her intended victim. Describe it as the acrid perspiration of a user hours shy from their next fix, and then contrast it with remembered scents that symbolize all that she was before the Embrace - the scent of her lover that lingered in the air after love-making, the smell of his skin after

a rainstorm. Compare the taste of stolen vitae to the taste of her former lover's kiss. Make her sense the junkie-emaciated feel of her own body, then contrast this with the feeling these senses pull from them.

Note: This should be done sparingly. It's all too easy to lose sight of the forest for the trees when using sensory detail. A litany of adjectives is no substitute for storytelling, and gross detail should be used for heightened drama, not as "filler" for a lagging scene.evoked from her lover's body against her own. Represent your theme in perception overload, in a manner that employs as many of the five senses as possible, then describe it in terms that allows your player to feel all the emotions that

Setting

Setting takes all the emotion of mood and shows it through a specific place. The conceptual look, sound and smell of a location can physically embody your theme and can elicit a personalized emotional response from your players. Remember, too, that setting includes Storyteller characters as part of the set-dressing. Let's continue the earlier example: Take the junkie concept and pretend that a specific troupe character is from a run-down district of her city infested with drug-crime. Drop your action down into this setting and show it as a place that junkies frequent: mean, lonely, dangerous city streets, with longs lines of drug zombies queuing up outside the boarded-over, rotting crackhouses and maybe a desperate Kindred waiting in the shadows to pick off the strays. Show the character a hardcore gangbanger dying alone in a pool of his own blood, intestines and excrement for drug money that will line someone else's pockets and then tempt her with the blood. Show her that it's a place where nobody even dares to hold the thug as he dies. Show her that it's a hive where the gangsta's 13-year-old sister pimps her own ass for enough money to get her next fix and settles with a john who kicks the living crap out of her every few nights or so. Make it a fucked-up rat-hole, where their mother works as a domestic, cleaning some high-society bitch's toilets for her live-in's lotto and 40-ouncer money. Contrast these images with

remembered images from the character's home - maybe she came from the same background, maybe her family tried to get out of the shitstorm and just couldn't. Then, contrast this further with the uptown glass and steel buildings, the five-grand-a-month condos and the whitewashed estates owned by the legitimate arms of the drugs cartels, which keep the drugs flowing into the slums. Populate the buildings with Storyteller characters like rich muthafucka ex-bangers who've made good by kissing ass and busting heads alternately with white-prick Mafioso and tongs. Then let her come to realize that some predatorily omnisexual 400-year-old Ventrue sybarite is skimming off the top of the whole organization to feed his jaded tastes for luxury habit. To add insult to, well, insult, the Ventrue's next intended conquest for his seraglio is the character's own brother. Find a location that fits your theme, describes your concept and provoke an emotional response from your characters.

Using theme, mood and concept isn't a one-time-only thing. They're the broad strokes in which your chronicle is painted. They're the skeleton, the infrastructure of the whole story. If you don't want to present a chronicle that meanders chaotically, you have to keep asking yourself questions about them. Much of the potential for emotional depth comes from your troupe's characters' own backgrounds. This point is important everywhere, but it's doubly so here because backgrounds are the stuff from which emotional response is drawn. It isn't easy to keep this going. You have to think about so many things and keep so many aspects of your chronicle straight, that you might think storytelling an effective game will lead you to therapy and Prozac. However, if you don't stop asking yourself questions, and if you make the answers to these questions fit your characters' backgrounds - and therefore, their emotions - it isn't all that hard. When your troupe takes an action, ask yourself, "What response from which Storyteller character will best counterpoint that action in a way that symbolizes the ideal that I'm trying to get across?" Then arrange it so that your symbolic response to the troupe's action comes from that Storyteller character. Describe the interaction in a way that touches as many of the five senses as possible, and add to the description the range of emotions that such an action would elicit.

On Theme Bravery

In the World of Darkness, the Storyteller represents all of the fantasies, dreams, nightmares and ambitions of her players' characters. In presenting a well-told story, the Storyteller feeds the imaginations of her players in ways that are ultimately satisfying and fulfilling to the troupe as a whole. Everyone who has been a part of a particularly well-run game knows this. A Storyteller who heads up an effective chronicle can transform the very room in which the troupe plays into something sinister. She can cause it to become a dark and dusty corner of cobwebbed phantasm, where the shadows playing on the wall can make the troupe jump en masse. The nature of the horror she creates can cause the troupe to pair off in groups before venturing out to the parking lot at the end of the night. Good drama is cathartic; it stirs up the emotions and cleanses them. Cathartic horror can touch those emotions so much that it causes its audience to check the back seats of their cars for serial killers and Nosferatu. Don't be intimidated by horror. Vampire: The Masquerade is an interactive horror story, and horror stories should be scary. Horror stories might not always be comfortable to watch and interactive stories might not always be comfortable to participate in, because horror is discomfiting. Horror takes the emotion of fear and magnifies it in a way that it shows the absolute darkest qualities of human nature. A skilled Vampire Storyteller can and should transport her players into that

horrid, uncomfortable world, should create it with them, and then, let them affect it.

Because you, as the Storyteller, determine what the chronicle's theme is, what conceptual look your chronicle has, what emotions you want to summon and what settings best summon those moods, you're going to have to give yourself a little "horror is good, it's not my enemy, it's what I'm here for" pep talk. Walk yourself through a list of possible roadblocks to doing your job that might arise out of actually doing your job.

Many qualities can positively or negatively affect your success or failure, but the biggest nasty of all is bravery; bravery of concept, theme, mood and setting is absolutely critical to telling a horror chronicle. It's very simple, really.

A successful Storyteller has to be brave. She has to believe in herself and in her players. She has to believe in her ability to take an idea and make it work. The creation of shared fear in a horror chronicle is very difficult to sustain and can be handled by keeping a close eye on theme, concept, mood and setting. But the fear of telling a horror chronicle is an insidious enemy. Have you ever found yourself backing off from a plot development because any of these comments crossed your mind?

"This is so idiotic..."

Have confidence. Even the supposedly dumbest of plot lines, if well-told, can be successful and compelling. A killer shark feeding off the coast of a New England town? A great, white whale that terrorizes the crew and deranges the captain of a whaling boat? A possessed Φ57 Chevy? A child caught in the throes of demonic possession? All of these ideas are, when taken out of context, questionable at best. But through the effective use of storytelling, they have shaken us, they have frightened us, they have made us ponder if swimming in the ocean is really all that safe. They've made us wonder if we should consider going to temple, mosque or church next weekend to ward off the possibility of being possessed by the Devil himself. Horrific themes take the threads of the mundane, uncommon or even fantastic and weave them into a garment of suspense, heroism and terror. It's unwise and not very fulfilling to believe that a particular theme or plot point is "too dumb to try." If it doesn't work, try something else. The possibilities of storytelling are literally limitless. Never use fear of theme failure as an excuse not to tell a story. That's pretty chicken-shit, and you're better than that, or you'd be playing some other, safe game.

"People will think I'm a _____."

Fill in the blank. A Storyteller is often afraid that the troupe will think less of her if she tries something new or different. She believes that if she introduces elements of a story that are unusual, or ugly or biased or controversial, that the troupe will believe she personally supports those ideologies. "If I introduce ultra-violent plot devices, the troupe will think

I'm a psychopath-in-training. If I introduce religious subtext, they'll think I'm trying to convert them, a Satanist or neurotically metaphysical. If I introduce sexual elements, they'll all get embarrassed - even if they say they won't - and they'll think I'm a perv. If I have a Storyteller character use the word Φnigger,' they'll think I'm a racist. If I use themes that are emotional, they'll think I watch too many soap operas." Wrong, wrong, wrong. (Okay, maybe your troupe would think this if they were simpletons, but you don't play with dimwits, do you?) This fear is unreasonable. World of Darkness players know that storytelling is creative fiction. They know that the world they walk in as real people is the real world and the world in which they roleplay is dark, horrific fantasy. They'll cut a Storyteller some slack if she helps them peek into a place they'd rather not see as real people, because if they didn't want to see it, they wouldn't be there. They understand that what is being presented to them isn't a representation of your ethical bent or your personal habits. Your chronicle is a representation of your game world, and that's all. In order to share in the ultimately frightening and dramatically satisfying aspects of that world, they'll very likely give you all the room you need to make it a breathing and believable one. They won't vilify you for presenting it in a way that's as ugly, grotesque and terrifying as it is.

If your players don't understand this, explain it to them. Better yet, find a group of players that isn't so daft, because players who can't distinguish the game from reality have problems other than spoiling the story.

"I might offend...."

Now on to "People will think I'm a _____"'s pesky kid sister. This is a very tricky prospect. Vampire: The Masquerade presents a world that is decayed and ghastly, and that world should be presented as such. But try not to present it in a way that outright offends your players. None of us enjoys being offended. It's distasteful at best. We all have boundaries that we'd rather not have crossed, and the players in your troupe are no different. A good Storyteller shouldn't assail her players; she should be reluctant to offend them, because that changes the whole landscape of why we play the game in the first place - the emotional, ugly, scary fun - into an activity that isn't pleasant for anyone. The best strategy a Storyteller can use for side-stepping this problem is to make a real effort not to cross the troupe's unified and individual boundaries. This calls for a give and take of information on the Storyteller's part and on the part of the troupe members. It sometimes works to give a game a rating system, namely, "Hey, everybody, tonight's installment is going to be very intense, I'd give it an NC-17. Do you think you can handle that?" (Not "be comfortable with," handle.) If anyone objects, rethink the concepts that might cause offense - not discomfort, but offense. If you can get the same idea across another way, do it. Remember, a Storyteller can still present the same "objectionable" plot points and suggest them, rather than show them outright. "Blue-booking," handling character interludes in written notes between Storyteller and troupe member, is effective (see "Advanced Storytelling Techniques," page 107). While it might rob your

players of the enjoyment of fully experiencing the whole content of your chronicle, it lets you avoid a potentially unpleasant personal situation. Still, what you put into your chronicle has to ultimately satisfy you and be true to your theme. Choosing content, and coloring the content with horror, is a very individual choice.

There will come a time, when you'll honestly believe that you need to show the NC-17 imagery for the sake of the chronicle. The best way to handle this is to make your decision known to the troupe members and leave it up to them if they wish to participate. It's better that they don't try it, because then they can't blame you for it crossing their boundaries, and it won't interrupt the flow of your game when they get up and walk out to throw up, cry or curse you. You warned them. Make sure that the players who might object to disturbing themes and imagery know that they are empowered to handle the situation as they deem best, and they might just decide to stay and give it a chance. But if they do, make it evident to them that they've made the decision to stay and you would hope that they wouldn't throw you off your stride by walking out in the middle. This gentle reminder should help you reiterate that, if they have any doubts whatsoever, it's best that they don't participate. Just let them know that you'll be willing to meet with them, take them through the parts they can handle, suggest the parts they can't and that their overall participation is important to you. Some troupes go so far as to use "safewords." If the action becomes to intense, for whatever reason, for a certain player to handle, he utters the safeword, which works like a pause button. At that point, he can duck out of the session and return when things cool down without depriving anyone else of the delicious, vicarious malice of the World of Darkness. To each his own.

Finally, it's imperative for you to believe that your troupe trusts you; your players must realize that the material you present to them is solely for dramatic purposes. Get to know your player's "primary principles," so to speak. Do your best not to cross them, and if you have to cross them, do it in a thought-provoking, story-motivated way, and empower them to say, "Thanks, but no thanks." They'll respect you for it in the long run.

That said, don't shy from illustrating the World of Darkness in as nasty a light as it should be. Vampire's world is populated by racists, homophobes, sexual predators, drug addicts and any number of other downright unpleasant people and institutions. By removing them, you take much of the edge from the world, which does the setting a supreme disservice. A difference exists between illustrating personal ugliness and condoning it. We're not telling you what to think, but once again, you may wish to reinforce in your players the idea that you're not supporting these things, you're using them to tell the story.

"That's too graphic/that's not graphic enough..."

Horror can be explicit. It can be graphic. It's always raw and visceral. It's supposed to be a representation of the darkest, the most grisly, the most lurid aspects of the human psyche. But then we go back to the "that's too offensive" axiom. How much is too much? Where does a Storyteller draw the line? The demarcation needs to be made where the story dictates it should be. If the Storyteller feels that something is gratuitous, if her gut feeling tells her that a gruesome scene isn't story-driven, she's probably right. Often, what a Storyteller doesn't show is scarier. Think back to a bathroom in a not-too-long forgotten motel where a woman named Marion took an ill-fated shower. The "Storyteller" never showed a knife breaking her skin; the closest he came to that was showing a motionless knife held in front of her. But, by focusing on her eyes, the shower head, the floor tiles, her hands and her blood running down the drain, it became apparent that Marion has been stabbed to death. Hell, even

Freddy Krueger was scary when he hung out in the basement, before they stuck him in every damn scene of those movies. The human psyche can invent things that, by and large, are much more fearsome, horrific and disturbing than anything you can describe in detail. The monster we see is not so scary as the one who evades our sight, causing us to imagine unspeakable horrors. A Storyteller just needs to know how to pick the right words to describe the correct innocuous details that, when strung together, add up to horror.

Still, times will arise when, for shock value, for an adrenaline jolt, even sometimes for an emotional underscoring, the story calls for graphic depiction of the grisliest aspects of the players' and the antagonists' actions. This is mature subject matter, so do the mature thing and handle it maturely. If you believe that a chronicle needs to have a graphically violent scene, do it seriously. If the plot calls for two characters to behave sexually, don't put a leer on it. If the chronicle calls for you to put a really disturbing spin on any taboo subjects - for instance rape, religious context or any sort of injury to a child - these hot buttons must be handled with the utmost gravity by the Storyteller's. She must describe the graphic horror to her troupe members, letting them see it in a manner that, first, cements the nature of the horror without glorifying it; second, makes the horror personally resonant and, third, makes the victims real and empathetic, that the troupe understands the victim's feelings or pain and the evil nature of what they've witnessed or done. If you don't pay attention here, if you just wantonly let the violence and perversity occur without any consequences - loss of Humanity, for instance - your chronicle will become a flat, boorish, cartoonish, sick grotesquerie pretty quickly. Do everyone a favor and don't be a goon.

"I don't know enough about _____."

Fill in the blank, again. The key to this storytelling quandary is the easiest the Storyteller will confront.

Learn. Straight and easy, no mystery, just learn.

A Storyteller needs to be able to characterize and describe the concept of her world, no matter the subject. After all, if she expects to be able to walk her troupe through it, she needs to be able to explain the world in terms that are neither too definite nor too broad. And let's face it, Storytellers are people with specific knowledge - we all have jobs and hobbies that we know quite a bit about - but we're not omniscient. Research is the best tool with which to confront the problem.

Books, articles, Internet information: These are all available resources one may exploit to make a World of Darkness story more real to its participants. Use them. Further, if no information exists or is readily available on a subject that you want to use, there's nothing to stop you from consulting someone else who has the specialized knowledge to help you explain an idea. With the help of these sources, you can usually devise a logical "PSE" or "Pseudo-Scientific Explanation" that explains your idea in terms that will be accepted in an "oh, it's a magic box, cool" kind of way by your players. Through research, logic and artful presentation, this best guess method is usually accepted as intriguing and understandable. However, know your players and their specialized knowledge, and don't be afraid to ask them questions if you believe they know something about a subject with which you may be unfamiliar. They'll share with you and help you out because they believe, overall, that it's to their advantage to aid you in research/knowledge matters that effect their Chronicle. Players are protective in all facets of chronicle ownership, and they'll get added enjoyment out of participating in some of its design.

Now, as if it has to be said, we must remind you in good conscience not to be a dumbass. We're not saying, "Go smoke a fist-sized rock of crack and tell a Vampire story about it!" We're not encouraging you to shoot bank tellers so your combat scenes splatter better. Don't get on your sister to research a poignant incest scene. We all wish we didn't have to talk down to people in these books, but guess what - the knuckleheads are out there. Don't be one.

"That's too obvious/that's too obtuse."

Don't worry. If a Storyteller believes her troupe will pick up on something too easily, it will fly right by them. If she believes that they'll never see to the center of her tangled machinations, they'll dive so intuitively into the heart of her story, they will make her wish she had reread Machiavelli a few more times. It happens. It's the Storyteller's responsibility to deal with this, and the only way to do that is to roll with the punches. The best storytelling often comes from the consequences of a missed opportunity or the enthusiasm of a plot too quickly uncovered, because mistakes are made. Mistakes are very powerful plot catalysts. The wise Storyteller can't be afraid to let the troupe take over the plot, because it's their story, too. But a Storyteller's reaction to the troupe's brilliance and misinterpretations should be reasoned, should be consistent with your theme, and it's wise to plan a "back door" out in case this runs too far afield and works against your theme, rather than with it. Remember that plot lines in the World of Darkness are rarely ever linear plot lines. It also strains believability if the Storyteller tries to strong-arm the troupe into following her unique vision without letting them walk their own paths at times, whatever the consequences and wherever those paths lead the story. Turn every crazy action of the troupe into a storytelling opportunity.

Mood Techniques

As people, Storytellers and players alike have dimension. They're 3-D, they aren't cardboard movie standees. Our chronicles need dimension, too. We must give shape and character to our chronicles by using various techniques that give them the same dimensions as life. You can use techniques from a variety of artistic mediums - books, music,

television, movies, whatever - to give your chronicle added dimension.

Note: Common sense must be employed in these techniques or they could backfire on you. Realism and reality are two very different things, and those lines should never be crossed. Never use props that are real, especially weapons of any sort. Never engage in physical conflict that is real. Stage violence is cool, but it's always done by trained professionals and it's completely inappropriate for a storytelling game. Storytellers need to mandate a rule of "Don't touch" and "This is my space and this is your space." Don't hit people or blow up their cars. Remember, it's a game, and forgetting that is dangerous. Like we needed to say it again. You know, it's amazing that certain people can assimilate enough of these books to delude themselves into believing they're really the Unholy Dominion of the Florida Panhandle, but they're incapable of comprehending the six million times we say, "This isn't real, punchy." But we digress.

Set Dressing

Troupe members respond to atmosphere. This atmosphere is often conveyed through characterization, but it can be powerfully implemented through a visual allusion to it. While practicality obviously constrains realism, simple things can be done to evoke a mood.

Play by candlelight. Fears come out in the dark. If you're playing in a small area, this doesn't usually present a safety hazard and it's extremely affecting. You can even try blacklight or a red light bulb in some of the lamps, but sometimes this makes it difficult for the troupe to see.

Put something over the window that casts shadows on the wall. Highlight it with an ambient light source. With cooperative players, this evokes as much terror as being a kid alone in your bedroom, when the tree outside looks like a giant monster.

Encourage your players to "dress" their parts . Simple articles of clothing can help the troupe and the Storyteller to supplement the mood, and it's not too expensive if the your players chip in for some common items. Don't do anything as geek-assed as answering the door for the pizza guy in a Dracula mask and vinyl cape, and you don't necessarily have to go to work dressed "like a vampire," but you get the idea. A jacket, hat or even cocktail dress can do the trick admirably. Try to encourage your player to dress their characters in a way that visually represents them, and have at it. If you're indulging in a live-action session, you may wish to take this even further and play in full costume. Just spare us the whiteface and velvet frock coats, please. If you look like a vampire, you're pretty obviously breaking the Masquerade.

Music

Music is varied and can communicate a variety of qualities and feelings. It's also been linked inextricably to the modern conceptualization of the vampire. Choose music carefully during the chronicle planning stage, and it will really enhance the ambience of the game. Keeping in mind the overall theme of the chronicle installment will suggest appropriate music naturally. Do you know of some groups that have done songs with lyrics that say what you're trying to communicate? Of course you do. Use them. Scoring your chronicle can be as elaborate as burning a custom CD "soundtrack" for each story session or as generic as choosing a few, varied mood-enhancing pieces to underscore specific emotional moments in the story. Mix styles. Goth-industrial is cool and depressing and all that, but don't limit yourself to it. Your players can hear only so much Berzerk :Wumpscuts: for a Blue Incubus before it gets tired. Explore all your options. Run the gamut of classical music, romantic music, country music (Johnny Cash could kick Marilyn Manson's ass), techno (and its billion sub-genres), heavy metal, swing, big band, world music, gangsta rap, top 40 and even musical theater. (A particularly creative Storyteller took "West Side Story," because it best illustrated her chronicle's theme, structured her installment's concept around it and let the emotions behind the lyrics elicit the responses she wanted to draw. It worked so well that her entire troupe - even the members who actively hated musical theater - got involved in it and loved it.) Genre means nothing to the Kindred - if the vampires always haunted the goth clubs, the hunters and the Inquisition would be waiting there for them. Vampires follow mortal trends to hide behind them, and music is easy to keep one's undead finger on the pulse of.

Visual Aids

Nothing drives a point home like a picture. Maps, shadowy pictures cut from magazines of exotic locales and a variety of other sources can underscore a particular setting by giving the troupe a physical representation of it. Be creative. Break out the scissors and glue, or sit down at the computer, boot up your graphics program and scan in the strange and eerie locale shots at will. Screw them up just enough to make them look as foreboding and beautiful and ugly and bizarre as your needs dictate.

Description

Storytellers must describe everything their players encounter. Remember that concept is a representation of your theme and that mood adds an emotional element to concept. Try to think about how an object or scene to be described looks, tastes, feels, sounds and smells, then describe it in words that add the emotional element. Choose effective words and phrases to get that point across. For example, guns don't just go "bang," they "pierce," "rip" and "explode," the air smells "acrid and smoky, like the blaze that almost killed you last night" after they're fired, and it tastes "like a mouthful of automobile exhaust."

Further, use analogies, including similes, descriptive techniques that show a thing was "like" something else, and metaphors, ways of describing something by characterizing it as something else, to give texture to what is being described. "Like a..." and "as though it was..." are good descriptive transition devices. Remember, though - too much belabors the point. You don't need a soliloquy to detail a foreboding door hanging from its hinges.

Props

Props are physical representations of objects the coterie may encounter during the game. Taken from the world of theater, props allow the troupe to employ their senses in a very real way and to interact with the things they've found. But, again, common sense should always be employed when choosing or using props. Never use firearms, knives or anything that could actually hurt somebody. Further, respect should be shown for people and property alike when using this technique. Finally, everyone's boundaries need to be respected when they're used as well.

Gothic and punk, or Beauty and the Beast

Gothic-Punk is the term used to describe the world of the World of Darkness. It is the mood, the setting and the attitude of the inhabitants of the World of Darkness. Rich in ambience, mystery and intensity, the Gothic-Punk world is every bit as dark and violent as the name suggests. It is, after all, the hell that is the vampire's existence. Whatever sick, demented or excruciating situation you may find yourself in, know that it all happens regularly in the World of Darkness.

For the Storyteller attempting to create a Gothic-Punk world of her own, the ability to apply these elements to the story is crucial. And to do that, she must understand what the words "Gothic-Punk" really mean.

Forget what you think you know about Gothic-Punk. Whatever you've been told, that's probably exactly what it isn't. If you're thinking punk means mosh pits, The Sex Pistols, Green Day, skinheads or rebellious teens with orange-spiked hair, dog collars for jewelry and a serious overdose of body piercings.. um.. no. And if the term "gothic" brings on visions of pale-faced tortured souls with black lipstick, black-dyed hair and a plethora of silver jewelry, then it's time to put these cliches to rest and dig a little deeper. Find out what's under the surface. The Gothic-Punk world has little or nothing to do with the fashions that define the subcultures and everything to do with the attitudes and motivations that are the driving force behind the choice of clothing.

Gothic

The gothic setting and mood is a crucial part of the World of Darkness. If you understand the gothic aesthetic and apply it to the world you're creating, you won't end up with a bleak and desolate setting. The gothic aesthetic is not about misery and depression as so many people assume it to be. The gothic style is just the opposite.

The gothic style takes the very things that seem miserable and depressing and finds a sense of beauty in them. In the gothic sense, the night isn't something to fear. Instead, the night casts a seductive spell on those willing to wander in and explore. The morbid and the tragic can seem romantic, even sensual, for those brave enough to look into the eyes of the things they fear most. It embraces the decadence of the modern world and cherishes the strength it takes to do so. Squalid surroundings can drive the weaker man insane, but the crumbling ruins of a once-thriving town are somehow comforting in the gothic aesthetic. To look into the eyes of the destitute is almost blissful because there is strength there, strength that the ordinary person doesn't have. For the vampire, the pleading look on the face of his prey can be absolutely enchanting....

The gothic ideal finds a fascination with the macabre and has an affinity for all things dark. Darkness means more than a simple lack of sunlight. It is the overriding attitude, especially in the gothic sense. Unlike the rest of society, those embracing the gothic lifestyle do not fear the dark side nor do they pretend that it doesn't exist and they sure as hell don't hide from it. The gothic attitude is an acknowledgment and an acceptance of the darkness. It does not mean acting upon the urges that the dark side sometimes brings, but it does mean seeking out a better understanding of why the urges are there in the first place.

What may seem like a preoccupation with death is actually a celebration of life. It isn't about suicide or murder, but it is a realization that an appreciation of death gives an appreciation of life. Comfort is found in the icons or images of death. Graveyards and crosses provide a dark ambience to what could otherwise be a boring backdrop.

Style, flair, and imagination permeate the gothic world. Creativity is essential for the gothic ideal because in that same search for beauty in all things, the gothic sensibility refuses to give in to dullness. Whether it's through art, personal fashion or architecture, the gothic sense always ensures it's interesting.

Punk

While the gothic aesthetic seeks out the beauty in a situation, the punk attitude looks for the beast behind it. The punk mentality doesn't believe in being pretty or refined. A sugar-coated world is too disgusting to imagine because it is a lie. Always searching for honesty, the punk ideal digs under the surface until it finds the ugly in what appears to be beautiful.

In the boldest sense, punk is brash, harsh and in-your-face. It refuses to be ignored and doesn't believe that anyone should go through life "comfortably numb." Anarchy and lawlessness

reign supreme. An uneasy comfort is found in turning the world upside down. Punk embraces chaos and disorder because that's where true power can be found.

The anger that seems so prevalent in the punk mentality isn't about racism or skinhead behavior but is, instead, a defiance of the status quo and a hatred of the corporate machine. In the punk mentality, the corporate world is an evil that sucks away any life or vibrancy a person may have. It is a controlling force that, left unchecked, will continue its assault on personal freedom until there's nothing left but worker bees slaving away for the beast that owns the world. It promotes conformity while robbing people of the most important qualities they have: individuality and imagination. Conformity should be avoided at all costs because that would mean giving up one's individuality. To conform is to accept the thoughts and ideas of others (particularly those in authority) without question, while the punk ideal encourages thinking for oneself. The two cannot coexist as far as the punk is concerned. Free will and free thinking are casualties in the acceptance of the status quo. Those who sell out and adopt normalcy become sheep for the slaughter. Any semblance of conventionality is too close to this living death for the punk and cannot be tolerated.

The fundamental belief of the punk ideal is that life is meant to be lived - fully, completely, no matter what the situation may be. The punk ideal is always pushing the limit. Everything is done with passion; anything less would be the equivalent of giving up. Being who you are is what makes life interesting, and individuality should be protected at all costs. If that means waking up the neighbors, so be it. The punk refuses to become like everybody else, refuses to fit in and refuses to tone down, for that would be the same as giving up, and when you give up, you may as well die. It takes imagination to be different, a strong constitution to live on the edge and a strong body to handle all the emotion and energy coursing through it. If you can't handle it, don't even bother. Go be a worker bee.

Gothic-Punk

While the gothic and punk attitudes don't seem like a perfect fit at first, they both encourage creativity and imagination. The fashions and images of the two ideals require it. Both the gothic and the punk lifestyles hold tight to the creativity that allows them to be who they are. They know that the normalcy of the status quo and the mundane suffocates the imagination, and the fringe element of society doesn't want any part of it.

For the Gothic-Punk way of life, emotions rule actions. Forget logic and reason. Passion, for better or worse, is of the utmost importance. If you don't have passion, you don't have anything. Feeling something, even if it's painful, is better than feeling nothing.

The result of all this emotion is energy, especially for the punk. No lethargy or apathy here. It's all about adrenaline.

Never sleeping, never resting, never giving up the fight. Hell, you can sleep when you're dead. Until then, live life the way it's supposed to be lived – with energy, passion and on your own terms.

Vampires and the Gothic-Punk World

The romantic ambience of the gothic aesthetic complements the brutal defiance of the punk ideal to create a world that is a perfect haven for the vampire. The threat of death is always present in the Gothic-Punk world, whether it is real death or the walking death of conformity. The vampires are out and about each night, lurking in the shadows, searching for that perfect victim, the one who has everything to live for but nothing he feels strongly enough to die for. The darkness holds promise for the predators as the unsuspecting mortal inhabitants of the Gothic-Punk world come out to play. The forbidden activities of the nocturnal world hold much promise for the brave and the stupid.

And politics among the undead cannot be ignored. Betrayal and revenge are necessary evils intended for friends and enemies who are often one and the same.

The dark side of one's nature has never been so delightful….

control

Vampires boast to each other that they rule the world, at least the parts of it not occupied by Lupines and other complications. The truth is more complex – and offers more potential for storytelling. Vampires cannot simply give orders to everyone on the planet: They work within limitations that they often don't acknowledge, even to themselves.

No nation of Kindred exists, no ethnic group or sub-species acknowledged by scientists and diplomats constitutes the "vampire race." Vampires exist parasitically on the institutions that make up human society. Rather than taking direct control of their host community, vampires work indirectly and through disguises, tricking human beings into acting in ways that serve the vampires' agendas, or simply reaping the benefits of their altogether-uninfluenced actions. Human institutions rely on deception as well as visible chains of command, of course, but for vampires the opportunity to give orders publicly occurs only when the vampires disguise themselves. No would-be prince of the night simply steps to the podium, bares his fangs and barks directives that hapless kine rush to execute. A Kindred prince sitting on a throne in the modern nights is putting up a front, has a sense of irony about his situation or is deluding himself.

Many vampires like to think of themselves as the lords and ladies who move the world. Some actually did hold social or political power in life and wish to continue to do so after the Embrace, while vampires who were powerless in life strive (consciously or otherwise) to make up in unlife what they lacked in life. The inclination to act as masters of empires makes unnecessary complications for Kindred, tying up attention and energy in formalities that have little to do with the realities of their existence and encouraging players at the game of power to gloss over real opportunities around them.

The world holds five times as many Shriners as Kindred. The Shriners operate across as much of the globe as Kindred do. Yet the Shriners manage to operate just fine, contributing significantly to scientific progress and the humane relief of suffering (thereby changing the future indirectly, through preserving the lives of children who'd otherwise die), all without their own executioners. Neither numbers nor geographical expanse make the elaborate power structures Kindred like to build around themselves all that necessary.

At this point you may be wondering, "But, then, do vampires actually matter at all?" Yes, they do, in many ways and through many channels. Their opportunities for influence don't match up well with vampires' own stereotypes, but that only means the opportunities are different, not absent. Like every other aspect of vampiric unlife, Kindred influence is not truly as they would have you believe.

offices and titles

This section makes frequent reference to terms like ruler, office and title. The meanings of these words has varying value in Kindred society. These terms are used for convenience rather than to suggest vassalage. To be sure, very few Kindred in the modern nights are "rulers," though they may claim the title of prince. A prince does not control her subjects with a wave of her wand or a remote control. Vampires do not click the "on" button, "powering up" their police minions to harass foes or sending reporters to a character's haven's door. Instead, these concepts are the reflections of a social contract between vampires. Vampires far more often influence than control outright. A prince has authority only in the sense that other vampires respect her claim to the title. Despite some popular misconceptions (often promoted by adherents of the Camarilla and reinforced by the hypocritical actions of the Sabbat), Cainite society is not a neo-feudal shadow government of infinite hierarchies. No vampire is bound by her condition to "serve" some nebulous and hereditary Kindred "lord," though a strong prince will certainly make her will seem like law or at least the wisest course of action. Anyone can claim the title of prince or bishop (and more than one city has been torn apart by faction struggles between supporters to multiple claimants), but making others recognize that claim is the most dangerous and vital game.

Kindred over Kindred

While an individual vampire may briefly "control" a single human being via a Dominate power or some such, vampires as a group do not control human affairs. Whatever authority a vampire wields over some aspect of a human community relies on the appropriation of power that belongs legitimately only to mortals. Vampires govern mortals only insofar as the vampires manage to present themselves as mortals also. Vampires wield power as themselves, in their true identities, only over each other.

Vampire communities are small. The entire world population of Cainites, packed into one town, would scarcely qualify as an urban area by the standards of modern census bureaus. Nor do all Kindred belong to any single institution. Neither the Camarilla nor Sabbat could fill a typical sports stadium if the whole sect gathered at once - and what would the entire assembled Sabbat or Camarilla be doing, anyway? Vampires deal regularly with their coterie or pack, the prince or bishop and perhaps a dozen or two other vampires residing in the vicinity. The dynamics of small groups and subcultures shape their relationships with each other.

The Role of Tradition

Vampiric authority rests on tradition rather than written law. A few famous treaties codify specific issues and lay down formal directives. Almost every Camarilla neonate can recite from memory the Traditions. While most Cainites never see a

copy of the documents for themselves, the terms of the Convention of Thorns and the Code of Milan circulate somewhat within the Sabbat. The foundations upon which Kindred build domains, however, take no authoritative written form. The Six Traditions and the central doctrines of each sect move by word of mouth, elders instructing younger vampires. Inevitably, the details change over time as an interpretation becomes popular or falls from favor.

Tradition can bend a long way before it breaks and can accommodate change more readily than laws written without provision for changes. As long as what the tradition's inheritors see as the essence of their belief survives, the form given to the tradition can vary a great deal. Individuals who retain confidence in their heritage can adjust to fresh circumstances. In Navajo tribal lore, for instance, European introductions like the raisin and the shovel now fold seamlessly into pre-contact stories. Their presence, tribal storytellers say, is itself a message that the Navajo people can keep up with the times without losing their fundamental identity. The Six Traditions originated in ancient nights, long before anything like medieval or even classical notions of kingship and central authority; they've changed to incorporate more recent ideas that appealed to enough Kindred to win inclusion.

Tradition often expresses the consensus of a community's whole membership better than law does. Laws emerge from the decisions of those with the drive to take part in however their particular society governs itself, while tradition incorporates the concerns of all who hear and repeat the stories. No single individual can order others to like his interpretation, even with mental Disciplines to compel cooperation from those at hand. Would-be manipulators of tradition must persuade others, couching their versions in language that satisfies the hopes and fears of the audience. In the long run, grace and empathy count for more than Dominate to any vampire hoping to change popular views about the Six Traditions.

The adoption of classical and then medieval terminology reflects vampires' dependency upon innovations by human rulers. A vampire in the Final Nights seeking another such change now might pitch an interpretation of some modern addition as reflecting the "true spirit" of the older formulations or might argue that the addition serves contemporary Kindred needs where the older formulations fail. In either case, the innovator cannot order the change: It will take decades or longer to circulate through Kindred society and find (or fail to find) acceptance. A sufficiently dire crisis might motivate Kindred to accept breaking one or more Traditions for the duration of the emergency, but change in the long term never happens rapidly.

Note that manipulation of the Traditions forms an excellent focus for a centuries-spanning chronicle with extensive downtime.

Personal Authority

Vampires apply a variety of labels to their rulers, but in almost all cases, it boils down to a single basic principle: One vampire exercises as much authority over others as they allow her to. One city's "despotic" prince may seem quite the opposite of another city's prince, who exists as a figurehead supported by powerful primogen. Tradition establishes some widely accepted categories of leadership, the details of which all vary a great deal in practice.

Like all predators, vampires know (whether they admit it consciously) that in the end they all compete for the same prey. A vampire could simply forsake the complications of Kindred society and retire to someplace with a steady food supply and whatever diversions he finds personally satisfying. If he plans carefully and maintains self-discipline, hiding makes a great deal of sense as a strategy for surviving the Jyhad and the Final Nights. Most vampires feel the need to win the acceptance, admiration and obedience of their own kind, however, and these drives drown the simple charms of self-preservation in isolation. Many Kindred institutions reflect the tremendous vampiric drive to prove one's superiority. Every distribution of power exists in a fragile balance that crumbles the moment a participant finds advantage in doing

something else.

Although vampires can develop transhuman intelligence and insight, they often lag in moral development. Their powers allow them to bypass many of the constraints placed on interactions between human beings. Etiquette and morality alike reflect the limitations of human power and offer principles with which to resolve disputes. Beings who can simply force their will on others either never develop the inner awareness of limits that creates morality or have to put forth constant effort to keep the awareness from crumbling. Moral challenges that humans solve in a moment, with little or no conscious consideration, may require extended deliberation for a vampire, whose instincts point her toward the unrestrained passions of the Beast.

In some senses, then, a vampiric domain resembles a summit meeting of political or economic leaders among mortals. Every vampire has the potential to muster tremendous resources, and their individual decisions resemble the mores of society at large (at least, they do if the vampire doesn't want to rise one night with Inquisitors hidden in her haven, or unless she is very, very careful). In other situations, the domain resembles a particularly dangerous nursery school, inhabited by beings who lack the basic internal restraints that almost all mortal adults share and who can back up their whims with preternatural force. Any successful leader of such a motley gathering needs to balance the conflicting demands of untrammeled egos. No leader makes it work forever.

The prince or sect official almost always needs physical competence. Frenzy and deliberate challenges of physical force threaten the prince's authority; a prince who cannot subdue an out-of-control member of her domain shows herself unworthy of others' respect. Physical power isn't enough to keep a leader in power, though. The prince must assuage the fears of her subjects and demonstrate how supporting her keeps them safe. Real threats she destroys make good lessons.. and so do manufactured threats, as long as none of her intended audience discovers the truth. The prince needs to show that she can keep vitae supplies secure, protect havens and stave off menaces like Lupines and hunters. Even that isn't enough, because any random bravo can do the same. The prince must show her intended subjects that acknowledging her claim creates opportunities for them to satisfy their hopes and dreams as well.

Few princes do as well at persuasion and encouragement as at intimidation, which is why their position is always vulnerable to challenge by eloquent outsiders.

Tokens of Favor

As the holder of de facto authority, a vampiric leader - prince, bishop, justicar, priscus, whatever - can bestow a variety of gifts on her subordinates. The very fact that many of these gifts are traditional means that leaders often give them little thought. Consideration, however, suggests fresh applications.

Right down to the local prince, leaders can appoint and remove the holders of offices within their respective spheres of influence or even create new titles. Depending on the circumstances, appointment can be either punishment or reward. Being Keeper of Elysium in a peaceful, prosperous domain generally means reward and little risk, while being sheriff or scourge in the midst of sect war and social chaos often implies a shortened existence and suffering in the meanwhile. As with princedom and higher offices, a lesser position generally means as much or as little as its holder makes it. Respect among vampires generally flows from demonstrated ability, and every office holder has opportunities to show herself to others. Once on the spot, a vampire can exercise informal authority, which becomes increasingly "real" as others accept it. More than one prince has fallen thanks to sending an enemy off to a dangerous role, only to have the enemy thrive and eventually displace the prince.

Boons allow a leader to reward his followers without the permanent entanglements of office-holding. Kindred recognize two very different categories of boon-giving that leaders seldom distinguish. First, leaders give boons to individuals as reward for specific services rendered. The leader singles out the individual or individuals chosen and defines both the reasons for reward and the nature of the reward given. Second, leaders give boons to whoever can provide a particular service, as a prize. The leader takes a significant risk here, since the boon could go to someone the leader would prefer not to assist. Careful definition of the grounds for reward allows the leader to give a reward to an individual most likely to complete the task, but time and chance happen to disrupt many such plans. Boons as prizes do have the advantage of allowing the leader to see how the various individuals under his command behave with their gifts, scouting out potential targets for more personalized attention. Further, these boons need not be physical things. Princes may well dole out rights to prime feeding grounds, sovereignty over influence in certain areas, promises of future aid or even the blessing to create progeny. Very few boons take the form of cash, items or anything else so base.

Subject, Servant, Fan, Associate

The word "subject" itself carries implications that point vampires away from insights into their real situation. Few human gatherings of a dozen or two dozen people have a "prince," and the members of such a club aren't "subjects" in the sense of being bound to their ruler. They have lives outside the club. Vampires also have existences apart from the affairs of their domain, the private concerns they address among select associates or keep secret from all other vampires. The prince sets the tone for what happens when vampires gather and can intervene when vampires clash with each other or with mortals. Unless a vampire presents a visible challenge to one of the Traditions or some other generally accepted rule, however, the prince rarely intervenes in other vampires' personal affairs. Princes who push the line too much only create rebels, anarchs and autarkis.

Vampiric leaders have a substantial arsenal of social tools that most of them seldom think about. Above all, vampires in prominent positions become objects of imitation, just as human public figures do. Vampires who want to be like their leader take suggestions as easily as orders or even more easily. When the object of desire expresses disapproval, the imitator disciplines himself and strives to prove his worthiness with redoubled effort. When the object of desire smiles in satisfaction, the imitator may well be satisfied with that and no tangible reward. Different cultures apply different terms to the condition: gravitas, the dignity of the king, grace, being cool. The content of the admired features varies across time and space, but the principle of imitators and imitated seems universal. It's one part of the human condition the Embrace does not remove.

Almost every leader also has followers who can act as extensions of the leader's own will. Enthusiastic followers preach the merits of conforming to the leader's will, and the rewards the leader gives them show others the advantages of joining their ranks. Punishment creates short-term obedience through fear; reward wins loyalty. The leader can give a message in private that followers pass on in public without others in the area realizing that it originated with the leader - thus, the prince influences the tone of his domain even in those places he does not go in person. Followers see things the prince cannot. If the prince pays attention to the reactions of the vampires around him, he can even recruit a follower whom the rest of the domain does not know to be a newly minted confidant; he can also fake a quarrel with and loss of favor for a chosen follower. The "outsider" can then observe for the prince with no more suspicion than vampires always hold toward each other.

The Advance of the Whole

The goals a leader sets for the group she directs advance the individual interests of some members while interfering with the personal concerns of others. The leader needs to know who stands to gain or lose from her activities before committing the group to anything beyond survival and maintenance of the status quo. Unwanted allies create at least as many problems as unintended enemies and generally require more careful handling.

Vampires tend to detect slights early and often, intended or not – just ask the harpies. A leader about to commit the group to a significant course of action must be prepared for the objections sure to follow. Any appeal to tradition often works, putting the objector in the unenviable position of appearing to dissent against the whole heritage of Kindred society. On the other hand, popular innovation can also put the objector on the defensive, particularly if the leader can point to examples where too much conservatism threatened the group. The leader can also try to cast the objections as purely personal pique, the objector obviously trying to subvert the general good for selfish reasons. Even though almost all Kindred are passionately selfish beings, they enact grand ruses to appear more sophisticated in their motives and will take over from the leader the task of criticizing the embarrassed few. How many times have Kindred uttered the fatuous words, "for the good of the Camarilla," or, "for the benefit of the clan"? In the language of modern peer groups, individuals who worry about being cool themselves most harshly ostracize their peers who fail to seem cool.

Few problems allow only one solution. A wise leader generally considers a whole range of options. The more she knows about what would hurt or help the members of her group, the more she can fine tune her plans to pass out rewards and penalties without seeming to give these boons directly. The principle here applies at every level from domain to sect; the higher-ranked the leader, the more complex the calculations of individual and sub-group interest and the harder it is to amass enough information to plan knowledgeably. These limitations account for much of the turnover in higher-ranked positions, since failure comes more easily.

Title and Authority

Actual power, in the sense of being able to give directions and expect obedience, seldom corresponds precisely to the formal organization of a group. Both those who hold the trust and respect of the rest of the group and those who hold the official titles naturally want to know who their potential rivals are. Extracting information about who others respect, however, often becomes recursively complex. Individuals who feel themselves in inferior positions to those demanding answers tell their superiors what they think the superiors want to hear. Conversely, individuals who feel themselves superior to their interrogators tell their "inferiors" whatever's amuses them, or may advance agendas of which the "inferiors" remain ignorant.

(The Chicago by Night books introduced an extremely useful system of charting the relationships between individuals and groups within the setting. Storytellers would do well to work out similar diagrams, based how characters deal with each

other. Characters themselves lack the means to gather such objective knowledge even with the help of Disciplines: The participants in power structures deceive themselves, as well as each other. No leader or follower knows as much as he'd like, and astute leaders can simply plan for the inevitability of surprise.)

Many vampires with personal power choose to avoid the complications of formal titles. They may lend their support to the titular authorities in exchange for considerations, precisely as in any power-brokering arrangement from the local bridge club to Parliament. Depending on the perceptiveness of those in power, participants in the chain of command may not even realize that they owe their apparent popularity to the behind-the-scenes influence of others. Conversely, a smart holder of a formal office may realize that some of the individuals in his group exercise more influence than they realize themselves. By swaying them, he can steer the rest of the group, without the effort of dealing with so many variables of personal interest, obsession, ignorance and misunderstanding.

Remember that sect offices exist (largely) to advance the sects' respective purposes. The Camarilla wants to protect Kindred society at large from outside threats; the Sabbat wants to throw off the need to hide from mortals and lead a crusade against the Antediluvians. Neither group tolerates failure well, and especially not the moment it jeopardizes their overall plans. An incompetent prince or bishop can keep deceiving his superiors for a long time but not forever - that's part of why sects employ archons, cardinals, justicars and the like. The local leader, in turn, has to balance the concerns of his sect against those of the individuals in his vicinity. If he serves the sect so well that all the local individuals face extermination for the sect's greater glory, he won't last, anymore than if he keeps his local domain fed and happy while ignoring the cause he allegedly serves.

Independent authorities can ignore the orders of sects but must deal with efforts by both sects (and other independent factions) to bring them under their jurisdiction. Real independence from the clash of sects comes only for individuals prepared to abandon Kindred society at large. Since the world holds a finite number of urban areas, and since other forces deny access to some otherwise suitable cities, vampires compete fiercely for the remaining resources. Independent leaders can and do thrive but only at the cost of continuous effort, and in the end, the Jyhad comes for them all.

In every case, power is what the individual vampire can get away with.

Kindred over Kine

Every scrap of power vampires hold over mortals rests on deception: either the vampire lies, perhaps by omission, to her victims and subjects about her real nature, or her agents know the truth and help deceive the world at large. The Inquisition ended the last era of vampires ruling (in the true sense of the word) openly in their true forms, at least in Western society, and any effort to revive the practice would revive the Inquisition or some other anti-Kindred sentiment, as well.

Vampires offer mortals two sorts of gifts: tokens of prestige, power or advantage within human society that the mortal recruit wouldn't achieve on his own and gifts from the supernatural realm that no human could get on his own. In return, the mortal recruit does some things the vampire could do on her own but which would be inconvenient, and some things that Kindred nature makes impossible for vampires. Further, the vampire may or not reveal her true condition to the mortal she seeks to control. Each category of exchange creates complications of its own.

Informed Bargains

The simplest form of vampiric dealing with human beings has the vampire display her power and cow the target mortal into submission. She thereafter keeps information about Kindred nature and society away from the mortal, who acts as her agent in human society. The mortal doesn't learn about vampiric rivals or superiors who might rein in his new mistress, nor is he likely to find anyone among the living who believes his accounts. This is control: The vampire gives the orders and the human carries them out. It works as long as the vampire doesn't allow her servant to acquire knowledge of how to attack her, whether directly (with surprise and a sharp stake, for instance) or indirectly (by alerting visiting Inquisitors to her haven).

Beyond the simple fact of mastery, the vampire may deal with her servant generously or harshly as she sees fit. Ghouling provides her servant with great benefits, but also vastly increases the risk of discovery. Vampires can produce wealth and resources of many kinds, but the servant's social position limits how much of any such gift he can use, just as it does his ability to spend the profits from other illicit enterprises. The IRS won't stop an investigation just because a man got rich on money given to him by a vampire rather than embezzling it. A vampire's servant may well improve his lifestyle gradually, proceeding slowly enough to avoid attracting too much attention or arranging a suitable cover - a good mental manipulator might reward her servant with a winning lottery ticket or other legitimate windfall. The task for which she recruited the servant remains an issue, however: She won't let him promote himself out of the place she needs him.

Matters become substantially more complicated if the servant comes in contact with any other members of the night world. Now the servant might gain leverage to use against his mistress; the vampire must take care not to put weapons (physical or social) into his care, not without making very elaborate preparations to protect herself. The more her servant knows, the less risk she can take with him. The dangers don't all stem from his potential actions, either - her

fellow Kindred may target him for mental manipulation, bribery, kidnapping and the like. The vampire can try to protect her servant with the support of ghouling, defensive wards, etc., but tools and gifts that distance him from mortal society carry their own risks of exposure and may make it that much harder for him to carry out necessary tasks.

What begins as an exercise in absolute power develops into an increasingly mutual dependence the longer it goes on.

Together Against the World

Mortal men and women who accept the gifts of vampires in exchange for service seldom proclaim their new allegiances to anyone. The challenges they face as servants of hidden powers don't differ greatly from the problems confronting spies, criminals and revolutionaries. Vampires' servants often think of their plight as unique and end up reinventing the wheel when it's time to deal with troubles.

A vampire seeks out a mortal because she needs something he can do that she cannot. It might be as simple as manning the front desk of an office during the day, so as to present the appearance of a legitimate business, or as involved as coordinating bribery of high-ranking officials and disposing of bodies on a regular basis. Most mortal servants perform relatively mundane tasks, even though their new employers are unusual. Insofar as the servant's new role requires him to do work outside of his normal parameters, however, he faces a dilemma: The more attention he puts into it, the less he can put into his preexisting routine and the more risks he creates. His master likely thinks of discovery as the major risk, but dismissal and demotion hurt just as much when it comes to doing the work that attracted the master's attention in the first place.

Vampires often underestimate human ingenuity. Accustomed to thinking faster and drawing on lifetimes' worth of experience, vampires spin out complex cover stories that they expect to mislead potential hunters. Human beings with experience at deception learn that the simplest cover stories are almost always the best. Lying takes effort, and the more complex a story, the more likely it is that the liar will slip at some key moment. A servant who knows this lesson may not have an easy time persuading her master. Worst of all, the vampire might keep experimenting with various cover stories, leaving conflicting accounts to be discovered if anyone starts comparing stories.

Master and servant need to work together when the truth starts leaking out. Unfortunately, tensions run high at such moments. A vampire who loses control can easily slaughter her servant and then has the problem of disposing of him even as the triggering trouble remains active. The master may also go into denial and see it all as some trick by the servant to improve his condition and respond with punitive measures that only attract more attention. It takes trust to deal with a crisis, and trust does not flourish among the undead. When master and servant do cooperate, they can deal with a great many challenges and enjoy an enormous competitive edge over vampires and mortals in less equitable relationships.

For the partnership to work, the vampire must set aside some of her preferred absolute mastery. If the servant abuses the gift, then she may be worse off than before. She may also come through the crisis better than expected, with accidents among interlopers opening fresh opportunities for her and her servant to exploit. She won't know until she tries, and novelty seldom delights vampires. Familiar old control seems so reassuring and may continue to seem that way right up to the point of exposure and destruction.

When planning the actions of Storyteller characters, keep in mind that few people respond to signs of illicit behavior in their relatives, neighbors or co-workers by rushing to suspect the presence of a vampire. They suspect mundane vices and crimes: an affair, mental illness, drug or alcohol abuse, embezzlement and the like. People like to make sense of the world, even if it requires pushing hard on some uncooperative pieces of evidence. The suspicion that something supernatural might be at hand grows slowly in the mind of almost anyone except a particularly devout believer or a raving lunatic. (Storytellers take note: Those are not synonymous categories, and if you think of believers only in terms of mental deficiency, read more in the history of religious thought and practice.)

People who suspect their neighbors of wrongdoing seldom rush to make the accusation directly, either. Whispers and stares rouse the worst suspicions in observant targets, who worry that the supernatural link has been discovered somehow. The resulting interplay of misunderstandings can be a comedy of errors, tragedy or anything in between – and probably several at once.

Uninformed Bargains

Finally, a vampire may disguise her nature and interact with human beings in the guise of a fellow mortal or exert powers so that they don't know they're being directed at all. The problems of unknowing servants acting in ways that endanger their usefulness apply whether they know the source of their changed behavior or not. A careful behind-the-scenes manipulator can shield herself from observation by using mortals, if she commands them to act in ways that don't become so bizarre as to warrant closer scrutiny. A particularly careful manipulator prepares evidence to support charges of mundane, explicable malfeasance for the time she may need to sacrifice a pawn. The secret is to leave as few loose ends as possible. Perfection seldom happens, but then, it doesn't need to if the vampire provides enough clues to let outside observers feel comfortable with mundane explanations.

Passing as a human being reduces some risks and increases others. So long as the vampire behaves carefully, the disguise she adopts plays into human assumptions. People

know, if only vaguely and from a distance, about gangsters, spies and the like. There's enough novelty in a contact with such a person to satisfy most people's curiosity; they're unlikely to probe in search of stranger explanations. On the other hand, people in sensitive positions often receive training about what to do when approached by outside agents and may take preventive action. The would-be mistress must observe carefully and long enough to establish that her target will most likely respond favorably rather than going for help. A cry of mob harassment brings response more quickly than a cry of encountering a vampire, in almost every situation.

The Visible Manipulator

Vampires generally shun the public spotlight, not because they've stopped desiring adulation and obedience, but because long experience shows how difficult the deception becomes over time.

Inevitably, people start asking questions when a public figure never appears during the day. Celebrities of many sorts lead active night lives, but even in the modern nights, daytime obligations weigh down almost every job. A vampire simply cannot function as a high-ranking government official, for instance, thanks to morning meetings, recorded voting sessions and the like. A vampire who mingles with the public needs a source of income that doesn't depend on normal business structures. Vampires flock to the arts, in part, because it's easier for singers, writers, painters and their ilk to keep whatever schedule they choose.

(The public at large often underestimates how demanding the routine of a commercial artist becomes, however. Singers, for instance, need to make recording sessions and meet with managers and attend publicity occasions and respond to a great many other demands on their time. The option of being a total recluse does remain, but it cuts the artist off from the commercial networks generally necessary to achieve great fortune in the first place.)

Vampires who have aptitude with Disguise, Obfuscate and related talents can arrange for imposters to stand in for them at daytime events. Such a deception may last a long time, so long as the impersonator can mimic her secret master's abilities. It may also crumble suddenly. The highly competitive mass media, always hungry for scandal, provides plenty of incentive to expose the secrets of celebrities. A vampire can probably get away with killing one or two paparazzi, but a mounting toll of death, madness or inexplicable changes of behavior looks like a tempting news story all its own. In short, the Masquerade maintained in the public eye requires constant effort and generally ends in failure despite that effort.

It's somewhat easier to take on a persona that already has wealth and now enjoys few regular obligations. A foresighted vampire may nurture a human retainer to power and influence, then step in as the mortal's heir or simply kill the retainer and step into the role directly. The risks of exposure remain, but somewhat less intensely so. The individual of wealth and leisure has to worry about background scrutiny on the part of would-be biographers and other snoops. Smart planners assume that any weaknesses in the transition from human to vampire may become exposed; however many self-identified "princes of the night" underestimate humanity once again and find themselves confronting hunters.

Experienced vampires who've seen public Kindred rise and fall before often pressure their celebrity-seeking comrades to reconsider. A hunt, after all, endangers all the supernatural denizens in the area, not just the ostensible target. When persuasion fails, violence may step in. No outside observer can guess how many tragic deaths among rising stars in science, art, entertainment or other fields may reflect the secret conflict between vampires over the limits of safe existence. The effort to manipulate humanity from among the masses brings some of the same threats that vampires hold over humanity.

These difficulties do not mean that characters should never be allowed to mingle publicly with the kine. While nobody can banish bad luck, as Storyteller you shouldn't make every difficult task impossible. Reward careful preparation and consistent conduct, and you provide incentives for players to prepare and be consistent. Some vampires do move openly among mortals, while concealing their inner nature, and it's possible for Kindred to exercise tremendous influence this way. In the end, this is what makes playing a publicly known or famous Kindred so exciting.

The Long and the Short and the Tall

Vampire: the Masquerade, the **Guide to the Camarilla** and the **Guide to the Sabbat** all provide useful information about running a chronicle of typical length. Such games are presumed to last for a single long story or story arc, then end. But what about games that are exceptionally long or short? What special concessions and preparations does a Storyteller need and want to make in such a chronicle?

Short Games

Short games are a challenge to the Storyteller's planning and social skills as well as to their plotting. They are really, really tricky to do properly. A three- to six-hour time limit is much more difficult to work with and produce a good result from than you might first imagine. Normally, short games are used when giving demos, to acclimate and introduce a new group of players to a game, or (most often) played at conventions. In such controlled environments, these games show off the Storyteller's skill and provide a memorable experience with the game.

Run properly, short games are dazzling and can even sell people on a game they're convinced they hate. Run

improperly, they could convince the biggest Vampire fan in the world to head for pinball and not look back. Unless you're an experienced Storyteller or have played in a number of short games before, make sure to test your creations out on some people who won't be offended if it sucks horribly. Even if you know what you're doing, you really should playtest. If you don't know what you're doing, it'll almost certainly take a couple of shots to get it just right. Trust us. We've run our share of stinky games.

Below is a list of tips you may find useful in making a short game work and work well. These are in addition to all the things you need to do to make a game successful. Good Storyteller skills are, if anything, even more critical, because the audience in a short game isn't generally familiar to you or with you. A lot of things slide by on implication or understanding in an established group, and you won't have that luxury in a one-shot.

Simple Plot

A short game is just that: short. As Storyteller, you have between four and eight hours to get the players from the beginning to the end and take care of all the details in between. Remember that these players may be unfamiliar with your Storytelling style and of uncertain quality. Keep the puzzles simple, the lists of suspects short and the connections between segments of the story obvious.

Short stories have to be fairly linear - they have a lot more in common with movies or brief prose than with soap operas or novels. These games are necessarily much more concerned with moving from the starting point to the climax than with exploring the characters and their place in the world; they are far more linear than a single chapter of a Vampire chronicle or story. Don't deluge the players with choices. This doesn't mean that the players shouldn't have any influence over the game: Feel free to present the players with a big decision at the climax. However, make the leadup to the climax straightforward enough that the characters are sure to get there.

Likewise, running into a brick wall during an investigation is fine in a normal game and can even be enjoyable. However, in a game that's only going to last a single session, this sort of thing is a waste of time. Make your puzzles simple, and remember that what seems obvious to you won't necessarily be obvious to the players. Use the "rule of three" when constructing the plot. In each segment of adventure, try to leave at least three different solutions to a problem or three pieces of evidence that obviously lead the characters to the next scene.

Finally, try to put the characters in the same sort of time crisis that you as a Storyteller are facing. If there's some sort of ticking clock or immediate pressure, then the players will be trying to speed things along, rather than running the clock down. Obviously, this is not always going to happen. Sometimes the characters will happily argue for three hours of real time or watch as their remaining moments slip away like sands through the hourglass. Regardless, the game is considerably more likely to play out within the allotted time frame if there is some sort of crisis to provide a sense of urgency.

As an example, one game run at a convention involved a nuclear device hidden somewhere in Los Angeles, with a very short deadline before the bomb's owners pushed the shiny red button. If the characters didn't get to the bomb and cut the blue wire in time, they and all their friends and relatives got to find out what the afterlife is really like.

Simple Characters

It's very strongly suggested that the Storyteller make up the characters for a short game. This saves an immense amount of your most critical resource - time. Remember that the players are probably going to have only 10 or 15 minutes to get familiar with their characters before play starts. Make the characters simple; all of them should be archetypal enough that they can be described in one sentence, and the character write-ups should each fit comfortably onto one side of a single printed page.

When creating characters, be mindful of several concerns. You need to make each of the characters unique. Don't force the players to fight to stand out. Each character should have their own special connection to the story and be distinct from the other characters.

Make up a few more characters than the largest possible number of players. This ensures that even the late arrivals get a choice of what to play. On the other hand, the game may not fill up entirely. You should set a minimum number of players you will run with (usually about half the maximum planned size is good). By following these guidelines, a game for eight players that has about 10 possible characters and may run with only four players.

Obviously, if you're not careful when writing up the characters, its possible to have non-viable coteries when the group is small, because either essential skills will be missing or there just won't be enough characters to see the game through. Make sure that any possible combination of characters still stands a good chance of completing the game. It's tempting to have a core group of four or five characters that you hand out first, then an equal-sized reserve that are only available if the game is big enough to use them. Be very careful doing this; it's easy to make these characters the important people and the fifth wheels, respectively. You don't want to short someone just because they showed up two minutes later than somebody else.

For example, the previously mentioned convention game was written for a maximum of six players. It was intended to be a small demo, and because there were going to be Kuei-jin, one of the key design factors was making sure the group was manageably sized. When the characters were created, they

were designed to give each type (Kindred and Kuei-jin) a social specialist, a combat specialist and an occultist. This way, the party could lose half its numbers and still complete the story. The members of the coterie could do at least one other thing in a pinch, so it was fairly certain as few as three characters would make a viable coterie, and the game would run smoothly with four or more.

The actual characters themselves were dead simple - a Ventrue who specialized in covering up Masquerade breaches, her Toreador bodyguard, a Giovanni occultist and so on. Each had an attached sheet covering basic backstory information for the character and any hidden knowledge the individual character possessed that was critical to play. Nobody was going to have to strain their brains trying to figure out how the characters "worked," letting them focus instead on portrayal and solving the puzzle at hand.

No, Shorter Than That

Really. Until you've run a few short games, it is very hard to grasp just how fast four or six hours can fly by. Keep in mind that if you're running at a convention or as a demo, people may not be able to stay around if you exceed the scheduled length. Since short games are almost always structured around a conventional build to a climax, this means that you may have to end the game without ever reaching the really dramatic part. Would you rather end a half-hour early and have everyone participate in the climax, or run 30 minutes over and have half the group miss the big finale?

Allow about 40 minutes for each significant segment of game and about an hour for the climax. Obviously, this is a rule of thumb. You won't know how the game runs until you play it. Ideally, you should playtest the game twice (with a different group of players each time) before running it "for the public." The first time will run very long and point out any horrible, obvious mistakes you've made. After you go back to the drawing board and tighten the story up, the second test will show any gaffes that may have been missed on the first run through and will take about as long as the actual run, so you'll know if you should cut or add. You won't always be able to test a game twice, but you should always run at least once before a public performance. That first run through is really critical to figuring out if your brain stopped working and what you've overlooked. It will almost always limp pretty badly - preserve your dignity, and let it limp in private.

It's wise to use your regular group of long-suffering players for the first run. They will have endured all sorts of terrible experiments at your hands, without any more complaints than necessary. If you're going to be writing several games for conventions, you would be well-advised to cultivate a tolerant group of friends who let you try out your new and innovative (read: untested) ideas on them without laughing too hard when they don't work as well in practice as planned.

Come Prepared

Time is essential. You have only a small amount of it, and you're storytelling with an unfamiliar group. Have everything you need. Bring your books and your dice. Because you don't have a lot of time, make sure all the critical data in your notes in marked with highlighter or printed in red ink. Likewise, make up a cheat sheet for yourself and the other players, a page or two long, that contains all the basic rules. If you're feeling ambitious, you can even customize the cheat sheet to each character. The less time spent digging in the books, the more time spent playing the game.

Also, strive to be a good host. While everyone is responsible for being prepared to play, as Storyteller you're the axis on which the game turns. Bring things that the players will need to play but that they might not have, like pencils with erasers and extra dice. Because not everyone hauls their entire gaming library to every game, you might even want to bring an extra copy or two of the rules. Be sure to keep an eye on extra rulebooks if you bring them; they tend to vanish if not watched closely.

Oh, and most importantly: Do not forget the notes for the game. You'd be surprised how easy it can be to pack everything but those notes, and they are the one thing that you must have to run. When you're checking off your list of dice, mechanical pencils, spare erasers and so forth, the actual notes are gonna be the last thing on your mind. Make damn skippy that you have them before you walk out the

door. If you are forced to improvise, you may as well be starting from scratch - which is a bad idea for a new game.

Smooth Delivery

Playtesting and coming prepared are two critical steps to achieving the ultimate goals of making sure that everything goes as planned and that all the players enjoy themselves. Do everything in your power to keep things going smoothly. If you have props and handouts, make sure they're in order and that you have plenty of copies. Make sure your notes, particularly things you're going to read aloud, are printed in a big, legible font with well-spaced lines, so you don't stumble. When important rules will come into play, record them in the margins of your notes.

Watch the players before the session and seat the quiet ones close to you so that everyone gets a chance to participate. If groups or factions among the characters exist, seat them together as well. Have a cheat sheet with all the characters' vital Traits on it, particularly including their Alertness, Stealth, Investigation and combat-related details - because the characters will pick fights. Surprises and shocking revelations work a lot better in short games than long ones, and preparing ahead of time allows you to make important rolls without tipping players off to even what's going on.

In short, sit down and think long and hard about everything you can do to make things go off like clockwork. If you think this all out ahead of time, you'll be prepared for the little upsets and forced to extemporize only when things go completely awry.

Be Ready to Wing It

And have no fear, things will go completely awry. Even after several playtests, six people applying their own solutions and sensibilities to a story is a guarantee to send things careening in unanticipated directions. It's entirely possible the plot as written will be derailed in the first five minutes. How you handle this really depends on your preferences and skills as a Storyteller - if you could anticipate it, you wouldn't be improvising. This isn't necessarily a bad thing. Just understand that all your planning may be for naught, and focus on keeping things enjoyable, not on beating characters

back into the script or getting frustrated at the players for taking things in an unexpected direction.

Say, for example, that the players of the Fires of Heaven pack make one of those leaps of inductive logic that only players are capable of and decide that the nuke is hidden underneath Dodger Stadium, when it is, in fact, somewhere else entirely. Wasting most of their precious time preparing, they charge off to the stadium to save the city. What do you do?

You have options. You could be brutal and have them discover the place is empty and they've guessed wrong. You could have them receive additional clues to the device's actual location. You could even just transplant the bomb to Dodger Stadium so that the adventure goes off without the players ever knowing they'd guessed dead wrong. What you should not do is break down into tears or splutter angrily and shout, "You stupid fools, how couldn't you have completed my perfect adventure the way it was intended? Bah! You deserve to die!" React to the characters' actions, not the players' weirdness.

Make It Enjoyable!

People have chosen your game to have a good time. You are storytelling to give them one. Don't forget that. Some special considerations to this bear mentioning. The first involves killing characters. Obviously, because this is a one-shot game, fatalities are much more acceptable than in a full-length chronicle. It's entirely permissible to make an adventure in which all or most of the players' characters will die at the climax. However, Final Death during play is a little different. If the story is a meatgrinder designed to waste half the characters in the first hour, tell the players in advance so they can make some plans in case their character ends up under the hammer. Alternately, work up some way that these players can continue in the game, maybe by assisting you

and playing antagonists.

Be careful with sources of aggravated damage. Because characters are unlikely to have enough time to recover from more than a health level or two of aggravated damage, don't deal it too generously. While it may be okay to kill off a couple characters, it is definitely not good to smack everyone with three or four levels of aggravated damage unless you know exactly what you're doing. Few stories will be completed adequately by a group of characters whose common denominator is that they have been mauled and must crawl from location to location, leaving a trail of their own gore.

Finally, you will generally have little control over what sort of players you get in a small game. This means that while you may possibly get some fantastic players, it's just as likely that you'll get cheese-headed gibbons with single-digit IQs. There's no time for negotiating about proper behavior or encouraging good sportsmanship. If you get someone in your game who sucks badly and is ruining it for all the other players, just kill off their character as soon as you can and continue. Be thoughtful and responsible in this. It's to get rid of the guy who shows up blind drunk or insists on trying to diablerize the rest of the party every chance he gets, not the person with cologne you don't like. Also, don't be an idiot and whack someone in a fashion that's obviously going to antagonize them. If you make a big scene or get into a fistfight, the game will suffer for it.

Feet First, First Time

If you're running a demo or otherwise giving players their first taste of Vampire: The Masquerade, make sure you keep things simple, and ease them into play gradually. However much fun it may be for experienced players, it's unlikely that people new to the game are going to want to play the game's more esoteric aspects.

In your game, hold off the debates between a primogen council and visiting archons over the best way to defend a city from Sabbat attack. Experienced players may love it, but newbies will just end up confused. Instead, try for simple situations. Fights, Masquerade breaches and nights at Elysium are all things that can be explained in a paragraph or two.

Likewise, if you're teaching Storyteller-system mechanics, make sure to give the players a low-stress situation in which to learn. It's no fun being pressured to understand exactly how combat works while avoiding an untimely demise at the paws of frenzied Lupine. Let the players work out the kinks on mortals or some other simple situation before you throw their characters into whirring festivals of Discipline-use involving other supernatural creatures. It's critical that players ease their way into how the dice work, how combat works and how their various Disciplines function.

Save Them for Next Year

You spent all this time writing up and playtesting a short game, so what do you do when you're finished running it? Don't scrap it - take it home and fix the weak spots. If it sucks and you hate it, don't hesitate to toss the game out and write another. One the other hand, if it comes off properly or with just a few hitches, don't waste your efforts. Save it for next time. Enterprising Storytellers should have many opportunities to run short games, be it a bunch of people coming in from out of town, a convention or a demo at the local game store - many of which even offer store credit for running in-store demos.

After the fourth or fifth time you run a game for different groups, you'll pretty much know exactly how it runs, where things may go off the rails and how to manage the various critical points. The result is potentially very impressive. As long as you don't have too many repeat customers, who's going to know that you've been using this for the last three years and that you can recite the plot in your sleep? More importantly, who'll care?

Long Games

So you know all about running games that last only a few hours. But what about the other extreme. What about games that last a few years? Most of the existing Storyteller guidelines are for games that will run for a single plot arc. Trying to follow these guidelines to run a game spanning five or six times longer than the estimated length may seem like an invitation to disaster. It would be like sitting down at a one-session game and passing out sheets, ready to make up the setting hand-in-hand with character creation.

The following are a few suggestions for preparing long games. In many ways, preparing for long games is an art form all its own. It can be an exercise in creativity as or more enjoyable than actually running the game. If you do it and find you like it, so much the better. If you try it once or twice and just can't get into it, don't worry. There's nothing wrong with doing things the regular way.

Make Sure You Like It

You're about to build a setting that you will be using every Wednesday night for the next few years. It can take a couple of months of serious work to set up for the game. You probably don't want to go through all that unless you're fairly certain you'll finish. If you secretly want to play Werewolf: The Apocalypse, do not start a three-year Vampire game.

On a smaller scale, don't make critical setting elements out of things that don't really grab you. If the idea of Nosferatu scuttling beneath the streets on their midnight missions doesn't interest you, don't make your city the center of their underground culture. If you think the Sabbat are a bunch of slobbering shovelheads whose only purpose is to ruin an otherwise interesting game, don't schedule them as regular nemeses.

Nobody Is Indispensable

Even if you manage to keep all your players for several years (a feat that verges on the miraculous), you'll still going to lose some characters to attrition or people just growing tired of playing the same role. If you're playing regularly for a couple years, just resign yourself to a shifting cast. It's much better to find a way to accommodate dead or missing characters than to strain the story and everyone's disbelief trying to keep the goners alive. If done properly, the game is like a serial or hundred-chapter novel, with a story bigger than any of the people involved.

And the way to do it properly is to avoid the Bad Fantasy Novel school of plotting. Storytelling games have seen enough messiahs, predestined saviors and indispensable heroes. Make sure the players aren't the only people in the game world who do anything of consequence. Think of Casablanca; it's a compelling story with characters who are important to the world as a whole, but World War II is going to continue regardless of whether Rick Blaine joins the Resistance, sells Victor Lazlo to the SS or dies trying to defend Ugarte from the Gestapo.

No matter if you're telling a story a big as the migration of young vampires to the New World or as small as a night-by-night soap opera of unlife in Philadelphia, make sure your Storyteller characters are more than just cardboard cutouts there to drop clues for the players' characters. If the setting depends on realistic characters with genuine motivations and long-term plans, the death or retirement of a player's character won't derail things.

By making the setting or overall story the center of the game, you gain a lot of resiliency. Not only can you afford to lose a couple characters if things turn unexpectedly bloody, but you can lose the whole group. If the characters end up dead or the subjects of a blood hunt or you move or the game falls apart, all you have to do is turn the clock forward a year or two and figure out what all the Storyteller characters did during the interim. Suddenly, what would be a crushing blow to a normal game is a historical footnote in a much larger story.

Take, for example, a long-term game set in a Pittsburgh recently recaptured from the Sabbat in the 1950s. The characters are ancillae in a coterie that tries to look after the day-to-day functioning of the city's underworld. Individual characters have come and gone in the tumultuous nights prior to the millennium, but the story of the decline and decadence of the Prince of Pittsburgh's domain continues regardless. Players' characters Kindred have turned into Storyteller characters, transferred elsewhere or died, but the game itself perseveres.

Experience For New Characters

At two or three points per session, one session a week, the average character racks up about 150 experience points a year, not counting end-of-story awards and any experience handed out to simulate characters learning over long stretches of downtime. It's entirely possible that a new character will be 300 or more points of experience behind the original characters. You have a couple of options for handling this.

Everyone Comes In At Zero: All new characters are created using the normal character creation rules. The upside to this is that experienced characters actually shine and can display the fruits of several years of devoted play, in addition to being very realistic. The downside of a group in which almost everyone has 300 experience is that the more experienced characters' ghouls may be able to outperform the newbies to the coterie. It might be realistic, but not everyone is going to find the vampiric equivalent of "pack intern" fun to play. Also, if the experienced characters have nemeses of equivalent power level, expect casualties to run high among the new characters when the shit goes down.

Everyone Comes In Equal: You keep track of the number of experience points awarded, then give new characters a bonus of the same size. On the good side, a player whose character has been knocked out of the game by a disastrous roll of the dice doesn't have to start again as a raw neonate. On the bad side, this means that a new player comes in at equal power to people have been there at every session for the last year. This can be unfair to the more regular players, and it can also cause suspension of disbelief issues. Even in the World of Darkness, vampires are rare, and once you reach a certain level of power and influence, you are going to know most of your peers, at least by reputation. Where was this ancillae with his fingers in Silicon Valley last year when the players' characters organized a conference on gaining high technology influence?

Likewise, characters built from a big fat lump of experience awarded all at once tend to look very different than characters who get the same amount of experience through several years of play. Normal play applies a lot of pressure to round a character out, while lump awards tend to make a character ultra-specialized. There's really no way to simulate the way a character may suddenly have a pressing need to learn an odd Discipline or unusual Secondary Ability like Ventriloquism or Economics. Also, you have to keep track of how much experience you award, which is trivial if you start from the beginning of the game, but if you decide to start counting after nine months of play, good luck.

Splitting the Difference: This is the compromise between starting everyone as a newbie and giving starting characters

a windfall to bring them up neck-and-neck with the older characters. New characters receive some sort of award to make them competitive with the established characters, but not enough to make them equal. Good awards are one freebie point for each week the game has been running, or one ten-sided die's worth of experience points for every ten points of experience the oldest character in the game has received. Basically, new characters start off with enough of a boost that they aren't hopelessly inferior to the established characters, but are still subordinate in terms of power. This is the generally recommended method of starting new characters, but the requirements of every game differ.

Forward Planning

Normally, as Storyteller, you can just improvise to cover any unexpected inadequacies in your plans, and you can leave undetailed any inhabitants of the setting who won't be directly relevant to your game. However, in an extended game, this isn't really an option. Because the setting is so central to the game, it's important that you know all the characters who will have an impact on that setting before you start play.

While a certain amount of "this Storyteller character was in torpor until recently" and "this other Storyteller character hasn't made her presence known for some time" is acceptable, you should try your best to sketch out all the important personalities and powers in your setting. It is, after all, the War of Ages, and the Jyhad needs many participants for the Byzantine schemes to really start unfolding. Not only do rich casts of Storyteller characters drive the setting, they make Backgrounds like Mentor, Allies and Contacts much more than a place for clues to come from.

Don't just limit yourself to one city. Elder levels of Auspex and Dominate allow older vampires extreme ranges of action, and most Cainite elders can travel between cities without too much fear of attack. Indeed, Methuselahs can brush aside entire Lupine packs that obstruct their terrifying progress. The War of Ages is bigger than just your home town. Try to think nationally or globally, not just in terms of who's fighting over feeding rights on the local college campus. Certainly,

the primogen of the city have a lot more on their minds than the disposition of influence over the local used-automobile trade.

The players never even need to have the slightest idea who the movers and shakers behind the plot are. The very fact that something takes place in the setting other than the events the players' characters set into motion adds immensely to verisimilitude. While you can fake it and just have the prince "indisposed" for a time, it works much better when the characters can look back a year later and realize that the prince w as off meeting with someone specific and that everything has had a coherent shape the entire time.

Be careful about doing this much outside of very long games. In a game of regular length, an excessively long cast of characters tends to dilute the focus of the game and push the vampires into roles more marginal than many players enjoy. Also, if the characters will never find out the secrets, it's a waste of effort to detail them fully.

While you're making up your cast, don't just limit yourself to Kindred. Does a large pack of Lupines plague some area of the city? If so, where are they? What about magicians and faeries? What areas are especially haunted? Don't turn your game into a bad monster movie, but there are.. things.. out there in the World of Darkness other than the Children of Caine. Some of these things should probably make their presence known, if only as bad, weird shit that smart young vampires steer clear of.

Also, absolutely most importantly, don't neglect your mortal cast of characters. Think beyond local witch-hunters and fervent priests. What about the mayor and the city council, the chief of police, the DA and local judges, the chief of the fire department, local media figures and celebrities, captains of local industry and organized crime figures? What about the secretaries and assistants who advise these people and control what information they use to make their decisions? Who are the characters' landlords and who runs the black market? Who manages the hotel where the Kindred's intrigue plays out among the wealthy and foreign dignitaries? Who is a ghoul, who is blackmailed, and who is too smart or too

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dangerous for the local Kindred population to touch?

While not entirely necessary, it can be worthwhile to keep track of the politics of these communities as well. What will the characters do when their police contact tells them that the scary old wizard of the South Side was found brutally murdered in his home or just died from a heart attack? Likewise, what about those pesky mortals? Is the mayor about to lose his next election? To whom, and why? Even the most enduring political administration is a yawn to an elder vampire. Cainites see pawns come and go, and it wears on them. With a long game you have a golden opportunity to play this up. Strive to make your world as realistic as possible. Let the players feel that if their characters vanished tomorrow night, the world would keep going on without them.

Disgressions and Subplots

Welcome digressions and subplots. You have all the time in the world to explore the characters' attempts to keep touch with their mortal families, their artistic aspirations, their searches for an ideal haven, feeding details and every other detail of vampiric unlife usually skipped over to "get on with the plot." When you're going to be using the same chronicle for a few years, these sorts of things are the plot.

Obviously, depending on how much time you want to cover, you may speed things up and skip over years or even decades at a time. When you do slow down, however, take advantage of the long scope of the game to develop the characters' attachments to the world. Done properly, the Storyteller can actually manage to evoke things like ennui, detachment from an all-too-fleeting mortal world and despair at ebbing Humanity. (You know, all that other stuff Vampire talks so much about but that usually gets lost under whacking Lupines and competing to see who has the dominant influence among the city's warring gangs.)

One worthwhile thing to do that is not only rewarding but also seems to occur naturally is running "spin-off" chronicles in the same setting as the main game. Any long-term setting worth playing in will have more possibilities than even the most reckless group of players could ever hope to explore. As the main character group matures and its plans scale into the longer and longer term, it's perfectly acceptable to change focus to other characters with more exciting night-to-night existences. These may be the regular characters' ghouls or progeny, other neonates or even characters from other World of Darkness games.

Not only does this increase the depth of setting exponentially and make the game more tolerant of things like player attrition and character death, it's also a lot of fun. Knowing there will be mini-chronicles to explore obscure but interesting facets of the setting is good for the central narrative. It gives the players the ability to work without dragging the coterie into every subject of possible interest, and it frees up the Storyteller to develop things that are interesting but not salient to the story at hand.

As an example, say the coterie is forced into exile, under blood hunt or threat thereof. Although they're certain to take most of their ghouls along, what of their abandoned retainers and their other mortal contacts: friends, allies, enemies, loves? What about Kindred allies and enemies? While the characters are laying low with someone's grandsire in New York, what's happening to the people back home? What better way to find out than to storytell some of the people remaining behind and see how things go?

Experience

One thing long-term play will point out is that even though the Storyteller system can seem slow, a couple years of consistent play will turn out some formidable characters. How do you explain the fact that after what may be only a year or two of in-game time, the players' characters can now potentially take out their clan's most potent local member?

Feel free to explore a number of approaches. You can assume that everyone gains experience this quickly and just improve the elders' Traits accordingly. You can just pretend it doesn't usually happen and allow the players' characters as protagonists to gain a sudden advantage over the Storyteller characters. Alternately, you can assume that most vampires go through a "growth spurt" of sorts after the Embrace. After about 300 to 500 experience points, either start cutting back the experience award to one or two points per session, or start increasing the multipliers to buy up various Traits. The most important thing to remember is that the players' characters shouldn't be the only ones to improve. Even if, for example, an elder isn't accumulating as many new abilities, she may well be earning her seventh dot in Manipulation or Fortitude. This isn't a game of keeping up with the Joneses, but the other characters should have some growth, or they just become stagnant (which actually fits some vampires' manner..).

Gehenna

Vampire's "happening any night now, ready or not here it comes, don't make any long term investments or buy a house"-type Gehenna can prove very problematic for a long-term game. If you start in the current nights and use the published material, it would seem as if the Kindred's waning Humanity and struggle against the Beast may soon be overwhelmed by an onrushing tide of events far larger than individuals' concerns.

Frankly, this is pretty easy to work with. Most of the published Vampire material is, at best, tangential to Gehenna. Just ignore the onrushing end of the world. The Golden Rule is there for a reason - it's not like the game demands that you blow up your carefully constructed game because some book says so. If your players don't understand why you might want to ditch certain "canonical" material, you need to get some new players.

The choice is yours, but the various directions you choose will determine the kind of game you get. Generally, the more entrenched the elders and the greater the gulf between the neonates and the elders, the more solid the vampiric social system, the less cinematic the game will seem. Conversely, if the characters can close the gap in just a short while, it's going to look a lot more like a gangster film, as the characters overtake and force out their elders. Do what you want, but be aware that you're going to have to live with your decision for a long while.

Advanced Storytelling Techniques

Movies, books and television provide their audiences with a variety of tricks that can be adapted easily to the realm of dramatic storytelling. Directors, writers and editors use these techniques to heighten their story's clarity, to manipulate our emotions and heighten our fears. These unique approaches give perspective and focus to parts of the stories that the tales' creators want to emphasize and underscore. These techniques help the creators tell those stories in ways that make the high parts higher and the scarier parts more horrific. As Storytellers, we can use these techniques, too. They provide a Storyteller with the same benefits that they do the creators of non-interactive media. Storytellers are always looking for ways to make their games less static, more dramatically satisfying and more distinctive. Chronicles are table-bound (or couch-bound, if you play in the living room..). They don't have the freedom of visual expression that film and television enjoy, but they can be improved by borrowing techniques from these art forms. If you use them, they can add aesthetic distinction to your tale, and they'll improve the impact of your chronicle in ways you haven't imagined.

Blue-booking

Blue-booking is a storytelling technique that allows offstage action to be explored in greater depth. It's a solo participation technique in which a troupe character tells the Storyteller, in narrative form, about what happens during a bit of offstage business. The movie Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, for example, is a great example of movie blue-booking, because the story takes all of the offstage business in Shakespeare's Hamlet and tells it from the perspective of Hamlet's two friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The

audience, familiar with the action in Hamlet, is now able to see what happens to these two important characters firsthand. Through the first-person form of movie blue-booking, we see interesting and pivotal action that is mentioned, but often isn't part of the main plot.

Storytellers can use this technique, too. Often, interesting action takes place outside of the main plot line that you may wish to explore with a single player or with a small group of them. The blue-booking technique gives them a writing assignment to tell you, in first-person form, about what happens to their character offstage at that particular moment. It can also be used during play to tell you about a piece of action the troupe character wishes to keep secret and is a non-threatening way to handle mature subject matter.

Example: Stephanie is running a Vampire game. Eric is playing Jackson Asher, a Ventrue neonate with a knack for electronic surveillance. Lisa is playing Sean Andrews, a Toreador neonate with a cover concept as a local reporter. Jackson and Sean are caught in a war of attrition with each other. The reasons why aren't important for this example; what's important is that the battle they've engaged in, a contest of one-upmanship, takes place outside the main plot action, and neither Lisa nor Eric wants each other to know what their characters are doing. The action takes place outside the interrogation room of a Los Angeles police precinct. Sean is using his reporter cover to gain information that Jackson wants to keep from him.

Jackson has just witnessed Sean taking a photograph, one that might be pivotal in giving Sean a piece of the puzzle, and one that shows Jackson clearly in the shot.

Eric: "I get up and move to the door. I open it and step outside into the hallway."

Stephanie: "The room is thick with people – undoubtedly mortals – but you've been in here so long, that you're used to it by now. You hear heartbeats and you smell vitae. What do you do?"

Eric: "I try to ignore that; I'm not really hungry right now, and even if I was, the cop shop would be a pretty idiotic place to feed."

Stephanie: "Okay, so you're not hungry enough to risk breaking the Masquerade. What do you do now?"

Eric: "Where's Sean standing? Can I see him?"

Lisa: "Wait a minute here! I don't want him to see me, much less intervene with me directly. Do I see him searching the room?"

Eric: "Look, I'm trying to be nonchalant about it."

Stephanie asks Lisa to make a Perception check for Sean, and Lisa's successful. Lisa decides that Sean is going to do the only sensible thing available to him and head for the door. Stephanie then has Eric check to see if Jackson is able to track Sean's movement through the crowd. He's successful.

Eric: "Not a chance! That little prick's not getting out of here with the photograph."

Lisa: "Oh, yeah? Watch me."

Lisa grins and winks at Eric.

Stephanie: "Ok, wait a minute. You're both in a sea of people, less able to walk where you want to than simply going with the flow. That provides each of you with some cover. Are you trying to keep your actions as secret as possible?"

Both: "Oh, yeah."

Stephanie: "Then you'll need to start sending me some notes. This is a fine place to draw to a close for the evening – I'll read over your blue books and we'll work out the results for the next session"

Lisa and Eric both pull out their respective notebooks. Each player gives Stephanie a note, in turn, about exactly what their character is trying to accomplish in the scene. Jackson continues to follow Sean, and Sean continues to try and elude Jackson's pursuit. Stephanie makes appropriate skill checks when the action calls for her to make a decision on their success and failure and the degrees of each. By the time the direct action concludes, they've eluded and directly "one-upped" each other all the way down two city blocks. Over the course of the next few chronicle installments, Jackson and Sean continue to blue book Stephanie notes about what they're doing to over-match each other. The ruses and twists work well because neither sees nor knows what the other is doing; that information is shared only by Stephanie and the player directly involved in the exchange. They use the blue-booking technique to plan, plot and act, and the action gains more "realism" because each action is a total surprise.

This technique doesn't have to be used only to keep direct and indirect actions secret. It has a variety of applications. It can be used to play out the details of more personal material and even material that's adult-oriented and might be embarrassing to the rest of the group. (Sexual material can be played out this way, especially if the majority of the troupe is uncomfortable with it, but adult-oriented material isn't just limited to sex.) Blue-booking can also be used to highlight backstory – information relevant to only one particular character's history – and can successfully keep the game from slowing down because not everyone is directly involved in the action.

Cut Scenes

A cut scene is a storytelling technique that enhances a story by jumping between two bits of simultaneous action that can be directly related to each other, in direct opposition in emotion and tone or both. When used in horror or suspense, they're extremely effective if they juxtapose the monstrous nature of a specific plot point with something innocuous or even joyous. This technique underscores the horror and makes it seem even more horrific because it's contrasted with something that's pointedly not horrific. The "cut to" scene makes the "cut from" scene much more poignant, scary and emotional by contrast. Two excellent examples of the effective use of cut scenes in recent movies are from Schindler's List and The Untouchables. In Schindler's List, the main plot action shows the Camp Kommandant Amon Goeth raping and beating his Jewish housekeeper in his wine cellar, and throws those horrible images up against flashes of scenes from a Jewish wedding and scenes of Oskar Schindler and his lover having a evening out on the town. The director cuts between shots that capture the joyous celebration of the wedding and the pleasant atmosphere of the cabaret, to the terror and humiliation on the face of the woman as Goeth violates her. Her anguish is all the more real, all the more horrible and all the more effective because it's held up in direct opposition to something that's beautiful and uplifting, or just naughty and fun. In The Untouchables, Al Capone sits sobbing, watching Enrico Caruso perform Pagliacci, while his hatchet man, Frank Nitti, murders treasury agent Jimmy Doyle. The contrast of seeing Capone enraptured and in tears by the magic of Caruso's voice, while Doyle painstakingly crawls through pools of his own gore to reach for a train-station map showing on which train Capone will send his bookkeeper into hiding, is doubly horrific and poignant. The audience sees that Capone can cry for the performance of an opera singer, but he can also smile in deranged enjoyment when Nitti passes him a note signaling that Doyle is dead. When used in a chronicle, a Storyteller can use a cut scene to enhance the direct action of the plot and quickly take it elsewhere - to another simultaneous bit of direct action that contrasts with the previous action. This enhances the emotional tone of the original scene and counterpoints it.

How do you use this technique in your chronicle? Maybe you want to underscore terror and despair as a particular character is Embraced. You could alternate the direct action, the Embrace and all the stalker-versus-prey games that lead up to it, with scenes from the character's background, scenes of home, friendship and love. By "quick-cutting" between images of death - the moment of capture, the tearing of clothing, fangs ripping into skin, the slow, tortuous draining of precious vitae - and scenes of life - horsing around in the grass with friends during a scrub football game, taking an erotically charged shower with a lover, laughing with friends at a Friday-night bar rendezvous - you can make the terror of Embrace all the more vivid and emphasize the fact that this loss is immediate and life-ending.

Try different approaches by enlisting the services of other players to play the "bit parts" in a scene; try using cut scenes to bring the metaphorical tone of your scene back to your chronicle's theme by making the "cut-to" images representative of that theme. Use them to show the similarities and differences between your troupe characters and your Storyteller characters by cutting back and forth between your troupe's actions and the supporting cast's actions. Use your imagination, think about your theme, concept and mood, and pick "cut-to" and "cut-from" images that represent your theme and concept visually and emotionally. By using this technique, you can draw the plot action and the emotional tone of your chronicle into a cohesive whole.

Obviously, cut scenes are very difficult to use without bogging down the story. They require great effort on the part of the Storyteller to handle the rapid shifts in perspective, and they require maturity and dedication on the part of the players to give the situation their full attention, otherwise the scene will fall flat or be awkward and confusing.

Flashbacks

Flashbacks are storytelling devices that take scenes that happened in the past and tell them in a whole, cohesive moment. While cut scenes can draw from backstory to underscore a particular piece of chronicle action happening in the now, flashbacks tell that past moment in its entirety. Flashbacks can also be complete stories themselves, stories that may not even be drawn from the pasts of the initial scene's characters, but scenes that tell something about what is happening to those characters now. Flashbacks are a technique of visual and emotional foreshadowing or allegory that work because they tell the direct scene's characters something about what is happening to them. They are appropriate and useful in a variety of ways. You can use them to add flesh to the bones of your troupe characters' backgrounds by playing through them and using them to foreshadow problems that your troupe characters' are facing. Flashbacks can impart insight to the coterie by showing its members what happened to the flashback scene's participants. You can use flashbacks to give your troupe characters epiphanies and enlightenment, and you can connect those character insights to your chronicle's theme, concept and mood. Flashbacks are a very valuable technique to use in horror because you can use them to impart a sense of immediate danger, despair and fear. You can use them to show your troupe "the face of the enemy" and add to their fear because they've seen what the enemy has done before. Additionally, they can be used to underscore direct chronicle action in much the same way that the cut scene can but to tell an extended version of the contrasting action. Try different mixes - tell complete stories or whole singular scenes with dialogue. Try using them to tell related stories that contrast with your main story. It's up to you.

For instance, maybe the coterie is in league with a particular up-and-comer in Camarilla city politics. The direct action of a certain scene involves the troupe meeting with the prince to participate in an event at the prince's haven where the up-and-comer plans to "expose" a rival as traitor. Perhaps one of the characters is a Malkavian with the Discipline of Auspex and, after an interlude with the politico, he touches her shoulder in a gesture of intimacy. This touch imparts a vision to the Malkavian that tells him a whole story about exactly what she's done to frame the rival for her own betrayal of the prince. As the Storyteller, you use the flashback technique to draw all the other characters into a first person narrative of the betrayal and the frame-up. You play the real traitor and work to show a complete picture of her activity and pull your players into the action by simply assigning them the fill-in roles on the spot. After you use this technique to show what's happened in the past, you break the vision and pull the action back into the present by bringing the room back into direct focus.

It's tricky, but it works. Don't worry that, in telling a flashback, your troupe might take a plot point in the flashback that needs to happen for your present story to make sense and pull it in another direction. You can simply infer that the flashback scene was merely "the first attempt." What you've done is shown, rather than told, the players that the politico is a lying, cheating bastard and a danger to the prince in a way that's infinitely better than just telling the Malkavian that "your Auspex roll shows that the politico is the real traitor."

Snapshots

Snapshot editing in film and television is used in many different ways. Like cut scenes and flashbacks, it imparts information to the audience. Snapshots are similar to cut scenes in that they quickly cut to and from specific images and they're like flashbacks in that they can be used to tell a complete story. They can give your troupe characters a fast image of what's happened in the chronicle's past, and they can give one compelling image during simultaneous action that "explains" that action or conversely obscures it a little more than it already is. Snapshots are different from the two previous techniques in that they can be used to impart information that might happen in the future as a result of the direct action that's occurring in the "right now" of your chronicle. Think of them as MTV-style storytelling because they use eye-blink images that impart a complete picture of the outcome, consequences or rewards of your main story. You can use them to evoke specific emotional responses in the coterie, and they are an excellent resource for allowing you to rapidly tie an image to your chronicle's theme, concept and mood. Use them as such, and take it a step further by serving them up to impart a sense of visual irony, foreboding or triumph.

Let's imagine that we're in the Prelude stage of a chronicle. Maybe the theme of our chronicle is that change is necessary to reach redemption. We're working with a character's Prelude and we're trying to give her a glimpse of what's going to become of her once she's received the Embrace. We'll let this character go through her day, nothing special, nothing out of the ordinary and then, just after the sun's gone down, when she's having dinner in a quiet little mom-and-pop

restaurant with her lover, we'll have her glance out the window and see a stranger outlined against the brickwork of a stately, gothic church on the other side of the narrow street. The church is just a little bit crumbled, a little in disarray, from the lack of funds to keep it repaired. People come and go from the church, clergy walk in an out, and a young priest sits on the steps in the midst of a group of people, poor parishioners of all ages and colors. The mood of the group looks low and depressed, and we'll draw the character's attention to a large sign near the church doors that proclaims this Sunday's Mass will be the last one, because the church is closing its doors. The door of the restaurant is opened, and the character catches brief bits of the conversation from a few of the louder and angrier voices. She learns that the biggest reason for the closure is that an administrator on the board of the diocese has decided to divert funds to a better attended, richer church in the suburbs. Then, we let the character catch brief glimpse of the stranger leaning against the building, separate from the crowd, standing directly underneath a ledge in the stonework where a gargoyle leans out menacingly from an outcropping. His face is shadowed by the brim of his hat, and his overcoat looks dirty, even a bit tattered. Then, quick as a flash, we cut to an image from a perspective that's away from this place, inside the character's own apartment. She sees, outlined against the light of the window over the fire escape, that same person, only this time she catches an eye-blink image of the man's face and chest. It's horrible mouth pulled back in a grimace of pain and torment, his chin dripping blood, the front of his stained white shirt soaked in it. The thing lunges toward her, and she sees its mouth open in a glitter of fangs. Then, just as quickly, we take the action back into the present by bringing the character back to themselves just as a car pulls up in front of the church and an older priest steps out of it, a weary expression of relief on his face. This new arrival causes the group to stop their shouting long enough to listen, and everyone within earshot, our character included, learns from him that the administrator has reconsidered. She overhears that the church has been given the funds to stay open for another five years, five years that they can use to turn the situation around. Then, as the crowd comes alive, congratulating each other in joy, hope and relief, everyone hears the crash of something hitting the pavement. Everybody's attention - the character's included - is drawn to the place where the stranger was leaning against the church's stone edifice, and it becomes apparent that he's gone and that the gargoyle overhead has toppled, crashing to the ground in a pile of shattered granite.

Dream Sequences

The dream sequence is a storytelling device that uses the dream state to impart story information. Many of the previous techniques can be used in conjunction with dream sequences, using them inside the dream state in the same way that they're used outside of it, but what's important with dream sequences is that they tell a whole story inside of the dreaming landscape. Think about it; vampires dream just like everyone else (maybe more so, because the older they get, the longer they "sleep" in torpor), and dreams seek to purify the subconscious mind by emptying it of troubling, disturbing thoughts. While dreams can be pleasant, they can also be awful and terrifying. A character's slumber allows you, the Storyteller, to play all sorts of nasty, paranoid, heinous or even uplifting and unlife-changing games that draw the characters' fears, hopes and ambitions into the panorama of your chronicle. You can use dream images that are prophetic, foreshadowing something that will happen to the coterie, or you can use them as simple worries and fears that play out in a way that will never actually happen. Remember that dreams are largely symbolic, sometimes they impart information in ways that are totally unintelligible.

A clever Storyteller can use dreams to spectacular effect. In a dream, you can show the characters their mistakes and magnify them, you can then, in turn, show them their successes and make those successes seem microscopic in comparison with their mistakes. Dreams are also a great vehicle for bringing in visual references to the Merits and Flaws your participants choose. Does one of the characters have the flaw Nightmares? Give him the flavor of the worst possible outcome of that Flaw amplified in a dreamscape. You can use dream sequences to impart a sense of purpose to your characters, or you can even use dreams to give the characters a particular challenge or quest. You can comfort a character with images of forgotten acquaintances living their lives happily and reach back to draw the troupe character into close comraderie for a bittersweet, nostalgic interlude, or you can tease him with weird, Daliesque images of everything he aspires to be as a vampire, placing his feet on that path for the first few tentative steps.

Example: Your chronicle's theme centers on the hopelessness of Gehenna's approach and connects it with millennial frenzy. The kine world is a mess of crime and treachery, a metaphorical representation of the rotted Antediluvians coming back to gorge on their childer, just like stock-market manipulators gorge on money by speculating on the efforts of others. People turn to empty cults and murderous prophets to try and make some sense out of the cesspool. Debauched politicians screw with the good of their nations as callously as they screw their mistresses. Characters hunt the streets of the hopeless cities, profiting from the aimlessness and despair that the mass decline has created by feeding from many of the city's nastier street denizens.

That night, after all the feeding is done, after the characters have played vigilante and benefited from the game, they return to their havens placidly sated, smug and self-satisfied. As dawn banishes the night sky, you send them into a dream of Gehenna dressed up in the turn of the millennium's clothing. You sweep them up into visions of New Year's Eve, weaving through the crowded, teeming streets, moving to a decadent cadence that's half hedonistic celebration and half religious experience. They prey on the revelers, glutting themselves on vitae, and you let them do it in full view of everyone present. Funny, but nobody seems to notice, they're so caught up in the barrage of excess, debauchery and hysteria. Then you subtly shift the spectacle to one that's

even more menacing, and you change the sea of faces around them to those of other Kindred, caught up in the same frenzy, the same debauchery and the same holy delirium. And then the screaming starts, and it's not the Rapture or any of the other myriad spiritual explanations for the end-times, it's the Antediluvians come back for them to end the Time of Thin Blood. The characters never see the old ones' faces, they only see the monstrous remnants of other Kindred that have fallen to the ancients' terrible thirst. You take the characters through a truncated, image-laden, emotionally charged short-subject film featuring every horrid aspect of it. Then, when night falls, you let them wake in a sheen of blood-sweat to tremble out of their havens and look at the enchanted picture of the world you've drawn for them with new insight and paranoia.

Parallel Stories

This technique takes the players and puts them into the ancillary plot of the chronicle and lets them look at it from a different viewpoint. Parallel stories can also be used to tell a separate but connected story that runs alongside your main plot line.

Parallel stories are interesting because they give you and your troupe a breather from the usual plot line of your chronicle. (Okay, maybe in Vampire: The Masquerade nothing should be deemed "usual," but it lets the troupe take a break from the primary plot of your story.) It gives the story a shot in the arm because it allows players to see their impact on the world through others' eyes. It also allows the troupe to change the face of the chronicle as they change their own faces under the guise of new personas.

Troupes can tell a parallel story during a normal chronicle, if you want to rotate the duties of storytelling among all members of the gaming group. Every troupe character has a potential new story to tell, and every new story has the possibility of being told from another viewpoint. Try to use this technique in situations where you don't damage the chronicle's main plot line, theme, concept or mood because all Storytellers plan chronicle action that needs to occur, even if they say they don't. "The event that must happen" is a schtick that occurs in every chronicle once in a while because its an unavoidable necessity when writing a chronicle with a strong plot, and parallel stories can change those events. Don't assume that the characters won't fill in the blanks that a parallel story provides for them and try to change the main story in a way that's more favorable to their base characters. For that reason, probably more so than the others, this technique calls for maturity in the players and a measure of trust between both the Storyteller and the troupe.

Parallel stories can also help support the emotional subtext of your chronicle by connecting those stories to a supporting cast drawn from the main characters' backgrounds. However, they work well in a variety of other instances as well. Storytellers can give information from the main story to the parallel characters and then connect them to the main characters. Parallel stories' characters can create a sense of tension and opposition by placing themselves directly in the path of the troupe's main characters and giving the parallel characters a sense of what monsters the primary characters have become. For instance, the ancillary characters could be witch-hunters hot on the trail of the troupe, provided skilled storytelling allows the players to doubt the well-being of their original characters. This technique also allows the troupe to flesh out its ghouls, retainers and childer and gives them insight into those supporting characters. In this way, a Storyteller can show the daylight hours, when the troupe's main characters are asleep, instead of simply skipping over the daytime. (One great example of this is from Bram Stoker's Dracula. In the book, Dracula's unwitting retainer Renfield is stashing boxes of dirt all around England and doesn't have a clue why he's doing it. He just knows that the master is coming, and he has to prepare the way for it. Stoker uses this to show the terror and confusion that Dracula causes in his victims because Renfield falls deeper and deeper into madness as he does his master's bidding.)

Parallel stories also give another perspective to the results of certain Disciplines, like Dementation, by placing the player whose character caused the Dementation literally inside their victim's mind, painting the picture of what madness can be much more vividly. Additionally, a hunters chronicle can illustrate the sorts of lives that the coterie can never live - and, ironically, the obsession to which hunting drives the hunters, forever removing them from "normal" lives themselves.

Recognize the potential of this device for your chronicle, connect it to your theme and concept, and then, let it illustrate the mood of the piece by comparison or contrast to the main plot action.

Boot Camp

A term coined by Storyteller Michael Vogel, this is a technique that folds the characters' human backgrounds into the beginning of the chronicle more centrally than a traditional Prelude often allows. It can be viewed as an extended Prelude because all the characters start play as mortals, and they very possibly play through a whole story arc as mortals. This technique has value because it adds substance to characters by forcing players to start their characters as people and exploring all the changes vampirism imposes on them. It's a more immediate way for your troupe to get a handle on their characters than by just starting them with a short Prelude because they must evolve as people and then evolve as vampires. It helps the players explain why their vampires are the way they are, without just assuming it. It isn't for everybody - many troupe members want to jump directly into the game as vampires - but with the right group, it adds layers of motivation to their characters by contrasting all things human with the Curse of Caine.

This is also a viable technique for introducing special Storyteller characters from the characters' backgrounds and

letting those relationships evolve organically. It can show characters the faces of their sires prior to the Embrace and makes the hunt of predator and childe-to-be much more personal. Boot camp also spawns ideas for individual plot hooks for every character in the coterie: It can sow the seeds of characters' ambitions and carry rivalries from life to unlife. The process is much the same for the characters' allies. It lets the characters touch their human families and makes the loss of those families much more poignant, giving them a more immediate sense of how unattainable and how lost those former lives have become to them now. Boot camp drives home, more easily than any other technique, the difference between Humanity and the Beast by letting characters experience the friends, family, love interests, etc. whom they might later be tempted to Embrace and the family that must continue to think that they're truly dead in order to survive.

Storytellers may also combine this with a break from the usual mode of character creation. For example, a game may begin in which the characters still attend high school, that point in everyone's lives where emotions are much more magnified. Take them through the loves, the fights with their parents, the wrecked cars and all the emotional turmoil. Maybe a character's significant other ends up as a hungry neonate's midnight feeding or a pet science project for a Tzimisce - who later becomes their sire.

These advanced techniques can enrich your chronicle dramatically. Use your imagination and don't ever be afraid to try something new or different. They may not be easy but, because they make you think in emotional comparisons and contrasts, they'll add depth to a chronicle in ways that are poignant, visual and fulfilling.

chapter four:
the troupe

The highest joy of man is creativity.

-Boris Strugatsky

Alternate character creation

Vampire: The Masquerade provides a very functional set of rules for character generation. Everyone receives the same number of dots allocated to the same general categories, which, in theory, leads to roughly equivalent characters. This also occasionally leads to arbitrary outcomes. A player might have too many dots for one category or not enough for another. Concept might demand only two dots in Backgrounds as opposed to five.

Confronted with such issues, a Storyteller may choose to modify the system to suit his players' needs. It's very simple to do so, but some Storytellers might not have any ideas on how to proceed or be uncomfortable moving beyond the rulebook itself.

Keep in mind that character creation is simply a tool for players and Storytellers that can be used to fill the chronicle's needs. No method is particularly more valid than any other. These are options for the Storyteller to entertain and subject to her approval.

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fine-tuning the process

For most games, standard character creation will do, but a few tweaks might make it easier to manage a chronicle. One tweak might be to simply disallow Abilities or Backgrounds over three. Perhaps the Storyteller wants no character lower than 11th Generation or wants all of the characters to be members of a single clan (or not be of certain clans standard to the setting, like Brujah in a Camarilla chronicle).

Such adjustments are simple to apply, but respect the players enough to explain why they are necessary for that particular chronicle.

What Is a Character?

When a player sits down to create a character, he should really have at least a basic idea of what he wants, but there isn't really a "right way" to start. He can assemble the Traits to find inspiration or start with a clear idea and build the Traits from that. When he's finished, he should have a clear idea of the characters history, personality, (former?)

occupation, age and interaction with human and vampire society.

A complete character includes the character's outlook, personality and history; she's more than a collection of Traits. The dots are useful for those times you need to figure out what happens, but you can usually kick them to the curb for normal storytelling purposes. Encourage your players to think in terms like, "Andrew Hart is a 23-year-old physics major, who's stuck living in low-rent housing because he can't stand dormitories. He misses his parents but loves his studies (even if he dislikes the tedium). He's an explorer of sorts and wants to make one of the next big discoveries in quantum physics but isn't sure where to start yet. He really loves Cuban food but can't find a decent restaurant nearby." The Storyteller uses every technique in his arsenal to help the player establish this sort of feel for his character. A player who thinks in terms like "Axel Blood, anarch leader and sworn enemy of Vlad Pretentious, has three dots of Potence and a titanium baseball bat" still has a way to go.

This is not to say that all responsibility lies on the Storyteller's shoulders, but it can't hurt to help out here and there.

Human First

This can be applied to any of the methods below. Simply, you create the human first with 6/4/3 dots in Attributes, 11/7/4 dots in Abilities, five in Backgrounds, seven dots in Virtues, and Humanity and Willpower calculated as normal (including the basic free dot in each Attribute and Virtue). The Storyteller may choose whether to allow some or all of the standard 15 freebies to be spent before the Embrace, but the goal here is to establish the human before the vampire. Since vampires are individuals first, vampires second and clans third, it's best to establish who that individual is before giving her fangs. See page 113 for suggestions on how to begin the chronicle in this manner.

Once the character undergoes the Embrace, simply add the additional points where appropriate: 1/1/0 dots to Attributes, 2/2/1 dots for Abilities, 15 freebies, or 56 additional freebies if the Freebie Pool technique is used (see below).

Choose the Clan

The Storyteller need not leave this decision in player hands. Instead, he can choose the clan and Disciplines for players, leaving them to create the individual pre-Embrace. It's best if the players agree to this technique, just as any other. Issues of consent in this case are a bit more important. Although this is arguably more realistic, it can very well take the wind out of the player's sails if she's stuck playing a character she doesn't like.

Choosing the character's clan for the player can be tricky to pull off well. When it works, it can be an intense experience for the player, especially if you don't tell him what clan you've

assigned. After all, it's entirely possible a sire might wait a while before even broaching the subject.

Fooling the Players

Another method that requires much trust, but can be very rewarding if it works, is to give the players character sheets for one of the other games or supplements, have them create normal people who haven't yet become "supernatural." Tell them you'll decide what tradition/tribe/guild/kith or whatever they'll play. Get them together and comfortable with playing their characters for a few sessions, then run the Embrace scene. Don't bring Vampire books to the game, even for reference. Conduct the story according to the rules for whichever game you claim, so they won't suspect.

It can't be stressed enough that this kind of bait-and-switch can upset players if not handled well. It's best to do this only with players who trust your judgment and won't pelt you with dice and pencils at the first sign of betrayal.

Trait Pools

This method is very simple. You take all of the dots for Attributes, and put them in one pool of 15 dots, applied to whichever Attributes you prefer. You may choose to distribute them as 7/5/3, 5/5/5, 6/5/4 or whatever comes to mind. Apply the same to the Ability pools, giving 27 dots to apply to Talents, Skills and Knowledges at will.

Advantages (Backgrounds, Disciplines and Virtues) don't pool under this system.

This provides more flexibility for player choice and a greater fine-tuning of characters. Be warned, though: It also allows for a greater degree of min-maxing. As always, pay attention to what the players create, and work with them to assemble a plausible character. This system works well for creating tragically flawed or uncommonly heroic characters; a crippled character may not need three extra points in his Physical Attributes, while a genius may need eight or more dots among her Mental Attributes.

Freebies

This method gives you even more flexibility. The value of all the dots that would appear on a character sheet (excluding the first dot in each Attribute and Virtue) yields 184 total "Freebies." Allow the player to distribute these freebie points wherever she desires, but as above, keep an eye out for min-maxing. The potential to optimize for specific character types is much easier with this system.

Adjusting the Costs

Alter the costs for specific Traits; for instance, you could make Knowledges cost one freebie or increase Willpower's cost to three freebies, depending upon specific chronicle flavor. If you want a chronicle about Kindred scholars, lowering the cost for Knowledges makes perfect sense. On the other hand, if you want certain Backgrounds to be rarer, you can charge two points for some, like Status or Generation.

Adjusting the Totals

If you want to run a game of ancillae or elders, you might instead (or in addition) alter the starting total. You might double or even triple beginning freebies to allow for the greater power level or decrease it by a third or so for a truly low-powered (thin-blooded?) game. Experiment to find what particular level suits your chronicle best, and stick with it. Be wary of high-powered games; many Storytellers find themselves with a tiger by the tail and no real idea how to deal with the monsters players create.

Extra Credit

This is an incentive program, often used to encourage players to contribute more to a chronicle than mere physical presence. It can take many forms and works best as a bonus to creation. The player creates something for the chronicle or adds greater depth than normally needed for a character, and, in return, he receives a reward to put on his character sheet.

Biography

Many Storytellers offer freebies for a detailed life story (with a suggested minimum of 5,000 words); perhaps five freebies or so. Offer more points for extra effort beyond that, but don't be overly generous. You want a little extra for good work, not

some elder monster by virtue of a thick stack of paper.

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Merits and Flaws

Merits and Flaws can inspire ideas for plot hooks to dig into characters, but are they really necessary? Most Merits can be duplicated (or approximated) with additional Ability or Background dots and most Flaws are simply background issues. If you use the Journal and Biography options listed here, the extra freebies easily account for points granted through Flaws.

Then again, some people like Merits and Flaws, which is why they're included as optional systems.

Ultimately, Merits and Flaws are crutches. A Merit like Rising Star provides a benefit not too dissimilar from Status. A Flaw like Clan Enmity implies a game with very rigid clan distinctions - do clans keep lists of enemies? "The Ventrue's Most Wanted," issued to all neonates upon release? Merits like Iron Will give the character the ability to break or bend specific rules - often at the expense of mood.

If a player wants the effect of a Merit or Flaw, then discuss it with him to determine what's appropriate for the character. Some Merits and Flaws have specific effects that cannot be duplicated with Attributes, Abilities or Backgrounds. In such cases, it's best to work out the specific effect the player wants and find a way to accomplish it either with other Traits or through bonuses or penalties applied as appropriate. This shouldn't be a point-balancing exercise but a way to give a character greater depth and more hooks without adding the additional bookkeeping required by Merits and Flaws.

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Journal

A player might offer to keep records - a personal journal or diary, a chronicle or timeline or perhaps even short stories about her character. This comes close to blue-booking, but the journal effort should continue above and beyond that. This should be a serious commitment, not a one-off process. Offer 10 freebies or so, but don't award them until a few sessions have passed with the player keeping his end of the bargain. If you're certain you can trust the player, offer it right at the beginning. Either way, remove the bonus points if the player fails to maintain this practice. Give her time to make up for a few missed sessions, but if she's consistently lax...

The Web Chronicle

In the days of free Web space, cheap Internet access and affordable computer peripherals, many troupes enjoy posting their chronicles on the Net for other players to visit, use and comment upon. A Web-savvy player may offer to do this, which is probably worth a few extra points at character creation. Remind her to be considerate of copyright issues, but other than that, she's got free rein. Note that this

sometimes requires disclosure - Storytellers may have to reveal the Traits of their characters and details of their plot, so this option might not satisfy every troupe's tastes.

Different Power Levels

One of the most difficult issues for a Storyteller to deal with is a chronicle in which one or more characters begin play more powerful than the others. This can be a rewarding style to manage if pulled off well. Perhaps one player portrays an ancilla and the others are neonates he's sired or recruited, or perhaps one plays a vampire and the others play ghouls.

The problem comes in when players think that one player receives a greater advantage/more powerful character than the others. To avoid such a problem, make certain that all characters, especially the weaker ones, have some area in which to shine above and beyond the others. The ancilla may have chosen a neonate because of his superb high-society contacts - something the ancilla may not have developed. Make certain that all of the characters get to show off and are useful for plot advancement.

Free Form

This may be the most difficult style to handle. The idea is to work with the player to create the character he describes, whether or not it fits within the point limits set by the rules. In essence, rules take a backseat to character. The player should write a detailed description of character history, a "wish list" of Traits he wants his character to be good at (and roughly how good that is) and justify it all. Note that "justify" in this case does not mean "10 pages of typewritten excuses to get permission to play an Antediluvian." Justifications should be clearly thought-out, reasonable and supported within the background story.

Naturally, such a character must not only be internally consistent but also consistent with the chronicle the Storyteller and other players envision. Otherwise, a poorly chosen background element can easily disrupt the game, if not caught before play starts (or nipped in the bud when it comes up). This technique requires a great deal of trust and cooperation between the Storyteller and his players. The Storyteller interprets the wish list into a character sheet for the player and may choose to ignore, reduce or increase some Traits based on the background. It is both appropriate and polite for the Storyteller to explain the reasoning behind such changes to the player and discuss the decisions throughout the process.

Ideally, the free form creation technique can be used along with the Prelude, providing greater context for each Trait as it's defined on the character sheet.

No Limits

"No limits" means precisely what it says. The free form system allows a player exactly what he asks for as long as

he's reasonable. You can easily end up with a coterie composed of an elder or two, an ancilla, three neonates and a ghoul. This is perfectly all right, as long as the players and the Storyteller can handle it. Each character should be designed to fit the concept and not the rules template. In truth, such a game may even de-emphasize Trait value and emphasize character (as all good games should). Be careful how you handle each player and who gets what; what might be a wonderful opportunity for one player might be the left-hand path to Storyteller damnation for another. See below for more hints on this sort of thing.

The Big Secret

The traditional character creation system works well for this tactic, as do any of the variants proposed here. This is not so much a creation system as it is a chronicle option. A Storyteller invoking the Big Secret gathers the character

This system is extremely realistic, arguably more so than

sheets at the beginning of a chronicle.. and keeps them to herself. In this manner, players are encouraged to consider the relative strengths and weaknesses of their characters. Is the Brujah a better fast-talker than the Toreador? Quite possibly - only the Storyteller knows for sure. This has the added benefit of forcing the players to regard their characters as more than dots on a sheet. Players respond to the game more in accordance with their original concepts than they do by balancing the statistical probabilities of their dice pools.

Matters of experience require minor bookkeeping. At the end of a session or story, the players tell the Storyteller where they'd like to allocate their experience, and she keeps a running tally, never letting the characters know when they've achieved their improvement, but allowing them to find out empirically through play.

these things, alter them if necessary and you want to use

many troupes enjoy. After all, it's not like we can "feel" another dot when we learn something in the real world, but then again, this is a game. In the end, the Storyteller and the players should all be happy.

Flexibility vs. Permissiveness

The first lesson any Storyteller must learn is "how to say no." The most important lesson is when to say yes. It's sometimes difficult to say "no" to a friend when he wants his vampire to diablerize his way to Fifth Generation and learn all the secrets of Necromancy, Chimerstry and Thaumaturgy. Allowing such a combination can easily disrupt or destroy the chronicle's mood or flavor, whether or not it seems likely at the outset.

On the other hand, it's also far too easy to say "no" to anything that seems remotely unbalancing or unusual, and that can sometimes amount to punishing a player simply for being creative or clever. Think carefully before dismissing player ideas or requests out of hand. Work them over, consider if interesting plots or complications can involve

them, then offer the player a compromise. The end result may strengthen the chronicle rather than weaken it, if handled well. Always inform the player that such benefits or characters can be withdrawn at any time, if they turn out to be harmful to the game.

An extension of this includes "to whom you should say yes." Some players come up with great ideas, but in practice they devolve into a munchkin's paradise. Player responsibility is at least as important as usefulness to the chronicle. If a player turns out to be irresponsible, don't be afraid to withdraw any extras, but be certain to explain why you've withdrawn something. Eventually, you'll develop a fine sense of whom you can trust to play privileged characters and whom you cannot. Watch player development, since some may cross the boundaries over time.

Character vs. Chronicle Necessity

The final, most important issue is "How does this character benefit the chronicle?" Above all, every character must fit into the chronicle, must interact with the other characters and

must abide by the same terms and conditions as the other characters. This does not necessarily mean the characters should be close friends (fat chance among vampires), but it should mean that they have interesting and productive hooks for inter-character dynamics. Ideally, players should work with the Storyteller to determine chronicle style and with each other to determine what roles each would like to fill and how to bring the characters together without using clichҒs.

Be careful about allowing full-blown adversarial play. Such a game can cause hard feelings and reduce player fun. A coterie forms to survive against a multitude of enemies. The Kindred in the coterie may not like one another, but they cannot afford to backstab each other every night. Enemies wait in the shadows for just such a lapse, to exploit and further weaken the characters' alliance. The end result of a game of betrayal is a broken coterie with most of the characters either dead or dominated by greater powers. Another common outcome is the fracturing of the original coterie into two (or more) new coteries. These new coteries tend to feel intense hatred for the "betrayers" in the original coterie, turning the players' characters against one another.

One way to handle a chronicle with two mutually antagonistic coteries would be to split it into two simultaneous chronicles. Coterie A plays on Saturday nights, Coterie B plays on Thursday nights (for example). If a different Storyteller runs each game, get together and compare notes afterward. This makes personal conflict easier to establish. Make certain the group division makes sense - each coterie should be coherent.

Advancement Alternatives

The process of character definition does not end with all of the dots colored on the sheet, the background questions answered and the Prelude played out. It continues throughout the character's unlife. Over time, the character will grow and learn new tricks, abilities and powers. She may grow stronger or change her beliefs. Like many elders, her faculties may actually decline, atrophying from disuse. Whenever a particularly traumatic or unusual event happens in a character's life, the player should probably re-examine his character's motivations, beliefs, goals and attitudes. By the same token, what he does and how often might influence what he learns over time. Note that these are options - they result in a somewhat quicker escalation in character power than the normal manner provides.

Trait Advancement

A vampire learns faster when he puts his abilities to use on a regular basis in tense situations (much like most characters). An elder who haunts her haven and hatches secret plots from relative safety will advance more slowly by comparison. You may wish to keep track of how many experience points you normally hand out and apply one or two per session to Abilities or Attributes the character used in new or interesting ways or had great success with (four or more successes).

The Storyteller should also keep the player apprised of advancement for specific Traits, not in terms of experience points, but rather through description. "You feel more confident about your insights into your sire's plans."

Disciplines

The Kindred's supernatural powers advance more quickly if pushed to the limit more often (and most neonates certainly do so in the Final Nights). With this in mind, some Storytellers keep a running tally of which Discipline a character uses most often and apply an extra experience point to it, two if exceptional successes come about or the character finds creative or efficient uses for it. Keep track of this additional advancement in a notebook or some other place away from player eyes. As above, use description to hint at advances.

No more than one or two Disciplines should receive this award each session. In any case, don't let advancement exceed the limit of one dot per Trait per story. The experience bonuses should be in addition to the standard award for a session, but generally not more than two additional experience points.

Tailoring Experience Awards and Improvement

Sometimes, the Storyteller starts with what seems a like reasonable reward and may end up with super-powered killa bloodsuckaz or with players frustrated over slow advancement. She needs to strike a happy medium, and that depends entirely upon the needs of the chronicle, the Storyteller and the players.

A chronicle centered around elders should not have the same advancement rate as one that focuses on neonates struggling to survive the Final Nights. A long-term chronicle can easily develop into an extremely high-powered game if the Storyteller isn't careful about advancement, whereas a game set during the Final Nights will have intense moments sprinkled liberally throughout and more opportunities for characters to develop Traits in shorter periods of time. There's a distinct difference between "spending a year fighting the Kuei-jin invasion" and "spending a century studying human anatomy and pain tolerance."

Additionally, once a character surpasses a certain point in her development, further improvement becomes very difficult. The Storyteller system is very granular - by keeping scores simple and dice pools relatively small, it leads many people to believe that it ranks competence arithmetically rather than geometrically. Don't be misled - consider Attributes and Abilities as "root numbers" and their scores as "exponents." A character with Academics 5 is literally an order of magnitude more educated than one with an Academics 4 (who's no slouch herself, mind you). The maximum score a human can ever possibly attain in an Attribute or Ability is 5, which places those people with scores of 5 among the world's most capable in their given field. While this may seem an

admonition against "power characters," it is more a warning for Storytellers to consider how their players spend experience points. A character who wants to increase her Brawl from 4 to 5 probably isn't going to do so by picking fights with drunken thugs at dive bars - she'll have to fight ever more capable opponents, rather than greater ranks of less-competent foes. It's easy to learn one's first dot in practically any Ability. When one wishes to command more knowledge or skill than practically any given expert in the field, however, things become more difficult.

Naturally, this applies only to Attributes and Abilities. Disciplines are inherently vampiric in nature and other Traits - Virtues, Humanity, Willpower - are less objective in nature and less quantifiable by personal achievement.

Long-Term Advancement

Chronicles may span centuries, and Kindred don't stop learning (they simply learn more slowly). The maturation system (see p. 170) doesn't really reflect a typical vampire's learning curve; they're extremely conservative estimates, based not on accomplishment but mere survival. Given that, you should work out how quickly you want the characters to advance over time and modify it based on character activity. The following discussion isn't precisely a system, per se. Instead, the intent is to offer concepts for consideration when developing your own advancement guidelines.

A vampire who spends time perfecting her mastery of music would develop a dot or two of Expression and Performance within a decade or two if not sooner, along with possibly Academics and other Abilities that may relate to her studies. Another who spends his time occasionally catching up with current events and maintaining his Backgrounds will show no progress at all. In some areas, he may lose expertise. If you feel the character has neglected an Ability sufficiently to warrant a loss of a dot, inform the player before making the final decision. She may choose to alter her plans, and players typically hate losing things.

Given time, any vampire will reasonably learn a little of nearly everything. A person can learn much in a single century. Given even more time, a vampire who can afford to attend to his studies can easily become a true Renaissance man. It's possible to overdo this and provide a character with an incredible surplus of dots, and this should be avoided if possible. Most Abilities should be sufficient at one dot, with only the character's real interests going to three or higher.

Developing a few Abilities to five dots within a century or so is not unreasonable, but it requires a lot of work.

The vampire who spends all of her time improving Disciplines, Abilities and Attributes may find that to do so she must neglect her mortal contacts, her associates and even her responsibility (if any) to Kindred society. Consider also the social skills of one who has been locked away from others for decades at a time. She's lost touch with the world, in addition to Kindred society. It's possible to stay in touch with one or the other and spend every night cramming as much learning in as possible, but it's not very likely. Such dedication requires a high Willpower (7+ at the very least) to maintain for more than a few years at a time.

A vampire can spend his time currying favor with other Kindred, make himself useful in general, work hard to maintain and expand his contacts, cultivate mortal and immortal acquaintances and so on, but this leaves little time for high-impact learning. He will do well simply to stay on top of his preferred fields, let alone advance in them.

A character can strike a balance between both extremes, maintaining and increasing healthy Backgrounds and spending time on new Abilities and/or Disciplines or raising existing Traits. She does keep up with Kindred society, doesn't lose track of her contacts and can gain a few dots to add to other Traits. Players should carefully consider which approach to take and understand the drawbacks inherent in each before making a final decision.

Non-Experience Advancement

For those who don't care for accounting or want to try something different, try offering advancement without experience points. Like the above system, the player tells his Storyteller what he wants to study or practice and, relatively, how much time he wants to work on it. After a reasonable period of time, the Storyteller grants the additional dot. Dramatic use of Traits during stories may shorten the time needed to increase an Ability.

Rather than create a complicated system that involves number of hours spent per night, week or year, it's best simply to decide upon a general rule of thumb, to be modified when necessary. Naturally, it should take much longer to raise an Ability from three to four than to raise it from one to two. Raising a Trait to five (or more..) is a matter of several years' hard work.

COTERIE Prelude

This can be a very important tool. It serves as an introduction for the entire coterie, giving the characters greater context for interaction at the actual beginning of the chronicle. Perhaps they band together for mutual defense against an elder antagonist or to solve some particular problem, and they then stick together. Whatever the reason, they have established contact and know each other once play begins. This will save time in the initial stories, since lines of communication need not be established before the action begins.

problem players

A problem player is a player who, for whatever reason, disrupts the game. It's important for you as a Storyteller to realize that sooner or later, every player will have a problem - but unless it becomes chronic, they aren't out of line. It is a rare group indeed in which, over the course of a couple years, every single player won't make you want to rip your hair out in bloody tufts. This section will hopefully give you some coping mechanisms that are a little easier on your scalp.

Dealing With Problem Players

Handling problem players is a delicate matter. If they had no redeeming qualities, it would be easy - you'd just tell them never to come back. That you're dealing with the player and attempting to resolve things means they offer something you think is worth saving, despite the problems. This makes the process of approaching the player and establishing communication very important.

It's critical that you move early to deal with what you sense may be problems. If you wait until you're on your last nerve before you speak with a player, your temper is going to be dangling by that last, frayed thread when you come bearing a litany of complaints. This is not conducive to establishing open lines of communication. It's better if you come when you see the situation just beginning to develop, so that you have the emotional and mental wherewithal to stay calm with a player who is likely to be defensive. And the player is likely to be defensive, with good reason. She's just having a good time, playing her character, and here you are telling her she's doing it wrong. You might in fact be right, but that doesn't make it any easier for her to hear.

Adversarial chronicles

A chronicle involving characters at each other's throats can work, but it does not work well in the traditional coterie format. If your players really want to screw each other over, and you want to oblige them, it's best to step outside the format and give them a venue in which this can work.

Prince of the City

One idea is the "primogen game." Every character is an elder or member of the primogen in a specific city. For whatever specific reasons (which should be worked out with the troupe), they're at war with each other. Alliances can come about in play and be broken nastily, grudges come out into the open or are secretly avenged. It amounts to a secret war in the chosen city. This might be due to a struggle for the princedom or an attempt to cover up certain "problems" in the

area. The end result will be one elder on top; the others will either acknowledge the claim of princedom, slink off into the shadows or die the Final Death.

This can be tricky to pull off well, but the end result is well worth it. As long as the ground rules are established at the outset, everyone understands what's at stake.

In this style of play, the players might also create characters to represent the elders' childer and minions for use as pawns and sacrifices.

City Invasion

In this case, the players may split into two or three groups, with each representing the Camarilla, Sabbat, anarchs or Kuei-jin. The idea is that full-fledged faction warfare has begun - the Sabbat invades a city, the Kuei-jin are out to destroy the Kin-jin, the Camarilla wants to break Sabbat presence in a city. Finally, perhaps any or all of the above factions might fight for the uncontested dominance of the city. Each player represents one of the leaders behind his chosen sect's efforts. Note that to run this style well, the Storyteller should try to make room for in-depth character portrayal and interaction, rather than allow it to devolve into a simple bloodbath.

Likewise, don't discuss a player's inadequacies with him after one of you has had a big fight with your spouse, a hard day at the office or another taxing encounter. Your player doesn't need to be told how bad he is at his hobby at the end of a terrible day, and you don't want to accidentally lash out at a player for something that isn't his fault.

Go into things with an at least somewhat open mind. While you should theoretically have a more objective perspective than your players, you may be a lot less detached than you think. The player might have complaints about your style of storytelling, and those complaints may well be legitimate. Talking to a problem player is not about laying the smack down on him. The talk is about trying to reach some kind of compromise that preserves the quality of the game. You are not the player's adversary; you and he are working together to make the game enjoyable. If you just dictate a solution from on high, all you'll do is double the amount of tension in the group.

Private Discussions

The first step is to take the player aside and talk to him one on one. Do this in private, and as suggested above, do it at a time when you and he are both in good spirits. Approach it like it was a serious matter. Don't be overly friendly; acting like a bumbling parent trying to approach their teenage child for a "rap session" is going to look pretty silly. On the other hand, don't preface your remarks with a reenactment of "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." While what you're doing is quite serious, the idea that everyone is there to enjoy

themselves really makes cowing a player into good behavior contrary to the spirit of things.

Go into the discussion ready to talk about what you feel the player is doing wrong and to hear their side of things. Don't get excited, don't let the argument turn acrimonious or adversarial, and don't let yourself be put on the defensive. You want to calmly explain to the player what you think the problem is, suggest a solution and hear his side of things. Try to see the player's perspective, but keep in mind that you as Storyteller are mostly concerned that you're not overlooking some serious and legitimate concern on the player's part - not to work your way into a compromise that doesn't fix the problem.

Peer Pressure

If the player is hostile to discussion of the problem, you're probably better off ditching him. This is a game, not an assignment. However, a lot of ground exists between hostility and fixing the problem, so more serious measures than a personal talk may be in order. Wait a few sessions to see if the player improves - many problems can't be fixed instantly.

If things don't improve to your satisfaction in a few sessions, the next step in the escalation of the solution is pretty easy. If the player is a genuine disruption, one or several of the other players will probably be grumbling as much as you when the "problem child" screws up. In fact, if you have a good relationship with the players, it's likely that one or more of them will have come to you with their problems. (Hint: If nobody even seems to notice when the problem player acts like a complete meathead, there's a good chance they're either all goofs or that the group is totally ingrown. In either case, it might be time to consider greener pastures.)

Real Problem Players

Sooner or later (probably sooner), you may have a total freak on your hands. He could be someone who intentionally disrupts the game just to spoil other people's fun. He could be someone who is too simple to understand the chronicle's subtle nuances. He could be someone who shows up to every session drunk. He could be someone who has so many issues that he can participate only by vicariously acting out the frustrations of his real life. These are just a few members of the savage, game-wrecking barbarian hordes who lurk in wait to join your game and screw things up.

The best thing to do with these prizewinners is to be selective about who you let into your game and never have to deal with them at all. The next best thing is ditch them. You're not a social worker or a therapist. You're storytelling for enjoyment, not to help people work through their problems. Gibbering monkeys do nothing but disrupt the narrative, alienate your other players and are generally just no fun at all. Save your stomach lining and the goodwill of your other players: Change where the game meets and don't tell the mook. If all your players are hounds, fold the game and find another group. Save your frustration for something that isn't supposed to be an entertaining pastime.

Tell the players who have complaints that you spoke with the problem player, and your pleas were in vain. Key phrases you should use are, "Maybe you can talk to him," or, "You're her friend, why don't you try to reach her?" Hopefully, the player will go to the miscreant and talk to him in a way you can't. The effect of several people performing the same job in the game, pressuring the problem player to modify his behavior in a positive fashion, will (in theory) reach where you as Storyteller cannot.

You may not always want to use peer pressure to bring an erring player back in line. If the problem player isn't part of the game's core social group, the pressure may be very negative or sound like the problem player should leave the game rather than reconsider his behavior. Basically, if you think the troupe is going to put the problem player in a trashcan and roll her down a flight of steps until she assents to do a better job playing her character, skip this step. Leaving aside the issues of legal exposure, nothing good is going to come into your game from the group version of telling someone how much they suck.

Smacks Upside the Head

The next step is the metaphorical slap upside the head during play. When the player indulges his problematic behavior, stop what you're doing and turn your attention directly to him. Tell him calmly that whatever he's doing is a problem and he should rein it in. If you have any sort of control over the game at all, play will instantly stop and all eyes will focus on the player.

If it works, the player will sink back, sheepish at having just been called out for the crime of goofiness. The player's performance is fairly sure to improve over the next few sessions. Over time, he may begin to slip back into old bad habits, but addressing the issue every three or four sessions will combine with pressure to do well to keep a mediocre player's bad habits on the road to improvement or at least under control.

If facing the problem head-on doesn't work, you'll precipitate an angry argument or a tearful flight from the room. In either sort of confrontation, stay rational. If the player wants to make it an argument, the choices are really, "Mend your ways or leave the game." Backbiting and recriminations have no place in it, so just don't let them in. Tearful flights from the room should be dealt with in an adult fashion. You may have just hurt someone's feelings very badly, or they could just be the kind of person who likes to win an argument with melodrama. If the former, do what you can to explain that it's not a personal attack, and if the latter, let them go off to their regular sulking partners.

Just don't skip right to the cattle prod of public censure or underestimate the effectiveness of scolding if it is used sparingly and well. When you make it clear that you expect people to perform, they will often surprise even themselves with their efforts. If you have the sense not to push your players around and abuse your power, when you actually use that authority, your disapproval gains a lot of weight. Also, just as an aside, your public praise can have just as much of an effect as your public disapproval: Don't forget to commend a good performance or a major improvement on a player's part, and perhaps reward significant progress with an experience point.

Out They Go

The final escalation after public censure is deciding that your original assessment was wrong, that the player is a monkey, and the only real solution is to drop them out of the game. Make no mistake, this is serious. Games and friendships can end when people start to play, "Who here is really my friend?" If you think it's going to be some sort of horrible three-month social drama, you might consider folding the game on some trumped-up excuse and starting something new a couple of weeks later with a different roster of players.

How exactly you get rid of obstructive players depends on how much of a scene they're going to make and if they're likely to twist your head off and use it as a soccer ball should they become unhappy. You should probably just talk to them privately, face to face, tell them that some irreconcilable differences exist and ask them to not come back. This can take some nerve. If they're going to snivel on your shoes or beat you into the hospital, you may wish just to drop them some e-mail about it, preferably with a while before the next

session, so you can handle all the acrimony before the next group meeting.

If things are really bad, and you have the support of your other players, you can always just announce that the game is folding and then reconvene it someplace else on a different night. It might be cowardly and rude, but again, this is supposed to be fun. Having your life turned upside down by two weeks of hysterical melodrama is probably not enjoyable. If you have to do some sneaky things to keep the game together, well, you might at least want to consider them.

Problem Player Types

Below is a catalog of problem players and the various ways that you as a Storyteller might want to deal with them. Keep in mind that not every problem player will fall into these groups. Most players have a couple of faults that they exhibit to vary degrees depending on their mood, the situation and how easily you're annoyed at the time. Really bad players can be so addled as to defy categorization and aren't worth the effort of taxonomy, anyway.

The Star

Creativity gone out of control, this player creates a tremendously detailed character. The character comes complete with detailed histories, biographical sketches, subplots, associated Storyteller characters, turn-ons, turn-offs, spring and autumn wardrobes and everything else that could conceivably be needed to portray the character as the focus of a Dickens novel. The player then wants you to become familiar with this material and incorporate it into your game. All of it. If the group is like this, it just means the game is immensely demanding to run. If just one or two of the players are like this, the game rapidly becomes their show, with the other characters as the supporting cast.

Solution: Dealing with a Star is harder than you'd think. Players who spend several hours a day detailing their characters generally want to see that hard work incorporated into the game. This is made more difficult by the fact that the material is often quite imaginative, it's just that there's too much of it to use without consuming the game. You're left with the choice of either running large numbers of solo stories for the character (and thus rewarding the player for disruptive behavior by giving them a central role in the game) or else just resolutely ignoring the fruits of the player's labor. This can potentially breed bad blood, but it's very difficult to tell this sort of player to stop, because the output is often high quality, and the player is acting on innocent motives. The best solution is to hopefully steer the player toward a blue-booking effort or perhaps rewarding their diligence by giving them a few bonus experience points if they keep a detailed record of the chronicle.

The Prodigy

Players invest a lot of love into their characters. Unsurprising, given that the character is the player's cool, supernaturally powerful alter ego in a fantasy world that exists just for the gratification of the players. When that character fails, the player sometimes experiences a profound feeling of disempowerment. Things like Willpower points exist to allow characters to succeed at the things the players really want, but some players are very sensitive about failure. These players generally either insist that you're short-changing them or just get angry and sulk. In either case, it's not good for the game, because it happens at critical moments.

Solution: Ideally, you would just say, "Grow the hell up." If the player has no reason to complain, then feel free to say it. Sometimes, however, the player will have at least some reason to sulk. It's essential that you not encourage players to throw tantrums when then don't get their way, but don't discount all player dissatisfaction as whining. Remember that as a Storyteller, you're there to facilitate an enjoyable game. While it can be horrible for the game if you just ignore the rules, it's just as bad to follow them dogmatically. If the game could be run straight from a book, you wouldn't need a human Storyteller.

The Freak

Some people confuse horror and disgust. Other people's parents didn't know enough to just ignore Junior when he stuck out his tongue and showed the family what he'd been eating. In either case, the result is someone who confuses roleplaying that makes the characters uncomfortable with descriptions and situations that make the other players uncomfortable. Lesbian incest and detailed gore-romps lead the way in a parade of poor taste. Some players may do this to be "mature" (that is, say things their parents wouldn't like), and others may do it just to creep out those unfortunate enough to bear witness. The end result serves no real purpose but to offend, take up time and be dumb.

Solution: Tell the player to stop, and refuse resolutely to get excited or offended. Because offensive things are almost always done to attract attention, the more you ignore it, the less the player is rewarded for bad behavior.

The Terminator

Be it with Feral-Claw-whirling, Celerity-boosted, kung fu action or with twin double-barreled twelve-gauges spewing Dragonsbreath hell, this player knows that the most important thing their character can do is kill things. In fact, almost any obstacle, real or perceived, will be met with a bullet or mighty blow. This is not only hard on the scenery, it's also hard on the plot. Every interrogation is the Saint Valentine's Day Massacre. Every Storyteller character, no matter how obviously powerful or critical to the plot, is beaten down and their wallet searched for clues.

Solution: Too many computer RPGs or hack-and-slash campaigns have left this player unable to tell the difference

between storytelling and a first-person shooter. Generally, outside the sort of carnivals of carnage that are their native environment, these characters don't last long. They normally make one brief, frenzied suicide run until the forces of sanity catch up with them, usually in the form of other players' characters.

Unfortunately, the games that make up these players' native environment have Chow-Yun-Fat-level body counts for players' characters as well as bad guys. When their characters are killed, these players will happily have another go at things, immediately. Some may even make up several characters ahead of time in preparation for their untimely demise; not too hard, as they're typically a carbon copy of the last character. On the good side, these players get bored easily. If you run things realistically and just have them automatically slay mortals in their path, they'll either start roleplaying to get out of the center of the mess they've caused, get tired of all this boring character interaction and leave the game by the third session or get killed. In the latter case, just tell them they're not suitable to the game or make the player wait another month until you get around to introducing their new character. By that time, they'll be long gone.

The Rules Lawyer

Your every judgment and ruling is recorded and meticulously filed in the mind or notebook of these players. They will extrapolate from these rulings, and when they attempt to do something ludicrous and derail the game, you will be told the day and time of all rulings you've made pursuant to the subject. The end result of this proof is inevitably that you have already in fact ruled in favor of the matter, and it is now irrevocable. It is difficult to describe the degree of irritation experienced when you must make perfectly sound and accurate rules judgments on the fly while running a five-player game.

Solution: If you've handled one of these players before, all the subsequent ones are a snap (assuming you know the game really well). To some extent, this player has a legitimate case. Yours rule interpretations define the way the world works. Players shouldn't have to guess what's going to happen when they do something elementary. On the other hand, these players are caught up in mastering the rules of the game and not in playing it. Reserve the right to change snap judgments after giving them some thought out-of-game. Reserve the right to contradict yourself. Reserve the right to change the way well-established things work if it's required to keep the game from breaking down. The Storyteller exists precisely because of the need to have human moderation and intervention. Do your job and keep things running smoothly and enjoyable for all concerned, and rationalize the results after the fact.

The Chump

It's inevitable that a player who has only minimal social skills will eventually decide to play a Ventrue ex-CIA interrogation specialist who was a high-society debutante prior to joining the Company. So what do you do when the slickest thing since Caine invented Presence is stumbling around in circles trying to introduce herself? This can be a serious disruption to a game, particularly if the group lets each character be unchallenged in their specialty.

Solution: If the player's social ineptitude is only marginal or if the group is willing to accept a certain amount of abstraction, you can use the player's attempts as an indication of general intent. Once you've determined the direction of their efforts, have the player make rolls using the character's social Abilities to determine how well the character performs. After all, the players don't have to shoot a gun with a certain amount of accuracy for their characters to hit in combat. Sometimes everyone needs to ask to make a roll because they aren't as good as the character. These folks just need to

do it more often than everyone else.

If the group doesn't tolerate abstraction of social situations or if the player has more serious social problems (like severe shyness or no understanding of how humans interact), this approach won't work so well. At the point where the bulk of the character's social interaction is simulated with dice, you really have to steer the player away from social roles. Try to encourage them to take combat or planning characters, rather than acting as the group's talking head. The whole reason for face-to-face storytelling is the interactivity. While using dice as a crutch is acceptable - that's why the systems exist - having the party's primary social character rolling out her every social encounter really defeats the point of the game.

The Dolt

Someone has to be the dullest knife in the drawer, and this player is that someone. Clues inevitably elicit mistaken conclusions. Interactions with Storyteller characters go in unexpected and unrewarding directions. These players usually learn about the plot via a slow, step-by-step explanation given to them by a fellow player roughly three seconds away from a homicide rap. Worse, these players are often very defensive about their lack of insight, and the tensions that develop between the group as a whole and its less mentally apt members can be very difficult to manage.

Solution: There's not much you can do about dumb players. If you're running a sophisticated or complicated game, it can be a real disruption to have one or more players unable to comprehend the point of the exercise. If someone's just a little slow, have them make some Intelligence + Whatever rolls, and toss out some clues - everyone needs hints now and again. Couch your revelations in statements like, "You realize that the priest may have been lying to you," to prod the player in the right direction. If you like the player, throw him the occasional bone of a non-mentally challenging situation where his character can shine.

If the player is dumber than a frog on a log, try to steer them toward characters who have similar shortcomings, but be subtle. People get defensive at phrases like, "You're too dumb to play a Tremere." Don't kick someone in the ego without expecting a response. Leave your egalitarian ideals at home: You're a Storyteller, not a social worker. Dumb players who are a serious disruption or a liability that a delicate narrative can't afford should be cut out of the group.

The Wallflower

This is the player, often new to gaming, with a case of terminal shyness. Quietly, she sits in the back of the group and watches the game go by. During periods when your game shifts into high-gear, everyone-shouting-at-the-top-of-their-lungs-to-be-heard mode, you may not even notice this player is present for 30 or more minutes at a time. This can

be quite disruptive when the player timidly sits out several turns of a major combat.

Solution: Don't confuse someone who is portraying a quiet character with a problem player. Not every vampire talks constantly. If it is the player and not the character playing her cards close to her vest, it can take a lot of work as a Storyteller to coax her out of her shell.

First, open up your game to a sincere, quiet, interested audience. A lot of really quiet players just want to watch the game unfold but can't do that without a character. Save yourself the disruption of a character whose player is really just there to watch, and soak up the ego boost of having spectators at your game. Once you get used to the idea of having them around, spectators who are quiet and non-disruptive are no problem at all. Just think of your game as avante garde theatre and don't get stage fright.

Second, make sure as Storyteller that you are doing your part. It is not intuitive to people raised with a conventional set of manners that the best way to make themselves heard in a shouting crowd is to shout louder. A lot of people become frightened or confused by the amount of talking out of turn that goes on in a game. Make sure you ask the players for their opinions and actions. You should already be trying to distribute your attention equitably. Assert yourself and let the quiet person get a word in edgewise over the loud-mouthed gumby telling you that she's also going to study the Ritual of Smash the Major Antagonist.

Meanwhile, take the player aside and explain to her that she must be assertive or that she will get trampled. Obviously, people don't just spring into a new social situation, but over the course of a few sessions, the player should start to express herself without prompting. Make it clear to the player that you won't be there to support her forever. You may lose some players this way, but eventually you have to take off the training wheels.

The Veteran

It is a natural human urge to tell stories. Unfortunately, some people have problems restraining this urge. Any event in play (or any event at all, in the worst cases) is a sufficient excuse for this player to launch into an extended war story about a past chronicle, the player's military exploits or any one of 10,000 other topics. This is made worse by the fact that the recitation is usually delivered with sufficient volume to drown out the voices of more focused players.

Solution: There is no game session without kibitzing. The average session will probably run between a fifth and a third digression, particularly if the players are part of a social group that doesn't assemble very often outside of the game. Try to set aside some time at the beginning of the session for people to socialize. If the group takes a meal break, let it be a fairly long one to allow more time for socialization. During play, become familiar with the use of the words "let's keep

the game moving." Like acting out, telling stories is a way to be the center of attention. If you and all the players stop dead, look coldly at the disrupter, sigh lightly and ask if you could please get on with the game now, you'd be surprised how many people fall in line.

The Loathsome Quoter

Compulsive digression is at least amusing when you haven't yet heard the stories fives times each. However, you and everyone in your group may well have heard everything Yoda and those wacky guys from Monty Python have to say. Nevertheless, it is almost certain that you will get to hear it again (and again, and again) at the hands of the Loathsome Quoter. What exactly makes the abuse of flaccid, stock gamer humor such a critical part of some people's storytelling experiences is unknown. Whatever the cause, you can bet that when a character rushes to the side of his former mortal love, now a withered and sickly old woman, a voice will echo from across the room "When 900 years old you be.." totally destroying the moment.

Solution: Tell the player to stop quoting Highlander at inappropriate moments. Dock her experience points if she doesn't. Invite her to leave if she continues to do so. Quoting is a vile habit and encourages inbred thinking.

The Two-Fisted Coward

A more specialized version of the player whose character is too cool to fail, this player wants his character to be at the center of all the exciting stuff but not to take any of the consequences for being the person to press the button. He will insist on being at the head of any situation, until it goes terribly wrong, at which point he will inform you that he never took part. This will annoy you, and the resultant arguments can waste an awful lot of time.

Solution: Make sure you're describing the scene well enough for the players to all visualize it in a roughly similar fashion. Make sure to ask everyone where their character stands when some critical event begins unfolding, and keep track of people's location. Nobody wants to be told she's in the killing zone after having taken special precautions not to be there. When it finally comes down to it, you're the arbiter, your word is law. If you say a character was leaning over the crypt when the Tzimisce elder reached up to yank someone into the coffin, that character becomes so much dust under the elder's fangs. End of story. Don't abuse the powers of Storyteller omnipotence.

The Player Slayer

Any time in-character actions or relationships start mirroring out-of-character relationships, problems are developing in your game. They may fester for a long time before manifesting, or they may be as instantaneous as someone starting a new character to "get" the character who killed the slighted player's last character. In either case, you're going to have problems with game continuity.

Real-world stuff happens, and things like falling outs and budding romances among your players aren't really your business as a Storyteller. However, when characters in a long-established continuity suddenly change attitudes to mirror the feelings of their players, that threatens the game, and that is your business.

Solution: This one is a potential game-killer. People are going to have lots of strong, irrational feelings. You don't have the right to dictate personal lives and feelings, but you can damn well take the players in question aside and insist privately that they either play nice in-game or that both of them are going to hit the bricks. The words "grow up" might be employed to some effect. Do not, under any circumstances, play favorites. Other than this, all you can do is play damage control and figure out how to keep the game going with one or more characters suddenly gone or dead.

The Cardboard Character

Some people confuse playing a unique and individualized character with playing the last member of a dying race. Others have no intention of actually playing a character but have a staggering list of guns and swords listed on their sheet. These are the players who will beg you to let them play a Baali, a Cappadocian, a shapeshifting vampire alligator with true magic or a character "like the guy in Highlander, except he has twin silver katanas and a pair of Ruger Redhawks loaded with Glaser rounds. And an Uzi.

Plus, he's laserproof and invisible."

Solution: The player may simply want kewl powerz or to be able to full-auto her way through problems that would otherwise require thought. More likely, she doesn't understand that what makes a character unique isn't the implausibility of the character's backstory or some berserk capacity for martialry. While you should pretty much just learn to say no, don't be too quick to pull the plug on your player's creativity. Being a Lasombra antitribu or an arms broker isn't going to somehow destroy your game.

The problem is when the character is either a collection of powers/equipment cobbled together for no reason but killing things or the personification of an improbable backstory, devoid of any real personality other than clan stereotypes and a two-dimensional persona ripped off of a syndicated cable science-fiction series. You can generally tell the difference between the monkeys and the players looking to do something interesting. Use your judgement, but don't forget that you have the right as Storyteller to veto crud, no matter how long the player labored over cobbling together a list of Soldier of Fortune's favorite models.

The Loremaster

This player cannot refrain from thinking of the game in mechanical terms. Any demonstration of supernatural ability will send the player scurrying through a stack of books trying to figure out precisely what power it could have been. These players are often Rules Lawyers and will generally use a plethora of proper nouns from other World of Darkness games; for example, "Why, every neonate in the Tremere clan learns that South America was once inhibited by shapeshifting bats called Camazotz that were tainted by the malefic supernatural entity the Garou know as the Wyrm!"

Solution: The amount of damage these players can do to the atmosphere of the game at critical and dramatic points is enormous. Compulsive taxonomists compete with the slobbering combat junkies and Monty Python quoters for the bottom-feeder niches of the gaming ecology. Tell the player to stop, penalize him experience if he won't, and ask him to leave the game if he still refuses to desist. Nothing ruins a game's mood like an obnoxious player rudely revealing the puppet's strings.

The X-Factor

For this player, the scheduling of the game is a matter to be determined on a week by week basis based on the time that is most convenient for planning her day. She may arrive an hour or more late or may just never show up at all.

Solution: Attendance is not an optional thing for a storytelling game. While everyone has to cancel now and again, a player who can't manage to show up on a regular basis is best told to just save herself the occasional trouble and not show up at all. One easy way to combat this is to make a player show up for two or three sessions of "observing" an established game before you let her create a character. If the player can't make it through two or three concurrent sessions without an absence, she doesn't need to bother with a character.

The Copycat

This is perhaps likened to a very peculiar form of hero worship or emulation. A player will find either another player or a character he really likes and admires and set out to have their character become like the other player's. Either he will ask to create a new character in the image of the idol or else begin adopting more and more of the character's habits. This also covers people who incessantly play characters from movies, comics, books or other sources than their own mind.

Solution: If done because the player is conveying a character's hero worship, this is tremendously cool. If done because the player is suffering from hero worship, it's disturbing. It can mean a player is having personal problems or self-confidence issues that, if you're a friend, you may want to talk to him about. It could just mean that he sees something he idolizes in that player or character. It can also be that the player isn't a terribly original thinker or is convinced that he can't have cool ideas, so he feels compelled to lift them from someplace else.

Personal issues aside, you're mostly interested in the fact that one of your players is assiduously stealing the schtick of another. If that's impermissible by the house rules of the game, you need to talk to the emulating player about it. A lot of these players flit from emulation to emulation, and there's really no help for them, except to convince them that that it's a bad idea to steal from movies or other players rather than making up their own material.

Storytelling Degeneration

All vampires exist on the brink of self-destruction. A very few wrong steps and a vampire becomes a ravening monster driven completely by hunger and primal urges. The constant struggle to maintain any sort of ethical system in the face of the Beast's temptations is one of the central themes of Vampire: The Masquerade: A Beast I am, lest a Beast I become. This section offers practical advice on storytelling that theme as it relates to specific actions in the course of play.

The vast majority of vampires follow some form of Humanity, so most of this discussion centers on Humanity. The Paths of Enlightenment create some special opportunities and problems of their own, covered after the general principles.

Knowing What You Know

Whenever you take up themes of suffering, failure and loss, you should know what understanding of the real world and of

your fictional inspirations you bring to bear. Most people who enjoy storytelling games are relatively young men and women. Very likely, whatever we know about the long, slow weight of decades (and centuries) we've learned from the accounts of others and acts of imagination on our part, rather than experience. Some of us have gone through horrible tragedies and learned the hard way how surprising anyone's reactions can be in the depths of a crisis. Others of us have led lives with a fairly high level of comfort, with suffering pretty much confined to the minor stresses of middle-class existence at the end of the century. The odds are good that you have not suffered permanent debilitation, chronic illness, prolonged starvation, torture, exile or any of the other major challenges that lead people into moments of moral doubt. Then again, enough roleplayers lead unusual lives that it'd be unwise to assume here that your experience of tragedy is all second-hand.

Only you and your players know what your situation is. Whatever it is, there are some things you can do to prepare yourself. You can and should mine your own experience for insights; you should also put human history and literature to date to work for you. Study tragedy. Wherever possible, go see great plays performed or at least watch them on film and video, rather than just read them. Look at the story of Oedipus for foredoomed calamity, Julius Caesar's as an example of good intentions misinterpreted, Richard II's rise and fall for ego wed to folly, Richard III's horrific progress for the calculated choice of villainy and so on. Worldviews change, but some aspects of the human condition don't. Make use of the accumulated efforts by past generations to make artistic sense of moral collapse; you aren't the first to try it, and you don't have to invent everything for yourself. Adapt and arrange.

Don't confuse the game with reality. The experience of playing and storytelling vampiric struggle can tell you things about the real world. Most of what truths you may discover will be symbolic and metaphorical. Be careful not to assume that you know it all once you've played various in game challenges through to success or failure. We tend to surprise ourselves when the real crisis arrives, for good or ill. You may better understand the options available, but there comes a point where no amount of storytelling really prepares you for confrontation with your own limits or tells you the inner truth of another's experience. Storytelling is sometimes very potent entertainment; just remember that it is entertainment, albeit of an engaging and complex kind. Take the lessons as far as they go, but no further.

Humanity

Every vampire was human once. He learned notions of right and wrong, whether by accepting the teachings adults and authority figures offered him or by rejecting them in favor of his own ideas. He died in the Embrace, became a vampire and had to adjust his values to suit his new existence. The potentially endless conflict between his condition in unlife and the ideals he developed in life provides fertile ground for storytelling.

How Much Goodness?

Humanity as presented in Vampire is an abstraction, folding together countless individual beliefs into a general framework. It is a measure of the relationship between the Beast and the Man - it is not a general assessment of how "nice" a vampire is. Not every vampire who follows Humanity follows it to the same degree. The lower a given character's Humanity score, the more prominent the Beast is to her.

For instance, a Humanity 8 vampire and a Humanity 5 vampire who go feeding together and accidentally kill their vessels are likely to have very different reactions. The Humanity 8 vampire worries. Is she turning into a conscienceless killer? If she fails to maintain self-control in this matter, where else must she worry about losing control? The unintended death challenges her notion of who she is, and forces her to confront her conscience. Her player should make a Conscience roll. (See **Vampire: The Masquerade** p. 221.) The Humanity 5 vampire, on the other hand, takes it in stride. His sense of himself as a being with self-control allows for occasional mistakes. He may well kick himself for practical reasons, like the difficulties of disposing of the body, but it doesn't stir him to the core.

Work out with your player how strongly a given vampire wants to be more humane than he is. One Humanity 5 vampire may take the accidental killing completely in stride, while another looks back wistfully on the nights when he didn't have to drink blood to survive and wishes that at least he could avoid killing people. Neither answer is "right" or "wrong." The Humanity rating measures which acts the vampire can take in stride without feeling moral degeneration; it doesn't set limits on what the vampire aspires to.

Neither living people nor vampires agree on the merits of every element in the Hierarchy of Sins. Some moral systems make selfishness a positive virtue rather than a vice, while others teach that there is no such thing as legitimate ownership of any physical property and therefore no such thing as theft. As Storyteller, take some time to review with your player how she thinks of her character - Humanity is a sliding scale governed by you. The more you know about how the character has seen the world in the past and how she sees it now, the better you can make the process of degeneration and derangement a real challenge. Through narrow-minded literalism, you can punish characters more or less at whim, since nearly anything can seem dreadful when properly interpreted. Through overly generous impulses and inattention you can make Humanity meaningless, no obstacle at all to vampiric self-indulgence. Better storytelling lies in between those extremes.

It's important you and your players know how much emphasis you want to put on the struggle against degeneration. There are no bad choices, only ones that make the story more or less enjoyable. Conflicting assumptions do more to undermine gaming pleasure than

almost anything else. Think about what you want, talk with players about what they want, and work out an agreement.

The Narrow Way

Just as some classic vampire fiction does, you can put degeneration front and center. The large-scale issues and conflict of Kindred society fade into the background, most of the time; when you want to examine the souls of the characters in depth, it's good to look closely at their nightly routine and immediate circumstances. A chronicle focused on the loss of Humanity almost certainly heads toward tragedy. In the long run, vampires lose. Don't get started unless you know that you and your players are prepared to deal with the themes of sacrifice and failure. This can be an extremely rewarding style of storytelling, but it's not for everyone. As another suggestion, a story can focus on the scions of Kindred society and their morality. If you and your players want to deal with the personal side of power, run a chronicle dealing with princes, archons, justicars or other prominent members of the night society. A chronicle of this sort lends itself to interaction with the metaplot, since these characters must respond to and make decisions about the unfolding crises of the Final Nights. They pay a heavy price for their power in the loss of their souls, through constant compromise and betrayal of ideals in the pursuit of advantage.

In the narrow interpretation of Humanity, every failure counts. Judge each lapse harshly. Characters should judge their own failures equally harshly, with sharp, painful awareness of once again falling from what they once were. (Some vampires were fiendish men and women, taking existence for granted. Now that they know how fragile their hold on Humanity really is, they aim for a standard of moral purity that has become more important than anything they cared about in life.)

The simplest aspects of Kindred existence pose moral problems. Feeding presents constant risks, and isn't there something fundamentally selfish about preying off another's vital fluids? Can any mortal genuinely consent, given the vampiric advantages in manipulation, and if not, isn't every feeding a form of assault or rape? Moralistic vampires worry about that. Havens create other problems. No government in the world has tax categories for "vampire," so some sort of deception must occur. Does the vampire lie to officials himself or persuade others to do it for him? Are the countless small lies surrounding vampire existence among mortals a form of fraud? Do they constitute injury? And if a vampire sets out on a course she knows will deprive others of the use of their resources as they intend, is that a form of intentional property damage?

The modern age generally doesn't give much respect to claims of morality on any scale larger than the individual. Vampires who try talking about their problems to anyone else risk dismissal as worrisome kooks.

Morality isn't the exclusive domain of Puritans and Victorians, however. The old-time Mafia practiced a code that was, in its way, very strict indeed: Mafiosi could do almost anything to each other, with minimal justification, but punished offenses against innocent bystanders harshly. Even conflicts with the police remained (in theory, if not always in practice) purely professional. A Mafioso's version of Humanity might be quite a bit different from that of a Japanese salaryman, but he'd take the loss of control just as seriously. The Mafia's code checks his own impulses and gives structure to his existence.

The narrow way doesn't require any particular moral system. It requires that the morals be clearly defined and that they not amount to "do whatever you want, except don't do this stuff you wouldn't want to do anyway." The conflict against the Beast means fighting against desires that seem very attractive.

Most vampires cope with the problem of unattainable standards by "defining deviancy down," accepting limitations as imposed on them by their condition. They give up aspirations. Note that this doesn't have to mean changing their actual Humanity score. A Humanity 6 vampire who used to dream of finding redemption through selfless service to others gives up the hope of doing so on any sort of regular basis. Her actual behavior doesn't change, only the way she thinks about. You and your players should take advantage of these storytelling opportunities whether or not any numbers on character sheets change. The mechanics exist to serve the task of telling interesting stories about interesting characters; the stories and characters sometimes flourish while leaving the numbers behind. The loss of hope may lead to acts that court degradation, but only indirectly, in that people who find themselves without hope often commit desperate acts while searching for a new anchor.

The Limits of the Code

Some moral systems don't go all the way to 10. Nobody really holds "Humanity" as an abstract concept; people hold specific ideas about right and wrong. It simply won't occur to many people to codify some entries on the Hierarchy of Sins for Humanity as problems. There are no Humanity 10 corporate raiders: If they become filled with zeal for a (morally) better life, sooner or later they have to move to another code of conduct. The same holds true for the vast majority of worldviews in every society.

As Storyteller, it's your job to have the final say about how far a particular worldview can take a vampire in pursuit of moral perfection.

Some players may object that this is judgmental. They're right. You are making a decision about the scope of a moral philosophy. You're simply doing it in the course of the game. Feel free to point out to players that your judgment applies only to vampires dealing with the Curse of Caine, and that unless there's something very remarkable about your players, the same judgment doesn't apply to them. Humanity is a game system, not a tangible real-world code.

Sometimes a player has in mind a concept that requires adjustment to the standard Hierarchy of Sins. Feel free to make the changes necessary, as long as everyone involved agrees on what you're doing. A violent punk probably feels little qualm about theft from some targets and the destruction of some people's property, while caring very much about what happens to compatriots and whoever fits the definition of "the oppressed" in her estimation. She cares about selfishness when it hurts her comrades, not when it affects outsiders who still buy into the social values she hopes to overthrow. A tribal chieftain who's survived to the Final Nights may have never accepted the notion of personal property but may have views on privacy and social role that provide comparable sins he must guard against. As long as the revised hierarchy actually does provide restrictions the vampire must take seriously, modify it as much as necessary. The scale should slide to accommodate the individual - it's designed to be malleable, so you can make the most versatile use of it.

The Broad Way

Degeneration may occupy space at the side of your chronicle rather than the center. Vampires should always feel some pressure to draw a line against the Beast, but it may usually be nothing more than a dull push in the back of their minds. The typical vampire hits a point of balance and stays there for years or decades on end, sliding down slowly.

Yes, Humanity can take a back seat in your chronicle. However, Vampire is written with the struggle between Beast and Man in mind. We won't explore the options involved in storytelling a chronicle that has minimal emphasis on morality, but that option is always open to you. Be careful, though - stories that do not make vampires accountable for their actions can easily become little more than slugfests and hack-and-slash.

Humanity and the Ages

Neonates

Few vampires lived as moral paragons before their Embrace; most begin at Humanity 7 or a point or two below that. Not many vampires start at 4 or below. Such folk tend to strike prospective sires (even among the Sabbat) as too wild to manage or simply too monstrous. When they do become vampires, they tend to run amok down into Wassail in short order. Vampires who begin with Humanity of 8 or above, on the other hand, sometimes find existence as Kindred intolerable and destroy themselves or arrange for someone else to destroy them.

Many neonates dabble with the idea of adhering to a very strict moral code as a means of coping with the Kindred condition. Few keep it up for very long before finding it not just difficult but dull and not very rewarding. A persistent handful drive themselves to Humanity 8 or higher.. and many meet tragic ends. Kindred with Humanity that high have as many difficulties mingling with human beings as very low-Humanity Kindred and also find themselves alienated from the company of other vampires. The slightest slip sends the moral crusader tumbling down. It's all too common for a vampire to plunge from Humanity 9 to Wassail in a matter of nights, given a crisis that forces the vampire to deviate just once in a marked way from her personal code.

Most neonates settle down into a stable condition of Humanity 5-7. It takes some effort to maintain this position. Kindred have to make some effort to survive at all, so this doesn't make things any more difficult than the vampire's nightly regimen in most cases. But these staid sorts are not the focus of your story...

Ancillae

After their first century of unlife, many vampires begin to lose their hold on morality. All the living people they cared about are probably dead, and a great deal of morality hinges on the sense of personal obligation. Larger-scale ideals must sustain them now, ideals that seldom seem very important in the face of an eternity of parasitism. Self-preservation becomes the dominant concern for almost all ancillae.

Note that the pursuit of self-interest does not require the ancillae to wantonly slaughter everyone else. Allies have pragmatic value. So does a good reputation. Many careful ancillae work to regain lost Humanity not so much because they really care about the principle as because they find it serves their ends - keeping the Beast at bay. It adds enough opportunities and benefits to be worth the hassle.

Elders

Vampires more than a few centuries old often tend toward extremes. Either they can mingle undetected among most mortals, guarded by a tightly clenched moral code, or they're profoundly inhuman creatures who cannot enter the mortal world at all without fear of detection and panic. By definition, no elder is mediocre. It takes great force of will to survive through all the challenges the centuries present. Whatever outlook the elder holds, he holds it with fervor. Arguing with him about it tends to produce bad results for the arguer.

Elder perspectives on Humanity tend toward the highly idiosyncratic. They make major issues of challenges that everyone else takes in stride and then show no qualm about horrific acts. Moderately aware younger vampires often perceive such customized versions of Humanity as inscrutable. A careless remark to that effect generally results in a destroyed younger vampire. Vampires more than about 600 years old may remember the years of the Inquisition, when inhuman vampires who couldn't blend in attracted the attention of mortal hunters and the shocking majority of all Kindred in existence perished. Before the Inquisition, vampires found one Kindred per 1,000 mortals a fine, sustainable ratio. After the Inquisition, one Kindred per 100,000 mortals seemed safer. It took self-control to survive that time, and even in the Sabbat, elders almost all agree that moral strength made the difference between unlife and Final Death.

Regaining Humanity

It's much easier to make mistakes than to fix them. The standard way to regain lost Humanity is with experience points (see Vampire: The Masquerade, p. 135). For satisfying storytelling, though, the experience point expenditure should follow after some significant in-game effort.

First, the character must realize that he's losing control over his soul and that he needs to work to beat down the Beast. You might think this would be self-evident, with characters not just spontaneously developing new moral courage on a whim. Experience shows that it doesn't hurt to be explicit about it. Until the character shows an awareness of the problem, feel free to disallow any expenditure toward raising Humanity.

Second, the character must make a sustained effort to improve. The period of time and the threshold of moral excellence you set go a very long way to determine the tone of the game.

- Taking no risks vs. not failing. If you require a character trying to regain Humanity to take no actions that require a degeneration check, you make improvement of any kind very hard. If you require that the character not fail any degeneration checks during recovery, then you allow for the presence of temptation while still holding the character to a standard of generally consistent behavior.
- The long road vs. the longer road. If you require the character trying to recover Humanity to spend nights or weeks without degeneration checks (or at least without failing any), you impose significant constraints on his freedom of action but provide a clear and readily obtainable goal. If the character must go months or years before gaining the opportunity to attempt recovery, then the vast majority of vampires will simply come to terms with their sins, leaving self-improvement to the fanatical few.
- Certain vs. uncertain progress. If you allow the player to spend experience points and reap the benefit after the character goes through a period of self-discipline, then you establish that the road to

moral progress is fairly clear and distinct. Vampires can know about how much effort it takes and weigh costs against benefits. If you require the player to spend experience points but then make a degeneration (or rather regeneration) check, rolling the character's current Humanity against a difficulty of the desired higher rating, before allowing the increase, then you make all future progress uncertain. Vampires tend to regard it as a lost cause or at least too fraught with peril to be worth it in most cases.

The "standard" answers are that the character must avoid failing degeneration checks, must spend a few nights or weeks per dot of current Humanity and receives the increase automatically when the player spends experience points. How many complications you add should depend on how tragic a feel you want and how central you want moral exertion to be. If progress seems too difficult, characters and players just won't bother, so if you want it to make it a challenge and an emphasis, make progress hard, but reward effort often enough to keep players and characters from losing hope.

The Paths

Vampires who hold some form of Humanity don't face the Beast altogether alone. Although they lose touch with much of their living condition as the years pass, something of what they learned and experienced while breathing under the sun remains. Some vampires choose to turn their backs completely on the mortal condition, not just letting it fade, but actively rejecting it. These vampires adopt one or another of the Paths of Enlightenment.

Rejecting Humanity doesn't allow the vampire to wish away the Beast as easily. Without some system of conduct to measure himself by, the vampire who no longer holds to Humanity doesn't just fall into Wassail, he generally rockets down at record speed. The Beast exploits all of his desires and takes control for the final rampage.

The Paths of Enlightenment reflect the efforts of inhuman vampires to keep their Beasts in line. The Paths are artificial in ways Humanity isn't, not evolved over generations of living trial and error, but arranged piece by piece as if in a laboratory. The Paths have no margin for error: Vampires on the Paths seek to replace all their accumulated subconscious impulses with a deliberately chosen code of conduct that starts by rejecting mortal mores. Each Path provides a rigid framework that supports the vampires who attach themselves to it, but which breaks and collapses the moment they start letting go. Vampires with Humanity have some opportunity to improvise and adjust, while vampires who wish to tinker with their Paths must rewrite the whole system at once (and deal with the Beast during the interval without moral guidelines, too).

How Much Enlightenment?

Like their counterparts dedicated to Humanity, vampires who adopt a Path may not adopt it in its entirety. A particular vampire may not even know the full extent of the Path, depending on how much her sire and other Path moralists told her. She may regard some of what she does know as remote and abstract, not relevant to any conditions she expects to find herself in. Not every Path follower is a paragon of that Path's virtues (or Virtues).

For instance, a young Ravnos Embraced frivolously for her particular criminal aptitudes begins studying the lore of her lineage and adopts the Path of Paradox. She grasps the basics at the outset, and develops a Path rating of 6 or so in short order. The higher steps of the Path elude her, however. A woman herself, she may never come to terms with the notion of Embracing women as a sin: If someone hadn't done it to her, she'd never have been able to pursue this enlightenment at all! Likewise, since she comes from outside any jati and yet clearly shows a good measure of enlightenment, the sin of Embracing outside the jati seems silly to her. She's committed to the principles of the Path. She accepts that elders find these things violations of those principles. She simply doesn't feel she has to think they're 100 percent correct every time. Her Path rating likely never rises above 7 or even 6.

When dealing with a character on a Path, make sure that her player understands the ethics of the Path. The vampire must accept the ethics, even if she disagrees about each step of translating them into specific sins. Without some ethical framework, the Beast wins. It always wins. Vampires who adopt a Path must be aware of how precariously they balance. A vampire may not set out to become the model follower of her Path, but however far her vision takes her now, she must hold to those steps with ruthless tenacity.

Storytelling the Change

Don't let a character's movement from Humanity to a Path pass by without significant game-time attention. Yes, the mechanics for it are clear and straightforward. The numbers exist to mark a radical change in point of view, and any such drastic change in the character's soul belongs in play.

Very, very few vampires conceive the idea of abandoning Humanity all on their own. Some vampire already on a Path spots the character's potential and approaches to recruit him. Usually the character spends a fairly long time under surveillance before finding out what's going on. Use this time to develop a little paranoia and suspicion, if you want. In particular, characters with high Auspex should have some sense of impending loss and gain without understanding what it might mean.

The approach itself brings the character face to face with changes in himself he may not have recognized and may not want to accept. Vampires on Paths don't make their approaches lightly, and the recruiter won't step out of the shadows until fairly certain the recruit will accept. The period

leading up to this provides many opportunities for sophisticated storytelling, as the player needs to keep his own knowledge of the character's condition separate from what the character knows about himself.

Then comes the change itself. The character must work his way down to Humanity 3. That's not just a matter of jaywalking, cheating on taxes and using the wrong salad fork. Vampires with a Humanity rating of 3 may routinely engage in mental, physical and social violence. They probably lack any meaningful tie to human or even Kindred society at all. To deliberately reach this condition, the converting vampire must reject everything that once mattered to him, turning on neighbors, friends and allies alike for the sake of toughening his soul.

The change might not work. According to the mechanics in Vampire (p. 288) the player must make a roll when the character reaches Humanity 3. If the effort fails, the character can try to hit even deeper realms of degradation. The end result of it can easily be the complete destruction of the character's higher impulses and the total triumph of the Beast. For every vampire who moves to a Path, at least one more fails. As Storyteller, you are not obligated to make such a radical change easy or automatic. Make sure that the player understands the risks before proceeding, so as to give the character a chance to decline. Once the process begins, play it through and see where it goes; don't intervene to force an outcome.

TRUST NO ONE

A vampire who wants to learn more about the Paths, particularly if he's the subject of a recruitment effort, must proceed very carefully when trying to find information. Most elders prefer to err on the side of caution and treat sudden interest in the Paths as signs of a planned betrayal, punishable by destruction. Young vampires generally know a mishmash of partial truths and Kindred urban legends. (Feel free to make up interesting false stories to tell. The weirder they are, the more plausible they may seem. Every age accuses its dissenters of infant sacrifice, conspiring against the oppressed and general moral turpitude.) As with the process of change itself, provide characters and players with a little context. Most sires teach their childer that some questions really ought not be asked. As long as players know the risks, the hunt for someone with the relevant lore makes an enjoyable counterpoint to the (witting or otherwise) march away from Humanity.

chapter five: Alternate settings

The world is too big and too intricate to conform to our ideas of what it should be like... The world is confusing, and just because we invent myths and theories to explain away the chaos we're still going to live in a world that's older and more complicated than we'll ever understand.

- Moby

Vampires are eternal, unchanging creatures, defined more by their predatory needs and nightly battles than any other trait. A vampire Embraced in Renaissance Italy may still prefer the fashions of his home era and region and would likely decorate his haven in the Renaissance style, play Renaissance music and so on. An elder who succumbs to this stasis is a doomed creature, as likely to fall to hunters trained to spot such anachronisms as to anarchs looking for a quick route to power. The Kindred must adapt over time - or die again. This, along with the Beast, is a difficult challenge to overcome. It also makes for great stories over long stretches of time as characters grow from neonates fresh from the Embrace to elders waging centuries-old Jyhad against rivals as potent as they.

The Kindred's power grows over the centuries, and blossoms to a truly terrifying degree. Such a creature survives night to night on the depth of her cunning and the strength of her will. A creature with potentially superhuman intelligence and infinite patience can be dangerous. Her immortality also makes it possible to play her (or others like her) in nearly any setting imaginable.

Vampiric legends date all the way back to Biblical times, when Caine, cursed by God and banished from his family, built the city of Enoch. He created his childer, and they created their childer and so on.. and thus we see the world as it is tonight. The Storyteller can use this history as a backdrop against which to place her stories. Vampires fit in everywhere from Ancient Greece to Victorian England, all points in between and extending beyond both eras. A fulfilling, long-term chronicle can be played out in its entirety in the Roman Empire or Hammurabi's court. Indeed, it's possible to run a chronicle set only in the 1960s. Pick a time period and explore it. Explore the events, cultures and people of the time. A game set in one era can be thematically stronger than one laid out against the ages.

However, a Storyteller need not ground her entire chronicle in one given setting. A chronicle set in the modern nights may do well to "take a break" and illustrate the beginning of an elder's vendetta in Colonial Africa. A troupe may enjoy experiencing firsthand their prince's rise to power, hidden behind the events of the Louisiana Purchase. A shadowy nemesis may have come in contact with a character's sire during the Long Night. Alternate settings work well not only

as extended chronicles, but as dramatic vignettes in any chronicle at all.

Alternate Time Periods

Vampire chronicles can be set in any era. The following is a basic Vampire history lesson. Take it for what it's worth - it's fairly incomplete, but it isn't intended as anything more than a primer. If you want to run a chronicle set in these time periods, go to the library or bookstore, pick up the pertinent books and study, study, study.

One peculiar aspect of the Vampire setting is that as humans gain greater ability to fight the Kindred, the vampires weaken by generation. In the Second City, the Antediluvians must have been as gods, but in modern nights, the typical anarch barely has blood strong enough to sire childer. In theory, earlier time periods mean more powerful characters. Be careful not to let character power overwhelm the story, though. Allow the story to accommodate such power, and expect it, but don't let your players use such potent forces to derail the game. One important point to consider is that in earlier ages, a greater percentage of vampires were aware of each other than in later times. Caine, the Second Generation and the Antediluvians all knew each other personally. The most ancient of the Fourth Generation knew one another and the Antediluvians: It's much harder for Reushka, fourth-generation Brujah, to rampage all over the landscape when three or more others of equal or greater power wait to stop her.

Finally, feel free to take any historical event and change it. From there, you can develop a world even further removed from the World of Darkness. What would have happened had the Great Khan not died, causing the Mongol hordes to retreat to Asia and cease their invasion? What if the Spanish Armada hadn't been destroyed by storm? Would England have become subject to Spain? Ask these questions, research the events, and create your own answers. One such answer can fuel years of satisfying play.

Prehistory

Vampire acknowledges no Cainites in prehistory, but don't let that stop you - at least if you really want to do this. It's possible to postulate some sort of proto-vampire, perhaps doomed souls forced to wander the landscape and drink the blood of men. Maybe these creatures, lacking Lilith's tutelage, never learned how to pass along the Curse or develop powerful Disciplines (like, say, past the fifth dot). Such a vampire would be a weak creature by Kindred standards, but still a relative god to the mortals around him.

Each such prehistoric vampire would exist because of a curse levied, by god, man or spirit for terrible crimes (like, say, the murder of one's brother).

If such vampires ever existed, it's unlikely that any survived beyond the spreading of Caine's curse. Perhaps the Crone in the Book of Nod was such a creature? Is it also possible that Caine, his childer and grandchilder exterminated all such early vampires? Or that they still stalk the Earth, in forgotten or secret domains?

It's strongly suspected that the Wan Xian existed long before the Cainites appeared, so a prehistoric Kindred of the East game is also a viable possibility.

Enoch (Early Biblical)

Enoch, the "First City" of Cainite legend, could be anything. Was it a primitive village or a grand city? In his loneliness, Caine creates three childer - Enoch the Wise, Zillah the Beautiful and Irad the Strong. In turn, bestowing favor or curse, the Second Generation brought several into unlife. Caine's law places the limit at one Cainite for every three mortals - thus making a very populous city of undead. The humans of Enoch gave worship and service to the Cainites, and this may have given rise to a few ancient Middle Eastern cults.

Vampire-worship and the open interaction between Cainite and kine defied God's curse upon Caine. In response, God sends the Great Flood to wash Enoch away. The Flood kills most vampires and forces the survivors to fend for themselves until human culture can rise again.

It's unknown how many childer the Second Generation Embrace within Enoch's walls or how long they thrive before the Flood comes. Enoch is wide open territory for a chronicle, with a lot of uncharted territory - The Book of Nod provides supposedly firsthand material on what unlife is like in Enoch, what Caine's laws are and the ultimate destruction which follows.

Enochian characters are Third Generation (or even Fourth - can the Third Generation sire such thin-blooded creatures? It's likely that the Second Generation - or Caine - would kill any such pitiful wretch who dared cross their path). The humans worship the characters as gods (or servants and messengers to the gods), but they are still subject to their sires' (and Caine's) whims. The Third Generation (not yet Antediluvians, as the Great Flood has not yet occurred) have yet to master the power inherent to their potent vitae.

Most will not get the chance: Within a few centuries (How many? It's the Storyteller's choice. History here is left deliberately vague), the Great Flood will destroy Enoch, obliterate most of the Third Generation and drown most of humanity, leaving only a few to pick up the pieces after the waters recede. No Cainite weaker than those of the Third Generation is known to have survived the Deluge.

Enoch is unique in Cainite history. It exhibits a few similarities to modern cities: Caine's word is law among vampires, much as a prince's claim in the 20th century, for example. The differences, however, outweigh such minor bits of familiarity. A major difference lies in the Masquerade or lack thereof. Vampires are (as stated above) worshiped and revered by the humans around them, not hidden away. Most of the Third Generation is given the Embrace without Caine's consent. In a city so crowded with the undead, competition for resources is fierce and deadly. Rogue mortals take it upon themselves to rid Enoch of its unholy plague. Grim omens of the coming Flood slowly become prominent. Personality clashes are inevitable in Enoch as the Third Generation vie for their sires', or even Caine's, favor.

Enoch is unlike later cities in that it's active throughout the night, to accommodate the "gods'" needs, but humans are still primarily diurnal. Most nocturnal activity will be that of vampires or their servants. Torches and other open flames can provoke Rлtschreck, so most of the city is in darkness - a small hindrance to supernatural senses.

The Storyteller should be careful to avoid abuses of power. This shouldn't be too difficult, since the characters, no matter how powerful (individually or as a group), exist in a city where Caine rules literally as liege. Gratuitous abuse of the human or vampiric population or the breaking of Caine's laws will be met with vengeance from the Second Generation or Caine himself. It is not out of concern for human welfare that vampires would act to protect the mortals, but for fear of losing their sustenance. All of the usual vampiric problems are just as important in Enoch as during any other time - the Beast is a foremost concern for all vampires, thus making so many Cainites among so (relatively) few mortals a recipe for disaster.

When it comes to punishment, exile is distinct possibility. Cainites who break Caine's laws or relatively weak-blooded vampires may find themselves ejected from Enoch's relative safety, forced to find some other place of succor. Human settlements aren't numerous in this time, those that exist are lightly populated, and travel is extremely dangerous, far beyond any difficulties in later times. The possibility exists that exiled characters could come into conflict with the dreaded Lupines or older exiles who have established themselves (and thrived) elsewhere.

As a cautionary note, Enochian chronicles (and some suggestions below) require a significant amount of maturity on the troupe's behalf. Cainite history is not a litany of fireball-shooting psychotics blowing the hell out of the landscape. Think long and hard - two or three times - before deciding who to invite to such a game. Think a few more times before you decide whether you really want to run it. Cainite history is treacherous, mysterious, dark, dangerous and horrifying. It's not "Vampions" (ancient superheroes with fangs), nor is it necessarily about power-questing. If the primary motivation to play characters of the Third Generation is to "get 10 dots in my Disciplines," perhaps a different venue for aggressions might better serve the players.

The Second City (Post-Flood)

After the Flood, the surviving members of the Third Generation (now the Antediluvians) rose up en masse and destroyed their sires. These Antediluvians sought dominion over what the Second Generation once had.

When the waters shrink back to their former depths, humanity builds a new city upon (or near) Enoch's former site. The Antediluvians claimed rulership over this Second City. They had not yet learned their sires' lessons and Embraced many childer. The Fourth Generation, weaker than their sires, are appropriate characters for this time frame. The vampiric population again increases beyond the point where the mortal population can support it, and bloody feuds often break out between the coteries and broods of the Second City.

Caine curses each of the Antediluvians for their crimes of rebellion and hubris in striking down their own sires. From these curses come the weaknesses associated with each clan.

At some point, the Antediluvians realize that their childer are as much a threat to them as they were to the Second Generation. When this realization strikes, the Antediluvians retreat into hiding, waging Jyhad from secrecy and safety. It's possible that a coterie of the Fourth Generation successfully attacks and destroys (or commits Amaranth upon) one of the Third Generation. Such a murder by itself is sufficient to send the Antediluvians into hiding. Another possibility is that one of the Antediluvians fakes such a demise to drive his fellows into hiding, to make his own activities that much easier. Even more likely, the very threat of rebellion might drive the Third Generation into seclusion.

The potential for warfare among the Cainites or between Cainite and Canaille presents great opportunities for dramatic chronicles. To repeat an earlier point, be careful not to allow players to abuse character power. Cainite warfare (Jyhad) is a subtle, perfidious thing, with moves taking months or years to achieve fruition. You don't see Methuselahs duking it out in the streets, using their "exploding point technique" on each other, nor do you see them organizing armies to march against each others' strongholds. Jyhad is a quiet conflict, guided by secrecy and deception, and the time of the Second City is when it truly begins.

Classical/The Ancient World

The Second City falls and Cainites scatter to the four winds. The Fourth Generation sires the Fifth Generation to serve them (and set themselves up for another revolution. Don't they ever learn?). The ancient world presents a rich period for epic storytelling. Vampiric gatherings are rare and difficult to manage, but they can and do happen (witness Carthage, for example). A few vampires might band together for mutual protection or to accomplish some mysterious goal.

The ancient world spans Babylon, Phoenicia, Egypt (Khem), Hellenic and Hellenistic Greece, the Roman Empire, the founding of Israel, Carthage and countless other secret cultures and cities. A chronicle might cover the Brujah's founding of Carthage and its eventual fall to the Roman legions a millennium later. Many Cainites set themselves up as gods for worship and blood sacrifice - and several gods of the ancient world demanded blood. Many ancient cultures also saw human traits (and failings) in their gods. It's possible that Cainite feuds (equally as petty or titanic as any Olympian grudge) inspire some of these tales - such is the nature of the Jyhad.

Characters native to the ancient world are of the Fifth or Sixth Generations, often working for their sires, even more often existing on their own. Few survive the Embrace and the Beast to become another's pawn. Several Cainites develop reputations that span the known world.

Greece

Home to the city-states of Athens, Sparta and others, and birthplace to many philosophers, Classical Greece serves as the birthplace for what evolved into many modern ideas, such as democracy. This is true even for the Cainites. Elysium was born here to establish a safe place for vampires to interact and debate without fear of attack. Cainites who failed to support this new custom were often shunned, those who violated it, destroyed.

Carthage

Carthage is the Brujah's grand attempt to re-create Enoch, a city where Cainites could openly rule over mortals, accepting blood, sacrifice and worship. It is not the idyllic paradise many Brujah of later centuries paint - the human populace is required to sacrifice children to the city's "gods," and rumors of infernal ties divide the Cainites against each other.

Carthage stands for over a millennium. In that time, the Brujah within explored new levels of the vampiric condition - scholars discover new and potent applications of blood magic, others descend deeply into the Beast, hoping to gain understanding from the process. Some within find the conditions appalling and try to restore the city to a utopian path. Others, including many Brujah, push it further into depravity.

Throughout Carthage's existence, associated vampires travel the known world, describing the city's wonders to those they meet, recruiting undead into the Brujah's dream. Characters can spend decades seeking out other vampires hopefully sympathetic to their cause and trying to convince them to join.

Many vampires who hear of Carthage don't see it as a dream, but a nightmare. The tyranny of blood and death the Brujah hold over Carthage's mortal population is seen as an incitement for humans to rise up against their undead "masters." A few farsighted Cainites see how this can potentially lead to an uprising against vampires everywhere, most especially they themselves. These vampires work against Carthage, spreading rumors, ambushing recruiters and eventually infiltrating and undermining the city from the inside. When Carthage finally falls to the Romans, it is these agents who betray the city from within.

Alexander the Great

Alexander the Great, one of the greatest Western generals to ever lead an army, begins a campaign of unprecedented conquest which ends only with his death. He conquers Persia and marches his army into India. Alexander is a strategic and tactical genius, but much of his success comes from his subordinates (such as Cleitus the Black, who an inebriated Alexander executes when he points this out).

Neonates whose sires allow them little opportunity for personal accomplishment or advancement might choose to follow Alexander's army and take advantage of the chaos and disruption of existing power structures. Young Cainites could seek to establish power bases in newly conquered cities and nations. This isn't as easy as it looks - the chaos warfare inevitably brings can serve to soften the targets, but other vampires have power structures in place that may have survived centuries. Dislodging these elders from their homes is a dangerous, thrilling task and one well suited to stories and chronicles.

The Roman Empire

Arguably the greatest empire of the Western world, Rome, at its apex, spans from what will become Great Britain to the Middle East, from Germany to Northern Africa. Trade ranges even farther. Culturally eclectic, the Romans borrow a great deal from their subjects; religions, customs, languages, cuisine and more. It's easily the most cosmopolitan nation of its time.

The city of Rome serves as the empire's heart. It's (predictably) overrun with opportunistic vampires who war with each other (and mortals) for influence, resources and the chance to guide Rome into the future. Cainites find great prizes to be won in open and secret political struggles. As Carthage is the Brujah's pride, Rome belongs to the Ventrue. Even so, vampires of every clan are drawn to the city in search of whatever fortunes they can wrest from the fabulous capitol.

Rome is a bastion of faith - the profusion of religions is no

deterrence to the presence of True Faith. Cainites must be cautious when dealing with or working against the great temples of Rome.

For as long as Rome has been of any consequence, multitudes of Nosferatu have made their havens there. Given that "all roads lead to Rome," so too must all news flow through the great city.

Late Antiquities/The Dark Ages (AD 450-900?)

Following the fall of Rome comes an age commonly perceived as lacking art, science, philosophy or culture. This assumption is patently false - the tales of King Arthur originate during the Late Antiquities and the Catholic Church sets down its roots and grows into its full power.

Europe and the Middle East break into multiple new nations, monarchies arise and feudalism grows out of the era. Following mortal trends, Cainites rule over fiefdoms across Europe - many do so openly, with little care for keeping their nature secret. This practice plants seeds that will later blossom into other problems, but for the time being, Cainites thrive. Elders establish the Law of 1001 Nights (one vampire per 1,001 mortals) to prevent overpopulation. With that check, hundreds and perhaps thousands of Cainites populate Europe, North Africa and the Middle East.

The Inconnu of this period are Roman Ventrue who tired of the nightly games and now seek peace from the incessant Jyhad. The secretive Manus Nigrum begins its crusade to prepare for Gehenna and serve the Antediluvians when they arise. Few other sects exist in this time, as vampires are focused locally. The Blood is more important than allegiance to a larger faction, or so most Cainites reason.

With the Roman Catholic Church's rise to dominance in Western Europe, Rome's aura of faith becomes actively dangerous to many Cainites. Vampires often experience discomfort, disturbing dreams and occasional destruction within the ancient city. This isn't a problem for all vampires, and many choose to join the Church (some earnestly convert to Christianity, several use the Church's power to their own ends).

Medieval (AD 900-1400?)

Vampire: The Dark Ages is a far more complete start for chronicles set in the medieval era. Conversely, it's not a necessity for games set in this time frame. The game focuses on the close of the 12th century, and this section discusses games running throughout the medieval period.

For Cainites, the first real event to mark the transition into the medieval era is a theft of ancient blood; a cabal of Hermetic wizards magically transform themselves into vampires. Their leader, seeking legitimacy in Cainite society , tracks down and diablerizes the Salubri Antediluvian. From this act of cannibalism follows a purge of Clan Salubri.

Clan Tremere's rise to power on stolen Salubri blood and souls rocked the vampiric status quo, mostly unchanged since the fall of the Roman Empire. Other Cainites, uncertain how to deal with the "Usurpers," alternately accept, ignore or revile them. The Tzimisce, Nosferatu, Gangrel and several Hermetic cabals wage vicious war upon the newly undead Warlocks in the lands of Eastern Europe.

The Inquisition

The rise of the Catholic Inquisition stands as a traumatic turning point in "recent" Cainite history. The Church creates the Inquisition to root out, receive confessions from and ultimately execute heretics. While elements within the Catholic Church do use it as a tool to seize land and money or as a weapon for enemies to denounce and accuse one another, it far more often serves its intended purpose. The Inquisition genuinely puts down heresies, eliminates "witches," uproots and destroys monsters (such as Cainites) and serves to alert the Church to the danger the supernatural poses to mortals.

Elders throw their childer to Inquisitors to buy time for their own survival; numerous vampires of all ages and generations

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fall to the Inquisition's flames. For the sake of survival, Cainites are forced to retreat from mortal scrutiny and conceal their nature, lest they too suffer the Inquisition's punishments. Literally thousands are destroyed, leaving the Cainite population a shadow of its former numbers. The betrayal and bloodshed shatters relations between generations - sire turns against childe, and vice versa - sowing seeds for the Anarch Revolt.

The Black Death

In the mid-14th century, a virulent plague sweeps across Europe, killing at least one-fourth of the population - by extension making it difficult for vampires to feed in some areas (and uncommonly easy in others). The question is, does the plague affect vampires? Can they carry it? What happens if a vampire bites a victim of the plague? Does it mutate with exposure to his vitae? What sort of greater plague could develop from that? Or is the Black Death the result of such a mingling?

The pestilence creates a huge labor shortage, destabilizes traditional social relations and leads to crackdowns on peasant wages and mobility. The common folk respond with some of the largest revolts ever seen in medieval Europe. These revolts, in turn, inspire the already disenfranchised neonates into open war against their sires - the Anarch Revolt.

The Anarch Revolt

The neonates and ancillae who survive their elders' betrayal swear vengeance and lash out against their sires. This backlash, building after centuries of pressure, sweeps in a wave of sudden violence across Europe, leaving a great many destroyed or diablerized elders in its wake.

A chronicle based upon these events might center upon a pack of anarchs who escaped the Inquisition's fires and now seek vengeance for their sires' betrayals. Another possibility would be opportunists who use the conflict as a cover to steal elder vitae. Finally, Cainites who manipulate anarch and elder alike to advance their personal agendas (without regard for the issues at stake) constantly watch for gullible Cainites.

Assamites

The clan of slayers uses the confusion to intensify their campaign of Amaranth against European elders, hoping to steal their power and destroy the Western Cainites' hold on the world. While Assamite dogma claims this as a religious duty, it's just as likely most of them are in it for personal power, bloodlust and gratification.

Characters might be a pack of Assamites out for the thrill of elder blood or perhaps a specially assembled coterie - one of the first groups of archons - created and trained to ferret out and kill Assamites. The Assamites lose the war when the elders' Nosferatu agents discover Alamut, their hidden headquarters in the mountains of Anatolia. The players' characters might be these very agents. A third concept would be to combine the above ideas, as one side infiltrates (or attempts to) the other.

Sects

In the fires of Inquisition and revolution, the first true sects rise. The Camarilla's birthing dates farther back than the official date of formation at the Convention of Thorns in 1493. The Founders and others send emissaries to approach all known Cainites and invite them to support and join the new sect, as protection from Inquisition, anarch, Assamite and other enemies.

A chronicle could easily center on such a diplomatic charge. Characters would need to be as convincing as possible and always look out for treachery, roving bands of anarchs and worse.

Renaissance/Reformation (1400-1650)

For the Canaille, the Renaissance is a mixed blessing. On the one hand, the Renaissance sees the development of the Gutenberg printing press, the rise of the Lutheran denomination (and other forms of Protestantism), impressive strides in the arts and sciences and a move away from feudalism. On the other hand, is the Renaissance also sees the rise of secular absolutism, the divine right of kings and totalitarianism. The Inquisition continues with such worthies as Torquemada and others continuing the purges in the name of Mother Church.

This era marks three shocks to the Cainite world. Anarchs led by the Tzimisce Lugoj successfully attack and (many Cainites incorrectly believe) commit the Amaranth upon Tzimisce himself. Anarchs and Assamites claim to destroy the Lasombra founder. Finally, in 1444, Augustus Giovanni betrays his sire, Cappadocius and consumes his heart's blood. This marks the fall of a second clan as the newly ascended Giovanni seek to put all Cappadocians to the sword.

In less than five centuries, four Antediluvians - seemingly indestructible forces of nature - fall. This shakes many elders to the core of their being - if the terrible Third Generation isn't safe, then who is? Who are these Cainite killers of gods?

Another important event is the discovery of the Americas. Christopher Columbus sailed to the New World, which led to a new age of colonialism as European powers rushed to move various undesirable populations into North or South America or simply decided to expand into and conquer existing nations. Imperialism begins a rather healthy growth curve during this time period.

The Convention of Thorns

October 23, 1493. The night the Camarilla officially formed, the Assamites were punished with the curse upon their blood, and "sabbats" of rogue anarchs ravaged a nearby village. Later, these renegades will form the Sabbat's core. Characters who served as emissaries before are likely to be present, as are anarchs or Assamites who fought to destroy the elders.

The convention sees the Camarilla establish a stringent policy toward Masquerade enforcement - to not only hide from humanity but to make humanity forget they ever existed. It also sees the adoption of the word "Kindred" to describe vampires and the decision to move away from and indeed possibly stamp out the older roads of morality practiced to date. Characters in the newly formed Camarilla might be employed as archons or sent out to pass the news to those who could not make it to the convention. Vampires on inhuman codes of morality have difficulty passing easily among mortals without detection and are a risk to the (now) heavily enforced Masquerade.

Renegade characters might also spread out to pass the word - of the treachery of elders and the assembly of a new order. Characters have the chance here to participate in the Sabbat's formation and possibly serve as the sect's leaders.

Protestants

Martin Luther's Reformation brought about many changes for his new flock - they had access to the Word of God in a language they could understand, and they were no longer subject to the Catholic Church. Unfortunately, in many ways, the Protestants weren't much of an improvement for heretics and Kindred. They practiced their own Inquisitions, among other things. Luther supported pogroms against Jewish ghettos, and the Calvinists were certainly no bastions of tolerance. Kindred who made their havens in Calvinist areas found it quite difficult to thrive as many of their laws seemed to directly target Kindred habits - such as being up and about at night. Calvinists subjected each other to intense scrutiny for signs of "sinful activity" (very broadly defined) and were also subject to strict curfews. Under Calvinist doctrine there is little room for a private life - a Kindred who exists within a Calvinist community would have to be extremely careful to survive. An additional problem is that many Calvinists held strong beliefs - strong enough for True Faith in many cases - further making Kindred existence less tolerable. The extremely zealous Calvinists are also likely to produce tenacious and fanatical witch-hunters, who think nothing of burning a building to destroy the Kindred within.

The Masquerade

The newborn Camarilla begins a campaign to wipe out all traces of Kindred existence and leave only rumor and superstition in its wake. As "archons," characters can track down and either eradicate or resolve Masquerade breaches, some of which have persisted for centuries. It's difficult for elders to change their ways so rapidly, but the only other option is Final Death.

Fortunately, the mortals find their own distractions from the monsters of the past and many begin searching for answers in observable phenomena - science. Kindred enthusiastically support this change of focus as much as possible. Many fund scientific research, patronize scholars and encourage inquiry into realms where the supernatural does not fit. Kindred do not keep the Masquerade simply by not revealing themselves. They also try to encourage mortals to look for answers that don't allow for the possibility of Kindred existence.

The Enlightenment (18th century)

The Enlightenment is characterized by advancement in the sciences, many new (or evolved) philosophies, new ways of looking at religion and spiritualism, and revolution (or the seeds for such). The Enlightenment is a time when people stopped looking to religion for answers but before anyone truly looked to science. Philosophers explain the world in terms of reason, not faith. History generally portrays this as a time of positive growth, as monarchies lose power and individualism gains ground. Still, there are notables such as Catherine the Great of Russia, who did little to improve the quality of life for their subjects.

Limitless Opportunities

With the expansion of sciences, philosophies and the powers of royalty, Kindred have plenty of opportunity for intrigue of all sorts. Imagine a debate between Sabbat and Camarilla scholars over the existence and/or proclivities of the Antediluvians or scheming in the court of the Sun King. Catherine introduces the few Western ideas that suited her and otherwise maintains an autocratic rule, increasing her military power. How would progressive Kindred react to Catherine the Great's adoption of enlightened values without allowing reform or modern ideals to affect her realm? Do the Russian princes have policies toward their Kindred populations similar to those Catherine maintains? Do Kindred elsewhere?

Revolution

Toward the end of the 18th century, American and French populations rebelled against their respective monarchies, establishing very different forms of government. Neither is based on the "divine right of monarchy." The United States formed as a democratic republic, guaranteeing representation for the common man and allowing no kings to dictate to him. Of course, the truth of the matter was much less idealistic, and the end result was not an improvement for the vast majority of the mortal population, but it was a beginning. American Kindred, on the other hand, gain greater autonomy from their elders. They also have less support from these same elders. The French Revolution sees the

wholesale execution of the monarchy. As the saying goes, "Madame Guillotine never sleeps." The executions continue night and day for nearly a full year (June 1793 - July 1794). Many mortals see the French Revolution as a triumph of reason over superstition and privilege, and it serves as an influence over British intellectual development over the next century. For Kindred, it may be a different story. Anarchs or Sabbat might use the revolution as cover to bring down powerful elders, and many of those same elders go into hiding or leave France to avoid the bloodshed. Many others die in the revolution, seen (possibly correctly) as part of the problem.

Romantic (19th century)

The Romantic period marks several social changes and events; William Godwin predicts socialism, Napoleon conquers much of Europe only to be defeated at Waterloo, industrialization begins (not coincidentally, making conditions worse for the working classes) and the first Romantic poets (William Blake and Robert Burns, for example) appear. Romantics see that the rise of technology might lead to the alienation of man from nature and that progress might lead to prosperity for a few but greater oppression and poverty for most mortals. Many Kindred are all too happy to see this turn of events. Wealthy and powerful mortals are rarely interested in changing society. Conversely, the working class has little spare time to think about issues beyond simple survival.

The Poets

Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote such works as "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and "Kubla Khan." Blake wrote The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, a satire directed at organized religion - something that would have been unthinkable in earlier ages. Any artistic Kindred might associate with these luminaries or be an aspiring Romantic poet himself. Given the iconoclastic nature of works like Blake's, there's room for all kinds of sensibilities.

Industrialization

What seemed to be a blessing turned to a curse, as many of the lower classes worked under slave-labor conditions in factories. Personal freedoms were not exactly valued in many parts of society. Industrialization brings the rise of large factories with difficult working conditions (for the working class) and great profits (for the upper class). The aristocracy does not hold all of the reins of power, in light of recent revolutions and the current economic upswing (for industrialists). The working class provides an easy and desperate population for vampires to prey upon - to recruit them as allies, use them as minions or even hunt them as food. The new "aristocracy" of industrialists provides a new stratum in which to move - one that is possibly more influential than the traditional aristocracy. Opportunities abound for neonates who seek ways to get into their elders' favor.

Victorian England

The Victorian era saw England's expansion into a global empire. By the end of the 19th century, London was the political and economic center of the world. Political reforms ended the monopoly wealthy landowners held over Parliament, thanks to increased voting rights in England. On the other hand, life for the working class became even more oppressive as the industrial revolution continued to advance. Industrialists paid little mind to the hardships inflicted on their lower-class employees. The economics of the time led to a cycle of increasingly harsher depressions (leading eventually to Black Thursday in 1929) which mainly affected the working classes. Economic fluctuation could easily make or break a vampire's fortune as easily as a mortal's. Neonates who want to get rich need to find mortals skilled in financial matters and keep a close eye on events to take advantage of the ups and downs. If a neonate plays it well, he might find himself with influence and resources sufficient to impress his elders, while another could be ruined after making a bad decision. Vampires might also use market manipulations to try to ruin more influential ancillae or elders and pick up what's left afterward.

Vampires benefit greatly from the industrial revolution - it leads to people keeping longer (and thus later) hours and larger concentrations of mortals in smaller areas, which makes for better feeding grounds. Longer working hours gives the working class less time to worry about issues like whether vampires are feeding on their family members. Materialist values increase at the expense of spiritualist ones (with exceptions, of course - see Romance), which means the newly wealthy have concerns of a more immediate nature than possible supernatural predation.

Science and Politics

Two influential texts were published during this period; Charles Darwin's The Origin of Species and Marx and Engels' The Communist Manifesto. The first revolutionized the way scientists view the origins and evolution of life on Earth, and continues to affect scientific thought. The second had a drastic effect on political evolution in later years, leading to several nations (including two world powers) adapting the precepts to their needs.

The Origin of Species is something of a victory for the Masquerade. It conclusively demonstrates that scientific thought has no room for the supernatural and no time to look for it. It's very possible that prominent ancillae pushed for support of scientists researching such topics. The Communist Manifesto is a victory of a different sort. Many Brujah, who still pine over lost Carthage, see it as a necessary evolution of the views their elders cultivated so long before. A truly classless society could see Kindred and kine existing side-by-side in equality. Note that this is an idealistic, unrealistic and inaccurate view of Carthage. Such a culture could never actually survive - Kindred prey upon humanity. Few vampires in existence, however, have a real

idea of what Carthage was like, most have only fragmented and idealized accounts passed from sire to childe over the millennia. The few who do know the truth have no reason to reveal it.

The Literature

The Victorian era isn't characterized by any one specific style of literature, but writers conformed to certain accepted (or expected) standards- and rather puritanical standards at that. Novels and poetry were expected to fit within certain rigid codes, certainly an antithesis to the Romantic poets' experimentation with style.

By the 1890s, writers rejected these standards. Oscar Wilde's work serves as an example of this change in focus; his works are best described as sensational, not respectable. Dracula, by an Irish author named Bram Stoker, made quite a sensational splash in Elysiums across Europe and the British Empire, as Kindred tried to discern who was responsible for this incredible breach of the Masquerade. Some secretly envied Vlad Tepes' nerve in allowing or inspiring such a story for mortal consumption. Either way, it served to make the vampire more a figure of literary horror and romance than anything with a resemblance of reality.

The Literary Vampire

Dracula wasn't the first such story. The first vampire in this literary tradition would be John Polidori's Lord Ruthven, inspired by none other than George Gordon, Lord Byron. Many suspect deeper inspiration, as Ruthven is the first vampire story to incorporate traits common to the "real thing," at least in the World of Darkness. To the dismay of many Kindred, Ruthven served as the model for later fictional characters. Later figures include the 109-part penny dreadful series, Varney the Vampire or the Feast of Blood; and Sheridan Le Fanu's "Carmilla." It could be argued that the Victorian literary field defined the modern perception of the vampire, coincidentally bringing it closer to the reality of the World of Darkness, but it also shows a mortal fascination for the undead. Additionally, to the amusement of many Kindred, it spawned a profligacy of vampire "wannabes," at the same time that it mocked vampires for being locked in their own times.

Imperialism

Not to be fazed by the loss of the United States of America, the British Empire continues to expand. Holdings spread from Australia to China to India and nearly everywhere else in the world. In truth, the sun never sets on the British Empire, or more appropriately for the Kindred who followed the expansion, the stars always shine on the British Empire. With such expansion come many opportunities for Kindred to establish new power bases where none had existed before. Unfortunately, such expansion nearly always leads to conflict with indigenous supernaturals, whether other vampires, the mysterious Cathayans or the ferocious Lupines.

Elders might send troublesome ancillae or neonates away, to find (or carve) their own places - mercifully distant from the elders' own havens. Conversely, disenfranchised elders might choose to move to new lands to avoid dealing with old and troublesome grudges, while others pursue those same grudges. As always, Kindred ride on the coattails of human expansion.

The Roaring 20s

This is an excellent time for a chronicle, with the end of the "War to End All Wars," the Soviet Union's post-revolution years (and the Kindred who go along for the ride - or fall in the revolution), prohibition, organized crime, the first feature-length film and more. This decade has ups and downs to spare. Kindred might become involved in organized crime - or try to stop it. It doesn't take much of a leap to see a possibility for the mobs to conflict with a vampire's power-base. If goals coincide, an alliance is also a possibility. European Kindred could gain or lose everything thanks to World War I. Europe's rebuilding from the war's devastation and a terrible flu epidemic makes it a particularly dynamic region.

Prohibition

In 1919, the United States outlawed alcohol, which had the practical effect of encouraging organized crime, rather than effecting any real prevention. Kindred active during the 20s can take advantage of the situation to get a piece of the action or even use speak-easies as discrete feeding areas. Federal and police raids on crime might accidentally (or be used as a cover to) discover Kindred havens, leading to an altogether different set of problems.

European Politics

After World War I ends, many European nations scramble to insure that "this shall never happen again." Sixty-four nations even signed a pact to make all war illegal: the Kellogg-Briand Pact. Statesmen hypocritically pronounced an end to conflict while simultaneously planting the seeds of the next war. The postwar climate in Europe is a perfect time for opportunistic Kindred to take advantage of losses suffered during the war years - elders or ancillae may have died, leaving vacuums waiting to be filled. On the other hand, some elders will also take advantage of such openings and will not always find neonate meddling welcome. An elder might choose to recruit the neonates rather than make them enemies, so their gains in turn enhance his, but this could bring his enemies to the neonates' doorsteps.

Black Thursday

On Thursday, October 24, 1929, the Stock Market begins its downward spiral, finally bottoming out the following Tuesday, ruining fortunes, lives and national economies. While it comes as a surprise to some, any economist could see disaster on the horizon. Germany's economy collapses in

1927, foreshadowing the greater collapse two years later. Many ignore the signs in favor of apparent economic prosperity.

Many Kindred are quite conservative and probably lose very little to the crash itself. But what of those who speculated? An incautious Kindred could lose access to influential contacts or his own resources. What happens to a vampire who loses his haven, his allies and his shirt, all within 24 hours?

The Great Depression

Following the stock market crash in 1929, several banks fail, international trade drops, and investments (foreign and domestic) plummet. Economically, the world is screwed. There are still a few wealthy families about, and they're very wealthy by the standards of the time. The poor are much more numerous and live in misery.

A Military Coup?

While this theory may not be true in the real world, it fits perfectly into the World of Darkness. Alarmed by President Roosevelt's "New Deal," several millionaire businessmen (led by Du Pont and J. P. Morgan) conspire to overthrow the United States government and replace it with a fascist dictatorship modeled after Mussolini's Italy. The plot is foiled when General Smedley Butler, invited to join the conspiracy, instead reports it to Congress.

It is entirely possible that Kindred are either involved or directly behind the plot or even block its occurrence. It's even possible that it could have happened in a variant World of Darkness, which would dramatically change the future.

The Sabbat

The Sabbat finds the squalor and misery of the Depression ideal for their own ideologies and uses the opportunity to feed and Embrace at an accelerated pace. This lack of care leads to later spread of disease throughout the sect and the civil war in 1957.

The Second World War

The historical roots for WWII stretch back several decades, but the real thing starts on March 12, 1938, the day Hitler occupies Austria. November 10, 1938, Kristallnacht, marks the night when Hitler's forces first move openly against the Jews.

On September 1, 1939, Hitler invades Poland. On September 3, France and England declare war. Roosevelt declares neutrality. On September 27, 1940, Japan officially joins the Axis. Finally, on December 7, 1941 the Japanese navy attacks the US fleet stationed at Pearl Harbor, bringing the United States fully into the war.

The Second World War continues until 1945, when the Allies overrun Germany and drop the first atomic weapons on the Japanese cities Hiroshima and Nagasaki. While the full scope of the war is fascinating, there simply isn't space to discuss every event, action or concern during these times. Consult any appropriate history book for more details.

This is a time of great tension for European Kindred. Those who remember how the previous war was fought won't necessarily be too happy about this one. It marks the first use of several weapons and tactics, such as the blitzkrieg, carpet-bombing and, eventually, the first atomic bombs. When news of Hiroshima reaches Kindred, elder and neonate alike are shocked by the consequence - humanity has tamed the sun. A chronicle or story might begin near (or in) a battle, starting in medias res. The first issues for the characters would be survival and escape. Other situations might require vampires to go into or near a battle to find something or someone, or resolve a problem. What if one of the coterie is taken prisoner by either side? Perhaps the characters' enemies somehow arranged for the battle to happen on their doorstep?

The Holocaust

Also known as the Shoah to the Jews and the Porrajmos to the Roma, this, one of the most horrific human acts in recorded history, also serves the Kindred. Although they do not create the death camps, many vampires certainly use them to their advantage.

The camps serve as an ideal cover for feeding and experimentation for Camarilla and Sabbat alike. Several Tzimisce, Tremere and others work in the camps, so as to more easily gain access to involuntary subjects for their peculiar studies.

Mossad and other agencies keep records of as many of the officers involved in the camps as possible and probably have pictures and firsthand accounts of the Kindred who were there. These agencies seek to hunt down and bring the last remaining Nazi war criminals to justice. For those who are skilled in disguise, such as the Tzimisce with their flesh-crafting powers, this risk is not so great - although exceptional investigators might find a trail left by a vampire grown cocky because of her power. Other Kindred have different issues - they will appear the same age today as they are in Mossad's photos, which could be a threat to the Masquerade. A prince or archbishop is unlikely to forgive a former Nazi whose presence draws Israeli or Interpol agents into her domain to track down and apprehend the escaped war criminal.

The 60s - 70s

The 60s and 70s are a time of violent social change. From the Bay of Pigs and Kennedy's assassination to the birth of the punk movement, the world shifts dramatically. Vampires might form a rock-and-roll band and play the Whiskey-A-Go-

Go in Los Angeles alongside the Doors, Led Zeppelin, the Turtles and so on. Politically speaking, vampires could be involved in any of the numerous movements of the time (the modern liberal and conservative movements are products of the 60s). A vampire could easily find uses for groups such as the Weathermen, the Symbionese Liberation Army or the Black Panthers - all radical political groups with violent agendas.

Kindred might choose to lead cults, draw mortals to their banner to manipulate the kine for money and blood. Charles Manson, Jim Jones and the Reverend Sun Myung Moon are examples of this phenomenon. Certainly, there were enough mortal gurus that a few vampiric types wouldn't necessarily be noticed.

As precursors to the modern nights, the 60s and 70s are important times for neonates. Many are Embraced during these decades and could be involved in literally anything. Setting a chronicle in this time frame can be exciting - counterculture really gained its momentum in the 60s and continued into the 70s. Music and politics changed swiftly. Communes could serve as convenient herds. Imagine what it would be like for a veteran to return from Vietnam only to receive the Embrace. Consider how a neonate Embraced in the 50s might react to the changes in the 60s or the 70s - or exploit them.

The Cold War

Millions of people live in daily fear that nuclear war will start at any moment, a war that would mean humanity's extinction. For the Kindred, this means nothing less than Gehenna. Many elders exert their own influence to slow or stall the march to Armageddon, fearing their sires' rise. Others choose to ignore the issue, pretending it doesn't exist and doesn't apply to them. Characters in this time frame might sit on either side of the fence, but most young vampires have a better grasp of the issues involved and perhaps insights into the political forces at work.

Kine children don't trust their elders not to push the button, and many choose to protest this fact. In vampiric society, the age gap is all that much steeper, and the neonates feel the elders' mistakes all the more keenly. This era sees massive defections to the anarchs and outright rebellion against the older Kindred.

Popular Entertainment

Popular music takes quite a turn, with lyrics dwelling on war, drugs, insanity and other disturbing subjects. The hedonistic indulgences of rock-and-roll performers attract many neonates to their banner, perhaps as a means of nonviolent protest against elder and/or government policies.

Goth and Punk Movements

Musical extremes evolve into punk, a style of music characterized by a rapid beat along with violent music and lyrics. The Ramones are among the first punk bands, along with The Sex Pistols, Patti Smith, the Stooges and others. Punk fashion is characterized by a harsh aesthetic - leather, metal spikes, mohawks, garishly dyed hair, combat boots and ripped jeans.

Goth evolves from the original punk movement, marked by bands such as Bauhaus, Christian Death, Southern Death Cult, Joy Division, Sisters of Mercy and Siouxsie and the Banshees. Some mark the birth of the goth movement with the release of the Bauhaus song, "Bela Lugosi's Dead." Characterized by a dark, eerie, moody feel, the music marked the splinter from punk to goth, although the term isn't applied to the movement until 1981.

These musical movements mark the beginnings of the "Gothic-Punk" world in which Vampire is set, so some study of the origins (and the original Gothic architecture and artistic sensibilities from earlier centuries) of these movements is appropriate.

Gehenna

This is it. The end of Kindred society as we know it. The

Vampire Storytellers Handbook

Antediluvians rise, eat their childer and finish the Jyhad for all time. The prophecies are in The Book of Nod, the players are already moving into place by the Final Nights. Why not move full-bore into the end times?

Antediluvians need not immediately start devouring their childer. Instead, they may choose to move quietly, contact their childer, slake their thirsts inauspiciously and start the end game.

This is where the characters come in. Any power level the Storyteller wants to deal with is appropriate.

Just How Powerful is Too Powerful?

Some of these chronicle ideas suggest characters up to and including young members of the Third Generation. This is, of course, out of hand. Or it can be, but that doesn't have to be the case. The Storyteller merely needs to keep track of a few concepts when designing, plotting and running her chronicle.

There's Always Someone Better

The first and arguably most important concept to keep in mind when running high-powered games is that no player should ever get away with letting Disciplines think for him or using them as a replacement for storytelling. The more powerful the character, the more likely thoughtless flinging of Thaumaturgical Fingers of Flaying and combined Potence/Celerity Running Leg Locks will attract unwelcome attention from others who are equal or greater in power. Ironically, the more potent the creature, the more judicious he must be about exercising his power.

Less is More

Oftentimes, players want to use the neatest toys, the kewlest new Disciplines and darken as many dots as is possible - perhaps it's some kind of gaming dementia. Left unchecked, the end result is some kind of unmanageable monster. The idea here is to make certain that characters have no more power than absolutely necessary for the chronicle. More often, a bit less works even better. Players work best when they are lean and thirsty for more, when they must think about their situations instead of applying a convenient power. It's hard to want for much when you have everything, after all.

Challenges are Interesting

If there is no room for meaningful conflict, perhaps the characters are too powerful. If none can oppose the mighty coterie your players' characters have assembled, then it's time to re-think the opposition or how the characters were built. It doesn't matter if the chronicle is set in the Final Nights with 15th-generation Caitiff or in the Roman Empire with sixth-generation emissaries from a Ventrue scion, the

opposition must be a challenge to the characters. No one enjoys a pushover. The Storyteller won't, nor will most players. It's simply no fun.

Low-Powered Play

Players can have as much fun in chronicles designed for truly weak characters. Whereas an elder has to choose how and when to apply his incredible power, a neonate doesn't have the power to apply, she has only her wits.

This is not to say that the powers available to weaker characters are useless. Much can be accomplished with Command, Awe or Ignis Fatuus. The trick is to apply them when appropriate in a creative and interesting fashion. There's a certain appeal to beating the odds with the minimum force necessary. If the characters outwit the prince, gain status in the process and end with one or two primogen owing them boons, the outcome is that much sweeter when they accomplish it as "rank neonates."

Necessity, as they say, is the mother of invention.

Storyteller Abuse

It's easy to overreact to character power and toss overwhelming opposition at the characters simply because there seems to be no other way to defeat them. This turns the game into an adversarial setup, where the players and the Storyteller become enemies and try to overcome one another. This is not really a constructive style. The best reaction when this comes on is to back off and rethink the situation. Why is it necessary that the characters fall? Why is it so difficult to offer a realistic challenge? Discuss it with the players, they might catch things the Storyteller has missed. More discussion on the relationships between the players and the Storyteller may be found in chapter four.

Characters might seek to worship the Third Generation or annihilate them. The Sabbat may move into total war and attempt to destroy the monsters one by one - they probably won't succeed, but it'll be a glorious time trying.

The Camarilla might burst apart at the seams as one of the tenets of its existence goes out the window. Characters might be caught in the backlash, trying to hold things together and prepare for the coming hellstorm. Kindred might engage in a frenzy of kinslaughter and diablerie, seeking the power necessary to enable their survival. Others might greet the sun in hopes of avoiding Caine's wrath. The latter may leave exploitable opportunities, but is there time to take them up?

The Masquerade will not survive long, as the Antediluvians increase their depredations, leading to human attempts to destroy these dark gods. Lupine attacks will rise, and just about anyone else with a concern for humanity's wellbeing will probably get in on the action.

A Different World

Vampire has a great system for simulating nearly every type of vampire to appear in folklore, fiction or film. Clans, generation and the Noddist myths aren't necessary for a good Vampire chronicle.

Alternate Locations

One simple bit of exploration includes changing simple assumptions about vampires as they exist in the World of Darkness. Don't like the "canonical" history? Change it. Don't like a clan? Remove it entirely, or swap it for one you do like. Don't like a city's power structure as published? Replace it, or ignore the city. Nothing in Vampire is set in stone, and that includes the timeline.

Which Clan Falls?

Recently, the Ravnos fell. Something destroyed their Antediluvian, and a majority of the clan died in the backlash. But you want to keep the Ravnos around? Keep them around. Perhaps the Antediluvian survived despite the assault - or there was no assault; your choice. You can adjust the number of survivors as well. Despite the disaster, enough Ravnos survive for them to be viable characters. What if none survived? Or you could double or triple the number of survivors.

Alternatively, you could use the disaster as a model for killing another clan. Imagine what would have happened if, instead, an Ancient arose from the ruins of Carthage or in the Middle East? Want to destroy the Tremere? Go for it. The Ravnos fall is a model for events, not a straightjacket. Vampire's metaplot is merely a timeline of suggested events and ideas for your chronicles.

No Clans at All?

Imagine a world in which clans don't exist - perhaps all vampires are Caitiff, or characters choose three "clan Disciplines" at character creation. In such a world, it's entirely possible that several "specialty" Disciplines - Necromancy, Chimerstry, Quietus and others - simply do not exist.

Such a society would necessarily be quite different from Vampire: The Masquerade, as clan lines are gone. This can be valuable for eliminating simple stereotypes (all Brujah wear leather and carry TEC-9s, all Ventrue wear business suits and carry cellular phones, etc.). Players have more reason to make characters individuals and less reason to try to "fit in" with a group.

Sects may or may not exist, and the Anarch Revolt and other historical stresses are still possible (elders are still self-absorbed bastards, after all).

Lineages may still have conflicts, both within and without. Presumably, sires would choose childer for the same reasons as in mainstream Vampire games, and a neonate may grow to hate her sire for many of the same reasons. Only clan issues are eliminated, and they're tertiary anyway.

No Camarilla

When elders called the Convention of Thorns, the anarchs prepared for their final vengeance against the elders who sacrificed them to the Inquisition. With one fell swoop, the most influential Camarilla supporters were destroyed in a terrible conflagration. The Sabbat might form in the ashes of such a coup, seeking to dominate the mortal world through fear and terror rather than co-exist with subtlety and guile. This could lead to open warfare with humanity, creating an even larger blood bath, or it could force the Sabbat to work underground, adopting traits the Camarilla would have espoused. Still, consider what vampire society might be like if Sabbat ideologies dominated - how many clans would join? How many would choose to remain independent? Would they attempt to form an alliance later, to defy the Sabbat's dictates?

No Sabbat

Conversely, what if the elders behind the Camarilla orchestrated the destruction of the most influential anarchs, leaving the nascent Sabbat without the leadership that enabled it to thrive in future centuries? The Camarilla could grow unchecked by the Sabbat's opposition, perhaps even with different philosophies. Lacking the balance of a nearly matched opponent, the Camarilla need not concern itself with

many of the issues it currently faces.

It may grow to be oppressive, which might lead to a second Anarch Revolt, as new generations fight against "elder tyranny." Even then, it would likely be too entrenched to shake free.

Lacking an immediate outside threat, the Camarilla would have time and energy to devote to enforcing the Masquerade vigorously and stamping out other troubles, such as the Anarch Free States in California. Such a chronicle might deal with anarch resistance cells, forced to operate in even more secrecy than their elder opponents.

No Sects

Perhaps the Anarch Revolt never happened. Instead, in the light of the Inquisition, several clans may have chosen to form a loose alliance to deal with the problem without formal treaties or laws. Such a society might continue in the basic mode followed in Vampire: The Dark Ages, in which princes still claim domains in cities, but there's no pretense of sect to limit or enforce conflict. Without the stresses of potential Sabbat invasion or Camarilla meddling, stories might take on a different tone, with conflicts growing from very personal issues. Again, as above, it's still possible for anarchs to exist. No Inner Circle, regents, justicars, archons, Seraphim or Black Hand can dictate affairs to other Kindred - unless they have the personal might to back their decrees. On the other hand, a greater number of freelance investigators or bounty hunters may stalk the Kindred, working with whatever flexibility they can manage.

The large-scale strife might be absent from such a chronicle, but it offers greater room for individual feuds between cities, broods, coteries, packs or any other vampiric social unit. Without the arbitrary structure of sects, smaller sect-like organizations might grow in regional territories. Perhaps the Princes of New England band together against outside threats, or in Southern California they ruthlessly war over territory and resources.

Travel between cities is much riskier in such a chronicle. Characters don't have the assurance of a commonly accepted set of laws or even general interpretations. The Lasombra Prince of Seattle might not have much time or care for emissaries from the Toreador Prince of Vancouver, B.C.

Alternate Vampire Myths

For every vampire in folklore, screen or fiction, there are probably two or three stories about how they come about. Certainly, the Caine myth need not be the only story (or even the true story) about how vampires came to be. It need not even appear in individual chronicles, replaced instead by other stories, modified to taste.

Classical Mythology

Vampires, or creatures like them, appear in legends from nearly every country on earth, from the Greek lamia to the Asian creatures who suck spinal fluid. Some of the more common European myths that deal with vampiric origins are as follows:

- Those excommunicated from the Church sometimes rose as vampires after burial.
- People buried in unhallowed ground might rise as a vampire.
- Suicides or redheads might rise as the undead.
- Victims of vampiric feeding (sometimes three feedings are required) arise from the grave with a thirst for blood.

Whatever the cause, the vampire is usually cursed by God to wander the Earth and feed on the blood of the living. These monsters are not the hip, sexy rock stars so often seen in modern tales (or Vampire chronicles). They're ravenous drinkers of blood and bringers of plague.

In a game based upon such myths, it's necessary to work out how to deal with generation, society (if there is such) and origins. It may be appropriate to distinguish between vampires created through improper burial and the undead other vampires engender. Disciplines might be based upon how one becomes one of the walking dead, rather than who's responsible, for example.

Perhaps in such a scenario, generation is a function of age, rather than distance from a mythical (and potentially unheard of) first vampire. Themes would necessarily be different,

dealing with death, damnation and redemption more so than your usual chronicle, as characters attempt to come to terms with their damned states more so than in "stock" Vampire stories.

Fictional Mythology

Not to be outdone by folklore, fiction provides origins ranging from accidental demonic possession to alien colonists from the distant past. Vampires pass on the curse through childbirth or the bite or perhaps an exchange of blood. In some stories, distinct lineages develop over time or from strong-willed individuals who somehow define the traits of those they turn.

It's possible that any of the stories may be smoke screens for the real cause, which may have an important bearing on how a vampire might deal with her nature. A chronicle could center upon finding the actual truth; vampires could dig up (sometimes literally) secluded, scholarly elders, seek out lost scrolls or inscriptions in ancient temples or interpret long-lost prophecies to discern the hidden truths. Such information may aid in learning about a Gehenna-style end of all vampires or perhaps how a vampire might regain his lost humanity - probably very good reasons to hide the truth from prying eyes.

Noddist Mythology

Vampire already has an existing and complex mythos, beginning with Caine's curse and ending with Gehenna. What if certain elements changed? Consider if there had never been a flood or if the Antediluvians never overthrew the Second Generation? What if Caine himself was not truly the first vampire, simply the most well known?

Variations on the story of Caine might instead relate Gilgamesh as the first vampire, who entered the underworld to retrieve his closest companion, Enkidu, and traveled the known world to gain immortality. Or perhaps the first vampire was a Promethean figure, cursed by the gods for his theft of eternal life. Another variation might be the Cybele and Attis, Isis and Osiris and other similar "mystery" myths with dying gods and resurrection. Any could be the first vampire. Really, the dying/reborn god of the crops (Caine was a farmer), and the mother-as-tutor (Lilith?) appears in several Mediterranean cultures. The Caine myth could be adapted to many of them.

Bahari Mythology

Variations might be introduced via Lilith, rather than Caine. Perhaps Lilith was the first vampire, and Caine either diablerized her or simply moved on. Consider if the hotly debated "Lilith Cycle" is true? Lilith as God's feminine equal? Perhaps, as above, Lilith is some other figure from another mythos, such as the mother who resuscitates her lover/son. Or perhaps she truly is the demonic figure seen in some apocrypha or rather the first "human" rebel against God's will and equal to Adam when she was created.

It's Your Game, Dammit!

Okay, the Vampire line has thousands of words about how the Storyteller needs to be careful about mood and theme in her chronicles. But, not everyone wants to go there. You hear about chronicles where everyone plays a fourth-generation, smack-laying Tzimisce-Nagaraja Abomination with poisoned wooden stakes or the Antediluvians rising for Gehenna and veritably walking the streets, fistfighting other Kindred they see. Some games might feature Tarantino-style shootouts in the streets of Los Angeles right in full view of mortal onlookers or any of the dozens of other over-the-top styles of what could almost be described as "superhero-style play" or "goddamned twink-fest nightmares."

But so what? It's your game. Go for it; the Storyteller Mood Police aren't going to drop in and force you to play an angst-ridden über-goth vampire bemoaning her fate and God for being an undead blood-sucker cursed to wander forever as a stagnant piece of walking history. Just because we're not gumbies doesn't mean you can't be. Still, it's a good idea to make any chronicle or story internally consistent and interesting within itself. If you want to run a story where shotgun-toting Methuselahs blow each other away in various bizarre locales and run crime syndicates, go for it. But make it interesting and challenging. Don't give any ground easily, make it as tough as you can get away with. Most of all, make sure it's as much fun for you as for your players. Give it a rationale. Be sensible. Just because a story is over the top does not mean that it also needs to be bad.

chapter six: a world of darkness

...with an alien people clutching their gods. I should be glad of another death.

-T.S. Eliot, "Journey of the Magi"

The following sections include some suggestions for incorporating the other denizens of the World of Darkness into your Vampire: The Masquerade stories. These are guidelines, not complete rules by any means, and are best used for bringing in other supernaturals as adversaries, allies or contacts. Storytellers and players who want to introduce perennially played characters of other supernatural types should consult the other core rulebooks. The details for any particular Discipline, Gift, Sphere, Arcanos or Art should override these rules in the event of a conflict. As always, the Storyteller is the final authority.

Finally, these rules are slanted toward the Gothic-Punk Vampire "reality" rather than the chimerical existence of the fae or the spiritual world-view of the Lupines. The various games have radically different themes, and in no case can you simply stack one atop the other and achieve a seamless hybrid. The fundamental principles that lend each of the games their identity prevent such a perfect mixture - Vampire characters will soon find themselves claimed by the Beast if they pursue unlives of wanton killing, while such combat is part and parcel to Werewolf's desperate rage against an imminent apocalypse. Combining the games blurs the line between them: As a word of caution, don't attempt crossover unless you're a very skilled Storyteller or you just wanna kick ass. Any crossover will result in a loss of certain thematic elements from whatever games are introduced into the mix - too many "ingredients" or handling by a poor Storyteller yields a messy mix of "superpowers," rather than the individual horrors built into each game's distinct setting. Proceed with caution, if at all.

Relative Power Levels

When one character uses a supernatural power against another and the first character's ability to perform the feat is challenged by the second character's supernatural powers, compare the following: vampire's Discipline level, werewolf's Rank, mage's Sphere level, wraith's Arcanos rating, changeling's Art level or hunter's edge level. The supernatural with the highest score wins; ties are resolved through a resisted roll, and ties on this roll go to the defender.

Important Note: The scores compared are the highest level the character has achieved, not the level of the power in question. If a vampire has Auspex 4 but uses Aura Perception, the value used is 4 (the maximum level to which the vampire has developed that power), not 2 (the level of the Auspex power in use). Thus, an elder with Presence 5 will use the second-level Presence power Dread Gaze far more effectively than will a neonate who has just developed her second level of Presence. Elements such as range and

duration of effect do not change, but the power's strength over other supernaturals does increase.

Difficulties

Sometimes a rule calls for a character to defend with a Trait that she does not possess. For example, some werewolf Gifts use the victim's Rage score as their target number. Kindred aren't very big on Rage. When this situation arises, you may exercise several alternatives. If nothing else looks appealing, the default difficulty is always 6. If the target is actively resisting a power, the Storyteller may decide to use his permanent or current Willpower as the target, as this Trait is common to all Storyteller system games. Other easily derived difficulties may be appropriate Attribute + Ability totals. Common sense, of course, should override calculator use.

werewolves

The Garou and the other Changing Breeds are creatures of two worlds - the physical and the spiritual. With the exception of the Black Spiral Dancers and certain other Wyrm-corrupted individuals, the shapeshifters hold to a system of belief that views the undead as anathema. Thus, most shapeshifter Gifts applied to vampires will be of the offensive variety, and the vast majority of interaction between the two is of the violent kind.

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crossover example

Andrew, a vampire-hunting Son of Ether mage with Forces 4 (among other things), has caught up with Oliver van Grift, a Malkavian who has Obfuscate 3 in his bag of tricks. Andrew has the treacherous Leech in his sights, but van Grift decides to use a convenient cactus and Unseen Presence (Obfuscate 2) to effect a quick disappearance. Andrew knows the vampire is somewhere in the general area and decides to use a Forces 1 effect to scan the still-warm New Mexico desert for heat sources that are significantly cooler than the background. Since Andrew's Sphere rating of 4 is higher than van Grift's Discipline rating of 3, the mage has a chance to spot the vampire, even though the power that Andrew is using is a lower-level one than van Grift's.

"Has a chance" is what's important here. This system doesn't override the existing rules and is not automatic. The mage must still roll his Arete (just like any other mage using a sensory effect). If he has no successes, then van Grift stays hidden. One success tips off Andrew to the vampire's location.

Now, what if Andrew has only Forces 3? His power is equal to that of van Grift's Obfuscate 3. The result depends on the outcome of a resisted roll. Andrew rolls Arete, while van Grift rolls Wits + Stealth (just like any other vampire using Unseen Presence). Whoever has the most successes wins. If van Grift wins, he remains hidden. If Andrew wins, he pinpoints

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his target's position. Ties go to the "defender"; in this case, the vampire remains cloaked. Since Andrew is the one actively searching, Oliver gains the benefit of a tied roll.

What if Andrew has only Forces 2? His Forces is lower than van Grift's Obfuscate, and thus, it is not able to penetrate the Unseen Presence. However, the Storyteller should let him roll anyway and simply tell him he detects nothing.

Discipline	Werewolf Rank	Sphere Rating*	Arcanos	Art	Edge
1	1	1	1	1	1
2	2	2	2	2	2
3	3	3	3	3	3
4	4	4	4	4	4
5	5	5	5	5	5
6	6	6	-	-	
7-9	-	6+	-	-	

* In the case of conjunctional effects, use the highest Sphere rating of the effect that the mage is attempting.

The following rules are designed for use with Garou, the Changing Breed that Kindred are most likely to encounter. They can be adapted for use with other shapeshifters at the Storyteller's discretion.

Gifts and Disciplines

Werewolf Gifts come directly from the spirit world. They do not function on the same basic principles as Kindred Disciplines. Vampires can never learn Gifts, and the only way a werewolf can learn Disciplines is through being made a ghoul or an Abomination, neither of which are even remotely common in the World of Darkness.

Animalism: No Animalism power that specifically affects only animals (e.g. Beckoning) will have any effect on a shapeshifter, even one of Lupus breed. Garou do, however, have Beasts (as expressed through their Rage Traits) and these can be manipulated with the appropriate Animalism powers. The sole exception is communication - a vampire employing Feral Whispers, for example, could carry on a conversation with a Lupine through the language of wolves.

Auspex: Most Gifts that complicate detection can be seen through with a sufficient level of Auspex, as per the above rules. Scent of Running Water can be broken with sufficient Auspex if the vampire attempts to track the werewolf by scent.

Obfuscate: All enhanced-senses Gifts can be used to pierce a Kindred's Obfuscate, as per the above rules.

Healing: All Gifts that deal with healing (e.g. Mother's Touch) are intended to work on living beings. They have no effect on a vampire - in the unlikely event that a shapeshifter is somehow persuaded to use them on an injured Leech. Gifts that mend inanimate objects don't heal vampires either - the spirits won't allow that loophole.

Wyrm Creatures: Any vampire with a Humanity rating lower than 7 is considered a creature of the Wyrm from a Garou standpoint and is affected as such by the appropriate Gifts. A vampire on most modern Paths of Enlightenment is automatically considered Wyrm-tainted, regardless of his Path score. The Path of the Feral Heart is the only exception to this, and it is treated as Humanity for purposes of Wyrm-taint detection.

Resist Toxin does not keep a Garou from being ghouled. It does, however, give the werewolf four additional dice to soak the effects of appropriate powers of Quietus, Thanatosis or other Disciplines that inflict damage through blood contact, disease or decay.

Open Wounds causes a vampire under its effect to lose one blood point per turn instead of one health level.

Werewolf Blood

The Rage of a werewolf permeates her entire being.. including her blood. A vampire who feeds from a werewolf may find himself on the verge of frenzy until the potent vitae is purged from his system. Every point of Lupine blood in a vampire's blood pool adds 1 to his difficulty to resist frenzy (maximum difficulty 10). However, werewolves provide much more sustenance than do mortals - an uninjured werewolf has the equivalent of 25 blood points in its system. Lupines are much hardier than mortals, too: A werewolf's life is in no danger from blood loss until it is completely drained, at which point it falls to Incapacitated and will die within 10 minutes if not aided. A werewolf regains one blood point per hour (which becomes important, say, if one is kept chained in a vampire's haven as a supply of sustenance). Werewolf blood's very potency makes it psychologically addictive, which should be roleplayed - but sadistic Storytellers should feel free to inflict game effects on "dog-suckers" who go too long without a fix of "wolf juice."

It is rumored that Lupine blood can provide benefits similar to the effects of Celerity or Potence. In truth - and no Kindred know this - the additional benefit is a factor of the werewolf's Pure Breed Background. On the turn after a vampire spends one or more blood points that came from a werewolf with a Pure Breed rating, he gains extra actions and/or additional automatic successes on all Strength rolls, as per the following chart:

Pure Breed	Effect
1	1 additional action
2	1 additional action and 1 automatic success on all Strength rolls
3	2 additional actions and 1 automatic success on all Strength rolls
4	2 additional actions and 2 automatic successes on all Strength rolls
5	3 additional actions and 3 automatic successes on all Strength rolls

The effects are not cumulative (although they do add to existing Celerity or Potence benefits), and only the highest Pure Breed rating applies. For example, if Jesse, in one turn, spends two blood points from a werewolf with Pure Breed 2 and one blood point from a werewolf with Pure Breed 3, he will gain 2 additional full actions and 1 automatic success on all Strength rolls made during the next turn only.

If you are storytelling a crossover game and the coterie's pure-bred Lupine becomes a reservoir of steroid blood for the group's Kindred, you're doing it wrong. Consider your own reaction if a vampire asked to "borrow" a few liters of blood.

The Works

A Lupine can be ghouled; he gains one level of Potence as any other ghoul does. Most werewolves, however, will force themselves to spit out or vomit vitae rather than swallow it, as the blood of the dead is a mockery of all that is natural.

Attempts to Embrace werewolves usually fail. By the grace of their spirit-mother, most werewolves die upon the attempt. However, the Embrace works in a few nasty, rare instances - and the results are the rightly titled Abominations.

Note: These rules for Abominations are taken from the point of view of Vampire. More complete rules may be found in the Werewolf Players Guide Second Edition. This book does not pretend to have all of the cosmological complexity of Werewolf, so we present this information as it applies to this game only.

Kindred Lupines are literally things that should not be. The Embrace severs werewolves from the world's soul, their very reason for existing. As a result, the leading cause of Final Death among the dozen or so Abominations that exist at any given time is suicide.

Abominations are created in the same manner as other Kindred, except they have one last chance for a merciful death. A werewolf's player can make a Gnosis roll, difficulty 6, to die quietly. If the roll succeeds, he dies without pain and his spirit travels to its destined place. If the roll fails, he dies in torturous agony, but his spirit is free. If the roll botches, the werewolf becomes an Abomination. No Discipline, Gift, magic or any other power short of divine intervention can affect this roll, save one - the werewolf can spend a Willpower point for an automatic success and die peacefully (and is almost certain to do so).

An Abomination, unsurprisingly, is of the same clan as his sire, learns three dots of clan Disciplines and exhibits the clan weakness, just like any other Kindred. An Abomination may be Caitiff, as well. He may also spend blood points to increase his attributes or heal himself like any other vampire.

That's where the benefits end. After that, things become really unpleasant.

The Embrace usually causes even mighty Lupine elders to fall from their former peers' esteem. Abominations also cannot increase their Gnosis Trait.

Upon the Embrace, the Lupine's connection with the spirit world begins to fray. This loss means that Abominations cannot regenerate their wounds as do other werewolves; Abominations may heal themselves only by spending blood points. Although Abominations usually remember the Gifts and rites they possessed before their Embrace, they cannot effect any rites other than Wyrm-rites; only vile and corrupt spirits ever answer a call made by a dead thing. Abominations also may never learn Gifts from any spirits other than Banes, and these spirits are spiteful, devious teachers.

Abominations may not spend blood points for any reason in the same turn that they spend Gnosis, make Gnosis rolls, spend Rage or make Rage rolls. The mystical properties of Rage, Gnosis and the Blood all interfere with one another.

Abominations have blood pools according to their generation, as usual.

Abominations exist in a state of permanent, crippling depression. They cannot escape their dolor with Willpower rolls and cannot lift the curse while they "live." In effect, an Abomination must expend a Willpower point to play a scene with his dice pool at full. Additionally, Abominations may never spend Willpower points to gain automatic successes on any dice rolls.

Abominations' Humanity Traits often spiral downward quickly, hurling them into either the jaws of the Beast or merciful oblivion. They may never increase their Humanity, Willpower or Virtues with experience points, as they instead suffer incessant psychological erosion.

And in case you couldn't figure it out, we put Abominations in the Storytellers Handbook for a reason. They are included to be powerful, vicious foes and should be used sparingly, if at all.

Blood Pool Accounting

(See Illustration)

☒☒☒☒☒☒☒☒☐☐
STARTING BLOOD POOL

W W W
☒☒☒☒☒☒☒☐☐☐
AFTER FEEDING ON WW

W W W
☒☒☒☒☒☒☒☒☐☐
AFTER BAR FEEDING

W W W   C
☒☒☒☒☒☒☒☒☐☐
AFTER CHANGELING FEEDING

When a vampire has ingested two or more different types of blood, it is sometimes necessary to track how many blood points of each kind are in his system. A vampire typically spends blood in the order in which it was ingested, oldest blood (the vitae that has been in his blood pool longest) first. It is not possible to choose to spend more recently consumed blood first. We suggest that you treat the blood pool area at the bottom of your character sheet as a rotating track and pencil in abbreviations for different types of vitae.

For example, Jesse normally feeds on mortals. He has eight blood points in his system at the beginning of the night.

He gets into a fight with a werewolf and, miraculously, defeats it, spending four blood points in the process (this leaves him with four). Jesse then takes three blood points from the fallen Lupine to replenish some of what he lost.

Jesse swaggers into a bar, feeling like he's on something of a short fuse, and takes two more blood points from a mortal. He then spends one blood point to heal his last remaining injury.

Our hero then decides to call it a night after one more snack. He finds an attractive young lady and manages to coerce her into going off alone. Jesse takes one blood point from her,

only to be slapped hard enough to cause a health level of damage as she breaks free and runs away! Jesse spends one blood point to heal the damage, only to realize that he's seeing.. things. Jesse's latest "meal" was, unbeknownst to him, a changeling, and he's got seven blood points to go through before he can spend the one he took from her and get her vitae out of his system.

Mages

Although the Tremere claim that their Thaumaturgy is superior to the magic practiced by the obscure "Order of Hermes," the Spheres of the mages are more versatile than any Discipline could ever be. Due to the malleable nature of true magic, it is impossible to account for every situation that might arise with a mage. The following rules are a loose framework on which the enterprising Storyteller can build as required.

Sensing

Conflicts involving Auspex versus illusion or invisibility rotes - or Obfuscate or Chimerstry versus sensory effects - are resolved via the rules given above. The level of the Sphere in use (or highest Sphere for conjunctional effects) and the level of the Discipline are compared to determine whether or not there's a chance for one individual to see through the other's illusion, cloak or stealthing effect.

Countermagic

A mage can employ her Spheres to counter Animalism, Dominate, Presence and Thaumaturgy. At the Storyteller's discretion, other Disciplines - or specific powers of Disciplines - that target the mind or the soul may be countered with appropriate Spheres (e.g. the Auspex Level Eight power Psychic Assault may be countered with Mind or Spirit). Additionally, the Storyteller may rule that any vampiric Discipline may be countered by a mage with appropriate knowledge of Spheres - the static powers of Kindred are rarely a match for the versatile sorceries of the willworkers.

In the cases of foiling Animalism, Dominate and Presence, the mage must have some command (at least one dot) of the Mind Sphere. The mage's player (or the Storyteller) rolls Arete (difficulty of the opposing Discipline's level + 3 [maximum 10]); each success cancels one of the vampire's successes.

To use countermagic against Thaumaturgy, the player rolls Arete (difficulty of the vampire's Thaumaturgy rating + 2 [maximum 10]); each success cancels one of the vampire's successes. This may be used to interrupt Thaumaturgical rituals (at +1 difficulty) or to negate and dispel their effects after they are completed (at +3 difficulty).

Vampiric blood magic is quintessential in nature, as it is powered by Cainite vitae. It is much less versatile than Sphere magic, but it's less of an imposition on accepted reality. Because of Thaumaturgy's nature, it can be used to counter a mage's Effects. This does count as the vampire's action for the turn and cannot be a Celerity-generated multiple action. The player rolls Thaumaturgy (difficulty of the mage's Willpower). Every two successes cancel one of the mage's successes. If the vampire has Thaumaturgical Countermagic (see the Guide to the Camarilla, p. 108), each dot adds one level to the character's effective Thaumaturgy rating for purposes of this roll.

Vampires and Life Magic

Vampires are undead creatures. As such, Life magic does not affect them. Most Life Effects that work on mortal bodies (e.g. transformation, temporary increases of Physical Attributes) can be performed on vampires with the Sphere of Matter.

To "heal" a vampire, a mage must use a Matter 3, Prime 2 conjunctional Effect. This Effect is coincidental under the same circumstances that a normal Life healing Effect performed on a mortal would be coincidental. Healing aggravated wounds is always vulgar.

Aggravated Damage

As a general rule of thumb, any damaging Effect (except Life Effects) powered by Prime inflicts aggravated damage on a vampire, as does an attack incorporating Prime 4+ or a fire- or electricity-based Forces attack. Any attempt to cause aggravated damage through the creation of sunlight requires Forces 3 and Prime 2. Creating true sunlight at night is vulgar, as is "channeling" sunlight into the area from the other side of the planet (Correspondence 5).

Blood and the Wizard

A mage, unless she has performed Effects upon herself that alter her blood, has normal mortal blood in her veins. However, mages can derive some benefit from Kindred blood (beyond becoming ghouls, of course). Two blood points of vampire blood are worth one point of Tass. This is usually collected in some form of container - a mage who directly ingests vampire blood becomes a ghoul and also runs the risk of becoming blood bound, though few mages are aware of this.

A mage can be Embraced like any other mortal. However, the Embrace destroys the mage's Avatar, making her a "normal" vampire. Most mages who find themselves in such a condition commit suicide within a few nights.

wraiths

Interactions between most of the undead and the Restless are rare. For the most part, wraiths exist on a different level of reality than do Kindred. However, it's the uncommon vampire who goes more than a century without attracting the attention of a wraith - usually through the inadvertent creation of one. Also, vampires who practice the unwholesome Discipline of Necromancy see their share of the Restless.

Detection

A vampire must have knowledge of the first level of Ash Path Necromancy to see past the Shroud. Auspex Level Three or higher sometimes allows momentary glimpses out of the corner of one's eye (at the Storyteller's discretion), but no more. When a wraith who is in the Shadowlands attempts to hide from an observer in the world of the living through the use of an Arcanos, use the vampire's Auspex or Ash Path rating, whichever is higher, to determine success as per the general rules above. All wraiths may see through Obfuscate with the use of Lifesight and a roll of Perception + Awareness (difficulty of the vampire's Obfuscate + 3).

Arcanoi

Embody is something of an exception to the usual physical separation of vampires and wraiths, as it allows wraiths to cross the Shroud and interact with the physical world of the Kindred. Embodied wraiths are affected normally by all Disciplines that affect ordinary mortals (e.g. Dominate), and all Arcanoi that are hampered by the Shroud work without penalty.

Fatalism does not work all that well across the Shroud (minimum 3 successes to get a reading). However, information that is obtained regarding vampires tends to be more.. interesting.. than that involving mortals. Occasionally (at the Storyteller's discretion) a Fatal Vision (Fatalism Level One) reading shows the Oracle how the vampire's mortal existence ended - his Embrace.

Keening: At the Storyteller's discretion, an Embodied wraith may spend a Willpower point and use Requiem (Keening Level Five) to force a vampire into or out of frenzy. The victim of such an effect may resist with a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) if he is prepared for such manipulations.

Despite Moliate's similarity to the Discipline Vicissitude, the two powers are nothing alike. Moliate works on plasm and cannot affect a vampire's body, while Vicissitude is strictly geared toward the alteration of flesh and will not work on a wraith (even an Embodied one). It may, however, work upon the unfortunate victim who the wraith skinrides, but this has no effect on the wraith himself.

Outrage: Fires started by Death's Touch (Outrage Level Four) cannot directly ignite the undead body. However, clothing can easily be set ablaze. Obliviate (Outrage Level Five) works normally on vampires and can be soaked only with Fortitude (not Fortitude + Stamina).

Pandemonium: Any "blood" generated with this power is completely unpalatable to vampires and will induce intense vomiting if ingested. A vampire targeted with Tempus Fugit (Pandemonium Level Five) cannot employ Celerity to gain extra actions on top of those granted by Tempus Fugit, but Tempus Fugit can negate extra Celerity actions as per its basic rules.

Phantasm affects vampires in the same manner it does mortals. Kindred pulled into dreamscapes cannot employ Disciplines or spend blood points while trapped in the dream.

Puppetry can be resisted by Kindred who are aware of its effects. The player resists by spending a Willpower point and rolling Willpower (difficulty 7). If commands issued through Dominate and Puppetry come into conflict, the vampire and wraith make a contested Willpower roll. The loser cannot make another attempt to override the winner's commands until the next night.

Usury cannot be used to steal or restore health levels from or to Kindred, nor can it be used to create or steal blood.

Wraiths and Blood

Wraiths cannot be fed from, turned into ghouls or Embraced (though the Nagaraja's Nihilistics does offer an exception on the feeding prohibition, in the form of Soul Feasting).

changelings

The fae tend to avoid the Kindred - most vampires make changelings uncomfortable, and most changelings make vampires hungry. However, chance encounters do occur, and some sluagh and redcaps feel a certain kinship with the blood-drinking Prodigals.

Disciplines

Auspex Level Two (Aura Perception) will reveal a changeling for what she is. Fae auras usually appear as bright flickering colors, making identification of specific emotions more difficult - Storytellers should feel free to describe what colors might be in a changeling's aura, perhaps fudging the color scale a bit. A strong Auspex also counteracts those Chicanery powers that create illusions or conceal objects or individuals from sight, as per the general guidelines above.

Chimerstry may inflict chimerical damage upon changelings. Sluagh using Sharpened Senses may see through Chimerstry-generated illusions with a roll of Perception + Awareness (difficulty of the vampire's Chimerstry rating + 3). The Level Five Chimerstry power Horrid Reality can create the semblance of cold iron; a changeling "killed" with

illusionary cold iron from such a source gains a permanent point of Banality and falls unconscious until he is revived with an infusion of Glamour.

The second level of Mytherceria, the unique Discipline of the rare Kiasyd bloodline, allows a vampire to see (and recognize as such) a changeling's faerie aspect. A vampire with the second level of Mytherceria may also see the chimerical nature of freeholds and notice chimera with a Perception + Occult roll (difficulty 9).

Most changelings are affected by Obfuscate as if they were mortals. Sluagh can see through it by using Sharpened Senses with a roll of Perception + Alertness (difficulty of the vampire's Obfuscate rating + 3).

Aggravated Damage

Kindred fangs and Feral Claws inflict aggravated damage on changelings (see Changeling: The Dreaming, p. 247). Any changeling cantrips that inflict damage directly on their target (e.g. Primal Level Four [Holly Strike]) cause aggravated damage to Kindred. Like other aggravated damage, Kindred may soak this with Fortitude.

Glamourous Sustenance

Vampires are typically not mentally equipped to deal with chimerical reality, and ingesting the blood of a being with a chimerical nature has some rather unpleasant effects. Whenever a vampire feeds from a changeling, she gains the ability to see chimera and the chimerical aspects of the world around her for as long as she has at least one blood point from a changeling in her blood pool. She must also immediately roll Courage (difficulty of the number of blood points taken + 3). Failure indicates that she enters the second threshold of Bedlam (Changeling: The Dreaming, p. 208): She cannot distinguish chimera from reality, and she gains a temporary derangement related to the changeling's kith or Legacies (Storyteller's discretion). A botch on the Courage roll throws the vampire into the third threshold of Bedlam: all of the above, with the added "benefit" of a new permanent derangement of the Storyteller's choice, usually related to the changeling's Unseelie Legacy.

Kindred Changelings

Several attempts have been made to Embrace changelings. This almost always fails: The subjects die, screaming in agony. If a changeling is Embraced before her Saining, she becomes a vampire with absolutely no special benefits or powers whatsoever, just like any other mortal who undergoes the Embrace (although such characters may have rather.. unique.. personalities, and many display one or more Supernatural Merits or Flaws).

Changelings can be ghouled and blood bound. A changeling ghoul gains two permanent points of Banality that last as long as she has Kindred blood in her system.

Hunters

Until recently, hunters lived normal lives. Now they're something more, imbued with power and chosen to hunt monsters. Hunters get their power from the Messengers, mysterious beings roused to action by recent turmoil in the realms of spirit. No hunter yet knows the Messengers' full agenda, only that the Messengers want to rid the world of supernatural entities. Hunters fight most often against the proliferating numbers and variety of walking dead. After the walking dead, vampires most often attract hunter attention.

One or more hunters can show up at almost any moment to make unlife more complicated for the local Kindred. Zealots seek out Kindred to avenge the harm Leeches do. Visionaries also seek out Kindred, to understand them as well as to fight - but they understand precisely in order to fight more effectively. The Merciful seldom rush to initiate battle, preferring to concentrate on protecting vampires'

victims.

Power and Conviction: Optional Rule

Hunter: The Reckoning allows hunters to resist all efforts at supernatural deceit and manipulation through spending Conviction. If you want to allow truly powerful beings - particularly elders and Methuselahs - to break through the Imbuing, use this rule. Compare the number of dots in the Discipline or ability the vampire is using to the hunter's dots in her creed Virtue. If the hunter's rating is higher, the effort fails. If the ratings are equal or the vampire is superior, the effort at deception or control can proceed. Add the hunter's Virtue rating to whatever dice the character would normally have to defend against the vampiric assault. In cases where there's normally no defense possible, roll dice equal to the hunter's Zeal rating, difficulty 6, to cancel out attackers' successes.

Disciplines

Many Disciplines fail against a hunter with his mental defenses active, including Chimerstry, Dementation, Dominate, Obfuscate, Obtenebration Level Two, Presence and Serpentis Level One.

Animalism: Quell the Beast doesn't affect a hunter who's spent Conviction to engage her second sight and mental defense. Nor can a vampire on the edge of frenzy use Drawing Out the Beast on a hunter with active defenses.

Auspex: Use the chart at the start of this chapter to compare Auspex against a hunter's rating in the Innocence edge when the hunter uses Hide. Aura Perception shows a hunter's aura as unusually vivid and active. While using any of his Edges, a hunter's aura flares even brighter. Monstrous targets of the Martyr edge of Payback show auras with human manifestations intermingled with their normal auras. Heightened Senses do reveal the effects of the Vengeance edge of Trail. Telepathy only works on a hunter with active defenses if he chooses to allow it. Any use of Aura Perception on a hunter reveals a nimbus or halo about her, much like medieval and Renaissance paintings of saints.

Obtenebration: Shroud of Night does not stop vision-enhancing powers like the Judgment edge Discern.

Quietus: This Discipline's powers work against a hunter with active defenses. These powers are physical effects, not mental or emotional, and force of will doesn't stop them any more than will alone stops a Potence-strengthened punch. The sole exception is Quietus Level One, which a hunter may confound as described above.

Vicissitude: A vampire with Vicissitude can reshape a hunter, but the hunter's Imbuing fights back. Roll the hunter's current Conviction, difficulty 6; each success cancels out one success on the Vicissitude roll. Hunters' second sight does not pierce a disguise created by Malleable Visage, since that's a physical transformation. Edges that accelerate healing, like Restore and Rejuvenate, do reverse the effects of Vicissitude; the damage heals as if it were one level higher, since it takes more time to undo unnatural transmogrification.

Edges

Defense: Ward does apply to vampires who are intangible. Brand's effects remain visible to other vampires despite Mask of a Thousand Faces, Fleshcraft and the like.

Innocence: Illuminate works even on vampires in highly inhuman forms, including those created by Obtenebration Levels Four and Five, Protean Levels Four and Five and Vicissitude. A vampire on the scene can be detected, regardless of form.

Judgment: A vampire afflicted by Burden can change shape, but still can't move from the spot until the edge wears off. Balance applies to all expenditures of blood points, including healing, raising attributes and the like, in addition to fueling Disciplines.

Martyrdom: Unlike the standard hunter second sight, Witness does pierce disguises created with Vicissitude. Ravage applies to any vampire the hunter can see, regardless of the vampire's current form. A vampire afflicted with Payback cannot escape the limitation through shapeshifting or other transformation; the edge's effects last the full duration and may keep the vampire from using some or all of her Disciplines, depending on the limitation imposed.

Redemption: A vampire in non-human form can be targeted by Insinuate if he could hear and understand the question in his human form. Once a hunter drains all health levels from a vampire, she can go on to drain blood points with Respire.

Vengeance: Heightened Senses and Eyes of Chaos allow a vampire to see the effects of Trail and to pierce Smolder.

Visionary: As Storyteller, allow the player of a hunter using Pinpoint to specify whether he wants information about a weakness specific to the target or applicable to its kind. Specific weaknesses can include clan weaknesses and other features that don't affect all Kindred. Delve pierces through normal defenses against scrying unless you choose to apply the optional rule for power versus Conviction.

Un-Embraceable You

Hunters cannot be Embraced, blood bound or ghouled. The Messengers' Imbuing just doesn't let it happen. Gag reflexes make a Hunter fed vitae spit it out again, and vitae injected or otherwise inserted simply dissipates without effect. Drain a

hunter's blood altogether and he dies. (He doesn't become a wraith, either.)

kindred of the East and vampire Revised

Where material in this section contradicts the text of Kindred of the East, it should be considered to supersede and replace the previously published material. Storytellers are encouraged to rule independently when in doubt or to discard these conversions in favor of their own.

Dharmic Social Bonuses

While the Running Monkeys and jina may be impressed by displays of wisdom, the mandarins know that the ancestors and even the mighty bodhisattvas, however enlightened, are still fallible. Kuei-jin who themselves receive a bonus to social interactions based on their Dharmic station (see Kindred of the East, p. 54) may subtract the number of bonus dice they receive from the number of bonus dice an elder of higher station receives when the characters are interacting. So for example, a bodhisattva of Dharma 9 would receive only 3 bonus dice to Social rolls against a mandarin of Dharma 7. The Kuei-jin have little doubt that the bodhisattvas' incredible powers of persuasion are one of the reasons that the mandarins strictly limit the amount of contact they have with disciples and jina.

Unlocking Demon Chi

As stated on p. 91 of Kindred of the East, a Kuei-jin must roll P'o (difficult Hun +3) to gain access to their Demon Chi for a scene. Four or more successes on this roll sends the vampire into fire nature. This roll need only be made when the Kuei-jin wishes to burn "raw" Demon Chi.

The P'o roll used when activating a Demon Art is a shadow soul roll of Hun (difficulty P'o), as specified on p. 90 of Kindred of the East. When a Kuei-jin activates a Demon Art, be sure to use this special roll and not the standard shadow nature roll described on pp. 91 and 151 of that book. Kuei-jin invoking Black Wind must make this special shadow soul roll when first activating the Art as well as a P'o roll (difficulty 8) each turn it is active. As specified on p. 108 of Kindred of the East, failing this roll triggers automatic fire soul.

Resisting Mental Intrusion

Through the power of the P'o, Kuei-jin can resist spiritual chains of any sort, be they Soul Shackles, the blood bond, Dominate, Presence or the more esoteric abilities of other shen. Note that Kuei-Jin whose equivalent generation is lower than the Kin-jin's (see Kindred of the East, pp.12-13) is automatically immune to the effects of that Cainite's Dominate. Any magical power that would mentally subjugate the Kuei-jin's free will may be resisted with the P'o. This

includes even powers like Chi'iu Muh's Dragon Ward, Dementation and the Mibasham powers Pors'dan and Riddle of Maya.

Kuei-jin may spend Willpower to resist such mind control, but only if they are aware that they are bound. Storytellers should be generous in this. In general, only one attempt to break free is allowed per constraint, though extraordinary circumstances might allow an additional roll, at the Storyteller's discretion.

Note that the P'o cannot resist powers that investigate rather than manipulate (for example, Auspex or certain powers of Obligation), those that rely on mental misdirection (like Obfuscate or Shrouded Moon) or those that prey specifically on the Demon's nature (like Cultivation, the Dread Gaze or Goblin Spark "firecrackers").

Combat

Because it is complex, combat is the subject of extensive rules and is the facet of Vampire that changed most between editions. Most of the changes involve the new initiative system, powers that allow vampires to take multiple actions per turn and the new division between bashing and lethal damage. While matters could be glossed over, it seems better to give the Storyteller a full and established conversion to work from, and let individual troupes decide where to depart from the established norm.

General Conversions

Use Vampire's revised rules for normal weapons and hand-to-hand attacks. Supernatural weapons made manifest through Demon Shintai, Yin Prana or other powers do the amount of damage listed for the weapon on p. 214 of **Vampire: The Masquerade**. This damage is aggravated only if specified in the power description.

Sources of damage that do not have mortal equivalents but which do rely on attack rolls have their damage reduced by one. So, for example, bone talons grown through the use of Bone Obedience will now do Strength + 1 aggravated damage instead of Strength + 2. Included in this category are bone swords, the bloodlash, claws, fangs, maws, spines, suckers and pretty much any other attack that relies on the regular combat system (attack-dodge-damage-soak) to resolve.

Attacks that do not cause direct damage (for example, the Blood Atemi) or that do not rely on attack rolls to determine if they hit (for example, the Five Poison Cloud) make the transition to the revised rules unchanged from their original form.

Special exceptions to these guidelines are discussed below, under Disciplines.

Bashing Damage From Firearms

Regardless of the Kuei-jin's Aspect or Chi Balance, they treat damage from firearms as bashing damage. Note: The Kindred of the East Companion states that Yang-aspected Kuei-jin suffer lethal damage from firearms. This new rule supersedes that. Despite their elevated body temperature and ability to function sexually, Yang-aspected Kuei-jin are still undead. While the destruction of major organs might inconvenience them, it is no more than a nuisance. This is true even for Kuei-jin with permanent Yang-imbalances. However, the Storyteller should raise sharply the difficulty of permanently Yang-imbalanced Kuei-jin's monthly infection roll if they are severely wounded and leave the wounds unhealed or untreated. Storytellers may even require an immediate roll at difficulty 8 or 9 if the vampire encounters highly septic conditions while bearing unhealed wounds. The scarlet Chi that permeates the flesh of such Cathayans makes it a fertile breeding ground for diseases of the most virulent sort.

Extra Actions

Black Wind, Demon Chi and Yang Prana all draw on different and mutually incompatible sources of energy. As a result, these sources of extra actions are not compatible (with the limited exception of Dragon Dance and Black Wind). Just as with actions granted by Celerity, a Cathayan's extra actions can be used only for physical tasks. The difference between physical and mental actions is often very blurry for Kuei-jin and is left up to Storyteller adjudication. Generally, Chi Disciplines and Shintais may be used multiple times per turn, while most Soul Disciplines may not. In any case, keep the Kuei-jin's Chi expenditure limit in mind.

Actions gained from the use of raw Demon Chi and Yang Prana powers occur next round, as if they had been granted by Celerity. Just as with Celerity, these extra actions can be used only for physical activity. Actions gained via the use of Black Wind occur in the round that the Demon Chi is spent, thus making the first dot of Black Wind a very worthwhile purchase.

Reflexive Actions

The following actions are reflexive. They do not require an action and thus do not require that the vampire's dice pool be split.

- Using the P'o to resist mental domination
- Expending Chi to power Disciplines or improve Physical Attributes
- Healing damage with Chi
- Making a reflexive attack to active a power that requires the vampire to touch his target
- Soaking damage

Reflexive Attacks

An attack that requires the vampire to touch his target allows the Cathayan to make a reflexive Dexterity + Martial Arts or Dexterity + Brawl check to determine if he can successfully touch his target. This reflexive attack does no damage, other than the effects of the power. A Kuei-jin splitting her dice pool to use a Discipline that involves a reflexive attack multiple times in the same action must also split her reflexive attack die pool; the Kuei-jin gets only one reflexive attack pool per action. Kuei-jin attempting do something complex like climbing up a ladder while launching a normal attack on one target and using Equilibrium on a different target should split one die pool among all the actions including the touch attempt in the name of simplicity.

A Kuei-jin with extra actions cannot make a successful attack on a target with one action and then invoke a power on a later action based on the previously established "touch." The sort of physical contact required for the invocation of Disciplines in quite specific to the power in question, not just a simple condition of the power's effect.

Disciplines

Like Combat, Disciplines require a certain amount of mechanical overhead based on their importance to the game. As a result, the Disciplines section of the conversion is quite extensive.

Equilibrium

Equilibrium powers like Chi Mastery and Chi Interrupt can be used during extra actions, making Cathayans skilled with this art deadly in combat.

Tapestry

Tapestry is a difficult and often arduous Discipline to perform, and Tapestry powers cannot be performed with extra actions.

Chi-Shaping

The bad joss effect of Chi-shaping has different effects under the revised rules. When a target or area is affected with bad joss, "1"s and "2"s are subtracted from the number of rolled successes. Note that botching still requires no successes and at least one "1" to be rolled - no successes, no "1"s and one or more "2"s is not a botch.

Yang Prana

Principle of Motion

Each point of Yang Chi channeled through the Principle of Motion adds 3 to the Kuei-jin's initiative rating total for the turn, not three dice.

Yang Mantle

Although not explicitly stated, additional successes on the Cathayan's Dexterity + Melee roll to attack with a Yang bolt add to the damage done by the bolt, which does two aggravated damage by itself.

Dragon Dance

Because attack roll successes add to damage dice pools in the revised rules, the effects of the Dragon Dance are slightly different. Successes on attacks made by a Kuei-jin using the Dragon Dance are not counted twice.

Instead, when performing the Dragon Dance, the Kuei-jin's attack and damage roll difficulties are reduced by 1 when she is engaged in hand-to-hand combat. Also, the Cathayan's hand-to-hand attacks do lethal damage, even if made unarmed or with blunt weapons, making the blows of Yang Prana practitioners devastating against mortals as well as effective against those who have taken the Second Breath. The negation of wound penalties and other effects of the Dragon Dance are exactly as presented on pp. 105-106 of Kindred of the East.

Yin Prana

Yin Mantle

As in Yang Mantle above, additional successes on a Yin bolt attack add to a base two dice of aggravated damage.

Eightfold Yin Mantle

To clarify the method by which the wayang takes damage, it soaks with the vampire's basic Stamina only, not adding other bonuses such as Bone Armor, Stamina bonuses from Shintai arts or soak difficulty reductions from Permeate. However, a wayang takes half damage from bashing attacks and treats gunfire as bashing. It is, after all, nothing but an animate shadow.

Black Wind

Black Wind is as described in Extra Actions and Unlocking Demon Chi, providing its extra actions the turn the Demon Chi is spent. As noted on p. 106 of Kindred of the East, Black Wind can be invoked during the Dragon Dance. When this is done, the Black Wind can be used only to provide automatic damage successes or to increase running speed. Failing the Black Wind's per-turn fire soul roll while using the Discipline in conjunction with the Dragon Dance generally results in a terrible combination of fire and shadow souls, in which the Kuei-jin is reduced to little more that a chih mei for hours,

sometimes nights. As a result, most vampires avoid mixing the Disciplines, but during times of desperation, many Cathayans are willing to push the envelope for the extra power.

Demon Shintai

Demon Shintai's Attribute bonuses work as printed. As noted in General Conversions (see above), weapons generated with Demon Weapon now use the revised-edition weapons table to determine the weapon's Traits. Other damage-causing Investitures that cause direct harm have the amount of damage they do reduced by one.

Blood Shintai

Other than Bloodlash's reduction to Strength + 1 aggravated damage, Blood Shintai works as printed.

Bone Shintai

Bone Obedience

Talons do Strength +1 aggravated damage, and the Bone Blade does Strength + 2 aggravated damage.

Five Poison Cloud

Five Poison Cloud works as printed. Since there is no attack roll, the damage remains the same.

Ch'ing Shih

A Kuei-jin who has activated Ch'ing Shih has access to the Talons, Visage and Key powers of Bone Obedience free (though she must still wait for the appendages to grow). Bone Armor and Bone Blade continue to cost Chi, but the effect per point spent is doubled - Bone Armor provides two additional soak dice, and the Bone Blade lasts for six turns per point, rather than three. Wounds inflicted with the Bone Blade carry the same venom as the ch'ing shih's bite and talons.

Walking corpses created through the ch'ing shih's venom take damage as if they were a vampire (that is, halve bashing damage after an attack and treat firearms as bashing weapons). Unless the corpse is very badly mutilated, the zombies return with full health levels.

Jade Shintai

Jade Servant of the August Personage

Strikes by Kuei-jin wearing any of the five elemental mantles do lethal damage. Also, while the elemental mantles provide three additional soak dice (as per Class Three body armor), they do not penalize the vampire's Dexterity.

Flesh Shintai

Detach Limb

Constriction damage is bashing. Bite damage is aggravated, but remember that Kuei-jin must spend Demon Chi to grow fangs or a maw. Note that Kuei-jin penangallan leaping or floating about may make bite attacks even without a successful grapple.

Pelesit

The attacks delivered by pelesits do lethal damage by default, though the Kuei-jin may choose to shape the homunculi into forms that have bashing attacks.

Ten Thousand Forms

Kuei-jin using the Ten Thousand forms can grow a variety of horns, spines, claws and fangs that do lethal damage. Use the Bone Obedience and Demon Shintai characteristics as guidelines for how much damage these body weapons do. However, the Ten Thousand Forms does not allow the Kuei-jin to grow natural weapons that deal aggravated damage. Cathayans must use other powers (usually the Demon Shintai or Bone Shintai's power Bone Obedience) to make such fearsome attacks.

Ghost-Flame Shintai

Goblin Face

If for some reason the Kuei-jin's bite does bashing or lethal damage, the use of Goblin Face in conjunction with the bite causes the damage to become aggravated.

Goblin Spark

The Yang rating referred to in the third paragraph of the power description is the target's permanent Yang rating.

Chu'iu Muh

The "P'o domination" referred to in this Discipline is the Demon Shintai form. Kuei-jin must know the Demon Shintai to manifest the Dragon Tear. While in their normal mortal form, they may use only the Hun side of the Discipline, while in Demon Shintai form, they may use only the Discipline's P'o versions. It is the vampire's physical form and not their current soul state that determines which power is usable to be.

The Dragon Tear is a form of mind control. Kuei-jin who wish to resist its effects, even Spirit-Eating, may do so with a P'o roll (difficulty 9), as detailed on p. 91 of Kindred of the East. This roll may be made only once per attempt.

Spirit-Eating

Note that the loss of Dharma rating for actually devouring a soul is automatic for vampires other than the Devil-Tigers. The Hun and P'o must be in agreement to use either version of this power – Spirit-Eating is a metaphysically demanding process, and the Kuei-jin's dual soul must be in harmony over the matter. If the currently dominant soul wishes to use Spirit-Eating without the other half's permission, it must force the issue in a battle of wills. This is done via an extended, opposed roll of Hun versus P'o, with the difficulty of both rolls being the vampire's Willpower. The winner is the first to accumulate three more successes than its rival.

If the dominant soul wins, then the lesser soul must permit the attempt at Spirit-Eating to take place. If the secondary soul wins, then the Kuei-jin cannot use Spirit-Eating on that target for (at least) the rest of the night. A botch on this contest of wills generally leaves the failed soul prostrate for some time.

Finally, remember that the Devil-Tigers can lose Dharma for consuming souls to no real end, but even the worst abuses will constitute no more than an Act of Blindness.

Internalize

Distant Death Kata

Only simple physical attacks can be made with the Distant Death Kata. Attacks that have an effect other than doing damage (for example, most Equilibrium-based attacks) do not work with the kata. The difficulty is as normal for the attack, and the player must roll three or more successes to perform the Distant Death Kata correctly. Successes do not add to the damage inflicted by the kata, nor do automatic damage successes from Black Wind and burning raw Demon Chi. Attacks that would do aggravated damage inflict lethal

damage when inflicted by the Distant Death Kata.

Iron Mountain

Soaking has become more difficult under the revised rules, and Iron Mountain has changed to reflect this. To activate this Demon Art, the vampire must make the P'o roll (difficulty equal to his Hun) for shadow soul, as per normal. For each turn that it is active, the Kuei-jin must spend a point of Demon Chi.

Beast Shintai

Despite this Discipline's name, it should be treated as a Soul Discipline, including the Kuei-jin's inability to use its powers when in Demon Shintai form. Beast Shintai does not enable the Kuei-jin to increase their Strength Attribute under revised Vampire rules.

Mibasham

Stepping Stones

The effect of Stepping Stones is not instantaneous. The number of successes on the character's Intelligence + Occult roll is compared to the chart on p. 147 of Kindred of the East to determine the amount of time required to traverse the Wall.

More importantly, Following in the Crab's Footsteps and the Pranas provide the Kuei-jin with protection against the often hostile environments of the spirit world. Both the Yin and Yang Worlds are hostile to those without the proper spiritual natures, including the fallen Wan Kuei. Kuei-jin travelling the Yang World via Stepping Stones may suffer as much as one to three dice of aggravated damage per turn. The Yin World has entered one of its great storm seasons as the Sixth Age approaches, and Kuei-jin using Stepping Stones to enter the Yellow Springs risk instant obliteration. Those few Kuei-jin schooled in Mibasham typically use Stepping Stones as a method of exiting the spirit worlds in an emergency, using Following in the Crab's Footsteps instead to gain entrance to the Yin and Yang Worlds.

Entrance to Yomi via Stepping Stones is much less risky. However, the gate that opens one way does not necessarily swing the other way so easily. Vampires who enter the Yomi Realms via Stepping Stones sometimes find themselves either in the hazardous terrain of the Ebon Road or the Scarlet Path or else on the other side of a gateway into one of the Thousand Hells proper. In the former case, the Kuei-jin need only worry about preserving his existence long enough to gain his bearings. In the latter case, the Cathayan is likely to find attempts to leave the hell blocked by the various wicked spirits who act as gate warders for the Yama Kings.

A Stumble On The Path

Heaven does not smile on those who push their fellows from the path of enlightenment. Kuei-jin who are not akuma may well suffer an Act of Blindness from the use of A Stumble on the Path.

Drawing Distinctions

In its design, Vampire is intended to be played as a stand-alone game. The various factions, groups and subcultures prevalent in other games from the Storyteller series quite simply do not exist if you're playing Vampire exclusively. Vampire has no Silent Striders, no Technocracy and no Unseelie Court as they are defined by the rules.

This is intentional.

You've read the above caveats about the games' themes degrading when too many disparate elements are introduced. Mages have no Humanity Trait, so mixing them into a coterie of vampires and letting them kill without consequence, while acceptable according to the rules, harms both the mages' and the vampires' contribution to the story.

Certainly, a group of werewolves may call itself the Silent Striders in your Vampire game, but they're not going to be the Silent Striders as codified on page whatever of whatever other game line's book. Vampires aren't set up to worry about things like Umbras and Shard Realms and the Dreaming.

Now, we've been known to break this rule here and there. Necromancy, for example, was rewritten in the revised edition to fit more cleanly with Wraith. These little breaks are considerations for the larger concept. It's a bit fatuous to
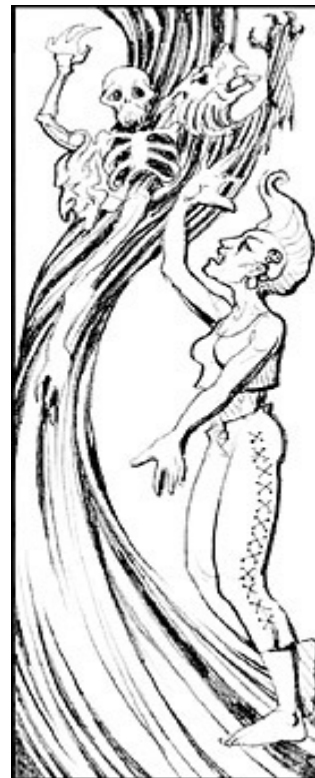
have rules for ghosts that, well, fail to take the ghosts into account. But by and large, Vampire doesn't depend on the presence of other supernaturals. Your coterie has more to worry about with the agitated anarchs than it does from some nebulous and rarely seen motley of changelings (who, by extension, have their own damn problems and don't give a toss about the vampires..).

The other supernaturals work better as mysterious allies or enemies, given power by the story's needs and quantified by the drama the Storyteller wants her troupe to enact. Don't feel that your city is incomplete because you haven't created a pack of Bone Gnawers to lurk in the parks and a cult of sluagh to scuttle through the sewers. You don't need these other elements to play a compelling Vampire game, and 90 percent of the time, you'll be better off without them. Overpopulating the world with monsters makes the mortals irrelevant - and if that were the case, vampires would need no Masquerade. The other denizens of the World of Darkness should exist as enigmas rather than reliable staples. Putting aside for a moment the pestilent problem of clan/tribe/whatever clones, placing a supernatural creature behind every plot makes the Gothic-Punk world far less mysterious. If the Kindred are to fear the fair folk, employing generic redcap hooligans as bouncers in every last one of the city's nightclubs does the setting and the game a disservice.

We're not saying, "Don't do crossover!" By all means, it's your game; do what makes you and your players happy. Break the Golden Rule over our collective heads if it entertains you. What we are saying is that you should give consideration to your story's needs. As Storyteller, you have the most responsibility for making sure the tale you and your troupe tell doesn't suck. Does the prince's chauffeur need to be a blood-bound Glass Walker Philodox? Couldn't he just as easily be a ghoul? Or, even more statistically likely, a normal, oblivious mortal? Familiarity breeds contempt: If the troupe should really fear the bishop's paid assassin, it's you're job to make them quake. You're just lazy if you rely on them to think, "Oh, he's a werewolf. He can kick our asses."

The Gothic-Punk world is ultimately one of subtlety and menace. Ostentation and violence certainly have their place, but consider the logical outcome of any given character's action. A pistol-wielding gangsta is going to have a short, violent life but is going to get what he wants. The smooth-talking senator's aide is also going to get it - and she's less likely to get whacked in a gang war, arrested for possession, etc. Using the other supernaturals is analagous. If you use them to cow the players or to hurl around strange powers, your game will likely be short and violent. If you use them to build suspense and tension, your game will be longer, richer, deeper and more mature.

And better.

There is no end, but addition: the trailing
Consequence of further days and hours,
While emotion takes to itself the emotionless
Years of living among the breakage
Of what was believed in as the most reliable -
And therefore the fittest for renunciation.

– T.S. Eliot, "The Dry Salvages"

The Sabbat and Camarilla are new organizations by Kindred standards, only a few centuries old. The vampires who created them were far older, their minds filled with hopes and fears from the dawn of history. Some vampires sought to fulfill purely personal agendas, while others acted for the greater good. One faction, which operated under a variety of names and through a bewildering variety of faзades, has plummeted from secret mastery to destruction and dispersal. Even though the "True Black Hand" falls in the same secrecy under which it once tried to rule, its passing matters to the Sabbat and even to Kindred society beyond the Sabbat.

History

Before the Sabbat

Prehistory

The truth about events that happened thousands of years ago seldom comes easily. Would-be secret masters of the world seldom leave behind extensive documentation, and when they tell their stories to younger audiences self-deception clouds details even more thoroughly than deliberate lies. Every story about ancient nights must begin, "According to...."

According to the survivors of the True Black Hand, their sect began in the ancient Middle East, with magicians dedicated to studying the secrets of death, spirits and the afterlife. Some survivors refer to the founded gathering as the Tal'mahe'Ra and give conflicting accounts of what language provided the word and what it means when translated into modern tongues. Other survivors name the group differently, and many don't give it a name at all. The group's members knew each other, and their gathering was (as the Mafia would put it much later) "our thing."

Whatever they called themselves, those early magicians made contact with Cainites and sought both to teach magical crafts and to learn vampiric Disciplines. Neither effort succeeded. A handful of magicians accepted the Embrace so

as to learn Disciplines, though at the cost of their former abilities.

As shared knowledge about the vampiric condition grew, the group's members began developing a larger set of goals. Above all else, they wanted to hasten the revival and return the Antediluvians, ushering in (as the group saw it) a new age of supreme magical insights. Vampires would turn from interfering with mortals to mastering the mystical potential within them, under the absolute control of the Antediluvians. That is, the group became a Gehenna cult with human as well as vampiric adherents.

A Society of Vampires

Gradually the vampires gained the upper hand, manipulating the magicians so as to serve Cainite schemes. According to modern survivors of the cult, around 500 BC most of the magicians left and founded a magicians-only society that would in time become the world's largest gathering of sorcerers devoted to death and fate. (The various claimants to the title of "world's largest gathering" tell stories of their origins that include no association with a secret society of vampires. The handful of outsiders who ever learn both sides' stories must judge for themselves whether immortal mages who must live outside material reality to avoid self-immolation or ancient vampires who like residing among ghosts and ghouled children provide a more plausible account.)

Now dominating rather than studying under the group's remaining wizards, the vampires expanded the scope of their studies. They ranged into Europe, trying (unsuccessfully) to learn the secrets of mortal blood magicians there and (much more successfully) gaining influence over mortal institutions. The cult's masters of Cainite studies began mapping out several new Disciplines, which continued to evolve until taking their current forms between 1,000 and 1,500 years ago.

The cult's unity ended about AD 450, for reasons the survivors debate as earnestly as they do the group's name. Depending on who tells the story, the real culprits were vampires too willing (or not willing enough) to focus on the Underworld, Setites, the Inconnu or mysterious forces from beyond the edge of the universe which can impersonate anything. The split itself followed geography, the Eastern branch was less concerned with mortal politics than the Western branch. Tales differ as to whether the Latin name Manus Nigrum, or "Black Hand," came into use before or after the schism. As the group's machinations attracted the attention of others, observers and victims referred to the half-seen manipulators as the Manus Nigrum. In short order, that name gained popularity within the group as well.

The Manus Nigrum didn't want any vampires except its own interfering with human affairs. During the "Long Night," or medieval period, members of the cult tried to strengthen human institutions that might strike back against vampires

hiding among mortals. It worked, though without the results the Manus Nigrum hoped for.

The Inquisition brought together devout vampire-hunters and coordinated their efforts, slaughtering careless vampires by the score. Unknown to the Manus Nigrum, vampire adherents to the Cainite Heresy - who believed that Caine was blessed by God with the vampiric nature - often used the turmoil of the hunt to slaughter their own enemies and substantially undercut Manus Nigrum influence. The vampires the Manus Nigrum most wanted removed, powerful elders who might conceivably threaten the Antediluvians' return, proved the most successful at escaping clerical fires. Neonates and ancillae fed the flames instead. The survivors were precisely those most capable of directing mortal attention elsewhere: that is, precisely the vampires capable of challenging the Manus Nigrum's power over mortals.

The conspiratorial view of History

To conspirators, everything looks like a plot or an accident. Trained themselves to work in disciplined secrecy and accustomed to using apparently minor shifts to advance their agenda, conspirators lose track of the reality that most people don't act that way. Conspirators look for rival schemes and can easily interpret the absence of evidence as proof that the rivals exist and are very effective. Suffering from a form of tunnel vision, conspirators see everyone as just like themselves or as mindless raw material. Motivations like sudden inspiration and honestly declared ambitions don't impress conspirators, who then fail to understand why events end up conforming to no master plan.

Players and Storytellers should remember that there's more to history than dueling conspiracies and simple chaos. Individuals act for reasons - not necessarily good or coherent ones, but reasons nonetheless. Major events don't have single causes, but happen because of a great many drives all interacting together in unforeseen ways. The Manus Nigrum fell partly because its members lost track of this truth. You don't have to make the same mistake. The more you allow room for individuals and groups to act outside of a vast array of planned and unplanned motives, the more interesting you can make the events of your chronicle. Ultimately, most vampires are entirely selfish.

The cult's leaders didn't stop to examine their initial assumptions or consider that the disaster around them might actually follow logically from their own actions. They attributed bad results to a variety of enemies, real and imagined, and pressed on with further schemes. Nobody within the Manus Nigrum voiced a concern that the cult's overall strategy might not work.

Undead Among the Dead

See **Vampire: The Masquerade** pp. 282-283 for an introduction to the wraithly condition.

The Underworld stretches off infinitely "below" the living world, and the farther a traveler goes from the "Skinlands," the stranger things get. Beneath the "Shadowlands," which mirror the mortal world, a tempest rages, with storm clouds that carry not water but the debris of memories and creatures native to the Underworld. Only a few safe havens punctuate the tempest's chaos. One of these islands of calm was crucial to the Manus Nigrum's history.

Vampires who learn anything at all about the mythology of their kind know of Enoch, the First City. No lore provides much information as to where Enoch stood; Noddist scholars argue all night about the merits of various possibilities. Certainly there's no sign in the modern world of a city that can plausibly be interpreted as Enoch. Early Manus Nigrum explorers in the Underworld encountered the city they call Enoch deep within the tempest.

It very well could be the original. Objects that held great personal attachment can appear in the Shadowlands once destroyed in the living realm, and various arts can move them from the Shadowlands deeper into the afterlife. On the other hand, dreams, hopes and fears also create echoes in the Underworld. The close similarities between the ghostly Enoch and descriptions of the original may reflect only the fact that vampires often feel strongly about their myths. The Antediluvians might have created the ghostly Enoch by force of will, for their own reasons. No test could easily distinguish between the two possibilities.

To the true believers of the Manus Nigrum, only the first possibility counted. Here was the first gathering place of the Kindred, revealed to the handful of faithful for their own use. Many of the eldest members of the cult's Eastern branch settled in Enoch, along with the more mystically minded Westerners. Far removed from any significant population of wraiths, the Manus Nigrum's scholars studied clues to the Antediluvians' purposes in Enoch's art treasures, while schemers developed ever more complicated plans to influence affairs in the Skinlands.

Deep within Enoch's foundations, the vampires found the tombs of four beings labeled the "Aralu." Cryptic inscriptions suggested that the beings might be Antediluvians. The early cultic explorers dreamed dreams clearly sent by the beings that provided confirmation, drawing on the symbols familiar from cult rituals. Not all the evidence fit the Antediluvian interpretation, but over time, the possible challenges faded from view and the Manus Nigrum settlers found their thoughts steered away from doubt. The level of passion stirred by Enoch's discovery might have seemed strange to outsiders, but the cultists didn't stop to ask if the Aralu might be shaping the Manus Nigrum for purposes quite different from the cult's own agenda.

Enoch of the Tempest became a sort of headquarters for the cult. Even though most cultists couldn't get there without ritual assistance, almost all cultists did make the trip at some point. Its atmosphere reinforced their conviction of righteousness, reminding them of past glories and suggesting future triumphs. All the troubles of the trip - which generally involved ceremonial death as well as extended astral travel - seemed obviously worth it once travelers arrived.

The Hand's Fingers

The Manus Nigrum brought together a very mixed lot of vampires. Like all Gehenna cults, it appealed particularly to individuals and coteries that felt alienated from "normal" Kindred society, at odds with their clans, and filled with a special insight to which others should but do not pay attention. Some of them belonged to other Gehenna cults in ages past but rejected other organizations as lacking a sufficiently purely sense of the truth. Inevitably, several dozen vampires, all convinced of their uniquely correct insights, created a fractious organization whose common

goals often had little to do with what any single member wanted. They categorized and blamed each other almost as often as outsiders.

Most members of the Manus Nigrum came from one of nine clans or bloodlines.

Assamite antitribu: A few Assamites helped found the cult, and they recruited successfully in the aftermath of the Tremere curse. Cult Assamites saw themselves as the protectors of their brethren flocking to the Sabbat and claimed credit for keeping their less favored brethren safe.

True Brujah: This bloodline's members claim to be the direct descendants of Brujah, untainted by descent through Troile, who diablerized his or her (the legends conflict) sire. The True Brujah differ dramatically from the other members of their clan not just in Disciplines (see p. 35) but in psychology. Other members of the Manus Nigrum sometimes speculated that the True Brujah originated in a later generation and advanced through diablerie, claims that brought carefully calculated revenge from offended True Brujah.

Gangrel and antitribu: The Manus Nigrum always respected the Gangrel as guardians of old, pure traditions and good servants of all vampires' true masters, the Antediluvians. Camarilla-adhering Gangrel and, much later, City Gangrel both struck the cult as betrayers of those old ways; the Manus Nigrum sought out individuals both in the main clan and among the antitribu prepared to receive enlightenment.

Malkavians and antitribu: The Manus Nigrum placed a high value on mystical insight, since the cult itself began in revelations granted from the Antediluvians to favored vampires. Any Malkavian willing to listen to cult teachings found a place in the Manus Nigrum, regardless of clan or antitribu loyalties.

Nagaraja: A curious bloodline known only within the Manus Nigrum, the Nagaraja date back less than 2,000 years. They began in experiments to fuse mortal mages' death magic with vampirism. The end result was, by the standards of the Hindus and Buddhists around the experiments, a nearly perfect combination of blasphemies: cut off from the cycle of reincarnation and dependent for their very survival on the most sinful predatory acts. Nagaraja can practice none of the major tenets of the religions taught by their society. Whenever the Nagaraja came to the attention of vampires holding Hindu or Buddhist views, let alone moderately devout mortals or Kuei-jin, purges followed. The Nagaraja found safety only within the Manus Nigrum.

Nosferatu and antitribu: The Nosferatu who joined the Manus Nigrum often did so out of a desire to purge their clan's sin against Caine, without actually dying themselves. They walked a fine line between suicidal despair and fratricidal rage and succumbed to despondency more often than any other group within the cult.

Toreador and antitribu: The Manus Nigrum fancies itself cultured, as well as spiritually correct. The Toreador provide aesthetic satisfaction, as well as a more extensive connection to mortal society than other cultists. Toreador connections proved particularly useful in India, where the Nagaraja needed shelter and the cult's agenda required extra mortal influence to make up for the greater-than-usual isolation of the Nagaraja. This often involved steering vampire-hunters at other targets, when efforts to portray vampire hunting as superstitious and unworthy didn't suffice, so that, over time, the Toreador became crucial to Manus Nigrum strikes at vampiric rivals.

Old Clan Tzimisce: The Old Clan isn't a single bloodline but a collection of elders who agreed that the main body of the clan had deluded itself. A few believed (or claimed to) that Vicissitude wasn't a Discipline but a disease. Most Old Clan Tzimisce rejected that claim and focused instead on the obvious facts of insubordination. The Old Clan blamed the main clan's elders for allowing such a catastrophically successful revolt and concentrated on building an endless succession of schemes to reclaim the clan homelands for themselves.

Ventrue and antitribu: Like the Toreador, the Ventrue help the cult particularly through influence among mortals. They also bring a rigid sense of hierarchy - whether nominally antitribu or not, the Ventrue of the Manus Nigrum despise their main clan for favoring mere economic status over nobility and intrinsic merit.

The Manus Nigrum was never a very large movement. It had about 150 to 200 vampiric members throughout its existence, with slumps during internal wars and crises. With the formation of the Camarilla and Sabbat, cult members divided

themselves roughly evenly between the two sects and independent Kindred communities. Most of this last third made their havens in the Middle East, central Asia and India. In addition, a handful of beings other than Kindred sometimes affiliated themselves with the cult. Wraiths joined most often, to take advantage of the cult's studies of the afterlife. From time to time, magicians associated with the cult, albeit in small numbers, and the sect also claimed enigmatic, less quantifiable supernatural members at certain times. At any given moment, six to 10 non-vampires mingled with the Cainite majority.

Ghouls

The Manus Nigrum relied on three families from whom they selected many ghouls. Most ghouls served the cult as long as they remained useful, either dying in service or dying for want of vitae when they proved useless. In addition, the cult included a cross-clan sub-community of vampires recruited from among the ranks of ghouls. These newly Embraced Kindred shared social and spiritual ties with the ghouls.

Enrathi

For more than 1,000 years, the Enrathi family of ghouls provided the Manus Nigrum with children for the vampires to train. The Manus Nigrum relied on mortal servitors, not just to carry out orders while acting in human society but to tend the cult's vampires and other non-human members. The most favored ghouls grew up in Enoch, receiving instruction in the lands of the dead; other ghouls might come to Enoch for specific courses of study but lived most of their lives in the physical world.

The Enrathi family traces its ancestry back to Etruscan farmers, long before Rome became a significant political power. About the time the Roman republic grew into empire, the Enrathi experimented with the slave trade. They found themselves good at it, and within two generations, it became the family's primary source of income. The empire fell, but there remained individuals and groups in need of slaves: power-hungry human beings, Cainites, other supernaturals. In times and places where slavery was outlawed, the Enrathi developed networks of contacts and an expanding repertoire of tricks to circumvent the law. When the Manus Nigrum approached the Enrathi with an offer of an extended relationship, the family already knew much about vampiric society and merely ironed out the specific details under negotiation.

Manus Nigrum doctrine includes the tenet that no other vampires should interfere with mortals, but this doesn't spring from deeply compassionate feelings. Rather, the cultists simply believe that only they know enough to rule mortals properly. Some vampires in the cult continue to resent the idea of negotiating with human beings instead of commanding the kine and destroying any who disobey. The Enrathi know it's a sore point and don't call much attention to the fact that they have a mutually obligating social contract with the Manus Nigrum rather than terms of submission.

The opening of the Americas and the concomitant rise in the transatlantic slave trade allowed the Enrathi to flourish as never before. Under a variety of names (and Discipline-assisted changes of appearance), the Enrathi became fabulously wealthy and well-connected. Their experiments with political power in the 17th and 18th centuries went badly, as the distinctive ghoul nature attracted the attention of vampire-hunters. Since then, the Enrathi have been content to be rich and private.

Marijava

The Marijava family records show dealings with vampires far back into the earliest eras of Hindu history. The family has included devout Thugs in every generation and has supported them with a variety of magical studies. By the time the family encountered representatives of the Manus Nigrum, Marijava ghouls were well established within Assamite and Ravnos lineages. The Gehenna cult never appealed to the family's majority, being too alien a faith and given over to obsessions of little interest to most Marijava.

A splinter line of the family did bind themselves over to the service of the Manus Nigrum around 500 BC, and they disappeared from family annals. Thanks to family magical defenses, the new servants of the Manus Nigrum also lost track of their kin and never knowingly encountered them

again. The ghoul line devoted itself to esoteric studies, pursuing blasphemous permutations of Indian religion in partnership with cult vampires, most particularly the Nagaraja. The cult's Marijava servants maintained huge libraries of theological and philosophical writings that would both fascinate and repel mortal scholars.

The Marijava ghouls served the Manus Nigrum as observers of Kindred affairs from mortal covers. Never very numerous, the ghouls spread themselves thinly around the world, infiltrating blood cults, domains that relied heavily on ghouls and mortal agencies (governmental and private alike) that might serve to monitor Kindred from a distance. Much of what the Manus Nigrum theorized about the current state of affairs, and therefore what it decided must be done next, drew on Marijava intelligence.

Not all Marijava individuals provided equally reliable information, however. Some sold themselves out to ancient cult enemies like the Setites or Ravnos, passing along false stories to lure cult vampires into traps. Others simply made up accounts and forged supporting details to fill in gaps in their legitimately acquired pools of data. When the vampires discovered the treachery of their servants, individual Marijava and their immediate relatives died in purges, but the lineage as a whole seemed too useful to destroy.

Rafastio

Members of the Manus Nigrum inclined to boast of the cult's influence say that the Rafastio family preserves the cult's ancient association with a powerful magical lodge called the Verbena. The Rafastio customarily smile and nod quietly. Other cultists point out that witches don't all belong to a single organization any more than vampires do. Whatever the secrets of prehistory may have been, the Rafastio began serving the Manus Nigrum several centuries before the Christian era, practicing the magic of blood and nature on behalf of vampires.

Like the Enrathi, the Rafastio trace their ancestry to northern Italy - in the case of the Rafastio, to the villages of the Po River Valley. Unlike the Enrathi, almost all the Rafastio stayed close to home. A few branches of the family emigrated to the New World in the 19th century, and one branch has operated farms in Kenya since the beginning of the 20th century. Everyone else continues to live within a few dozen miles of the family's ancestral holdings.

The Rafastio never enjoyed the Enrathi near-equal status. From the outset, it was clear that the Rafastio served the Manus Nigrum, operating at the cult's discretion and subject to the punishments a superior may inflict on inferiors. Particularly useful individuals in the family might receive the Embrace, but that happened very rarely. The service the Rafastio provided was precisely the forms of mortal magic that the Embrace makes impossible. While Embraced Rafastio almost all showed great aptitude for vampiric blood magic, the cult could acquire mastery of that Discipline

through more channels than it could find willing kine competent with magic.

Where the Enrathi always dealt with many contacts in addition to the Manus Nigrum, the Rafastio produced magic for their own benefit, that of the Manus Nigrum and no one else. Spirit bindings, potions of healing and poisoning, wards for remote gathering spots: Whatever the vampires of the cult couldn't do for themselves through magic, the Rafastio did. The cult paid them regularly, but complemented money with abuse and torments of many kinds. Rafastio sometimes tried running away. None made it, and their torments provided object lessons in the merits of continued submission for the rest of the family. If sometimes a cousin crumbled under a carelessly cast curse or was sucked dry in a moment of vampiric frenzy, that was merely part of the price paid for sanctuary in the Final Nights to come.

Ghouls Without Family

The Rafastio and Enrathi families occupied special formalized positions. Other ghouls entered the service of the Manus Nigrum on an individual basis, in response to specific needs. Their conditions ranged from highly favored luxury to nasty and exhausting labors assigned because someone needed to do it. At least 20 ghouls at any given time had the duty of hauling storm debris out of Enoch, a work that sometimes included handling incredibly toxic wastes and "living" creatures of unknown power. The mortality rate among the clean-up crews could run as high as 50 percent per year in times of great disturbance in the Underworld and never sank below about 5 percent a year. Sorting manuscripts in Enoch's libraries, on the other hand, almost never killed a ghoul and seldom created injuries more serious than back strain.

Ghouls serving the Manus Nigrum lived lives much like those of ghouls anywhere, attending to their masters' personal safety and discharging errands that might or might not ever be explained to them.

Chatterlings

All vampires develop perspectives on the world very different from any held by mortal men and women. The chatterlings started off with an alien point of view. Each chatterling came to Enoch as a child, carried by the Enrathi who'd kidnapped him or her, and then grew up in the lands of the dead. The rituals used to cross the Shroud are costly in terms of both blood and risk, so most of the Enrathi's "recruits" spent years on end in Enoch before getting another glimpse of the Skinlands. Elder vampires instructed the children in esoteric religion, while captive and freely submitting wraiths explained the Underworld to their still-living students. Any human beings the children encountered were either fellow chatterlings or ghouls who chose (or were assigned) to remain in Enoch. The Aralu, whatever they were, whispered in the children's dreams.

Even though the Enrathi examined their victims before kidnapping them, not all of the children brought to Enoch could survive such a life. Roughly a third of each year's "class" went mad before completing their training, and anywhere from one tenth to one half of the remainder perished in the next few decades due to accidents suffered while trying to cross the Shroud. The survivors learned to cope with perennially dark skies, transitory openings into the depths of the Underworld where spectres would try to lure them in, the variegated debris cast down by storms in the tempest and the peculiarities of Enoch's own residents. They accepted Manus Nigrum doctrine, with the nudging of the Aralu to provide confirming signs and wonders.

Then they returned to the material world.

From a city with hundreds of inhabitants, they went to cities of thousands and millions. The Skinlands hold colors, sounds, smells and textures unlike anything in the Underworld and lack many of the common features of the afterlife. Manus Nigrum ghouls understood the society of the worlds to which they returned only academically, through the experience of others. Many became overwhelmed by it all and had to shift to duties away from humanity at large. The strongest-willed managed to persist and even to thrive.

Most chatterlings served their vampiric masters as long as the ghouls seemed useful and then perished. The simple fact of vampiric disapproval moved many of the ghouls to suicide. After a lifetime of conditioning and service, no existence separated from the Manus Nigrum seemed worth living. Even the ghouls who most successfully returned to the Skinlands remained aware that they were outsiders, bearing an inner burden and secret knowledge that no other person could share. Very few ghouls rebelled, and those that did could be destroyed or re-conditioned.

The Manus Nigrum selected a handful of each cohort of ghouls to receive the Embrace. These chatterlings almost always occupied one of two extremes. Some chatterlings showed a special affinity for moving among mortals without giving away their differences. Others showed a particular aptitude for operating in the Underworld. The latter provided the Manus Nigrum with its ranks of sycophants, administrators and personal assistants to elder vampires dwelling in Enoch. The former acted as overseers of cult efforts to guide humanity, providing a more "human-like" perspective in planning sessions and acting as an independent set of eyes to chronicle the results of each operation.

The Sabbat Age

Since mortal tools didn't work out as planned, the Manus Nigrum tried Cainite tools next. The Camarilla seemed obviously the instrument of unseen adversaries, requiring a counter-balancing organization. The Manus Nigrum quietly helped support the Anarch Revolt and rejoiced in the destruction of some elders. Once again, things didn't work as planned.

The reputed destruction of the Lasombra and Tzimisce Antediluvians took the Manus Nigrum completely by surprise. Elders themselves, the cult's leaders never dreamed that "youngsters" could mount such effective action. In fact, some cult members decided that youngsters couldn't actually do such a thing, deciding instead that the Antediluvians must have faked their own destruction for reasons that no doubt make sense to Antediluvians. The devout few didn't win the support of the alarmed many, however. The Manus Nigrum as a whole agreed to monitor the emerging anarch organization in hopes of directing it to more suitable targets. Enraged anarchs could slaughter all the oppressive elders they wanted and think it was preparation for fighting Gehenna, while the cult pursued its own agenda. Thus, the Black Hand emerged as an apparently new player in the War of Ages.

Simultaneously, the Manus Nigrum suggested some of its members infiltrate the Camarilla. At first, they sought to topple the sect. When it became obvious that the sect was, though young, quite stable, they first attributed their failure to the presence of unseen enemies (usually the Inconnu, who in Manus Nigrum mythology coordinate all resistance to the Antediluvians), then decided to try to use the Camarilla rather than destroy it.

The Manus Nigrum in the East

The Eastern branch of the cult pursued its own concerns while the Western branch tried to take over Cainite politics. Eastern cultists described themselves as devoted more to the group's original purpose. In practice their "study of the mysteries of death" consisted mostly of building networks of followers and pursuing individual studies in Enoch. The cult paid less and less attention to the affairs of wraiths beyond Enoch's black marble walls, gradually losing track of even the broad outlines of politics and social organization among the Restless Dead.

Eastern cultists still active in the material world fought secret wars against the Assamites and Setites, starting in the Middle Ages and lasting for centuries thereafter. At least the Manus Nigrum says that it fought wars against these clans. To the clans, no group of two dozen vampires really looks like an enemy in the sense of being an adversary comparable to the clans themselves. Two dozen vampires who meet together only secretly and studiously affect independence in public don't look like an adversary at all, but like the sort of random nuisance that constantly arises in Kindred society.

The Manus Nigrum also fought (more frequently and more seriously) with supernatural beings of various sorts in India. The Nagaraja attracted particularly virulent opposition from other vampires, both for being "artificial" in ways that most vampires aren't and for their need to feed on flesh. Flesh

eating leaves behind damage much harder to cover up than vampires' normal sustenance and stimulates angry mortals to hunt all the monsters in the area. Vampiric hunters of Nagaraja saw themselves as acting in self-defense, while the Nagaraja saw it as both an oblique admission of incompetence (good survivors wouldn't need to panic that way) and jealously of the superior insights of the Nagaraja.

To some Ravnos, the hunt for Nagaraja had deeper significance. The Ravnos remaining in India were precisely those who drove out the Ravnos as other vampires tend to think of it - the Deceivers associated with the Roma people. Indian Ravnos took their history seriously, and that included a role for themselves as defenders of the surrounding culture and religion; even if mortals wouldn't often know about the dark gods of the night, there they were, fulfilling a self-chosen mandate to uphold the Indian spiritual order. ("Where saints fail, devils may prevail," as a Ravnos saying put it.)

The Cult Reunited

Manus Nigrum disregard for developments in the Underworld led to catastrophe not long after the turn of the 17th century. During one of the great storms that sometimes blast through the realms of the Restless Dead, an army of fanatical wraiths assaulted Enoch. The city's defenses crumbled and only a handful of survivors escaped. It took more than a century for the Eastern cultists to persuade their Western brethren to join forces and retake Enoch. The campaign itself took three years. The supreme military commander of the combined expedition, the Del'Roh in the ancient language favored by some cultists, thereafter became head of the cult as a whole. The split between branches came to a formal end in the mid-1700s, though sub-groups within the cult continued to pursue different aims.

Challenges Within the Sabbat

The visible Black Hand never operated purely at the whim of its secret mentors. The Black Hand's members joined because they accepted its views about the right ends and means for the Sabbat to pursue, not because unseen powers forced them to join. While the Manus Nigrum could attempt to steer the Black Hand, in the end the faction would move or not as its members chose. The Sabbat Civil Wars should have made this simple reality plain to the cult, but the Manus Nigrum never really managed to take its pawns seriously as individuals. When pawns behave, they're dismissable, and when they make trouble, they're problems to fix rather than people to understand. The conspiratorial mindset encourages thinking of other individuals more as machinery than as personalities.

Each time tensions within the Sabbat escalated to outright violence, it took the Manus Nigrum by surprise. Each time, the cult attributed the violence to its cagey, unseen enemies. Since manipulation rather than overt grievances created the wars, manipulation could settle them. The Manus Nigrum paid little attention to the terms ending each war, regarding them (sometimes correctly) as sops thrown to the pawns so as to allow the cult to resume pursuing its own agendas. In each case, this callous disregard for the responses of others helped prepare for the next civil war and finally for the cult's downfall.

The Manus Nigrum claims credit for saving the Sabbat during the First Sabbat Civil War (at the end of the 1700s through the turn of the 19th century) by distracting the Camarilla and anarchs, through agents in key courts. There's more truth to this claim than to many the cult makes. The Camarilla likely could have swooped into warring domains and exterminated the Sabbat in short order or at least culled the sect's ranks drastically. Instead, thanks in part to the inspiring words of distinguished elders and Manus Nigrum agents, the Camarilla focused on expanding into as-yet-unclaimed domains, opening up new territories and waiting for the

peace of decimation to settle upon Sabbat domains before attacking there. In addition, the war-ending prohibition of conflict between Sabbat members, the Purchase Pact, made it possible for the cult's influence over one faction to more strongly affect the Sabbat as a whole. Even the tensest diplomacy could serve manipulators' agendas better than war usually does.

The Second Sabbat Civil War, in the early 20th century, demonstrated the limits of such tense diplomacy. The opportunities (and threats) arising from escalating mortal conflict led the Sabbat into factional battles, sporadically and continuously. Once again, the Camarilla made gains at Sabbat expense, especially in Canada, though once again quick-witted rallies helped soften some of the blows. The 1933 Code of Milan, which ended the war, was a triumph of double-talk: It proclaimed perfect ideals (perfect within the

Sabbat's terms, at least) and then rendered them meaningless by putting practical power into the hands of the sect's leaders. The Manus Nigrum played little direct role in drafting the Code, but then, it didn't need to. Agents filled with a sense of their own importance acted so as to secure their position in the face of challenges from below and to channel hostilities into manageable bounded spheres of expression. Almost as an afterthought, the code committed the Sabbat as a whole to supporting the Black Hand, granting the Manus Nigrum that much more influence.

The Third Sabbat Civil War, which lasted for a mere 100 nights in 1957, ended with a settlement that pleased the Manus Nigrum, even though the cult didn't have time to gather and reach agreement about how to respond. Organizing Caitiff into a new "clan" suited the Manus Nigrum's desire for defined factions, which it may then arrange against each other. Groups are easier to steer than individuals, so the more coherence among the most troublesome and uppity members of the Sabbat, the better.

The recent growth in the ranks of the Sabbat Inquisition alarmed the Manus Nigrum, whose leaders remembered how the mortal Inquisition proved unsatisfactory (even if they would never admit that it might be their own fault).

The Sum of Power

Events seldom occur for just one reason. Assessing the actual impact of a secret movement requires separating its influences from all the other causes that would have applied anyway. In the absence of accountability to any outside party, conspirators can and do tell each other that everything they approve of depends on their intervention, while everything they dislike comes from hostile conspiracies or just plain bad luck. The urge to rule the world from behind the scenes seldom goes hand-in-hand with the willingness to assess one's behavior objectively or skeptically.

Members of the Manus Nigrum felt sure that the chaos regularly afflicting both major sects existed because they made it happen. They never accepted responsibility for debacles like inciting anarch revolution, and their appraisal of successes wasn't any more realistic. Few members of the cult believed that any other vampires could develop long-term plans like the Manus Nigrum, and even fewer believed that neonates or ancillae might act together simply out of shared concerns, without secret schemes to coordinate everything.

Therefore, no automatic answer to the question "How much of Kindred history depends on the Manus Nigrum?" is forthcoming. As Storyteller, you have the freedom to make the cult completely irrelevant and delusional, precisely as critical to events as it thinks or anything in between. The cult's self-assessment shouldn't be entirely true in every aspect. No group enjoys that sort of infallible insight into its own situation. However, the assessments of the cult's critics and detractors may also be wrong. If you have players with

characters who belong to the cult, allow them some satisfying confirmations and some disappointments if they start examining cultic claims in detail. Keep in mind that in some cases the cult may matter more than its members realize, so that surprises aren't all on the debunking side.

If you choose to use the Manus Nigrum material for your chronicle, keep in mind that the cult largely overestimates its impact on the more visible world of the Kindred. Looking back from the vantage point of the Final Nights, clearly, some elements of its view must be mistaken; mix error and accuracy to suit yourself and intrigue (and, ideally, satisfy) your players. The role of the Manus Nigrum is that of the Illuminati, at which it only rarely achieves success, due to its constant maintenance of secrecy.

The Final Nights

Decisive calamities strike the Manus Nigrum in very rapid succession. In just a few months, the work of millennia collapses. Most of the cult's members perish, and the survivors scatter to the four winds.

The Fall of Enoch

The Manus Nigrum lost its citadel in the Underworld quite suddenly. Over the centuries, the occasional wraith stumbled across Enoch; each time the wraith either ended up in vampiric captivity, met her end while trying to flee or returned to wraithly society only to find no audience willing to believe the story of a vampire city in the storm. The empire of the Underworld rules over European and American wraiths, and the death-lords who govern it learned long ago about Enoch. They dreamed for centuries of wiping the city out but never succeeded in getting reliable directions capable of guiding their forces through the tempest.. until just recently. At long last, wraiths not friendly to the empire, but even less friendly toward Enoch, gave the imperial forces precise information on the city's whereabouts. In short order the wraithly navy, composed of ghost ships from across the centuries, set sail to blockade and bombard Enoch.

Enoch's defenses begin with magical wards and 100-foot-high black marble walls. No small band of raiders could hope to penetrate them. The empire did not send a small band of raiders but a ghostly navy armed with the best firepower available. The dozens of vampires present within Enoch (and their ranks of ghouled and wraithly servitors) commanded tremendous power, dishing out enough damage to sink the first ships to approach. In the end, superior numbers and familiarity prevailed. The naval cordon held long enough for the empire to use its master weapon, the ghost of a nuclear bomb. In one blinding flash, Enoch and all the Manus Nigrum adherents within it dissolved into nothingness.

Most of Enoch's inhabitants, even those with high levels of Auspex, received no advance warning. The Aralu, whatever they were, provided no hints in dreams to their faithful

followers and fell to the nuclear fire just like the city's waking population. Enoch's enemies drew on enough power to hide their approach until it was too late for the defenders to escape. Early in the siege, a wraith patrol caught three young ghouls trying to sneak through the blockade; after Enoch's destruction, the empire ordered the ghouls released to carry the news to Manus Nigrum adherents in the Skinlands. "Beyond the Shroud," the imperial ghosts said, "vampires come only to meet the justice they escaped among mortals."

Leadership Crisis

The Manus Nigrum lost crucial individuals as well as a haven when Enoch fell. The current Del'Roh, a reclusive Ventrue antitribu, perished along with all her senior commanders. Like her predecessors, she'd been advised most often by the liches, three potent blood magicians of the ancient Middle East who were Embraced early in the cult's history. An apocryphal story has them surviving the nuclear blast long enough to be seen by wraithly sailors, burning and reforming as they drained the fleeting life essence of the city's lost souls, finally melting for want of further energy. Hopeful cultists tried to track down sources for the story, only to find them vanishing into the fog of social legend: Nobody saw it himself, only heard about it from someone else. The story seems to be merely an indication of the Restless Dead's respect for their opponents' strength.

The Seraphim turned to squabbling among themselves for the right to choose the new Del'Roh. Recriminations flew as to who should bear the blame for Enoch's fall - the Seraphim agreed only that someone within the cult must be responsible and must be destroyed for it. Factions not represented in the cult's supreme leadership also demanded consideration. The cult began splitting even more divisively than in a brief struggle between Eastern and Western branches. Clan and bloodline against each other, vampires against non-vampires, fanatics against merely confident believers, vampires oriented toward mortals against vampires oriented toward managed Kindred society: Every argument that could escalate into violence did.

The Week of Nightmares

The Manus Nigrum could have survived the loss of Enoch, albeit in weakened and disorganized condition. The core tenets of the cult said nothing about cities in the Underworld, not even the ghostly legacy of the First City. Even if some Antediluvians allowed themselves to perish, no doubt it was all part of the master plan. Gehenna was still coming, the cult could continue to gather its forces. The general sense of urgency could even bring the cult back together.

Then Gehenna started, and the cultists found their hopes in vain.

According to Kindred eschatologists, the Ravnos Antediluvian woke in a blast of waking-dream imagery some time in July of 1999. During the next week it fought against diverse opponents, all the while telepathically sending out symbolic portrayals of the battle. Finally, a unique combination of supernatural and technological power destroyed the Antediluvian. The fears created during that week echo throughout Kindred society, but they have special meaning to the Manus Nigrum.

From its inception, the cult received instruction in dreams from the Antediluvians. Prophets carried the word of the ancients. In Enoch, the Antediluvians spoke even more directly, confirming earlier teachings and adding detail all the time. Cultists moved in the certainty that they did the will of their slumbering masters.

The Ravnos Antediluvian, however, had nothing to say to or about them. Not one element of the Antediluvian's mental shouts can be plausibly interpreted as addressing the Manus Nigrum's works. In the moment of greatest need, their master

did not call upon the cult for assistance. It did not chide its followers for dereliction of some inscrutable duty. It showed no sign of knowing that they were there at all. Many of the cult's Eastern branch members flocked to its aid as they realized the true nature of the battle; they received no acknowledgement. The cult simply didn't matter to its master.

Despair set in.

Rationalization followed quickly. After all, the Ravnos Antediluvian was by any definition insane. It was busy. Some even whisper that it had been driven mad by dreams spawned of its own mastery of Chimerstry. Perhaps the next Antediluvian will wake with more composure and forethought. The rationalizations crumbled just as fast as they rose, however. None of the Antediluvians now speak in dreams to

the Manus Nigrum. Perhaps, the cultists muse, no Antediluvians ever did. Or perhaps the cult began with pure truth but allowed itself to become lost through the deceit of baser vampires (or other beings). No prophecy given to the cult spoke of the Week of Nightmares, and if prophecy doesn't prepare for the great crises, what good is it? Perhaps the prophets deluded themselves or willfully exploited the rest of the cult.

Far worse than factionalism, loss of faith broke the cult into so many disillusioned individuals. Some seek desperately for new sources of hope. Others wait for the end to come, in the conviction that they too can only perish at the hands of the Antediluvians. The Manus Nigrum no longer exists as a unified entity in any sense.

The Severed Hand

Groups exist because people believe in them. The facts of the Manus Nigrum's history didn't change because of events in the Year of the Reckoning. It's just that now the cultists no longer believe in their own infallibility. A profound sense of loss affects the sect - they feel deeply the frustration of having lost so much of their time. As the cult fragments, some of its former members claim to inherit the mantle of original truth, while others seek an altogether new faith.

The world at large still knows nothing of the Manus Nigrum. The cult's fragmentation does attract attention, since it manifests as increased turmoil wherever a secret guiding hand has been removed. Only the keenest observers have yet put the observable pieces together to deduce the Manus Nigrum's existence, but even the handful of associations some vampires do trace out fuel plenty of conspiracy theories.

The Pieces of the Hand

The Clans

Most of the Manus Nigrum members who belong to one of the major clans resume their normal unlives after the Week of Nightmares. The failure of the Manus Nigrum shows that vampiric society at large will not be redeemed, they think, but perhaps they can leaven smaller groups within the society and redeem some fraction. A handful of miniature Gehenna cults spring up among the Assamites, Gangrel, Malkavians, Nosferatu, Toreador and Ventrue. A single elder, or perhaps two or three together, begin preaching the imminent end times and the desirability of submitting to the Antediluvians' wills.

In another age, few vampires of any age would respond happily to the message that their only hope lies in obedience to the incomprehensible will of superior beings who might just eat them all. With the skies changing and unprecedented forces prowling the night, more vampires accept the idea that they don't know enough to survive on their own. No clan's

majority cares to accept the Gehenna cult message, but cults descended from the Manus Nigrum grow steadily. Some elders who thought of themselves as masters of the Jyhad realize that they stand far lower on the ladder than they imagined, while growing numbers of neonates and ancillae find their lot even more bleak than it seemed in calmer years. Submission now appears like a message of hope rather than despair to Kindred struggling to make sense of the new era.

Gehenna preachers who become particularly successful face the opposition of would-be clan leaders with other ideas. Rising tensions within the Assamite clan make it particularly dangerous to preach any "foreign" doctrine. The spread of Dementation among Malkavians means that many strange ideas circulate, so former members of the Manus Nigrum must compete for an audience.

The True Brujah

Brujah's loyal childer are nothing if not patient. The True Brujah began plotting long before the Manus Nigrum arose and can continue to do so long after it's gone. While the True Brujah do take the Gehenna cult cause very seriously, their rationalistic nature makes them less susceptible to the charms of manic prophecy. The desire to serve the Antediluvians springs from what the True Brujah regard as a calm, analytical appraisal of historical precedent and present realities.

At least, that's how the True Brujah would respond to any other challenge. The approaching end times call for different answers.

True Brujah deal poorly with crises. Unaccustomed to experiencing intense emotion regularly, dramatic and horrifying surprises create more confusion than might fall on the minds of vampires more familiar with passion. The beginning of Gehenna forces the True Brujah to act quickly and with limited information, two things antithetical to their nature. Deciding to abandon the Manus Nigrum didn't take long; figuring out what to do next continues to occupy the bloodline's collective attention. Arguments rage bitterly - with acid invectives and elegant rhetorical ploys when the participants regain their poise, with actual blows when reason fails.

Most of the bloodline's members agree that the times require punishing all wicked vampires (in practice, nearly all vampires) as quickly as possible. The True Brujah project their own psychology onto the Antediluvians, reasoning that the fewer sinners demanding punishment the Antediluvians find on awakening, the more focused and restrained the carnage of Gehenna could be.

Since Kindred society at large knows very little about the True Brujah, individuals and coteries from the bloodline can operate under a variety of disguises. In the absence of central bureaucracies with complete dossiers, no individual observer connects this coldly rational "Ventrue" with that

coldly rational "Malkavian" or the other coldly rational "City Gangrel." The True Brujah seek out vampires driven to slaughter some other group of vampires and hasten the process along. On the scale of modern conflicts like the slaughter of the thin-blooded, True Brujah efforts don't amount to much. The bloodline's activists persist with the simple observation that every bit helps.

The only True Brujah to admit their true nature have formed a loose relationship with the Setites. Setite histories preserve the True Brujah secret from the distant past, and Setites prefer to know as much as possible about their compatriots in subversion. Few True Brujah enjoy much success at persuading anyone outside their own bloodline, so they provide information and tactical suggestions for the Setites to apply. The combination works very well, combining ruthless intelligence with an intuitive sense of others' vulnerabilities. In some cases, the Setites make particular effort to undermine prominent Brujah of the main clan, with a secondary concentration on Brujah antitribu. The rest of the Setite-Brujah ventures strike absolutely anywhere an enticing opening appears.

A minority of True Brujah - loners and truly ancient elders - fears the risks of cooperation and prefers to work alone. A few of these dissenters actually sabotage the efforts of their own coteries, though most confine themselves to attempts at persuasion. When activist True Brujah find dissenters interfering, bitter brawls often erupt and the ranks of the bloodline thin that much more. Efforts on the part of forward-thinking True Brujah to organize a systematic campaign of recruitment and Embrace fall on deaf ears. The traditional response of "you cannot hurry the process" now yields to "we have no time for extended action, not with the world ending."

Storytelling: A Dish Best Served Cold

All vampires exist with a compressed, hacked-down spectrum of emotional responses. The curse of unlife takes away many human satisfactions. The True Brujah exemplify this limitation in a particularly extreme form. They only enjoy intellectual satisfactions, above all, that of revenge. Playing True Brujah requires particular effort to enter and sustain the bitter, barren inner landscape. If your players hanker for the chance to put some hurting on vampires, the True Brujah offer them a way to do so without it degenerating into a boring slugfest. The True Brujah must compensate for their lack of numbers and influence with ingenuity and widespread contacts. Revenge literature in novels and plays throughout the ages suggest inspirations.. for calamities and failures as well as successes.

The Nagaraja

The Nagaraja never had more than a few dozen members. Nearly all of them active in the modern nights perished at

Enoch. With them went the only way most cult members had to cross the Shroud and reach the city. Less than a dozen Nagaraja survived, and they realized that they would need better sanctuary than the cult's remaining fragments could provide. After several nights of debate among themselves, they decided to seek shelter among one of the courts of the Kuei-jin.

The Kuei-jin in and around India know of the Nagaraja - by reputation, generally, since there were never that many Kindred for the Cathayans to actually encounter - and would much rather stake the Kindred than aid them in any way. So the Nagaraja turned their eyes to the Green Courts of Korea. The Green Courts heard the Nagaraja plea with fewer preconceptions. The Green Courts have long taken an extremely pragmatic view of existence and would offer sanctuary in exchange for information, even if they knew as much about Nagaraja as the Kuei-jin of India. The Nagaraja paid dearly for their shelter, sharing nearly everything they know about Western forms of Necromancy and necromancer organizations. The offer worked. The Green Courts declared the Nagaraja to be "honored guests" for an indefinite period.

The news that most interested the Green Courts deals with the origins of the monster storms currently thrashing through the lands of the dead. The Nagaraja explanation of the war on Enoch supplements information about the foundations of Giovanni power to suggest to the Green Courts' ancestors the possibilities of a great strike against the Giovanni in the Middle Kingdom. In addition, few Kuei-jin oriented toward the dead and acquainted with the Western Necromancers can tolerate the Giovanni, and if the Green Courts mount a crusade, other courts may well suspend grievances long enough to join in. The Nagaraja struggle to maintain outward poise in their sudden transformation from desperate refugees to minor but significant players in Cathayan politics. The Green Courts do not allow the Nagaraja to Embrace, so, for the time being, the bloodline remains poised on the brink of extinction. Court ancestors politely dissemble when asked if this restraint might lift in the near future.

The Old Clan Tzimisce

The Old Clan Tzimisce - for no such thing as a Tzimisce antitribu exists - include both fairly typical disgruntled elders (and their well-indoctrinated, loyal childer) and a handful of outright lunatics. The lunatics did serious harm to the Old Clan's image in the minds of other Manus Nigrum believers and continue to do so even as the cult breaks apart.

The Old Clan differs from the main Tzimisce clan in part because none of the Old Clan possess Vicissitude. The Old Clan Disciplines, Animalism, Auspex and Dominate, reflect the concerns of ancient rulers in rugged wilds and small communities. Vicissitude strikes the Old Clan as unnatural and largely unwholesome, a perennial temptation to lose control and do something weird that provokes hostile response. The Old Clan Tzimisce fancy themselves as

leaders steeped in wisdom and knowledge, not constantly mutating freak shows.

The lunatic fringe takes this dislike of Vicissitude even further and claims that the Discipline isn't a Discipline at all but the manifestation of an evil spirit. Most of the Old Clan Tzimisce know better but found that trying to silence the lunatic fringe merely convinced the lunatics that other Old Clan belonged to the Vicissitude conspiracy as well. Abusive rants didn't matter; efforts to purge havens by fire and sword did. The Old Clan's saner members now generally try simply to keep the lunatics somewhere the rest of the Old Clan isn't.

The loss of Enoch and the shock of the Week of Nightmares convince the Old Clan that there's no point in trying to cooperate with a diverse group of vampires. As the end barrels down, the Old Clan must prove themselves worthy on their own terms, in their own crumbling estates. When the Tzimisce Antediluvian awakens (if indeed it hasn't already done so) it can accept them without having to deal with the unworthiness of the rest of the Manus Nigrum. Some members of the Old Clan never gave up their ancestral havens in Eastern Europe and now spend all (or nearly all) of their time at home, reviving the old ways as koldun and driving out other vampires. Old Clan Tzimisce without prior claims in Eastern Europe acquire their own estates through various combinations of force, fraud and persuasion.

In the economic and social turmoil of the post-Communist era, Old Clan Tzimisce tyranny often strikes farmers and townspeople as a reassuringly familiar note of stability. The wisest among the Old Clan elders remember vividly that overt demonstrations of vampiric power always bring hunters and Inquisitors sooner or later. They also know that vampiric power can do much even while concealed as charisma, commanding speech and other social tools familiar to mortals. Old Clan Tzimisce come to local power in the personae of returned heirs to noble estates, business moguls or lucky locals. They strengthen local institutions, help support local pride and channel the resulting enthusiasm to their benefit. Then, they withdraw from worthless Kindred society to cultivate virtuous domains in the old country.

Ghouls and Others

Enrathi

The fall of Enoch cut off the Enrathi revenant family from its primary undertaking and source of income. The fragmentation of the Manus Nigrum after the Week of Nightmares left the Enrathi with very few duties to the remaining members of the cult. The Enrathi never committed all its resources to the cult, just in case something went wrong, so, while there are short-term hardships, the family moves on smoothly to build up the rest of its slave trade. Within two to five years, the family's accountants project, Enrathi income will match and then surpass pre-collapse levels.

Long-held habits among the Enrathi give them an edge on survival in modern nights. Like the Giovanni and other prominent families within supernatural society, the Enrathi don't advertise themselves as all being related. They look to outsiders like a very diverse lot of ghouls and un-ghouled mortals who all happen to traffic in captive human beings. Students of mystical affairs know that the medium's gift and other talents show up in every ethnic group, so the presence of shared talents doesn't create suspicions. The Enrathi gather as an extended family only in places outsiders just don't go, like the Underworld.

The princes of cities with major airports and harbors know, of course, that kine and supernaturals alike smuggle human cargo for a variety of reasons. As long as the traffic doesn't arouse too much response from law enforcement and as long as the "gifts" and "expressions of gratitude" continue to flow to domain coffers, most princes don't care. The passing of the Manus Nigrum adds to this situation only a small rise in the number of experienced ghouls looking for new domitors.

Against the backdrop of the Final Nights, only profoundly paranoid princes look for traps, and most of them see their own delusions rather than the truth of a vanished conspiracy. Princes (and their subjects) who accept the services of journeyman Enrathi gain access to the family's accumulated wisdom about preserving the Masquerade and dealing with ghosts.

The Enrathi don't quite like everything about their new situation. Like all mediums and psychic sensitives, ghosts displaced by the Underworld's current storms beg, plead and shout for Enrathi attention. Ghosts demand everything from revenge on still-living targets to the creation of magical sanctuaries in which ghosts can wait out the storms. Enrathi vulnerable to the emotional harassment suffer psychosomatic illnesses; particularly desperate individuals seek to lose their gifts through trephination or lobotomy, and some commit suicide. This small-scale purge gives the advantage to individuals who combine the ability to understand ghosts with enough ruthlessness to resist cries for help.

Marijava

Deprived of the masters who've ordered their lives for millennia, the Marijava committed to Manus Nigrum service panic. Many bind themselves to the service of surviving individuals or coteries, hoping to preserve some piece of their traditional habits. One problem with any such arrangement is that individual vampires cowering in fear of Gehenna need fewer spies and assassins than a tightly bound cult out to suborn all of Kindred society. There's simply not enough blood for isolated cult survivors to support extended networks of ghouls. More than a third of the Marijava are now dying for want of access to vitae, and that number doesn't include the ghouls who've settled into careers of hunting vampires "professionally" to supply the needs of rogue ghouls like themselves.

Some Marijava search, in desultory or desperate fashion depending on the individual, for their long-lost family members. So far, none bear back stories of success to their relatives; about half of the searchers simply disappear, victims of vampire attack and other menaces of the Final Nights. (Marijava accustomed to urban existence often underestimate the dangers posed by Lupines and other monsters of the wilderness. The approach of Gehenna does not abolish the old-time perils.) The other Marijava may have died out long ago or may be concealed beyond the means of ghouls who bear the distinctive spiritual aura of prolonged contact with the Manus Nigrum.

Vampire Storytellers Handbook

Ghouls who secure their vitae supply simply practice their accustomed trade as independent individuals and groups. Vampires pay in blood as well as cash and other resources for information about their rivals. Government agencies concerned with hunting vampires and private organizations hoping to free human beings from monsters' depredations may also become ghouls' benefactors. A few Marijava who find themselves loathing their old existence cooperate with a new class of hunter bearing mysterious powers and oracular direction.

Rafastio

The loss of the Manus Nigrum's constant presence shatters the Rafastio collective sense of self. Without their vampiric masters, who've stood over them longer than any civilization now existing, the Rafastio ask themselves what can possibly give purpose to their existence. Other living magicians would shun them (if not hunt them down); the bitter experience of defectors to other magical communities made that clear long ago. Nor do most vampires trust mortal magicians who tell stories of serving unknown overlords of the Kindred.

Dozens of Rafastio die in the months after the Week of Nightmares. They anger a vampire on the verge of frenzy or attempt a dangerous ritual without adequate preparation or meet less printable ends. Many commit suicide, believing that no hope remains in a world without the Manus Nigrum. The family's surviving scions realize that their kin need overseers and gather to plot a course of action that can keep the extant members of the family alive and directed.

Sub-families within the Rafastio bind themselves to individual vampires who once belonged to the Manus Nigrum or to cultist offshoot groups. The family's oldest members - some more than 1,000 years old, thanks to a regular supply of vitae - act as brokers for the new allegiances, as well as arranging service for themselves. Several individual Old Clan Tzimisce take in many of the "orphaned" Rafastio, since the traditional vampires feel comfortable with Rafastio blood magic and appreciate the value of mortals to act as messengers as well as servants. Other Rafastio gather in havens around the world, half a dozen serving one old Malkavian here, two or three living with and around a mixed coterie there. Most Rafastio share a very gloomy outlook on the future and select their new masters with special attention to religious purity, in the hope that just possibly the new master might earn Antediluvian favor.

A significant minority of the Rafastio, perhaps 50 to 100 individuals, seeks out Ravnos survivors of the Week of Nightmares. These Rafastio reason that the Ravnos have come closer to contact with their Antediluvian than any other vampire now walking the world. Therefore, the Ravnos bear a special holiness, which might protect the Rafastio against the ills to come. Simply finding Ravnos takes a great deal of effort, even with the Rafastio expertise in magical analysis of blood to trace associations. Once found, few Ravnos even understand what the Rafastio want and fewer still care to accept the offer. Any Ravnos who does allow Rafastio to remain in her presence gathers a growing body of disciples very, very interested in protecting her.

The remaining Rafastio go into business for themselves, either as individuals or in family partnerships. The family's worst black sheep actually join with vampire-hunting groups: the Inquisition, government special forces and even the Arcanum. The vampire-haters among the Rafastio feel that if the Manus Nigrum was unworthy, then no other vampire can deserve to survive. Less drastically disillusioned members of the family offer their services to vampires outside the Manus Nigrum or work with mortal clients. In the turmoil of the end times, many normal human beings seek whatever supernatural edge they can find to help them get through it all. Anchored as the Rafastio are in traditional magic, they can cater to many requests for help with varying combinations of genuine magic and superstitious pandering.

Storytelling: The Political Witch

As in the real world, separatist groups press for independent status for the provinces of northern Italy, under the name of Padania. Some activists want Padania to be largely autonomous under the national Italian government, while others want Padania to be a country in its own right. Representatives of the would-be nation negotiate with the European Union in Brussels, with the United Nations and even sometimes with the United States; so far, no major national or international body supports Padanian claims, but persistence often brings results in this sort of dealing.

The Rafastio family may make a difference. Neither separatists nor nationalists make any public mention of magic as a consideration, obviously, and indeed most officials and would-be officials disbelieve in it. Both sides have some opportunists and manipulators who know better. In addition to trying to draw on Kindred influence, Padanian and anti-Padanian conspirators in the know contact mortal magicians and offer them deals to work magic against their conspiracies' enemies. The combination of experience with vampires and mastery over forms of magic that impress superstitious peasants and proletarians makes the Rafastio very attractive targets - or very dangerous loose cannons, to be eliminated.

Chatterlings

Nearly all chatterlings once serving the Manus Nigrum died when the ghost of a nuclear bomb fell on Enoch. More chatterlings than usual were present at the time, for independent reasons ranging from coordinating an updated list of cult sympathizers in the Camarilla to convocations for generations of past centuries with unusually high survival rates.

The survivors all shared an aptitude for moving among mortals. Some operate under deep cover and expect to go years without contacting their masters. They don't yet know that the remnants of the Manus Nigrum no longer care about the chatterlings' activities. More informed chatterlings do know of the cult's passing. Most of them continue on as they'd been doing, in the hopes that fresh leaders will emerge to tell them what to do. Thus, some of the cult's agenda survives in its absence.

As in Olden Times

Troupes looking for the "traditional" Manus Nigrum experience should consider a chronicle focusing on chatterlings. A small band of chatterlings may operate in the Final Nights much as its predecessors have done for millennia, applying the cult's wisdom and their personal resources to steer some faction of Kindred society in a desired direction. They may build sympathy for the idea of serving the Antediluvians, spread chaos among Kindred groups too unsympathetic to the true path of service or manipulate mortal society so as to weaken other Kindred's ability to direct the kine. Since years or even decades may go by between contact with other cultists, the chatterling coterie needs to deal with the changes that affect all Kindred (like the Week of Nightmares) but not with the Manus Nigrum's own fall. Chatterlings who do encounter survivors of the cult's fall may very well decide that it's a trick or test of their loyalty and punish the wicked lapsed Kindred as a matter of course.

Legacies and Successors

The Black Hand at Liberty

Now that no distinction between the "True" and "False" Black Hand exists, only the Black Hand exists. The group most intimately influenced by the Manus Nigrum now spins wildly as its leaders search for new directions.

Seraph Djuhah became impatient a few years ago with the pace of Manus Nigrum recruiting and set about hastening it. He ordered the creation of new Black Hand packs more independent of the rest of the Sabbat, with members specifically chosen for the probability that they would accept Manus Nigrum membership. He didn't stop to consider just how the change would look to outsiders and now finds himself widely suspected of planning a coup against the Sabbat's central leadership. Other Manus Nigrum believers distance themselves from him and cultivate new lines of influence, in the expectation that soon Djuhah will brighten some sunrise.

Seraph Izhim ur-Baal regards himself as inheritor of the Del'Roh's mantle. Circumstances detained him elsewhere in the Underworld while Enoch fell; given advance warning, he would have taken part in the final struggle. Now he presides over the remnant of the Manus Nigrum from the crater that once held Enoch. Massive storms sweep through the Underworld and have ever since a few hours after Enoch's destruction. Only a particularly strong few vampires can survive. Izhim ur-Baal is one of them.

The cult's members no longer respond with blind obedience to orders from above, so he works directly through the Black Hand, as well as through his secret ties. Like Djuhah, Izhim now operates Black Hand packs of his own, with the same fears striking Sabbat observers. Djuhah and Izhim accuse each other of plotting civil war; only their fellow Manus Nigrum believers recognize the struggle as one for control of the cult as well as of the Black Hand.

The other Seraphim of the Black Hand have no connection to the Manus Nigrum. The cult's own "Seraphim" perished along with the Del'Roh and the liches at Enoch. Djuhah and Izhim escaped precisely because their visible duties precluded their disappearing for extended periods. Some cultists debate the wisdom of trying to recruit Seraph Elimelech, but their peers fear that the seraph is too insane to make a reliable tool, let alone a brother in the cause. Others wish to allow the sect a merciful death and advocate letting it crumble rather than operating it as a shell of its former potency.

Black Hand packs that once took Manus Nigrum orders understand at least some of the disillusionment created by the Week of Nightmares. At the least, the former tools know that some of their masters died and others succumbed to despair. With the end times now at hand, Sabbat vampires vie with each other to prove their readiness for the great battle. Now-independent packs seek to prove to themselves that they can act boldly and effectively without the benefit of secret instructions. Boldness comes more readily than efficiency: packs perish in ill-considered fits of bravery, doing the Sabbat cause no good at all. Other factions in the Sabbat don't understand just what's responsible for such frenzy in the Black Hand and seek to rein it in or at least channel it. So far, efforts at control produce little in the way of results. The Sabbat at large doesn't appreciate its good fortune in having so many genuinely deserving targets at which to throw the Black Hand.

Storytelling Issues

In addition to influencing some of the Black Hand's leaders, Manus Nigrum agents recruited individuals and packs throughout the chain of command. The Manus Nigrum sought to steer the Sabbat away from actually challenging Antediluvians and Methuselahs, either by simply providing more accessible targets or by pulling particularly hostile individuals (and packs) toward Gehenna cults. The Sabbat gains enormous strength from its ability to act in a more or less coordinated manner; no small Gehenna cult can accomplish as much, so vampires maneuvered out of the Sabbat become less effective. The Sabbat focused on the battles of the moment, with long-term strategy kept vague, to help weed out unworthy vampires - both among its targets and among the Sabbat who fall in battle.

A simple truth of undercover operations is that the agent cannot afford to seem sympathetic to his real masters. Highly placed double agents must seem to do a good job for their supposed side or risk exposure. In the case of the Sabbat, this means that most Manus Nigrum agents talked up the war against the Antediluvians while actually helping to keep the Sabbat from fulfilling its destiny.

Players' packs can have backgrounds including service to the Manus Nigrum, either knowingly or not. If they knew that they operated on behalf of an ancient Gehenna cult with an agenda quite different from that of the Sabbat, they risked exposure. Did they survive through luck, cleverness or both? Make players work out the responses to various sorts of challenges: Sabbat Inquisitors who suspected the characters of being infernalists, pack members who overheard a snippet of conversation, elders with Auspex and Obfuscate who found strange things in the character's minds. Perhaps the characters had to flee and establish new identities. Perhaps they had to do so more than once. The Sabbat doesn't keep master membership rolls, but personal acquaintances may range far and wide, so running doesn't always work forever.

If the characters did not know about the Manus Nigrum, but you want to have it as a background surprise for them to uncover, think about what their cover was like. Spy recruiters routinely pose as someone to whom the potential recruit feels sympathetic. In the Sabbat, that might be the Sabbat Inquisition or a respected leader with a personal agenda. If the characters felt doubt about the Sabbat cause, their Manus Nigrum contact likely posed as a Camarilla operative hoping to convince the characters to weaken the Sabbat. You'll need to have a clear sense of what the characters encountered so as to know where the cover might break and allow them to trace the truth. (If you don't intend them to find out, seriously consider not doing it at all. Players may eventually figure out that they're puppets of unknown forces and dislike it. Unsolvable challenges are best saved for impersonal shoot-em-up games or books.)

Characters who've been loyal members of the Sabbat may find out that one of their packmates, or a local bishop or some other vampire they've known a long time, has been up to something else. The risks of detection facing agents played as characters also apply to Storyteller characters. Don't just hand the bald declaration "you know a spy" to the characters, provide clues and allow characters to pick up on the leads or not. Once the characters do discover a spy in their midst, they must decide how to respond. Prompt reports to superiors earn favor, but reports that include many uncovered truths may earn much more respect: Independent spy-hunters gamble that they can learn more and not send the target into flight. Delayed reports that include the admission of a spy's escape earn punishment.

Uncovered spies respond to their discovery in various ways. A single strong individual may well try to destroy her discoverers, and a pack of neonates could be hard-pressed to win against a fanatical elder. Other spies try to recruit their discoverers, and in the turmoil of the Final Nights, a Gehenna cult message might seem appealing (particularly if the spy leaves out complicating details about her cult's recent demise). A spy may try to pass as belonging to some third organization, so as to send her pursuers off against some

other suitable target. The fact that one has uncovered a spy doesn't mean that no secrets remain, and overconfident characters may need to be reminded of this with a stern object lesson.

Characters who bring news of the Manus Nigrum run into other difficulties. The Sabbat leadership cannot afford to admit that a Gehenna cult succeeded in enticing important members of the Sabbat. The story must not get out where it could damage morale or provide fodder for the Sabbat's critics. Characters expecting generous rewards may get them but accompanied by dire threats and even the hostile use of mental Disciplines. A particularly canny spy could win his freedom once the machinery of cover-up rumbles to life by offering to take his discoverers with him when he flees. Equally canny Sabbat leaders may choose to keep the discoverers close through bribes and incentives rather than threats, which means that characters could win unexpected promotions.. and the dangers that go with them.

The Camarilla at Liberty

Manus Nigrum claims to control of one element or another of the Camarilla reflected some common misconceptions about individual versus collective authority and control versus influence (see p. 89).

Individuals in the Camarilla, sometimes prominently placed, took orders from the Manus Nigrum. More individuals responded to Manus Nigrum prompting relayed through conduits and intermediaries, only some of whom understood just what they were doing. The Camarilla as a whole owed nothing to the Manus Nigrum, nor could the cult push very far without its agents (witting and otherwise) risking exposure for serving hostile agendas. While the cultists boasted to each other about how far their influence ran, in practical terms they could intervene only in very specific limited cases or in the long term to gradually shape consensus.

The absence of coordinated Manus Nigrum intervention therefore means relatively little to the Camarilla at large. The sect never belonged to the cult and proceeds now as in the past, trying to average out the competing claims of its leaders and to respond to an increasingly chaotic environment. The real significance of the cult's passing occurs on the individual level, as members who once took orders now get no instruction.

For some vampires, the absence of secret masters creates only confusion. Independent thought doesn't come easily to everyone, and after a few centuries of being a useful pawn, a vampire may lose much of her capacity to initiate and innovate. Other members of the Camarilla respond as Black Hand liberated servants do, with increased aggression and experimentation. They want to prove to themselves that they didn't lose their fundamental individuality during the years of service. Former servants who genuinely accepted Manus Nigrum doctrine carry on as best they can, wondering what happened to their masters and hoping that the chain of command may return some night soon. In the meantime, they tend their resources and promote the cult's views among those Camarilla vampires who show signs of listening.

Storytelling Issues

As Storyteller, you can put disruptive former Black Hand agents wherever you want in the Camarilla. Keep in mind that few of them ever existed at any given time; your chronicle's characters are unlikely to encounter more than a handful of high-ranking (or low-ranking) Camarilla members who've turned aggressive or otherwise unusual recently. An investigation into the causes of the change could lead careful characters right into the heart of the vanished cult, if your troupe wants to deal with it, or the behavioral changes can serve as just part of the background of the Final Nights. Don't bring former agents into your chronicle unless they'll actually serve your story.

Gehenna Cults

Many survivors of the Manus Nigrum retain the impulse to fanatically worship something. Since their old faith now seems unsatisfactory, they set about creating replacements. In addition to existing Gehenna cults, incorporate these if they suit the needs of your chronicle.

The Empryean Sodality

Enrathi revenant Niccolo Espuccio retains his conviction that Enoch was the spiritual center of the universe. The crater where it once stood now exposes the primal substance of the universe, the alchemical essence of existence that blood magicians and other students of the occult seek to duplicate. He believes that the whole universe must become that same substance and that nuclear fire combined with powerful magic can work the transformation. The Antediluvians will wake only when the world lies black and barren, ready for them.

He has no full-time followers but engages in personal debate and correspondence with both living and vampiric magicians. Some philosophically inclined Giovanni find his theories intriguing and would like to conduct some experiments. At worst, they'd get that much closer to the harvest of souls with which they hope to topple the Shroud, and if there's anything to Espuccio's claims, the Giovanni should know. Lobbyists in the legislatures of various nations with nuclear capability mount fresh campaigns for ground and aerial testing of nuclear weapons, while occult experts build networks of contacts among the engineers who'd conduct the tests.

The Knife of the First

Ventrue one-time princes Claudia Schoenecht and Karl Weissmont entered the service of the Manus Nigrum in the early 19th century. They claimed praxis in small Ruhr Valley towns with the assistance of cult ghouls and thereafter passed along information about just where Germany's

growing industrial output went in response to Camarilla influence. The cult never took them in as full members, but the princes earned the personal thanks of various cult leaders, including one of the liches when the vampires made a rare trip to the Underworld. The sudden disappearance of the cult left the princes shaken and disoriented; thanks to their connections, they got a much fuller picture of the scope of the cult's fall than most followers could.

Schoenecht woke one night with the insight that the Antediluvians can triumph only when later generations of Kindred stop resisting. The consummation of history must begin with the removal of all Kindred who know something about the Antediluvians' plans and above all with the removal of Gehenna cultists. The Manus Nigrum fell, Schoenecht decided, precisely because it knew enough to be an obstacle, intentional or otherwise. She explained the matter to Weissmont, who immediately agreed. Together they faked their own destruction and set about building a network of followers who could help them purge the ranks of Kindred who could oppose history.

Ten Assamites who used to belong to the Manus Nigrum compose the main force of Schoenecht and Weissmont's little army. Smaller groups of Malkavian antitribu, Ventrue and ghouls roam independently, with occasional reports to the movement's leaders. The visionaries now dwell in a slum apartment in Barcelona that offers them a good view of the cathedral of La Sagrada Familia. The former princes and a few chosen assistants trace out numerological insights in the cathedral, which they use to compile timetables for the war on the cults. Weissmont sometimes has dreams reminiscent of those sent by the Aralu to Enoch's faithful, even though the Aralu are now long gone. He and Schoenecht debate dispassionately whether he's receiving true messages or has gone crazy and must be destroyed.

The Servants of the Next World

Amanda Ruofo-Jones supervised the instruction of chatterlings in Enoch for more than three centuries. She happened to be making a rare visit to the lands of the living when Enoch fell. Now she resides in Pretoria, directing an interracial group of would-be mediums, many of them children. She teaches them that the world is about to be transformed and that they must prepare by contacting the souls set free in the cataclysm, since some ghosts can reach across time. The South African government regards the study group's two dozen members with some suspicion, fearing that spiritualism with a somewhat Western bias might be part of a general conspiracy to subvert the Mandela regime. Amanda has also offered secret haven to a pair of thin-blooded vampires, who brought with them a baby they claim is theirs. Amanda has discovered that the child is a dhampir and possessed of a crescent-shaped birthmark at the base of her spine. Amanda has convinced her mediums that the child is a "harbinger of a new era" and that the ghosts with whom the mediums speak may hold answers to the mysteries of the "time of all rebirth."

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scientists and the occult

The popular image of scientists as skeptical rationalists doesn't apply universally. Ever since the beginning of modern science, investigators like Isaac Newton and Robert Hooke have combined scientific research with studies of the supernatural world. In the 20th century, engineers took part in the Order of the Golden Dawn in its heyday between the world wars. Jack Parsons, one of the famous engineers of the 1930s, engaged in ceremonial magic with the young L. Ron Hubbard. While most engineers and scientists do retain a strong skepticism about magic, not all do. The Giovanni and independent necromancers preparing to test Espuccio's theories aren't working in a complete vacuum but moving among small communities of interest they may have known for a long time.

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The Shadow Crusade

Almost from the Manus Nigrum's founding, some members have found signs of hidden monsters lurking beneath the skins of other vampires. Depending on the particular paranoid inquirer, the monsters might be ghosts and other spirits, strange creatures created by magic or even creatures so alien as to be unknowable by Kindred or kine. The rationales vary, but they all converge on the idea that some vampires aren't really vampires and must therefore be destroyed. In the wake of the cult's collapse, the Shadow Crusade gradually emerges as an organization in its own right. Tzimisce and other vampires with Vicissitude are the most popular targets, since shapeshifting proves to the crusaders that something's wrong. (Masters of Protean become targets much less often, though a vocal few crusaders argue that all shapeshifting comes from infection or corruption.) Sometimes the crusaders destroy vampires who actually do prove not to be vampires, like careful Lupine infiltrators or ghosts using esoteric powers. More often, there was nothing wrong with the victim, only with the crusader's perceptions, but the Shadow Crusade provides no easy way to correct misapprehensions.

The Final Nights Hide a Million Stories

From the hidden horrors of the Camarilla to the naked fiendishness of the Sabbat, vampires play at the eternal Jyhad. Elders, ancillae, neonates and... others... prowl the nights. Only one individual knows all the secrets of the World of Darkness.

And They Must All Be Told

The role of the Storyteller is a daunting one, and this book is an invaluable aid for those who orchestrate Vampire chronicles. It includes a myriad of information, including enigmas best left out of players hands, to create stories and populate the casts of epic tales. The Vampire Storytellers Handbook revised edition leaves no stone unturned — except those that hide secrets no mortal should know.

Vampire Storytellers Handbook:

- Includes systems for rare bloodlines, Disciplines and elder vampires
- Presents a Vampire FAQ, details for the True Hand, crossovers with other World of Darkness games and other secrets of storytelling
- Outlines suggestions for alternate character creation, historical settings and chronicle creation

WHITE WOLF GAME STUDIO

WORLD OF DARKNESS

Vampire
THE MASQUERADE