

NIGHT HORRORS

The Wicked Dead™



a sourcebook for
Vampire
THE REQUIEM

The question you have to ask yourself is, if you're a walking dead man, why are you so blinkered?

Do you think you're the only impossible thing out there?

— Frances Black

This book includes:

- Secrets of the other vampires of the World of Darkness, from the vile Formosae, who feed on beauty, through to the bizarre and appalling Cymothoa Sanguinaria, nature's greatest horror.
- Beings that exist as direct consequences of the Kindred's parasitic existence, including the Draugr, vampires without Humanity and Dampyrs, children who should not be.
- The return of the Strix, vengeful spirits that plagued the Kindred back in the days of ancient Rome.
- New options, allowing players to take on the role of strange, exotic vampiric creatures.



www.worldofdarkness.com

Vampire
THE REQUIEM

I could eat you all up



By Wood Ingham and Becky Lowe

“Darling! You look so beautiful, I could eat you all up!”

This is who I am after here: A middle-aged woman, her razor lips painted Barbie pink is escorting another woman, a blonde wearing huge black shades that make her look even more like a stick insect, through a mass of soul-eaters with cameras.

I imagine the blonde, she's just a girl, she's like not even legal, I imagine her catching little glimpses of her bug eyes double-reflected in those long rigid eye stalks, enlarged to massive proportions.

She pouts and poses, expertly, for the cameramen—a reflex action—and turns on her three-inch stiletto heels and instantly forgets them, like something wiped it from her memory.

Maybe something did.

I will so insist on dressing up

I am walking two steps behind her. No one sees me, and that's OK, that's the idea. Except one chap looks over the camera for a second, and sees me—sometimes they do—and then looks back at the little screen on his digital SLR, and then looks over, and back at the screen. He has a funny look on his face. I mouth “sorry” at him and blow him a little pap-carpet kiss anyway. No hard feelings, old chap.

Oops. They're getting away.

I must dash. Or at least the best I can in these shoes.

I will so insist on dressing up.

Shiny

Inside, the gallery is all sterile glass and artificial light and shiny shiny steel pillars. I used to hate places like this when I was alive, but I've recently gained an appreciation for the aesthetic of surgery. So I stand there and go, ooh, shiny.

She stops at one of the paintings, pretending to admire it but actually trying to catch a glimpse of herself in the reflected glass. The painted PR woman tuts impatiently, eager to move on. The girl with the almond eyes and the cut-glass cheekbones eyes herself disapprovingly, seeing only blemishes. I can hear the grumblegurglepoppopploppl of her vise-flat stomach, watch the moisture in her eye as she catches sight of the vol-au-vents. And around her, I can see a lack of color, a deficiency, blotchy hungry patches, such hungry patches.

And she's whispering to herself:

“This little piggy went to market,

This little piggy stayed at home,

This little piggy had roast beef,

This little piggy had none,

And this little piggy went wee wee wee all the way home.”

The rain seeps in

It is raining outside. The hard, cold kind that seeps into your soul and gets stuck there.

The artwork is called Phagos.

I have seen the photographers, lovely fishy eyes behind lovely fishy lenses and this is my job, really, and so I think, I want to see someone here, and I want to eat. I catch the scent, faint but nevertheless perceptible, of freshly-baked vol-au-vents mingled with hairspray and—is that Chanel Number 5? How depressing—and I think, “I'm feeling peckish.” And I have seen her.



The predator lurks within all of us. We are each of us consumer and consumed. We are consumed by the desire to attain, often at the expense of others, and therefore our very want consumes us. We quickly become the thing we despise—the eater becomes the eaten.

Theophany is a practice as old as time itself. Pre-Christian religions often participated in the consumption of God's blood and body through the ritual human sacrifice of a deity substitute: a vestal virgin or otherwise. It was believed that the sacrifice would appease God. Consuming the sacrifice entailed identity with the godhead. The Christian sacrament of Eucharist is merely a continuation of this practice.

Eating another person is a way to express a relationship of naked power over him...

Others speak not of consuming, but of being consumed. In the late

Middle Ages, Eucharistic mysticism furnished a framework in which medieval holy women like Hadewijch and Catherine of Siena could report experiences of eating and being eaten by Christ, literal incorporation into the suffering flesh of the Savior.

Whether we are the eater or the eaten is a matter of personal choice. Perhaps it is a case of Survival of the Fittest, or something altogether darker, more primeval.

**"STUDIES OF POULTRY
SHOW THAT CANNIBALISM
CAN ALSO BE
THE RESULT OF
THE URBAN CONDITION=
OFTEN SPURRED ON FROM
OVERCROWDING, POOR
LIGHTING CONDITIONS,
RACIAL HATRED
AND PLAIN MEANNESS."**

Nobody notices me, any more than they notice the artwork.

Nods and grins and really-how-interestings, eyes darting frantically trying to catch the editor of Vogue or Cosmo or Tatler or if you're really desperate Glamour.

Everybody here is on a mission.

I don't care to speak to any of them. I make my way straight to the vol-au-vents on the table—to where she is—and I am standing beside her. The girl is perched on a pirouetted heel, her back against a pillar. A woman with too much makeup and twenty years on her is talking to her, and she is nodding and the colors around her are—so patchy! So hungry!—bored colors, magnolia and beige and taupe. She keeps looking at the plate of petit-fours the other woman is holding, and with a flash of orange she looks away. What are you scared of? A little roundel of pastry filled with salmon and crème fraîche or a fairy cake and you shudder and suddenly there's turquoise ambition and nervous red in specks between the gaps and little spikes of yellow. The woman with the plate sees someone important, and the girl pulls from her clutch-bag a half-health-warning packet of Marlboros and a little gold lighter. She takes forever to pull the cigarette out and tap it like an old man would and place it between her lips and breathe through it and take it out and put it back in and light up.

One of the gallery attendants, a woman in a tailored uniform by some haute designer who wanted to “do something different,” all black and plastic with round sunglasses like an ant, is at her side, asking her politely to refrain from smoking. It is against the law to smoke in here.

The girl flares with purple satisfaction. She scowls, though, as if she's going to stamp her foot like a toddler and smirks and says, “Don't you know who I am?”

The attendant stands.

She answers herself, in her most mocking, patronizing voice, “No, I don't suppose you do, you silly little woman.”

She blows smoke in the attendant's face and turns on her heel, hips swinging, arm cocked with the cigarette, letting the ash fall where it will.

With a nod to some other women, she struts through the gallery, laughing and tossing her hair back. The crowd surges forward, shuffling without conscious thought in the direction in which the model is headed.

And I think, Tonight, I am coming home with you.

Losers

Lilli gets in, throws her bag into the flat, lets it fall where it may, flings herself wearily onto the sofa.

She had expected the gallery showing to be dull. Losers. Losers, boring empty losers who all wanted to have their picture taken, who didn't have any interest in anything she wanted to say. She didn't have anything to say. She will be pictured standing next to one of the 3am Girls in the gossip pages tomorrow.

She has eaten, over the course of today, three vol-au-vents (salmon, organic cress, salmon again), one organic goat cheese and spring onion sandwich and—shudder—two fairy cakes. 230 calories. She feels sick.

She pours herself a cup of raspberry and cranberry tea, making certain to check the side of the box for forbidden contents before she does so, like she does every time she drinks it, like she hasn't memorized the ingredients list.

She feels a little uneasy, like she is being watched. Like something is in the shadows.

She gets up, retrieves her handbag—Vuitton tonight—from the kitchenette floor, returns to the sofa, stretches out, pulls out the exhibition catalog. Photographs of a series of plastic figures, customized dolls, in sadistic poses.

A doll dressed in a dog-collar is eating the brain from another doll's head—smiling rapidly—that it holds in its hands.

Identical twin dolls devour one another, piece by piece.

Three dolls are in the act of mutilating a plastic pony and eating the pieces.

A female doll lies tied to a gurney while another, hanging by its feet from the ceiling, has its head buried in the first doll's crotch, its arms around the doll's thighs. The lying doll's head is turned to the side, smiles blankly at the camera.

Lilli is bored now. Her stomach gurgles. She stretches out on the sofa, and tries to sleep.

Frances, sitting on the end of the sofa at the girl's feet, strokes her ankle for a moment. Then she reaches across and picks up the catalog. She flips through it, licking her lips, making little sighs of approval.

A pebble

I watch her. I watch her lying there for a long time. And I think, Gosh, she's quite beautiful, actually, and I realize that is rather odd because, when she was awake, I never really noticed that. I mean, she struck me in the way that it does when you see something a bit unusual looking—a pebble, perhaps, on the beach—and pick it up to see what it was about it that caught your eye. If you had asked me, I'd have said she was striking, rather than pretty.

I take the catalog. I think that perhaps we can do something with the artist. Which leads of course to a nose around her apartment. The iPod's on the table. I never got the hang of these things when I was alive. Still, how hard can it be? Here we go. You press this and twiddle this—Girls Aloud, Lady GaGa. Rhianna. Mariah Carey. Chiara. Dido. God, her music taste is awful.

I try on some of her clothes. I am in the bedroom of a sleeping supermodel. I think that it is mandatory, really. It's not good for me. I mean, latex leggings. Who thought of that?

It's all a way of raising the anticipation. But.

I am quite gentle. A little nip, on the wrist. I don't even wake her up. She smells so soft, so pink, so sleepy. I won't disturb her. She turns and smiles and moans slightly. And then settles back down when I am done licking the wound.

I think I would like to be back here, though. I find a spare key. I lock the door behind me.

It's best not to be too greedy on the first encounter.

All-Embracing

Lilli has a vision in her sleep: Ana comes to her, and takes away her blemishes and enfolds her in those big blubbery arms, chewing on her stomach and thighs, sucking away her own puppy-fat and taking it away and making it motherly and useful and all-encompassing. All-Embracing.

Becoming nothing

I always feel a bit bad about it afterward. I'm guessing that's a good thing. Right? I am still Real Frances sometimes. I still dance around my flat to Belle and Sebastian and I still swing on the swings in the play park when no one is looking.

And then sometimes I'm the hungry doll, me, and I have to keep feeding because otherwise I'd become nothing at all.

A long time ago, when I was still Real Living Frances, I remember for some reason or other being asked by a doctor to measure my height. And when they showed me the tape measure and I realized how little of me there actually was, how small I was, I got really scared. Because, most of the time, you sort of think of yourself as filling up an entire room, don't you? You don't ever consider what a small space of the universe you occupy, or the fact that if you disappeared completely, actually, most people on the planet wouldn't even notice.

Becoming nothing terrifies me.

Shoot

If there's one thing Lilli hates more than parties it's casting sessions. The bigger magazines—those that can afford to be fussy—can afford to get the photographers in. And the stylists and the makeup and hair people.

It's a bit like being a cow paraded at market. Lilli, being Lilli, has never been to a market, or come face to face with a cow.

Not that she'd want to.

Cows are icky.

Whatever.

When she gets there it's nine o'clock and she's feeling a bit tired and a bit faint and a tiny bit peculiar. She hasn't had the best of nights—she blames the vol-au-vents. Her face is not the freshest it has ever been, but nothing the makeup monkey can't sort out.

Lucinda, the agent, is there waiting for her, tapping her Manolos impatiently on the cold tile floor of the studio. An hour in makeup: fake eyelashes, and layers of foundation and blusher like scars and deep purple lipstick; an hour on hair like an ant's nest. They balance her on needle heels and zip her into this latex and metal dress that's all bubblegum blue and pink and then they have to polish it and she is squeezed and stretched and pummeled and paraded and she smiles and pouts and comes alive, dazzles and sparkles and becomes, just for one hour, real.



And underneath she is tired and she is lonely and she just wants to be normal, to be able to swing on the swings in the park like she did when she was a little kid, and scuff her shoes and just, you know, be.

It is all so boring.

And when it is done, she is sent away into the changing rooms and they deconstruct her and she sits, in a bathrobe, pink like a skinned rabbit, eavesdropping while the photographic directors and the agents and the artistic editors and the PRs and the PAs and the PAs' agents analyze her on a screen bit by bit, wiping out her spots and the blemish under her chin and making her eyes wider and her legs a little longer.

They want something "a bit more urban, a bit more edgy," and although to her face they love her and will pay her, they are wiping her off the screen. She cannot be the woman on the page. She is not good enough for them. And when no one is looking, the supermodel with the winning smile and the dazzling looks and the designer wardrobe to die for bites her lip and tries her very hardest not to cry.

She dreams of Ana

Before Lilli goes to bed, she kneels and says a prayer to Ana, asking that she might be made thin, be made perfect. She offers her body as sacrifice and resolves that she will never, never again have to face such rejection, such humiliation. And then she rises and smiles, because she knows Ana has listened.

That night, Lilli dreams of Ana, who is terrible and beautiful and hideous. She dreams she is in a line of girls, each one progressively more attractive than the other, a beauty pageant. She looks down at herself, and sees that her bones and her skin and her flesh are gradually disappearing, self-absorbing. She is slowly melting away, becoming nothing, consumed into the essence of another. So this is how it feels, she thinks, being eaten. As she steps onto the podium and the crown is placed upon her head, she smiles back at the cameras and each lens is empty, for she casts no reflection.

She has become no one.

She cannot keep from smiling in her sleep.

Don't mind me

I think it's time to visit my special new friend. She's a little thin, but I can use that. I'm toying with the idea of telling her who I am and maybe taking her to the Molding Room and letting her in on things. So to speak. But then I think, maybe I can keep her to myself and maybe feed her a few drops, one, two, three and have my own supermodel and maybe be a little naughty and... experiment. It's been a while since I... yeah. I lick my lips. She has so much potential.

So I make myself invisible and unlock the door and wonder whether she's going to be asleep. And I think it smells funny, and I can hear aa-aa-aaah sighs like someone's... enjoying herself a bit. And the glass table and the sofa are pushed to the side And in the middle of the carpet, Lilli, lovely Lilli is standing there naked and looking up into the middle distance with a look of ecstasy on her face, open-mouthed, wide-eyed, her arms straight, her fingers fluttering a little at her sides. She is making the little yelps, and her face is narrower than ever and sort of iridescent, and her eyes are huge and shining and empty, and this thing is slobbering over her shins and thighs, hiding them completely, this huge great pile of dark-brown fat, and I can barely parse what it is until it stops and it lifts its head from her thigh, its head—it's a woman, this thing, except it's not a woman, it's dead like me, all pale colors, that washed-out vermillion of the feeding vampire—it turns its pudgy neckless head toward me. Tiny round black buttons peer out at me, under, and this is the grotesque thing, under hair that's like straightened and conditioned Afro hair that's streaked and tied up. I can see a pair of fingers like thick, overcooked pork sausages grasping Lilli's thigh, and it—she—is staring at me now.

Lilli has stopped yelping, is breathing in that juddery way you do when you've just orgasmed. So I hear. And then she looks down at the obese creature that has been savaging her thigh and reaches over and touches the creature's hair with a look of admiration. Of worship.

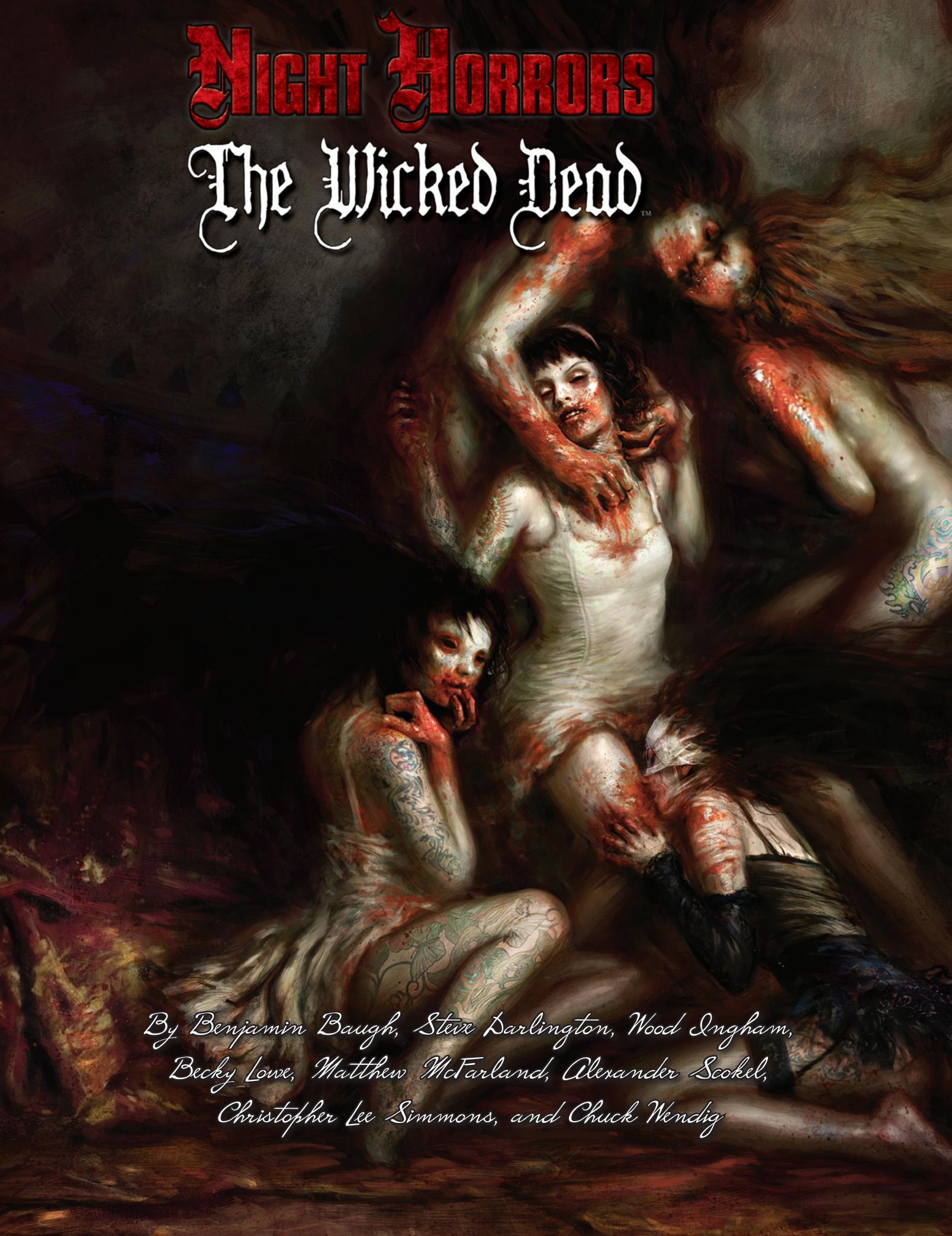
We stay there looking at each other, the obese thing and I, and I can't see any blood around her mouth, I can't smell any blood, and I feel the tinfoil-on-the-tongue thing that says she could probably tear me to pieces, and I beat it down.

"Don't mind me," I say. "I'll, ah, just be going." And I back out of the flat the way I came.

Sometimes you just have to let these things go.

NIGHT HORRORS

The Wicked Dead™



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WHITE WOLF PUBLISHING
2075 WEST PARK PLACE BOULEVARD
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PRINTED IN CANADA.

NIGHT HORRORS

The Wicked Dead™

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Introduction: Dead and Unburied

In them all were the same general features: one of these ghoulish spirits abode in a living man or woman, conferring supernatural powers of bat-like flight and glutting itself with nocturnal blood-feasts. When its host died it continued to dwell in the corpse, which remained undecayed. By day it rested, by night it left the grave and went on its awful errands.

—EF Benson, “Mrs. Amworth”

It’s easy to get blasé. We live these amazing lives. Every breath you breathe is a miracle. The chances against each of us being here at all, the simple fact that we think and create and walk around and love in the universe, are so vast as to be impossible for a human mind to envisage.

If monsters existed, they might get blasé, too. A walking dead man might be able to rip open vault doors, turn invisible and wipe his victims’ memories with a word, but after a while this stuff seems natural to him. It’s a really *human* thing to do.

But just as we sometimes, in moments of clarity, find the veil ripped away and the strangeness and improbability of our existence laid before us, so, too, does our vampire sometimes get the chance to see that stranger things exist in this world.

This is a book about some of those stranger things. It’s a book of truth and consequences: the truth of the bizarre vampires that don’t follow the same rules as the blood-drinkers with which we’re so familiar; the consequences of the Kindred existence and the terrible mistakes that come into being as a result of vampires’ sins.

What’s a vampire, anyway?

All but one of the entries in **The Wicked Dead** are vampires, but we’ve left our definition of vampire intentionally wide. In this book, a vampire is any creature that feeds from the life of another creature, and which is appalling enough to human sensibilities to stand outside the usual order of nature.

Apart from that rather nebulous definition, certain attributes exist that many vampires have, but that all have exceptions:

- Usually, a vampire is supernatural in origin, either through witchcraft, the agency of ghosts or some sort of curse. *Exception*: *Cymothoa Sanguinaria* (a cryptozoological animal).
- Vampires are often either ghosts or reanimated corpses. *Exceptions*: Cihuateteo (living witches); the Rizzetti Apparatus (a life-prolonging mechanical device); *Cymothoa Sanguinaria* (a living animal); ragged-man (a parasitic worm).
- The life upon which a vampire subsists (which, in game terms, we usually call Vitae) usually comes out in the form of blood and/or flesh. *Exceptions*: Formosae (emotions); Baykosh (lifespan); Mnemovores (memories).

- Vampires mostly look like people or the ghosts or corpses of people. *Exceptions*: *Cymothoa Sanguinaria* (an isopod); ragged-man (a small homonculus made of worms).

A vampire might eat flesh, steal dreams, feast upon fear, snack upon souls or leave its victims empty, mindless husks. Vampires can be utterly alien: The eponymous alien invader in HP Lovecraft’s story “The Colour Out of Space” is a life-eating vampire. Likewise, how about the spectral creepy-crawlies in EF Benson’s “Caterpillars” that bundle into a man’s room and feed upon him and give him cancer? In Ray Bradbury’s short story, the titular “Man Upstairs” looks like a man, except when you look at him through colored glass, and inside his body he has, instead of organs, only geometric shapes made of a strange gelatinous substance.

Vampires can defy our expectations. Vampires don’t have to follow the rules we set. In your games, don’t be afraid to mess around with vampire weaknesses and powers if that suits your game.

Why the Kindred are different

The Kindred, upon whom **Vampire: The Requiem** focuses, are a vampiric default of sorts. They’re creatures that exist in their own society. As the protagonists of the game, they’re in a privileged position. Other vampires exist in the World of Darkness, but none are quite like the Kindred.

- **The Kindred are more common.** Some vampires limit themselves to only a few countries, but from Reykjavik to Tokyo, from San Francisco to Sydney, from London to Beijing, the Kindred exist.
- **The Kindred are organized.** No other vampires have societies like this. Sure, vampires like the Cihuateteo persist in little witch-cults and the Formosae have their weird little social networks, but none of the monsters in this book have the hidden societies that characterize the Kindred. They don’t have covenants, and they don’t engage in politics in the way the Kindred can.
- **The Kindred share powers and weaknesses.** Although the Kindred are most likely five different kinds of vampire that exist together, they are similar enough that their Vitae has similar effects, both upon living humans and upon each other, and for them to be able to learn each others’ powers. All the Kindred

gain Vitae from blood, and all are susceptible to Frenzy and the Predator's Taint. A Mekhet can diablerize a Nosferatu. A Ventrue can bind a Daeva under the Vinculum. They're different creatures, but they share a common human source.

Playing the Wicked Dead

Having said all that, we've presented some of the creatures listed in this book (Dampyr, Jiang Shi and penanggalan, for example) in such a way as to make them suitable for players. But how to introduce them into your chronicle?

- **How are the Kindred to know, anyway?** You know what we were saying about the Kindred being similar to each other? Well, that's sort of true... but the Kindred also exist in any number of bloodlines. Bloodlines exist that can make huge institutional buildings into extensions of themselves, that can house hives of swarming insects in their desiccated lungs, that can invade dreams, that get older as time goes on, that can become clouds of toxic gas, and that can grow razor-sharp blades from their fingers and drink blood through them. With all these bloodlines, what is to stop (for example) a Formosa, a penanggal or a Jiang Shi simply participating in Kindred society as a vampire? The characters in a World of Darkness game don't know the game rules—they just see a vampire, a creature they understand as well as any other vampire.
- **You can create a coterie of these creatures.** Imagine a group of Cihuateteo trying to keep its humanity, all the while being forced to do terrible things to survive.
- **You can mix them with human characters.** A Jiang Shi only really gets to move around if one or more of her anchors is a living human being. Now imagine a group of mortal characters saddled with its blood-drinking ancestor. A Dampyr is pretty much a human being anyway, and it sort of makes sense that once he realizes who he is, he winds up in a cell of hunters.
- **Short-runs and one-offs can be fun.** You don't have to play these creatures for long. Creatures too weird to play for long can be fun as one-off characters. For example, later in the book, we'll introduce the death-spiral of the *C. Sanguinaria* victim. Playing through that can be appalling and harrowing.

Systems: Blood Potency 0

Several creatures in this book have Blood Potency 0. This is not the same as not having a Blood Potency rating at all.

The ramifications of this are discussed in the relevant sections, but in brief:

- Blood Potency 0 vampires always react with fear to "true" Kindred when the Predator's Taint activates.
- Creatures with Blood Potency 0 can spend 1 Vitae per turn, and can augment Physical Attributes and heal bashing and lethal damage just as true Kindred can.
- Creatures with Blood Potency 0 cannot form Vinculi or create ghouls.
- Creatures with Blood Potency 0 expend 1 point to wake in the evening.

- Blood Potency 0 does not allow the "blush of life."
- A character with Blood Potency 0 can hold 10 Vitae, or a number of Vitae equal to his Health, whichever is lower.

What's in this book

Part One: Truth introduces twelve creatures, all of them vampires, but all of them unique.

The **Aswang** (p. 16) are shapeshifters that hide among the ordinary folk during the day and become terrible monsters at night. And maybe they don't even know.

Baykosh (p. 22) preys upon the survivors of conflict, taking what time they have left, and then their hearts and livers.

The **bhūta** (p. 26) are ghosts that possess the innocent and make monsters of them.

The magic-working **Cihuateteo** (p. 30) seek to escape the pain of loss through immortality and blood-drinking.

Pray you don't get infested by **Cymothoa Sanguinaria** (p. 36)—it implants itself in your mouth, steals your mind and lays its eggs inside you. Trapped inside your own head, you're forced to watch yourself become a blood-drinking zombie horror.

Since the days of Rome, the **Formosae** (p. 44) have left their victims dying and beautiful, even as they become obese upon their victims' jealousy.

Ghûls (p. 51) swarm across the myths of the Middle East, eating the flesh of the dead.

Tales of the **Jiang Shi** (p. 57), the hopping vampire, have been told over the Far East since time immemorial. They're true.

The **Mnemovores** (p. 62) are pathetic creatures, feeding upon their victims' memories and their own.

The **penanggalan** (p. 67) leave their bodies behind, heads and entrails flying, shrieking into the night.

Vampires avoid talking about the **ragged-men** (p. 73, that infest vampires and then climb out to feast upon their hosts.

The **Rizzetti Apparatus** (p. 77) grants immortality... but it makes its user so, so hungry.

In **Part Two: Consequences**, the terrible mistakes the Kindred make rear up and bite back.

The **draugr** (p. 86) are cautionary tales, vampires that lose all their Humanity and get hunted down like the beasts they are. Apart from those hiding in plain sight among their more humane colleagues...

When a draugr Embraces or a vampire makes a mistake, the result is a hideous, mindless creature, a terrible bloody minion. These **Larvae** (p. 100) roam in packs and pose a terrible danger to the innocent and damned alike.

The **Strix** (p. 115) have returned from their resting place. The Owls possess and feast and do terrible things. They seek revenge—but for what? And why?

Everyone knows a vampire and a mortal can't have children. Except when they can, and the offspring is a **Dampyr** (p. 135). The hapless half-vampires know all too often they have a destiny. An irresistible lure to the Damned, the Dampyr's blood carries with it a curse that could destroy the Kindred forever.

I WANT
TO CONSUME

Ciudad Juarez (June 16)

— deer skull drinks blood?

Linked to missing tourist women

"IT IS GLORY
NOT TO DIE
OR BE SICK"

— Staff Sgt Bo Schiff,
Falujah

The hell is a
"nemo-vore?"

Tip on cryptid.xxx says to
check old folk homes?

Rumor:

Printing Press drinks blood,
~~Four~~ Turin (1989?)

"Hantu Penanggal"
Kuala Lumpur

— find the vinegar
bottle, steal it

Jones-Klein-Beauchamp
American Psychiatric Medical Clinic
583 Magnolia
Charlotte, NC
Tel: 434-XXXX

DR. ALOIS RUBIK, PHD
Department of Psychiatry & Neurobehavioral Sciences
Division of Outpatient Psychiatry

Fuck this guy!

Fuck him and his psych exams.
I work better alone

Check this shit out!

NEST OF "VAMPIRES"
FOUND BELOW
THE CAPITAL

NEW STANDARD PRESS
by Editor

"We think it's from a disease called porphyria,"
Police Chief Wilkins claims.

"Three Evitas" ---?

Manos Negras.

West Chester, PA?

MOSQUITOS AND TAPEWORMS
AND PARASITES THAT REPLACE
THE FISH TONGUE

— all feeders, "ragged men"
"worm men" "cymothoa"

BECOME THE MASK
THE MIST AND THE WOLF

I WANT TO
BE LIKE YOU

Thom the Vampire

By Chuck Wendig

The hallway is quiet this morning. The exposed pipes from the broken ceiling drip water, but even that pads against a meager, mold-fucked carpet, and makes no noise at all.

It's like this for a little while. Nobody comes, and nobody goes.

Then—a sound.

It's behind the door of apartment 234. The sound isn't much. Just a peep. A squeak. Could that have been a woman's cry? Muffled, maybe?

Hard to say. It goes back to being quiet so fast you'd think you were just hearing things.

This time, the silence doesn't last long.

The door to 234 shudders, like you just surprised it out of a long sleep. It happens again, and then the third time the whole thing blows off its hinges, blasting against the opposing wall and splitting the whole door in half with a coughing crack. A pale woman, naked but for white lace underwear and the handcuffs around her wrists (split in the middle, each now little more than a gleaming bracelet), comes with the door as it hurtles outward. It's her weight that helps to split it.

She falls—how could she not?—but she's fast to her feet, deftly avoiding splinters and the busted doorknob that's still rolling about.

As she bolts down the hall, maybe you catch a glimpse of the two fangs—curved white canines—in her mouth before she sets her lips into a line. Maybe you don't. Doesn't much matter. She doesn't look triumphant. She's no super-predator. The way her eyes are wide, the way her nostrils flare... this one's a scared animal. Prey, really.

She's gone only a second—crashing through the stairwell doors at the very end of the hall—before a man comes staggering out behind her. His lip's split, fresh blood running down his ill-shaven chin and neck. He's not like her. He slips on a door fragment, almost busts his knee on that doorknob. Plus, he's not naked. Pair of cargo shorts. Dirty white t-shirt splotted with what might be mud and what is most definitely blood (some fresh, some not-so-fresh).

He manages to regain his footing, and he's after her.

Oh, and did we mention he has a .357 revolver? He has a .357 revolver.

Handcuffed panties-girl is down in the lobby, and nobody's down there because it's five-thirty on a Saturday morning, and everybody's just come crawling home on their bellies an hour before, gut-drunk, ready-to-fuck, whatever. Everybody's gone coma.

She does this gazelle leap over a couch, lands elegantly on the toes of her right foot, and it gives her just enough momentum to shoulder another door off its hinges—this one doesn't explode outward, no, it just whams open. The reverberation is enough to jolt the screws out of their holes.

Outside, it's the open street.

Every muscle in her body—and, let's state what we already know, every dead muscle in her dead body—coils like a snake around the bone because, sweet unmerciful fuck, the sun is coming. Not now, not this second, but soon: within minutes.

She makes an error, here. It's not an animal's error; it's the error of a human. On the sidewalk, with a few cars passing, she stops to turn her head left, turn her head right. Girl's had a rough night as it was, and she just needs that moment to reorient herself. A wild dog wouldn't need that half-second. He'd just run. Her? She needs it.

And it costs her.

Because Thom—he's our guy, by the way, in the cargo shorts and the shitty t-shirt—is down in the lobby now, and he's not really a crack shot with the revolver, but once in a while a guy gets lucky. Plus, he gets that half-second of aiming.

The gun booms. It's going to draw attention, going to rouse the city from its coma (then again, in this city, people get stabbed on a street corner and nobody calls the cops), but for now, he can't let her go, just can't. Obsession works that way.

Normally, bullets and vampires, not really a big deal. Doesn't feel good, of course, having a fist of hot lead punch through skin. But, it's just that. It's a perforation of dead flesh. Stings. Sucks. But who cares?

To reiterate, though: lucky shot, this guy. The bullet hits her at the base of her spine. Slams right into the bone. The concussion splinters it. Sends a mess of bone shards forward through her midsection, and that tears some shit up inside. It's enough to take the strength right out of her legs. Make her wobbly. Make her weak again. Just like last night (dosed himself on Rohypnol, Thom did, then let himself "get taken advantage of" in his words—she took the bait, oops), and now she's down again.

Knees on hard sidewalk, handcuff chains rattling against the curb, she tries to pull herself forward—maybe she can reach out, catch a passing car to carry her far away, stranger things have happened.

But suddenly it's his booted foot on her wrist and his knee dropping into her back. He's got another pair of handcuffs (resourcefulness is one of Thom's many fabulous traits), and he's trying to turn her over, which hurts like a crazy motherfucker given the bullet that turned her tailbone into shrapnel confetti. She takes a swing at him but she's still woozy, and he pulls his chin out of the way.

"Fuck off!" she screams, then tries to drive her thigh hard up into his crotch. It might've worked. Thom, though, his balls are gone. Been gone for about six years now—testicular cancer's a mean little ferret, chews the manhood right out of you.

Thom slams her head backward into the edge of the curb, holds the gun in her mouth as he tries to get her to stand up, go back inside where they can discuss this like rational people.

"I want to be like you," he says, and he doesn't say it angrily. This isn't a man who's mad. Frustrated, okay. But angry? Hardly. She's his ticket—one of many that has refused to pay dividends, admittedly, but he wants her to like him, love him even. Enough to bring him into her world.

But that's not going to happen today.

Keyword: today.

Sun's up. Its first fingers come dancing up over the avenue, tickling the inner walls of the skyscraper canyon with orange light. She wants to say something to Thom, wants to spit blood in his eye, but she doesn't really get the chance. Because she catches fire in his grip. She screams. Her tongue is burning. Lashing about like a snake's tail. Her eyes are like hot coals all of a sudden. They start to melt.

Thom cries out, tries to drag her back inside, but you can't put these worms back in the can. As he yanks her into the lobby of the building, the sun-eaten cinder is like a mad infection, spreading from her extremities inward. It's like the ashen tip of a cigarette burning swiftly down. Her howls are lost, replaced with a crispy sound, like the crackle of paper in a fireplace. Thom cries out.

of the matter is, the Cancer almost got me. And it took so much from me. My goddam manhood is gone, shit. They say it could come back. Say it could come get me again and again and again. Maybe I'll lose more parts, bits and pieces cut out of me. Maybe I'll just die or whatever. But I got a plan. I know things. I've seen things. Death doesn't hafta be the end of me. I don't want to just be some corps, rotting on a slab, all eaten up by the Cancer. F that noise. I got a plan.

His plan isn't working out so well.

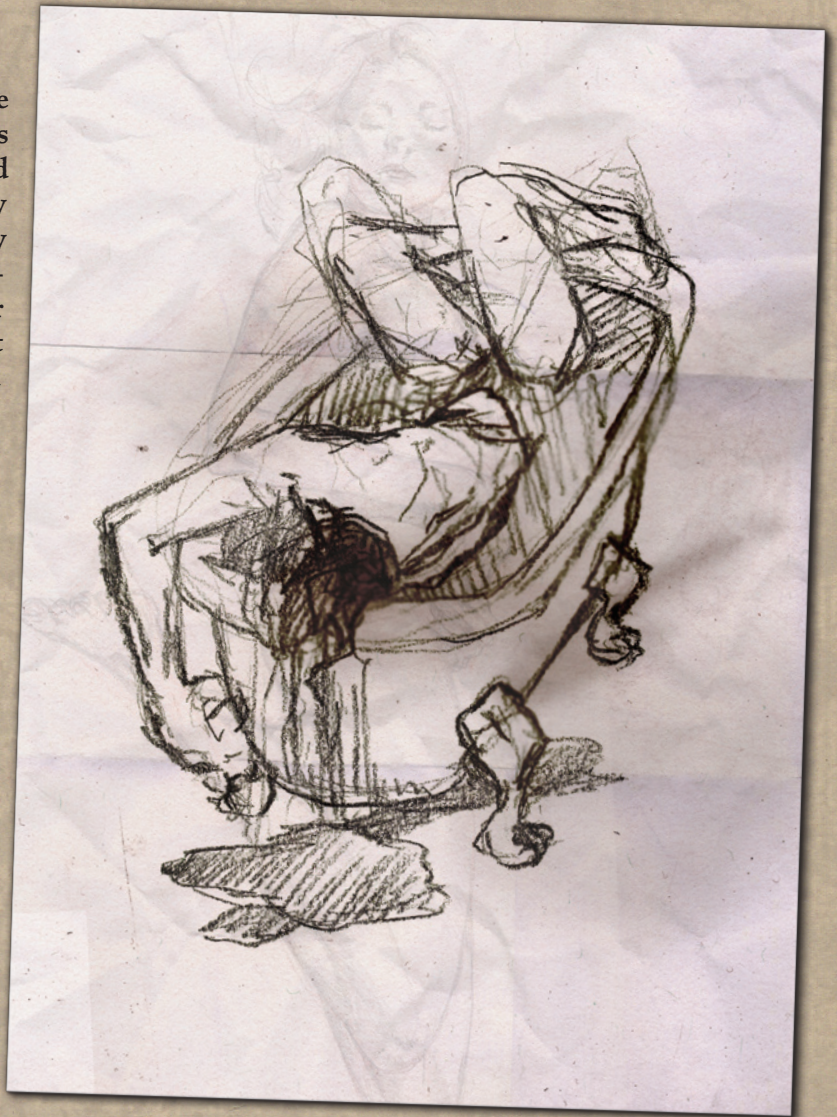
Thom plods back into his apartment. He saved what he could of her—his pockets bulge with the flaky, smeary ash that used to be the girl. No sirens yet; they really are slow around here. Last month, a lady got raped on the elevator. Old lady, too—eighty years old, something like that. Her screams were loud, shrill. Thom thought it sounded like a pterodactyl. Nobody called the cops. He sure didn't.

They'll come, though. Gunshots are a whole other level. Soon as the cops get done dunking their donuts and tasing each other for shits and giggles, it'll happen.

In the meantime, Thom goes over to the shelves on his wall. He gazes at the jars. A fluke—big like a baby manta—batters the inside of the glass, its hungry suckers scraping for a taste of blood. The next jar's nothing but a tangle of white worms, floating motionless like they're dead. But they're not dead. He unscrews the top of the jar, thrusts a fist into his pocket and comes out with a wad of ash ill-contained between his fingers. He drops it into the jar: it hits like diarrhea, a greasy plop. The worms come alive. The ball of them tightens like a knot. Like a feeding frenzy in a goldfish bowl, they go after the ashen flakes with their little mouths and eyeless heads.

Thom feels a twinge of pain in his midsection. Probably gas. Maybe the cancer, though. He always worries.

Sighing, he grabs a file folder off his dresser, sitting atop a nest of Chinese takeout boxes. Inside the folder, a ticket to Kuala Lumpur, and a hasty sketch someone did for him of a monster with the head torn off the body, the organs dangling from the neck, the rest of the body floating in a clawfoot bathtub. That'd be fine. Anything'd be fine. If he can't make do there, he'll come back stateside, and check out the rumors he's heard about these owls—demons, really, able to give the gift of immortal life. Then he'll be good to go. Then he'll get to live forever.



I have no idea what that was about.
But if I were you, I'd probably eat
cleaner people in future.

—Frances

Part One: Truth

Misfortunes do not flourish particularly in our path—they grow everywhere.

—Big Elk, Chief of the Omaha

Listen. Things aren't as clean and easy as they appear. It's not easy to accept that vampires exist, yet we make that leap when it's in our face, don't we? From there we have only to make the hop, skip and jump from Dracula to the Wolfman, and suddenly werewolves exist, too. But is that where we stop? Why? Why do we refuse to believe that some shadows are deeper than those inhabited by the Kindred? What about Frankenstein? What about the creature from the Black Lagoon? The Blob? Pod people and body snatchers? And if some of the old Hollywood horror staples are real, then what about the stuff too gore-splattered or horrible for film? Hu-

man myth, whether born from the bloody wombs of ancient pagan faiths or the grime-streaked legends of the modern city, bloats with tales of the bizarre and the macabre. What can we accept as truth and what can we dismiss as fancy?

The Kindred may be monsters, but they are monsters within a society, and that suggests a level of reason. But what follows has no place in society. These creatures have little reason when they have minds at all. Perhaps this is what makes them so frightening to the Kindred. Or perhaps they are labeled anathema because they beg the question: If we exist, what else does?

Aswang

*To Alonzo Ruiz, Prince of the Aswang Court of Blood, liege of the Kindred,
blood of Alvar Delgado,
blood of Macario Vargas,
blood of Jacinto Matso Mendoza de Toledo,
blood of Agueda Ortega y de la Santiago de Vega,*

On this night, 23rd February, 1946.

I have investigated the breaches as you asked, and I do appreciate that you honor me so by allowing me to spearhead this investigation, but I must regretfully admit that although my work has borne fruit, as yet I have not succeeded in bringing the villain to account.

The very night you entrusted me with this task, I went to the Intramuros, where the boy died. I took Buaya with me, as you suggested, and I'm glad I did. Truly, his knowledge of the local legends (and the area) helped me in many ways over the course of the events I will describe herein. I hereby apologize for doubting you, though I will not recant the things I said about his heathen associates.

Buaya showed me where the boy had been found, and the stories were true. According to the heathen, the boy, a student, was torn to shreds, but I couldn't even smell blood in the killing grounds. Whoever had done this had completely exsanguinated him before reveling in the remains. I immediately added Buaya himself to my list of possible suspects. I am nothing if not open-minded, however, and gave him the benefit of the doubt for the time being.

There was very little I could uncover that the mortal authorities had not, but Buaya told me stories of things that ruled the night before we Kindred came to these islands. He insisted that one of these creatures must have been the culprit, but I insisted on investigating the monsters we know before we spread our net to include peasant folklore. Though our people are, rightly, devout and zealous in their Catholicism, still they fall to mortal weakness and superstition, accepting too many irrational things as fact.

Buaya scoffed at me more than once. "You are Kindred," he said, as if that were somehow ironic.

But the fact remains that I simply have seen no evidence in my nights that anything outside of our Court exists in the area. Surely we would have encountered other such creatures and dealt with them appropriately.

He remained convinced, though he could not (or would not) provide any proof. As we surveyed the neighborhood, he told me to watch for black dogs and listen for strange noises. To be frank, I felt that he had forgotten his place as one of the Damned. But that kind of paranoia and fear coming from someone of his stature is infectious. I found myself jumping at every skittering noise, every cat crossing the street.

We questioned everyone we saw in the area, but got no further information. One prostitute told us the same stories Buaya had already passed on, and he gave me a knowing look, as if the whore's superstitions were somehow validation. We returned to our havens empty-handed.

The following night, the second attack occurred. We hurried down as soon as we heard, and even preceded the police at the crime scene. We successfully cleared the area and I... persuaded... the witness that he hadn't seen anything after all. But his story matched the whore and Buaya's superstitious mutterings. We hunted the area for three nights, until it came to us.

It did not look much like a vampire, my Prince. In fact, it was not even recognizably human. It had wings like a vast bat's and claws nearly as long as Buaya's kris, and a screeching call that sounded unlike any vampire that I had seen.

As it wheeled and screamed, Buaya attempted to flank it so that it could be taken out of the sky and destroyed. It was wise to him. The thing landed hard against Buaya's chest. It was small, only around five feet tall, compared to Buaya's significant height. It flexed its claws and flapped its wings once, and the Mekhet was torn in two like a rotten banana tree. He was ash before the creature's wings finished their arc.

Buaya told me it was an aswang. I suppose that it cannot really be anything else, but I have no idea what covenant or bloodline might count such a monstrosity as one of its own.

I will find the creature and I will bring it to the justice of the Court. This I promise you.

Jorge De Padilla,
blood of Alonzo Ruiz,
blood of Alvar Delgado,
blood of Macario Vargas,
blood of Jacinto Mateo Mendoza de Toledo,
blood of Aguada Ortega y de la Santiago de Vega

Truth

The term “aswang” is a confusing one. It is a Tagalog word used in folklore to refer to almost every kind of monster. The *aswang* is a creature stalking the Filipino islands, drinking the blood of its victims. It is a vampire, or maybe a werewolf. It kills its victims and fashions a double out of a banana tree before sending that double home to grow ill and die in the victim’s place. It is a vicious carnivorous goat.

The name has been used to describe such a huge variety of things that the vampires of the Philippines (and those who hunt them) use the term to indicate any supernatural creature, whether vampire, werewolf or otherwise, in the region. But there are other things that dwell in the Filipino shadows. Native things that had a claim on the title long before the Kindred came with the explorers and the settlers.

Vampires and Aswang

When Ferdinand Magellan reached the lands that would eventually be called the Philippines in 1521, his coming heralded the beginning of colonization that brought all manner of darkness along with it. As the Spanish squabbled over religion and trade with the largely Islamic natives, vampires came with them, fugitives from Europe seeking new prey, new territory.

The vampires grew in number, cautiously. Eventually, they created a new hierarchy, small in number and limited to a very few cities. In the process, they picked up that the Filipino word for “vampire” was “aswang.” Within a living generation they were using the term to refer to themselves.

Given their small numbers and—thanks to the almost monomaniacal dedication of their elders to tradition—their cautious attitude toward the Embrace, the vampires stayed in tiny, almost incestuous enclaves. They kept to the cities. And so, it was a long time before the vampires began to clash with the *real*, capital-A *Aswang*. The mages of the Philippines and even the werewolves, knew at least a little about the creatures, but the Kindred were, so to speak, in the dark, so concerned were they with their own small politics.

The *real*, or *Tama* (“Rightful”), *Aswang*, are obsessively territorial and vindictive creatures, often unable to accept the existence of each other, let alone the Kindred. The *Aswang* managed to coexist for a long time with the vampires, mostly by hunting the countryside while the vampires kept to the cities. But since the Second World War, the cities have grown and grown, and as people move there to find work or shelter, the *Aswang*

have followed them and sprung up there. Since the Second World War, the monsters have begun to meet each other.

What just after the Second World War was a rare thing has become increasingly common, and the Kindred don’t doubt that the “other” *Aswang* exist anymore. To begin with, they were a nuisance. Now the Kindred feel almost as if they’re at war.

The Aswang in the Philippines

The *Aswang* are deeply entrenched in Filipino culture. The president has been accused of being one. Filipino tabloids feature *aswang* sightings as often as American ones feature Elvis sightings. They are a central feature of the local folklore. To a large extent, that’s how they like it. And the *Tama Aswang*, inasmuch as creatures like this can understand such things, appreciate the fear and superstition their name still creates in Filipino communities within the country and around the world.

As economic factors and the media change the culture of the tropical nation, the *real Aswang* and the other vampires find themselves clashing.

They come in various breeds, various forms. But all of the true *Aswang* are shapeshifters, blood-drinkers that lead double lives.

The reserved and faithful wife who works at the meat packing plant slips away at night, not to rendezvous with a secret lover, but to indulge her taste for human blood. The old man is seen wandering the road to market all year, except for Holy Week, when something *else* stalks those paths. They live among us, slipping by unnoticed in their daytime lives, often fooling even themselves. Many of the *Aswang* suffer from a sort of dissociative identity disorder, cordoning off their deviant acts with two personalities bifurcated by the sun and their terrible hungers.

Outside the Philippines

Millions upon millions of Filipinos have left their homeland, creating one of the largest diaspora networks in the world. They settle in the US and elsewhere, and in many places where Filipino culture has traveled, so too have the *Aswang*. As Filipino families spread and marry into other cultures, the creatures spread to new communities and happily hunt new prey and spread their legend and legacy farther and farther around the world. Is the Chupacabra a Sigbin, or the Jersey Devil a Tik-Tik?

Stranger things have happened.

BIRTH OF AN ASWANG

But where do they come from? Were these creatures always this way?

Consider:

- An Aswang is born that way, child of a union between human and Aswang, coming into his bloody inheritance at puberty and aging when he wants to.
- An Aswang is undead: a witch in thrall to evil forces dies, and three days later, an Aswang crawls out of her grave.
- Or maybe the grave of an innocent is cursed by a witch or an Aswang performing some sort of desecration.
- None of the Aswang are ever really born: they are spirits older than humanity itself, driven to possess ("claim") humans and animals, creating strange half-breed beings.
- The Aswang is a kind of Larva (see p. 100) that happens after a botched Embrace, or when a vampire tries to Embrace a human who works magic, or is possessed.
- An Aswang comes into being when someone suffers from the Aswang's bite on more than one occasion but does not die.
- The Aswang are authentic parts of the supernatural fauna, creatures that breed true with their own.

Any of these might be true, for one or all of the breeds. All of them might be, depending upon circumstance.

Systems: The Breeds

The term *Aswang* (with a capital A) applies to a number of similar "breeds" of creatures indigenous to the Filipino islands, among them the *halimaw*, the *sigbin*, and the *tik-tik*.

Feeding Habits

Like a vampire, an Aswang must ingest blood in order to survive. Unlike a vampire, an Aswang cannot subsist upon animal blood. Her mutilating bite is nothing like the Kiss: the victim does not experience anything other than pain and fear, and the Aswang cannot close the gaping wound by licking it. Each breed of Aswang leaves a distinctive wound pattern on its victims.

Vitae

Aswang have the benefit of Blood Potency 0 (see p. 11).

Aswang burn Vitae more quickly than do their Kindred counterparts, possibly because they do not spend half the day in deathlike hibernation: an Aswang loses 1 point of Vitae each time the sun passes the horizon, once at sunrise, once at sunset. If, at any time, the creature goes too long without feeding, she begins to pay the price. When her Vitae total

dips below her Stamina rating she suffers 1 level of Lethal damage each night until she ingests enough Vitae to return her blood pool to a rating greater than her Stamina.

Like the Kindred, the Aswang can spend Vitae to heal wounds and activate their powers.

Unnatural Vigor

Every breed of Aswang is "blessed" with an unholy strength. Even though the Rightful can appear as the smallest, most delicate Filipina, she still has a formidable might borne of inhuman power. Spend 1 Vitae: the creature gains an increase to Strength (+2 dots) for the duration of the scene in which it is activated.

Halimaw

Description: The halimaw are possibly the most versatile and dangerous of the Aswang. By day, the creature lives a normal life, usually as a Filipino man or woman, often working in a meat packing plant or as a butcher. By night, the halimaw changes.

Halimaw often compartmentalize their daytime from their nighttime activities, developing two entirely separate personalities, each unaware of the other. Whether or not she is aware of what she is, a halimaw cannot use any of her powers during the hours of sunlight.

At sunset, the creature's daytime persona dissolves, and the Aswang becomes fully aware of what she is. She shifts into a more comfortable, "natural" form, a monstrous creature with batlike wings and vicious claws.

The halimaw's bite leaves a large bloody hole, torn by an enormous maw lined with razor sharp fangs.

Powers: Shapeshifting—The halimaw can change shape, though they are more flexible than their kin. By spending 1 Vitae, a halimaw can shift into the form of any human she has killed for the rest of the scene or until sunrise, whichever comes first. The halimaw can, at any time, choose to return to her monstrous form. The halimaw cannot shapeshift during the day, and at sunrise she reverts to her ordinary human appearance.

Flight — In her nighttime form, the halimaw can fly as quickly as she can run, held aloft by vast wings. It is important to note that a halimaw is a significantly larger target with her wings spread.

Claws — The halimaw's hands are tipped by fierce claws, making her a deadly foe with which to contend. There is no roll required to unsheathe these wicked claws; the halimaw must simply spend 1 Vitae and will them to extend. These ferocious weapons offer a +1 bonus to attack pools in unarmed close combat, and inflict Lethal damage. In addition to their combat potential, the claws add 2 dice to any climbing-related rolls as long as they remain invoked. The claws remain for a scene unless the Aswang chooses to retract them.

Tik-Tik

Description: Human by day, a birdlike hunter by night, a tik-tik has the ability to transform himself into a gigantic black flying creature that resembles an unholy cross between a raptor and a bat, with a long proboscis designed to suck the blood out of his sleeping victims. While the creature is feeding, he makes a telltale “tik-tik” noise from which he gets his name.

The tik-tik’s bite resembles the bite of a leech. It leaves a ragged central hole surrounded by a number of smaller wounds left by tiny hooks in the outer ring of the proboscis.

Powers: Shapeshifting — A tik-tik may shift between his human form and that of a large black flying creature. By spending 1 Vitae, a tik-tik can shift into his hunting form for the rest of the scene or until sunrise, whichever comes first. A tik-tik can, at any time, choose to return to his natural, human shape. The tik-tik cannot shapeshift during the day, and at sunrise he reverts to his ordinary human appearance.

Flight — In his hunting form, the tik-tik can fly as quickly as he can run. In flight, the tik-tik’s wings make a distinctive “tik-tik” noise, giving those nearby a chance to notice them with a successful Wits + Composure roll.

Claws — The tik-tik’s claws, part of his hunting form, add +1 to his dice pools and cause Lethal damage.

Sigbin

Description: This Aswang shifts from his human form to resemble a hornless goat, with large ears that are, according to local legends, capable of clapping like hands. The tail is long, and may be used to attack like a whip.

The sigbin’s bite resembles that of an infected, weeping animal. The creature’s muzzle is long and thin, and lined with sharp teeth, like a fox’s.

Powers: Shapeshifting — The sigbin may shift only between his natural “human” form and that of a strange goatlike creature. By spending 1 Vitae, a sigbin can shift into his hunting form for the rest of the scene or until sunrise, whichever comes first. A sigbin can, at any time, choose to return to his natural, human shape. The sigbin cannot shapeshift during the day, and at sunrise he reverts to his ordinary human appearance.

Clapping Trance — The sigbin can make a sound like the clapping of human hands, and this sound can lull a target into a trancelike state. The sigbin spends 1 Vitae and rolls Presence + Intimidation – the target’s Resolve. For every success the sigbin achieves, the target is stunned

for one round. The target snaps out of the trance the moment he comes to any harm and can act as normal in the next round.

Create Amulet — Once a year, it is said the sigbin must hunt for a virgin so that he might create an amulet from the victim’s heart. The amulet sustains the sigbin throughout the course of the year, until it is time to create another. The victim’s heart must be whole and healthy when it is extracted from the victim’s chest.

If the sigbin’s amulet is ever destroyed, the sigbin’s hunger returns in full force, forcing him out of his human form and into a ravenous rampage. If the sigbin does not find the heart of a virgin and create a new amulet within three days, he will perish.

Tail and Bite — The sigbin’s bite causes +1 Lethal damage. Its tail causes Bashing damage.

Francisco Vasquez

Quotes: *You need to have more faith.*

Is there somewhere more... private... we could go?

Description: By day, Francisco is a quiet, ordinary young man with a mix of Asian and Latin features. He carries a rosary in his pocket, and attends mass regularly, every day, just before dawn if he can. He dresses in slacks and white shirts and sleeveless knitted pullovers when he isn’t wearing the baggy jumpsuit uniform that all employees of the Shaftoe meat packing plant are required to wear.

After sundown, Francisco takes the form of something terrible, or something seductive: he spends much of his time in any number of seductive guises, both male and female, luring young students from the local college into encounters and then devouring them in his true form.

The daytime Francisco has no clue the nighttime monster exists, and while the monster has some inkling that he is someone else during the day, he has no memory of what the other Francisco does during the daytime.

Background: Francisco doesn’t know when he was born. He has in his possession, hidden in a box his daytime self doesn’t even know exists, a folder containing the medical records of a Filipino soldier rescued from a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp in 1944, with his name clipped to an aged black-and-white photo with Francisco’s face, just as it is now.

He’s been well known in the crumbling neighborhood he calls home for at least five years as Francisco, but whispered warnings about the wicked thing in the night have haunted the area for longer than that. The daytime

Francisco moved here—he isn't sure from where—and now he spends almost all his time within the collapsed walls of the Spanish fort, taking classes at one of the many universities and leaving only to go to work.

Storytelling Hints: Francisco's daytime persona has no idea he is one of the halimaw. He is shy, devoutly Catholic—he goes to mass just before (or just after) dawn every day, in fact—and completely cut off from his monstrous alter ego. When the sun goes down, the inner beast comes to the fore, and Francisco becomes a monster, terrorizing the very same people he works with, eats with and loves. The two characters are, for all intents and purposes, completely separate people with utterly divergent lives. Neither knows the other one exists.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 4, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics 2 (Catholicism), Computer 1, Crafts 1, Occult 3

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Drive 1, Larceny 2, Stealth 2 (Moving in Darkness), Weaponry 1

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Intimidation 2, Socialize 3 (Seduction), Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 4 (Lying)

Willpower: 7

Morality: 8 (day)/2 (night)

Virtue: Justice. By day, Francisco is convinced the world has an order and God will judge all. Francisco the monster believes his victims deserve everything they get, and his territory is his alone to hunt, and no other monster has a right to it.

Vice: Lust. By day, he struggles with what he considers salacious dreams. Francisco goes to confession a lot. By night, he slakes his lust without qualm.

Derangements: Multiple Personality Disorder (World of Darkness, p. 99)

Initiative: 7

Defense: 3

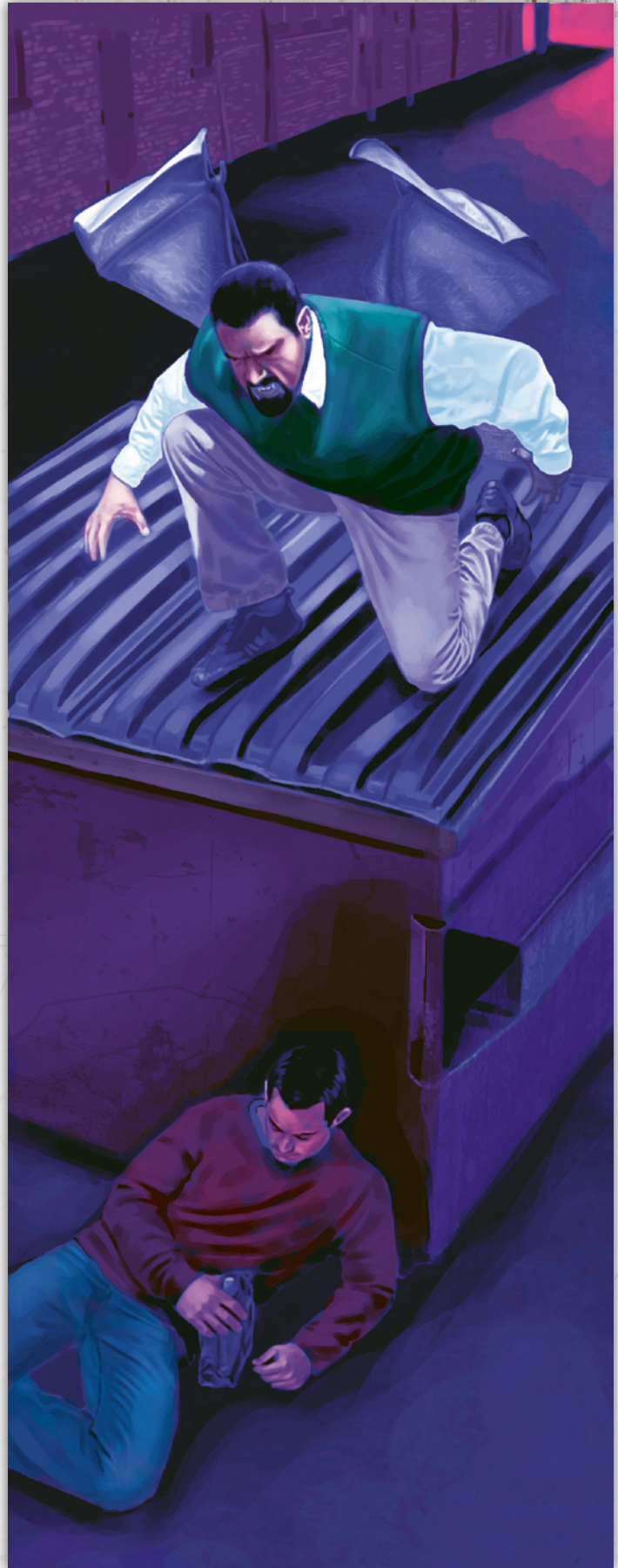
Speed: 9

Size: 5

Weapons/Attacks

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Claws	1A	7

Health: 7



Baykosh

<CASE CODE: 11B-34-2002>

<EVIDENCE CODE: 11B-114>

<RECORDING OF INTERVIEW CONDUCTED AT QUANTICO NAVAL INTELLIGENCE OFFICES. PRESENT ARE SPECIAL AGENT HOWARD DOBBS OF NAVAL CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION SERVICE AND MARINE FIRST CLASS BERNARD HANSON>

<RECORDING BEGINS 13:21 12-11-2002>

DOBBS: This your weapon, marine?

HANSON: Sir. Yes, sir.

DOBBS: Did you fire it last night?

HANSON: Sir. No, sir.

DOBBS: Our lab says otherwise. Says this was the weapon that killed Riley.

[PAUSE]

DOBBS: And Tucker. And Mays. And Quan. And-

HANSON: [unintelligible grunt]

DOBBS: Your company, marine!

HANSON: Sir. I am aware of that, sir.

DOBBS: Your buddies!

HANSON: Sir! Yes, sir!

DOBBS: You crying, marine?

HANSON: Sir! No, sir!

DOBBS: You crying for your buddies?

HANSON: Sir! No, sir!

DOBBS: I would, marine. If my company were all dead.

HANSON: Sir!

DOBBS: Does the code mean nothing to you, marine?

HANSON: Sir! No, sir!

DOBBS: Did they know something about you, marine? Did they find your dirty little secret?

HANSON: Sir! No, sir!

DOBBS: You like boys, marine?

[PAUSE]

DOBBS: I asked you a question, marine!

HANSON: Sir! No, sir!

DOBBS: Is that why you killed them?

HANSON: Sir! I did not kill those men, sir.

CLASSIFIED

"This is the story of Baykosh as my father told it to me.

"There was a soldier, who was the chief's son. And one day, the tribe went to war against another tribe. Many were killed, on both sides, but the brave was spared. His skin was not even scratched by arrow or club. His pony was not harmed. When he returned to the village, he spoke long and loud of his achievement to the tribe. He was proud that he had not been killed while all around him friends and foe had fallen.

"That night, Baykosh came into the soldier's tent. The man saw him and ran, but Baykosh shot him with an arrow, and he fell. The man tried to stand, but Baykosh hit him with a club and the brave was dead. Then Baykosh took the man's heart and liver for his prize, and returned to the land of the spirits."

- Falling Eagle of the Chippewa
(translated)

US GOVERNMENT

DOBBS: Got your gun here, marine. Fired last night. Into Riley's skull. Blew him inside fucking out.

HANSON: [grunting sound]

DOBBS: What was that, marine? You say something?

HANSON: Sir! No, sir!

DOBBS: [SHOUTS] Did you kill Riley?

HANSON: [SHOUTS] Sir! No, Sir!

DOBBS: [SHOUTS] Tell me who did!

HANSON: [SHOUTS] Sir!

[PAUSE]

DOBBS: [SHOUTS] I asked you a goddamn—

HANSON: [SHOUTS] Sir! It was the Grim Reaper, sir!

DOBBS: Marine—

HANSON: Sir. All bones under wet skin, sir. I shot it ten times, ten times, sir, never made a dent. Then it hit me and I couldn't move. Took my gun. Killed Corporal Riley. Sir.

DOBBS: Then what happened?

HANSON: Sir. It took his heart, sir.

<RECORDING TERMINATED>

CT

COP-KILLER MAKES THIRD

Reign of Terror Continues Against City's Police

NEW STAMPA PRESS
by Editor

Baltimore Police Lieutenant and mother of two Marika Rosales was found dead last night outside her city apartment. Medical officers responding to a 911 call found her body in an alleyway. Pathologist Daniel Ericsson who arrived first on the scene stated that Lieutenant Rosales had been shot twice at close range.

Baltimore police today refused to confirm or deny if they suspect this to be another attack by the notorious "cop-killer" feared responsible for two previous attacks on law-enforcement officers in the city.

Baltimore's Sergeant John Dyson and Officer Michael Wilkes were also murdered this week, making Lieutenant Rosales' death the third in these alleged serial police slayings. A source inside the department confirms that elements of this latest attack match previous ones, increasing suspicion of a serial killer at work.

A statement from the Baltimore Police Department this morning makes no mention of the previous killings. It describes the crime as "vicious and cowardly" and assures citizens that all steps are being taken to find and apprehend those responsible.

Truth

Baykosh steals time.

Baykosh feeds upon those who have escaped or cheated death in battle. It finds those who have faced terrible war or conflict and came through unscathed and unmarked. Then it takes away the time they think they have earned themselves, the second chance they believe they have won.

Baykosh is a ghost, albeit an extremely ancient and powerful one. It knows when a soldier returns from battle unharmed, and it tracks him down, runs him down relentlessly before killing him with the same weapon the warrior used on the battlefield. Then it tears open the chest and devours the heart and liver of its victim.

Throughout its existence, Baykosh has roamed and fed in North America. War and death have been omnipresent in American history... but so have survivors. Baykosh has killed hundreds, perhaps thousands of these survivors, sucking away all the years they thought they had bought for themselves, and all the joy they had learned to savor.

The foreign wars of the twentieth century have made Baykosh's hunting easier, transforms the entire country into a sanctuary, removed in every sense from the battleground.

Another trend of modern times that feeds Baykosh's endless appetite is that "soldiers" are no longer constrained to the traditional battlefield. Police officers in particular see themselves as warriors, and are viewed as

such by their communities. The authorities and the media encourage this idea, framing police crusades as wars on drugs or organized crime. In increasingly violent cities, the police see their homes as their sanctums, places of security and sanity after long days and nights on the frontlines. Baykosh has found this innocence, too, and exploits it.

Even random violence can attract Baykosh. Many parents are relieved when their children make it through high school without falling victim to drugs or alcohol or automobile accidents or school shootings or any manner of the countless threats to which highschoolers are heir. Battered spouses who finally muster the courage to leave; criminals who finally go straight: their relief invites Baykosh's hunger. Although soldiers are its preferred food, anyone who has been exposed to violence and now believes himself safe can become his prey.

Vampires are not safe from Baykosh. Vampires often trust even more than humans in the division between the hungry streets and their safe havens. Baykosh attacks where its victims feel safest.

Baykosh is a relentless hunter and a cunning warrior, but it is not subtle. When it identifies a group of survivors—a unit of soldiers, police involved in the same shootout or just civilians who walked away from a violent encounter—Baykosh hunts them one by one. It operates in no particular order, but unless one of its quarries drives it away, Baykosh will attack each survivor in turn. Baykosh's guns fire with supernatural force, the bullets tearing through walls and decimating

brick and stone. Its nightsticks shatter steel as easily as bone. Baykosh prefers to administer disabling wounds, leaving its prey helpless and exposed. Sometimes Baykosh delivers a killing shot before it takes its grisly prize; other times it leaves the victim alive to scream and thrash as it removes the heart and liver with its claws and teeth.

The folklore surrounding Baykosh has not been extensively recorded. Although it has preyed on people in North America for hundreds of years, it appears only rarely in folklore. What stories are told spread in weird places. Some, for example, have worked their way into military lore and gossip, changing slightly with each telling. A few stories are told about how to keep the spirit at bay, and one or two are even true.

Another story has it that soldiers are safe as long as they always remain in battle. Some infantrymen in the Civil War believed that if they slept cradling your rifle, they were protected from the spirit.

Baykosh cannot attack anyone on a battlefield or in any place associated with war or violence. Troop headquarters, battle bunkers, police stations, shooting ranges—these are all off limits to the ghost. What constitutes a battlefield is not always clear, but any place that has seen significant death in armed conflict potentially qualifies. The more recent the incident, and the more bloody, the more strongly it repels Baykosh. A site more than a hundred years old would need to have been witness to something like Gettysburg or the Alamo to qualify, whereas the effect of a mob killing on a street corner may last only a week.

If Baykosh cannot claim its victim by morning, it will move on to someone else the next night. If it cannot get any more of the survivors, it will move on to new ones, or sink back into the spirit world. If its targets are vampires, then facing the rising sun while in the middle of a battlefield is a whole other problem.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Although it is a ghost, Baykosh is an ancient and unique one and most of the usual methods of dealing with ghosts do not apply. It has no anchor that can be destroyed. (Its anchor is pretty much the whole of the North American mainland, if truth be told. It's the ghost of the American land.)

If Baykosh has unfinished business, it's the unfinished slaughter of humanity. Blessed weapons, abjurations and exorcisms do work, but Baykosh is no pushover. Neither is it stupid: its hunger is unending, but it would rather move on to easier prey than be destroyed. Wherever there are battles, there are survivors, and wherever there are survivors, it will feed.

Baykosh is a powerful antagonist in a single story, with the characters stalked by a monster that terrifies them yet also holds up a mirror of their own predatory natures. Or Baykosh can be a shadowy terror that lurks throughout an entire chronicle, irrevocably and arbitrarily claiming victors and survivors close to the characters, and keeping them always afraid, and most afraid of all when they have won the day and wish to go home and relax. Or...

- At the end of a large power struggle or turf war, the members of a coterie breathe a sigh of relief to discover they and most of their allies have come through unscathed. Then Baykosh starts preying upon the victors, one by one. The characters or their allies may suspect some member of the losing side is making final reparations, and the entire war may start anew. The characters must find the real culprit and expose its nature to both sides before the bloodbath begins.
- One of the characters' allies or minions has a police or military background and is under investigation, suspected of killing the rest of his unit. He calls the character for help, claiming to be innocent and raving about a supernatural menace. By the time the character gets to his apartment, however, the ally has been messily killed and now the character is implicated, as the last call the victim made and with his fingerprints all over the door. The coterie needs to act fast to preserve the masquerade as well as stopping Baykosh from deciding to dine upon them.
- A crazed cell of terrorists stages an armed attack at a popular location centrally placed in the characters' Rack. Eventually, the police and military contain the situation, but the kine in the area are still scattered and confused, and thus ridiculously easy to feed upon. Almost all the Kindred of the city descend upon the area for a joyous feeding frenzy. However, they soon discover something else is also preying upon the survivors, taking the food from their mouths. Nobody likes a party pooper, and the Prince will demand somebody destroy the interloper immediately.

Baykosh

Quote: <long quiet hiss>

Description: A seven-foot skeleton with flickering fires in its eye sockets, Baykosh resembles modern visions of the Grim Reaper, only without the cloak and cowl: grotesquely, it wears the uniform and carries the weapons of the warrior it has come to take. It has a sort of sticky, bloody transparent skin that slides and bubbles over the visible parts of its skeleton.

Baykosh always hunts in darkness; whatever light is present shines through its emptiness, highlighting the ripples of its unnatural skin. Baykosh never speaks. Its hollow eyes seem to leer with hunger and its lipless smile appears full of triumph and mockery as it closes for the kill.

Baykosh is always impressively armed, and—clear to those who have the experience to tell—brandishes its weapons with the skill and confidence of a veteran. Its weapons of choice are always the weapons of choice of its target, replicating even personal details and precise characteristics. Under even the strictest forensic investigation, the damage done by these ghostly replicas will match exactly that done by the real weapon.

Background: Baykosh appears in folk stories attributed to several Native American tribes. Most of its myth is concentrated in the stories of the people of the Great Lakes, but if it was ever bound there, its reach now extends right across the continent. No stories speak to its origin; if it is the ghost of a once-living person, this is known to no one except Baykosh itself.

Storytelling Hints: Although it has a very particular diet and stalks in the shadows, Baykosh is not a subtle killer. It is a brutal and direct predator that is very hard to destroy. It is the dramatic equivalent of a sledgehammer and should be used accordingly: tearing apart buildings, furniture and people with unstoppable fury and relentless hunger. Its power is a large part of what makes it scary. The other thing that makes it frightening is the way it attacks, butchering its targets inside their own homes, when they feel safest. Nothing is quite so scary as a sanctuary being violated. Baykosh violates the sanctity of identity, too, taking its victim's weapons and appearance in some kind of sick parody. Thus Baykosh can explore the theme of reflection, mirroring the predatory nature of the vampires, and sharing the same dark devotion to winnowing the herd for its own good.

Attributes: Power 6, Finesse 3, Resistance 4

Willpower: 10

Morality: 1

Virtue: Charity. In a twisted way, Baykosh believes it is giving something to humanity by disillusioning it of its foolish ideas of safety and survival.

Vice: Greed. Baykosh is so hungry to devour the hard-won time of humans it often loses a sense of self-preservation in pursuing its prey.

Initiative: 7

Defense: 6

Speed: 19

Size: 5

Corpus: 9

Essence: 10



Numina: Clairvoyance (dice pool 9), Compulsion (dice pool 9), Phantasm (dice pool 9), Telekinesis (dice pool 9), Terrify (dice pool 9)

Supernatural Powers

Weapons Mastery: Baykosh is a master of whatever weapon his prey used in battle, whether ancient or modern, and its weapons do not obey the natural laws. Bullets seem to home in on their targets, blows that should have gone wide miss by only

inches. Baykosh's targets suffer a -2 penalty to their Defense against its attacks. The ghost's weapons are as ethereal as it is and never run out of ammunition or misfire. As they are part of Baykosh, they do not add extra dice to Baykosh's attacks.

Note: Baykosh regains Essence through killing. When it delivers a fatal wound to a victim, all its Essence returns as it feeds upon the survivor's "time." The ghost cannot regain Essence any other way.

Bhüta

POLICE DEPARTMENT OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK 134 EAST STREET NEW YORK CITY

PAGE	DATE RELEASED TIME			PRECEDENCE		CLASS	SPECIAL	IMP	CIC	ORG-MSG IDENT
	DATE	TIME	MONTH	YR	ACT	INFO				
01 of 03					RR	RR	UUUU			0470730Z

TRANSCRIPT: INTERROGATION OF JULIA MARIE SAINT

CASE #: 37998001B

OFFICERS: NATHAN CORD, ROBERT MARKAN

S: I have to go.

M: Really? Oh, no problem then. Here, let me get the door. [laughs]

C: Bob, sit down. Julia, we all know you're not going anywhere. You're in a lot of trouble. You know that, right?

S: I can't stay here. [coughs]

C: Julia, do you know why you're here?

S: I can't hold on much longer. This body is falling apart.

M: Pay attention! We found the body, we have witnesses to put you in the area, fingerprints and a match with your teeth. You're a sick little bitch, and your crazy act isn't going to get you off, you get me?

C: The only way we can help you is if you help us, Julia. What was his name?

[pause]

C: Julia? Miss Saint?

S: [voice muffled] That's not my name.

M: Oh, for the love of fuck.

C: Do you know why you are here?

S: I am only doing what I need to do to survive. Please. I need to eat.

M: Suck it up, tell the truth, and I'll get you a candy bar.

C: Look, I'll get you a bagel and something to drink.

[Det. Cord leaves the room]

S: That won't help.

M: Oh, well let me just order you a fucking steak then... I bet you like 'em raw, huh? Who was he?

S: Who?

M: Your last meal. Why'd you do it?

S: I could show you.

M: Sure, go right ahead.

[The room is silent for 2:12 here. Cameras show that Det. Markan and the suspect sat across from each other without moving for 1:48, before the suspect collapsed. Det. Markan made no attempt to revive or resuscitate the suspect until after Det. Cord returned.]

C: Here, Try— What the fuck? What happened to Saint?

M: What?

C: [Trying to revive her] Her, Bob. What the fuck happened to her?

M: I... I don't know.

Answer Your Phone. - Live Mail

<https://mail.live.com/default/?&=g1857mf=0&xyzSH7GMU2GRYT3>

Answer your phone.

From: Nathan Cord <withheld>

Sent: August 3, 2008 11:32:00 EDT

To: Robert Markan <withheld>

Bob,

What's the story, man? I can only come by your place so many times.
Nobody blames you for Saint. You froze up, is all.

Give me a call.

Nate

Truth

A bhūta is in the purest form a ghost. Like all the restless dead, the bhūta cannot move on, but it is not satisfied with remaining incorporeal, or even with possession. To the bhūta, sharing a body with a host does not even approach the ultimate goal: a permanent corporeal form. A brand new life.

Many of us would do whatever it took, no matter how horrific, to get back to the way things used to be. To have the pleasant weight of a body responding to our desires. We never realize how much we treasure even the most basic actions we take in our daily routine, from breathing to eating, until it is gone. The lives they steal are a small price to pay for the palpable experience of simply, physically, *being*.

When the ravening ghost takes a body, the creature doesn't just possess it. It hollows the body out, destroys the spirit that inhabits it, and moves into the violated remains. But the link remains tenuous, and the body never recovers from the trauma it has endured. As the bhūta pushes the body beyond its limits, it rejects the invading phantom and begins to unravel.

While the ghost is in a solid body, it exists in a near constant state of ravenous hunger. It is driven to feed upon human flesh and blood.

Rules

The bhūta may use any of the ghost Numina found on p. 210ff of **The World of Darkness Rulebook**. While in a host body, it can use any Numina that don't specifically depend upon it being insubstantial.

New Numen: Claim Body

The ravening ghost does not simply possess a body. As long as the person's psyche remains in the body, there is a chance the victim can wrest control from the possessor and evict it. This is simply not acceptable to the bhūta, as it requires a more permanent solution. The bhūta attempts to gain access to its chosen victim's body and digs away at his soul.

Dice Pool: Power + Finesse vs. target's Resolve + Composure

Cost: 3 Essence

Action: Extended and Contested; the bhūta must gather 50 successes before sunrise. Each roll represents one hour of effort.

If the bhūta fails to gather 50 successes in the required time, the attempt fails.

CLAIMED?

Players who own **Mage: The Awakening**, **Werewolf: The Forsaken** or **The Book of Spirits** will recognize the bhūta's claiming of its victim's soul as exactly the same as a spirit-claiming. It is and should be handled in those games in roughly the same way, bearing in mind the unique attributes here.

A Broken Body

Traits: Once the bhūta has usurped the body, the ghost's Power, Finesse and Resistance are divided among appropriate traits in the host's body—so, for example, dots in Power get divided between the Power Attributes (Intelligence, Strength and Presence), and so on. The dots get added the moment the ghost inhabits the body. Any derived stats, such as Willpower, must be recalculated to account for the shift in attributes. The ghost uses the Skills of the host, and its own Virtue, Vice and Morality score.

Healing and Damage: Even after destroying the spirit of a body, the bhūta's control is not perfect. The flesh itself rebels against the foreign presence, and the host body begins to fall apart. The bhūta has a number of days equal to the body's Stamina before things begin to go awry. Every sunset after that, roll Stamina + Resolve for the host body. If the roll fails, the body takes 2 points of Aggravated damage.

The host body does not heal naturally while under the bhūta's control. If the body takes any other damage, this hastens the collapse of the system and the ravening spirit's hunt for another viable host. The only way to halt or reverse this damage is to commit yet another unspeakable act: giving in to the bhūta's terrible craving for human flesh and blood.

Feeding: A bhūta gains Essence by drinking human blood, in the same way a vampire gains Vitae. The host body doesn't have fangs of any kind, so the blood and flesh need to be let using some sort of weapon. Each point of Essence gained causes 1 point of Lethal damage to the victim.

Anchors: Like other ghosts, a bhūta has one anchor. Unlike many other ghosts, this is almost always something small and portable—an amulet, perhaps, a watch, a small token like an old child's toy, or a book. The bhūta's host carries it with him and tries to take it from the body of the ghost's last victim before moving on. If it somehow loses the anchor, the ravening ghost knows where it is, and will do anything at all to get it.

Stopping the Bhūta

The *Garuda Purana* tells that the only way to drive a ghost to move on and reenter the cycle of reincarnation is for an appropriately qualified member of the same culture as the original ghost to perform funeral rites appropriate to it (which in mechanical terms works the same as an exorcism—see **The World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 214).

A quicker way to rid the world of a bhūta is simply to destroy its anchor. Only a foolish bhūta will make finding its anchor a simple task. It is generally hidden quite well, though the ravening spirit still finds itself drawn to the item, but not as limited as a regular ghost. A bhūta may travel up to one mile away from its anchor for every point of Power it possesses. For example, a ravening spirit with Power 5 can travel up to five miles away from its anchor with no ill effects.

Chiranjeev Badbhagi

Quotes: *I'm so hungry.*

You don't know what it's like to live like this.

Description: When he isn't inhabiting a body, Badbhagi's spirit may be seen, in certain circumstances, as a luminous cloud of roiling energy. To those who can see ghosts, he is an intensely skinny young man from somewhere in the Indian subcontinent, with bright, feverish eyes. Usually, his general appearance is that of whatever host he has taken.

Background: Chiranjeev was nobody. He was one of a million homeless hoodlums in Kolkata. He grew up in abandoned squats and warehouses along the shores of the river Hooghly, learning to do whatever it took to survive. Stealing, killing or begging, nothing was out of the question, as long as it kept him going.

He dreamed of the future, ignoring the past and tolerating the present as a necessary evil while he scraped and saved to go to America, where everything would be easier. Then, he told himself, he would make amends. When he finally arrived in New York City, he was crushed. He found himself just as lost and alone, just as poor and just as anonymous as he had been in the streets of Kolkata. But he wouldn't give up. Eventually, he got a job driving a cab. The first honest work in his life. Of course he screwed it up by stealing from his bosses.

They were less than forgiving, and Chiranjeev didn't survive the punishment. Even then, dead and forgotten, he could not bring himself to give up, to move on. Just as in Kolkata, he learned to do whatever it took to survive. Anything, so long as it kept him going.

Storytelling Hints: Chiranjeev is locked forever in a state of utter desperation. He is beyond the point of structured, meticulous plans for the future. He just wants the warmth and weight of a solid form, the rasping silk of skin-on-skin contact with another human being, the taste of a hamburger. Sensation is everything, but the knowledge that it's only temporary has a leavening effect upon his enjoyment. He tends to choose physically hardy hosts, so he can keep them longer, but he'll take just about anything in a pinch.

Ghost Form

Attributes: Power 3, Finesse 4, Resistance 3

Willpower: 10

Morality: 3

Virtue: Hope. Chiranjeev believes that, despite the terrible things he has done, he may someday be redeemed and find a body he can inhabit long enough to create a new life for himself.

Vice: Wrath. Frustration and disappointment at the failure of his life causes Chiranjeev to lash out at those around him, especially those who don't seem to appreciate how good they have it.

Initiative: 7

Defense: 5

Speed: 17

Corpus: 10

Numina: Claim Body (dice pool 7), Phantasm (dice pool 7), Terrify (dice pool 7)

In Possession of Body (healthy male, around 30)

Physical Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Investigation 2, Occult 3

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 2, Larceny 4 (Pickpocketing), Stealth 3, Survival 2, Weaponry 4 (Knife)

Social Skills: Streetwise 4 (Gangs), Subterfuge 3

Willpower: 8

Initiative: 7

Defense: 3

Speed: 13

Health: 8



Cihuateteo

SABADO
ALAS 9 DE LA NOCHE
@ EN LAS PERROS DEL DIABLO
DJ ACHILLE
DJ UNIQUE

One of the more interesting bits. Included a CD from Unique, but that's gone now. Was a song called Cihuateteo. Spanish-speaking buddy of mine said it was just a typical song about a break-up. I don't remember most of it, but there was some English that stuck with me:

Cihuateteo, Cihuateteo
Sucking at my lip
Cihuateteo, Cihuateteo
Bite it baby, rip
Let's start some shit
Let's start some shit

Down in Laredo they tell the story of a woman, a pretty blonde thing living just north of the border. She had followed her husband from a small town in Illinois—business had taken him to the southern reaches of the nation. Six months pregnant, she was ready and willing to make the best of her new life in Laredo, even when the people in her Lamaze class warned her to keep her doors locked and invest in a security system.

But her contractions came early, only a few weeks after moving in, and when she wasn't able to reach her husband by phone, she left a message on his voice mail, another with his secretary, and a third on the kitchen table. A yellow cab got her to the hospital, but there was precious little the doctors could do to save her child's life. He had come too early, and he was gone. When they told her, she cried and wailed and finally fell into a restless sleep.

She awoke to find her room filled with people, dark forms dressed in dirty gowns, each holding a broom made of wood and grass and stained with uneven blotches of crimson. Each wore a mask, a grotesque thing of turquoise, feather and bone through which dark eyes held her paralyzed. She glanced toward the emergency call button, but it had vanished.

Then they spoke. They offered a way out, a freedom from fear of mortality, a meaning to her living existence and an occupation to occupy her mind. They spoke as one voice, a voice that curled into the woman's mind and nestled into twisted caverns of her insecurities. She listened and, finally, she agreed. As she nodded weakly, she asked, "What about my son?"

"He was a sacrifice the jaguar required," they answered as one. "And, if you are to join us, the whore

must be satisfied, as well." She was going to ask what they meant when her husband entered the room. He moved directly toward her, as if he didn't see the witches at all. He didn't react in the slightest as they drew their shining black blades.

The story doesn't end, not with a proper ending. It says the pretty blonde woman is still out there, working days selling gasoline and cigarettes in a convenience store out on I-35. At night she takes to the air with her broom, always searching for a son to replace her own.

Mistresses of the Gods

The Cihuateteo form a cult dedicated to ancient gods of death and transformation, filth and redemption. The Cihuateteo devote themselves to their dread deities, pledging to further the goals of the bloodthirsty divinities on Earth. They become sterile, but in return their patrons grant them a reprieve from death and bless them with the powers of the Kindred.

Truth

The thing is, many of the Cihuateteo want to die, but they're terrified of death. Each is brought into the cult by its members, who keep an eye out for women suffering through the pain of a lost child. They approach the new recruit at her most vulnerable and offer her the chance to live forever and never face losing a child again. Those who decline they leave alone. They initiate the women who accept into their ranks in a dread ceremony, during which the recruit pledges herself to the old gods, sacrificing something dear to herself on an altar of her pain, anger and loss. Her forearms twist, becoming the avian talons of an owl, and her eyes flash gold when they catch the light. A vision comes upon her; when she awakens she remembers seeing the other side of the gulf of death, a dark and bloody hell ruled over by Tezcatlipoca. She knows that if she fails or betrays her new master, she'll be consigned to that burning darkness for eternity.

Few among the Cihuateteo possess such resolve. Tricked into a cult she doesn't fully understand, the new witch uses chalk to paint her face and arms white. She fashions a twig broom and makes a mask with the face of an owl or snake from turquoise affixed to a human skull. She chips an obsidian knife to a razor sharp edge. She consecrates her magical tools to bloody gods at an old crossroad and begins learning the secret magic of the living dead.

Stories involving the Cihuateteo most likely take place in Mexico, Central America or the American Southwest. The cult itself is slow to spread, believing its purpose of spreading suffering, encouraging change through chaos and helping humans toward redemption through suffering should focus upon the chosen people of the gods (those of Mexico).

That said, the Cihuateteo find it far easier to travel than the Kindred. So many Mexican communities have spread throughout and grown within the cities of the United States, marginalized, and often exploited as cheap labor. And among them the Cihuateteo can always appear. The Cihuateteo pull people from these communities into their cult at their weakest and most desperate moment, twisting that desperation toward unfair service. As above, so below.

Many Cihuateteo are older than beginning characters, and some might serve as particularly strange mentors for vampires of the right outlook. The gods the Cihuateteo exalt demand the spread of chaos and strife, seduction and betrayal. While such an individual might seem a natural teacher for an Acolyte or even a member of Belial's Brood, the Cihuateteo focus upon forcing change might appeal to a Carthian or Dragon. Rumor has it that one Mexico City Dragon has made the cult a subject of personal study, following with clinical eyes the chaos the members leave in their wake.

The Cihuateteo cut particularly pathetic, tragic figures, whether as antagonists or protagonists. Their story is essentially one of slavery, pressed into service to deities they may not believe in (and furthering a philosophy of tribulation they may not support) out of the fear that they will be damned not by their actions but by their natures. Can they rise above what they have become? How badly do they want to?

SHADOWS OF MEXICO

Readers who own *Shadows of Mexico* may recall a brief mention of the Cihuateteo (p. 57) as a priestly line of Gangrel and Daeva playing at divinity.

What happened to the line of Gangrel and Daeva that supposedly once claimed the title? Do they lurk still behind the scenes, manipulating these female blood witches to their own ends? Did the witches perhaps usurp the vampires' power? Or did those Kindred ever actually exist at all?

The Cihuateteo seem, at first glance, to be humans who have stolen the power of the immortals. They age, albeit more slowly than might be expected, yet they never (with an exception, but we're coming to that) actually die. Some force animates and empowers the Cihuateteo, but it also twists them and forces them into subservience. Without their gods, the Cihuateteo do die, damned to a hell they have each personally witnessed. Or so they believe.

Players who wish to portray one of these unfortunate souls may do so with the following changes to the normal **Vampire Character Creation** rules:

Blood Potency

Cihuateteo achieve Blood Potency 0 upon their initiation into the cult. Their Blood Potency never increases, regardless of age. Blood Potency 0 is discussed in greater detail in the Introduction (p. 11).

Predator's Taint

As other characters with Blood Potency 0, the Cihuateteo suffer from the Predator's Taint and trigger it in other vampires. They always feel compelled to flee from the Kindred, and the Kindred, in turn, feel compelled to attack the Cihuateteo. Most Cihuateteo develop Mask of Tranquility shortly after induction into the cult, however, providing them a method of hiding their presence from the Kindred. Furthermore, the Cihuateteo do not inspire the Predator's Taint in one another. They do not question this as unusual, instead attributing it to their own divine station and the fallen state of the walking dead.

The Embrace

The Cihuateteo cannot Embrace, instead inducting prospective members through one of the Rites of the Crossroad. Furthermore, while the Cihuateteo retain a level of life lost to the Kindred, the Embrace fails to take hold upon the Cihuateteo. They can never become true Kindred. One Tijuana Bishop who attempted to Embrace one of the witches claimed that such was evidence of the power of God and the utter inaccessibility to redemption for those who turn their faces so fully from His glory.

The Bishop has since disappeared.

Vitae Use

Cihuateteo possess a pool of Vitae they can use for healing, physical augmentation, and the activation of Disciplines. The Cihuateteo can neither commit nor suffer diablerie. Furthermore, unlike Kindred, the Cihuateteo do not *require* Vitae to fuel their existence.

Cihuateteo regain Vitae by stealing the breath from living humans. The Cihuateteo does so by crouching over the victim and breathing from his mouth. The victim suffers 1 Lethal damage per Vitae regained by the Cihuateteo.

Within the cult, those that openly engage in this practice are often looked upon with revulsion. As a result, the Cihuateteo perform this dread work in the deepest secrecy, hiding it from even their coreligionists.

Merits

The Cihuateteo are alive, but they are largely immune to the poisons and diseases of the natural world. In game terms, each gains the equivalent of the Iron Stomach, Natural Immunity, Quick Healer, and Toxin Resistance Merits, even if they wouldn't normally meet the prerequisites for those Merits. Many also learn the Iron Stamina and Holistic Awareness Merits, furthering their ability to survive in a harsh, hostile world.

Advantages

Cihuateteo retain the Morality Advantage after their induction into the cult. Characters that begin as Cihuateteo begin with Morality 5.

Cihuateteo cannot gain Willpower by sleeping. (They suffer nightmares based upon their visions of the afterlife.) Instead a witch can regain Willpower only by fulfilling her Virtue or Vice, furthering the work of her gods at some risk to herself (functioning as if she had fulfilled her Vice).

Disciplines

Upon their initiation into the cult, the Cihuateteo gain the first dot of Majesty and Obfuscate as well as one Rite of the Crossroads (see below). They may increase the Majesty and Obfuscate with experience as if they were clan Disciplines (new dots x 5 experience points) and may purchase Animalism, Auspex, Celerity, Resilience and Vigor with experience as if they were non-clan Disciplines (new dots x 7 experience points). They may purchase additional Rites of the Crossroads for 12 experience points each.

Frenzy

The Cihuateteo are possessed of but a weak Beast (which they refer to as "the little jaguar"). They never suffer Frenzy due to fear (save in the case of the Predator's Taint) or hunger. Only stimuli that would require 3 or more successes to stave off Frenzy (p. 179, **Vampire: The Requiem**) require the character roll to maintain control. Cihuateteo never suffer penalties to such rolls for hunger or starvation.

Damage and Healing

The Cihuateteo do not scar, and, given time, can heal even the worst wounds (including severed limbs). Unlike the Jiang Shi and Ghûls, however, the Cihuateteo suffer from damage largely as humans. If one has lost her last Health to Bashing damage, for example, she must roll to remain conscious. If she has lost it to Lethal damage, she begins bleeding out. A Cihuateteo that has lost all of her Health to Aggravated damage dies; her soul to go on to its infernal reward. While a Cihuateteo may use Vitae to heal as a Kindred, she also heals naturally at the same rate as humans.

Other Traits

The sun does not harm or strike fear into the Cihuateteo, but they may not utilize *any* of their Disciplines during the day. As a result, they typically sleep and remain hidden during the day.

Cihuateteo age at two-thirds the normal rate (two years for every three that pass). They *never* die of old age or disease, however. They simply continue aging, suffering a -1 die penalty to all physical dice pools for every 50 years alive after 50 (their first penalty appears at 100, their second at 150, and so on). Particularly old Cihuateteo appear to be little more than monstrous, desiccated, skull-faced husks (a major reason for the culture of mask-making within the cult). Cihuateteo cannot become “true” vampires and cannot be Embraced.

Secrets of the Cihuateteo

All Cihuateteo possess the following powers:

Shapeshifting

The Cihuateteo gain a certain level of power over their physical forms.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Action: Instant

Effect: The character can choose to sprout vicious owl talons from the tips of her fingers or transforms into an owl. The claws inflict +1 Aggravated damage.

When in owl form, the character’s talons and beak inflict Lethal damage and her traits change as follows:

- Strength becomes 2
- Dexterity +1, Stamina +2
- Size falls to 2 (and Health is reckoned based upon the new Size)
- Speed becomes Strength + Dexterity + 10 while in flight. Ground speed is equal to one-quarter of the flight speed, rounded down.
- The vampire gains a +1 bonus to all Wits-based perception rolls due to unnaturally heightened senses.

A Cihuateteo cannot benefit from both transformations at the same time. The transformation remains until the character chooses to shift back (as a reflexive action).

Rites of the Crossroads

The Cihuateteo believe their dark patrons grant them the sorcery the women use to follow their masters’ dread tenets. Each Cihuateteo gains one of these powers shortly after her induction into the cult (characters created as Cihuateteo gain one for free), and further powers can be purchased for 12 experience points apiece. The cost listed for these powers is given in Vitae, but unlike normal Disciplines, the cost to enact a Blood Rite of the Crossroads requires that the blood be let from another being; the Cihuateteo may not make this sacrifice herself. As usual, each Vitae taken from another inflicts 1 Lethal damage (though actually subduing the sacrifice may result in further damage). Despite the name, these rites need not be performed at a crossroads, though, like all Cihuateteo powers, they can be used only at night.

All Rites of the Crossroad use the following mechanics:

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Occult

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Something goes dramatically wrong with the ritual. Perhaps the gods do not find the sacrifice pleasing or perhaps the ritualist is not godly enough. Either way, the effects of the ritual are reflected upon the ritualist or mislead her in some unpleasant manner.

Failure: The ritual fails to take effect.

Success: The ritual occurs as indicated.

Exceptional Success: As success. Furthermore, the character regains a spent point of Willpower as the rush of the successful ritual reinvigorates her faith in her dark patrons.

Suggested Modifiers

- +4 The ritual is performed during a lunar eclipse.
- +2 The ritual is performed on the new moon.
- +1 Ritualist utilizes an obsidian dagger in her sacrifice.
- 1/-3 The ritualist is distracted.

Rituals

Blessing of the Obsidian Mirror

This rite inducts a prospective member into the ranks of the Cihuateteo. Only elders of the cult possess this rite, and knowledge of it is considered a sign of leadership and wisdom. This rite transforms a willing female

subject who has recently (within the week) lost a child in birth into a Cihuateteo. If any of the requisites aren't met, the rite fails to have any effect. The effect of this rite is permanent.

Blessing of the Sacred Grass

The Cihuateteo anoints the bristle tips of her distinctive broom with the blood of her sacrifice, granting it a minor enchantment. The broom now inflicts +1 Bashing damage against ephemeral entities such as ghosts and spirits. Such entities can automatically sense the presence of these items, and most make pains to keep their distance from one that wields such a broom. This blessing lasts until dawn.

Eyes of the Jaguar

The Cihuateteo's eyes glow green as she speaks this prayer to Tezcatlipoca, beseeching his aid in finding one who has fled. As she turns her eyes from the night sky to the earth, she can make out faintly glowing footprints in the earth, leading her toward her quarry. Successful performance of this rite grants the user a +5 bonus to track a single individual. This power cannot create tracks where there are none, however, and a clever individual can foil this power even through mundane means (such as using a raft, which leaves no tracks). This rite *does*, however, aid the tracker in following vehicle tracks if her quarry boards one. The effects of this rite remain until dawn.

Rite of the Cursed Bead

The Cihuateteo rubs a small bead decorated to look like a skull in the spilt blood of the sacrifice. The blood seeps into the bead, leaving the surface clean. To ghosts, the bead seems to glow with inviting warmth. By expending a Willpower point, any ghost that becomes aware of the bead may use it as if it were one of its anchors. This leads to the bead becoming a source of one or more hauntings. Cihuateteo often leave these beads overnight in haunted locales before secreting them on the person or into the home of someone who has earned their ire. The bead's effects remain until the following full moon.

Rite of the Gathering Storm

The Cihuateteo dances wildly as she pours the sacrificial blood upon her brow. As it rolls down her face, the first peals of thunder can be heard in the distance. By the end of the scene rain begins to fall. Each following scene is plagued by a heavy thunderstorm that can levy up to a -3 penalty to actions taken in the deluge. At dawn the clouds break, ending the effects of this rite.

Rite of the Wild Whore

This rite produces a small measure of colorless, odorless liquid with a slight smell of almonds. When ingested, this liquid lowers a character's inhibitions and composure. This inflicts a -3 penalty to all rolls to retain self-control, whether to resist an attempt at seduction or to keep from flying off the handle in anger. This penalty applies to Frenzy, as well, though tricking a Kindred into ingesting the substance can be a difficult proposition. (Feeding from someone who has ingested the liquid *does* count.) Characters under this ritual's effect are more likely to indulge in their Vices and gain 2 Willpower for doing so (rather than the usual 1). The liquid retains its efficacy for one week after the ritual is completed, but the mad-dened state resultant from its consumption remains only until dawn.

La Viuda Gris

Quotes: *Know that you died for a higher purpose.*

Without suffering, there can be no experience.

Description: A pale, almost ephemeral figure, La Viuda Gris looks like a strong wind might carry her away. Shrouded in thin cotton robes, her skin clings tight to her emaciated muscles, making her seem more skin and bones than human being. Her forearms are covered in pale white scales stained with dried blood and her fingers end in obsidian talons. Her head is crowned in wispy white hair, and her eyes almost always glow gold. She often wears an owl mask made of feathers and obsidian pasted to a human skull and is never seen without her grass broom. She moves with an avian grace, despite her advanced age.

Background: La Viuda Gris remembers little about her life before the cult. She remembers growing up in an expansive hacienda under the watchful eye of her father. She remembers being taken by the customs of the Natives and the appearance of a particular farm hand. And she remembers the pain and anger she felt on the night her baby died and the horror of the vision granted to her by the ancients. Since then there have been numerous nights following the will of her gods. Now she does so almost out of habit, the only pleasure taken in her work being the knowledge that she won't die, not tonight.

Storytelling Hints: La Viuda Gris is equal parts living piece of folklore and force of nature. She didn't even notice when she became okay with murdering babies for the power she gained from them. She continues to exist almost out of a sense of inertia, rarely speaking (and speaking only in the catechisms of her faith when she does so), simply performing holy works during the

night before retiring for the day. She has existed for a long time, and the inertia of that life will make her difficult to destroy.

La Viuda Gris is a character particularly suitable for the endgame of a chronicle. She can offer the characters a challenge physical, social and mental, and her destruction can see the end of an entire cult of the Cihuateteo. Unfortunately, all La Viuda Gris knows of existence is her life as a priestess of the old gods. If convinced to set her faith aside, she has nothing tying her to life and will kill herself, finally facing her fears.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 5, Resolve 5

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 4, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 2, Crafts 3, Investigation 3, Medicine 2 (Herbal), Occult 5 (Aztec), Politics 1 (Cult)

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Larceny 2 (Lock-picking), Stealth 2 (Owl Form), Survival 4

Social Skills: Animal Ken 1, Empathy 2, Expression 2, Intimidation 3 (Horrifying), Persuasion 1, Subterfuge 3 (Inexpressive Features)

Merits: Allies 5 (Cihuateteo), Danger Sense, Holistic Knowledge, Iron Stamina 3, Meditative Mind

Willpower: 8

Morality: 1 (Fugue, Narcissism, Vocalization)

Virtue: Prudence. She's been doing the exact same thing every night for a *long* time because it's safer than facing a change of her own.

Vice: Wrath. Unfortunately she's built up a lot of anger. She has to take it out on someone.

Health: 10 (13 with Resilience)

Initiative: 9

Defense: 4

Speed: 12 (15 with Vigor)

Blood Potency: 0

Vitae/Per Turn: 10/1

Disciplines: Auspex 3, Majesty 3, Obfuscate 4, Resilience 3, Vigor 3

Rites of the Crossroad: All of those listed above and any more the Storyteller devises.

Weapons/Attacks

Type	Damage	Size	Special	Dice Pool
Claws	1A	N/A	N/A	5 (8 with Vigor)



Cymothoa Sanguinaria

CRYPTUBE

File Edit View History Window Help

Address <http://www.cryptube.com> Search

"Give us a kiss!"



5:24

Comments

Felix (12 minutes ago)
Wow, it's true. I imagined it, and now there's already a fetish for it. I'd better quit thinking about emasculation vore via vampiric vagina dentata.... oops!

Skepticat (1 hour ago)
Another elusive cryptid rarely seen around here- the humble comma. It's obviously a real bug. Just look at how the segments move. Also, that's STAN Winston, you despicable cretin.

Bigfooter (2 hours ago)
Fucking liberal faggot shit will believe anything, because NOBODY has made a horror movie in the last fifty years with puppet monsters or anything like that OH WAIT YES THEY HAVE. Suck Sam Winstons cock shitbird.

Skepticat (3 hours ago)
Debate rages, but I remain skeptical that Bigfooter's dick is visible to the naked eye. Watch till the end before commenting, moron. It moves around when they cut it out.

Bigfooter23 (4 hours ago)
So Fake! You assholes believe anything. It's viral marketing for a shitass movie. They stuck a jumbo prawn in a desperate whore actor's mouth and filmed it with shitty-cam to make it look edgy.

TruBlefer (5 hours ago)
The average human female tongue is approximately 60 grams and 10.24 centimeters. Assuming typical scale, this thing is the size of flat kosher hotdog. If this is like the fish parasite, it ate her tongue and grafted in its place. I wonder if she could talk with that in her mouth?

MANSQUACH (7 hours ago)
ID HIT THAT!

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Of all the horrors and monsters, beasts of nightmare, bloody-lipped demons, and creeping specters haunting this dark world, sometimes the dumb engines of evolution grind out creatures to rival the worst of the secret occult horrors. *C. Sanguinaria* is just such a creature.

Parasites. Let us consider parasites.

Some recent studies suggest that in complex ecosystems, the total biomass of parasites exceeds that of predators. The parasitoid wasp *Glyptapanteles* lays its eggs upon hapless caterpillars, and when they hatch, the larvae burrow in and eat. When they're ready to pupate into adult wasps, they hijack the behavior of the caterpillar, and it climbs up a shaft of grass to allow the larvae to wriggle from within its flesh and attach themselves to the grass, forming chrysalis. But *Glyptapanteles* is not finished with its poor host, no indeed, for a few of the larvae remain within, burrowing about in its nervous system and secreting chemicals. The cored-out caterpillar remains living, after a fashion, and serves to guard the metamorphosing wasps, thrashing about madly at any insect hazarding too close to the creatures feeding upon it. The wasps emerge, and the caterpillar dies.

This power of parasites to hijack host behavior isn't limited to caterpillars. The protozoa *Toxoplasma gondii* is commonly found in the feces of the housecat, and benignly infects upwards of one third of the human population of the planet. With a healthy immune system arrayed against it, it is quiescent, but with the body's defenses compromised by immune deficiency disease, it can ravage nerves and brain. In *Rattus rattus* and his rodent cousins, the *Toxoplasma* organism alters behavior, giving the creatures an affection for the smell of domestic cats and cat urine. Infected mice trend to cat-infested areas, increasing the chances that they'll end up as meals, and permitting the newly introduced organism to reproduce with the cat's native population.

And might the protozoa have a similar effect upon humans? Well, it could explain why we'd open our homes to furniture-destroying aloof little sociopaths.

And then there's *Cymothoa Exigua*, a tiny monster popular on the Internet. *Exigua* enters the gills of the spotted rose snapper fish and attaches itself to the base of the fish's tongue, absorbing blood and nutrients until the tongue withers away. *C. Exigua* grafts itself to the tongue stump, and functionally replaces it. This relationship is almost a symbiosis, except the fish only just breaks even, and he's got a segmented isopod instead of a tongue.

And *Cymothoa Sanguinaria* is so much worse than all of these.

Parasites get inside us, use us to propagate, hijack our reproductive energies to fuel their own life cycles, and perhaps even control our minds. They remind us that fundamentally, we're flesh, and all the airy realms of spirit matter not at all when the body anchoring it to Earth is eaten away from within, and the core of thought and identity corrupted by the mindless invader.

Pray to God to save your soul, because your body and mind belong to *Cymothoa Sanguinaria*.

C. Sanguinaria is superficially similar to its cousin species *C. Exigua*, but much, much rarer. Conditions allowing *C. Sanguinaria* to prosper are uncommon. Although exceptionally rare, it has a lifecycle dependent upon natural hot springs, and evidence suggests *Sanguinaria* or a nearly identical species has propagated in Iceland, Japan and the American West, in regions of natural geothermal heating. Humans parasitized by *Sanguinaria* have been fairly rare, though several historical outbreaks in Japanese onsen are suspected, and the Japanese snow monkey (*Macaca Fuscata*) may play a more regular host to the organism.

The course of infection is similar in humans and other large mammals, though the behavioral changes imposed upon human hosts are more complex than those seen in wolves, bears, moose and deer.

C. Sanguinaria larvae enter a host through the nasal cavity or mouth. A common vector for infection is mammals bending to drink from warm springs which remain unfrozen during winter. Among humans, recreational bathing provides the most common opportunity for the tiny larvae to invade the sinuses.

The parasite secretes a complex stew of antiseptic and anesthetic chemicals during the first days of stage 1. Its creeping progress into the host's throat goes unnoticed. While the host sleeps, it creeps into the mouth. It begins to hollow out a pocket in the soft tissues under the tongue, and latches onto the host and begins consuming blood. When so attached, *C. Sanguinaria* secretes a cocktail of chemicals that alter brain chemistry in subtle ways, creating a sense of mild euphoria and elevated mood, with manic episodes. This serves to distract the host until the larva has burrowed into a sub-lingual pocket, and begun metamorphosis into an adult *C. Sanguinaria* specimen.

When the parasite matures, it fully grafts to the host's body, and extends its tail through a channel under the tongue into the host's upper esophagus in preparation for the egg laying coming at the end of stage-1 infection. The subject's olfactory centers are suborned to serve *C. Sanguinaria* as well, and others infected with a parasite begin to smell extremely attractive. In the wild, infected animals will approach one another even if normal predator-prey relationships would forbid this, and engage in close grooming activity, culminating in the hosts lying so their hermaphroditic parasites can emerge partially from the mouth, and fertilize each other.

Among human hosts, this fertilization more frequently results in spontaneous and (to the hosts) inexplicable sexual arousal and relations. During a kiss, the parasites copulate.

Once fertilized, *C. Sanguinaria* influences host behavior to make it extremely territorial, so the scent of other infected hosts becomes repellent, and induces anxiety and aggression. The parasite deposits its eggs encased in a thick layer of mucous into the host's esophagus, and they migrate downward and attached variously to the stomach and intestinal lining where they slowly mature and hatch larvae that themselves parasitize the host for nutrients. The parasites then drive the host to find a secure (and exclusive) brooding area to eventually deposit the larval parasites.

The host passes through increasingly common periods of fugue—a loss of conscious volition during which complex actions and interactions can take place of which the host will have no memory when returning to sentience. The host will also be driven to seek out sexual partners in order to feed *C. Sanguinaria* the blood meals its eggs require to mature, and its larvae to grow. This vampiric exsanguination explains the parasite's name ("blood-drinker"). The host might bleed as few as one or as many as a dozen victims, depending upon the parasite's rate of maturation.

By the end of stage 2 (see below), most hosts enter a permanent fugue state, becoming in effect cognitive zombies. A host's brain still operates at a degree of sophistication (though, mostly to enact behaviors beneficial to the parasite), but the parasite has wholly suppressed the host's consciousness. Horrific as this is, the telepathic observation by a group of vampires of a stage-3 host revealed that his conscious mind remained alive and aware, forced to watch and endure the actions of his body without any ability to control or override them.

Patterns of brain damage caused by the parasite's chemical excretions suggest certain brain regions cut off, *physically*, from others: the mind of the victim, walled off in an oubliette of neurons, and shown atrocities without even the power to close the eyes, or flinch away.

As stage 3 progresses to its inevitable and grotesque conclusion, the host becomes more and more feral, and aggressively territorial, meeting perceived threats with violence.

The blood meals have done their work, and when the larval parasites have reached a stage of maturity permitting them to survive as free swimmers in the brooding pool, they release chemicals that cause in the

host severe abdominal cramping and contractions of the intestinal muscles not unlike mammalian labor. The creature compels the host to immerse himself in the prepared brooding pool, and then experiences a violent distention of intestinal tissues. Larvae burst out into the pool (taking with them large portions of the host's decaying intestinal tract). The host, emptied, experiences a surge of energy (caused by still more chemical secretions of its primary parasite), and returns to his territorial protection of the brooding area, allowing the larvae to grow and establish themselves in the pool. If suitable hosts (large mammals) venture into the host's territory now, rather than attack with violence, the host will sometimes incapacitate them and place them by the brooding pool, providing the larvae with ready access to a new host.

Without the ability to absorb nutrients, the late stage-3 host is doomed to die in a short time, taking with it the parasite that was the engineer of this doom.

But Darwin smiles upon the beast. Its evolutionary duty is discharged with success, and the selfish genes that drive all life are propagated further—dumb replication underpinning the sublime birth of a child as much as the piratical organism that might one day steal that child's blood, will and humanity. In the end, the lesson we learn from parasites is that we're all flesh, we eat, and we are eaten.

Everything else is just meat, singing to itself in the dark.

Stories

Body horror, flesh terror—stories featuring *C. Sanguinaria* **revolve** around revulsion. The body in rebellion, the flesh invaded. They also hedge into stories about the terror of the familiar becoming alien—when a friend or lover begins to act oddly in small ways, then big ways, and finally horrific ways. Themes of consciousness and free will are also relevant—stripped of conscious direction, the body of a stage-2 host can convincingly appear human sometimes, even to loved ones, all while the cutoff sentience of the victim's brain uselessly screams. What's consciousness even *for* if the flesh can get along quite well without it? *C. Sanguinaria* isn't even evil—it's as morally neutral as a thunderstorm or a mountain lion eating an incautious jogger. Even when you realize what it is and rise with anger and hate, and you smash it, burn it with fire, poison its brooding pools, execute its hosts... so what? What's your anger worth? Even in death, *Cymothoa Sanguinaria* doesn't hate you back. It just doesn't care about you.

It's the kind of thing that isn't really suited for long-term play, but some players might—for want of a better word—enjoy the horror of playing *C. Sanguinaria*'s victim.

The character dies at the end, of course. Maybe you'd play it as a one-shot. Maybe it's a way to end the story of a long-running and beloved character. (It's a horror game! Who says the protagonists of such stories get happy endings?)

For a short term, descend into the essence of personal horror. Play through the course of a host's infection with the parasite, her fall into fugue states and missing time, and then the evidence of cannibalism, madness. Finally, locked into a prison of flesh, a witness trapped in her own skull, forced to watch the death and the spawning, to feel the bursting surge of the parasite larvae emerging, and the pain of it and yet... wholly unable to act, even to will an eye to twitch or a finger to move. This is going to be intense. All the horror of being a vampire without any of the dark romance or cool powers to take the sting out of it, plus a horrible death a certainty from the start, with redemption at best an existential thing.

Sartre said, "*Freedom is what you do with what's been done to you.*"

How do you get right with this kind of horror? In the context of a storytelling game, you have the advantage of not being bound by linear time—mixing the horrific present with the comparatively idyllic past gives you dramatic contrast, and allows you and your storyteller to frame issues your character is trying to work through, and then reach an internal and personal redemption even as the parasite completely takes over the flesh. In a strange way, complete surrender to the parasite is freedom. The mind, so completely divorced from the concerns of the body, is free to consider things from a unique perspective. If you're zen about the whole thing, it's almost nice until you have to watch the parasite eviscerate a pair of earnest Mormons who were unfortunate enough to knock on your door.

And what of the other characters? Do they have to put down their friend? Or have they been infected, too?

This is a delicate sort of game, and not one every troupe will want to play. Talk it through with the rest of the troupe, be clear about the boundaries you'll set in the course of the game, and, if everyone's willing and ready, scare the daylights out of each other.

An outbreak of *C. Sanguinaria* provides fodder for red herrings complicating larger plots—exsanguinated corpses being such a classic clue—or for mysteries in themselves. Tracking an outbreak can be handled like a medical investigation (perhaps even casting the mortal protagonists as a CDC field team, or a group of vampire hunters trying to get there before the CDC team), or one by concerned citizens of the darkness, fearful one of their own might have slipped the leash and gone feral.

For instance: a friend of the characters' starts acting strangely. Ideally, use an established storyteller character for this hook, because this will have the greatest impact. She picked up a parasite while vacationing somewhere with hot springs, and between air travel and whatever other bad habits she has, it's developing slowly. She feels as if she's cold all the time, and runs the heat too high. She has brief moments when she seems to tune out, but doesn't lose track of conversations. A little like absence seizures. Eventually, the characters witness their friend engaging in some uncharacteristic flirting and hookups, though she'll be vague on the outcome. When they finally catch their friend in the act—ideally in the brooding area she's prepared—the horror hits. If they try to cover for their murdering friend, they may be looking at Humanity or Morality rolls. If they execute her, they're definitely going to. This story could play out parallel to other action in your chronicle, and can serve as an introduction to a larger story arc involving the parasite, or as a small standalone story or brief diversion.

The evidence collected by the Kindred playing at nighttime naturalism suggests another story, and another form of terror. Seeking insight into this elusive species, or dispatched by a patron and thus seeking, the characters follow the signs, and finally confront the reality of a thing previously known only in theory—and the terror of actualization, when theory is swept aside and replaced by truth, lands a hammer blow.

For instance: A Kindred naturalist acquires the services of the characters via influence or obligation—the proverbial offer you can't refuse. She dispatches them to an old medical resort and spa, closed since the mid 1980's. The building was built in the 1950s on the site of a wildly evangelical Pentecostal revival from the nineteenth century where preachers preached and sold the "healing waters" to the curious and converted. The spa's steady decline saw it used as a bathhouse catering to the swinger community in the 1970s before the vogue passed, and efforts to market the place as a family health spa failed to revive it. The decaying tiled interior

combines the worst creepy elements of an abandoned hospital with a drained swimming pool. The waters still flow, though, and the place's caretakers guard it with unusual fervor. Stranger, a small tent city has grown up around the spa, and someone is preaching here again, though this time the sacraments of bread and wine are truly becoming flesh and blood. The cult has accepted parasitism by *C. Sanguinaria* as some form of mystical transcendence, and in addition to the dangers posed by large numbers of stage-1 and -2 hosts, the cult leaders may possess more esoteric abilities. They don't simply want to protect the parasite; they want to *propagate* it.

Or what if a ghoul gets the parasite. Or a host gets made a ghoul. No ghoul should have been able to throw a Gangrel riding his beast quite so hard through a plate glass window and that far into the street. No ghoul should have been able to outrun the Daeva, or ignore her emotional hammer blows. No ghoul should have seen the Nosferatu standing there and shot him in the legs like that. If the characters get lucky and take one down, they'll find the fat parasite having wholly replaced the ghoul's tongue, waving eyelessly to bite their unwary hands if they stray too close. If they have no experience of *C. Sanguinaria*, this whole thing might seem to be a supernatural parasite or something, but information available through contacts or obscure knowledge reveals something possibly worse—one of their own has found a way to transform parasite and host into a ghoul, stopping the parasite's reproductive cycle (and killing its larvae), and placing them both into thrall. The ghoul has all the "advantages" of a stage-3 host, plus those of an ordinary ghoul. The ghoul is intelligent and interactive, but the conscious mind is absent, showing nearly no aura activity, and no mind or emotions to influence or Dominate. Nor are its perceptions clouded by Obfuscate. Finding a horrorshow where someone is breeding parasites and providing select clients with access to these creatures as thralls will mean dealing with some of the nastiest areas of a city's political landscape—nobody wants to be associated with this, but *everyone* who knows wants one of his own.

Regardless of the approach, *Cymothoa Sanguinaria* is a thing of flesh and fleshy realities. In its own way, it's beautiful, but in a more specifically *human* way, it's utterly revolting.

Within the bounds of good taste and the tone of your chronicle, and most importantly, what's acceptable in your group, it's a great way to really push the body horror.

If you've got a troupe where such can happen, get one of the characters into a passionate clinch with a *C. Sanguinaria* host, and let her *feel* the probing leech-mouthed parasite exploring her mouth. Moments like this demand rolls (Resolve + Composure or Stamina + Composure) to resist violent physical or mental reactions—emphasize the flesh acting on its own, flinching back from the invasion. In a sense, this revulsion and reflexive reaction confirm the themes the parasite embodies. Characters subject to Frenzy may also need to resist their own inner monsters rising up to bear them away in fear, or to lash out in terrified anger.

You're looking for *cringe* here—the ape pulls his lips back from his teeth, and leans away from the source of his disgust. It's an expression that clenches muscles used to suppress the gag reflex.

The butcher's smile is not a sign he's jolly, but that he's trying not to vomit on the meat.

Unlike fear, which is difficult to genuinely inspire in players, a certain measure of disgust is easier to invoke with a few well chosen details—the emergence of the parasite from under a lover's tongue, the ragged and rotting prolapsed intestines, the way the distended skin of a late stage-2 host's abdomen pulses and bulges, a gross parody of the human mother swollen and gravid, the unborn child's foot or hand pressing outward. The host gets thinner and thinner, and it gets easier and easier to see the larvae move in his guts.

This shit is *gross*. Use it.

Cymothoa Sanguinaria

Description: The parasite itself is a segmented crustacean (an isopod if you want to be pedantic) resembling a flesh-colored king prawn or jumbo shrimp. Fully grown, it's the size of a large sausage, but by this stage it cannot survive outside its host. The larvae are small, pale and soft-bodied, hardening only in their adult stage. They can easily slip inside the nose and into the sinuses, feeling like a splash of warm water more than a parasite looking for a host. Eventually, the parasite devours the tongue of a host, and grafts in its place. It licks constantly around the host's desiccated lips, tasting the air.

The host's description varies by stage of infection:

- **Stage 1** – No obvious outward signs of the parasite, though a careful oral examination will reveal the parasite in its flesh pocket under the tongue. The parasite secretes psychoactive chemicals, which begin to alter the host's behavior in subtle ways. It compels

the host to seek warmer conditions—ideally, warm and wet. In the wild, an animal would seek out hot springs, but humans often create their own hot wet areas. As Stage 1 progresses, hosts experience an increase in confidence and aggression, a week to a month of vigorous energy and increased strength, and sexual prowess. They'll find themselves overcoming lifelong fears and hang-ups like they just don't matter anymore, and acting uncharacteristically brazen in social situations.

- **Stage 2** – As the parasite grows, the brain damage and neurological changes in the host become more exaggerated, and the behavioral shifts emerging in stage 1 become extreme. The aggression increases from the social to the physical plane, and the host begins to stake out a brooding area, as well as sniffing around for a mate for his parasite. If sexual reproduction isn't possible for the parasite, it can reproduce asexually, but there's a behavioral bias for seeking other hosts with which to exchange DNA. Once fertilized, the egg laying begins, and with the implantation of the eggs into the host's intestinal lining, the behavioral changes become even more dramatic.

The host begins to experience dissociation episodes during which he feels as if his body acts on its own while he watches helplessly. Most hosts rationalize this when they return to control, and the paranoia induced by the parasite's secretions makes seeking help a terrifying prospect—it feels as if when others know about the odd episodes, they'll lock the host away and kill him. The host also begins to seek victims—donors to bleed for the maturing eggs.

They employ social tactics at first, but as the eggs mature and hatch, they usually transition to stalking and kidnapping. The strength and vigor of stage 1 rise to the superhuman, and the body feels no pain. The parasite is as thick as a finger, and twice as long—it can gouge and stab a victim quite badly, easily severing major arteries (a tactic it uses when bleeding a victim). By the end of stage 2, the host has transitioned from conscious with brief periods of fugue state, to almost completely dissociated with only increasingly brief moments of sentience.

- **Stage 3** – The transition into stage 3 is violent and bloody. The brooding process ravages the host internally, but somehow the host survives, hollowed out in body and mind. The brain damage is so severe that the conscious mind never returns to control, and the host's behavior disintegrates into a territorial defense of the larvae. Stage-3 hosts feel no pain, and can exert themselves to physical destruction. They can't live more than a couple of weeks, but many destroy

themselves before then. For all intents and purposes, they're the living dead.

Background: The *Cymothoa Sanguinaria* parasite is, despite its horrific lifecycle, completely mundane, a creature evolved to fill a niche. Or so one hopes—if God created *C. Sanguinaria* perfect and complete in its present form, God really hates us.

Those infected with a *C. Sanguinaria* can come from any walk of life, any background—most become hosts by dumb luck alone, a dip in the wrong spring at the wrong time of year, or drinking from a tainted water source, as might happen in a developing world slum with frightening regularity. A few might even be victims of stage-3 hosts who abduct them and force them to accept a larva.

Storytelling Hints: Stage-1 hosts would seem perfectly ordinary to those who have never met them, but to friends and family they'll seem more confident and aggressive, quicker witted and oddly more charming. The honeymoon period doesn't last long. When Stage 2 is reached, even strangers begin to get a strange vibe from hosts—the intensity and confidence begin to merge on the manic and intimidating.

Lean too close to the players when portraying a stage-2 host, speak a little too loudly, take offense easily. Occasionally seem to blank out for a moment, and then return to the conversation as if unaware of the interruption. Stage-3 hosts are non-vocal, so convey their predatory territorial drives with body language. Lean in, glower, show your teeth.

Attributes: The host's attribute scores are modified as follows. Each stage is cumulative with previous stages.

Stage 1 – +1 Wits, +1 Resolve, +1 Strength, +1 Stamina, +1 Presence, +1 Composure

Stage 2 – +1 Wits, +1 Strength, +1 Stamina, +1 Presence, –2 Composure

Stage 3 – –2 Intelligence, +1 Strength, +1 Stamina, –3 Presence, –1 Composure

Morality: Morality begins at its normal level for a given subject. Each time the host loses Morality due to her actions or the parasite's goading, she experiences a period in a fugue state as her consciousness slips beneath the surface, and her body runs on parasite-hacked autopilot. These periods last longer and longer as Morality declines, until finally becoming permanent.

Virtue

Stage 1 – Becomes Hope

Stage 2 – Becomes Faith

Stage 3 – Becomes Fortitude



Background: Gary Georges rode the rails of mediocrity right out of high school and into a job cleaning up after hours in the same school from which he failed to graduate. Gary is one of the gray ranks, the unseen faceless non-people who make civilized life possible for everyone else. He'd have kept on chugging away until one day losing his job when the school system instituted

random drug screening, and his regular indulgence in Humboldt County's finest agricultural exports. Alas, this wholly mundane misfortune was not to be.

While attempting some ill-advised bonding with his estranged father via the manly outdoors pleasure of camping, Gary happened upon a buck deer in the final throes of stage-3 *Cymothoa Sanguinaria* infection while looking for a place to take a semi-private piss. The buck charged him, goring him badly with its antlers, and spattering him with the stinking discharge emerging from its anus, alive and wriggling with *C. Sanguinaria* larvae.

If only Gary had elected to take the P.P.O. rather than the H.M.O. health plan. His treatment at the emergency room completely failed to notice the parasite working its way into his sinuses, and then it was a week before he could see his GP. At that point, he decided he felt too damned good to see the doctor.

Gary rode the first stage of infection hard. He quit smoking up, and started hitting the bars. He was amazed as his brazen courage in approaching women, and how often being direct worked. He told an edited version of the buck deer story, ending with him wrestling the beast to the ground until a veterinarian could be found to help it, and completely failing to mention the giant deuce he'd dropped in his trousers during the attack.

Back at work, he even found himself flirting with teachers he'd long lusted after, and some of the more mature students. *Dear Penthouse, I never thought this would happen to me until...*

It was all his fantasies of courage and sex and respect made manifest, and it continued right up until he had his tongue in the assistant librarian's mouth as they tore at each other in the janitor's closet, and a shock of pain cut through his jaw and throat. Mrs. Salia made a coughing gurgle, and then his mouth was full of coppery hot blood, and *something was wriggling out from under his tongue*. Welcome to stage 2.

He cleaned up somehow, and got the body down into the basement where he sealed it in a drum of US Government H₂O from the school's elderly fallout shelter. He continued his sexual conquests, but they become increasingly predatory and intense, his interest in his conquests less and less about sexual gratification, and more about control and domination. And he claimed the boiler room as his own domain. Somehow, it just felt right—the hot darkness. He began fiddling with the school's boiler, eventually figuring out how to lower the temperature of the hot water—the hot water pumped to the school's bathrooms and its showers—from scalding to merely hot.

Description: Gary Georges is a washed out thirty-something, going pudgy and running on automatic pilot most of the time. Pale from working nights, dark hair, light eyes. His face forgotten the moment it's out of sight. The sort of person about whom people say, "He was so quiet, you know?" when the cops find the bodies. As the parasite works its magic, his back straightens, his eyes focus, and he develops this aura of slightly dangerous intensity. As it progresses further, this intensity gets scary, and he becomes more and more impulsive.

Storytelling Hints: Gary is clinging hard to his delusion that everything is all right, even as he has more blackouts, and finds himself splattered with the blood of more victims. When his brazen charm fails, he falls back on his old pathetic persona, begging for help or forgiveness. He doesn't know it, but he's preparing the boiler room at the high school to be a brooding chamber. He's going to birth his larvae into the cooled-down boiler, and the tiny baby parasites are going to be piped all over the school, to splash onto the faces of showering cheerleaders, and into the football team's post-game whirlpool.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 5, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 3, Composure 1

Mental Skills: Craft 3 (DIY), Medicine 1

Physical Skills: Brawl +3 (Grappling), Drive 2, Firearms 2, Stealth 2, Weaponry 2

Social Skills: Intimidate 2, Persuasion 3, Socialize 2

Merits: Contacts 2 (Pot Dealers), Iron Stomach 2, Unseen Sense (Ghosts)

Health: 8

Willpower: 4

Morality: 5

Virtue: Faith. An irrational optimism has taken root in Gary, a belief that somehow, despite all evidence to the contrary, it'll all be OK in the end. It's not the parasite—it's pure human self-delusion.

Vice: Gluttony. Now this, on the other hand, is the parasite working on his neurochemistry. Gary's whole internal reward system is completely screwed up. He's always been a nervous eater. Now, he's a nervous gorger.

Speed: 12

Defense: 3

Initiative: 4

Notes: Gary has all the advantages of a stage-2 host.

Formosae

HOME >> PRO-ANA >> GENERAL >> TOPIC: Hi There!

sal 10:42 03-03-2008

hihi :) im sally, diag three yrs ago but a n00b here. just saying hi.
ym stats are HW: 117, CW: 110, LW: 108, GW: 100

[Reply](#)

nat 10:46 03-03-2008

hey sal welcome aboard :D but what is hw??? :?

[Reply](#)

sal 10:48 03-03-2008

omg sorry it is Healthy Weight, they used it on another board i was on (and Current Weight/Goal Weight/
Lowest Weight).

[Reply](#)

ThinspiratorConspirator 10:49 03-03-2008

Healthey Weight, nat.

[Reply](#)

ooo000ooo^@x@^ooo000ooo Hang in there kitty!

ThinspiratorConspirator 10:50 03-03-2008

whups scooped

[Reply](#)

ooo000ooo^@x@^ooo000ooo Hang in there kitty!

nat 11:06 03-03-2008

so how did u get to LW, sal? are you using same things now?

[Reply](#)

lotsaluv 11:20 03-03-2008

Welcome Aboard, Sal! Love to see pix of u sometime!

(My pix are here :p tho I have gone up since then doh o_0)

[Reply](#)

sal 11:28 03-03-2008

I will post pix soon lotsuluv. Nat I am using some appetite sups my cousin got me she is rilly fat lol plus
fasting/juicing of course. Juices + dieretics worked well last time so I am trying that.

[Reply](#)

lotsaluv 11:29 03-03-2008

A/S/L, sal?

[Reply](#)

lotsaluv 11:31 03-03-2008

Uh,s orry don't mean to be nosy :0

[Reply](#)

sal 11:39 03-03-2008

Lol thats cool lotsa iam 18 I am doing premed at Columbia so my pares cant bug me about my
weight nemore ^_^ oh and I am a girl lollo

[Reply](#)

dreamgirl

13:33 03-03-2008

Sal can u tell me how the juicing goes? I drink only water and sugar free soda and I am not losing nothing :(

WALKING THE DREAM: My LJ

[Reply](#)

lotsaluv

13:46 03-03-2008

Get lost dreamgirl we warned you already about this!

(Also so-called "sugar-free" soda has lots of claroies you should never drink it)

[Reply](#)

ThinspiratorConspirator

13:50 03-03-2008

Ignore dreamgirl sal, she is a wannarexic (see the lexicon if u don't know what that is. There is another forum for them anyway as we keep telling her.) I'll alert the mods to move her post.

[Reply](#)

ooo000ooo^@x@^ooo000ooo Hang in there kitty!

sal

13:59 03-03-2008

lol well dremgirl I will talk to you on the other forum then if you like :)

[Reply](#)

nat

14:05 03-03-2008

Love to hear how jucing go too neway, sal! PM me if u like!

[Reply](#)

sal

14:07 03-03-2008

kaykay1! Dremgirl sent me some links too.

[Reply](#)

ThinspiratorConspirator

09:31 11-04-2008

HEY SORRY to necro this thred but this was the last time we saw dreamgirl and now I think she's dead look at this posted on her LJ which was linked in her sig must be th e same girl

They say she died from straving herself (usuaul crap, stupid paper) She must have lost it too fast. Very sad.

[Reply](#)

ooo000ooo^@x@^ooo000ooo Hang in there kitty!

nat

09:42 11-04-2008

omg so sad she was nice when she posted in the right forum

[Reply](#)

sal

10:05 11-04-2008

Hey thats not nice nat! geez.

[Reply](#)

nat

10:10 11-04-2008

sorrysorry!! didn't mean it like that. my bad. It looks like she got her weight down real fast by those news photos she is real pretty there

[Reply](#)

ThinspiratorConspirator

10:27 11-04-2008

Yeah she is so really really thing that's why it's so sad

[Reply](#)

ooo000ooo^@x@^ooo000ooo Hang in there kitty!

nat

10:37 11-04-2008

Yeah. Can u PM me the url she sent you sal?

[Reply](#)

Truth

Unlike blood, fat is something humans are not just willing but desperate to give away. Somewhere in the history of the dead, something decided to make use of this fact. Something that has grown fat upon human misery.

The Formosae are a kind of vampire, dead like the Kindred, hungry like the Kindred, but in other ways not at all like them. They have existed for thousands of years. Some of the Kindred have met or heard of the “beautiful ones.”

They feed upon human misery. They grow fat upon disappointment, upon failed aspiration, upon damaged senses of self.

That’s not a metaphor: Formosae quickly become huge bloated sacks of something very like fat, but not fat. As a Formosa ages, she loses the ability to move on her own. Later still, she will lose any semblance of ever having been human. Imagine: a vast heap of undulating flesh with the nubs of withered limbs protruding like tiny tentacles. At the top, spread across a flat mass of skin spreads a barely-human face with gray lips and black teeth that still thirst for those precious emotions.

And yet the Formosae, against all the evidence, believe they are beautiful, and that they serve only beauty.

Every so often, a vampire might come across a weird little ritual book, translated from Latin into stilted, convoluted English. It’s called the *Semen Veneris Attisque*, the *Issue of Venus and Attis*. Old copies of it were printed by subscription. Newer copies appear in PDF, or a print-on-demand format.

Hidden between ugly liturgies about disappointment and revenge, sex-rituals and rituals for castrating and maiming willing subjects, a narrative unfolds. The Cult of the Magna Mater grows, after a long decline, under the tutelage of that most sexually adventurous and gender-queer of monarchs, the Emperor Elagabalus. Women escape disenfranchisement through the mysteries of dominance and the temporary adoption of new roles. Men castrate themselves and become women. Slaves enslave the free. Bodies change more: human anatomy becomes fluid. Aging and death, the constant enemies of beauty, become co-opted into bloody rites of self-mutilation (or self-transformation?) and one night, the desires of these bodies join together. A priestess sacrifices herself, carves out her own breasts and womb with a sacred blade; the cultists lap up her blood and cut themselves and donate their own genitalia, their hair, their hearts.

And they keep going, long after they should be dead, cutting themselves to shreds, becoming skinless, anonymous, eyeless, tongueless, earless.

And then something—someone—is born from the blood, something dead and hungry and perfectly beautiful, beautiful forever. This, the book says, is the hungry messiah of the cult, a creature beyond sex and life, a new Venus-Attis, true daughter-son of the Magna Mater, the perfect corpse. The progenitor of the Formosae, the Beautiful Ones.

Is that true? It’s all so vague, pieced together from snatches of poetry, from ritual guides to cutting off your own skin.

The theory doesn’t quite fit the reality. The Formosae, the progeny of that first Venus-Attis, start out beautiful, but they grow fatter and fatter, swelling with each and every feeding.

The creatures eat the despair of people who want to be beautiful, leaving an ephemeral, wan beauty in the victim, and grow hideously fat upon it. And they eat each other’s despair, too.

Each Formosa knows how to create a creature like herself, and knows she can feed upon her sire, just as she can feed upon the living.

The weird fat that fills out the bodies of the Formosae, made from stolen aspirations and jealousy, is as addictive as Kindred blood, and has many of the same effects. And the stolen emotions are as deadly. A Formosa feeds upon you, and you may become more beautiful as your aspirations are taken away, but in the end you can become only a good-looking corpse.

Standards of beauty change over time, and people want different things. These days, ironically, a lot of people want to be thin. And whole communities exist, dedicated to it.

Slavery and co-dependence

The Formosae create slaves by giving their victims chunks of their own bloody fat to chew, fat made of distilled human emotion and withered corpse-flesh that supplies no nourishment of any sort. It might seem disgusting, but a great many people are desperate enough to try anything to get beautiful. And it has the same effect upon the one who eats it: three meals and he’s a slave.

A Formosa can create more of her own kind, too. By the time a Formosa Embraces a victim, she is likely entirely enamored of her bloated queen and would gladly drink deep of her mistress’ flesh. If all goes according to plan, it will leave the priestess thin and beautiful again and her victim fat and hideous. To avoid constantly feeding off each other, the newly thin queen will then seek out new victims, returning to her original thralls to strip off the fat that returns all too quickly. Eventually, the regnant has a harem of enormous thralls, all keeping her beautiful and themselves enslaved as she keeps them fed.

Things change, and Formosae nests can support only a small number of the creatures. Eventually, Formosae succumb to a compulsion to abandon their harems and seek new feeding grounds. Hungry and helpless, many of the thralls starve into torpor, although the Formosae have a unique ability to go without Vitae for longer than most. Whatever the case, the starvation thins them down enough to regain mobility, and they begin immediately to sate their hunger. The Vinculum of the Formosae begins to sour if not refreshed, and so abandoned thralls begin to imagine their creator as a betrayer... and plot revenge on her.

Besides instilling a powerful thirst for vengeance, the abandonment of a thrall typically destroys the slave's mind. Some come to believe they deserved their suffering: most thralls of Formosae lack self-esteem to begin with, and something in the hag's kiss seems to magnify this, creating levels of devotion beyond what even the Vinculum can create. Others survive their treatment by deluding themselves into believing there was no betrayal and their regnant did make them beautiful, as perfect as Venus-Attis him/herself. This delusion of perfection persists throughout their lives, and Formosae harems seldom have mirrors to reveal the truth. Others cover themselves with layers of makeup or bind themselves tightly in girdles and straps so they can maintain the illusion to others and especially themselves. Modern times have, of course, made these pretences so much easier. A Formosa that can still walk might have made a slave of a plastic surgeon, receiving every kind of tuck and suck and pinch to hold back his terrible weight. None of these procedures last very long.

The modern age has become a golden age for these twisted predators. Now, in this age of excess, people fall into two categories: the beautiful and successful, and everyone else. The aspirational images that fill the magazines and the screen are unattainable. And yet, we are constantly told we must attain these impossible ideals to be happy. Anyone would think it was a conspiracy to create food for the Formosae.

Their hunting grounds are everywhere men and women worry about their body image. They post ads in diet magazines and leave cards in the waiting rooms of plastic surgeons. They linger in dress stores and gyms to whisper to others about the one true solution. Their ultimate hunting ground is the Internet. So-called pro-ana sites and support forums are bursting with girls desperate to reach Goal Weight and willing to try anything to do it. Equally common and equally stuffed with victims are sites for people desperate to escape the self-loathing they feel every time they look in the mirror. People exchange mails, and pass around secret URLs. The most desperate

find the private residences and clinics of the Formosae. The bite is quick, invites ecstasy, and removes jealousy. Its effects are immediately visible. Addiction is guaranteed, and the indoctrination begins.

The Formosae have become the ultimate drug dealers, selling nothing less than the greatest narcotic of all: self worth. The demand is unceasing and immeasurable. A powerful Formosa queen may now control so much of a city's wealthy and elite women as to be a threat to any vampire Prince, and what's more, her ghouls serve with a faith born from a very different kind of addiction.

Like the Daeva, the Formosae want their havens to appear comforting to mortals, but they do so by expressing a formal, clinical air, like that of a doctor's office or private health spa. Part of this reassurance comes from wealth, and those Formosae with the resources will ensure their havens are large and impressive and located in the wealthy areas of town. Size is of course vital, as havens may end up storing harems of a dozen or more Formosae, each the size of a small water buffalo. Doorways will be large, stairs and narrow corridors will be few and attendant minions will be numerous.

Systems: New Blood

A Formosa gains Vitae just as one of the Kindred does: he bites down hard and sucks, and the bite instills ecstasy in the victim. It's a different sort of ecstasy, less sensual pleasure and more catharsis. And after the bite, and the sucking, the victim is undeniably more beautiful. Arms are fatter, hands are finer, noses straighter, eyes clearer, skin clearer, hair brighter, teeth straighter, as if all the undesired hair and fat and grease and flesh and pus and ugliness were sucked away.

Formosae don't actually feed upon blood: they feed upon *life*, and life is really what Vitae is. It's just for the Kindred, the blood is the life. For other vampires, it's sometimes something else.

Feeding Systems

- A human victim has the same number of Vitae for a Formosa as it does for any other variety of vampire, with one difference: if a victim has a mental illness (in game terms, a Derangement, particularly one affecting self-esteem or body image) a Formosa gains an extra, free point of Vitae, which does not damage the victim, every time she feeds from her victim.
- And taking a point of Vitae has the same effect: one point of Lethal damage for every point of Vitae stolen. And every point of Vitae a Formosa steals means 1 point fewer left behind in the victim's body should she be unlucky enough to gain the attentions of one of the Kindred as well as the Formosa.

- Although a Formosa's bite kills the victim eventually, the victim barely notices he's dying. (Consider what happens to Ali McGraw in the classic Hollywood weepie *Love Story*, for instance, where the sick heroine looks more and more luminous the sicker and closer to death she gets—it's exactly like that.) A victim fed upon by a Formosa gains the Striking Looks Merit at 2 dots (or at 4 dots if she already has it at 2 dots—there's no effect if the vessel has the Striking Looks Merit at 4 dots).

Vitae Systems

Vitae taken in this form behaves in the same way as Vitae from blood: it grants the vampire the same gifts and powers as it would one of the Kindred.

- When a Formosa needs to use his Vitae to feed a mortal or ghoul, he has to cut it out of his obese body. It is a pale gray color, greasy and a little flaky, like dried-out soap. It tastes sweet and musty.
- Drinking Formosae Vitae can lead to addiction in the same way as blood addiction. (In game terms, it is interchangeable with Kindred Vitae, meaning that someone already addicted can eat Formosae Vitae and get the same effect, and vice versa.)
- A Formosa can create a Vinculum with it, and create ghouls.
- A Formosa can use Vitae to power Disciplines, heal injuries and supplement dice pools.
- When a Formosa uses up the Vitae, it doesn't affect her physical appearance. The fatty deposit stays. The actual Vitae isn't really the fat, it's in the fat, the emotional power of jealousy and catharsis and life that the creature steals. The only ways to lose the deposit are through being fed upon by other Formosae, or after torpor. If a Formosa is fed upon by another of his kind, he loses all the excess weight and gains in looks (gaining the equivalent of the Merit Striking Looks, at 2 dots) when the points of Vitae in her system drop to 1 or 0. At this point, he may prevent himself from falling into torpor or Frenzy through use of the Continence Discipline (see below). The Vitae has to be drained by another Formosa. Being drained by another vampire has no effect upon the creature's weight.

Systems: similarities and differences

Formosae have the following abilities and weaknesses:

- Formosae are vulnerable to sunlight and fire in the same way Kindred are.
- A Formosa takes only Bashing damage from firearms and does not roll to avoid unconsciousness when all her Health boxes are filled.

- The Formosae are susceptible to Frenzy of all kinds, but do not risk Frenzy or suffer penalties to rolls to avoid Frenzy for seeing or tasting blood.
- Formosae trigger the Predator's Taint in other vampires and each other.

On the other hand:

- Formosae do not return to the appearance they had when they were Embraced when they awake.

Dead Weight

After being Embraced, a Formosa swells over the space of a few months until she is about fifty pounds heavier than before. Thereafter, she gains fifty to a hundred pounds for each point of Blood Potency she possesses.

This weight soon becomes impossible to hide.

At Blood Potency 2, the Formosa becomes so hideous—not just fat, but fat in an unnatural, *dead* sort of way, fat that lies wrong on the body—that she gains the Flaw Deformity (see **The World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 219).

At Blood Potency 4, the Formosa becomes Size 6 and she gains the Flaw Lameness.

At Blood Potency 6, the Formosa's obesity becomes such an obstacle to movement that she gains the Flaw Crippled.

At Blood Potency 8, the Formosa becomes Size 7.

The Formosae fight an unending battle with their own flesh, and it shows. Whether enormously fat or waif-thin, their skin is stretched and pale and covered with unsightly blotches and scars. Almost all take steps to disguise their ugliness and like the Daeva they favor high fashion and flamboyant style. However, there is always something a little *off* about their disguises, even among those with the most expensive tailors or the most talented makeup artists. Somehow, their ugliness seeps through all disguise, leaving a telltale mark—perhaps the makeup is a little too thick, or there are sweaty stains spreading out from the armpits of the Vera Wang gown, or an ungainly muffin-top cannot be prevented from oozing over the top of the tight cut-off jeans.

Most of the Formosae are women and all of them have body image issues. Little else unites them. Ambitious Formosae prefer to Embrace the rich and connected, but the poor are often much more desperate. Generally, Formosae Embrace to create servants and slaves, not companions, so take those they feel are quite beneath them, or have proven to be weak or lesser in some way.

Character Creation

Aside from the odd way they absorb Vitae and the strange things it does to their bodies, the Formosae are very similar to the Kindred.

Since image is so important to them, most hags favor Social Attributes and Skills. Physical Attributes are almost always the weakest. Although their bodies are ravaged, the fatty diet has compensations: many Formosae have the Quick Healer or Iron Stamina Merit, and get a lot of use out of Iron Stomach. Contacts, Retainers and Resources are common (if not necessary for the most obese), but their bitter infighting prevents most Formosae from having Allies or Mentors. Thanks to their beautifying bite, they almost always have large Herds. Sloth, Gluttony and Envy are the typical Formosae Vices, and Temperance is almost never their Virtue.

- Formosae begin at Blood Potency 1. A Formosa character may purchase the Haven and Herd Merits.
- The favored Attributes of the Formosae are Manipulation and Stamina. A character may add 1 dot to one of these Attributes at character creation.
- The following Disciplines are common among the Formosae: Continence (see below), Majesty and Resilience. Characters may buy dots in these for (new dots x 5) experience points. Formosae may also gain dots in Animalism, Auspex, Dominate and Obfuscate, for (new dots x 7) experience points. A Formosa may not learn Celerity, Nightmare or Vigor.

THAT THING ABOUT "KINDRED" NOT REALLY BEING KINDRED

So one wan, slightly kooky Mekhet wrote this document a year or two ago that went the rounds among some of those Kindred in the Ordo Dracul who had worked out e-mail, and while a lot of it wasn't really relevant to a lot of vampires (or even a lot of Mekhet, actually) and some of it was really surprising, one of the things she said, this wan little Mekhet, in the middle of all the Nico quotes and the navel-gazing, was that vampires of the five clans aren't actually the same thing.

As in, you can look at, say, a Mekhet or a Nosferatu, and think: *vampire*. A bit different, sure, but from fundamentally the same source. So there must have been some common ancestor, some vampire evolutionary root that produced these five clans of vampire. Which makes the assumption that the supernatural follows the rules of the natural world, and misses the fact that they *do* have a common root: living humans. What if the five clans actually appeared independently, and only look similar because they were all once human, and humans who die and become undead are more likely to turn into things like this?

The Formosae are like this. Not *quite* similar enough to be another clan, but still overlapping with the Kindred in a lot of ways. A creature like this makes the idea that the Kindred themselves are more different from each other than they think make a lot more sense.

New Discipline: Continence

For the most part, Vitae is life. There is a difference, however, for those that have mastered the Discipline of Continence. Learning this art allows vampires to store up reserves of Vitae in their flesh, and tap into those reserves when necessary. This allows them to fuel their other vampiric abilities when most other Kindred would be all out of juice.

Other vampires (as in Kindred) can also learn the Discipline.

Cost: 1 Willpower to activate; 1 Willpower to maintain each night

Continence is unlike many other Disciplines in that no one actively rolls it. Rather, it allows a vampire to hold more Vitae in his system than other vampires for a short time.

When the character activates the Discipline, the vampire can hold a number of points of Vitae in his body equal to his dots in this Discipline. The Vitae can be used in all the ways normal Vitae can be used. The vampire can access this extra, separate pool of Vitae at any time, although the player must say which pool of Vitae he is using.

If another vampire tries to feed upon a character using this Discipline, the player of the feeding vampire must make a reflexive Wits + Composure roll to "find" the extra pool of Vitae and drink from it, whether he knows about the Discipline or not. A vampire attempting diablerie upon a character with this Discipline must empty this pool as well as the main Vitae pool in order to succeed—if he really wants to.

For the Formosae, this Vitae has the added bonus of not creating that soapy fatty deposit that deforms their bodies (and so, when an elder Formosa forces her thralls to feed upon her, making her beautiful again, she retains some extra Vitae here, meaning that she neither becomes torpid nor necessarily enters Hunger Frenzy).

Angie Ward

Quote: *Lick my feet, you stupid skinny bitch!*

Description: Angie was made a vampire while still a teenager, and her face retains a youthful cheer under her brown curls. Below that, she balloons into a freight truck of flesh and flab. At 390 pounds, she still remains mobile and still believes she remains beautiful, dressing in lingerie and ball gowns designed for her size but not quite as dazzling as she believes. She's also kept some of the daintiness she had as a model. In parts of her head, she still is that model, and she'll use her powerful mass to punish anyone who doesn't agree.

Background: Angie was always a heavy girl, but she was fair-faced, theatrically gifted and loved attention so she dreamed of being either a model or a movie star. However, when she entered these industries it was the age of Twiggy and the other waifs of the late 1960s. Angie's weight and low self-esteem prevented her from succeeding in either of her dream jobs, and she

became self-destructive, trying every binge diet she could find. She even tried heroin for its promised thinning powers, paying for it by moving into adult films. Her Embrace was simply another act of predation in a life filled with them. When she discovered her new hunger would destroy every last vestige of her figure, however, she went completely insane. In her mind she cast herself as a kind of Dark Venus, sent to punish the too beautiful in the name of the ugly. She preys upon the anorexic on the Internet, hunting down the most desperate posters on pro-ana sites and offering them the ultimate prize. Once she has them hooked on her power, she makes them demean themselves for it, slowly destroying the mind and soul of thin girl after thin girl to punish them all for every moment of mockery she suffered, and every ounce of self-loathing she feels.

Storytelling Hints: Angie is a pure predator, and uses her power solely to inflict greater cruelty. Although she is getting larger and larger, she fears competition too much to make more of her kind. This situation cannot last, driving her to greater and greater savagery as she fears her time is running out. Characters will likely stumble onto Angie following a trail of dead anorexic girls to a circle of still living ones who will do anything to protect their queen bee. A wild predator in the coterie's city needs to be put down but Angie is no pushover, and her rabid followers will protect her to the grave. Characters may even discover their loved ones, ghouls or allies have fallen under her spell, making the battle far more personal.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 1, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 1, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 1

Mental Skills: Computer 3, Crafts 2 (Web Page Design, Fashion), Investigation 1, Medicine 2 (Weight Loss), Occult 1

Physical Skills: Brawl 3 (Grapple), Larceny 2, Weaponry 2 (Knives)

Social Skills: Expression 1 (Acting), Intimidation 3, Streetwise 1

Merits: Herd 2, Iron Stamina 3, Retainers 2

Willpower: 4

Humanity: 2

Virtue: Fortitude. Whatever obstacles are in her way, Angie will fight tooth and nail to get what she wants.

Vice: Envy. All Angie wants is to finally be as good as those skinny bitches who teased her in high school.

Health: 8

Initiative: 2

Defense: 1

Speed: 10

Blood Potency: 1

Disciplines: Continance 1, Majesty 3

Vitae/per Turn: 10/1



Ghûls



Image 4.8

The colony, far from being deterred, continues in its practices—they work again at their grim task the very same night.



Image 4.7

Complete immolation succeeds where we saw firsthand that all other forms of violence, including decapitation, failed.

Some of the eldest mystics of the Middle East and northern reaches of Africa share a tale of the Ghûls. They say when the world was yet young, before the world had been gifted the laws of Heaven, humanity remained a wicked and devilish thing. It rutted in the mud with abandon and ate uncooked flesh in its sloth. The people gorged upon wine and drugs, fulfilling their every base appetite. God came to the wickedest of these creatures and spoke:

“Without guidance, you have become most wicked creatures, lower even than the serpents that drag their bellies across the dry earth and whisper lies into the ears of children.”

Shocked by the glory of the Lord, the wicked creatures stuttered and protested. They knew not what they had done to cause such offense. The Lord named their crimes, and they felt shame they had not known since they were virgins at their mothers’ sides. When he finished, the Lord again spoke:

“You, my wayward children, are doomed to the fires of Hell. If you beg forgiveness now, you shall be made divine, that your damnation be turned to a greater service. If you refuse me, know that you shall be cursed until the end of time with madness, obsession and pain.”

Most of those present accepted God’s generous offer. Others, however, bitter, prideful and akin to Shaitan, refused God’s mercy and forgiveness. In His glorious anger, God cried tears of glorious wrath that burned those they fell upon. All present became transformed, granted a measure of His grace. Those who accepted God’s mercy died but were reborn. Those who rejected Him remained alive, but were cursed to never again rest for all of the days of the world. While both became the Jinni, the concealed, only the unrepentant became the Ghûls.

The Unrepentant Children of Sin

Sin exists. Not every half-dead monstrosity results from a grasping bid for immortality. Some simply arise from the inexplicable touch of divine retribution. The curse of the Ghûl is one of his own making. Each Ghûl claims, sometimes only to himself, that there was a single identifiable moment in which he could have turned his back on his wicked ways and avoided his cursed state. Some wish desperately they could turn back the clock and scream a warning to their past selves to repent. Many, however, exult in their wickedness, gladly accepting the nightly feast their mind and body mandates for the power and longevity granted by their damnation.

If the devil exists to tempt mortals from God's will, then the Ghûls are truly its closest adherents. All lived lives of depraved gluttony and lust prior to their damnation and were too prideful to repent. Now the majority continue their debauched lifestyles, dancing, drinking and writhing in Epicurean pleasure in the dark corners of the world.

Unlike vampires, Ghûls have achieved a true immortality; not only do they cease to age, they cannot be killed by any means short of immolation. Furthermore, Ghûls truly *live*. They breathe, experience the full gamut of emotions, and enjoy sex just as any human. No internal Beasts plague them, and they don't require Vitae to sustain their immortal lives.

On the other hand, they seem to take disgusting pleasure in a gluttonous feast of dead human flesh. They haunt graveyards at night, digging up newly interred corpses to gnaw the rotting flesh from the bones. Worst of all, the Ghûls seem to make no distinction between the dead flesh of a deceased human and that of a sleeping vampire. Kindred, hunters and stranger creatures alike attempt to destroy Ghûls wherever they can, burning their corpses on massive pyres. Unfortunately, the Ghûls possess none of the usual markers of a vampire and can prove extremely difficult to find.

By all accounts, the Ghûls seem to have arisen in the Middle East. What force singled out that geographic area for this curse remains unknown. Recent years, however, have seen reports of grave-robbing and cannibalism on the rise in communities around the world. What happens if these creatures have begun appearing in communities with strong ties to the Middle East? What if the curse spreads from those neighborhoods into the larger population?

Stories

Each Ghûl suffers from a terrible curse, and while many of them embrace the horrors of their condition for the power it grants, others see the state as a divine punishment for which they must work to atone. A Ghûl and a Kindred might become allies or lovers in the quest for redemption, each working with the other to reconnect with their lost

Humanity. Each may work to keep the other from feeding (perhaps by restraining them), but such will inevitably end in disaster. On the other hand, tensions may rise when each finds helping the other difficult when jealousy over the ability to sleep and rest or to walk unharmed under the sun comes into play.

Conversely, a Ghûl and a Kindred may become unusual allies, enabling one another in their vicious pursuits. Were two such characters to become hunting partners, both might find their morality spiraling into oblivion as they murder their prey to sup from his warm blood and eat of his fresh flesh. What characters would come out of the woodwork in an attempt to end such a violent spree?

It is more likely that the Ghûls serve as antagonists in a story. Most remain utterly unrepentant, and they don't always fulfill their late night hungers with the utmost discretion. Vampires and mages alike might share an interest in keeping this curse from spreading and exposing the unsuspecting masses to the supernatural, while a pack of werewolves might view the Ghûls as a threat to its territory.

Mechanics

Ghûls exist in a state that maintains their lives and makes them incredibly resilient at a vile cost. These creatures seem to arise primarily in the Middle East. They arise solely from humans of Morality 4 or lower. Ghûls often had some experience with the occult in life, whether as students of the occult hiding among some of the more obscure Islamic sects or explorers of the old codes of demon summoning and binding.

With Storyteller permission, players can create Ghûl characters by using the Character Creation rules provided in **The World of Darkness Rulebook** with the following additions:

Blood Potency

A Ghûl has Blood Potency 0, which is not the same as having no Blood Potency trait at all. Blood Potency 0 is discussed in greater detail on p. 11.

Clan

A Ghûl is not a vampire and possesses neither a clan nor a clan weakness. She does not benefit or suffer from blood ties or blood sympathy.

The Embrace

A Ghûl cannot Embrace, though she can *be* Embraced. In this case she becomes a Kindred in all ways, completely abandoning all of the benefits and weaknesses of being a Ghûl. She keeps any Disciplines she may have developed. (If she had fewer than 3, she gains additional Disciplines appropriate to her clan; if she had three or more, she retains those but gains no more.)

Ghûls fall to their wretched state through a variety of means that typically culminate in the consumption of dead flesh (whether as part of an occult rite, a bid for immortality, curiosity or debauched gluttony). The curse that befalls one of them thereafter is hers alone, and she has no one (and no sire) to blame but herself.

Vitae

A Ghûl may spend 1 Vitae per turn for the purposes of increasing physical dice pools and fueling Disciplines. She possesses a Vitae pool that is filled by the consumption of dead, uncooked flesh. Every pound of flesh grants the creature 1 Vitae, meaning that most Ghûls easily fill their Vitae pool with each night's feast. A Ghûl continues to eat even if she has filled her Vitae pool; excess Vitae is ignored. If a Ghûl is somehow prevented from eating on any given night, she loses 1 Vitae and suffers 1 Lethal damage. If she is restrained long enough to reduce her Vitae to 0, she instead suffers 2 Lethal damage per night.

Ghûls suffer a compulsion they cannot control to eat raw flesh for the duration of every night from midnight until the sun first begins to light the horizon. At midnight a Ghûl must spend a point of Willpower or seek out flesh to consume, eating until dawn. The flesh can be animal or human, but it must be raw. Many Ghûls haunt graveyards simply because they provide the easiest source of their needed sustenance. Ghûls cannot eat more than the tiniest amount of other food without getting sick (much like Kindred). Furthermore, they *never* sleep (save when recovering from wounds as described below). While Ghûls do not become tired, many develop Derangements as a result of their constant waking life.

A Ghûl *cannot* be made a ghoul, addicted to Vitae or placed under the Vinculum. (Indeed, a Ghûl can't hold a point of vampire Vitae down any more than she can a glass of wine.) Furthermore, she cannot create ghouls or thralls, and her blood carries no risk of addiction.

A Ghûl can neither commit nor suffer diablerie.

Advantages

A Ghûl's Advantages are determined as a mortal character's. A Ghûl possesses a Morality trait as well as a Virtue and Vice, and regains Willpower as any mortal. The only exception is that Ghûls do not sleep and therefore regain no Willpower for doing so. Characters that begin play as Ghûls do so with a Morality of 4.

Disciplines

Ghûls possess no Disciplines when they first change into monsters, but may purchase Celerity, Majesty and Vigor over time as if they were out-of-clan Disciplines.

Damage, Healing and Final Death

Ghûls do not roll to remain conscious when they lose their last Health to Bashing damage and do not fall into torpor when they lose it to Lethal damage.

A Ghûl suffers Wound Penalties only from Aggravated damage. When she loses her last Health level to Aggravated damage she explodes in a bloody mist, some of which finds its way back to the location of the Ghûl's last meal, where it reforms into the Ghûl. A Ghûl dispatched in this manner regains all her lost Health, but her Vitae pool is reduced to 0 and she remains asleep for a number of days and nights equal to 10 – her Humanity. In this state, the Ghûl becomes vulnerable and can be destroyed by burning her body.

Other Traits

Ghûls no longer suffer ill effects from exposure to any natural disease or poison.

Ghûls are, for all other intents and purposes, alive. They heal at the normal rate for a mortal, they contend with no Beast for control of their actions, and the sun has no deleterious effects upon their person or abilities. All Ghûls suffer from the Melancholia Derangement, which they must roll to resist whenever the weaknesses of their state interfere with their goals or desires. Ghûls may purchase Merits typically limited to mortals (save Unseen Senses), but lose such Merits if ever Embraced.

Powerful Secrets

Aside from those traits listed above, all Ghûls have the following powers:

The Beautiful Stranger: Ghûls can appear particularly attractive to someone they have never met before, an illusion that persists so long as the victim does not discover the Ghûl's dread secret. A player controlling a Ghûl may spend 1 Willpower when first meeting another character to gain a single die to applicable Presence and Manipulation rolls with that individual, as if the Ghûl possessed the Striking Looks 2 Merit. This power stacks with the benefits of Striking Looks. The effect remains until the enchanted target discovers the truth of his beautiful stranger, either by confession from the Ghûl or witnessing the Ghûl in the act of consuming flesh. Other evidence will be ignored or rationalized away.

The Wild Ride: When all else fails, the Ghûl can reduce her enemies to unthinking animals. The Ghûl must be able to establish eye contact with her victim and tell him what animal he is to become in a language he can understand. (This statement requires *at least* the following words: "You are" and the name of the animal.)

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Persuasion vs. target's Resolve + Composure

Action: Instant and Contested

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The power rebounds upon the Ghûl, reducing her to a feral state for the remainder of the scene.

Failure: The power has no effect.

Success: The target becomes convinced he is the animal named, and acts in all ways as if he were. If the target possesses an inner Beast prone to violent outbursts (such as a vampire or werewolf), the target falls into immediate Frenzy, regardless of the animal named. This power remains in effect until the end of the scene.

Exceptional Success: As success, save the effects of the power remain until the following dawn.

Suggested Modifiers

- +2 Striking Looks 4
- +2 The target has the ability to change shape into the named creature.
- +1 Striking Looks 2
- +1 The target is possessed of an inner Beast.
- 2 The target has never seen in person an example of the named creature.
- 3 The character names an animal wildly inappropriate to the current environment (such as requiring a character in the desert to become a dolphin).

Ghûl Occultism

Furthermore, many Ghûls possess the following powers, legacies of their occult studies prior to their transformations. Not every Ghûl knows these powers, however, and a few know others besides. Ghûls portrayed by players may purchase these powers as Merits (as indicated by their level in dots, below), but must begin with Luck Magic.

Alchemy (••)

Prerequisites: Occult •• and Medicine •

Effect: If given access to an alchemical (or chemical) laboratory, the Ghûl may transmute a simple, common, non-precious substance into another simple, common, non-precious substance. This ritual requires 1 hour of work.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: An accident occurs, possibly causing mild burns or a minor explosion. The material is lost.

Failure: The material remains the same.

Success: The material is transmuted.

Exceptional Success: The final product is imbued with a mystic energy. It can be used to inflict Bashing wounds against dematerialized ghosts.

Suggested Modifiers

- 1 Per point of Size of the original material over 1
- 1 Per point of Durability of the original material
- 1 Per dot of Resources cost of the new material
- 1 Poor laboratory equipment
- 1 No sample of the desired substance

Aura Sight (••)

Prerequisites: Empathy ••

Effect: By staring at and focusing on an individual for one minute, the Ghûl can read the eddies and currents of a target's soul.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Empathy vs. target's Composure + Blood Potency

Action: Instant and Contested

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Ghûl receives misleading information.

Failure: Nothing happens.

Success: The Ghûl can observe a target's aura as per the Auspex power Aura Sight (p. 120, **Vampire: The Requiem**), save she cannot use it to differentiate between supernatural creatures and need not take penalties for how carefully she's examining the aura. She gleans only a single emotion (the strongest), and gains a +1 bonus to all Social rolls with the target.

Exceptional Success: As success, save the bonus to Social rolls is +2.

Suggested Modifiers

- +1 Character possesses a bit of hair, blood or clothing from the target.
- +1 Character observes the target in the reflection of a mirror over a century old.
- 1 The subject is a habitual or pathological liar.

Curse of Ill-Fortune (•••)

Prerequisites: Luck Magic, Persuasion •

Effect: By ritualizing for 10 minutes (including the consumption of raw flesh), the Ghûl can curse a target.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Persuasion vs. target's Composure + Blood Potency

Action: Instant and Contested

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The curse rebounds upon the Ghûl and he suffers its effects.

Failure: Nothing happens.

Success: The target suffers a penalty equal to the Ghûl's dots in Manipulation to a number of dice pools related to a specific activity (a job interview, driving, fighting, etc.) equal to the Ghûl's Persuasion. This curse remains for 24 hours.

Exceptional Success: As success, save the penalty applies to *all* rolls of the designated type for 24 hours.

Suggested Modifiers

+1 Character possesses a photograph or video of the target performing the activity to be cursed.

+1 Character possesses a tool the target uses for the activity to be cursed.

-4 Target possesses the Luck Magic Merit.

Luck Magic (••••)

Effect: By spending 10 minutes ritualizing, the Ghûl can grant himself excellent luck at a specific activity. With a 30-minute ritual, he can grant that luck to another or grant himself superlative luck.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Occult

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Ghûl loses the benefit of the 10-Again rule for the specified action.

Failure: Nothing happens.

Success: When using the 10-minute ritual, the Ghûl gains the 9-Again rule for a number of rolls of a specific type (driving rolls, firearms rolls, etc.) chosen at the moment of casting equal to his Manipulation. Alternatively, he can spend 30 minutes ritualizing and grant himself 8-Again or another character 9-Again for 3 rolls of a specific type. These "lucky" rolls must be used within 24 hours.

Exceptional Success: As success, save the affected dice pools also gain a bonus die.

Suggested Modifiers

+1 Character possesses a piece of hair or clothing or a sample of blood from someone who excels at the type of action designated.

+1 Character possesses a picture or video of the target performing the chosen activity particularly well.

Ayda Nejeh, The Mail Order Ghûl Brick

Quote: I... I don't understand. Slow. Talk slow. Please.

Description: Ayda is beautiful. Deep oval eyes gaze from beneath dark, lustrous hair that smells always of desert spices. She wears dark, loose-fitting clothes that fall suggestively down her olive body like dusky wine. Her movements belie her beauty, suffering a little from her confusion and shyness. Like a lost animal, she seems

utterly out of her element. But like a cornered dog, she seems ready to bite if threatened.

At times, Ayda seems all of that and more. Her beauty becomes ethereal or angelic, gaining that fey otherworldly magnificence granted only by the mind's eye. Most importantly, she seems the most innocent of possible creatures.

Background: Ayda was born in Fallujah, Iraq, just before the first Gulf War broke out. The only daughter of a wealthy politician and businessman, Ayda learned early on that appearances often mattered more than reality in Iraqi society. Her father, for example, played at being an upstanding member of Sunni society, but behind closed doors he delved into tomes of the esoteric laden with the secrets of calling forth dread Jinni and binding them with their own labyrinthine laws. Ayda's father forbade her from entering his private chambers, much less reading from his personal library, and when he caught her doing so, he decided to send her to a private school in Europe. There, he hoped, she would learn to be a wealthy woman in the European tradition, something he could use to build a connection to a wealthy family of the West.

Far from quelling it, however, life among the youthful elite only fed Ayda's rebellious nature. She used drugs, enjoyed sex, and the moment she learned that some of them shared her interest in the occult she joined in. When the group was inevitably caught in the midst of a rite by the headmaster, most of Ayda's friends received slaps on the wrist from their parents. Ayda's father, however, brought her back to Iraq. Enraged at her father's hypocrisy, Ayda enacted against him a forbidden curse she found in the back of one of his tomes, a curse that culminated in the consumption of the uncooked flesh of a hooved animal (goat, in her case). A week later the Americans invaded, and a week after that her father was dead. Ayda, however, had been transformed.

Desperate to escape the fundamentalists rising to power in her war-torn homeland, Ayda seduced her way into a camp of American mercenaries, utilizing their communications equipment to place advertisements across the Internet: beautiful Middle Eastern princess will marry any man who pays her way out of Iraq. She neglected to mention her unusual diet.

Storytelling Hints: An intelligent and discerning young woman with a cruel streak a mile wide, Ayda currently plays at being provincial and uneducated, pretending to be the beautiful foreigner in need of help. She speaks in slow and halting sentences and plays up her accent, often asking people to repeat themselves or define "unfamiliar" words. Her act allows her to take her time to take in and understand her surroundings, feeling out the best way of manipulating those around her into getting what she wants.



If Ayda makes it to America, she'll play at being the perfect wife to her benefactor, at least for as long as it takes to find her own two feet and method of paying her own way. It little matters whether or not the unfortunate husband is attractive or kind; Ayda's too proud to pretend at married life for long. Will her husband discover his bride's dark secret or will he become her last meal under his roof?

Ayda can enter a story in a number of manners. A wealthy character may have known her from her study abroad (in which case he might be surprised at how much she has changed but is possibly willing to help her keep her secrets) or a computer-savvy Kindred might know her from interactions on the Internet. One of the characters' more wealthy and desperate allies might help her come to America. There's also some wiggle room in what role she plays in the story. She may be just as cruel and self-serving as the above suggests, or that may be an act, as well. Perhaps she's hiding behind it while trying to atone for a past that has left her laboring under a divine curse. Can the characters help her find her lost Humanity, or will they damn her further? Then again, perhaps she hasn't been a Ghûl long enough to truly understand what she's lost.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 2 (History), Computer 1, Crafts 1, Medicine 1, Occult 3, Politics 2, Science 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Drive 1, Firearms 1 (Pistol)

Social Skills: Animal Ken 2, Empathy 3, Expression 1, Intimidation 1, Persuasion 3 (Seduction), Socialize 2 (Etiquette), Subterfuge 3, Streetwise 1

Merits: Alchemy 2, Aura Sight 2, Barfly, Curse of Ill-Fortune 3, Luck Magic 4, Resources 2, Striking Looks 4

Willpower: 6

Morality: 3 (Irrationality, Fixation, Melancholia)

Virtue: Pride. Ayda's made some mistakes in her life, but she's learned from them. Now she'll be master of her own life.

Vice: Lust. She enjoys new experiences more than anything else. The fact that she spends each night locked in the same gluttonous ritual frustrates her terribly.

Health: 8 (9 with Resilience)

Initiative: 6

Defense: 3

Speed: 10

Disciplines: Majesty 1, Resilience 1

Blood Potency: 0

Vitae/per Turn: 8/1

Jiang Shi

All that remains of Daniel Sears is a cautionary tale. The thrall of a Succubus that lusted for rare and unusual books, Sears was regularly dispatched to domains the sun made inhospitable to his mistress. His regnant heard tell of a rare printing of a Chinese encyclopedia, one with an additional sixteen pages of material outlining the unusual vampires of China. Of course, she had to have it.

Daniel never returned from the Far East. His regnant, undeterred, sent her bodyguard and resolved to wait out his return in torpor. When she awoke, the book was at her side. She hungrily perused it, seeking out the pages on the Jiang Shi. There she found everything she could hope for: a description of their appearance, where they could be found, and even how to create one. These last few pages described a rite—and included instructive illustrations—in which one cuts out the heart of a virgin. This pure organ becomes the vessel for the higher soul. Then one must cut out one's own heart and, before it stops beating, press it to that of the virgin's. The blood must flow through the virgin's heart, where the higher soul remains, before being suckled by the ritualist. When the ritualist's heart, which now contains only the lower soul, is replaced in the body, the gaping wound in his chest heals itself. The wise Jiang Shi finds a safe repository for the virgin's heart, which never decays and never stops beating, for if it is destroyed the higher soul escapes and the Jiang Shi immediately dies. The encyclopedia entry suggested placing it within one's own body, next to one's own now-black heart.

But the Succubus paid little attention to the details of the rite; her eyes were drawn to the blood that stained the pages, in some cases binding them together. Enraged, she sought out her bodyguard, only to find that he, too, had never returned from China. In the months that passed she learned her former guardian had been killed outside Beijing. She never learned how her servitors had managed to fulfill their duties from beyond the grave. Nor did she ever learn a key fact about her highly religious bodyguard, something he had mentioned only to his fellow ghoul Daniel Sears: he was a virgin.



Image 18.5

Local contacts were of remarkably little help regarding the entity. They seemed to treat it as a dirty secret, as something that wasn't discussed in polite company.

The Hopping Corpses

Desiccated, fetid creatures with long limbs, papery white skin, and carrion breath haunt the villages of East Asia. The Koreans call them *gangshi* and the Japanese *kyonshi*. The Chinese whisper of the Jiang Shi, the hopping corpses, their forearms and hands twisted into birdlike claws, skin covered in a thick fur of white and green, and mouths filled with rows of pointed sharklike teeth from which hang small chunks of uncooked flesh. The locals who claim to have seen them describe their eyes as filled with baleful red flame burning with a grim hatred for the living.

Some of the living explain away the Jiang Shi as an invention of the superstitious peasantry, who, witnessing dead bodies hanging tied to poles for easy transport, created stories of the sorceries necessary to animate them, that they may hop to their destination in the next life. Others suspect criminals and grave-robbers might deserve credit for concocting tales of the hopping dead to

frighten superstition police (so they wouldn't interfere with the criminal activities). Few imagine that each Jiang Shi began as a human who, through his mad desire for immortality, cut away and imprisoned his higher soul that his demonic inner Beast might remain to haunt the earth for years to come.

Of course, such explanations hardly matter when one leaps over the gated fence that circumscribes your lawn, through your bedroom window and over your sleeping body.

Stories

Like a ghost, the Jiang Shi can move unseen, can travel instantaneously from one place to another, is incredibly difficult to destroy through mere physical attack, and tends to haunt specific locales or people. Like a vampire, the Jiang Shi must consume blood to survive, is incredibly strong and fast, and is possessed of a terrible Beast that drives its actions. Stories that involve the Jiang Shi tend to hit all these notes, blending the ghost story with the vampire, leading characters into frighteningly haunted locales before seducing them and leaving them weak and anemic.

These shark-mouthed, fire-eyed, white and green-furred vampires are extremely specific to the lore of China and, to a lesser extent, Japan and Korea, but East Asian communities appear all over the world, and in the World of Darkness, their monsters can all too often go with them. The procedure that leads to their creation is decidedly a product of the Chinese approach to philosophy and magic. Thus the Jiang Shi appear in (and then haunt) locations that, if not in China, Japan or Korea, possess strong cultural ties to those nations (but consider the old, teeming Chinatowns of London and San Francisco).

Jiang Shi serve as a kind of warning: these monsters threw away what made them human in a desperate bid for power. A **Vampire: The Requiem** story featuring the Jiang Shi may examine this; when a person becomes damned to unlife by her own hand (without the handy equivocation of fault provided by the Embrace at the hands of another), the inevitable question arises of whether or not the tradeoff (eternal life and incredible power for true life and one's soul) is worth it.

Jiang Shi do not necessarily lend themselves well to being protagonists (especially given their limited ability to travel), but players wishing to take on a vampire with more pronounced weaknesses and less power in return may find such a game interesting. The Jiang Shi may increase his mobility by forcing living anchors (see below) to travel where the Jiang Shi wants. How

does the character feel about using his former loved one in such a way? What happens when she grows old, approaching death herself? Jiang Shi also lack an accepting society to protect them from their own base natures (and many become largely feral as a result), due largely to their immobility.

ELEVATION

It may be possible, at Storyteller discretion, for a Jiang Shi to rise above the fallen state into which he has cast himself and become one of the Kindred. This could be handled in the same ways one might use to uplift one of the Larvae (p. 109). A Jiang Shi that becomes Kindred immediately becomes Blood Potency 1, gains a clan (with the bonuses and weaknesses that come with it) based either upon the Kindred that uplifted him or the Kindred the Jiang Shi consumed through diablerie. He retains the physical Disciplines he possessed (i.e. Resilience, Celerity and Vigor), but loses all other features and powers of the Jiang Shi.

Some Eastern magicians and vampires claim that a hidden Jiang Shi society exists within the folds of human society. These Jiang Shi follow obscure and esoteric modes of thought that allow them to re-attune themselves to their higher souls.

Rules

The Jiang Shi are magicians who have cursed themselves with undeath in their quest for immortality. In many ways, they follow the same rules as the Kindred. A player interested in portraying a Jiang Shi may do so with the Character Creation rules in **Vampire: The Requiem**, with the following changes:

Blood Potency

Jiang Shi have Blood Potency 0 (see p. 11).

Clan

Jiang Shi did not suffer the Embrace and therefore have no clan. No Jiang Shi possesses a clan Discipline or clan weakness. The hopping corpses do not benefit or suffer from blood ties or blood sympathy.

The Embrace

A Jiang Shi cannot Embrace, although he may be elevated to Kindred status in the same way as a Larva (see above sidebar).

Vitae Use

A Jiang Shi keeps a Vitae pool like a Kindred and may expend Vitae to heal, enhance physical dice pools, fuel Disciplines and wake each night. These half-vampires cannot use Vitae to counterfeit a Blush of Health, hold down food or drink, engage in sexual congress, or create ghouls. A Jiang Shi's blood does not carry risk of addiction.

A hopping vampire may consume Vitae at the rate of 1 per turn (though he does not benefit from the Kiss, requiring him to immobilize or restrain a victim before drinking). He may also gain Vitae by consuming raw flesh (and gain 1 Vitae per pound consumed).

Vinculum

A Jiang Shi cannot be shackled by the Vinculum, nor can he establish the Vinculum on others.

Diablerie

Jiang Shi cannot be consumed through diablerie, though they may be able to commit diablerie on Kindred (see the "Elevation" sidebar above).

Disciplines

Each Jiang Shi gains 1 dot in either Celerity, Resilience or Vigor at character creation. A Jiang Shi character can raise his rating in these three powers through the expenditure of experience as if they were non-clan Disciplines (for new dots x 7 experience points). These Disciplines follow all the usual rules as given in **Vampire: The Requiem**.

Frenzy

A Jiang Shi can behave rationally, but finds himself easily overwhelmed by his lower soul (which Western vampires would call "the Beast"). Jiang Shi suffer a -5 to all rolls to resist Frenzy of any kind. Jiang Shi especially fear flame and do not benefit from the 10-Again rule on rolls to resist Frenzy inspired by fire.

Torpor and Damage

A Jiang Shi enters torpor only through starvation. He does so on any night in which he does not have 1 Vitae to spend to wake up, but awakens again as soon as a potential victim approaches within 30 yards of his grave or one of his anchors (see below).

A Jiang Shi remains functional until he loses all his Health to either Lethal or Aggravated damage; at that point he dematerializes and reappears in his grave with all damage immediately healed. He is in torpor and his Vitae pool is reduced to 0 points. He awakens again, ready to feed, the next time any living human passes within 10 feet of his grave. The Jiang Shi suffers Aggravated damage from fire, and if a Jiang Shi suffers an Aggravated wound from fire in his last Health box, he burns to ash and meets Final Death. A Jiang Shi may suffer Aggravated damage from other sources, but only fire can truly destroy him.

Humanity

The Jiang Shi possesses the Humanity Advantage. A Jiang Shi's Humanity is equal to his Morality (usually low) at his time of transformation. Characters that begin as Jiang Shi begin at Humanity 5 and cannot lower Humanity to gain extra experience points at character creation.

Jiang Shi possess vicious teeth and claws that inflict +1 Lethal damage, but can never be retracted or dismissed. (They are permanent features.)

A Jiang Shi becomes inert during the day, using The Hidden Grave (see below) to instantly return to his grave at dawn. (Exposure to sunlight, however, does not harm him.) During the day he exists in a maddening wakefulness (completely aware of what goes on about him) but is entirely paralyzed until the sun sinks below the horizon.

Like ghosts, each Jiang Shi possesses at least one anchor (see **The World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 209). One of these anchors is always the creature's grave. A Jiang Shi controlled by a player has a second anchor: this can be a living (or possibly unliving) individual to whom the character had a strong connection. A character Jiang Shi can buy further anchors with Merit dots: each anchor is a 3-dot Merit. A Jiang Shi may travel a number of miles from any given anchor equal to his Resolve. The Jiang Shi may spend a point of Willpower to travel as an instant action from one anchor to another—the creature dematerializes in one location and reappears in another in a matter of seconds. If all the Jiang Shi's anchors are destroyed, he immediately dies as his lower soul flees its body.

Powers of the Jiang Shi

Each Jiang Shi possesses two of the following powers at character creation, and may buy new ones for 12 experience points each.

Dust On the Wind

It is said that the Jiang Shi can transform into columns of smoke or dust, riding the wind away from those who might harm them.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Action: Instant

Effect: The Jiang Shi becomes insubstantial. The creature seems to turn into a cloud of dust or a noxious fume that quickly dissipates, but such merely masks his shift into Twilight, the insubstantial state shared by ghosts. While in this state, the Jiang Shi may not utilize Vitae or any of his supernatural powers save his ability to travel instantaneously between anchors. He may, however, perceive and interact with dematerialized ghosts. While in this state, the character's Speed becomes Strength + Dexterity + 10, but he remains limited in his movement by his anchors.

The Hidden Grave

The Jiang Shi becomes dust, sinking into the ground and reappearing in his grave, safe and whole.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Action: Instant

Effect: The Jiang Shi becomes the finest cloud of dust: he dissolves into the stone or earth of the grave. The following turn he reappears and reforms in his grave. Even the rare Jiang Shi that was never buried typically establishes a small grave for himself. If a Jiang Shi has no grave, he cannot utilize this power.

The Infernal Flight

Some claim the hopping corpses can take wing, transforming themselves into vile birdlike demons.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Action: Instant

Effect: The Jiang Shi transforms himself into a cruel-looking, demonic bird with mottled gray and black feathers. This huge, hideous creature possesses burning red eyes, a vulturelike beak and vicious talons. (Both the beak and talons inflict +1 Aggravated damage.) The Jiang Shi can transform back into his natural form as a reflexive action without any further expenditure.

The following adjustments are made to the character's traits while in this form:

- Strength becomes 2
- Dexterity +1, Stamina +2
- Size falls to 2 (and Health is reckoned based upon the new Size)
- Speed becomes Strength + Dexterity + 10 while in flight. Ground speed is equal to one-quarter of the flight speed, rounded down.
- The vampire gains a +1 bonus to all Wits-based perception rolls due to unnaturally heightened senses.

Mask of a Thousand Faces

The peasants whisper that one can speak to a Jiang Shi and never know it. One should never follow a stranger home, or one might find oneself in the lair of the Jiang Shi.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Action: Instant

Effect: The Jiang Shi creates an illusory mask that hides his deformities from the eyes of others. The Jiang Shi cannot choose the exact appearance of the Mask of a Thousand Faces, though he can specify gender. The illusion created by this power typically possesses the same height, build and ethnicity of the Jiang Shi, but otherwise the power can alter his appearance significantly. The Jiang Shi may choose to make the illusion particularly alluring or unassuming, granting a +3 bonus to Persuasion and Socialize (for the former) or Stealth and Subterfuge (for the latter). This power lasts until the end of the scene, though the Jiang Shi can end it as an instant action.

The Wicked Visage

Cost: 1 Willpower

Action: Instant

Effect: The Jiang Shi adopts a truly terrifying mien. His eyes flash red, smoke curls forth from his mouth and nostrils, and his hair stands on end. This grants the Jiang Shi a +3 bonus to Intimidation dice pools for the remainder of the scene (though the Jiang Shi can end it as an instant action). A Jiang Shi may not benefit from both The Wicked Visage and Mask of a Thousand Faces at the same time.

MERIT: LIVING ANCHOR (•••)

Prerequisite: Jiang Shi

Effect: Your character possesses a strong metaphysical bond to another individual. This person is likely a mortal friend or relative, but may be a supernatural entity. She *cannot*, however, be another Jiang Shi; the bonds that tie the Jiang Shi to the living are bonds of jealousy and longing, emotions these beasts do not feel toward one another. The bond need not be one forged while the Jiang Shi remained alive (someone who prays each day at a temple haunted by a Jiang Shi, for example, may eventually come to serve as that creature's anchor), though it often is.

The Living Anchor acts in all ways as an anchor for the character. The Jiang Shi can travel to her as an instant action, but can travel from her only a distance in miles equal to his Resolve. As a result, Jiang Shi often threaten and coerce their Living Anchors to travel to locations of the cursed creature's choosing.

Drawback: The bond with the Living Anchor must be established, requiring at least an uninterrupted hour of contact each week for four weeks before the Jiang Shi may purchase this Merit. This time requirement is waived for living family and close acquaintances from life, but the character must somehow arrange to be in the individual's presence for an hour to cement the bond.

Furthermore, the Living Anchor may not be particularly inclined to assist a self-damned creature of the night. The Jiang Shi must keep the Living Anchor convinced that helping him is in her best interest. He may do so through bribery or threats, though actually killing her severs his connection to her (which may leave a Jiang Shi stranded at his grave, depending upon how remote that location is). A Living Anchor who has been pushed too far can become a deadly and devoted enemy to the Jiang Shi. One legend persists in Japan regarding a Jiang Shi (*kyonshi*) that killed his Living Anchor's cousin. The Living Anchor hunted down the Jiang Shi's grave and, with the help of a priest, destroyed the foul abomination. With both its anchors in one place, it had nowhere to run.

Liu Dong

Quote: *Respect your ancestors, child!*

Description: Liu wears a fine silk shirt in the Nehru style, but close examination reveals dirt, wear, and the fact that it doesn't fit quite right. He wears a pair of expensive spectacles over his burning eyes, but the lenses have been broken out. His hair has been carefully pulled into a bun, but it is still dry and matted (not to mention white and green). In short, Liu takes pains to appear civilized and well dressed, but never quite pulls it off.

Sometimes, however, he adopts the Mask of a Thousand Faces. He may seem a beautiful maiden or a wealthy, gentle student, and he then seems confident, appealing and friendly. Of course, this is but another layer of pretense, and when the prey has been lured into Liu's mausoleum, he drops the façade and reverts to monstrosity again.

Background: Born in rural China as the nineteenth century turned into the twentieth, Liu grew up on a farm. It was an accident that almost cost him his life in his youth that opened his eyes to the possibilities of magic, and he pursued his witch's art with a fervor born from his desperation to escape his home. Eventually he managed just that, traveling to the capital to join the secret societies of the magicians and philosophers there. He grew old with time, however, and sought the secret to endless life. Familiar with the Jiang Shi, he felt sure he could usurp their immortality while avoiding the failings that would render him one of their impotent number. He performed the ritual to rip his soul asunder and darkness consumed him. When he awoke, he found himself again on his family's farm. He's been there, pretending to a society and civility that simply doesn't exist in the wilds, ever since.

Storytelling Hints: Liu's madness is of the cold, calculating variety, always hidden behind a veneer of cold civility. He invites his victims to tea, contaminating their drinks with secret herbs that rob their muscles of strength while leaving their minds sensate to his wicked ministrations. He plays with his food, caressing them as he discusses philosophy, politics or even just the weather. He's desperate for the connection. When he's satisfied the man within, he lets his lower soul forth to fulfill its violent desires.

He seems incredibly eager to meet the characters, always leaning in to listen when they speak, always meeting their eyes. He takes care to control the rage and hate within, silently promising his Beast a brutal release just as soon as he can seduce these strangers into his lair.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 4, Resolve 5

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 3



Mental Skills: Academics 3 (Philosophy), Crafts 2, Investigation 3, Medicine 2, Occult 4 (Magic), Politics 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 3 (Claws), Stealth 3, Survival 4, Weaponry 2

Social Skills: Animal Ken 1, Empathy 2, Expression 2, Intimidation 2, Persuasion 3, Socialize 1, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Danger Sense, Fleet of Foot 3, Haven (His Roadside Mausoleum: Location 2, Security 3, Size 2), Fighting Style: Kung Fu 4, Language (English), Meditative Mind

Willpower: 8

Humanity: 3

Virtue: Fortitude. Liu is slow to abandon his goals. Not even death stood in his way.

Vice: Greed. Liu wants power, he wants to live forever, he wants blood. In short, Liu *wants*, and his fulfilled desires are never enough.

Health: 8 (11 with Resilience)

Initiative: 6 (8 with Celerity)

Defense: 3 (5 with Celerity)

Speed: 13 (16 with Vigor, 39 with Celerity, 48 with Celerity and Vigor)

Blood Potency: 0

Disciplines: Celerity 2, Resilience 3, Vigor 3

Vitae/per Turn: 8/1

Weapons/Attacks

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Claws	1L	7 (10 with Vigor)

Mnemovores



ST CATHERINE'S
MENTAL HEALTH
RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Patient Number 12 in the study. Howards, Matthew. Caucasian male aged 66. Diagnosed 6 months previous, condition existed for 17 months total. Diagnosis early onset PPV-type Alzheimers. Recruited from retrospective Alanal study.

12-12-2005 First interview session. Ran through written and oral tests. Subject did extremely well on general knowledge, presidents up to Bush Jr perfectly. Recent personal detail slightly sketchy, cannot give current address, has trouble naming grandchildren. Deep memory strong up until approx 1980s. Short-term memory average for age group.

21-12-2005 Second interview. Full history taken. No obvious high risk factors.

4-1-2006 Third interview. Interesting use of language, says he can "feel the memories slipping away". May be in theorized "critical stage" of rapid memory loss. Repeated oral test A, score similar but not precise. Will follow up further.

6-1-2006 Repeated written tests. Results different from first run (see attached). Must repeat oral tests tomorrow.

13-1-2006 Repeated written tests again. Results show limited but continued memory degradation. However, no clear pattern in difference, loss appears scattershot. Both older and newer memories lost.

24-1-2006 Extended interview, three hours. Short term memory remains unchanged throughout. Long term memory remains unchanged throughout. Subject showed symptoms of depression. Angry at condition, used emotive language of memories being "stolen" from him.

10-2-2006 Subject unable to recall previous Christmas at all. Visual aids offered no assistance. Asked patient if he would consider becoming part of MRI scan study arm. Forgot to bring scans to show what results look like, but patient seemed amiable.

25-2-2006 First scan while sleeping. Thermal, blood, electrical, radiography scans attached. Tomography map shows unusual shape of left hemisphere—cause unknown.



26-2-2006 Repeated oral and written tests. Subject named presidents up to Carter. Still unable to remember previous Christmas, but full memory of study participation. Frustration remains high, subject resisted some parts of the test. Possible result bias? Check with Darman. Speed of degradation now extremely high but remains random.

16-3-2006 Repeated oral questions while scanning patient in MRI. Questions hitting memory gaps consistently cause temp flares in unusually-shaped area. Must get Brady to look at this.

19-3-2006 Repeated full scan and computer tomography of brain. Left hemisphere now more misshapen—as if his brain is collapsing from the inside. Double checked all scans—no tumors, no mass whatsoever in region. Could be heretofore undocumented physiological symptom? Call everyone in on this.

20-3-2006 Patient has become increasingly disturbed and agitated. Demonstrates full paranoid delusions, blaming unspecified agents for “taking” his memories. May have to be sedated in future sessions. Forgot to call Brady again, he needs to see this while there’s time.

22-3-2006 Patient cannot seem to recall concept of Christmas. Dramatic loss of memory in one specific area—could be a whole new pathology?? Remembers most presidents up to Nixon, but omitted Adams (both) and Arthur—strange blindspot? Light sedation seems to be helping.

26-3-2006 No session, operation difficulties with the MRI, bulbs not replaced after last session.

6-4-2006 Degradation becoming acute. Patient has trouble recalling participation in study. Names of relatives have become patchy. Unsure if related to sedation medication. Can’t get Brady, his number must have changed.

7-4-2006 No change. Performance on oral tests still poor. Named every president up to Roosevelt, missed Adams and Arthur again. Scan proceeded well—brain damage continues. Sending copies to everyone I can remember.

11-4-2006 Study halted—patient no longer reliably remembering giving consent to study. Family consent being pursued, but are apparently reluctant. Frustrating as time becoming extremely limited. Prior to realizing consent lapse, subject had great trouble with oral tests. Could not name any presidents or name day of the week (see attached).

12-4-2006 No study today; got lost, arrived at hospital late, subject was already too sedated to question. Dammit, no time for this!

13-4-2006 Patient stopped taking medication, during night attempted to escape institution in paranoid frenzy. Subsequent heavy sedation invalidates most of our tests. May have to abandon study if condition does not improve. Sent scans to everyone I can remember.

14-4-2006 Scanned subject again, brain size degradation continues. Subject remains paranoid and delusional.

15-4-2006 Missed appointment, stress getting to me it seems.

16-4-2006 Study halted again—family claims I never contacted them re scanning permission. Clearly need a break from study. Have organized notes so other researchers may follow this subject in my absence. So much to be learned!

22-4-2006 Recorded from St Laurence’s surgical recovery. They tell me I was in a car accident. Suffering some shock and memory loss from trauma, don’t want it to affect my work. Have composed full study report (attached), will send to Darman, he will find someone to continue.

23-4-2006 Focus and memory unreliable, completely unable to continue study—poss damage from shock or concussion? Darman, I’m sending all of these notes to you, we need to keep following this subject!

24-4-2006 Last note before sending. John, I don’t remember any accident. I don’t even own a car.

There was somebody in my room last night.

For all the power and immortality vampires have, they pay a terrible price. While they rule over the kine, they themselves are ruled by a long litany of restrictions and limitations. And like the living, the Kindred have constantly sought to overcome each and every one of their limitations, whether through magical rituals, spiritual quests, or the study of the arcane Coils of the Dragon. But perhaps the most debilitating restriction placed upon the vampires—and the one they seem least able to resist—is their ignorance of their own nature. Trapped in the Fog of Eternity, they know nothing of their own pasts, and therefore cannot control their futures.

So far, nobody has been able to do anything about the Fog, and most have given up trying. The Sanctum preach that this is the Lord's will: that His bestial servants be as blank slates to their pasts, rediscovering their horrific nature anew each night. Even the most ardent pursuers of the Dragon's Coils have concluded that the Fog is inescapable, that it is the one price that must always be paid. With immortality comes forgetting, and that is the way it must always be.

But what if it wasn't?

What if the Fog wasn't just a law of vampiric nature? What if something or someone was *causing* it? What would that mean if there were individuals or groups deliberately keeping the vampires ignorant? What secrets are they protecting, and what power must they possess?

Those who have heard the rumors of the Mnemovores think they know the answers to some of these questions—and wish they didn't.

The Mnemovores' food of choice is memory, not blood. Like other vampires, they have a terrible need for sustenance, and must return again and again. But for them, not feeding means having to feed upon themselves, eating their own minds.

The Mnemovores also share with the Kindred that terrible ignorance of their own origins and nature. No matter how fast they steal the recollections of others, their own memories seem to fade even faster. So with each feeding they only replace what they lost, until their minds are nothing but a jumble of jetsam, washed up from the rise and fall of a thousand borrowed lives.

Until the Mnemovore feeds for the first time, he knows almost nothing, and that is the hunger that drives him. He craves desperately to fill the void in his understanding and takes it as greedily as he can. The Mnemovore places his mouth over his victim's, and gives the longest, lingering kiss. And with that caress go her memories—her first day at school, her first prom, the name of her grandmother. When his victim awakes, her memories are gone forever. The Mnemovore's sustenance comes from the emotional significance of these memories: a first kiss, a wedding day, a funeral, the death of a loved one, a great success. At the same time, the memories replace the emptiness in his own brain.

Stealing memories is a lengthy and random process. The monster rarely completes it in a single attack. A feeding Mnemovore may learn the intimate personal details of his victim's loved ones but not really understand why the victim remembers them (since the emotional quality of these memories is no more than sustenance to him). He may learn his victim's bank details but not remember what a bank is.

The only solution a Mnemovore has is to feed as long and as often as possible, building up as much memory as he can before it fades. Even newly created Mnemovores have the sense not to risk feeding from the same source too regularly, for fear of inviting discovery. Very rarely does a Mnemovore drink a victim to emptiness, for that almost always attracts attention.

The Mnemovores maintain a predatory instinct even with no trace of memory, and that teaches them to remain in the shadows and hunt carefully. But their greatest defense is their theft of memory. Nobody ever clearly remembers being attacked by a Mnemovore. They exude an aura of forgetfulness, stealing memories without using even their hands. Even those who get a good look at their attacker retain only flickers and fragments come morning. Thus the Mnemovores remain unknown and largely undocumented despite having lived among humanity for millennia.

The damage they do is not completely undocumented, but it is rarely investigated. Those who have their minds plundered as they sleep remember nothing of the attack, and in most cases have little idea that anything is missing. You cannot remember you have forgotten something, after all. The loss of small memories is easily explained in the chaos of modern life—lost keys, forgotten phone numbers, missed birthdays, these things aren't noticed. Meanwhile, the loss of deeper or older memories are blamed by kin and kine alike on the ravages of time: the passing of seasons causing old memories to fade away, details to be lost, and the spaces filled in from other memories, the best we can recall. Our subconscious, out of habit or self-defense, sews together a patchwork to explain the present and what we think we remember of the past. The soft suffusion of nostalgia may be simply a survival response to the attacks.

The Mnemovores target some people for much greater feasting, and these victims suffer much greater and more noticeable losses. It's easy to identify them as suffering more common complaints: geriatric memory loss, psychogenic fugues, early onset Alzheimer's, subconscious and unconscious repression, and so on. Vampires have their own name for their suffering—the Fog of Eternity—and the minds of the Kindred are the most popular of all the Mnemovores' feeding grounds.

There are other things that cause the Fog, of course, but that just makes it easier for the Mnemovores to feed unnoticed. When memories die so often and so quickly, a predator taking some goes unnoticed. What's more, vampires typically have much greater and older memories than mortals. Even with the Fog, they may remember events from centuries past, and their memories are held so loosely they come out in a rush, engorging the Mnemovore in seconds. The other reason vampires are favored prey is opportunity: vampires sleep a lot, and sleep more deeply than any mortal. Havens are rarely so well protected that this opportunity is worth passing up.

Mortal minds are, however, better for harvesting the kind of information the Mnemovores need most, such as how best to hide themselves among humans, how to get into human houses while the humans sleep, and how to survive the general passage of modern times. A mixed diet is the best of both worlds and provides food around the clock: feeding upon vampires during the day and mortals during the night.

Mnemovores must feed constantly because their minds hold memories even more loosely than those of vampires. Do they have any kind of "memory" at all? It often seems that as soon as the Mnemovores use a piece of information they have garnered they lose it. This makes a Mnemovore a scatterbrain: easily distracted and easily led, leaping from one prey to whichever one next catches her eye. If she steals the memory of her victim's loved one, she then likely goes and feeds upon that person: he is fresh in her mind. If she learns about a hospital, she seeks it out and begins feeding there. If she continues to take similar memories, some things get reinforced. If she keeps repeating patterns she keeps the memories of those patterns, allowing her to become a better and better hunter.

In the most part, however, the Mnemovore's knowledge is hopelessly fleeting. A Mnemovore is not an idiot by any stretch—she retains a strong survival instinct, and she is reasonable enough to make deals and hold conversations—but she cannot hold information or knowledge for any great period of time. If prevented from feeding for a significant period, the Mnemovore loses vocabulary and understanding of basic concepts. She returns to nothing but a mindless predator that can remember nothing except to feed.

This is the Mnemovores' curse, the rules that come with their power. Despite having the ability to steal the very makeup of the minds of Kindred and kine alike, they cannot use this power to their full advantage. The secrets they could use to command and control much of the world trickle away like sand in an hourglass. Even so, they remain extremely dangerous, and their weakness is the vampire's blessing. If the Mnemovores could retain what they learned, they would soon rule the whole world, and leave the human race nothing but mindless zombies, slaved to their will.

Quotes: *Tell me everything.*

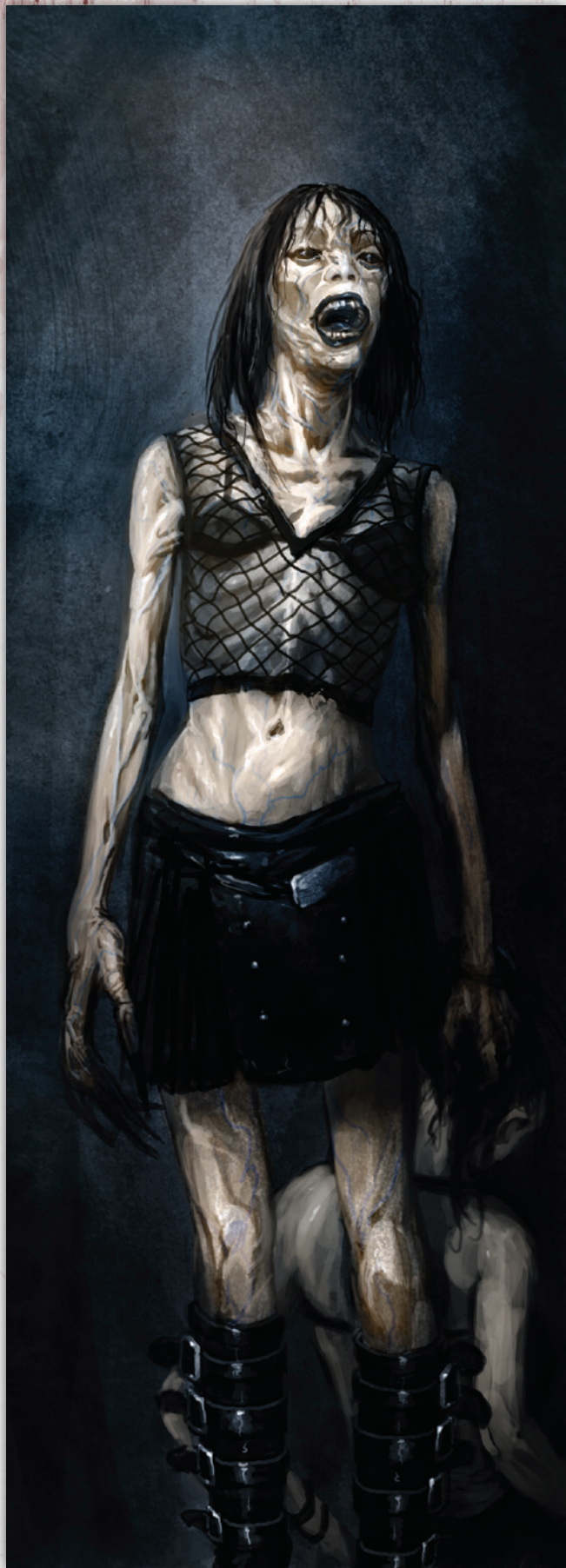
I've lost my keys. Where are my keys? I've lost my keys. Where are my keys? I've lost my keys...

Description: Once a victim loses her last vestige of memory, she quickly changes to resemble her predator. Her skin becomes cracked and parchment-gray. Her fingers grow narrow and extend into long, spiderlike tendrils. Lacking any knowledge or concern for fashion, the Mnemovore typically wears the filthy remnants of the clothes she was wearing when she died. She speaks in whispers and moves in silence. Her eyes slowly become solid black globes. Otherwise she retains much of the appearance she had in life, and from a distance will still be mistaken for one of the living.

Background: Records suggest the Mnemovores have been around as long as the Kindred and their origins are equally unknown, and likely equally unknowable. As with the vampires, there was probably an original Mnemovore, an ancient precursor that passed his curse onto his prey, but the Mnemovores have no lore or myth about such an individual. Unlike the vampires, they seem to have no need (and perhaps no ability) to build any real culture or society among themselves. Instead they simply shift through the ranks of Kindred and kine, progressing back and forth from feeding to hunger, their growing population kept in check by the ever-increasing difficulty of catching their prey unawares.

Vampires that have discovered the Mnemovores have many speculations. As the memory thieves feed so much upon vampires, it may be that they have a parasitical relationship with the Kindred, and could never have arisen without them. It may even be a symbiotic relationship—is there perhaps some memory the vampires are better off not knowing? Do the Mnemovores strip away memories that need to be cut back, like old bark off a tree?

Storytelling Hints: Although clearly unnatural, the Mnemovores are more pathetic than scary in appearance. What is scary about them is what they can do. Memory is our most precious possession and the idea of losing it is terrifying on a very deep and personal level. It's also an incredibly powerful attack, as it leaves its victims unable to remember their attacker or even being attacked—they may even believe everyone else has had their memories altered, rather than them. Memory alteration can be the ultimate attack, allowing someone to be killed and at the same time their entire existence to be erased from the memories of their friends. The Mnemovores would have trouble doing something like that but players may think of it on their own. That's the power of memory alteration—once it becomes possible, it very quickly conjures up some truly horrible scenarios. The terror comes from your players' own imaginations, and there is nothing scarier than that.



Mental Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 1, Manipulation 1, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Varies, see below

Physical Skills: Brawl 2 (Grappling), Larceny 1, Stealth 4

Social Skills: Intimidation 2, Persuasion 2

Merits: Danger Sense, Fresh Start, Fleet of Foot 2

Willpower: 8

Virtue: Prudence. Despite their hunger, the Mnemovores are cautious, patient hunters.

Vice: Envy. It enrages the Mnemovores that they cannot retain memories the way their prey can.

Health: 7

Initiative: 6

Defense: 2

Speed: 11

Disciplines: Dominate 2, Obfuscate 2

Supernatural Powers

Out of Sight, Out of Mind: If a Mnemovore remains out of sight for five full turns, any character who previously saw her must make a reflexive Wits + Resolve roll to remember he ever saw the Mnemovore. If a group of individuals have seen the creature, anyone who makes the roll and remembers seeing the Mnemovore can remind his fellows, who don't need to roll again—it all comes back. Once a character has made a successful roll, he does not need to roll again to remember the Mnemovore.

Thief of Knowledge: The Mental skills of a Mnemovore depend entirely upon what were its most recent meals. Typically, a Mnemovore has between 4 and 13 dots.

Steal Memory: After a successful grapple attack (6 dice), the Mnemovore may use its action to drain the memory of its target. The Storyteller rolls the creature's Wits + Dexterity – the target's Resolve. This is an extended action and each roll takes ten minutes. Each success the Mnemovore gains causes the victim 1 point of Bashing damage. For every 3 successes the Mnemovore gains, the victim loses 1 dot from one of her Mental skills (Storyteller's choice) and the Mnemovore gains a dot in the same skill. A dramatic failure means the Mnemovore may never drain more memories from this subject and must seek a new one. If the victim has no Mental skills left to steal, the Mnemovore may steal a dot of Intelligence instead. If the victim is reduced to 0 dots in Intelligence in this manner, she dies and rises the next night as a Mnemovore with no Mental skill dots—and a desperate urge to feed.

Healing: Mnemovores can heal injuries by using dots in Mental Skills they have gained: 1 dot for a point of Bashing damage, 2 for a point of Lethal damage and 5 for a point of Aggravated damage. A Mnemovore, although undead, has no vulnerability to sunlight and isn't any more vulnerable to fire than a human.

Penanggalan

KD: No. I should have known better.

N: Blaming yourself doesn't fix anything.

KD: I shouldn't have taken the job. I shouldn't.

N: I wouldn't have turned it down. It sounds like it would have been a wonderful opportunity.

KD: I guess. Sheila was so supportive. She's always been so brave, but undertaking a move so far into her pregnancy? What kind of inconsiderate asshole am I?

N: OK.

KD: All I saw was the raise. I mean, living in one place is pretty much like living in another, right? How much difference could there be between Kuala Lumpur and California? Besides, Sheila always wanted to see more of the world. Hah.

N: But you made the move OK.

KD: It was nice, at first. Sheila overexerted herself. How could she not? Here she is, six months in, carried off to halfway around the world and expected to get settled while she feels like a beached whale. Meanwhile, I'm happily setting up my office and ignoring all the signs. Just believing her when she says everything is all right.

N: It's easy to see things like that in hindsight, though.

KD: I mean, I tried to do something. I got her help. But I fucked that up, too.

N: Help?

KD: Arundhati. Indian woman. Housekeeper.

N: And she didn't work out?

KD: I don't know. Sheila didn't like her to start with. You know how women get all unreasonable and weird when they get pregnant?

N: I suppose.

KD: She kept telling me Arundhati smelled like vinegar.

N: And that was why she didn't like her.

KD: That was it, start to finish. Easy enough to say, "Well of course she's ill, it's just the pregnancy." Anyway, Sheila got over it. She got to be pretty good friends with Arundhati.

N: So what-?

KD: I started getting e-mails. About a week before she was due, the first one. I ignored it. Thought it was spam. Then I got a second one, and I read it. I don't even know why I did. But I did. From a doctor. Called Heim. It turns out he was an obstetrician.

N: And then you replied to it.

KD: Yeah. He told me that he was afraid for my wife. That the housekeeper was dangerous.

N: And you believed him?

KD: I still don't know. But there must have been something, because I called the guy. And I said I'd meet him after work.

N: What was he like?

KD: He was crazy. But then I knew that from the e-mails. He looked like Santa Claus' skinny brother, with the rosy cheeks and the white beard. He told me some weird-ass fairy story.

N: About the monster.

KD: The penanggal. There's this woman. She has an affair. It ends badly. She gets-get this-pickled in vinegar and her head gets separated from her body. With all the organs flying around after it. And it's like this flesh-eating monster.

N: And this was leading to-?

KD: And the point was, this guy was convinced that Arundhati was just like that, a monster. Some sort of vampire. And I just laughed at him. Laughed in his face.

N: You didn't buy it.

KD: Not to begin with. Until I went home that night. The story must have got to me. I started watching Arundhati. She was perfect, really perfect. Just pottering around, doing all the stuff Sheila couldn't do, and most of the stuff she could. But she really did smell of vinegar. Really.

[pause]

That wasn't the thing that started creeping me out. She licked her lips. I mean, whenever she was standing next to Sheila, she licked her lips. Dr. Heim told me that these penanggalan wanted the blood of pregnant women. And... and... babies. And it was like she was looking at Sheila like she was... hungry.

N: What did you do?

KD: Nothing. I mean, I'm sane. I'd been working too hard, I told myself. I'd just let the crazy old man spook me.

N: But you saw him again.

KD: He called me. A couple of days later. And I was going to hang up on him, but he really meant it. You could hear it. I was humoring him, I suppose.

[pause]

I met him again in KLOC Park. He wouldn't come to the house. Said Arundhati would recognize him. He arrived, like, right on time, like on the dot. He was really calm, all smiles. He was joyful, he said. Glad that we would do what needed to be done to save my wife and eliminate the threat of the creature.

N: The housekeeper?

KD: He meant Arundhati, yeah. I started to realize that he was serious. He really thought she was a monster. And he meant to kill her. He had this elaborate plan, and I listened and nodded and thought, you are batshit insane.

N: And you still played along?

KD: I thought I might be able to stop this. Show him she was just a-you know, housekeeper. Or maybe stop him. He was an old guy. I reckoned I could handle him.

[pause]

Turns out the following evening Sheila went into labor. Rebecca. Eight pounds, one ounce, and beautiful, and born so fast there was no time to get to the hospital. Arundhati was a lifesaver. Rebecca couldn't have been born without her.

[pause]

But she had the baby in her hands and she handed the baby to Sheila for the first time and-I saw it, I saw it-she licked Sheila's blood from her hand.

N: And the doctor was there?

KD: He got there at sunset, just after Rebecca was born, Doctor Heim, in his suit, supposedly to give Sheila and Rebecca a check-up. Arundhati wouldn't even acknowledge he was there. She just walked out of the room and got her coat to go out.

[pause]

So Sheila and Rebecca were crashed out pretty soon after the first feed. So Sheila couldn't see what I was doing, which was crazy and wrong and dangerous, but I couldn't help thinking about how long her tongue was, how she closed her eyes when she licked up the blood, and Heim was playing with that.

He had this bag of broken glass and, like, thorns from some rosebush or something, and he started lining the windowsill and doorway to our room with this stuff. And he said, you need to wait here. She'll come back, he said. And he pulled out an axe. He gave me an axe. He left me there, dumb with the half-realization of what it was I was thinking of doing. And went to follow her. And left me. Holding an axe.

N: And she came back.

KD: I don't think I'll ever fully believe it. She came back. The sight of her-Arundhati's head-the housekeeper's head-floating there, and all her guts just dangling below her like that, sort of pulsing and... dripping.

[pause]

She floated in through the windowsill. And the stomach and the guts sort of lifted out of the way of the broken glass. And then Rebecca sort of made that little quacking noise that newborn babies make, and I just went crazy and ran at the thing with the axe.

[pause]

She opened her mouth and screamed at me and I was whacked against the wall like I'd been hit with a sledgehammer.

And then Sheila woke up and I was there trying to get up and Sheila screamed, and Arundhati started to descend on her, and then I was up, I don't know how, and the next thing I knew I had blood all over me, not my blood, and Sheila was in my arms sobbing and the baby was crying and Arundhati was gone and we were all right.

N: And that was it.

KD: Yeah. That was it. About two hours later, Heim came back and said that we wouldn't see her again. I told him we didn't want to see him again, either. He understood.

N: That was the end of it?

KD: No. Sheila got sick. The bite. It was infected or something. Rebecca will never know her mother. I got a transfer back to the New York office after the funeral.

N: And this is why-

KD: She followed us back to America. I saw her once, in New York. Sheila came for her daughter, head and guts and coming for Becca.

[pause]

She keeps coming back. I can't stay in one place for very long anymore. I can't kill her, I can't, but I can't let her have our daughter. So we have to run.

During the day, the penanggal hides in plain sight. He generally works in fields that allow him to be close to victims who can't really fight back: Children. Old people. The infirm. Her preferred food sources: pregnant women and young children. Many work as midwives, obstetricians, pediatricians, nurses. Aside from the telltale vinegar scent, the only markers of his true nature are ephemeral. Subtle hints of behavior are often the most warning a victim will get.

At night, the penanggal's head comes loose from its mooring, detaching from the body at the neck. It floats up, dragging the slick and glistening viscera out of the torso and leaving them dripping, dangling as it flies in search of prey. The penanggal glides along at an unnaturally quick speed, able to outrun or catch most mortals with ease. His hair might be long enough to take on the shape of wings, but cutting a penanggal's hair has no effect upon his ability to fly. The penanggal's hair and organs are prehensile and surprisingly strong. When he chooses to physically grab his prey, he can do so by lashing out with his intestines, wrapping them around his victim and dragging the poor wretch to a waiting, sharp-toothed maw.

The lair of a penanggal is always well hidden. It usually includes a vinegar bath, used when the penanggal returns, to help shrink the swollen and tender organs so they may be packed back inside the creature's body, the source of the smell that always accompanies the creature.

The penanggalan originally hail from Malaysia (although a similar creature, the manananggal, exists in the Philippines). Having said that, the infection they inflict upon their victims has caused their curse to travel far afield. Unlike many other undead monsters, these creatures can and do travel, many of which seek some sort of release from their bizarre condition, or have a need to get away from loved ones who might realize what they have become, or have an enemy or a victim to pursue. Relatively few penanggalan exist, but they can exist *anywhere*. The only obstacle to true mobility is the need to feed and the need to preserve the body while the creature hunts. As a penanggal's Humanity falls, he increasingly feels the need to feed upon more innocent victims.

A penanggal might even fall in with a coterie of vampires: the creature can easily be mistaken for a vampire from an exotic bloodline and has the same hunting grounds. One might even conceivably become involved in the vampire politics of a region, although his truly hideous form may not be welcome in the presence of even the most depraved of Princes.

A penanggal character is created in much the same way as a Kindred character. Apply the template as follows:

- Add 1 dot to either Dexterity or Presence.
- Take 3 dots in Disciplines, chosen from Mengilai (see below), Auspex, Celerity, Dominate, Nightmare, Obfuscate, Resilience and Vigor. Disciplines cost new dots x 6 experience points to raise.
- Blood Potency begins at 1 dot. As with Kindred characters, Merit dots can be spent to increase Blood Potency. Characters separated from their bodies (see below) can use Vitae to increase physical dice pools. Every sunset, a penanggal loses 2 Vitae from his system.
- Penanggal blood does not cause blood addiction, and cannot be used to create ghouls or Vinculi. Penanggalan can, however, be bound under Vinculi and can become addicted to Kindred Vitae.
- Penanggalan can buy the Haven Merit, but not the Herd merit.
- The character's Morality changes to Humanity. A penanggal has no Humanity-based dice pool cap on social interaction when in human form, but when separated from his body, cannot use Social Skills at all, except to intimidate (and the creature's horrific form grants a +3 bonus to Intimidation dice pools).
- The penanggal always triggers the Predator's Taint, even when whole.
- A penanggal must preserve his body when he separates from it (see below). Formaldehyde and vinegar are a bit old-fashioned these days, and make a penanggal smell very strange; a freezer leaves a body very cold. However he preserves the body, the method of preservation leaves a taint of some kind, meaning a penanggal always suffers a -1 penalty to all social dice pools when dealing with the living.
- A penanggal's aura always looks like a vampire's aura, whether or not he is separated from his body.

Separation

The penanggal is defined by his ability to separate his head from his body, and must be detached to make use of many of his abilities, including his intestinal lashes and even his fanged bite. When whole, a penanggal is no more powerful than an ordinary living human.

It costs the penanggal nothing to perform the separation, but the creature must expend 1 point of Vitae to reattach the two portions. It takes a couple of minutes, during which time the vampire is both unable to use his powers and as vulnerable to damage as a human.

- A penanggal may not separate or use any of his supernatural abilities in sunlight. If still separated from his body and in sunlight, the monster suffers Aggravated damage in the same way as one of the Kindred.
- While separated from her body, the penanggal can Frenzy, for all the same reasons that one of the Kindred may do so: fear, hunger or rage.
- A penanggal can use Vitae and has access to Disciplines only when separated from her body.
- While separated, the penanggal's body is extremely vulnerable. If the penanggal does not take steps to preserve her body—either through refrigeration or immersion in some sort of preservative fluid (like vinegar or formaldehyde)—the body suffers a point of Aggravated damage over the course of the night. The body is helpless, and if someone destroys it, the penanggal meets Final Death at sunrise. It is more or less essential that the penanggal has a suitable Haven with all the accouterments necessary for her existence, including an inconspicuous method of ingress and egress while she is separated.
- In her human guise, a penanggal moves as quickly as any other human. When she leaves her body behind, however, she becomes preternaturally fast. When detached, the penanggal's Speed rating increases as her Species Factor rises by 2, to 7.
- While separated, a penanggal takes only Bashing damage from firearms, does not suffer Wound Penalties, and does not need to roll to avoid falling unconscious when all his Health boxes are filled with Bashing or Lethal damage.
- A penanggal's bite does not grant the ecstasy of the Kiss, and the victim must be grappled, unconscious or immobilized in some other way for the vampire to be able to steal blood. The monster's bite can be used as an attack, which causes Lethal damage.
- The penanggal's internal organs are terribly strong. They can pick up and manipulate objects as nimbly as a human. The creature's guts can be used as a vicious weapon, and deliver Bashing damage with a +1 dice pool bonus.

The Wasting

When a penanggal feeds, she leaves her prey in the grip of a terrible, debilitating disease. The illness drags on, slowly killing the person as surely as if the creature had torn him to shreds. The player of a character who suffers more than 4 points of Lethal damage from a penanggal's bite must roll Stamina + Resolve – the penanggal's Blood Potency to resist being afflicted with the Wasting.

Other supernatural characters get to add their Blood Potency equivalent when resisting the Wasting, so, for example, mages add Gnosis, werewolves add Primal-Urge and Changelings add

Wyrd. Prometheans don't have to roll at all—the disease doesn't affect them. Vampires are immune to the Wasting, too.

The Wasting's victims grow weaker at a dizzying pace.

Once per night of game time, the player makes a Stamina + Resolve roll to resist the effects of the disease. If the roll fails, the character suffers 2 points of Aggravated damage. Success simply holds back the disease. The Wasting, as a supernatural disease, cannot be “cured” in the traditional sense, and a character cannot beat the disease by enduring it.

If at any time the victim rolls a dramatic failure, the victim dies and becomes one of these flying nightmares, cursed with a taste for human blood and damned to stalk the night as a gory monstrosity. If the victim's Health track is ever completely filled with Aggravated damage, he simply dies.

The only way to cure the Wasting is to destroy the penanggal and feed the victim at least part of the creature's liver.

ARE PENANGGALAN KINDRED?

Just as with the Formosae, the game systems used to present the penanggalan are very similar to those used for the Kindred, with Blood Potency, Disciplines and Vitae.

But this is the part where we point out that they're very different creatures that happen to have some similar characteristics. Really, the systems are only so similar because it's pointless making up a completely new set of rules for something when we already have rules that model this stuff perfectly well.

The point being, even though the systems are similar, the phenomena they abstractly represent are different. So no, the penanggalan aren't Kindred.

Mengilai

The scream of the penanggal, the *Mengilai*, pierces the night as the creature feeds. And as the creature grows in power, the supernatural power of the creature's scream becomes a danger to those who would hunt it.

Kindred cannot learn *Mengilai*.

• *The Hidden Voice*

In some legends, the penanggal's scream is a sign of safety. It has a sort of reverse-Doppler effect. The further away the creature is, the louder its scream. The only time you are in danger is when you cannot hear it at all.

It's not true. With the Hidden Voice, the penanggal can cause her shriek to come from another location.

Cost: None

Dice Pool: Presence + Expression + *Mengilai*

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Not only does the creature's voice pinpoint its location, the penanggal cannot use any Mengilai power in the next turn.

Failure: The penanggal's voice is not thrown. Its shriek is a clear marker to its position.

Success: The penanggal can throw her voice up to ten yards per success achieved on the roll.

Exceptional Success: The penanggal can throw her voice as far as she can see.

•• *Curse of Babel*

This ability leaves the subject mentally shattered, unable to speak or form coherent thoughts. In the past, victims were generally diagnosed as hysterical and treated accordingly. The curse renders the victim unable to describe her attacker in the immediate aftermath and increases the likelihood that her eventual descriptions will be taken as the ravings of a broken mind.

The subject must be within earshot and able to hear the penanggal's shriek.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Presence + Expression + Mengilai – target's Composure + Blood Potency

Action: Instant and contested

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The power does not work, and affects the penanggal himself for the rest of the scene.

Failure: The penanggal fails to gain more successes than the victim. The power has no effect.

Success: For each success the penanggal's player rolls, the victim is unable to describe the penanggal or explain the creature's actions in any coherent fashion for one hour.

Exceptional Success: There is no additional effect beyond added duration of the power's effect.

••• *Unhinged Wail*

The sight of a penanggal is enough to make one question one's sanity, but the shriek of a penanggal can temporarily drive a target to the brink of madness.

Cost: 1 Vitae, 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Presence + Intimidation + Mengilai – target's Composure + Blood Potency

Action: Instant and contested

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The penanggal suffers the effects of a mild Derangement and cannot attempt to use this power on the target for the rest of the night.

Failure: The power has no effect.

Success: The victim is afflicted with a mild Derangement for a number of hours equal to the number of successes rolled. The specific Derangement is subject to the Storyteller's discretion.

Exceptional Success: As a success, but the subject also loses a point of Willpower.

•••• *Shattering Cry*

The scream of the penanggal takes on a physical force, violently slamming into its target and causing actual damage. The victim's ears bleed, and they suffer Bashing damage from the creature's shriek. The target must be within earshot, though it works just as well against a deaf target as one with perfect hearing.

Cost: 1 Vitae, 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Presence + Intimidation + Mengilai – target's Stamina

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The power damages the penanggal instead, causing 1 level of Bashing damage.

Failure: The power has no effect.

Success: The victim suffers 1 Bashing damage per success rolled.

Exceptional Success: There is no additional effect: extra successes are their own reward.

••••• *Invisible Tongue*

The shriek of the penanggal resonates at exactly the right frequency, creating a conduit between the target and the penanggal, allowing the penanggal to steal the victim's Vitae from a distance. The Vitae is siphoned through a vortex of sound, flying through the air to the penanggal's waiting mouth.

Cost: 1 Vitae, 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Presence + Intimidation + Mengilai – target's Stamina

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The power damages the penanggal, causing 2 levels of Bashing damage.

Failure: The power has no effect.

Success: The subject gains 1 Vitae per success, causing the victim to lose an equal amount of Vitae and take appropriate Lethal damage.

Exceptional Success: There is no additional effect beyond the extra Vitae stolen.

Destroying a Penanggal

The penanggalan exist in a strange half-state between being truly alive and merely undead. Malaysian peasants used to line the windows of their homes with thorns and broken glass to snag and tear at the hanging viscera as a penanggal entered their homes. They are resilient, but there are a few ways to permanently kill them.

The first is simple: Fire. Fire causes Aggravated damage to the penanggalan, as the ultimate purifier. The sun also damages penanggalan kept from the safety of their bodies in much the same way as it hurts Kindred. The final way involves stuffing the abandoned body of the creature with glass and other sharp objects, causing the returning penanggal to suffer a hideous and painful death as her organs are punctured and torn inside her body.

Arundhati anak perempuan Ameretat

Quotes: Oh, how lovely! How far along are you?

I only have your wife's best interests in mind, sir.

Description: By day, Arundhati appears to be a beautiful, dark-skinned Indian girl in her twenties, with long, lustrous black hair. She is friendly and even charming, despite the smell of vinegar that surrounds her even immediately after a shower. When speaking, whether in English or Malay, her accent is soft and lyrical.

Background: Arundhati was raised in Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia, by devoutly Islamic parents. As she grew up, she rebelled by abandoning her parents' religion and seeking her own path. She fell in with a group of *ahli sibir perempuan*, witches who drew her into their own dark arts. Arundhati made a pact with their demonic patron, but ran astray of the demon's requirements, damning herself to existence as one of the penanggalan.

Storytelling Hints: In human form, Arundhati is subtle, fading into the background. She is good at her work and friendly. Her favored victims often love her, and it should be no different with the player characters. The idea that this utterly pleasant girl could be the twisted horror screaming in the night should be completely beyond imagining.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 2, Medicine 2, Occult 3(Witchcraft)

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Brawl 2, Drive 1, Stealth 2

Social Skills: Animal Ken 1 (Dogs), Empathy 2, Expression 2, Intimidation 3, Persuasion 1, Subterfuge 4 (Con Jobs)

Merits: Haven 4 (Security), Linguistics (English), Resources 3

Willpower: 6

Humanity: 4



Virtue: Fortitude. Arundhati knows she can weather any storm and survive any complication, if she just holds on.

Vice: Gluttony. She cannot resist an appetizing morsel. Arundhati's quite the epicurean, though her idea of food doesn't exactly mesh with the mainstream.

Health: 7

Initiative: 6

Defense: 3

Size: 5

Speed: 10/12 (when detached)

Blood Potency: 2

Disciplines: Celerity 2, Mengilai 4

Vitae/per Turn: 11/1

Weapons/Attacks

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Bite	L	4
Intestinal Lash	1 (B)	5

Ragged=men

The verses you're looking for are not in the Testament. They come from The Testimony of the Plague Angel, part of a deuterocanonical body of work. Using Selisarius' translation of the Greek we read (Testimony 13: 23-5):

Of the rag(ragged) men that walk as we do, be
not afraid. I have countenanced that they are not
Of the Lord, but of the Kindred. xiv Shall not the Lord
Deliver us from the profit of our own Sins? Shall not
The Lord preserve us from all that is not of His plan?
xv If we are the shepherds, we need fear not the weakness
Of the flesh of the sheep

Examining the Latin translations reveals that when the Prophet speaks of the rag men he uses the Latin word *pannulus*, meaning crumpled or worn, as opposed to *dilapidare* which would mean torn or ruined. Significantly, *pannulus* is used again in Heptateuch 12: 33 where the Monachus states:

And feed not on those tainted or unclean lest ye be
Unclean. Those who become Unclean must be sent into
Exile, lest the ragged (*pannulum*) ones walk amongst you.

Comparing these usages with the descriptions in the *Journal de Provins* you sent me, I must agree with your conclusion that the *liche-blanc* sighted in medieval Provins were likely indeed to be these "ragged men". The author of the *journal* makes specific use of *pannulus* to describe their form despite writing in Middle French, which indicates he was indeed working from the apostles. As to whether the *liche-blanc* correspond to the several other citations you list, that is impossible, at this time, to conclude either way. Nor can we conclude what the rag-men may be. Decarre suggests that Longinus is poetically referring to that which are more commonly dubbed "the Larvae" although the Proclamations of Plumes agree (as do I) that this is ridiculous. The author of the *Journal* believes his "white leper-skins with mouths of/like snakes, wide open" are Longinus' ragged-men, but Longinus did not see need to specify.

The ragged men and the *liche-blanc* have no special merit among the creatures of darkness, they reflect only the lessons that the Lord has laid before us, if we would only learn. This is why Longinus saw no need to be more specific. As for the lesson, we need look no further than the same Heptateuch (3: 1-3), where Longinus begins:

*Arimath, as I have told you, it is our duty to feed
As the wolves feed. ii but now I say to you to act with
Watchfulness. We must be as the shepherd and take
The best of the flock for our harvest, not the least.*

This is a lesson we have long forgotten. to take the best of the flock. Once, we dined on kings and queens, and the Lord God blessed us for winnowing His flock at the highest levels. Now, we feed on whores and sinners, and the Lord God sees our weakness and our sin. He sees us shunning the sacred duty with which He has charged us, and He has punished us accordingly, as he punishes all who turn against His will and ignore his commandments. These "worm-men" you say you witnessed may indeed be the ragged men or something like them, but it is all the same: they are our sin made flesh, and I am not at all surprised that you found them amongst the spiritually derelict. Nor should we react to exterminate these creatures—truly, instead, we should welcome them, for they winnow us as the Lord would have us winnow the kine. Blessed be he who is burned by the fire of God, for he becomes only stronger in the fires. Blessed be he who is consumed by the hunger of God, for he leads others to their own strength.

Truth

The ragged-men are not men at all, but an unnatural parasite with a bizarre lifecycle, a lifecycle that has evolved—or was once made—to make perfect use of the vampires around it.

The ragged-men begin as microscopic larvae that live in stagnant water. In cities, they most commonly inhabit sewers and other unhygienic areas. In this form they are typically imbibed by homeless people, indigents and the very poor. When drunk, the larvae lodge in the throat or stomach of the drinker. There they burrow into the victim's flesh and begin to transform into their next stage, a tiny nymph-form with minuscule wings. This transformation causes the victim's throat to become incredibly irritated, resulting in a great thirst and a terrible wracking cough. Victims are driven to seek vast quantities of fluid to ease both symptoms, typically leading to the ingestion of more larvae.

As the pain becomes more severe, the sufferers seek out some kind of treatment. This drives them to move among other people in the city, seeking charity, alcohol or medical attention. As they do so, their coughs expel the now full-grown nymphs (and the human victim eventually recovers). These flying creatures have a lifespan of only a few hours, but that is usually enough to land on the skin of other victims. The nymphs seem able to select healthy people and, it is suspected, subjects more appealing to vampire tastes. Even if this is not the case, the nymphs immediately take steps to make the victim more likely to be bitten. As they burrow through the skin, they produce a reddening effect, making the skin look ruddy and young. The infection soon causes fever, which in this case gives the victim a healthy glow. The eyes widen, the cheeks redden, and the skin pales, exposing veins and arteries. Finally the nymphs reach the bloodstream and lay their eggs. The presence of these causes the blood to thin and the heart rate to soar, forcing the blood around the body at top

speed. Some vampires even think it makes the victim's heart beat louder. The combined effect renders the mortal the most tantalizing meal imaginable, and vampires rarely resist. The lust is rewarded, too, as the blood tastes sweet and rich.

Once the vampire feeds upon a carrier, the parasite's lifecycle enters its most potent stage. Inside the vampire, the nymph eggs hatch into tiny, hungry worms. The ragged-man is a supernatural creature, so these creatures survive perfectly well within the vampire's unnatural flesh. There they sit and grow, feeding off the blood the host provides. To ensure an ample supply, the presence of the worms drives the vampire to be constantly hungry. Yet for all he drinks, he gains a minimum of sustenance, for the worms take the lion's share for their own. Victims fall into Frenzy often, due to anger as well as hunger as they become increasingly crazed and frustrated by their condition.

The worms drink and grow ever larger. As they grow they also fight, until only one worm survives to take nourishment. It will remain in the belly of its host, drinking and growing for up to a month. At the end of this cycle, the worm can be up to thirty feet long and as thick as a cigarette. To keep itself hidden, it coils tighter and tighter within its host, but if it remains any longer the belly or chest may swell and reveal the source of the vampire's suffering. Killing the vampire (or tearing it open) always kills the worm if it is still immature, but after only a few days of feeding it is strong enough to attempt to enter its final, weirdest stage.

When the worm reaches maturity, it begins to gnaw at the inside of the vampire's stomach, causing a reaction as if the host has just eaten food. The vampire immediately begins to vomit messily and bloodily, as is normal after eating, but then is horrified to discover she cannot stop, and that unnatural white streams of mucus are also spooling from her mouth. The vomiting lasts half an hour, leaving

the vampire exhausted and weakened from the wracking spasms. Some even bleed to Final Death as they expel the enormous fleshy worm from their throats.

Worse is yet to come. When the vomiting stops, the vampire realizes she has regurgitated a pile of white rubbery material bigger than her head. If she has the stomach to watch, she witnesses the pile coalescing into a little humanoid form. The shape of this creature will approximately match that of its host—the same height, weight and body type—but remains nothing but a gooey mass of white-yellow tubes resembling a collection of bound, coiled rags. Two arms and two legs stick out in an almost humanoid pattern but are in fact weak, fleshy tendrils ending in curved barbs. At the top of this horrid form, where the face should be, is a massive sucking mouth rimmed with hooked teeth. The ragged-man still needs to feed.

This membrane homunculus has only hours before it dissolves into liquid and dies. It needs to feed as much as possible and as quickly as possible, and then reach a body of water for its final transformation. It flops forward on its tendril legs, half like a man, half like an undulating worm, shooting its fanged sucker out at anything ripe with blood. Typically it falls upon its host, who is now too weak and shock-ridden to offer much defense, but it will crawl far and fast for more. Inside its fleshy tubes are millions of eggs, and for each drop of blood it finds, a few hundred germinate. When the ragged-man reaches water, it collapses into it, releasing the fertilized eggs back into the environment. Most of these eggs will die before being drunk by a new host, but not all of them, and so the cycle begins again.

This final feeding is the most desperate. The creature is weak and if someone can kill it before it reaches water, its eggs will all die from exposure. What it lacks in strength it makes up for in speed, however. It leaps like a pouncing lion, throwing its fanged maw at its target's throat or chest. Its teeth are razor-edged and its sucker is relentless, but if it meets any great resistance it will detach after just a few mouthfuls and slough away to find an easier victim. If the little monster's victim is helpless it will take all it can, leaving behind a rotting corpse and no explanations.

Ragged-men are not unknown by vampires, but vampires rarely discuss them or investigate their presence. Few mortals like to admit they have caught an embarrassing, unsanitary disease, especially one they suspect they caught due to their own carelessness. In vampire society, where almost everyone is looking for the first sign of weakness as a signal to attack, owning up to a disease—a mistake like this—is extremely dangerous. When the worm-man-thing eventually appears and wreaks havoc, vampires become even less likely to explain things, as they do not want to be seen as to blame for the monster now feeding upon coterie or covenant-mates. And if discovered, fear of contagion makes the vampires pariahs, if not targets for blood hunts. Powered

by fear and shame, speaking of the disease has become taboo, and thus ignorance allows it to spread ever wider.

Another reason for the stigma is that some vampires believe only vampires that prey upon indigents can catch the disease. Although the homeless and poor can spread the nymphs to anyone, they most often cough among their own types, and the disease is most commonly spread to “alley-cats” as a result. This introduces a whole other layer of social stigma to the disease, with vampires able to label it as a just punishment for “dirty habits.”

Lost in ignorance, most vampires know only that they become terribly ill, are unable to feed properly and it is almost certainly their own fault. Then the victim produces a hideous monster from inside himself. Panic is inevitable. Guilt, shame and terror usually follow. Superstition is also rife. Some vampires believe the ragged-man is their Beast—after all, it is a wild, blood-sucking beast—and wonder whether, after its departure, they are cured. Others see it as a sign that their Beast has triumphed and abandoned its mortal shell, no longer needing to pretend to be human in order to feed its bloodlust. A number of religious vampires have taught that the ragged-man is an ectoplasmic creature manufactured of pure sin, loosed upon the world because the vampire was not true to the Testament and the Word of God. Those that come to the latter two conclusions often kill themselves after the eruption, or adopt such dangerous behavior that their death soon follows.

This is the real danger of the ragged-men. If fought, they lack any great strength or stamina, and guns and blades can cut them to pieces with relative ease. Preventing them from feeding after they take their humanoid form will quickly break their lifecycle. Likewise, Críac magics and Theban blessings might exist that purify a vampire's flesh, killing the worm while it lives inside its host. But while fear, shame and ignorance remain omnipresent, these facts lie undiscovered and the disease persists and thrives.

Like any organism, the ragged-men's numbers increase as much as possible, and the more the numbers rise, the faster they breed and spread. Given a few years of uninterrupted cycles, a single ragged-man can spread its infection across an entire metropolis, contaminating a quarter to a third of all vessels on the Rack, and thence, nearly every vampire that feeds there. These situations can quickly reach a crisis point, with a whole city of vampires driven to feed but unable to get what they need. Breaches in the Masquerade are likely, and the laws of hunting grounds are forgotten or discarded in the desperate hunt for untainted sources. Chaos reigns and even the most tyrannical Prince or fearsome Hound will be unable to contain it.

Systems

When a vampire feeds upon a carrier of the nymphs, the vampire gains 1 extra point of Vitae for every Health point of damage he causes. The blood of infected human carriers is hot, sweet and incredibly potent.

This increase holds true only while the vampire is healthy: once the worms are born, the carriers taste bitter and rotten. The worms need no further competition within their host.

After feeding upon an infected mortal, the vampire must make a reflexive Stamina + Resolve test with a penalty equal to the amount of blood taken (the actual amount of Vitae, not including the bonus Vitae). Failure indicates that a ragged-worm will start growing in his stomach sometime in the next forty-eight hours.

A vampire inhabited by the ragged-worm gains only half of any Vitae he drinks, rounded down. For example, if a vampire takes 3 Health points of blood from a mortal, he gains only 1 point of Vitae. The other 2 go to the worm. Between ten and thirty nights later, depending roughly upon the vampire's feeding habits and the Storyteller's whim, the worm metamorphoses.

The infected vampire suffers a -1 die penalty to all Resolve + Composure rolls to resist anger or Hunger Frenzy while the worm is in his stomach. (This penalty stacks with all others, such as actually being hungry or starving.)

Vomiting up a thirty-foot worm over half an hour is extremely injurious. The vampire must make a Stamina + Strength roll with a -2 penalty or take a point of Lethal damage. Even if he succeeds, he takes a point of Bashing damage from the exhaustion. Dramatic Failure means the vampire chokes on the worm or his vomit and becomes immediately Incapacitated.

When the ragged-man rises in humanoid form, it seeks another 10 points of Vitae, and takes 1 point from each successful bite attack. It can take Vitae from mortals and vampires alike, but gains none from animals.

Ragged-man

Quote: slurp sslub xss

Description: In its first form, the ragged-man is a maggot, too small for the eyes to see. In its second, it is a minuscule insect with gossamer wings, only really visible in swarms, looking like a cloud of dust. In its third, it is a transparent worm about a centimeter thick and up to thirty feet in length. In its final form, it is an abhorrent combination of man and worm that is terrifying to behold. In the darkness, it almost looks like a mummified figure, its rumpled white skin like bandages wound around a human body. As it gets closer, however, its victims can see the sick way it rocks forward, the hooks on the hands and feet, the yellow bile that drips off its baggy flesh and the hideous sucking maw that it wears instead of a face.

The statistics below are for the humanoid ragged-man; as worm, nymph or larva its traits are negligible.

Background: Life, as they say, finds a way. Even the supernatural are not immune to the forces of evolution, and somehow a parasite evolved to take great advantage of the bloodsucking creatures all around it. Such evolution normally



takes millions of years, of course, which suggests that the vampire or some similar blood-drinking ancestor is equally ancient. Reliable records of the creature seem to date back only a few centuries, which may indicate that the creature is some new step in an accelerated evolution, or that only in recent times have vampires lived in large enough groups and with sufficient scientific understanding to actually observe and understand the organism and its progress. Whatever the case, if the organism could actually be studied, it would presumably reveal as much about vampire biology as its own.

Storytelling Hints: Ragged-men provide excellent visceral horror: the shock of splatter and the revulsion of gore combined with the tactile discomfiture of having something living and burrowing inside you. They make excellent antagonists for a single story with a strong horror theme. Diseases have a more subtle edge of terror to them, however, especially those that carry such shame and stigma with them. Characters may face tough choices and defining moments in how they decide to deal with the threat of infection from their colleagues and loved ones. Introducing a vampiric disease into your city provides an automatic campaign arc as well: the first act, as rumors form and unexplained deaths occur, the second as the disease is identified and feared but remains inexplicable and incurable, and the third where desperate panic grips the city and the race to find a cure, burn out the infection or flee to safe sources produces an apocalyptic meltdown to rival the largest clan war.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 0, Wits 1, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 0, Composure 1

Mental Skills: N/A

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 5 (Grappling), Stealth 1, Survival 1 (Find Water)

Social Skills: Intimidation 4

Merits: Fast Reflexes 2

Willpower: 10

Health: 7

Initiative: 5 (with Fast Reflexes)

Defense: 1

Speed: 10

Disciplines: Auspex 1

Weapons/Attacks

Type	Damage	Size	Dice Pool	Special
Bite	2L	N/A	10	Sucking Bite

Supernatural Powers

Sucking Bite: The ragged-man's biting attack does damage but also initiates a grappling attempt. For every round the grapple is maintained after this, the ragged-man drains 1 Vitae from its target and causes a point of Lethal damage as well, as per the rules on p. 165 of the **Vampire: The Requiem Rulebook**. Breaking the grapple means tearing the hooked teeth out of the victim's flesh, an act that deals an automatic point of Lethal damage.

The Rizzetti Apparatus

RANDOLPH MERRIWETHER

4 0

This being an excerpt of a short recollection of the estate and effects of one Randolph Meriwether, late of Providence but originally of the city of London, England. The following is from a handwritten epistle received by Mr. Wilhelm _____ from S. _____.

In the fallen portions of the house I discovered a series of rooms long since left fallow, choked with cobwebs and dust, and full of furniture gone to rot. The furniture had been of the finest construction before it fell into neglect, and even then was inarguably beautiful. As you know, my true interest in Meriwether's artifacts lay entirely elsewhere. I dreamed of his strange medical devices, since, as you well know, I have long held a passion for the trivium of ancient or eccentric medical practices that have fallen out of fashion among the bulk of the medical community in our most wonderful and modern city of London.

Meriwether's passions and mine intersected on many occasions, though we had never met. I knew only of his collection via the many papers he had published on the subject. I must confess I never truly understood his obsession with the work of Federico Rizzetti on his transfusion machine, which he claimed occurred before Harvey's excellent study of the human circulatory system. According to M, Rizzetti learned his technique from the Moors while traveling in the Middle East, a conjecture I cannot credit despite my vast amounts of research into the life of Federico Rizzetti and his many great works.

Certainly, there is no proof of the provenance of Rizzetti's machine. He was a contemporary of William Harvey and the transfusion device went unreported, except in Rizzetti's own eccentric journals. Of course, the device itself cannot work on humans. Rizzetti claimed success, but no corroborating evidence has

ever been found nor has any brave or foolish soul ever been able to reproduce his experiments. Since the 15th century, the number of successful human transfusions has numbered less than ten.

The late doctor of Providence himself attempted to reconstruct the circumstances of Rizzetti's alleged success, but he failed as well. In his correspondence, I have discovered that he was insistent that the experiment would have worked had the device itself not been missing a key piece of material which he could not procure.

I am including a sketch I made based on Rizzetti's original diagrams of the apparatus. You will note that the central chamber of the contraption has a circular space intended for some sort of filtering agent. Scholars and practitioners alike have debated the nature of the filter since Rizzetti's death. The inventor's detailed notes regarding the use of the apparatus were destroyed in the fire that razed his home. My colleagues have been attempting to discover the material that Rizzetti used for his successful experiment to no avail. After studying the personal documents I acquired at M's estate auction, I believe he discovered a new possibility!

According to his research, the proper material to filter the blood is quite natural! It is an untreated piece of a certain species of coral found thus far only in a small lagoon in the Mediterranean. I tell you, Wilhelm, I immediately undertook the journey, despite the difficulties and inconveniences of arranging a sabbatical on such short notice.

When I returned with the coral, which I preserved in accord with M's exhaustive notes on the subject, I longed to experiment with the apparatus, but I could not gain access to the local asylum to procure subjects for my investigation. I tried without success for some months, before I finally came to the conclusion I know you will think me mad for even considering: I had to volunteer to be my own subject.

I know what you must be thinking as you read this letter, but allow me to dampen the suspense by reminding you that I am writing these words after the experiment. Before I describe the process to you, I want you to know that it does, ultimately, work!

Once I had determined that I would be one half of the equation, I needed another participant, preferably a healthy specimen of a man, who would be able to provide me with similarly healthy blood, unlike the children Infessura described providing blood to his holiness, the Pope. I admit to you now, with some shame, that the methods by which I procured my secondary participant were less than noble. I hope that you will forgive my small improprieties when placed beside the degree of the results.

I bribed a policeman to render one of his prisoners into my custody for the purposes of the medical experiment. I must confess that the bribe itself was quite the bargain, though I had no prior experience with matters of that sort before this particular incident. The gentleman (I must be clear that I call him that only out of

the most perfunctory respect) was less than friendly or cooperative. He was a foul-smelling brute with a tendency toward the sort of ill-mannered loutishness that fairly defines his kind and invariably finds them headed to jail. He spoke with the heavy, coarse accent of a Bostonian, and was utterly and amazingly hirsute. I admit I felt a small amount of trepidation when considering transfusing this uncouth and unhygienic cad's blood into myself.

Regardless, I plunged forward, risking it all for this chance to prove myself either an impetuous but brilliant scholar or a dead one. I took the (sedated and utterly incapacitated) ruffian into my laboratory and, having given my assistant the evening off, began to prepare for the experiment. As you can see in the schematics I included, the device itself is rather large, and incredibly intricate. The next portion of my experiments is to attempt reproducing the apparatus with an eye toward utility, since I'm afraid the great Rizzetti was (though he was loath to admit it in his papers) at least as much an artist as a scientist. I am certain I can simplify the works of the machine using some of the great breakthroughs of our Industrial Age and make a far more robust and reliable implement that can be used in contemporary medical settings without looking like some sort of fantastic artistic installation. A true workman's tools must be utterly utilitarian, lest they invite admiration, as that playwright you are so fond of intimated in his (quite lurid) novel. I admire Rizzetti's work from an aesthetic point of view, but I am quite aware that the values of his time are not the values of our great century.

As I said, I prepared for the experiment. The convict (I refer to him as such, though he had not been placed before any judge or tribunal; the police officer who provided him assured me that he was guilty, however) was laid on a standard examination table of the sort one might find in a doctor's office. I myself lay in a chaise. One need not be uncomfortable in the search for truth, after all. I first attached him to the apparatus, then myself. I must note here that this is not a painless experience. The four hollow needles on either end of the device are by no means minuscule; rather they appear (and feel) more like pipes or straws. My arms ache even mentioning their circumference here. Once attached, I pulled the lever and activated the machine. It was wondrous, my friend! The shining gears turning and activating the pumps were marvelous, though the pain of having my blood so removed, via the device's suction, is not something I believe I can convey in text. Rather, allow me to say that I do not feel that I am up to the task.

I expected the laudanum and opium concoction I dosed the convict with to affect me as, logically, it would now be running through my veins, but I felt no ill effects. Precisely the opposite, in fact—I felt completely invigorated! The moment his blood entered my arm, I felt as though I had just injected myself with cocaine. Everything seemed clearer. I was so aware. Wilhelm, it was positively glorious!

I am afraid the glory was short-lived...

Truth

Federico Rizzetti was born in Italy in the seventeenth century, the son of a doctor. Though he became a doctor himself, the works of what he called “the clockwork epiphany” fascinated him. His practice quickly fell to the wayside as he focused upon increasingly byzantine mechanisms that rival the complexity of the works of Friedrich von Knauss nearly a century later.

Rizzetti was no toymaker. He did not make devices to amuse and entertain. Rather, his creations were intended to build upon his medical and alchemical knowledge, for though he was obsessed with the clockwork devices, he was also intent upon understanding the human body and all its complex mechanisms. The transfusion device was only one of a number of machines he created. Rizzetti never used the device himself. He was murdered by the first successful test subject, who disappeared with the device. The apparatus popped up again a little over a century later, in the collection of a barber convicted of murdering several of his customers. It was auctioned off to a judge, who retired from the public eye after overseeing the barber’s execution. He kept the device for nearly two hundred years before he was lynched by a mob of superstitious townsfolk. The device fell into the hands of Randolph Meriwether, who suffered from a rare blood disease. He failed to unlock the device’s secrets in time to save himself, and Steven Fallow, a hematologist and admirer of Rizzetti, discovered the apparatus. Fallow has been in possession of the device ever since.

Rizzetti’s machine still works perfectly well, as long as it is maintained and it contains the filtering agent. The coral it uses as its filter is rare, however. The truth is that the coral itself is only circumstantially required, and the true agent at work in the filter is a species of bacteria that colonizes the coral. The bacteria can survive in water with very specific properties. (Though the lagoon is the only *known* source, some have theorized that the alleged fountain of youth in Florida would have similar properties.) It flourishes when it is immersed in a mixture that includes human blood.

When filtered through the Rizzetti apparatus, the bacteria enter the subject’s body and form a kind of symbiotic relationship with their new host, flushing the body of impurities and curing the recipient of whatever ails him. Over the years, patients have been cured of everything from tuberculosis to cancer to age itself by the device. It is truly a miracle cure.

Why doesn’t direct contact with the bacteria cause the same effect? One cannot simply inject oneself with the bacterial solution and reap the benefits. Perhaps the “waste” that the bacteria clean from the bloodstream must have somewhere to go.

The “cure” lasts only a short time. Without regular sessions with the apparatus, impurities build up and the patient gets ill again. The bacteria themselves thrive and reproduce and die, eventually crowding the veins of the patient with a tiny nation of blood-drinking symbiotes. As the infestation grows, the body cannot produce enough blood to sustain the bacteria, and the host begins to experience *cravings*. The body needs blood, and it doesn’t know how to express it in any way other than hunger.

The Device

The Rizzetti Apparatus is a complex machine, like a music box crossbred with a large assortment of test tubes and graduated cylinders. Delicate brass gears interlock and spin around beautifully stained cherry wood, powering a syringelike pump that pushes the blood through a series of conduits and miniature floodgates in precisely-blown glass tubes to the vital heart of the device, where the coral filter is installed. The apparatus is a wonder of filigree and exquisite design. It is a work of art, but it is also an alchemical and medical masterpiece.

It is impossible to run across a device of such exquisite workmanship without being aware that it has extraordinary value. Regardless of the device’s alleged efficacy—or lack thereof—it is both beautiful and in remarkably fine condition. Discovering the device’s origins requires a certain amount of research (requiring a successful Intelligence + Occult, Academics or Medicine roll, depending upon the avenue the character wants to explore).

Treatment

When a subject undergoes a regimen of treatment via the Rizzetti Apparatus, the effects are immediate and startling. The process is unlike normal transfusion, in that blood is actually taken *from* both parties. The “good” blood runs through the coral filter, where the bacteria begin to react immediately, reproducing and colonizing the blood before it is injected into the subject’s bloodstream. One feature of the bacteria is that no cross-matching is necessary. The donor’s blood type does not matter; any will do as long as the bacterium properly colonizes the transfused blood. Any impurities in the donor’s blood are devoured by the bacteria or captured by the coral filter. The blood of the subject is pulled out, and either injected into the donor’s system or disposed of. Either way, the donor survives the process in only extremely rare and unusual circumstances.

The device itself is too large, cumbersome and fragile to be used in any sort of combat situation and may be used only on two prone subjects. The subjects are generally strapped down, to prevent them from harming themselves

or the machine by thrashing about. A complete treatment takes a number of rounds equal to the donor's Health levels, with the machine transferring 1 point of Vitae from the donor to the patient (and vice versa, if the machine is properly attached to both parties). The recipient of the bacteria-laced blood takes no damage from the process, as the process heals her as quickly as the device harms her. The donor, on the other hand, takes 1 level of Lethal damage per point of Vitae so extracted. The blood transferred to the donor during this process is tainted and pregnant with impurities, and offers no respite from the damage. In fact, if the donor somehow survives the process (for example, he has more Health levels than the recipient), he suffers 1 level of Lethal damage per day that the corrupted blood remains in his system. The only alternative is to receive another transfusion of fresh blood (from the Rizzetti device, for example).

The Prognosis

When the treatment is over, the patient is fully and completely healthy. Fit as a fiddle, the subject feels, in a very real way, better than she has ever felt in her life. A new blush of life blooms throughout her veins. She finds herself infused with energy where there was none, acutely aware of the world around her in ways that make the past seem vague and distorted, and above all burning with a hunger to experience, to truly *live*. This zest for life lasts, at first, for quite a while. Everything is perfect and wonderful for a number of months equal to the amount of Vitae the patient received in the first dose.

The subject does not age. All her faculties are sharpened: she gains 1 dot each of Wits, Dexterity, Strength and Stamina.

But the bloom must fade from every rose over time, and the effervescent life afforded by the Rizzetti Apparatus is no different. After the blush wears off, the subject begins to feel the first twinge of hunger, as the bacteria devour her blood from the inside. The character's Physical and Mental attributes return to their normal levels. Each week thereafter, the patient takes 1 point of Lethal damage as the bacteria devour another point of Vitae worth of blood. The only recourse to halt this damage is simple: another treatment session. But first, the patient must find another donor.

The Hunger

One side effect of the device is that the subject experiences a debilitating hunger as her blood is ravaged in her veins. Her body requires more blood. It *knows* what it needs, but it has no way of communicating that desire to the conscious mind. So there is *hunger*.

Like the Kindred, the character is maddened by the sight of blood, and subject to the Wassail, or Hunger Frenzy (see **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 179). The character suffers a -1 dice pool penalty for each point of Vitae the bacteria have devoured since her last session with the device.

If the character drinks human blood, it satisfies the hunger for a number of nights equal to the number of points of Vitae she ingested. Kindred blood, however, has the opposite effect. The bacteria begin to replicate even more quickly and *immediately* cause the destruction of another point of Vitae worth of blood and the concomitant level of Lethal damage.

Steven Fallow, the Impetuous Scholar

Quote: Oh dear. I'm afraid a transfusion is our only recourse.

How fascinating! But I'm afraid I don't know what you mean.

Description: Steven is undeniably a scholar. His thin body is exceedingly lank, and his small eyes give him an eternally squinting appearance. He moves awkwardly, like a broken marionette dangling from too-long strings.

Background: Steven was born in London, England, in the nineteenth century. His mother died in childbirth, and his father, a doctor, left him to be raised by nannies. Despite this, the child looked up to his father and tried to emulate him, becoming a doctor himself. However, when he was at Cambridge, he became utterly enthralled with Rizzetti and his obscure, but brilliant machines. Over time, he built his own practice and wealth, and an extremely large (and respected, in some circles) collection of Rizzetti artifacts.

He discovered the apparatus at an estate sale and subjected himself to its effects. Since then, he has continued his research, trying to perfect the device and remove its side effects. He has failed time and again, trying additives (that are devoured by the bacteria) and alternate coral (on other patients who survive only very occasionally), but he has never achieved remotely positive results. When he began, he killed only criminals in his quest to stay alive, but as time went by, he became less and less concerned with paltry things like morals. It is a simple matter to justify someone's death. They are mundane, common, they will never accomplish anything remotely as important as his goal. Steven's life is far more intrinsically valuable. Now he's more concerned with who he can overcome and dispose of with the least attention and effort.

He has discovered vampires, and he's beginning to develop theories about mixing the bacteria with Kindred blood, but he needs subjects upon whom to experiment.

Storytelling Hints: The catchphrase is awkward. Steven is Ichabod Crane, all angles and stumbling naiveté. But he's not. Behind the clumsiness and the embarrassingly gawky attitude is a keen and cunning mind. Steven plays to the stereotype in order to set people at ease. He's just a bumbling nerd; how could he hurt anybody? Of course, it's not that he really *wants* to hurt anyone, but he *needs* it, to satisfy his cravings and to continue his studies. Steven has been alive for over a century, but he has not been sitting still. He's well-versed in modern medical technology and is always looking for ways to incorporate new advances into his research. He is getting desperate.

Note: The numbers in parentheses are Steven's original attributes, when he is unaffected by the apparatus.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 3 (2), Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 3 (2), Dexterity 3 (2), Stamina 3 (2)

Social Attributes: Presence 1, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 5 (Rizzetti Artifacts), Computer 2, Investigation 2, Medicine 5 (Hemotology), Occult 4, Science 5 (Biology)

Physical Skills: Brawl 1, Firearms 2, Larceny 1, Stealth 3

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Expression 3, Subterfuge 3

Willpower: 7

Morality: 4

Virtue: Fortitude. Steven is certain he will escape this existence and negate the horrible cravings that come along with it.

Vice: Pride. He cannot back down, no matter how many times he fails. Steven is the only one who can solve this problem. He is more capable than Rizzetti, and he will succeed where all others fail.

Health: 8 (7)

Initiative: 6 (5)

Defense: 3 (2)

Speed: 11 (9)



Jorge and Miranda

By Chuck Wendig

Hot blood in her mouth. Greasy skin on her lips. The sound of sirens, somewhere; banshees, wailing. Bright moon above. Rough hands pulled her up. Moonlight caught a grizzled face peering back at her. He had a face like scourged leather, though most of it lay concealed behind a massive black beard. Dark eyes caught the city lights twinkling in them. He licked at pointed teeth.

"Miranda," he said, though it came out more MEE-randa, with a faint roll to the "r"—Spanish? Not quite, she thought, still dizzy. "Miranda Corliss, yes?"

She tried to speak, but her voice only croaked—so dry, though the rivulets of blood crawling down her throat did a little work toward soothing her speech. Miranda cleared her throat, nodding as she did so.

"Do I know you?" she asked, trying to stand and failing. "Where am I?"

"You don't know me," he said. With those callused hands, he hoisted her to her feet. Her head swooned. Her body cried out, thirsty. Teeth bearing down on each other, she held the bloodlust at bay. "As to where you are? On a rooftop. With the city lights all around. Smoke in the distance. And the ruins of your life—or what passes for it—here all around us." As if to indicate, he swept a clumsy arm in a revealing gesture.

Her eyes followed his gesture—she saw the city lights, bleary and washed out through the haze that hung over the buildings. Beyond that, seven plumes of smoke, each blacker than the night itself, drifted toward the moon. And then, her eyes returned to the rooftop, to this strange man, to a rotten and abandoned pigeon coop, to—

No.

"I..." she tried. "I don't understand."

"Your handiwork." He shrugged. "Sort of."

It was him. Her sire, her father, her Prince. Crucified to a half-collapsed board against the pigeon coop, a long stake jutting at a cock-eyed angle from his bare chest. She didn't want to move closer, but she did, couldn't help doing it, and looked closer. His fingers had been removed. Not cut; bitten. Bits of skin flayed off. His eyes, burned to ash in his head. His lips, pinned back with rose thorns.

And on his pale stomach, a phrase smeared in red blood:

A CRUCE SALUS.

"From this cross comes salvation," the man said, his accent so heavy she almost didn't understand it at first (from dis cross combs salflashun).

Miranda dropped to her knees, clutching the bare calf of her Prince. A tiny voice inside her wondered, Is there blood in there?

"I don't understand."

"Neither do I," he said.

"Who did this? How'd this happen?"

"All good questions. I'd advise you to look deep. To look back."

"You think I did this?"

The man clucked his tongue. "I don't think you did it. I know you did it, Miss Corliss."

"No, it's not—"

The owl with flashing eyes wasn't an owl at all, was it? Just the shape of an owl, made of faintly pulsing shadow, with wisps of gray drifting off it like whorls of steam. It perched at the foot of her bed as she awoke, still healing from the tortures of the night before, and it shifted from insubstantial foot to insubstantial foot.

"You are plagued," the owl said. Outside, summer lightning—no thunder, no rain—flashed, and Miranda thought she saw more owls, dark blots, flying against the lit sky, but then darkness was back and those shapes were gone. "I come to help."

Miranda looked at the cuts across her arm—flayed skin, flaps of cold flesh that one could peel up and peer within, no blood, just red, just dark.

"Phaedra," she said.



"Your sister."

"Not my sister. My... I don't know."

"Your torture. Your bane."

Miranda sat up, pulled her knees in close. "Yes."

"You are weak. Too weak to handle her. Even your father..."

"The Prince." Her shining love, her valiant lord. He never had time for her anymore. She rarely saw him. Too busy running the night-to-night. Too busy twisting squabbling fools up in their own rope.

"He cannot handle her. She is chaos. She must be put back in her box."

The owl spun its face around—cocking it sideways at her, the eyes catching the lights of the lamps by her bed, both eyes now vertical, not horizontal.

"What do I do?" Miranda asked. She didn't know who this strange spirit was, but the way her sister tormented her... she'd listen to any specter, any demon. Just to make it stop.

"Little girl, little girl, let me in."

"What? What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say. Let me in. Let me in your cooling bones. Let me live inside your dead heart. Just for a night. Maybe two. No more than that. I will give you secret strength."

"I don't know." The bird was closer, now. She didn't see it move, but it had; it now drifted up the length of the bed, not walking, just... flowing, somehow, impossibly.

"I could take you anyway," the bird said—not a threat, no. The creature's words were not malicious, only cold and true. "With but a touch, your skin is mine."

"Then why ask?"

"Because it's much more satisfying to have you agree. And so I make my offer. I wonder if we can work together. I want to help you, Miranda. Will you accept my gracious proposal? Together, we will make your sister pay."

Images of Phaedra in pain ran through Miranda's head. It didn't make her happy, not exactly, but it did feel right. Proper. In her image, the pale, cackling witch with her pretty red dresses and pretty red lipstick was bound corner to corner atop that dining room table she loved so much, the one with the ebonized maple base, the Brazilian rosewood pallsandre, all done up in French art deco. The rosewood would hide the blood. How quaint.

"I accept," she said.

The owl cocked its head, as if in a nod.

It wasted no time at all.

The bird did not drift, this time—there came a stuttering, shuttering shape where the black smoke of the bird disappeared and reappeared perched on her chest. She smelled wood-smoke, sulfur, a wet forest floor, and blood, so much blood. The sound of wings flapping, a terrible rush of noise, filled her ears. And then—

"Phaedra," Miranda blurted. "I did it to hurt Phaedra. The owl. It told me things. It offered to help."

The man with the beard (and now, she saw, a bowed back as if a great burden lay across his shoulders like a terrible yoke) shuffled up next to her, nodding. "Yes. That's how they do it. Vile things. Liar birds. Demons, I believe. My name is Jorge. I hunt these monsters and any who might dare to violate the, ahh, sanctity of our society."

With a tender hand, she reached up toward her Prince's heart, toward the stake that jutted from the broken breastbone. "We should remove this..."

"Me? I'd wait."

"Why?"

With a crooked, curled fingernail, this man—Jorge—pointed at the flesh of her sire. Dark lines, as if colored with coal dust, ran up along his ribs, and where those lines lurked, the skin grew dry and flaky. "Striations. Signs of death. Seen in some when they lose the blood. You may wake him if you choose, but you do so when he will be hungry. I suspect we look like little sandwiches standing here in the dark. Little bags of blood."

As if to make it clearer, Jorge bit down twice on air—clack, clack.

Miranda jerked her hand away.

"Reconsidering, then," he said.

"Yes."

She took several steps backward. The sirens wailed in the distance. She could smell ash on the wind.

"Something happened," she said.

"It is true."

"Is it my fault?"

"Could be. You were not the only one who let one of those terrible birds into her body. Where one is, many more may come. When many more come, something terrible always happens. A storm. A riot. This time, here, a fire. Tenements burn. Two blocks worth—it's hot, it's August, the water cannot stop it. Many will die. Have died."

Once more, she felt staggered. "It's August," she said. "That's not possible."

"I assure you. I am no elder. I know what month it is."

"But, it was June. June when the owl came to my window."

"Mm. So the bird wore your skin for two months? Not a surprise."

Hunger pulled at her gut. Soon, she'd need to feed. But this wasn't done, not yet. This man was helping her. She urged the chattering imps and nattering voices inside her to quiet down; this man still had things he could tell her. Things to explain.

She went over to the rooftop's edge, gripped it with white knuckles. "So. A terrible fire. My Prince is..." Miranda couldn't even finish that sentence, as it was apparently something she had done. "Tell me some good news. Phaedra. She stands punished, right? For her crimes against me? Against others?"

Jorge came up behind Miranda, put one of his rough-hewn hands on her shoulder. He sighed; it was a human affectation, an odd thing that was yet also strangely comforting. "I hate to be the bearer of shit tidings, but it is so often the case. Your sister is not only fine, but emboldened. Your sire and hers is out of the game. She took it as an opportunity to... ah, steal the crown for herself. Temporarily, as she put it. Until they find your father."

The voices inside Miranda rose to a wretched din. This time, calling not for blood to slake hunger, but for her sister's head to sate her anger. She held on. Barely.

"Fucking witch," Miranda spat.

"It gets worse," Jorge said. "You had a herd, but they are dead. You had your servants, and they are missing. Worst of all, two weeks ago, you announced—well, the bird within you announced, but it was your voice, your handwriting—what you had done to your father."

"Fuck. Fuck." The monster inside her wanted out. But this one was her monster, and she had made the mistake of letting another fiend inside her. She was keeping this one. She just had to leash it just a little bit longer.

"So, your sister. She called a blood hunt on you."

Miranda buried her face in her hands. She bit down on her palm, tasted bitter skin and no blood at all. Teeth crunched through muscle; it was dumb, but it kept her on the edge but not tumbling over it.

"They're going to come for me, then."

"Yes."

"I need to fix this before they can. I need to undo what that fucking owl... what I did."

Jorge gave her shoulder a comforting squeeze.

"I appreciate this," she said. "I do. You... you saved me. I would've just lain on this rooftop, half-dead until the sun came and got me and my sire, and then we'd have both been... blasted to ash."

"Sure, sure. No problem."

"Together, we can hunt this down." She turned and looked over her shoulder at Jorge, who offered a reassuring smile and nod. "We'll find one of those owls and choke it. Make it tell us how to fix this. Then we'll go after Phaedra. Wouldn't surprise me if she somehow sent that owl after me. She always was a demon-lover. Metaphorically, I mean, but Jesus, maybe that's literal, now. But we'll go after those responsible. Right? You'll help me?"

The stake went up under her breastbone, the tip of the willow branch thrusting into the dry meat of her dead heart.

She had been watching Jorge's face, and feeling his hand on her shoulder. His other hand had worked invisibly, bringing the stake to her belly and then pushing it up between the "v" of her ribs. Everything in her world went dark and still.

"Why do they always assume I want to help them?" Jorge asked aloud. As usual, the city at night offered no answer. He grabbed the slumping girl, and dragged her over to the crucified Prince. Out from under a tarp hidden in the shadows he pulled two large boxes, metal coolers big enough to fit a body a piece. He flipped open his cell phone—it was an old phone, almost as big as a man's slipper—and called his people.

"Extraction time," he said, then hung up.

It is not unreasonable
to be scared of birds.

—Frances

Part Two: Consequences

A Vampire is generally described as being exceedingly gaunt and lean with a hideous countenance and eyes wherein are glinting the red fire of perdition. When, however, he has satiated his lust for warm human blood his body becomes horribly puffed and bloated, as though he were some great leech gorged and replete to bursting.

—Montague Summers, *The Vampire: His Kith and Kin*

Kindred history is riddled with inconsistency. Part of this is because vampires don't have reliable memories—the Fog of Eternity sees to that. But part of it, too, is that vampires manipulate their own records for personal gain, or to excise their own mistakes. Therefore, finding references to the actual workings of the Camarilla, or to the creatures that menaced the Kindred of Rome, might be difficult.

But while history might be written by the victors, what *actually happened* does not change. The Striges are still out there, hungry for Kindred blood. Sometimes a child

is born to an undead parent, and a new Dampyr walks the earth. Sometimes the Embrace doesn't quite "take," and a Larva goes running to find a nest. And while the Kindred-in-authority would love her childer to believe a vampire gone from killing and bloodlust is no more dangerous than a wild dog, easily destroyed once caught, the truth of the draugr isn't quite so simple.

It's easier to ignore the stranger aspects of Kindred existence than to face them. But sometimes a coterie *must* face the truth... and then the consequences.

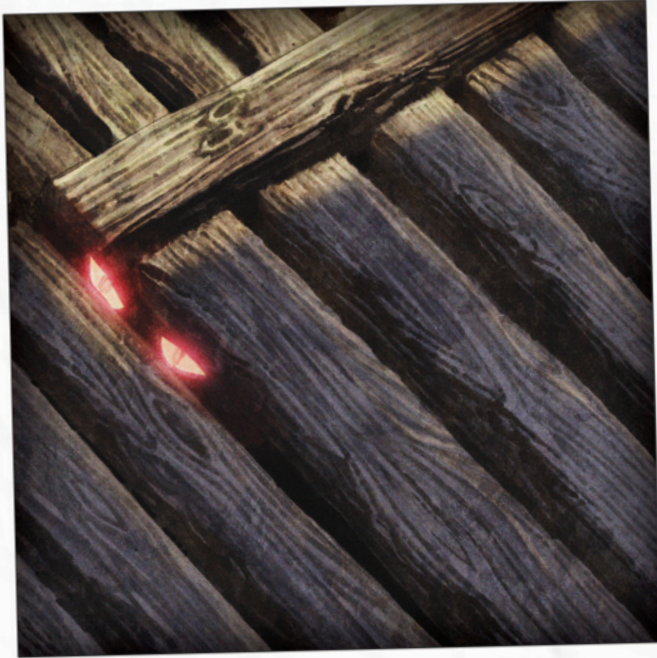
Draugr



Shed at Dad's house



Inside the shed — there's blood on the floor but it was too dark to photo right



*Trap door to Dad's root cellar.
Heard something moving.
Didn't go down.*

PY SANDS HOTEL ➤

*leaving these under mattress
like you said. Directions to
shed are on reverse side.*

*If you find my Dad, please
make it quick and painless,
OK?*

Steve

Vampires wax poetic about the struggle between Beast and Man, but it ultimately comes down to one question—how long can a vampire keep the Beast in check?

Some vampires think letting the Beast out sometimes creates enough of a mollifying effect to keep the Man in the driver's seat. Some think prayer and meditation make a difference. The Ordo Dracul has its Coil of the Beast, and the Invictus stress the Masquerade, perhaps hoping to fool the Beast into thinking it *can't* take over, because it is subservient. And some vampires just take it one night at a time, pushing down the urges of their bestial side and hoping for the best.

Some of these methods work. Most of them, in fact. But, again, it's not a question of whether the vampire can resist Frenzy. It's a question of when he fails to resist it, because it *will* happen, sooner or later. Humanity falls away. It just takes longer for some Kindred. But letting Humanity drop is not the same as letting it die entirely. Kindred that fail to keep even a shred of the Man alive become *draugr*.

Becoming a draugr (or a “revenant”) for the Kindred is roughly analogous to developing severe dementia or Alzheimer's for the living. They see it as a fate worse than Final Death. Some vampires also see it as inevitable. They feel their Humanity slipping away, notice that killing just doesn't mean what it used to, and they give up. That, of course, only makes it easier to kill, and hastens the slide into degradation.

Because of the fear and stigma that surround the draugr, vampires have developed legends, stories and widespread opinions (especially among the covenants) to help lessen this fear. The Invictus spreads horror stories about the draugr: these creatures are mindless, slaving breaches of the Masquerade, they say, and they need to be put down at all costs. Vampires in the First Estate are also quick to draw a connection between the draugr and the strange, vicious cabal of vampires called Belial's Brood—and the connection does seem warranted, given the Brood's actions. The Ordo Dracul focuses its efforts regarding the draugr upon how to rehabilitate them. This isn't out of any altruism, necessarily, but more because developing a Coil or a process that could, say, enable a draugr to enter torpor and emerge sane again would be an immense boon to the covenant. The Circle of the Crone looks at the draugr as the end of a cycle. The Man dies, and all that's left is the Beast. The Lancea Sanctum talks of moral and spiritual fortitude, while the Carthian Movement looks at these wretches' impact upon the surrounding Kindred. Unaligned Kindred just keep away from them in terror.

No matter what the covenant or the spin, other vampires usually miss the larger issue. They see draugr as mindless monsters because it's easier to see them that way, much as living people would rather think of murderers as large men with angry glares, bloody knives and differing ethnicities, or of pedophiles as creepy men who wear long coats and stare at playgrounds. The truth is much more terrifying. Monsters don't usually wear



their deviance on their sleeves. *Real* monsters blend in with their prey, and so, often, do draugr. Many are still functional enough to interact with other Kindred. Some even hold positions in a city's vampiric power structure. Some, even most, stay apart from other vampires, raising broods of Larvae and existing only to feed, but even those draugr are more intelligent and cunning than other Kindred would give them credit for.

Underestimating a draugr is dangerous, though. Beyond the obvious problem of assuming that draugr are stupid and thus easily dispatched, it also leads to ignorance of the draugr's numbers. A revenant that goes on a bloody rampage or creates a small army of Larvae is easy to spot. One that finds a niche and sticks to it isn't so easily found.

And this brings up another matter: If a draugr isn't causing breaches to the Masquerade, why kill it? Certainly, they do tend to kill people, but so do vampires in general. A careful (or lazy) draugr doesn't cause widespread death, and might not even endanger the Masquerade, so does it merit a full-scale blood hunt?

Yes, the Princes and Primogen of the city respond. Yes, say the Hound and the Sheriff, and they summon up a coterie of young Kindred to burn the menace. Yes, say the rank-and-file Kindred of the city, and they vow to stay out of the hunters' way. Any of these vampires might give credible reasons for their answer—danger to the herd, attracting mortal hunters, and so on. But the real reason, the highest truth, is simply this: *It could be any of us, and we wouldn't want to exist in that state.*

HAVE I SEEN THIS BEFORE?

Readers familiar with **Gangrel: Savage** and **Macabre** have seen a section on draugr in that book. **The Wicked Dead** has a slightly different take on these creatures; you might notice that the mechanics and presentation are different in places. That isn't to imply, however, that they are mutually exclusive, precisely because in the World of Darkness, there are no absolutes.

Put another way, consider that what we (as in, *us*, in the real world) know about the world around us is always changing. Look at the periodic table of elements today versus the one developed by Medeleev and Meyer in 1869. Neither is false, but one is more complete. The same might be said of any given vampire's understanding of the World of Darkness. An Invictus politico knows draugr exist, but thinks them to be mindless brutes. A Lancea Sanctum inquisitor knows they exist, that they are mindless brutes, and that they are more difficult to kill than other Kindred. A Carthian Sheriff on the edges of Kindred society knows all that, and that draugr of different clans have different capabilities. And a Circle of the Crone elder knows all *that*, and that some draugr can blend in with more rational Kindred, hunting them the way vampires hunt mortals.

One of the overriding themes in the World of Darkness is that there's always another mystery. When you read these books, don't see two takes on the same topic as contradictory. See them as layers. It's not mutually exclusive—it's *all true*.

The Mindless Beast

Kindred commonly perceive vampires that have lost their Humanity as uncontrolled, mindless predators. Indeed, this perception is justified. Many draugr exist in a perpetual state of Frenzy. They have some control over their actions, but that control is largely dictated by Vice (see below). They cannot communicate with other Kindred (except Larvae) in any meaningful way, and they see vampires only as competition for food or as prey. The Beast rules them, and what that means specifically depends upon the vampire in question. But all such draugr are lost. If any way to rehabilitate them exists, no Kindred has found it.

The Careful Predator

More dangerous, perhaps, is the vampire that retains control of its mental faculties. These Kindred can still move within vampiric circles (albeit with some difficulty), and while other vampires don't see them as well-adjusted, they

also don't recognize them as draugr. These predators can be likened to serial killers among people. They blend in, and protracted interaction might reveal that something is fundamentally *wrong* with them, but that's generally only noticeable in hindsight.

Just as such human predators take out their frustrations on animals, though, draugr do so on humans. No matter how functional the draugr is among Kindred, he cannot pass for human, at least not for more than a few moments. The draugr looks like a monster—sallow, pale skin, protracted fangs, a raspy, breathless voice (since draugr don't take in enough air for appropriate loudness) and sloped posture that suggests a hunting animal. Gone is the cultured predator, the seductive monster, if it ever existed. The draugr takes by force, but retains just enough sentience to truck with other vampires.

The rest of this chapter refers to draugr either as "mindless beasts" or "careful predators." Differences in system are noted where appropriate.

STORY HOOK: DRAUGR STUDIES

The text makes reference to vampires studying tendencies in draugr and how vampires respond to losing Humanity. How, exactly, are such studies conducted? Surely vampires don't have research labs with volunteers ready to slide into mindless depravity?

No, they don't, but Kindred *are* aware that committing inhuman acts drives them to becoming draugr, and that they commit inhuman acts more often while in Frenzy. Therefore, vampires wishing to study the draugr phenomenon might follow other Kindred that are already on the way down, as it were, and provoke them to Frenzy at inopportune moments. Rumors persist of Kindred researchers with special dispensation to perform such actions, provided they share any data they acquire with the Prince of the region (and probably the Ordo Dracul, which is always keen for more information).

Why would a Prince agree to this sadistic practice, especially since it threatens the Masquerade? Because some night that Prince might lose her last grasp on Humanity, and perhaps the data collected tonight will lead to a cure in the future.

The Man Lost to the Beast

Conventional wisdom among Kindred states that when the last of the Man has gone, only the Beast remains. Since the Beast is responsible for Frenzy, it stands to reason that a vampire with no Man to contain it would be in a constant state of Frenzy. Simple and logical.

The truth, though, is that Frenzy lasts only as long as the stimulus that instigated it. A vampire that falls into wassail doesn't continually hunt for blood when he's full. A vampire fleeing a fire in Röttschreck doesn't sit cowering for the rest of the night once the flames are no longer in view. And once a vampire has killed his foes, Anger Frenzy subsides. If a draugr really existed in constant Frenzy, it would be constantly running, killing and feeding, and that's not the case. Some draugr certainly do exist in this kind of perpetual Frenzy, unable to control their responses to stimuli that would normally excite the Beast. Others, though, are a bit more even-tempered. What makes the difference? The nature of the Beast.

A vampire's Vice does much to inform the actions of the Beast, but the differences between two vampires' Beasts aren't usually observable. This is because the Beast normally has only a few moments at a time in which it is free to act—Frenzy. The rest of the time, it is relegated to the vampire's subconscious. It can give the vampire urges, even nightmares, but on the few occasions it assumes control,

it does so to cope with an overpowering stimulus: rage, fear or hunger. It is disoriented and hyper-focused upon whatever caused the Frenzy.

But as a vampire's Humanity falls, the Beast gains more and more power. Its outlook is filtered through the vampire's Vice, and so the Beast has been part of the vampire's makeup since before his Requiem began, in a sense. Consider, for example, a man who is decent and generous (Virtue of Charity) but who is impatient and snaps at people when they seem obtuse (Vice of Wrath). If this man is Embraced, his Beast is vicious, cruel and impulsive. It might be easier for him to enter Anger Frenzy (see p. 179 of *Vampire: The Requiem*). If he goes on to lose Humanity, he becomes more impatient as his Humanity falls, until he starts to snarl at anyone who dares to ask him a question, which happens more frequently as his voice gets more feral and unintelligible. When he at last becomes a draugr, he attacks anyone within reach, and probably ends his Requiem on a pyre or beheaded by the other Kindred of the area.

Alternately, the man might express his Vice through vocal and social intimidation, rather than physical. He isn't impatient so much as intolerant and belligerent. As his Humanity falls, he's quick to snap, but he doesn't lose his language (though at the lower levels, he still can't pass for human). As a draugr, he doesn't attack unless physically provoked. It doesn't take much for him to feel provoked, granted, but the opinion of other Kindred is "he's losing it," not "he's lost it."

This is an important point about the draugr. They *cannot* pass for human. Human beings see them for what they are—monsters, or at the very least, lunatics. Vampires, however, might see them as low-Humanity Kindred, which is very different from no-Humanity Kindred.

Vice

When creating a draugr character, consider the vampire's Vice first and foremost, and decide what that Vice meant to the character as a mortal, a vampire and now as a draugr. Think about what kinds of acts might feel comforting to such a character. For example, a character with a Vice of Envy might sit quietly by herself and imagine her rivals having tragic accidents, events that couldn't be traced to her, but would be satisfying all the same. A slothful vampire might ride a subway and wait until he is alone with a single passenger to attempt to feed—even if this takes all night. These actions wouldn't necessarily allow a character to regain Willpower, but they feel comforting because they are reaffirmations of that character's self. They also provide good roadmaps to what kinds of draugr the characters would make. As a rule of thumb, if the character's Vice



would be easily expressed in some kind of Frenzy, it's more likely the character would be a mindless draugr (Wrath and Gluttony, especially). If the Vice doesn't neatly lead to one of the three Frenzy types, the draugr might be a bit more self-aware. These are guidelines only; it's perfectly possible for a greedy vampire to lose all self-control to the Beast, but a gluttonous one to be able to contain herself.

Below are some suggestions for each of the seven Vices and how they might translate into both a mindless and careful draugr, along with an example.

Envy

Envy is different from jealousy. Jealousy drives a person to guard what he already has, to keep it locked up and hidden so it can't be stolen. Envy is the coveting of what others have, and wishing (or bringing) them harm because of it. Vampires might envy the living for what they still possess, or they might envy other Kindred for their status, age or power. An envious vampire might work to obtain what he wants, either by earning or stealing it, but such ambition might be better suited to Pride or Greed. If Envy truly festers in the vampire's heart, he will work to destroy his rival. That way, while he doesn't get what he wants, at least his rival doesn't have it anymore, either.

Mindless Beast: An envious monster attacks viciously, but loses interest quickly. When the draugr chooses a target, it typically makes an All-Out Attack (p. 157 of **The World of Darkness Rulebook**), but flees when the target manages to injure it. This does not apply, however, to feeding attempts. If the draugr is after blood, it attacks more carefully, but probably still gives its victim time to register the pain of the attack.

Careful Predator: A draugr driven by Envy that maintains some ability to reason chooses enemies and remembers them. He might be quick to add new rivals to the list, or he might focus upon one target until she is destroyed. Hate and bitterness guide him, and provide his anchor in the world of the Kindred.

Example: Embraced into Clan Mekhet during the Cold War, Ivan Markovich immigrated to the United States with the help of a clanmate's connection to a Russian shadow cult. Over the years, he worked to pay off the favors this friend had done him, all the while growing more bitter and jealous. Finally, one last session of torture and murder pushed him over the edge, and he lost his capacity for Humanity entirely. He has not, however, lost his capacity for revenge, and slinks through the night, hunting down his former friend and anyone else who dares claim connection to the "People's Will."

Gluttony

All draugr seem gluttonous. They don't stop feeding for petty concerns like their victim's heart stopping or a mortal witness to their predation. But Gluttony as a Vice indicates a desire to gorge, to possess and to fill past capacity. Not all draugr have this compulsion. Those that do hunt nigh-constantly, whether mindless or careful. They never feel sated, even if their blood pools are full. Such draugr are unlikely to create broods of Larvae, because that requires sharing blood. Of course, a clever draugr might realize that with a brood of several Larvae, he has access to vampire blood whenever he wishes.

Mindless Beast: These creatures hunt down the best blood—vampires, living people in the pink of health, or, conversely, those afflicted by drugs and disease that give the blood a special flavoring. The glutton doesn't stop when full, and pursues blood above all else. Note, though, that Gluttony as a Vice doesn't *always* relate to food, even in vampires, and so a vampire that becomes a draugr might suddenly develop an appetite that was once expressed through knowledge, sex or some other pastime. The tendency hasn't changed, though, merely simplified.

Careful Predator: The draugr tends to have a slightly more rarefied palate, but this usually means that when the glutton feasts upon a new kind of blood, he mentally notes it, rather than eschewing one type of blood for another. The true glutton might eat filet mignon when possible, but will stuff himself on hamburger when that is what's available. The draugr glutton is no different.

Example: A connoisseur and functional alcoholic in life, Brent Trilby didn't change much when Embraced as a Nosferatu. His downward spiral began when he drained dry a woman tipsy on wine from his cellar, and ended some years later with him bashing in the heads of several homeless, scraping the remnants of blood from the inside of their skulls. His wine cellar still exists, and some of the bottles on the shelves are quite valuable. Some, inevitably, aren't full of wine anymore.

Greed

Gluttony's more refined and worldly cousin is Greed. A greedy person desires worldly objects not for their utility or even, necessarily, their value, but for the satisfaction that comes from ownership. Greedy vampires are sometimes collectors, and they sit upon fabulous fortunes, many times what they will ever need. They kill and torture to acquire more, and they justify it with any number of excuses—they plan to give some to charity, they will need the money to finance their long unlives, etc. When the last drop of Humanity is gone, they don't bother with rationale anymore. They might not even bother with value. They just take.

Mindless Beast: The lair of a greedy draugr is a flea market of items and clothing taken from victims. The bodies of the dead might even be stacked in a corner or laid out in rows, and anyone attempting to remove them—EMS crews, detectives, scavenging beasts—can expect to join them. These draugr almost never create Larvae. If they did, they'd have to share.

Careful Predator: These draugr are much the same, but their collections have a greater level of organization. Often, the creature even has several different sites. One might contain money, gold and other items of value, while another holds clothing, neatly folded and sorted. The last is for the bodies, and it is far away from the other two. Secretly, it is the draugr's favorite. These draugr are more likely to create Larvae, but this too is an expression of Greed. They create childer to possess them, and are quite willing to destroy them if they grow unruly.

Example: The last thing Alma Bedford did before succumbing to her Beast entirely was to have her mortal agents empty her accounts, redeem all her stocks, and convert all her assets to cash. Then she brought them to her estate, dumped the money in the basement, and told them to wait on the first floor for their reward. How she managed to demolish the house, she doesn't remember, but the bones and ghosts of her retainers still linger. The money's still there, probably several million dollars. She can't get it, but no one else can, either, and that's good enough for Alma.

Lust

Just as Gluttony isn't always about food, Lust isn't always about sex—but it's certainly the focal point of the Vice. Vampires have an odd relationship with sex. Over the years, they've become more associated with it in popular mythology. Also, the "truth" about them has come to light more completely and more often—are these two issues related? Are vampires more sexually capable than early legends let on? In any case, vampires' emotions atrophy, meaning that sex is difficult to enjoy on any level other than using it as a means to take blood. But that doesn't explain the behavior of the lustful draugr. These monsters crave the feeling of power victimization brings, and are quite willing to use the act of rape to get at that feeling. Note that "rape," to a vampire, doesn't have to involve an act of physical dominance. Dominate, Majesty and even a few drops of blood can force the issue just as easily as Vigor can.

Mindless Beast: These sorts of draugr don't tend to last very long. Nothing brings out the press like a serial rapist/killer, and one that incorporates a vampiric motif sends up red flags to every vampire hunter in the region. The Kindred might feel any number of ways about the living,

draugr and morality, but the hard truth is that a draugr that rapes as well as kills is an immediate threat to the Masquerade and needs to be put down. Truth be told, the Kindred enjoy this kind of hunt. Vampires don't get to be righteous often.

Careful Predator: On the other hand, a draugr still capable of social functionality with other Kindred can slake his lusts for years with no one the wiser. Such vampires tend to be able to use Disciplines to keep their victims compliant, and once the act is over (presuming the victim survives), what standing does she have to complain? "Magic coercion" doesn't stand up in court...and this frustration is all the more delicious to the draugr.

Example: Benjamin Vest was known as "Red Ben" among his fellow Daeva for his predilection for seducing virgin women and leaving stained with their blood. Of course, "seducing" was being generous, since he employed Majesty to do the work for him. This ended predictably—Ben became a draugr and his former coterie, which had made a joke of his habits before, became the foremost advocates for bringing a blood hunt down on his head. Ben didn't lose his mind entirely, though. He's already turned four of his former victims into Larvae, and he plans on making *all* of them into his slaves.

Pride

Prideful vampires become draugr before they realize it's happening. Every degeneration strips them of a little more of their ability to cope with humanity, but they see it as the living who are being stupid, distant and thick. Yes, that might be because of the vampire's newfound power as one of the Kindred, but the prideful are typically of the opinion that people have *always* been idiots. Once the last bit of Humanity melts away, the vampire finds confirmation of what he has always known. Humans are sheep. They are prey, and they are better off dead. In fact, other vampires lack the understanding (or strength, or zeal, or faith—whatever trait the draugr most prides himself on) to be allowed to exist. The draugr then begins his hunt. It will end when only he and whomever he deems worthy are left standing.

Mindless Beast: A prideful vampire that becomes a mindless beast wanders through a landscape in which it is the god-king of all it surveys. Such a vampire attacks whatever prey it sees fit, and Embraces its victims as Larvae at every opportunity.

Careful Predator: These Kindred come off as exceptionally egocentric and vile predators. They apparently can't be bothered to acknowledge mortals, except as blood sources, and any vampire that can hold their attention is a threat. Such Kindred are usually diablerists by choice

(rather than by inclination, the way most draugr are). Like their more bestial cousins, they create broods of Larvae whenever possible. Pride requires comparison, after all, so the vampire needs some that he can lord over.

Example: She was called Nettle for many years, the Gangrel Acolyte and sorceress presiding over the Circle's most sacred rites. No one knew how close to the surface her Beast had come, and then her most trusted disciple found her slicing away pieces of a still-living mortal man and sucking the blood off. She backed away, but Nettle pounced on her and took her soul, and in so doing became a draugr. She's still in her old position, but she no longer has the focus required for rites or Crúac. She's passed off her duties to other Kindred, and refuses to teach her "lessers." Impressing her might be impossible, or might require a true act of savagery. Either way, the Circle in her region is in for interesting times.

Sloth

Over the years, Sloth has been interpreted as both despair and apathy. In Kindred, it can mean both. A slothful vampire that succumbs to the Beast might well greet the next sunrise, but it more likely tries to arrange things so that it never has to hunt again. It makes a haven someplace in which humans will come to it, and then it grabs them, drains them, and goes to sleep. The draugr doesn't eat more than it has to, and it certainly doesn't go making trouble. It might seem that these draugr are comparatively harmless, but they are usually well-fed and well-rested. Many of them have minions, too—why do the work when Larvae are so easy to create?

Mindless Beast: Slothful Kindred that lose their minds tend to find out-of-the-way havens and are just as happy to feed upon animals as people. If they can lure mortals to them, perhaps with a cry for help or a seductive beckon into an alley, they drink human blood, but unless Blood Potency necessitates it, they don't expend much effort. Disturbing these Kindred is more dangerous than one might think. They fight efficiently and fiercely. After all, finding a new home is work.

Careful Predator: Slothful vampires that retain a modicum of intelligence are able to appreciate the value of doing a little work now so as to remain lazy later. That means they take urban havens, often in crack houses and other places that see traffic, but no permanent residents. They lightproof a room and wait, like a trapdoor spider. And then they spring, dragging helpless mortals into their dens, draining them dry. Sometimes they Embrace a victim, and send him out to herd mortals toward the vampire, but sometimes they don't bother to expend the energy required to create Larvae.

Example: Maria was just coming to bring her husband his cigarettes when the Mekhet vampire grabbed her. She doesn't know why he Embraced her rather than just killing her, but she never went home. Coming up with a plausible explanation for her absence just seemed like too much work. She was beaten into torpor in Nogales, and when she emerged, she just wasn't herself anymore. She traveled to a slaughterhouse, following the scent of blood, and made herself a haven beneath the knives. There, in the eternal darkness of the factory, she lays in a never-ending pool of blood, sated.

Wrath

It's not hard to imagine a vampire succumbing to Wrath. It happens often—the Beast does not suffer humiliation or provocation easily. Whenever a vampire enters Frenzy, the onlookers are seeing Wrath at work. But a vampire whose true Vice is Wrath is a different kind of monster, one that draws strength from exercising his anger. “Losing control” of the anger isn't an accurate descriptor, because abusers are capable of remarkably calculated and creative sadism when they give vent to their rage. Vampires are no different. A wrathful Kindred might employ the (comparatively) subtle arts of Dominate or Majesty to harm the object of her ire just as easily as she strikes or bites him. And when Humanity fades entirely, the draugr that remains of a wrathful Kindred is in constant pain. She wants the world to suffer as she does. Everything hurts her, and so she wants to hurt everything.

Mindless Beast: By far the more common type of wrathful draugr, these brutes exist in a near-constant state of Frenzy. They do not enter Röttschreck easily, and they seldom create Larvae (or if they do, they soon destroy them). The popular perception of a draugr is probably this kind of monster, but that's probably because they are the most visible. They don't have much appreciation for subtlety. Any victim they can catch is fair game. If the draugr isn't hungry, it might still drain blood and then spit it back in its victim's face, or tear off hunks of flesh, anything to cause pain.

Careful Predator: It's not common for a wrathful Kindred to retain his functionality upon becoming a draugr, but when it does happen, the results are terrifying. Such monsters have all the sadism of their mindless brethren with the patience and creativity to make the experience last. Their havens are torture chambers, and their victims often become Larvae that are just as vicious as they are. A Larva elevated from this state (p. 109) is likely to be extremely troubled, and have horrible nightmares of his time in service to the draugr.



Example: In life, Katherine Marigold was a nurse. She was also a serial killer. She hated other women, and particularly the elderly, and so she used her position to murder both while they were under her care. When she was exposed, she fled into the countryside, and she met a Gangrel hiding from the world. She fooled him just as she'd fooled her employers, and he Embraced her to help her escape from the world that was falsely accusing her. She diablerized him three nights later. Her Humanity didn't last (there wasn't much there to begin with), and now she hunts hospitals, ignoring the people who talk to her, relying upon her crisp uniform and forbidding countenance to keep others away, and feeding upon the women and the elderly she so detests.

Mechanics

Draugr use the same mechanics as other Kindred, for the most part. They gain an additional benefit and weakness based upon clan, as noted above. The other ways in which they differ from other vampires are noted below.

Skills

Draugr are capable of using any Skill normally available. In practice, however, mindless beasts normally don't use Mental Skills or Physical Skills requiring technology (such as Firearms or Drive). Social Skills are usually limited to Animal Ken or Intimidation.

Careful predators, however, might still be capable of using computers, performing research, and even pretending to have emotional responses. They don't do any of these things unless it's in line with the Beast's desires, of course, but it's possible, and saying "a draugr never does this" is often the last mistake a neonate makes.

Social Concerns

In game terms, all Social rolls with other Kindred suffer a -3 modifier (whereas Social rolls with mortals automatically fail). Intimidation rolls are not subject to this penalty.

Draugr cannot normally imitate life by spending Vitae. Those that know the Predator's Camouflage Devotion can do so, but for only a short time (see p. 95).

Virtues and Vices

Draugr invert Virtue and Vice. A draugr can regain 1 point of Willpower per scene when acting within her (probably long-forgotten) Virtue, or all spent Willpower once per chapter when acting on her Vice.

The Embrace

Draugr can Embrace mortals. The result is usually a Larva (p. 100). The draugr kills and drains his victim, and then

expels 1 Vitae point's worth of blood into the corpse's mouth. The corpse rises thereafter as a Larva. (This also requires the expenditure of 1 Willpower point, not dot.) The Larva is immediately loyal to the draugr.

Interestingly, draugr can create Larvae out of corpses that would not normally be candidates for the Embrace. A body that has been dead for a number of nights equal to the draugr's Blood Potency and is mostly intact (the head and the heart, most importantly) can be raised as a Larva. This time is multiplied by five if the intended victim:

- died as a result of a vampire's fangs or claws
- was a ghoul or a blood-bound slave
- was fed upon by a vampire within the week before death
- was subject to a vampire's mental Disciplines (Nightmare, Dominate, Majesty or other Disciplines with psychological effects) on the night of his death

Embracing new draugr

Careful predators can choose to put more mystical force behind the Embrace, causing a mortal to rise as a draugr. This works only on victims the draugr kills herself (much like a traditional Embrace), and requires the expenditure of a dot of Willpower. The Storyteller then rolls the draugr's Resolve + Blood Potency.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The victim dies and cannot be Embraced. The vampire still loses the Willpower dot.

Failure: The victim dies, but the vampire does not lose the Willpower dot—the draugr senses something wrong at the last second and doesn't expend the energy. The draugr can still Embrace the victim as a Larva, if she wishes.

Success: The victim rises as a draugr of the same clan as the Embracing vampire.

Exceptional Success: As above.

The childe of a draugr is usually of the same temperament (that is, careful predator or mindless beast) as the sire, but not always. A childe that is less cognizant than the sire still follows the sire's orders. A childe that is more intelligent and aware than the sire probably destroys the sire in short order.

Disciplines

A draugr's use of Disciplines becomes incredibly savage and primal. While still perfectly capable of using Disciplines such as Auspex, Dominate and similar phenomena, it wields them solely to sate its urges, and make its hunt easier. The draugr possessed of Majesty is a terrible and horrifying figure, a veritable blood-soaked messiah whose unholy allure brings its prey to violent ends.

Draugr cannot, however, utilize blood sorcery: they cannot use Theban Sorcery, Crúac, or similar magics. Any Coils of the Dragon draugr knew before falling to the Beast fade. This

puzzles the Ordo Dracul, since the Coils are ostensibly permanent changes to the vampiric condition. The Dragons' going theory is that the Beast, when given complete control, can *undo* these changes. Needless to say, this terrifies the Dragons.

Merits

Careful predator draugr are capable of possessing most of the Merits usually available to **Vampire** characters. The following Merits are disallowed: Common Sense, Holistic Awareness, Meditative Mind. Social Merits such as Contacts, Allies, Retainer and Herd aren't necessarily disallowed, but remember that draugr have great difficulty dealing with the living face to face. Striking Looks is allowed, but it bestows its bonus only when dealing with Kindred.

Mindless beasts, on the other hand, are limited to the same Merits as Larvae (p. 104).

Either type of draugr can use the Swarm Master Merit (p. 108).

Devotions

Since draugr are capable of using Disciplines, they are also capable of using and developing Devotions. Obviously, some Devotions make more sense than others, but if a vampire learned a Devotion before becoming a draugr, he remembers how to use it. As noted above, use of Disciplines is always tainted by the Beast, and so the Devotion takes a decidedly savage twist.

Below are three Devotions draugr might find especially useful. Non-draugr Kindred can learn them, as well.

Predator's Camouflage (Majesty •, Obfuscate ••)

From this rather odd combination of Disciplines comes one of the careful predator's most useful assets. Normally, draugr are unmistakably monstrous, and any living person who sees one can't help but recognize the deadly hunter. This Devotion, however, allows the draugr to mask the Beast within for a few crucial seconds—long enough to grab a victim, or get close enough to bite.

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Wits + Stealth + Obfuscate

Action: Instant

Upon successful activation, the character is indistinguishable from a normal, living person for a number of turns equal to the successes rolled. This Devotion does not affect how the vampire appears in mirrors and other reflective media, however.

This Devotion costs 9 experience points to learn, though the benefits of Predator's Camouflage for a non-draugr are limited. Then again, if the vampire's Humanity has fallen far enough, it might be a true blessing to be able to pass unnoticed among the living.

Monster's Call (Majesty ••••, Protean •)

Draugr don't always cooperate, but sometimes a kind of pack instinct takes over. This Devotion allows a draugr to call out to any others of its kind in the vicinity. This Devotion is mercifully rare, because it constitutes a terrible danger the Masquerade (not to mention anyone standing near the draugr employing it).

Cost: 1 Willpower + 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: Presence + Persuasion + Majesty

Action: Instant

The draugr lets out an unearthly howl. This hideous sound carries farther than it should—the draugr's Beast reaches out to the Beasts of any other Kindred in the area, and they respond.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Any draugr or Larvae within a quarter mile respond, but the pitiful, mewling cry for help enrages them, and they attack the draugr (that has no idea the Devotion backfired).

Failure: The howl carries, but the mystical summons does not. The attempt fails.

Success: The howl rings out and carries with it a mystical summons to any vampiric Beast in the area. All draugr and Larvae within a half-mile per success respond to the summons. They aren't necessarily under the vampire's command when they arrive, but they attack mortals and non-draugr first.

Exceptional Success: The call affects normal Kindred in Frenzy, as well.

This Devotion costs 15 experience points to learn.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+3	The summoner has the Swarm Master Merit
-3	Devotion enacted indoors

Eyes of the Beast (Ausper •, Celerity •)

The draugr is extremely difficult to surprise, and is adept at battling multiple opponents at once. The creature's Beast warns him of incoming attacks, the character listening to the same minute changes in the environment that warn a spider of intrusion on its web. Or, perhaps, does a tiny vestige of the Man, some lingering bit of Humanity, warn the Beast?

Cost: 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: N/A

Action: Reflexive

Once the character activates this Discipline, he adds his Ausper rating to his Initiative rating. (If he activates Celerity as well, he adds both Disciplines.) Also, the character's Defense does not diminish from being attacked by multiple opponents in the same turn (see p. 155 of **The World of Darkness Rulebook**).

This Devotion costs 6 experience points to learn.

Draugr by Clan

Some Kindred like to pretend that some clans are more prone to becoming draugr than others. It's bunk. Ventrue go mad faster. Gangrel are savages whose minds deteriorate. Nosferatu are forever cut off from humanity by their horrific presences. Daeva are slaves to their passions (and thus to the Beast). Mekhet fade into obscurity and become obsessed with patterns and signs. The truth is that while an individual vampire might be more prone to falling from Humanity, it's too broad a generalization to make about a clan.

What is true is that members of various clans produce different kinds of draugr. They have different weaknesses and different proclivities as functional Kindred; why shouldn't this sanguine diversity persist? Below are some generalities on how a given vampire might behave as a draugr based upon clan, as well as a system benefit and weakness. These systems are in addition to the general systems for draugr listed above.

Daeva

Daeva are probably the most likely clan of Kindred to become careful predators rather than mindless beasts. The Daeva are already slaves to Vice, in a way, and so perhaps becoming draugr isn't as much of a shock. In any event, the passions of Succubus draugr tend to become more basic. The Daeva's haven is still well-appointed and comfortable, but "comfort" no longer means soft beds and amenities. Now, proximity to food and accessibility while carrying a body are the important things. Daeva draugr still enjoy sex, but very rarely do they indulge in such activities without feeding from their lovers as well. And, of course, they *revel* in the consumption of blood. Other Daeva might secretly envy their fallen clanmates this passion—in a draugr, it feels real.

Benefit: Daeva draugr can exsanguinate a victim in seconds flat. Instead of taking 1 point of Vitae per turn, the draugr drains a number of Vitae equal to her Blood Potency. This applies only against mortals; against other Kindred, the draugr is still limited to 1 point per turn, as the blood is slower to flow.

Weakness: Daeva draugr are *always* hungry. They have no sense of how full their blood pool is, nor when they fed last. A Daeva draugr always takes at least a -1 penalty to rolls to avoid Hunger Frenzy (and may take a higher penalty if her blood pool is, in fact, low—see p. 179 of **Vampire: The Requiem**).

Gangrel

Some Kindred say a Gangrel's relationship with his Beast is like a man talking to his own reflection, but they don't say it very loudly. Yes, the Savages do have insight into the Beast that members of other clans don't, but that doesn't make them more prone to becoming draugr. It does mean, though, that when Gangrel *do* fall from Humanity, they are among the most dangerous creatures loose in the night. Much of the lore that

vampires possess about draugr actually refers to Gangrel draugr, as they are much more likely to become mindless beasts than careful predators (at least, those that get caught are). But even the mindless among Gangrel draugr have a kind of bestial cunning that makes them dangerous, not least because they are the most likely clan of draugr to Embrace (and thus create Larvae).

Benefit: Gangrel draugr are preternaturally swift. They add 3 to their Speed ratings.

Weakness: Other vampires are rival predators, or food, in the draugr's eyes. The Gangrel clan weakness (p. 107 of **Vampire: The Requiem**) applies to rolls to resist the Predator's Taint for Gangrel draugr.

Mekhet

Once a Mekhet becomes a draugr, odds are she's never seen again. These monsters vanish into the shadows, often retreating underground, far away from the blazing sun. They prey upon mortals and vampires who venture into caves, tunnels and catacombs, and if they never taste fresh air again, what does it matter? Occasionally, a Mekhet draugr takes up residence in a city heavily laden with air pollution, someplace wherein even moonlight is filtered through fog. It finds a hunting ground with plenty of underground or building access, and it stalks its prey swiftly and silently. If it interacts with other Kindred, it merely nods and lets them pass, or allows its powers of Obfuscate to cloak it completely. Mekhet draugr avoid danger, preying upon the weak, and whether they are mindless or still cogent, they are superb at doing so.

Benefit: Mekhet draugr can see perfectly in pitch darkness. They take no penalty for fighting blind due to lack of light, and receive a +2 modifier to all Stealth rolls.

Weakness: In addition to their usual problems with fire and sunlight, Mekhet draugr can be forced into Röttschreck by bright artificial light. Anything brighter than a 100-watt bulb can compel a Shadow draugr to flee.

Nosferatu

The Haunts are monsters whether or not they maintain their Humanity. As such, a Nosferatu draugr is difficult to detect for what it is, at least until it attacks. Nosferatu don't show much of a tendency to become mindless beasts or careful predators, though Kindred that study the subject have tried (unsuccessfully) to draw correlation between a Haunt's outward appearance and his predilection in this matter. It is true, though, that whatever form a Haunt's menacing presence takes, he finds it nearly impossible to hide it once he loses his Humanity. The Beast revels in its ability to horrify, and the vampire becomes Nightmare made flesh.

Benefit: The Beast contributes its hunger and savagery to the Nosferatu's facility for causing terror. All uses of the Nightmare Discipline receive a +1 modifier.

Weakness: Unlike Mekhet draugr, Nosferatu lose much of their facility for hiding along with the last shreds of Humanity. Nosferatu draugr do not enjoy the 10-Again on uses of the Obfuscate Discipline.

Ventrue

Ventrue draugr are unequivocally more likely to become careful predators than mindless beasts, but that might be because by the time a Lord reaches Humanity 0, he has already long since lost his mind. Gangrel might be more likely to attempt the Embrace as draugr, but Ventrue give them a run for their money. The Lords are certainly more likely to set up small and fanatically loyal packs of Larvae, and have even been known to set up multiple nests in a given area, with one nest acting as “bait” for hunters and zealous Kindred. Ventrue that become draugr can exist alongside other Kindred for a long time, and some vampires even feel that the transition to draugr begins much sooner for the Lords than for other clans. This is probably just resentment on their part, of course, but it’s hard to look at the megalomaniacal Ventrue and not wonder.

Benefit: Ventrue draugr are much better able to function among other Kindred. The penalty for dealing with vampires is -1, not -3 (see p. 97). Penalties for dealing with mortals are unaffected.

Weakness: Ventrue draugr long for the structure of Kindred society, even if they can no longer participate in it to the same degree. When attacking a vampire of higher Blood Potency, a Ventrue draugr suffers a -2 penalty to all attacks and Discipline use. If the vampire is helpless (staked, in torpor, held down by Larvae) this does not apply, and it never applies to attempts to commit diablerie.

Storytelling the Draugr

When including a draugr in your chronicle, have a look at the Humanity chart on p. 182 of **Vampire: The Requiem**. Note that at Humanity 1, a vampire can commit serial murder and not risk degeneration. That means a draugr is more degraded, more bestial and more, for want of a better word, *evil* than a vampire that always kills her victims.

We’ll let that sink in for just a moment.

Draugr are the bottom of the barrel. They are as low as a vampire can reasonably get, except possibly the Larvae, but Kindred don’t become Larvae because of their own actions. Draugr, on the other hand, really are monsters of their own making. They are the themes of **Vampire: The Requiem** personified. They *are* the Beast within.

Human beings are capable of some astoundingly depraved actions. A few moments of research on the Internet should confirm that—look into crime records or torture methods. And yet, the perpetrators of these actions are still human. They can’t be

other than human. In the real world, it’s not an option. In the World of Darkness, though, vampires have to hold on to some vestige of Humanity, no matter how small, or else they become lost to the Beast for all time. That retention of the Man is so central a theme to **Vampire** that it’s necessary to portray draugr as the brutes they are in order to showcase that theme.

As such, if you’re going to include a draugr in your chronicle, find out what the comfort levels of your players are and then go right up to that line. A parent might not want to see a story in which children come to harm, and that’s fine and should be respected. But if that’s the only caveat, then feel free to have whatever horrible things you can imagine happen to adults in your chronicle. Draugr can do it. They don’t lose a *thing* by doing it. They have lost everything they have to lose. And therefore it should go without saying that the draugr capable of having conversations with other Kindred will lie, betray and backstab as they see fit. Nothing is sacred to them. Nothing means more to them than the Beast, because the Beast is all they are.

Story Hooks

- The Prince of the city becomes a mindless beast and vanishes into the night. One of the Primogen immediately claims power, but other forces in the city claim the Prince left behind strict instructions that they be granted praxis. The characters are charged with capturing the Prince and bringing him back still undead. What happens then, of course, is another question—how can information be reliably extracted from a draugr’s mind? At least one of the characters, though, is bribed to make sure the Prince doesn’t come back at all.
- The characters are taking a train ride across country. At night, when they emerge from the cabins and move about the train, they meet another Kindred. This vampire, a Mekhet, is quiet and unassuming, certainly insane, but not violently so. If they snoop, they might find a collection of blackened, twisted metal in his suitcase—wreckage from other train derailments he and his Larvae have caused in the past. He plans to wreck the train and feast upon the dead or incapacitated. If that includes the characters, so much the better.
- The Ordo Dracul approaches the coterie with an interesting assignment. If they agree to commit one murder a week for the next two months, they will be granted some fantastic boon (use whatever would motivate the characters—money, magical instruction, power, even the chance to commit diablerie). The only condition is that the Ordo must be allowed to scan the characters’ thoughts to verify the killings. The Ordo’s goal, of course, is to see how long it takes for one of the characters to break, becoming a draugr.
- A Carthian vampire has captured his sire, now a mindless draugr. He doesn’t have the courage to put a stake in his heart (and isn’t sure he’d survive the experience anyway), so he has him locked in a cell. He brings his sire food every

night, and reads to him from the Bible, the Koran, the Book of the Dead, *The Prophet*, and anything he thinks might help. If the characters could help elevate a draugr, they would be hailed as heroes in the Kindred world. But is it possible?

- The coterie hears rumors of a cave system that contains the tomb of a now-deceased elder vampire. This tomb, supposedly, holds this elder's writings and the many mystical artifacts he collected over his long unlife. But getting to the tomb is difficult, and other coterie have tried and failed, while others have returned missing a few members but with some fabulous riches. The tomb is everything the rumors claim it to be... but the cave system is inhabited by a slothful Gangrel draugr. She allows Kindred to find a tomb every now and then, just so the rumors keep flying. She has never allowed anyone to find the *real* tomb, however. (As a side note, this story hook would also work quite well for **Mage: The Awakening** or **Hunter: The Vigil**.)

Draugr Queen Bee (Mindless Beast)

Quotes: <high-pitched, feral scream>

Description: Filthy, bedraggled, half-shredded clothing covers immaculately beautiful pale skin. Her eyes are still dazzling, even though Humanity has long since fled them. At the first sign of trouble, she shrieks, calling down her pets from the nearby tenements. She lets them feed, but she always takes her tribute.



Background: The Queen Bee was always surrounded by throngs of admirers when she was alive, and became a Harpy after her Embrace. Her long slide into moral decay ended with her standing on darkened highways blinding motorists with her beauty, and sucking the blood from their severed limbs after the crash. She still does this sometimes, but if not she turns the victims into Larvae to serve her. Sometimes hunters come, and they kill a few of her followers, but the Queen always escapes.

Storytelling Hints: The Queen Bee does her own hunting sometimes, and so a good use of her in a chronicle would be to allow the characters to track her back to her haven, wound her... and then listen to her shriek, bringing the small army of Larvae to her side.

Since she was a moderately famous person in life, the story might also revolve around that aspect of the Queen Bee. Maybe someone recognized her and now the press is sniffing around. The characters not only need to kill her, they need to kill her followers (or usurp control? see p. 107) and do it before anyone films them.

Clan: Daeva

Covenant: N/A

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 2, Composure 1

Mental Skills: Investigation 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 2 (Grapple), Stealth 1, Survival 3 (Slums), Weaponry 2

Social Skills: Intimidation 4 (Larvae), Persuasion 2, Streetwise 1

Merits: Fleet of Foot 3, Inspiring, Swarm Master

Willpower: 4

Humanity: 0

Virtue: Hope. The Queen Bee wants her followers to trust her and believe she will protect them.

Vice: Pride. She won't, however. In the end, only the Queen is important.

Health: 7

Initiative: 5

Defense: 3

Speed: 15

Blood Potency: 3

Disciplines: Celerity 3, Majesty 5, Protean 1

Vitae/per Turn: 12/1

Devotions: Monster's Call

Old Man of the Woods (Careful Predator)

Quotes: This is my land. Leave the way you came. Now.

All right. I warned you.

Description: Huge, bloated with the blood of animals and hikers, the Old Man of the Woods is a monster. He doesn't bother with clothes anymore, meaning that copious body hair and blood are his only outer coverings. His eyes are piercing, he seldom bothers to retract his claws, and when he speaks, he gives the distinct impression that he's about to pull out the listener's windpipe. Usually, that's because he is.

Background: He tried. He really did. The Old Man of the Woods fell in with Belial's Brood before he really knew what being Kindred was about, and before he knew it, his Humanity was all but gone. He fled his coterie and wound up in a dense national forest, but before he could center himself, he happened upon a family, camping. He doesn't remember exactly what he did to them, but that campground is still haunted. Not even the wolves go near it.

He's remained in the woods ever since. He's comfortable with what he is, now, and sometimes he thinks about returning to the city and hunting there. But that would require finding clothes, and interacting with others, and he doesn't want to do that. He'll stay here, between the trees, melding with the earth at sunrise. And drinking the blood of whatever crosses his path.

Storytelling Hints: The Old Man of the Woods is lazy and perhaps even a bit cowardly, but it's a good thing he is. If he were more ambitious, he'd have moved to a more populated area. As it is, he won't commit diablerie because doing so would make him unable to feed upon animals. Therefore, Kindred in his woods might get away with a warning and a claw-slash, if they catch him after he's fed upon hikers or deer.

The Old Man is best used for a scare. Older Kindred tell their childer to avoid the woods—he's the reason. Wise vampires tell neonates that no matter how strong they become, someone out there is always stronger—that's him.

Clan: Gangrel

Covenant: None

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 4, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 1, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Crafts 3 (Traps), Occult 1



Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 4 (Claws), Firearms 1, Stealth 3 (Hunting), Survival 4, Weaponry 2

Social Skills: Animal Ken 4, Intimidation 3

Merits: Giant, Haven Size 1, Iron Stamina 3, Strong Back

Willpower: 4

Humanity: 0

Virtue: Justice. Part of the reason he's never returned might be that the last remnant of the Man he was knows he has become an abomination.

Vice: Sloth. Or, it might just be that he can't be bothered to walk all that way.

Health: 10

Initiative: 5

Defense: 3

Speed: 13

Blood Potency: 2

Disciplines: Animalism 2, Protean 3, Resilience 3, Vigor 2

Vitae/per Turn: 11/1

Weapons/Attacks

Type	Damage	Size	Special	Dice Pool
Claws	1A	N/A	N/A	11

Larvae

MISSING GIRL! HAVE YOU SEEN ME?



AMANDA MARIE KAZMERCYK, AGE 16, DISAPPEARED FROM A PARTY LAST WEEK. SHE IS A JUNIOR AT CENTRAL CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL. SHE HAS BROWN, CURLY HAIR. SHE'S ABOUT 5'6" AND 125 LBS. IF YOU HAVE ANY INFORMATION ABOUT HER PLEASE CONTACT THE POLICE DEPARTMENT, OR CALL 419-555-1421. HER FAMILY IS PRAYING FOR HER SAFE RETURN.

REWARD OFFERED FOR ANY USEFUL INFORMATION!!

\$\$\$\$\$ TRUST ME
- YOU DON'T WANT TO
FIND THIS GIRL NOW!

Regardless of the motive behind the Embrace—love, hatred, desire, even a strange sense of altruism—no vampire ever performs it lightly. It *can't* be done lightly, because to Embrace a human being requires a supreme act of will on the part of the vampire. And yet, the truth is that not even the most intelligent vampire knows what kind of Kindred her childe will make. Devout and gentle church-goers become insatiable blood-lusting fiends. Murderers see the error of their ways once they have become undead, and strive to make amends for their actions. The Embrace changes a person in ways no one can imagine, and well it should.

Sometimes, though, the Embrace goes *wrong*. It doesn't take hold the way it should. The curse burns out any self-awareness the childe once had, leaving only a human shape, the barest glimmer of intelligence, and the Beast. These quasi-vampires are called *Larvae* in Kindred circles. Some refer to them as "minions" or "vermin."

Larvae are uncommon, largely because their sires usually destroy them. But many elder Kindred have at least heard stories about them, and they are not a new phenomenon. One of the most unpleasant rumors about the Larvae is that a vampire of sufficiently strong will can control them, bind them with a Vinculum and send them out as shock troops.

This rumor is actually true, except that Larvae make terrible assassins—they don't possess the wherewithal to execute complex commands. They do make superb guards, however.

Origins

How do the Larvae come about? Stories traded among Kindred occultists refer to "Embraces gone wrong," but that isn't very helpful by itself. The various covenants have their own explanations, sometimes referring to a given vampire's "worthiness" in the eyes of one divine figure or another, but in truth no one has managed to pinpoint what creates a Larva.

Consider, though, that a Larva is a vampire. The Larva is given over to the Beast, much like a draugr (see p. 86), but unlike the draugr, the Larva never had full self-awareness. The bestial impulses of the Larvae don't come from the erosion of the Man, but from the Man's complete and nigh-instantaneous destruction.

How does that happen? We're going to offer a few possibilities.

The System

But before those possibilities, here's a system: a Larva is created when the Embracing vampire spends a Willpower *point* rather than a *dot*. And that's it. What the Storyteller and the players need to decide is whether or not a vampire can do this willingly, and if so, under what circumstances. But regardless of what other cir-

cumstances are in play for Larvae, this simple rule is what allows the half-Embrace to take effect. This, too, is why a vampire can expend a Willpower dot later and "complete" the Embrace (see p. 109).

Botched Embrace

A vampire might Embrace a victim in moment of guilt following a Hunger Frenzy, or a fit of pique following an Anger Frenzy. In either case, the Beast is still close to the surface, and this taints the attempt at creating a childe. The sire's Beast transfers as much of its hunger, its rage and its fear as it can to the childe, and the childe's human soul, already guttering in the face of death, goes out entirely. All that is left is the Beast, and a new Larva rises.

There are other ways in which an Embrace might be botched, too. If the Embrace is interrupted before it is fully complete, the childe might receive enough of the Blood to rise as a Larva, but not a full Kindred. And sometimes a vampire is simply so weak-willed that the Embrace doesn't take—the would-be sire just doesn't have enough mental fortitude to thwart death, at least not entirely.

A question that this raises, of course, is: Could a player's character perpetrate such an Embrace, winding up with a Larva instead of a true vampire? The answer is: certainly, but it's something that requires a bit of consideration from the Storyteller and the player. The Embrace of a person is often an event that, in the chronicle, takes a great deal of attention and consideration. The player might not appreciate discovering that her character's would-be childe is a mindless animal. Then again, she might relish the roleplaying challenges it presents.

In the end, as with so many other matters, it falls to the Storyteller to know her players' minds and to juggle drama with fun. In any event, if a character creates a Larva when he was intending to create a true vampire, the character loses a Willpower point, not a dot, as mentioned above. Also, the Storyteller might consider granting the player an extra experience point for the session, or indeed for any session in which the Larva childe causes the character a serious problem (much like a Flaw; see p. 216 of *The World of Darkness Rulebook*).

The Storyteller might also wish the botched Embrace to be a real and ongoing concern in his chronicle, and thus have some game systems to back it up. Below are some systems to represent the botched Embrace:

- **Embrace After Frenzy:** If the character attempts the Embrace in a scene in which he has succumbed to Frenzy (or within an hour, if the scene ended with the character exiting Frenzy), the player rolls Humanity. If this roll succeeds, the character can Embrace as usual. If it fails, the character loses a point (not a dot) of Willpower and the corpse rises as a Larva.

- **Distraction:** The character is interrupted after he has drained the would-be childe of blood, but before the Embrace is entirely complete. The player must roll Resolve + Wits. If this roll fails, the corpse rises as a Larva.
- **Weak-Willed:** Whenever *any* vampire attempts the Embrace, the player must roll Resolve + Composure. For every 2 full points of Humanity above 5, the player receives a +1 modifier, while for every 2 full points of Humanity *below* 5, the player receives a -1 modifier (meaning Humanity 1 incurs a -2 to the roll). If this roll fails, the corpse becomes a Larva.

Embrace by Draugr

The draugr, Kindred in whom the Man has died off entirely, cannot create true vampires. Once a vampire settles into his new draugr state, though, he develops a twisted parental instinct. He finds a nest and drags victims back to it, creating Larvae and building a “family.” Rumors persist about an extremely wealthy Ordo Dracul vampire that trapped one of these creatures and forced it to Embrace. (These rumors go on to state that this Dragon’s well-appointed haven is now the largest Larva nest in North America.)

If a vampire were to attempt the Embrace while in Frenzy, the result might be a Larva for the same reason. The Beast doesn’t normally bother with such things, of course—its only impulses are *fear, hunger, rage*. But even if it happens only once in a century, it still happens.

Cursed Blood

There are other forms of magic in the World of Darkness, apart from vampires’ blood magic. The living use magic, too, and who knows how it might interact with vampire blood? Consider: A vampire runs afoul of a witch upon whom he quite innocently attempts to feed. She spits in his face and curses him for “a year and a day,” but he escapes the situation with nothing more than wounded pride and forgets about it. Six months later, he falls in love with and attempts to Embrace a woman he met during his nightly meanderings. But when he drizzles his Vitae into her mouth and attempts to will her soul to return, he finds his thoughts confused. She rises, though, albeit not in the way he intended.

Another, similar method of Larva creation involves ghouls. Rumors state that if a ghoul dies with fresh vampire blood in its system (ingested the same night, or at least within 24 hours), the ghoul rises as a Larva. The rumors are muddled, though, on certain points—some state that only new ghouls (those given their *first* taste of Vitae that same night) are susceptible, while others state that only ghouls whose aging has been retarded for at least a year can rise as Larvae.

CURSED BLOOD AND HOW TO ACQUIRE IT

The World of Darkness holds many, many ways to become cursed. Various vampiric bloodlines have the ability. Some spirits and ghosts have Numina (and therefore can grant curse-creating Gifts to werewolves). Changeling contracts can apply curses. And living spellcasters of all kinds make it their stock in trade. As such, the notion of “cursed blood” is presented here as a possibility, the idea that such a curse *could* interact with Kindred blood and cause an incomplete Embrace. It’s not something that should happen every time or even predictably, because if it did, someone would have figured out how to use it long ago.

If, however, you own **Mage: The Awakening** and would like to employ Supernal magic to throw a vampire’s reproductive capability off its track, consider this: A spell incorporating Death (to affect a vampire), Mind (to put the vampire’s Beast in control) and Fate (to set the trigger “when the vampire tries to create another of its kind”) might activate when the vampire attempts the Embrace, forcing the roll to avoid a botched Embrace listed on p. 101. That’s a complicated spell to cast at a moment’s notice, though—what mage has that kind of presence of mind when staring down a vampire’s fangs?

Deliberate Creation

Larvae make superb guard dogs, it’s true. They combine the strength and speed of a vampire with the trainability of animals (in a best-case scenario; like dogs, they are quite capable of turning on their masters, but this is discussed further below). As such, Kindred have, at various points, attempted to create them deliberately. Is this possible?

The question isn’t whether it’s possible; the question is: Would it be interesting in your chronicle? An ancient Theban Sorcery rite might allow it, as might a particular application of Crúac. (Either would probably be a level-three ritual.) What if a Dragon developed a Coil of Worms, allowing him to choose whether to Embrace a person as a Larva or as a “true” vampire? But then, these are powers exclusive to covenants, and nothing says that the creation of Larvae would be available to any vampire that learns a given Devotion, or even a given Merit.

For something a bit more unstable, though, consider a vampire that learns how to Embrace victims as Larvae using one of the methods already listed. For instance, an enterprising Daeva learns that anyone she Embraces within five minutes of coming out of Frenzy rises as a Larva. She can, perhaps with a little help, arrange situations in which she flies into Frenzy in a locked room with a hapless mortal. In a short amount of time, she builds up a small force of Larvae. What does she do with them? How well can she control them? And what if

one of her intended servants manages to kill her before she kills it? What, then, becomes of her other pets?

Another option is that all Kindred are capable of deliberately creating a Larva. They simply need to learn how. In this case, discovering the process might be a matter of tracking down the right mentor, uncovering the proper totem, or just practicing.

System: deliberate creation

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Occult

Cost: 1 Vitae + 1 Willpower

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The intended Larva dies, but will rise as a Larva sometime within the next week. The Larva can instinctively track down its erstwhile sire. It might view the sire as an enemy and immediately try to kill him, or it might see him as its master and bring him “presents”—eviscerated cats, dead people, etc.

Failure: The attempt fails, and the intended Larva dies.

Success: The target becomes a Larva. The process takes about an hour, during which the victim writhes and screams in pain. After that, the Larva rises and is under the character’s control.

Exceptional Success: As above, except that the Larva rises within a few minutes.

Larva Creation

Larvae are mechanically similar to other vampires in some respects. They feed upon blood, they can use Vitae to power some Disciplines, and so on. This section discusses how they work from a game-systems perspective.

Blood Potency

Larvae have Blood Potency 0. Note that this isn’t the same as not having the Blood Potency trait at all. A Larva’s blood is weaker and thinner than any neonate’s, but Larvae are still vampires. The ramifications of having Blood Potency 0 are discussed below.

Clan

Larvae do not have clans. The Blood is too weak to pass along the spiritual curse of the Kindred that spawned them. As such, Larvae do not have a specific clan weakness, nor do they have clan Disciplines.

Predator’s Taint

Having a Blood Potency rating of 0 means a lone Larva will always flee before a “true” vampire when the Predator’s Taint is involved. Note, though, that Larvae often travel

in groups. The collective response of a group of Larvae is determined by how many Larvae are in the group. Therefore, if a group of four Larvae confront a vampire with Blood Potency 2, the Larvae attack, while the vampire’s Beast is inclined to flee (and rightly so).

The Embrace

Larvae cannot Embrace, obviously. They *can* create more Larvae, but it is difficult for them to do so. This requires a pack of at least five of the creatures, and they must all contribute at least 1 point of Vitae to the “Embrace.” The pack then makes a teamwork roll (see p. 134 of *The World of Darkness Rulebook*), using Resolve + Composure as the dice pool, contested against a Stamina + Resolve roll from the victim. If the victim wins, his body rejects the infection and he dies. If the Larvae win, the victim rises as a new Larva.

Vitae Use

Larvae can expend Vitae to heal Bashing and Lethal damage, to increase Physical Attributes and to power Disciplines just as Kindred can. A Larva can expend 1 Vitae per turn. A Larva can hold Vitae equal to its Health rating, or 10, whichever is lower.

Larvae must expend 1 point of Vitae to awaken each evening. Larvae *cannot* create Vinculi or ghouls. They cannot expend Vitae to create a “blush of life” or eat food (see p. 156 of *Vampire: The Requiem*).

Blood Ties

As Larvae do not have clans, they do not have access to the powers of blood sympathy, nor do the rules for blood ties apply to them (see p. 162 of *Vampire: The Requiem*). A vampire that manages to assume control of a Larva or pack of Larvae does receive similar benefits (see below).

Vinculum

As mentioned above, Larvae cannot create Vinculi in mortals or Kindred. They *can* be subjected to Vinculi, though it doesn’t take hold as easily as it does in other Kindred. This might seem strange, given the weakness of Larva blood, but it stems from the lack of intelligence and self-awareness from which Larvae suffer. They aren’t capable of feeling true loyalty or admiration, and so the Vinculum is expressed as everything else is for the minions: through the lens of predation.

Larvae are interested, first and foremost, in feeding. When they taste the blood of a true vampire, they experience a rush of pleasure and excitement, but expressed as a desire to *keep feeding*. A vampire that tries to bind a Larva with the Vinculum had best be able to hold it down. Because if he can’t, he’s liable to end up drained dry and put into torpor.



All of that said, Larvae are susceptible to the Vinculum. When a Larva tastes another vampire's blood, the Storyteller rolls that Larva's Resolve + Composure – the vampire's Blood Potency. If this roll fails, the Larva reacts to the power of the Blood, but the specific reaction depends upon the circumstances. If the Larva is attacking the vampire, the "Vinculum" is expressed as a desire to consume the rest of the potent blood. If, however, the vampire has physically bested the Larva (see Control, below), the Larva regards the vampire as its master. If the Larva in question was the pack leader, the entire pack falls under the vampire's control.

Diablerie

Larvae can commit diablerie, though it rarely occurs to them to do so. They do not naturally feel the urge to keep drinking once they have consumed all the blood in a vampire's body. That said, if commanded to by a controlling vampire, a Larva might be able to consume another Kindred's soul. This has the effect of elevating the Larva to Blood Potency 1, transforming it into a true vampire (see Elevation, below). The system for diablerie is the same as presented on p. 159 of **Vampire: The Requiem**.

It is possible to diablerize a Larva, but as Larvae have Blood Potency 0, the only possible benefit would be to acquire a dot of Vigor, Celerity or Resilience, or a dot in one of the few Skills of which Larvae are capable. Of course, blood-addicted Kindred might not be able to stop themselves. A vampire that diablerizes a Larva still suffers the usual drawbacks: loss of Humanity, possible Derangement, and the stain on her aura.

Skills

Larvae lose most of the Skills they possessed in life. The only Skills Larvae are capable of using are: Athletics, Brawl, Stealth, Weaponry and Intimidation. Larvae are still capable of using Specialties in these Skills, but the Specialties need to be simple enough to make sense with the Larva's animalistic mindset. "Bite" is an appropriate Brawl Specialty, but "Kung Fu" is not. A rule of thumb: If the Specialty would make sense for a dog, it makes sense for a Larva.

More about a Larva's mindset is discussed below under Storytelling.

Merits

Larvae have access to the following Merits from **The World of Darkness Rulebook**: Danger Sense, Eidetic Memory (rare, but possible), Ambidextrous, Direction Sense, Fast Reflexes, Fleet

of Foot, Giant, Iron Stamina, Strong Back. The same logic applies here as with Skill Specialties. If a dog could conceivably use it, a Larva probably could. Larvae do not use individual Fighting Styles, though they can make use of a special Fighting Style: The Swarm (see below).

Note, though, that a Larva might technically have a Merit it can't make use of. For instance, a very attractive man or woman might become a Larva, but there's no point representing that attractiveness with the Striking Looks Merit, as the Larva isn't going to be engaged in the sort of actions that would benefit from the Merit. This sort of trait might *become* relevant if the Larva is elevated, however, so it's not a bad idea to note.

Advantages

Larvae use the *higher* of their Dexterity or Wits to determine Defense, just as animals do.

Also, like animals, Larvae do not have Virtues or Vices. They regain Willpower through rest only.

Disciplines

The only Disciplines Larvae are capable of using are Celerity, Vigor and Resilience. As Larvae do not have clans, these Disciplines are considered "out-of-clan," not that experience point totals typically matter for Larvae.

Frenzy

A Larva's Beast is always close to the surface, and it doesn't take much stimulation for a Larva to Frenzy. Being attacked, frightened or tempted with blood require an immediate check to avoid the appropriate kind of Frenzy. All Frenzies require one more success than they normally would to resist, based upon the totals listed on p. 179 of **Vampire: The Requiem**, and an uncontrolled Larva suffers a -2 to the roll to avoid Frenzy. Larvae that run in packs, however, have a slightly easier time of it. Packs of Larvae avoid Frenzy as a teamwork action, with the leader of the pack as the primary actor (again, p. 134 of **The World of Darkness Rulebook**). The -2 modifier still applies, however. If the primary actor succeeds, none of the Larvae enter Frenzy... but if he doesn't, they all lose control.

Larvae with a Kindred master do not suffer the -2 modifier on Frenzy checks.

Torpor

Larvae do not enter torpor due to starvation, damage or staking. A wooden stake in the heart simply destroys them. Likewise, if a Larva's rightmost Health box is marked with Lethal damage, it remains active (and immediately enters Frenzy). Any further damage is considered Aggravated, and when the creature's last Health box is filled with Aggravated damage, of course it is destroyed.

If a Larva attempts to rise in the evening but has no Vitae in its pool, it suffers a point of Bashing damage instead. Its first impulse, obviously, is to feed. If the Larva is prevented from feeding (locked in a stone cellar, for instance), it will eventually starve to death.

Larvae do not usually last long enough to worry about entering torpor from increasing Blood Potency. See Elevation, below.

Humanity

Larvae do not have Humanity traits. They see other creatures as food, and have no moral compunction about consuming their blood.

Other Traits

While Larvae do not have many of the advantages true vampires do, their Blood enables a fast-forming pack bond. As mentioned, a group of Larvae (called a "pack" or a "swarm") is much more dangerous than a lone minion. The Larvae quickly establish a hierarchy, in which the most powerful of them assumes control. Which Larva is the most powerful is usually determined by a roll of Presence + Intimidation, with the Larva with the most successes assuming control. If there are any ties for the highest number of successes, though, the Larvae brawl until one leader emerges.

Once a leader has been established, the Larvae have a kind of intuitive sense of one another, similar in some ways to the blood sympathy of Kindred of the same clan.

A new Larva that encounters an existing swarm rapidly finds a place in it. Sometimes that means taking control of the pack, if the newcomer is exceptionally strong or vicious, but more often he is relegated to the bottom of the hierarchy. If two swarms meet, they fight for dominance, and the winners assimilate the losers into their pack structure. If two *controlled* swarms meet, though, they fight for their masters and give no quarter.

Larvae of the same pack can sense each other within a 50-yard radius, and can always find one another inside that range. Outside the range, they have a vague feeling of other vampires, but cannot differentiate between Larvae and true Kindred. Vampires sometimes use Larvae as bloodhounds, tracking down fugitives, or truffle-hunting pigs, hunting down torpid elders, because of this ability. Using a Larva to hunt another vampire is an extended action, and involves keeping the Larva on task. The dice pool is Presence + Animal Ken, with each roll representing 30 minutes of tracking. As long as the player continues to gain successes, the tracking continues. (How many successes in total are required to find the quarry is up to the Storyteller.) If at any point the handler's player fails a roll, the Larva loses the "scent" or loses interest, and the handler's player must immediately attempt to coerce (Presence + Intimidation) or persuade (Manipulation + Animal Ken) the Larva to pick up the trail.

New Merit—Fighting Style: Swarm (• to •••••)

Any vampire that fights the Larvae and survives can pass along this piece of wisdom to his fellows—“Do not let them surround you.” A pack of Larvae doesn’t have much in the way of intelligence, but more than makes up for it in animal cunning, ferocity and tenacity. This Fighting Style simulates the way in which a pack of Larvae takes down its prey.

Note that only a true pack of Larvae uses the Swarm. If, for some reason, several unaffiliated Larvae wound up in the same place at the same time, and a convenient victim was nearby, the minions would be just as likely to attack each other as the vessel. They certainly would not use any of the maneuvers listed here, even if they knew them.

Not all Larvae are equally talented in battle, and so not all of them have access to all levels of the Fighting Style. The Storyteller needs to decide, when using Larvae in a battle, which minions have access to the Swarm and at what rating. It might be simpler to assume that all members of a pack have the same rating, rather than write out traits for a large group of them, of course.

Dots purchased (or granted) in this Merit allow access to special combat maneuvers. Each dot is a prerequisite for the next one, so a Larva can’t have Set-Up until he has Dogpile. All Larvae involved in a given maneuver have to have the requisite dots in this Merit to enact it, except for Sever Limbs (see below).

- **Synchronicity:** The Larvae anticipate one another’s moves, waiting for an unspoken signal before moving in. The Storyteller makes one initiative roll for the Larvae, using the character with the highest Initiative modifier. All members of the pack act on this initiative.

- • **Dogpile:** The Larvae attack a single target simultaneously, grappling him and holding him down. A maximum of three Larvae can enact this maneuver at once. Use the grappling system found on p. 157 of **The World of Darkness Rulebook**, except that the Larvae use the teamwork rules (found on p. 134 of that book). The primary actor subtracts the target’s full Defense rating from the roll, but if the roll succeeds, the character is grappled by all of the participating Larvae. This means that to break free, the grappled character’s player must roll Strength + Brawl – the highest Strength rating of the grappling Larvae + 1 for each additional Larva. The grappling Larva can bite the target on the next turn, but cannot enact other Swarm maneuvers.

- • • **Set-Up:** One Larva moves in and absorbs a blow from a victim. As the blow lands, the next Larva attacks, taking advantage of his packmate’s sacrifice. The first Larva sacrifices his Defense, taking no action for the turn. If the target attacks the “sacrificial” Larva, another member of the pack can attack the target and gain a +2 to the attack roll. Only one Larva can take advantage of this maneuver in a turn.

- • • • **Eyes Everywhere:** Since Larvae have an intuitive sense of each other’s positions and current situation, they are extremely difficult to overwhelm. All Larvae in a given combat scene with this level of Swarm do not suffer from the Defense penalty due to multiple attacks in the same turn (see p. 155 of **The World of Darkness Rulebook**).

- • • • • **Sever Limbs:** Once a pack of Larvae has grappled a target using Dogpile, it can hold the target immobile allowing devastating attacks from other members of the swarm. By chewing through the target’s flesh at joints, the Larvae can sever a target’s arm or leg in a matter of seconds. This is an extended action, during which the target must remain immobilized in the grapple. The attack roll comes from a Larva not involved in the Dogpile (and whose Strength doesn’t contribute to the penalty for breaking free, therefore). The Storyteller makes the Larva’s attack roll as usual. The target’s Defense does not apply. The Larva must accumulate a number of successes equal to the (target’s Stamina x 2) + Resilience (if any). If the Larva manages to accumulate these successes before the target breaks free, the creature chews through the target’s elbow, shoulder or knee and removes the attached limb. To a living target, this immediately fills the character’s Health track with Lethal damage (meaning that the character is bleeding out), even if the successes on the attack roll(s) were not sufficient to do this. To a vampire, the loss of the limb is obviously terrifying and inconvenient, but the vampire won’t bleed to death. He merely suffers the Lethal damage indicated by the Larva’s attacks.

Only the Larva making the chewing attack needs to have Fighting Style: Swarm • • • • •.

Example: A pack of four Larvae attack a hapless mortal walking home one night. Three of them (each with Swarm • •) grapple him, while the fourth (with Swarm • • • • •) chews through his arm. The man’s Stamina is 2, his Health rating is 7 and he has no wounds going into the fight. That means that Larva needs 4 successes to chew through his arm. The Storyteller rolls 3 successes on the first turn and 2 on the second. This indicates 5 levels of Lethal damage, but it’s also enough to separate the man from his arm. This fills his Health track with Lethal damage and he immediately begins to bleed out (as described on p. 173 of **The World of Darkness Rulebook**). Of course, the Larvae will surely drain his blood in the next few seconds, killing him.

If the hapless wanderer had been a vampire with Resilience 1, the Larvae would have a much harder time of it. For one thing, once the vampire activated Resilience, his effective Stamina increases to 3, meaning the Larva needs 7 successes to sever the limb (Stamina 3 x 2 = 6 + Resilience 1 = 7). At that point, it’s more likely that the Larva will put the vampire into torpor than take off his arm.

Control

Powerful Kindred can seize control of a nest of Larvae, becoming, in effect, the “alpha” of the pack. Doing so is difficult, however, because Larvae instinctively see true vampires as food sources or threats (depending upon their numbers). Below are several possibilities for how a vampire might manage to command a nest. The Storyteller might choose to restrict some of these options, depending upon what sort of story she intends to run, but they aren’t mutually exclusive.

It might be possible, therefore, for a vampire to “steal” a pack of Larvae away from another. Larvae, however, instinctively remain loyal to their pack, and so the bond between master and servant is hard to break. This is addressed in the game systems below.

Powers of the Blood

As with creation of Larvae, it’s possible that a supernatural power available to the Kindred enables taking control of a nest. Two examples (a Devotion and a Merit) are presented below. One, of course, requires a great deal more expertise from the Kindred than the other.

New Devotion: Swarm Control (Animalism ••••, Majesty •)

The vampire combines the power over the Beast that Animalism grants with the force of personality from Majesty. This allows the Kindred to tap into the hive-mind shared by the Larvae, and become its master. This Devotion requires time and repeated use to work, but once the vampire cements himself as the pack’s leader, his dominance is unshakeable and the Larvae will sacrifice themselves to the sun to protect him.

Cost: 1 Vitae per night

Action: Extended (each roll requires one night; target number of successes is equal to the number of Larvae in the pack + 10)

Dice Pool: Presence + Intimidation + Animalism

The character must be within sight of at least one of the Larvae in the pack in order to use this power. The player spends the Vitae and makes the indicated roll.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Larvae instantly attack the character. All previous successes are lost, and any further attempts to dominate this group of Larvae suffer a -2 penalty. (This fades after a successful use of the Devotion.)



Failure: No successes are added to the total. If this was not the first roll, the vampire can sacrifice 1 previously gained success in order to maintain control of the pack for the remainder of the night.

Success: Successes are added to the total. If this roll does not take the character to his target number of successes, the vampire still controls the pack for the remainder of the night. The pack will obey commands (issued verbally) from the character, and will attack enemies and perform tasks within its ability (see below). The Larvae will not, however, approach fire or sunlight for the character.

If this roll results in the target number of successes being accumulated, the vampire is now in full control of the pack. He can issue commands mentally instead of verbally, and the Larvae obey him unquestioningly, no matter how suicidal the command. Any attempt to wrest control of the pack results in the Larvae attacking the would-be master without mercy.

Exceptional Success: Considerable successes are added to the total. No special effect for exceptional success.

This Devotion costs 15 experience points to purchase.

New Merit: Swarm Master (••••)

Prerequisites: Kindred, Blood Potency •••, Humanity no greater than 5

Effect: The vampire's Beast resonates with the Larvae, allowing her to seize control of a swarm. Whenever the character is in close enough proximity to a Larva to trigger the Predator's Taint, the player may roll Presence + Resolve + Blood Potency in a contested roll vs. the Larva's (or the pack leader's, if applicable) Resolve + Composure. If the vampire wins, the swarm is under the vampire's control until she is physically separated from the swarm for a period of one hour per dot of Blood Potency. At the end of that time, the swarm regains its independence, though the vampire can attempt to assume control again. During the separation, the Larvae will follow the vampire's last orders, or, if no orders were given, attempt to find her.

While in control of a swarm, the vampire can issue verbal commands to the swarm. The Larvae follow the Kindred's commands to the best of their abilities. In order to force the swarm to undertake especially dangerous actions (entering a burning building, fighting a more powerful vampire without the rest of the pack, etc.), the vampire's player must roll Presence + Intimidation. If the command involves facing fire or sunlight, apply a -3 to the roll.

Another vampire can attempt steal the pack away from the master, but incurs a -5 penalty on the attempt to do it, whether using this Merit or another method.

Drawback: The swarm doesn't feel safe away from the master. The Larvae follow the vampire around, which can make maintaining the Masquerade difficult. Clever masters

find ways to compensate, but one Larva running off after a vessel can ruin the whole enterprise.

Dominance

Larvae are simple, instinctive creatures that solve their differences with physical combat. As such, a vampire that can best them in combat can lead them. Of course, one seldom fights just one Larva.

If a vampire can beat a Larva in close combat, forcing it to drink his blood, he can forge a Vinculum (see above). Besting a pack leader this way brings the pack under the vampire's sway, but the pack doesn't harbor any notions of "honorable combat," meaning the vampire has to take down the pack leader *before* the rest of the pack swarm him and drain him dry. Needless to say, this isn't a simple task.

Should a vampire assume control this way, any attempt to seize control of the swarm by another Kindred suffers a -5 penalty *unless* the vampire bests the controlling Kindred in combat. In that case, dominance is automatic.

Force of Will

This option is open only to vampires whose Blood Potency is high enough to trigger a fear response in the Larvae. Remember that a swarm's effective Blood Potency, for purposes of the Predator's Taint, is determined by its size. Therefore, in order for a vampire to take control of a swarm with three members through sheer force of will, his Blood Potency would have to be at least 4. (The first dot of the Protean Discipline, of course, can change this, meaning Gangrel have an easier time of taking control of Larva swarms.)

Once the Predator's Taint has been triggered and the Larvae begin to flee, the vampire needs to catch one of the swarm, preferably the leader. The vampire doesn't need to physically harm or even detain the creature, but does need to corner it, knock it down or otherwise render it powerless. At that point, the vampire's player rolls Presence + Intimidation + Blood Potency, and the swarm resists with a Resolve + Composure roll (using teamwork rules, the Larva being dominated the primary actor). If the vampire wins, he assumes control of the swarm.

Another vampire can take control of the swarm away as described above for "Dominance."

Draugr

A draugr can assume control of a swarm using either the Dominance or Force of Will methods, and uses the same dice pools as described above. It bears noting, though, that a draugr's control over a swarm is even more direct and unshakable, because the draugr's Beast is so much closer to the surface. Any attempt to steal control of a swarm from a draugr master suffers a penalty equal to the draugr's Blood Potency, *in addition* to any other penalties.

Elevation

It is possible for a Larva to become a true vampire. The Man isn't destroyed when a person becomes a Larva, but is simply buried deep within the bloodied, animalistic mind of the minion. Under certain circumstances, the Man can be revived. Some rumors even suggest that the Embrace can be reversed, and the Larva turned human again (see sidebar).

HUMAN AGAIN?

Talk to four different vampires about this, and you get four different stories:

- "It only works if the creature hasn't killed. If it's taken human life, it's gone—you might be able to *complete* the Embrace, but you can't reverse it." (Variant: Some sources state that if the Larva drinks human blood, it's too late.)
- "The failed Embrace doesn't kill the person. Sure, they look dead—no noticeable heartbeat and all. But as long as no catastrophic damage happens to that body, there's a chance to revive them. Once they get shot, stabbed, clubbed, any of the stuff that tends to happen to minions, it's permanent.
- "You've got until sunrise. That's it. If the person rises as a Larva at midnight, you've got less time than if they died at sunset, but them's the breaks. Once the sun rises, the clock runs out."
- "You have to show the creature something it loved in life, let it remember who it used to be. The best way is to bring another person, someone that truly loved the sorry sonofabitch. If they're going to snap out of it, that'll do it. If not...well, then you've just *fed* the thing."

Changing a Larva into a full Kindred is difficult, and the difficulty increases the longer the Larva exists. Doing so involves strengthening the creature's Blood Potency, and there are only a few known ways of doing this.

- **Adoption:** Another vampire can take on the role of surrogate sire. This involves feeding the Larva at least 1 point of Vitae, and spending the dot of Willpower to complete the Embrace. The Larva's blood then takes on the properties of the surrogate sire's, and the character rises as a true vampire. This is automatic only if the Larva has been undead for less than a year. After that time, the would-be sire's player must roll Resolve + Blood Potency to complete the Embrace, and this roll suffers a -1 modifier for every full year the Larva has been undead.
- **Time:** Blood Potency naturally increases over time. Normally, 50 years of unlife is enough to increase the trait by 1 dot. But a Larva's blood does not thicken the way a true vampire's does. If a Larva can remain extant for 100 years without meeting Final Death, it might have a

chance to elevate itself. This decision might best be left to the Storyteller (it's not going to happen often, so if it does happen it's probably a plot point), but if a game mechanic is required, the Storyteller can roll the Larva's Intelligence + Resolve. If this roll succeeds, the Larva becomes a true vampire. If it fails, the creature remains a Larva (but could try again in another 100 years).

- **Diablerie:** By far a more reliable method of elevating a Larva is to allow it to diablerize another vampire. As mentioned, Larvae do not feel the urge to diablerize Kindred. Once the vampire is drained of blood, the Larvae usually leave him alone (in torpor, which can easily be fatal, depending upon the vampire's location). A vampire that has taken control of a Larva, however, can command the minion to keep drinking. If the Larva successfully diablerizes the vampire, its Blood Potency increases to 1 and it becomes a true Kindred.
- **Magic:** Once again, the myriad magical rituals and practices of the various Kindred societies might come up with methods of elevating Larvae. Naturally, a Theban Sorcery rite would function very differently than an alchemical working designed by the Ordo Dracul, but the effect would be much the same—elevation. Whether or not a given faction of Kindred has access to (or could discover) such a working is up to the Storyteller. As with adoption, any relevant rolls suffer a -1 for every year the character has been a Larva.

Elevated Larvae

By whatever method he manages it, an elevated Larva is mechanically identical to any other vampire. A few considerations, however, are necessary:

- **Clan:** Larvae do not have clans, and when they become elevated they do not take on the clan of their "sire," whoever that might have been. Larvae that commit diablerie take on the clan of their victim, and those "adopted" by other Kindred gain their surrogate sire's clan, but what of minions that become true Kindred by other means? The Storyteller has a few options.

One is to choose the clan (or, if the elevated Larva is going to be a player's character, let the player choose). "Clan" is a mutable concept to some degree; this is what makes bloodlines possible. As such, it's possible for the Blood to "settle" into any one of the known patterns vampires see as clans. This casts doubt on clan being a completely familial concept, but maybe that would be interesting for your chronicle.

A second solution is that the vampire does not have a clan. It has no clan weakness, but no Disciplines are considered in-clan, either. If word gets out among the covenants about such a being, it can probably expect its Requiem to be cut short. No one likes to have their assumptions challenged.

- **Memory:** All Larvae were once human. When one becomes elevated, fragments of that human mind come back. Elevated Larvae are always partially amnesiac, even if adopted by other Kindred. They often remember Skills, but not training. That is, a cop who becomes a Larva, and is then elevated, might be a crack shot, but he has no memory of his days at the police academy (and has probably lost other Skills, such as Academics and Investigation). After going on pure instinct for so long, elevated Larvae suffer a kind of mental atrophy, and the past is usually the first casualty. Worse, Larvae elevated via diablerie sometimes absorb memories from their victims, and therefore cannot separate their lives from the Requiem they stole.

The Larva seldom remembers her activities before elevation. The last thing she remembers, usually, is the Embrace (or whatever circumstance led to her becoming a Larva). Fragments of her activities as vermin probably haunt her daytime dreams for years to come, however.

- **Disciplines:** A Larva keeps any dots in Resilience, Vigor and Celerity she has accumulated. Whether the character has any in-clan Disciplines depends upon what decision was made about the character's clan.
- **Skills & Merits:** Larvae don't necessarily keep their full Skill ratings, since much of a Larva's ability comes from animal instinct. It's not unreasonable to assume a dot or two of the Larva's Skills remain, but the player or Storyteller has carte blanche to rearrange them as seems appropriate. Skills from the character's life can also return, and new ones might emerge as the character finds his feet.

The Fighting Style: Swarm Merit is lost, of course. Most other Merits probably remain, but it's not impossible that Merits like Fast Reflexes fade (since they, too, might be based upon instinct now unavailable).

- **Humanity:** An elevated Larva starts off at Humanity 6, or Humanity 5 if she committed diablerie to become elevated.

Actions taken during the character's time as a Larva do not cause degeneration after the fact, because the character has no memory of taking them and so cannot take any true responsibility for them. Extreme circumstances (such as a video of the character slaughtering innocent people as a Larva) might force a degeneration roll, or at least a roll to avoid a Derangement.

- **Other Considerations:** If the Larva was part of a pack, the player can attempt to take control of it (applying a +2 modifier to any attempts to do so) with the Storyteller's approval. If the pack was controlled by another vampire, the character starts with a stage-1 Vinculum toward that Kindred.

The character's Defense changes to the lower of her Dexterity or Wits upon elevation. She also gains a Virtue and

Vice. These might be the same she had while alive, or the experience of becoming a vampire might change them.

Storytelling the Larvae

The Larvae are meant to fill a niche in the world of **Vampire: The Requiem**—namely, the minion vampire. This creature shows up in a number of films, TV series and other media (*30 Days of Night*, *John Carpenter's Vampires*, and *From Dusk Till Dawn*), and it seemed an appropriate inclusion for this book. But how can the Storyteller best make use of the creatures?

Larvae make for excellent combat monsters, for one thing. They aren't as versatile and powerful as true vampires, but they have the capacity to tear living opponents to pieces in short order. They pose less of a threat to a coterie of Kindred, but they can still leave other vampires injured and drained of blood. If the characters in your chronicle are neonates (or mortals, perhaps hunters, for that matter) they can present a different kind of undead foe than readers of **Vampire** might be expecting. Larvae hearken back to older legends of vampires, the kind in which the bloodsuckers are ugly, hungry and near-mindless.

But beyond their use in a fight, consider what Larvae do to set off the themes of **Vampire: The Requiem**. In a game about moral degradation, Larvae can show the characters that they have still farther to fall. Even a draugr isn't so weak and horrific as a Larva. The characters, depending upon what they learn about the vermin's origins, might think, There but for the grace of God go I, or they might think becoming a Larva is some kind of judgment on a person's worthiness—if one becomes a Larva, one wasn't worthy of being Kindred.

Another use for the Larvae is for their potential in showcasing the predatory side of vampires. Larvae hunt in packs, and while their tactics aren't especially sophisticated, they aren't stupid, either. The swarm tries to separate groups and kill off the members one at a time. They stick to the shadows until they can strike, and use their numbers to best effect. They hunt, and in that they are probably more successful than Kindred (often *luring* or *seducing*, even if they call it "hunting"). In the empty streets of a city, or in an abandoned building, or in the countryside on a night with no moon, the Larvae aren't just mindless goons anymore. They're dangerous animals, and everything containing blood is their prey.

Finally, the Larvae can be a superb tool to challenge players' (and characters') assumptions about the World of Darkness. The ability to create and control Larvae is outside the realm of knowledge of any of the covenants, and it's not impossible that *any* of the five major covenants might discover the secret of doing so. This, by the way, is why we don't commit to the method being a Theban Sorcery ritual, a Crúac ritual, a strange expression of the Coils of the Dragon, a Devotion, a Discipline, and so on. One wouldn't

make any more sense than another, and so it's more appropriate to leave this decision up to the Storyteller.

Portraying the Larvae

The Larvae are capable of more diversity than might be immediately apparent. Yes, they are minions, but that doesn't mean the Storyteller can't make them memorable. Consider the following points:

Appearance

Consider how long the Larva has been dead. They don't tend to change clothes, so think about what condition those clothes are in. The clothes should give some clue as to how the Larva met his fate, and what has happened to him since. Stab wound? Bullet holes? Bloodstains (almost certainly)? If the clothes are clean and new, that means someone is dressing the Larva like a doll. What kind of sick person would do *that*?

Don't overlook scent, either. The Larva probably smells like rotting blood, but an observer might catch a whiff of earth (the Larva sleeps underground), gasoline (the nest is in a junkyard) or incense (the Lancea Sanctum is using the Larva).

Behavior

Larvae aren't zombies, but it's perfectly acceptable to have them exhibit some zombie-like traits. Maybe they shamble a bit when they aren't hunting, but as soon as prey presents itself, they break into a full-out run. (Consider the plague victims in the movie *28 Days Later*.) Their mouths might hang open when hungry—they don't drool, of course, but perhaps a bit of unswallowed blood dribbles from their mouths. They might attack mannequins or statues before they realize they don't have any blood. Larvae almost assuredly chase (and might even catch) animals, since the blood of lower creatures can sustain them.

Quirks

As mentioned below, the Man doesn't die out entirely. You can make individual Larvae memorable, if you wish, by giving them little quirks that set them apart. A list of examples follows:

- The Larva can speak a few words, but it's always the same ones. "Please don't." "Where's Mom?" "Not tonight." This phrase is probably the last the Larva ever spoke, or heard.
- The Larva collects things. Maybe it chews the buttons off its victims' clothes or takes jewelry. Maybe it makes little piles of rocks.
- The Larva can't just let an exsanguinated body lie. It picks up a stick and bashes the victim's head in. Is it trying to prevent more Larvae from rising? Or is it just angry and destructive?
- The minion hunts only females. If it has no choice, it feeds upon male vessels (or animals), but it will fight off other Larvae viciously to have the privilege of female blood.

- The Larva constantly clears its throat. During a fight, a desperate victim stabbed it in the neck with a pointed stick, and a splinter got lodged in the creature's larynx. An observer could see it jutting out of the skin if he looked closely.

The Larva Mindset

Larvae aren't bestial, not entirely. They don't have access to many of their higher mental functions, and that limits their ability to use Intelligence, Manipulation and Presence. They can't use spoken language (they might be able to replicate a few words, but they can't form novel utterances), and their ability to problem-solve doesn't approach a living person's or a true vampire's.

That said, watching a Larva pack, it's possible to observe certain patterns. The Larvae respect their leader's commands. If the leader is another Larva, communication takes place via grunts, whimpers, hisses and snarls, but since the vocal apparatus is still human, there is a tremendous range of tonal quality and inflection to these animalistic sounds. More than one vampire has underestimated the danger of a lone Larva standing still and whining—it might sound like a meaningless noise, but the other four Larvae in the area hear it as "wait, wait, wait, *now!*"

If the leader is a true vampire, the Larvae can usually understand his spoken commands. This means communication between the pack members becomes more subdued—the Larvae don't need to communicate with each other as often, and so they aren't as "chatty." An observer sees an eerily silent group of Larvae, indicating desires and plans with gestures and body language rather than anything vocal.

Larvae consider their nests to be sacrosanct. They don't always leave them guarded; numbers don't usually allow for it. If a pack of Larvae grows large enough, though, it might leave behind a few minions to protect the nest while the others hunt. This means they might drag their prey back to the nest, still kicking and screaming, so that the guards can feed, too.

Larvae prefer nests that are completely underground, for obvious reasons. Catacombs, caverns and sewers make for good nests, but a basement will also suffice. The Larvae usually block off all but one point of entrance, but leave one more accessible with a few seconds work (sometimes using something heavy enough that only a vampire with Vigor could move it). However, the only reason Larvae flee a nest is if it catches fire. Otherwise, they rely upon their knowledge of the terrain and their ferocity to kill any intruders.

A tiny fragment of Humanity still lurks inside Larvae, and this comes out at odd times. A Larva might choose to protect a small child rather than feed upon her. It might

stop at a mirror and smooth its hair, even though it can't really see its reflection. It might playfully bite another Larva on the neck, or express anger at someone resembling its would-be sire. These actions don't tend to last long, and only seem to happen when the Larva has recently fed. Following up on these moments, though, might enable an outsider to elevate the Larva without diablerie.

Story Hooks

- A large pack of Larvae has taken up residence in a nest outside town, and it has developed an interesting strategy for feeding. The pack members wait for cars, and then one of them allows itself to be struck on the road. When the car stops, the others grab the passengers and drag them back to the nest. This isn't going to last long, of course (the cars don't move themselves away, for one thing) but the nest is cunningly hidden. Finding it quickly, before the Larvae do any more real damage, will be difficult.
- An elder arrives at Elysium with six Larvae in tow. They are docile and calm, totally under his power. He makes it very clear, however, that any attempt to harm him will end badly. Word immediately spreads through the Kindred community that he created these creatures, and that raises questions: Can he do so at will? Does this violate the rules on creating progeny without permission? And if it does, who's going to punish him?
- A neonate contacts the characters and begs their help. He attempted to Embrace his girlfriend, but was interrupted at the last minute and she became a Larva instead. He insists "she's in there somewhere," but he doesn't have the occult knowledge or contacts to help her. He is willing to do anything, including go under a Vinculum to the characters, to get his lover back.
- The characters all awaken in a basement. They are vampires, but they have no memory of the Embrace and no knowledge of their condition. They have shadowy recollections of being told to kill people by a woman in blue robes, but nothing before that. As they investigate, they can learn about their mortal lives and their actions as Larvae. How did they all become elevated at once? And who is (was?) the woman in blue?
- A Gangrel has refined his control of Animalism to the point that he can possess an entire pack of Larvae at once. These creatures have no conscious minds of their own, but the Gangrel can sense anything they can. He plans to use them to kidnap Kindred and diablerize his way into greater power. His first target: the Ordo Dracul's local Koagion, rumored to possess an ancient tome concerning the Larvae. The characters are conscripted by the Koagion to act as bodyguards, investigators or bait.

Quotes: <low, wet growl>

Description: This creature is still wearing whatever clothes it died in. It might be a policeman's uniform, a EMT's scrubs, or the garb of a professional on her way home from work.

Background: Whatever the case, this poor soul was just in the wrong place at the wrong time, and rose as a mindless predator.

Clan: None

Covenant: None

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 1, Composure 2

Mental Skills: N/A

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 3 (Grappling), Stealth 3, Weaponry 1

Social Skills: Intimidation 2

Merits: Fast Reflexes 2, Fighting Style: Swarm 5

Willpower: 4

Humanity: N/A

Virtue: N/A

Vice: N/A

Health: 7

Initiative: 7 (with Fast Reflexes)

Defense: 3

Speed: 11

Blood Potency: 0



Disciplines: Celerity 1, Resilience 1, Vigor 2

Vitae/per Turn: 7/1

Weapons/Attacks

Type	Damage	Size	Special	Dice Pool
Bite	1L	N/A	N/A	7

Amanda Kazmercyk

Quotes: <hoarse, throaty moan>

Description: Amanda was a lovely sixteen-year-old girl before her botched Embrace. Now, her once-curly brown hair hangs ragged in her face. Her clothes are torn and smeared in blood, and her manicured nails (the spa treatment was a present from her older sister) are cracked and split. She runs on the balls of her feet, and crouches down when stationary.

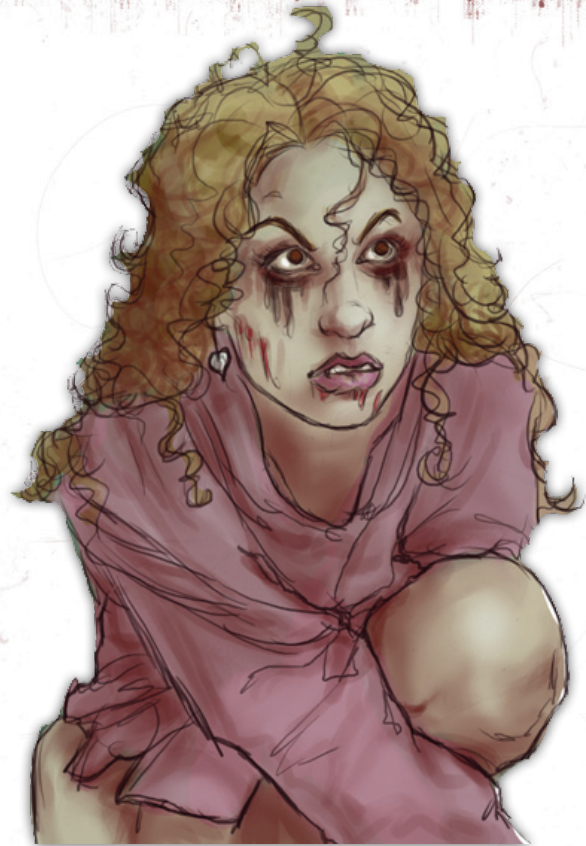
Background: Four weeks after her sweet sixteen, Amanda Kazmercyk went to a spa for a massage, manicure and pedicure. She took the last appointment of the day, and left after dark. She got to her car, waved to the employee who'd kindly waited at the door to make sure she was all right, and opened the door. That was the last thing she would ever remember doing.

Something grabbed her from behind. It pulled her into the trees ringing the spa, chewed her throat open and drank her blood. It left her corpse there in the clearing, but the corpse didn't stay down. Amanda's body stood up, and fell in with the Larva that had killed her. Why she rose up isn't clear—something in that particular Larva's bite, perhaps, or some family curse of Kazmercyk line? Who knows?

Certainly not Amanda. She doesn't know anything anymore. She's run afoul of a few of the Kindred in the area, one of which identified her from her "Missing Person" posters. The vampires of the domain are starting to get worried about the rumors. Amanda wasn't just some homeless person no one's going to miss—she was a young girl from a well-respected family. They aren't going to stop looking, and the authorities are involved now.

Storytelling Hints: Larvae are meant to be minions and, to a point, minions are disposable. But what happens when someone with a life becomes such a minion? Amanda has a family, friends and a lot of people looking for her. The Kindred in the area might send a coterie to destroy her, or, if the vampires in charge are a bit more knowledgeable with regard to Larvae, they might send a coterie to elevate her. At least then she could make a clean break with her old life.

Clan: None



Covenant: None

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Mental Skills: N/A

Physical Skills: Athletics 3 (Running), Brawl 2, Stealth 2 (Stalking)

Social Skills: Intimidation 2

Merits: Fleet of Foot 3, Fighting Style: Swarm 2

Willpower: 6

Humanity: N/A

Virtue: N/A

Vice: N/A

Health: 7

Initiative: 7

Defense: 4

Speed: 14 (with Fleet of Foot)

Blood Potency: 0

Disciplines: Celerity 2, Vigor 1

Vitae/per Turn: 7/1

Weapons/Attacks

Type	Damage	Size	Special	Dice Pool
Bite	1L	N/A	N/A	5

Zack McDonald, Elevated Larva

Quotes: *You tell me—have we met?*

I could swear I've been here before.

I know that guy. Run.

Description: Zack is a tall man, but he's easy to miss unless you're standing far enough back to notice him. People standing in his shadow seem to overlook him entirely. He wears thrift-store clothing and never seems to know what to do with his hands—pockets, behind his back, arms folded, clasped in front. He stares at everyone around him as though searching for a hint of recognition, and when he doesn't find it, he looks dejected and nervous.

Background: Zack McDonald knows his name only because it was written on the tag of the shirt he was wearing when he woke up. He was crouched over the decaying remains of a young girl, with three slaving maniacs around him. And his heart had stopped.

Zack has since learned that the "girl" dying in front of him had been dead for three centuries, and that he'd consumed her soul and her blood. He's also learned that he is now a vampire, and that up until recently he was one of those slaving maniacs. He hasn't quite awakened to the fact that all of this is real—it's still a surreal nightmare to him. But he knows (remembers?) a few things.



First, there was another vampire there the night he woke up. Second, that vampire told him to drink down that girl's soul. Third, that vampire did *not* do it for Zack's sake. Finally, that vampire is still out there, and he is not Zack's friend.

Storytelling Hints: Zack is at the center of a conspiracy, but he has no idea (thus far) what his role in it is or was. He might eventually learn that he *chose* to become a Larva so as to gain access to places a vampire with a mind couldn't, and that he was, at one point, hell-bent on destroying all the vampires in the world.

Of course, now he's one of them, which might change his attitude. If he remembers his compatriots (presuming they're still alive), would he sell them out or complete his mission? And who is the vampire that ordered him to diablerize that "girl," anyway? The Kindred of the area have been tightlipped, but there must be someone who'll talk to him.

Clan: Mekhet

Covenant: Unaligned

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Computer 1, Investigation 2, Occult 2 (Vampires)

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Drive 1 (Chases), Firearms 1, Larceny 2, Stealth 3

Social Skills: Animal Ken 1, Empathy 2 (Reading Emotion), Intimidation 2, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 1

Merits: Danger Sense, Haven Security 1, Haven Size 1, Swarm Master

Willpower: 6

Humanity: 5

Virtue: Prudence. Discretion is definitely the better part of valor, and Zack has had a hard enough time of it already. He doesn't take stupid chances.

Vice: Gluttony. Probably due to his weeks (months? years?) of indulgence as a Larva, Zack has a hard time not glutting himself upon fresh blood when he can.

Health: 7

Initiative: 7

Defense: 3

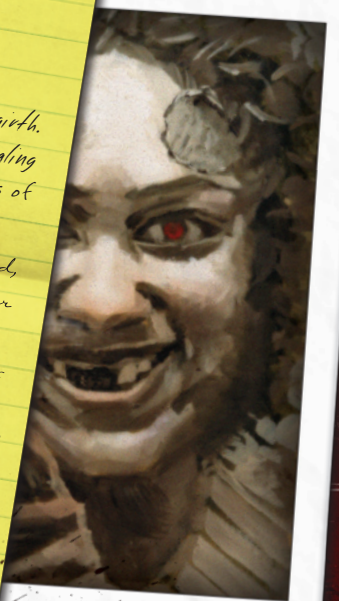
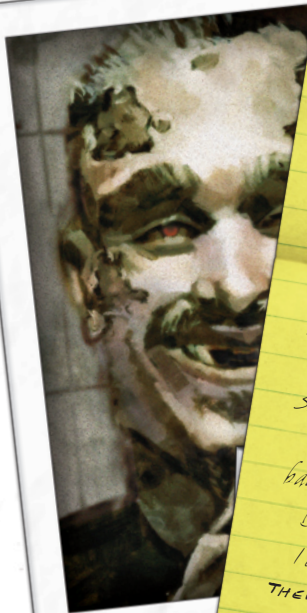
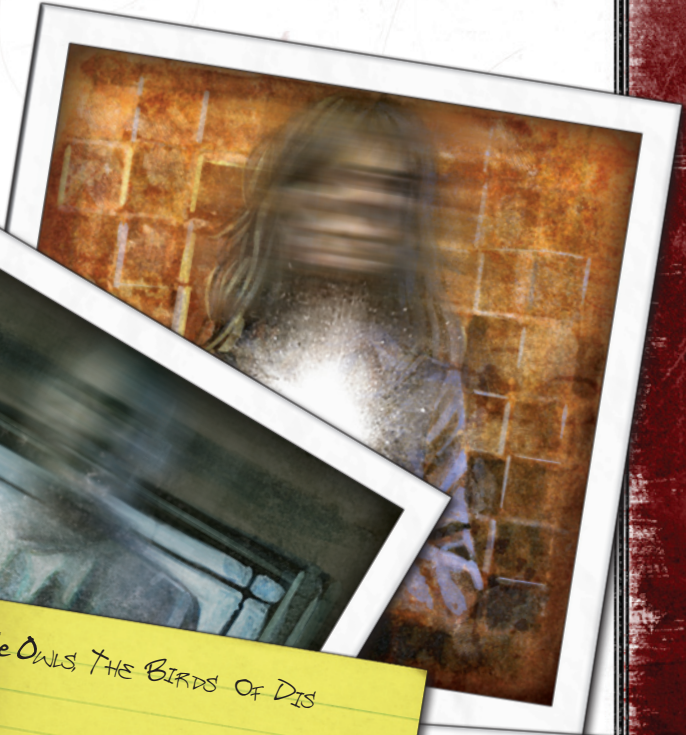
Speed: 10

Blood Potency: 1

Disciplines: Auspex 2, Celerity 2, Obfuscate 1, Vigor 3

Vitae/per Turn: 10/1

The Strix



The Striges, The Nemeses, The Owls, The Birds of Dis

My LINEAGE:
I AM ALL OF THIS.
I AM NONE OF THIS.

Today, I am a fat man. I disgust myself. The shirt on my chest can barely contain my girth. I'm sweating. The sweat smells of garlic, oregano. The breaths I take are labored, great, squealing wheezes. I taste vomit. My esophagus is starting to break down - I cough up bits of throat tissue every time I bring up a mouthful of spit and phlegm.

Before this, I was one of them. Beautiful, hungry for blood, green eyes, red hair, a thousand-mile stare. Skin the color of skim milk. I wore her for a long time.

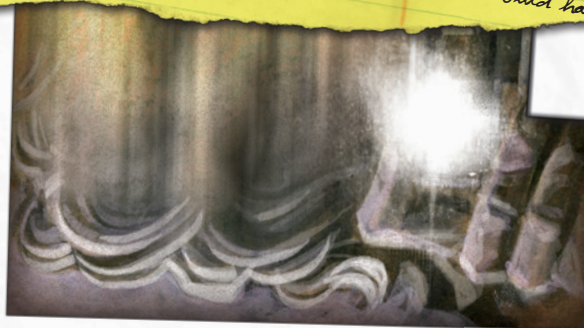
Before her, I squirmed into a skinned, rat-bitten man who slept on the streets.

Before him, I wore the skin of an old woman, rolls of puckered flesh hanging off of bad bones, bones that were pitted and brittle long before I took them for my own.

Before her, before him, before her, before him...

I was never these people. Not really. I don't know their minds. I only know their skin. Their organs, their skeletons. Each just a cheap suit, a stage costume. A happy masquerade.

I don't know who I am or what I am and I would have it no other way.



The Nemeses

The Damned have forgotten the Strix. Those with long memories have perhaps lost the memory to the seductive Fog of *Nepenthe*, the slow fade of the mind—or it is possible they have chosen to forget what they know. It's even worth considering that they never knew of the Strix at all, for they were never the target of the Owls' callous predations; the true victims of the skin-riding Birds of Dis were swallowed by history's great and terrible mouth long ago, and remain mostly forgotten. (Rome may once have been a shining pillar, a white crown with seven diadems, but for the Damned it is a time best left untouched, for the memories it calls are complex and troubling.)

It was unwise to forget. The Strix were gone for a long time, but they came back. Black shadows shaped like owls and ravens gather. They pour their inky shapes into the mouths of their victims, filling the marrow of the bones and the cooling spaces between organs. They walk those stolen bodies about like puppets. Their eyes shine and flash, like an owl's eyes when light strikes them. Stolen bodies decay, though. The flesh withers. Everything breaks down, and the costume can be borrowed for only so long before it must be discarded.

Every rule has its exception, of course. These fiends may thief the flesh of a vampire, pushing down the creature's throat and into the undead crucible of his body—the properties of the Blood are a great favor to the Nemeses, forestalling decay. The Strix may linger as long as it wishes in a vampire's body, with no fear of rot or repercussion.

For what purpose do these creatures return? Do they even understand what they are, or what they want?

History of the Beast: Habeas Corpus

The Strix are not mindless. They are not the howling and seemingly mindless rage of the draugr, or the half-formed hunger of the Larvae. They are cunning. They are intelligent. And they are more than willing to talk, whether out of loneliness, boredom, or a desire to play with their food.

Ask a Strix what she is, and she may not know. Ask her—or him, or it, as if the pronoun matters—where she came from, and she'll have an answer. Whether this answer is true or false, it is the answer all of them know, and all of them give.

In the earliest nights, vampires were truly Damned—they were dead things spared from decay, hollow men with shriveled guts. Only the blood of the living would sate them, but they remained incomplete creatures.

They were still human, or thought of themselves as such. They still pretended to have human ideas, morals, they still believed they were given over to the whims of a proper *conscience*. It was a debilitating weakness. They had no urge to consume the blood of others, even though it's what would keep them from desiccation and doom. The blood tasted foul in their mouths. They were cursed.

One of their kind—a lord in a long forgotten clan that called itself the Founders—sought to save his kind. He went into the deepest woods, traveling for many nights and hiding his face and flesh from the sun in hastily-dug burrows beneath the ground. He grew filthy and hungry, growing mad and bloodied as he stumbled through thickets that tore at his clothing and skin. Into the heart of darkness he went, looking to cross a threshold, the line separating this world from a place of death and shadow.

He found it. And there he found a covey of spirits sitting in the branches of dead trees, each specter a dark bird with bright eyes. On the brink of starvation and dementia, the Founders lord collapsed before the parliament of fiends and wept tears of blood—the last drops of it his body contained. The birds watched as his forehead touched the fallow ground and his lips weakly worked the dusty ashen earth into his mouth as if it would somehow sustain him. He whispered pleas around the mouthful of barren soil. He begged them for their help. And help him they did.

The birds took flight. They entered the Founder—black shadows squirming into his mouth, his eyes, his ears. It gave him terrible pain and great pleasure. When they had finally found a seat within his unliving body, they whispered not in his ear but in the deepest pockets within his innards:

"We are your Beast, the want and the need. We are the desire that tempers your denial. We are the truth that defeats the lie: you are no longer human, and so you no longer must act as human."

The lord wept, and the voices continued: *"This is our gift to you. Do not disappoint us."*

The black shadows fled the lord, leaving some of themselves behind: pits and holes and cavities, each a tiny mouth that whispered and gibbered and wanted. Once more, the shadows became birds and alighted upon the branches of the skeletal tree, their eyes catching the moonlight. The lord staggered into the night, a terrible hunger within him rattling his ribs like the bars of a cage. He was hungry. He was Damned.

Displeasure

Those words: “Do not disappoint us.” It was a promise and a warning.

The lord disappointed.

Yes, he and his childer were changed. They gained pleasure from feeding. They found delight in torment. Their dead emotions and human inclinations did not hold them back from being the predators they needed to be to survive. Within each was an urging devil, a ravenous Beast. The gift of the birds was what they needed.

And yet, they still played at being human. They made rules. They followed them. They arranged their childish little hierarchies, they gave speeches and debated issues and pretended to still know what love and hope meant. Were they the lords and keepers of man? Did they feed wantonly in the streets? Hardly. They kept to the shadows. Lurked in a subterranean city of their own making. They conceived of the Masquerade, a worthless mockery of human life and mortal morals.

They were pretenders. The birds had given them the chance to become something more than human, an apotheosis of monstrosity. But instead they chose to become something lesser, something that hides in the dark corners and cloaks itself in the crass clothing of human nobility. The lord and his childer were fakes and fools, each given the glorious choice to act as they wanted without regard or regret—a misused gift, to be sure.

Castigation

Punishment was due. The lord and his childer had disappointed the birds. The Founders received no warning, no second chances. The birds left their place of darkness and sought to rebuke and then destroy the Damned of the Founders clan. They stole corpses, often those that belonged to the Founders’ own loved ones and ancestors. In the flesh of these bodies, the birds were now the Striges, the harbingers of death. They visited torments upon the Founders. They stole from them. Manipulated events against them. Destroyed their living human families, friends and herds, then reaped the dead bodies as costumes to wear.

Then, the Striges started to take the bodies of the Damned. They made puppets of the Founders, riding the bodies and quieting their minds for nights, weeks, months. They ruined their unives. A Founder would awaken one evening with months of his Requiem lost and unable to be recovered, and he would return to his nocturnal society to find his place there spoiled, the earth salted. Old allies were now enemies. A herd

cultivated over countless years was now dead or cast to the winds. The taste of one’s sire might still linger on the lips, the greasy taste of his heartsblood on the back of the tongue. Grudges born, nemeses made, coteries broken.

The greatest trick of it all was that the Striges did not have to destroy the Founders directly. Others did the job for them. They were pushed to the edges of humiliation and shame, and all that they had built came collapsing down upon them. They were crushed. They were destroyed. Those few that survived, the Birds of Dis finished—but by then, it was something of a mercy, wasn’t it?

Many Returns

The Striges returned to their place of shadow, their degradation and devastation of the Founders complete. Satisfied with vindication, they once more kept to the darkness, to the forests, to the furthest reaches.

But now, they have returned, owl-shaped shades with shimmering eyes. They no longer have a home in the places of shadow, and the most frightening part is *they don’t know why*. They have once more been loosed upon the world, but they seem to possess no purpose, no grim task that allows them to come and go once it has been completed. The Nemeses are guideless, unfettered by the single-minded resolve that vindication can provide.

To put it in a more frightening way: the Strix are *free*.

BEAST AS BIRD, BIRD AS BEAST

Read that again, and you’ll find that the Strix claim to be the origins of the vampire’s Beast. In fact, in a manner of speaking, the Owls think they *actually are* the Beast within each vampire, and that with every Embrace a bit of themselves is passed along like a possessing spirit, a clinging parasite, a congenital infection.

Is it true? That’s up to you and, honestly, it probably doesn’t matter. Each clan claims its own origins. Each covenant points to different stories of vampirism’s origins. The nocturnal society of the Requiem is home to hundreds of competing theories, and that is as it should be. The Strix are simply adding one more voice—and one more complication—to the din.

What *does* matter, though, is that the Strix now have a reason to carry on their mad war against vampires. Once, they seemed to believe that only the so-called Founders carried the gift (and more importantly *squandered* that gift). Now, though, they see their gift present in all the Damned.



Modern Nights

Lightning flashes, and rain pours down. Outside, standing at the edge of the bayou, three figures wait. When the sky blazes with light for each half-second, it's easy to see their glowing eyes, their too-white teeth, their wicked smiles. When the lightning comes again, the bodies are now just piles of discarded skin—and up above, three owls are seen flying away. They are creatures of shadow, each an inky thumbprint smeared across a roiling sky.

The Striges have returned, but no one really knows how or why. Even the creatures themselves are blissfully unaware of the origins of their return; they know only that they no longer are able to wait in those distant places of shadow.

Motivations

What motivates such a terrible creature? What do the Strix *want*?

Theirs is an existential dilemma. Once, the Birds of Dis existed to punish the Founders. That was it. They were castigating horrors from beyond the veil. They had purpose, and when that purpose was complete, their time here was done.

Now, they're back. And they are without guidance, without metaphysical purpose. This is both freeing and troubling to the Birds of Dis. At the heart of the matter

lies a critical question each fiend must ask itself, which is, "Why am I here?" They'd love nothing else than to have a singular purpose, to be possessed of a keen and unswerving drive to do one thing very well. But they don't have that. They're aimless. Given over to their own fates. This might seem freeing, and it is. But it also troubles them. It makes them more unpredictable.

See, they're really not human, not at all. Humans are born without purpose, but they *find* purpose. They forge their own paths. Vampires do similarly; they are dragged into the eternal Requiem with little reason, and now face an eternity of dread, and so they create reasons to continue existing.

The Strix are not capable of forming such meaning. They try. It fails. They do not have societies, and seem incapable of working together beyond the way a pack of hungry dogs might travel together for a time. They cannot see past their own inclinations to form meaningful objectives. They have no ambition beyond their own demonic satisfactions and reptilian urges, all of which exist in the present, not the future. Oh, they can think a week or two down the line, maybe a month. Beyond that? What does it matter?

Still, even in the night-to-night, the Strix do have certain *wants* they seek to fulfill. They possess motivations, even though such impetuses are limited.

The Strix are creatures without skin, bones and muscle. So it is that they must steal bodies to experience what it feels like to have flesh. Not what it *means* to have flesh—thieving bodies offers no context, no sense of actual meaning. It's pure feeling. It's about pleasure and pain.

So, that is their first motivation: to harvest bodies they may exploit for the purposes of experiencing every sensation known to man. This isn't bestial. It isn't orgiastic. It's almost clinical, really—the Strix endlessly try new things, things that stimulate the bodies they've claimed, be it with delight or with suffering. The way a wine connoisseur rolls a Bordeaux around his mouth, coldly identifying hints of pipe smoke and cherries and chocolate—that's the Strix, matter-of-factly identifying the components to all the things the flesh can experience.

Think about all the experiences the flesh can have, down to the tiniest pleasures and miseries, and that is what a Strix seeks.

One night, she cuts herself endlessly. The next, she eats—just a little taste from everything on the menu (whereas the next night, it's a gut-bulging gorge fest). The same night, she hungers for a fuck—then a second, then a third. Again, think about the myriad options available. What does a massage feel like? What happens to the body when the Strix runs two miles, full-speed, without stopping? How does the flesh respond to a cigarette burn, or a splash of liquid nitrogen, or a cooling balm? What does it feel like to kiss a pair of dry, raspy lips, or to be kicked in the temple repeatedly? How does pastrami taste? Milk? Honey? Ash? How many flavors of fornication exist? A Filipino prostitute, a grotesquely corpulent shut-in, a supermodel, an amputee, all with so many wet holes, so many ways to *move* and shake and shudder. Is there a difference between fucking the supermodel, and fucking *as* the supermodel?

Such fun is, of course, limited. The bodies expire over time. The flesh cannot handle the possessor—the skin rots. The bones wither and soon snap. (Even that, though, is an experience worth having. Every body breaks down the same, technically, but every time *feels* different.)

Therein lies the pleasure of taking a vampire's flesh for a ride. The Damned do not decay. Death is forestalled. Moreover, they are creatures capable of further excesses of sensation: the myriad possibilities the Blood offers remain endless. Diablerie! The Vinculum! To enslave, or be enslaved. To turn to mist, to fall ten stories and get up again, to take a bullet to the chest and keep on running. The Embrace! The Final Death! So many new options on this menu, yes?

Without significant purpose, this, then, is the Striges' primary objective: to engage nightly in the never-ending sensations of the flesh.

They aren't driven to punish vampires like they once were. Upon sensing the Blood of a vampire, the Strix are not given over to a focused impulse to destroy the souls of the Damned.

That being said, old habits die hard. They aren't *driven* to punish, but they're also creatures without purpose that grow bored very, very easily. Moreover, they see vampires as inherently weak, detestable creatures. They have a gift—the ability to *be* inhuman, to relinquish one's grip on an old conscience that no longer applies—but they've gone and frittered it away.

So, it still comes easily to the Strix to dominate and destroy the Damned, punishing them for the perceived misuse of their potential. It allows a Strix a measure of patience—by targeting a single vampire to punish, the Strix earns herself a limited objective that might take place over weeks or months. She can focus upon doing nothing but tormenting the creature the same way her kind tormented the Founders of old: by arranging events through stolen bodies that eventually force the subject into increasingly bad situations. (To put it a different way, the Strix gives the vampire enough rope to hang himself.) Note that punishment doesn't always equal destruction; sometimes, it's far more interesting to leave one's prey floundering about in the wreckage of his own Requiem.

The Owl lets go of her castigating crusade only once the subject is sufficiently humiliated or destroyed—or if the entire process becomes rote and boring. If the Strix finds no thrill to be had or it all ends up just too easy, she'll move on, finding something that gives her greater pleasure.

A caveat: the Birds of Dis choose to castigate only those vampires that are squandering their monstrous potential. Certainly, some Damned are capable of acting as true monsters—those that have relinquished their Humanity in service to the Beast do not earn an Owl's ire (and in fact may actually gain the fiend's assistance, for the creature may sense a truly kindred—no pun intended—spirit). Only those vampires that seem bound to maintain their Humanity and human-seeming ways are deserving of castigation. In fact, the more “human” a vampire attempts to be, the more delight the Strix gains from breaking apart that vampire's Requiem, bit by bloody bit.

On rare occasions, an Owl's depredations may lead to a vampire actually becoming less human and more monstrous, inadvertently “learning” the lesson the Strix chooses to teach. If this should occur, the fiend will likely back away from her callous reprimands.

Here, then, is an unconscious motivator for the Strix—it is a purpose, but it is one the creature does not realize and cannot be made to recognize. The Strix portends tragedy and catastrophe.

Certainly, the Strix are free to roam as they see fit, whether in stolen bodies or as the intangible birds of shadow they truly are. But when many Strix gather in a single place, it always means something terrible is coming. In fact, the more of them that gather, the worse the event is sure to be. A terrible fire? A race riot? A F5 tornado or category five hurricane? An earthquake where the mantle of the earth splits like a hungry, consumptive mouth? Some say that crows, ravens and vultures know when death is coming, because they gather like children waiting for dinner on the table, and the Strix seem to be like that—they collect in places where something awful is about to occur, though the question of why this happens remains unanswered.

Further complicating the matter is a “chicken-and-egg” question. Do the Strix gather, unconsciously recognizing that something terrible is going to occur? Or is the terrible event *caused* by the gathering of more than one Bird of Dis in a domain? If the latter is true, it stands to follow that by lessening or eliminating the number of Strix in an area, disaster can be forestalled. If the former holds true, then once one sees a parliament of Owls in an area, nothing can be done—catastrophe is coming, its arrival ineluctable.

THE OWL, NIGHT'S HERALD

It's worth taking a look at owls as a symbol, to understand what they—and, by proxy, what the Strix—can represent. Owls are:

- Ill-omens, or omens of death. Certain native peoples in India believe they foretell an individual's death. Pliny the Elder believed they signal death, though not just on the personal scale. In Borneo, they're seen as creatures that bring bad luck.
- Symbols of death. Different than “omens” of death, here it's assumed that owls are simply beasts with a sympathy toward all things dead. They gather in graveyards, they haunt the trees outside a room where a person died. In Navaho myth, they're sometimes assumed to be ghosts. Some myths have them as psychopomps, shuttling souls from this world to the underworld.
- Betrayers. In China, myth (falsely) states that owlets pluck out the eyes of their mothers with hungry beaks.
- Occult forces. Shamans sometimes “learn” spells from owls. Their terrible “devil bird” shrieks are said to cause madness due to an owl's sympathy with the demonic.

Mechanics

The Nemeses are certainly *vampiric* in that they are shadowy predators that thief the life-force of others to commit nefarious deeds, but they aren't vampires as the rules have come to define them. As it stands, the Strix are given over to a number of unique systems, all of which are defined below.

Disembodied Shadows

The Strix are bodiless. They exist as manifested spirits (i.e. not in Twilight). They often appear owl-shaped, though some certainly manifest as ravens, vultures, or other predatory and scavenging birds. Their “forms” seem to comprise ephemeral, intangible matter: fog, smoke, mist, a cloud of ash, or simply a living, three-dimensional shadow. As with real birds, the Strix can take flight.

The following rules are considered in play when the Nemesis is in its default, bodiless form:

Movement

A Strix never walks; it always floats, glides or flies, and has a species factor of 15 for determining the creature's Speed score (which is determined by Dexterity + species factor, given that the Nemeses have no Strength score to speak of in this form).

Physical barriers do not impede a Nemesis's movement. The Owl may pass through any solid surface, from wood to steel, from plastic to glass. If the surface has a crack or fissure, the Strix can move through at a Speed of 6—the fiend literally “pours” its body through the opening, however small. (Assume it must be large enough for the human eye to see it, like the space under a door or a crack in a pane of glass.) If the surface is completely smooth and without any kind of opening (unbroken window, solid steel plate, etc.), then the Strix simply *pushes* its way past the object, though it does so at a much-reduced Speed 2 rate.

Wind or other physical forces (waving a blanket about, for instance) fail to move a Strix—it doesn't matter whether it's the faintest breeze or a Mack truck driving into the disembodied fiend. It won't budge.

The only barriers that truly impede a Strix are those formed of fire or sunlight, which should be considered solid and impermeable to these fiends. (More on these hazards can be found on p. 124, under “Fire and Sunlight.”)

Damage

First and most importantly: in disembodied form, a Nemesis does not take Health damage, and instead suffers Willpower loss.

If a blessed attack against the Strix would do 3 points of damage, it causes the Strix 3 points of Willpower loss, instead. If the creature is reduced to *below* 0 Willpower in this form, the creature is destroyed utterly—its shadow body dissipates in a puff of smoke, fog, dust or ash.

Normal, physical attacks are useless against the disembodied Strix; the creature takes no damage from mundane sources. Doesn't matter whether it's a punch, a swipe from a machete, or a blast of birdshot from a shotgun; all such attacks are harmless.

If an attack would inflict damage on a spirit, then it can damage the Strix. This includes damage done as a result of abjurations, blessed items or exorcisms (p. 214, *The World of Darkness Rulebook*).

Fire does not harm the disembodied creature, but does create an impermeable barrier to the Strix. Sunlight, too, causes such a barrier (see "Movement," above), but sunlight *will* damage a disembodied Strix. Exposure to direct sunlight—i.e. a beam or shaft of said light—causes 1 point of Willpower damage to the Nemesis per turn of exposure.

YES, WE KNOW

The Strix first appeared in *Requiem for Rome* and owners of that book will notice that the rules presented here are a little different from what they are there. (Grammar fans will also notice that the archaic plural "Striges" isn't applied so consistently.)

The idea here is that the Strix have returned to the world, but are not necessarily the exact same as when they left—they have changed, albeit only slightly. Whether this is an evolution for the creatures or a devolution remains to be seen; the point being, the mechanics surrounding them have shifted.

Determining Traits

As noted, a disembodied Strix is roughly the shape of a large owl, raven or vulture. A Strix in this form is considered to have a Size of 2, though this should not be considered the creature's "species factor" in regards to calculating Speed (see "Movement," above).

- Initiative remains Dexterity + Composure. Defense is the *higher* of Wits or Dexterity. Speed is Dexterity + species factor (15). The creature has no Health score, as noted above, and instead takes damage directly to its Willpower score, which is calculated as Resolve + Composure.
- A disembodied Nemesis has no Strength or Stamina, but possesses Dexterity between 1 and 5 dots.

- Weaker Strix have approximately 6 to 8 dots in both Mental and Social Attributes. More powerful creatures have between 12 and 15 dots in each category.
- Weaker Strix have approximately 20 dots across all Skills. Powerful examples are likely to have twice that. Disembodied Strix may learn and adapt new Skills and Specialties. Investigation, Stealth, Intimidation, Persuasion and Subterfuge at higher dots is a common phenomenon for the Nemeses.

Regaining Willpower

In both disembodied and possessing form, a Strix gains Willpower naturally at a rate of 1 per week when disembodied, or 1 point every two days when possessing a body—however, the latter is true *only* when the Strix is indulging her strange and grotesque whims (see "Playground of Flesh," p. 119). If during those two days the fiend fails to indulge herself, no Willpower is gained.

A Strix does gain Willpower as a result of its Vice (in the same way any other character does—1 point per scene), but not from its Virtue.

Virtue and Vice

All Strix do have a Virtue and Vice (confirming that, despite their sometimes apparent sameness, the Nemeses exist as individuals above all else).

Virtue and Vice, for them, can be considered roleplaying guidelines that keep them separate from the other Birds of Dis. A Nemesis with a Virtue of Faith and a Vice of Gluttony is likely to possess the already-corpulent (or the all-too-thin so they can be bulked up before they turn to rot) and has a cavalier sense that whatever horrific and chaotic actions it takes, all will turn out as it should. Alternately, a Strix with a Virtue of Prudence and a Vice of Wrath might be a creature given over to both pragmatism and bouts of extreme violence. These two elements might war with one another within the fiend, or may instead play well together (i.e. the creature is content to be patient and wait until the time is right to engage in its orgy of vindication and violence).

Possession

The Strix possess bodies. They steal them for their own use, inhabiting the flesh the way one might steal a winter coat. They can possess three types of bodies: human corpses, vampires (that are, frankly, just animated corpses) and living humans. This latter choice is "new" for the Strix—once, they were capable of claiming only those bodies that had already died. This is no longer the case; they can now attempt to thief the flesh of the living, though doing so isn't automatic or easy. That said, it does give the Strix access to greater sensations, for the nerve endings of a living human are far more... *sensitive* than those of a recently-deceased person.

Possessing Corpses

The Strix may possess any animal or human corpse, regardless of how decayed the corpse may be. Doesn't matter whether the body's still warm (dead for ten minutes) or whether it's long fruited and is now just a wrap of desiccated skin clinging to fragile bones (dead for ten years). As long as the body can still maintain *some* kind of animation, the Strix can wear it like a suit and animate the corpse. It requires only that the Strix touch the body and take one full turn (i.e. an instant action) to worm its way into the body's orifices (the way the fiend might pour itself through a keyhole or window crack).

System: possessing a corpse

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: None

Cost: 1 Willpower

The Strix inhabits a corpse, and can remain inhabiting that corpse as long as it chooses, though eventually the body will break down.

A human body decays as normal, losing 1 dot of Physical Attributes per two days.

When the body's Dexterity reaches 0, it can no longer move of its own accord.

When Strength reaches 0, it may be able to move and shamle about (provided it still has Dexterity), but it cannot pick up any objects heavier than five pounds, and it can barely affect the environment. (The corpse may be able to turn a doorknob, but not open a heavy car door.) When Stamina reaches 0, the body then starts to lose its remaining Health at a rate of 1 dot per day. Note that many of the body's traits (Defense, Initiative, Speed) diminish as the Physical Attributes wither.

When the creature's Health reaches 0, the corpse more or less disintegrates: bones turn to dust, marrow oozes, and the flesh collapses in a gassy, rotten heap.

When a Strix possesses a dead body, it retains the body's Physical traits, as noted, but it keeps its own Mental and Social traits. The act of possession alone tells the Strix nothing about the corpse; the mind is long-gone, and the carcass is little more than a rotten costume. (That said, the Strix may choose to investigate the identity of the stolen body, especially if it has some relevance to a vampire it aims to punish.)

The Strix may leave the body behind at any point, fleeing the flesh. It costs the Nemesis nothing, and requires no roll—the body simply collapses as the Owl escapes the suit, taking one full turn to complete the egress.

Possessing Vampires and the Living

Corpses and carcasses are easy to claim, representing little challenge for a Nemesis hoping to indulge its mad whims immediately. Sadly, though, those bodies diminish swiftly—bones crumble, muscles wither, skin ruptures as maggots take hold.

Thieving a human body or borrowing a vampire's undead flesh is far more satisfying, and gives the Strix a greater breadth of time in which to slake her inscrutable thirsts. That being said, it's more of a challenge to steal a body that remains as home to a sentient mind; the Nemesis must engage in a battle of wills and wits to pilfer such flesh.

System: possessing vampires and living humans

Action: Instant and contested

Dice Pool: Wits + Manipulation + Occult vs. target's Resolve + Composure + Blood Potency

Cost: 1 or more Willpower. A Strix may spend more than 1 point of Willpower in this action. Each Willpower point *does not* add dice to its pool. Instead, it causes a cumulative -2 penalty to the victim's roll. The Strix may spend as much Willpower as it wants on this action, not being limited to spending 1 point per turn. Of course, the downside is then that the Strix is with reduced Willpower upon inhabiting the body.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Something about the subject is anathema to the Strix; the creature screams and squirms, and the Nemesis loses 2 Willpower points. It may never again attempt to possess that individual.

Failure: The subject gains more successes than the Strix; the possession attempt fails. The Strix may make another attempt again in a subsequent turn, but does so at a -1 penalty.

Success: The Strix gains more successes than the target. The victim experiences an awful sensation, and may feel the spirit's penetrating presence entering her mouth, ears or other orifice. She may hear a heavy flapping of wings, or the cacophonous screams of shrieking birds. The Strix takes control of the body.

Exceptional Success: As above, except the Strix gains back the Willpower it spent in the possession attempt; it was far too easy, requiring little effort on the part of the Nemesis.

In both cases (stealing a human body or stealing a vampire's body), the mind is submerged beneath the Nemesis's own. The Strix keeps its Mental and Social traits, but uses the Physical traits of the host body.

When the Strix takes a human body, the mind is not just submerged, but lost entirely. For all intents and purposes, the human suffers brain death, and the only thing keeping the systems going (heart beating, blood flowing, electro-stimulus to the nerves) is the Nemesis's own will. If the Nemesis leaves the body, that's it. The mind doesn't

return. The human is dead and the body becomes a cooling corpse. (It is possible, however, that the human soul is cast out and becomes a restless shade, instead. See “Ghosts,” p. 208, *The World of Darkness Rulebook*.)

This isn’t true when the Strix assumes control of a vampire’s body, however. The mind is submerged, but not lost. If the Strix leaves the body at any point, the vampire’s mind returns from the murky depths and regains control (though the vampire remembers *nothing* of her time during the possession—it’s as if the mind is dead for that time, lost to darkness and feeling nothing).

Living human bodies still break down when the Strix possess them, as the inhuman mind isn’t a perfect fit and cannot keep the systems going indefinitely. Thankfully for the creature, the body breaks down far more slowly than that of a human corpse. The body loses 1 dot from a Physical Attribute per *week*. Beyond that, the same rules apply as when borrowing a human corpse, repeated here:

When the Dexterity of the body reaches 0, it can no longer move of its own accord. When Strength reaches 0, it may be able to move and shamle about (provided it still has Dexterity), but it cannot pick up any objects heavier than five pounds, and it can barely affect the environment. (The corpse may be able to turn a doorknob, but not open a heavy car door.) When Stamina reaches 0, the body then starts to lose its remaining Health at a rate of 1 dot per day. Note that many of the body’s traits (Defense, Initiative, Speed) diminish as the Physical Attributes wither.

It should be noted that the decay *appears* different than with a corpse, though. A human corpse suffers the signs of increasing rot and decay. A still-living human body stolen by the Strix diminishes differently. In the first several weeks, the body is on par with the depredations suffered by a methamphetamine addict, but as time goes on the collapse of bodily function becomes far more noticeable. The flesh is more easily punctured; the skin grows covered with sores, striations and small cuts; and the organs break down and may lead to the body “leaking” fluids or vomiting blood.

Also significant is that the human body cannot heal of its own accord when a Strix possesses it, though the Strix may spend 1 point of Willpower to remove 2 Bashing points or 1 Lethal point of damage. Without this forced healing on the part of the Strix, though, skin remains torn asunder, and broken bones stay broken. The Strix will suffer Wound Penalties where appropriate, but *only* to Physical actions; Mental and Social actions are not affected.

Vampires do not break down in such a way, and in fact don’t diminish at all (hence why they are such prized host bodies for the Nemeses). The Strix-as-vampire must still drink blood, however, but can use Vitae in all the ways the vampire can (healing, enhancing Attributes, fueling Disciplines, and so forth).



A claimed vampire body is considered torpid. (When the Strix wins the action to possess, the vampire's body technically enters torpor.) This means the possessed vampire cannot be affected by a wooden stake to the chest (beyond damage caused), and the vampire cannot fall into torpor when all his Health boxes are filled with Lethal damage.

Possessed vampires can be stopped only by destroying them utterly. In addition, the Strix suffers no Wound Penalties along the way toward said destruction.

If a Strix remains in a body (human or vampire) when it is utterly destroyed by means other than the natural breakdown to 0 Health, then the Strix is also destroyed. In other words, if the Strix is in a human or vampire body when it's blown to bloody ribbons by a loose grenade, the Nemesis is also destroyed. If, however, the Strix is in a human corpse or living human body when it breaks down to 0 Health, then the Nemesis simply emerges from the pile of rotting flesh in its disembodied state.

If a Strix abandons the vampire host body, the vampire collapses into torpor and may be revived as normal. As noted, she'll have zero memory of what transpired during the possession, regardless of whether two hours or two years passed.

Fire and Sunlight

The light of the sun and any manner of flame present impassable obstacles for a Strix inhabiting a human (living or dead) body or vampire. The following rules apply:

- Both fire and direct sunlight represent a literal barrier to the possessing Strix. The Nemesis may not move through either. If the Nemesis is caught in direct sunlight, the body stays rigid; the Strix cannot move within it.
- Sunlight, however, does not harm the Strix while possessing a body, *even if that body belongs to a vampire*. While the Strix may not move the body while caught in sunlight, the light does not burn the vampire's flesh as it would normally do. However, if the Strix is forced out of the body and into its disembodied state, sunlight does its normal damage (see p. 121) to the Strix *and* to the abandoned vampire body.
- A Strix cannot take possession of any body that is aflame. The entire body needn't be on fire to prevent the Nemesis's possession; any fire equal to a torch (i.e. equal to or bigger than Size 1 and intensity of +1) on the body or the body's clothing prevents the Strix from taking possession. It automatically fails the attempt. It also cannot take possession of a body that is caught in direct sunlight.
- A Strix cannot abandon a body caught in sunlight or set aflame. It remains trapped until at least some part of the body is either submerged in water (if on fire) or concealed in shadow (if caught in sunlight).

- For all these reasons, the Strix remain largely nocturnal by necessity. It must be noted, however, that they can operate with a small amount of freedom during the hour surrounding both dusk and dawn. Twilight in particular remains a time that a possessing Strix can roam freely without fearing the paralysis caused by exposure to direct sunlight.

Complications of a Vampiric Vessel

Vampires are themselves beholden to a number of unique rules, and when a Strix possesses a vampire, these rules must be addressed.

- A Strix may use a vampire's Disciplines, and may also learn Mental and Social Disciplines over time. The Nemesis can keep its own learned Disciplines from body-to-body, but if the Discipline necessitates spending Vitae as a province of its power, then the Strix can use those Disciplines only when it has Vitae to spend (meaning it cannot access them when inhabiting a human host). A Strix may never learn Physical-based Disciplines (such as Celerity, Protean, Resilience or Vigor).
- Strix may also learn Devotions, but only those that have constituent Disciplines that are Mental or Social in nature.
- The Nemesis may not learn the Coils, Crúac, or Theban Sorcery. Any ritualized or covenant-specific sorcery is off limits.
- A Strix may commit diablerie using the vampire host. The vampire host gains all the benefits and drawbacks that come as result of Amaranth (**Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 159). The Strix gains no lasting benefits other than the pleasures felt from the sensation and from potentially wrecking the host's unlife.
- A Strix may forge a Vinculum between the vampire host and another. She may also create a ghoul.
- The Nemesis may Embrace a vampire using the vampire host—doing so creates either a draugr or a Larva (p. 100).
- The Strix is not subject to Predator's Taint or Blood Ties while inhabiting a vampire.
- As noted, a possessed vampire body cannot enter torpor, because it's already considered torpid.
- A Strix within a vampire is no longer subject to Frenzy. Being sympathetic to the Beast (or, as the Strix would have it, actually *being* the Beast) allows the two to forge a "symbiotic relationship" of sorts. A Strix is cold and implacable much of the time, acting as monstrously as she needs and wants.

- While possessed, a vampire cannot lose Humanity—in fact, the Humanity score and any Derangements that exist as a result are completely irrelevant. The mind of the vampire is gone, replaced by the Nemesis’s own conscience (or lack thereof). Because the vampire is incapable of remembering what happened during the duration of that possession, no Humanity is lost as a result.

Dread Powers of the Nemeses

The Strix possess their own wretched abilities that make them truly unique horrors stalking the night. This section is devoted to the terrible powers the Strix possess. Remember, too, that the Strix are also capable of learning Mental and Social Disciplines on top of these dread powers, making older and more potent Strix truly formidable.

Common Powers

The Strix possess all the “common powers” below. Every Nemesis has these abilities, regardless of power, age or ability.

The Gathering Cry

Some Strix are alarmingly individualistic, but these creatures have no compunction about banding together. (Owls themselves are similar, existing mostly as solitary creatures, but some exceptions form groups, or “parliaments.”) A roving pack of Nemeses makes for a most troubling foe, engaging in their crass indulgences as a group.

A Nemesis can call to any other of its kind in the area. It costs 1 Willpower point.

The Strix emits a high-pitched keening sound only barely audible to the human ear (though animals are likely to grow suddenly agitated at the sound—dogs will howl, cats will hiss, birds will take flight). Any other Strix within an area equal to the caller’s Resolve + Composure in square miles will hear the cry, and is likely to come to the aid of its shadowy kin.

Owl Eyes

The Strix have alarming powers of visual perception. They can see clearly in conditions of low light, and also suffer no penalties due to darkness, fog, or other such limitations. In addition, if enough light is present (light from a streetlight will do), a Nemesis gains +3 to any visual-based Perception rolls.

This has a side effect—whenever the Strix possesses a body (corpse, mortal being or vampire), the host suffers a single easily-identifiable trait that signals the body as being possessed by the Strix. When light is shone in the host body’s eyes (even if the source is a low-candlepower flashlight), the eyes glow like an owl’s, reflecting and flashing the light.

Sense the Blood

The Strix can always sense the presence of another Nemesis, a ghoul or a vampire. No roll is necessary to do so, and it can automatically sense these individuals within a radius equal to the Owl’s Resolve + Composure score in yards.

Mask of Tranquility (Obfuscate ••) denies this automatic sense, though certainly the Strix might endeavor to sense the nature of the vampire by other, more mundane means.

Uncommon Powers

These dread powers are not possessed by every Strix; instead, assume any Nemesis possesses between two and five of these mad abilities.

Aura Distortion

Many of the Damned remain armed with the ability to see the aura that hangs about their allies and enemies, allowing them to gauge moods and predict behaviors. A Nemesis armed with this dread ability is able to take the aura of another and twist it, changing it to appear as something the individual is most likely not.

By spending a Willpower point and succeeding on a Manipulation + Occult roll, the Strix may make one change to a victim’s aura per success gained (see “Aura Signifiers,” p. 120, **Vampire: The Requiem**). She could, for instance, with a single success take a victim’s “light blue” hue (inferring “calm”) and distort it so that it is now a weak and muted aura (indicating the individual is being dominated or controlled). The Strix could make it seem as if the victim is suspicious, aggressive, or even a diablerist—all of which could be a powerful lie.

False Fiend

With but a touch—and the expenditure of a Willpower point—the Strix may cast an illusion upon a victim. The touch causes an illusory lividity to the flesh, marking it with striations of blood pooling beneath the skin. It gives the flesh a greater pallor marked with faint bruising, and even decay. Most importantly, it causes the victim’s eyes to flash like an owl’s eyes when even the most meager light touches them.

Obviously, what this does is serve to make a victim appear to be possessed by one of the Strix. For those who have heard the terrible rumors, the signs seem alarmingly clear: impending decay, pallid skin, flashing eyes. For those unaware of the rumors, it still confers a sense of the strange and terrifying as part of the illusion—few are comfortable with a victim who appears to be suffering from some sort of disease or spiritual malady.

The ability lasts for a number of hours equal to the fiend’s own Resolve score. During this time, the victim suffers a penalty to all Social rolls equal to that Resolve score.

Grotesque Ejection

When possessing a body, the Strix often strip what's meaningful about that person away—the mind is lost, the soul (if such a thing even exists) is torn asunder and left to the wind. The body has no value after the fiend is done with it (vampires providing an exception to that rule), and this dread power only helps to confirm the body's worthlessness with a “salt the earth” approach.

When the Strix abandons a human body (corpse or still-living), it can “detonate” the flesh in a rupturing explosion of viscera, blood and bone. The bone forms shrapnel. The blood sprays hot.

This is considered an explosive attack (pp. 178–179, **The World of Darkness Rulebook**). It has a Blast Area of 3 and a damage of 3 (with all damage being Lethal).

Use of this power is costly for the Strix, however. It costs 3 Willpower points to use, which leaves the Nemesis with reduced Health (as disembodied Strix use their Willpower scores to mark damage against them).

Hollow Bones

Birds, of course, have hollow bones—it's what allows them to glide effortlessly or take flight on the rising vectors of heat coming off a hot road or blister-baked desert. Given that the Strix have a supernatural sympathy with the avian world, this dread power perhaps comes as no surprise.

This power doesn't actually confer hollow bones, but it does allow the Strix to become alarmingly buoyant when it comes to taking great leaps. Possessing this ability allows the Strix—at no cost—to triple the distances one can jump (see “Jumping,” p. 66, **The World of Darkness Rulebook**). It doesn't matter how badly the borrowed body is decaying; the power is still in effect (though penalties to the jumping roll may figure into the equation—if the host body's leg is snapped and can't be healed, then taking a running jump on a hobbled limb is a troubled task).

This power also grants the Strix the ability to fall from great heights and take minimal damage—the Strix takes 1 Bashing point per 10 yards fallen (30 feet), and never takes Lethal damage from a fall. In addition, by spending a Willpower point, the Strix can actually land on its feet, or on its hands and feet in a crouch.

Indomitable

Many of the Nemeses are naturally able to resist the mind-controlling effects of the Damned.

If a vampire attempts to use the abilities of either Dominate or Majesty on a Strix with this Dread Power, it causes a terrible backlash that negatively affects the vampire. Successes gained on the Discipline roll (or, in the case of a power like Revelation,

successes gained *above* the resisting roll of the Nemesis) instead become penalties against the vampire's own Mental and Social rolls for the rest of the night. She feels dizzy, confused. She loses her bearings easily and stumbles over her words (a terrible fate for a vampire hoping to impress at Elysium).

To make matters worse, the Disciplines have zero effect upon the Nemesis in question. (A power like Awe may still affect all those around the Nemesis, just not the fiend itself.)

This power is considered “always on.”

No Surprise

Owls are alarmingly aware creatures—from a height far up in a tree, an owl can spot a field mouse scurrying across the ground. The bird's powerful binocular vision allows it to see far and wide, with a potent sense of responsiveness to all that surrounds it. And that's at night.

Some Strix have that keen awareness of their surroundings, too—here, a Strix may always add her Investigation dots into any Wits + Composure roll made to detect surprise. In addition, even if the Strix is surprised, the creature can still apply half its Defense (round up) to the first surprise attack. For more information, see “Surprise” on pp. 151–152, **The World of Darkness Rulebook**.

Shadow Parliament

A pack of shadows emerges from the alley's mouth. They cackle in unison. When one speaks, all speak. They lurch and lunge.

It's a terrifying image, and one that more than a few vampires have faced. It's also a lie, an illusion, born as a result of this dread ability.

By spending a Willpower point and succeeding on a Manipulation + Composure roll, the Strix can “duplicate” itself into a number of shadowy clones. The Strix gains a number of these clones equal to successes gained. Each clone comprises little more than shadow, mist, ash and gloom—but at night it's difficult to tell. (And even if a victim did notice this with an appropriate Wits + Composure roll, are three shadowy forms any less frightening than those not formed of seemingly fluid darkness?)

The clones don't move and speak in perfect synchronicity, but instead are one to three seconds behind (and several of this so-called shadow parliament speak at different intervals, creating a distorted, echoing effect when their voices rise together in a discordant mash-up). They really are ephemeral, and cannot affect the material world (or, for that matter, the spirit world). They're just illusions.

That being said, the illusion is a powerful one—a Strix using this power in combat gains +2 to its Defense due to the confusing nature of having several shadow figures wading into the fray.

This power lasts for one scene.

Sudden Surprise

As noted under “No Surprise,” actual owls are keenly aware of their surroundings. They can also remain still, silent and hidden for as long as they need, emerging from shadow only when it’s time to snatch up prey in their claws.

The Strix share that ability to surprise. Whether hiding in a corner, braced in the hallway space above a vampire’s head, or simply standing in a pocket of deep shadow, the creature gains a terrible alacrity when it comes to manufacturing an ambush.

The Strix must spend a Willpower point, and doing so hampers a single victim’s Wits + Composure roll to detect surprise by –3 dice.

Terrible Rush of Wings

By spending a Willpower point and succeeding on a Presence + Occult roll as an instant action, the Strix may summon a number of terrible shadowy owls (see sidebar, “Wretched Owl”) out of nowhere. These creatures take two additional turns to appear, but once they do, a number of them appear equal to successes gained on the summoning roll.

The wretched owls are shrieking, violent birds, as much specter as actual owl. They dive and scratch, with little caution for themselves. They do what they must to protect their Nemesis master, even if that leads to their demise. When such a creature perishes, it simply turns to a puff of black smoke.

WRETCHED OWLS

Description: A wretched owl is a shadowy owl—it appears distorted, with a too-large head and massive outstretched wings and a terrible beak that drools dark blood.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 5, Stamina 1

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 0, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Investigation 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 3 (Flight), Brawl 3 (Talons)

Social Skills: Intimidation 2

Willpower: 6

Initiative: 7

Defense: 5

Speed: 17 (species factor 10)

Size: 2

Health: 3

Weapons/Attacks

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Talon Scratch	1(L)	7

Rare Powers

The Strix have access to some truly unusual powers, abilities that go well beyond the pale with potent effects. Every Strix possesses one such “rare power,” and only one.

The Beast’s Rebuke

The Strix are quite clear on one point: those vampires that attempt to “masquerade” as human are squandering their gift. Such potential is not to be wasted. Vampires are monsters, so they should act like monsters.

This dread curse punishes those that attempt to maintain a high Humanity. The Strix must touch a vampire. Spend 2 Willpower points. The Strix must succeed on a Manipulation + Occult (and + Blood Potency if possessing a vampire’s body) roll against the target’s Resolve + Blood Potency.

If the Strix is successful, take the vampire’s Humanity score and subtract 5 from it. The resultant number is the penalty the vampire suffers to all Mental- and Social-based rolls for a number of nights equal to the successes gained above the vampire’s resistant successes. The victim suffers visual and auditory hallucinations for the duration, and all such hallucinations endeavor to stir the vampire toward indulging its greatest and darkest whims. The vampire might pass by a window and see herself on the other side of it slaking her thirst upon her human father. Or she might hear whispers exhorting her to feed, fuck or kill.

The trick is, should the vampire actually listen to those salacious urges and actually perform an action that reduces her Humanity, the penalty lessens by 1 as the hallucinations weaken. If she reduces her Humanity to 5 or below, the penalty is gone and the hallucinations fade as she experiences what feels to be a sharp “moment of clarity.”

The Strix may use this only once on a given vampire, and may access this power only once per week.

Devil’s Deal

The Strix are insidious, able to offer vampires a measure of knowledge or power provided that vampire is willing to sacrifice a bit of her own Humanity upon this Faustian altar. A Strix can offer the vampire two things: information or assets (in the form of Merit dots). The system for forging such a deal with a Strix is this: For every question answered or for every Merit dot provided, the vampire must perform one task the fiend demands.

Tasks range from the deceptively simple (“Steal from the Harpy at the next Elysium”) to the truly complex (“Find the Crone worshipers who make the barge their haven, then stake each of them; leave two out for the sun, but allow the other three to keep their petty unives”). Each task

likely reflects the vampire's own Vice and *will* endanger the vampire's Humanity score, forcing him to commit an action that would necessitate a degeneration roll (because, ultimately, that's what thrills the Strix). Tasks almost always have a built-in time limit set by the Nemesis, and usually necessitate somewhat immediate (within the week) action.

What does the Strix get? First, she gets tasks performed that may suit her needs, especially if one of those tasks involves bringing chaos and madness to the neatly-ordered and all-too-human nocturnal society of the Damned. Second, for every one task performed, the Strix gains 2 points of Willpower.

What does the vampire get? If it's information, he gains one answer to a question. The Strix are not infinitely knowledgeable, but they do possess an alarming scope of information (and can, perhaps most importantly, answer questions about Ancient Rome and before).

If it's Merit dots, the vampire can gain Merit dots in any one of the following Merits: Allies, Fame, Herd, Resources, Retainer, Status and Striking Looks.

The tasks demanded by the Strix can be as easy or as forbidding as the fiend chooses, and the vampire knows the terms before he seals the pact. The Nemesis makes no bones about it, and keeps all elements of the "deal" up front—that's the rub, that the vampire chooses the deal even knowing the punishing vagaries.

Sealing the deal necessitates the sharing of Vitae between the two—both must spill 1 point of Vitae (if the Strix is in a human body, this means 1 Lethal point of damage, and if the fiend is disembodied it demands 1 point of Willpower) and drizzle it on the ground. Once the deal is sealed, the vampire gains the benefits immediately, even before having committed to the tasks at hand.

So, what happens if the vampire bails on the tasks? Ah, that's the trick, and it's the one thing the Strix *never* makes clear. For every task the vampire either ignores or fails, the vampire loses 1 dot of Willpower and suffers 1 point of Aggravated damage that forms a terrible scar that remains visible on the vampire. (Even when the vampire heals the damage, the scar remains.) In addition, *all* Nemesis gain +1 dice for every task ignored or failed when using any Discipline against the vampire.

Bread Frenzy

The Strix seem to be masters of the Beast—or, according to them, they *are* the Beast except in a more primal, original form. The Beast, real or imagined, lurks within the dark heart of every vampire, and longs to be uncaged; even the slightest provocation (an insult, a match flame, a drop of blood on a white tile floor) can rattle the bars and undo the lock.

The Strix is one such provocation, and with but a touch and a point of Willpower can unleash the Beast and stir the vampire into Frenzy.



The Nemesis can choose the type of Frenzy caused (anger, hunger, fear—see pp. 179–180 of *Vampire: The Requiem* for more information). The Frenzy will last an entire scene, and the vampire may not resist the oncoming madness. She *can*, however, spend a Willpower point to gain a single turn’s worth of clarity within the clamoring din of the Beast raging within. This might be long enough for her to tell her coterie mates to run or to subdue her with a well-placed stake.

Shadow Infection

Sometimes, the mere presence of a Nemesis can cause a vampire great limitation and consternation—the fiends seem to exude an aura of fear and madness.

Here, this becomes literally true. The Strix may spend 2 Willpower points to give off an enervating aura. Those caught within it feel drained and subdued. For humans, this is an obvious effect: the humans suffer a penalty to all rolls equal to the Nemesis’s Manipulation score. Vampires, on the other hand, do not suffer from this penalty but in many ways suffer from something far worse: while within the creature’s aura, the vampire may not expend Vitae. Which means she cannot heal. She cannot invoke certain Disciplines. She cannot boost her Attributes. The vampire is cut off from that most critical of resources.

The aura extends in a radius around the Strix equal to the fiend’s Resolve + Composure score in yards. The aura is “on” for one full scene.

Vice Manipulation

The Nemeses are creatures of unlimited indulgence. They seek sensation from all avenues, be it food, sex, pain or adrenalin (from fear or triumph). The Strix seem to enjoy when others become like them, especially when vampires stop pretending to espouse some false masquerade and instead give in to the deep cravings their dead hearts possess.

With this dread ability, a Strix can endeavor to mold a vampire’s cravings to become something more in line with the Nemesis’s own, or in line with that to which the fiend believes the vampire can more easily fall prey. By succeeding on a touch attack and spending 2 Willpower points, the Strix may automatically change a target’s Vice (they can do this to humans as well as vampires, though it’s not nearly as satisfying) to a Vice of the Nemesis’s choosing. This change lasts for one month—a short period of time in the grand scheme of the eternal Requiem, but long enough to affect the way the vampire seeks to indulge herself (and, mechanically, gain back Willpower).

ARE THEY DEMONS?

Compare the Strix to demons, and some disturbing comparisons arise. They appear older than time. They’re certainly not human, and have no human origins. They are associated with death and the underworld. They are said to make insidious pacts and bargains, they can steal bodies, and they seem hell-bent to castigate those that fail to exploit their monstrous gifts. Blessed items, sacred prayers and exorcisms actively harm these creatures. Are they demons or devils?

Well, they’re certainly *demonic*. Whether or not they’re actually the literal “from-Hell” demons, probably not. At least, the Strix have no memory of Hell as it exists in Judeo-Christian lore. They don’t remember a place of punishment, or lakes of fire. They *do* come from a dark place, a place of shadow at the edges of known existence. This may be the spirit world, called the “Shadow” by some; alternately, it may be an underworld entirely different from Hell (if Hell even exists in this impossible cosmology).

That being said, it doesn’t really matter whether they’re demons or not, because the *characters* are certainly free to think it so. It’s an easy comparison, and the Damned may easily come to this conclusion. Moreover, some vampires (those of Belial’s Brood) have great interest in cultivating relationships with the infernal and diabolical. It’s not hard to envision some of the blood-soaked and branded members of the Brood cutting deals with the Strix, even elevating them to a station of worship. Admittedly, the Strix don’t really *want* worship (they grow bored with it, as they do with all things), but the Nemeses also will have little problem with the vampires of the Brood, because those Damned plainly embrace (little “e”) their own innate malevolence.

Storytelling the Strix

Up front, in discussing how you might use the Nemeses in a game, we’d like to point out a few things to keep at the top of your mind. These elements are some of what make the Strix stand out as enemies, and keeping these aspects in mind will help you to make them as monstrous as we truly hope them to be.

- The Strix are not human. They don’t understand human motivation, or, frankly, vampiric motivation (outside of what the Beast whispers or yells in a vampire’s inner ear). They do things either to please themselves or to work toward some inscrutable logic. This is part of what makes them frightening—what they do cannot easily be understood, if it can be understood at all.

- The Strix do not have names. They do not refer to one another, even though they are clearly aware of one another. And yet...
- They remain as individuals. At first glance, the Strix do seem alarmingly homogenous. But closer examination yields an uncomfortable truth: they each have different personalities (systemically best expressed through Virtue and Vice), which means they do not universally have the same traits, nor do they all make the same mistakes.
- The Strix are not mindless evil. Both the Larvae and the draugr represent something of a feral threat, the dual fears of vampires given over to bestial urges and of minion vampires out of control. The Strix represent something far more sinister, sinister because they are capable of reason when it suits them. They are not bestial. They are often cold and clinical.
- On a similar point, they don't represent super-predators. "Predator" implies a kind of natural chain—one creature feeds upon another, and that creature feeds upon something else, and so on down the line. Not true here. The Strix don't feed upon anything. They're carnivorous only in regard to pursuing their endless depravities and punishing the Damned for wasting such a precious gift (and those punishments are depravities all their own).
- The Strix believe they represent the Beast within, except as an external force. Whether or not this is literally true, it could be considered metaphorically true. Except they're not the "unchecked aggression" angle of a raging, howling Beast. They're the icy voice that urges murder, the insidious suggestion to keep drinking, to keep killing, to keep doing whatever it is that makes one feel *right* with the world.

SYMPATHY, TASTING OF ASH

Is it possible you can play up a sympathetic angle for the Strix? Yes, but it needs to be done carefully. A complex foe is an interesting foe, and the Strix have one element that ostensibly makes them a bit sympathetic: they're without purpose; they're guideless. And yet, they search for meaning. Theirs is a truly existential problem: they have no idea who they really are or what they're supposed to do.

Of course, you must walk the line. The Strix are monstrous. A serial killer can be sympathetic in that he is compelled to his crimes, but his crimes are cruel and evil just the same. That ethos goes here, too. The Strix may not be able to help what they are, which is sad—but they do what they do, regardless. They don't stop. They don't seek redemption. They cannot be "saved"—though, it makes for an excellent tragedy if a Strix convinces the characters it is worthy of saving, a path that leads to certain failure.

Bad Deal

One element that may come into play in any story featuring the Strix is the willingness of player or Storyteller characters to make deals with the Nemeses. The Strix represent a demonic force, and while logically it seems unwise to make deals with devils, it's a common theme. (One could argue that the Embrace is itself a kind of demonic pact.) What can one—human or vampire—gain from working *with* the Birds of Dis? (Note that making deals with the Strix can be dangerous to a vampire's sanity. It has a corrosive effect upon one's Humanity, and making deals with the Strix is a sin against Humanity 4.)

- Vampires often want great misery heaped upon their enemies. Not just bodily damage—no, the fiery touch of the sun is too quick. The Damned can be notably cruel, instead hoping to whittle away an enemy's life or unlfe, cut by cut. The Strix can offer that. The Strix want to punish, and may be happy punishing a vampire's adversary. How perfect is it to make a deal with an enemy that will steal the flesh of a foe and puppet his existence into the shitter, breaking apart his long-held plans like a cookie in a slowly-closing grip?
- The Strix can offer a lie, asking to join with the victim so that the person can gain power. It's a classic demonic possession scenario ("If I merge with you, think of the things we can accomplish") but here it's utter deception. The Strix takes over and the residing soul is lost. Humans are gone and done. Vampires are cast into utter unawareness during the "ride." The vampire *could* still gain something out of it, provided the Nemesis is willing to play fair. And it won't be, because it doesn't have to be. Grave ennui can drive the fiend to break any and all "deals" it held with the vampire host.
- The mind of the vampire isn't perfect. Time can erode memory, making it unreliable at best, and dangerously unstable at worst. Some might deal with the Strix hoping that such apparently ancient creatures (spirits, demons, whatever they are) might have an accurate memory of the past and some insight into those events that have come to pass. Ironically, though, the Strix don't really care about the past. They are creatures beholden to the present, and to whatever thrills them at this very moment. They'll gladly lie about the past, though, to any vampire willing to believe it. If a Nemesis can elicit a reaction this way, fine. If the fiend can manipulate the vampire into a course of action by providing a false face to history, even better.

Story Hooks

- A low murmur of voices among the lesser ranks of the Damned starts a terrible conspiracy theory: the Prince is no longer himself. Photographic evidence

is obviously impossible to come by, and the proof is meager. But he is acting differently, isn't he? Did his eyes flash bright when the limo passed by with its headlights on? Is this worth investigating? Can the characters get some real evidence into the hands of some of the Primogen? What happens when other more powerful vampires start to act strangely, too?

- Something's wrong with an ally. Maybe it's the cold, unblinking stare. Maybe it's the faint smile that plays at his lips. (He never smiled.) The characters confront him, and he makes it plain: he's not their ally, not right now, maybe not ever again. He is one of the Nemeses, and he wants to punish... oh, but not *them*. They're too small. Meaningless "in the grand scheme." In fact, he wants to bring harm to the characters' own enemies, those above them who oppress them. He wants to maintain the alliance. He wants to help them, if they'll help him. How did this happen? Are they willing to side with this possessing fiend to make a power play? Is this just a deal with a literal devil?
- The characters receive a note. It is penned in some ungodly combination of blood and feces, and it says in broad, childish letters: "THE FOUNDERS HAVE RETURNED." What does this mean? Who sent it? And why?
- The city's Damned may not know exactly what they're dealing with, they may not even know what the Strix really are. But they know they're out there, and growing in number—a small legion of possessing Nemeses. They know because the Strix are public about it. They taunt the vampires. Leave notes. Recorded messages. A trail of dead bodies. One "conspiracy theorist" among the Carthians, though, has evidence that when these creatures gather, terrible things happen. Catastrophes. Disasters. Anything from an economic collapse to a hurricane landing and drowning out the city. The more of these monsters that come, the worse the disaster. Is it possible to forestall the coming catastrophe by hunting these monsters? Or is it better to start to organize a great egress from the city, hoping to avoid the horror altogether?
- Someone leaves a box of books and papers and parchment on one of the characters' doorsteps. Some books in the collection are modern, written in the last 50 years or so. Some of the parchments and texts are truly ancient—all the way back to before Rome. Some of it was written by humans, some by vampires. All of it hints obliquely or explicitly at the nature and origins of the Strix—and all of this comes before the characters are even aware of the coming menace. What does it mean? Who dropped this off for them, and why? What happens when they find out that one of the Strix themselves is responsible for the information? What is the fiend playing at?

VENTRUE HATE

The Founders considered themselves "lords," and the Ventrue think of themselves as Lords, and sometimes even as the progenitors of all Kindred. If the Strix had such a hard-on for hurting the Founders, does that grim verve carry over to hatred for the Ventrue?

It can, yes. If you feel that's thematic and appropriate to your story, and works a telling point about the history you're trying to use in your game, go for it. We only caution you not to make the Ventrue seem something more important than they are. They're one of five clans, no more or less important than the others—don't put them on the pedestal. They're the "Lords" because they see themselves as such, not because they necessarily *are* that. Making them the only target of the Strix helps to confirm their false nobility, not cast doubt upon it.

Themes at Play

When considering using the Nemeses as key antagonists in your game, take a gander at the following themes. It might help to bring focus to why, and how, you utilize the Strix.

- *The world is home to worse monsters.* Vampires see themselves at the top of a black pyramid: they are secret rulers, dark feeders, seductive lotharios, and all that. We paint them as romantic monsters, and *they* paint themselves as such, too. The Strix are meant to give the vampires a sense of perspective and, in a roundabout way, help to make the vampires better protagonists. The Strix are so sinister and so strange they can't help but make the vampires seem, well, *human* by comparison.
- *Monsters are frightening because of what they do, not because of what they are.* Body-stealing is scary, sure. Shadowy owls are weird, no doubt. But that's not what really makes the Strix freaky. They're frightening because they are so far from human they can barely be understood, and their behavior exists as utterly unpredictable. They are scary because of what they are willing to do in pursuit of their very limited, moment-to-moment goals.
- *Purposelessness is terrifying.* Really. It is. A terrorist is frightening and dangerous, but he's following some kind of agenda. He has conviction in which he thinks he's right and just. Someone, somewhere, can get on board with that. Probably not you or me, but sympathy is *possible*—"Oh, he was lied to by his society," or, "He was coerced," or, "He really believes what he's doing is righteous." It doesn't excuse it, but it softens the monstrousness. Now, look at a serial killer. Much harder to explain away. Some killers kill because they know nothing else. They're driven to it. They can't explain it. No internal logic exists to support it. It's just the gleam of

the knife, the pleasure of the screams. That's the Strix. They don't have purpose, not really. They indulge themselves because they want to, and because they can. That's it.

Woods at Play

What moods do the Strix support in your game? How does involving these Nemeses change the tenor of your story?

- **Paranoia.** This is some real "Invasion of the Body Snatchers" stuff. The Strix borrow human bodies, but those bodies expire over time. Not so with vampires. The Damned are already a deeply suspicious lot, so what happens when they find out they can be possessed by horrible shadowy owls from beyond this world and made to do things to help destroy the vampires' nocturnal society? Crank up the paranoia knob.
- **Revulsion.** This revulsion doesn't necessarily come from the splatter-horror angle (though it can; the Strix can at times perform acts that are quite grisly), but more from the fear that arises when a vampire sees just how deep and dark indulgences can go. Vampires are very much about indulging themselves, and it's mostly about the sweet taste of blood. Strix take that to a whole new level, which leads vampires to question the Requiem—is it a path that will eventually lead to such depravity?
- **Escalation.** The Strix represent an escalation of horror. They are an invasive presence. More show up every night. Worse, when more gather, it seems to mean something terrible is coming (and the Nemeses don't even recognize it). It's positively apocalyptic. This doesn't mean The Apocalypse is coming, no—but it does mean the Strix represent an ending. They have come back to this world and their corrosive, erosive influence has the chance to eat away at the Danse Macabre, leaving vampire society in ruins. It's made all the more concerning when earthquakes and building collapses seem to happen in their wake.

The Disembodied Watcher (Shadow Owl)

Quotes: *Just because I do not have a body now does not mean I cannot get one. Maybe I'll take yours.*

Description: This Strix is without a body, and exists as a two-foot shadow bird, an owl with black tufts and glowing eyes, whose feathers and flesh comprise little more than a cloud of smoke and gnats.

Background: This Owl remembers the very beginning. It remembers watching from the woods as the Founders lord came staggering up, dropping to his knees in the dark dust and beseeching the parliament of shadows to give him succor. (It matters little whether this memory is accurate, for this creature believes what it witnesses is what is true.)

It knows the quality of the gift the Striges gave to the Damned, and so it intimately knows how they've wasted that precious potential. Thing is, this fiend remembers the fall of the last Founder, and how that was enough—they fled the world again, returning to



the bleak places, the dark shadows. What drew them out again? Why, in the last few years, have the Strix returned? This creature doesn't know, and unlike most of its kind, it wants to.

Storytelling Hints: The Disembodied Watcher knows it is an old spirit. It hates the Damned and what they try so dearly to be (*human*, how grotesque), but it doesn't endlessly pursue vindication. This creature is content to wait. Patience is key. It watches. It does not simply hop from body to body. Certainly at times its urges are too great, and then it must enter the flesh of another and use it up, riding the bones until they break. But then it returns to the boughs of the trees above, watching the world below. The most important thing to this creature is to find its place in this world, to make some sense of why it's here and what it's supposed to do.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 0, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 5, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Investigation 3, Occult 5 (Vampires)

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Stealth 5 (High Up), Survival 5 (Tracking)

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Intimidation 4, Persuasion 2, Subterfuge 4

Merits: Eidetic Memory, Encyclopedic Knowledge

Willpower: 7

Humanity: N/A

Virtue: Prudence. Patience is a virtue, so the saying goes. This creature happens to agree.

Vice: Pride. The Damned have squandered a gift from the Strix, which amounts to stepping on a bauble handed down by the gods themselves.

Health: N/A

Initiative: 7

Defense: 4

Speed: 19

Disciplines: Dominate 5, Nightmare 5

Dread Powers: *Uncommon:* Aura Distortion, Indomitable, Parliament of Shadows, No Surprise, Terrible Rush of Wings; *Rare:* Shadow Infection

Vitae/per Turn: N/A

REMEMBER...

When looking at the stats below, recall that the Strix assumes only the Physical traits of the body. The Mental and Social traits remain those of the possessing Nemesis.

Fiend of Envy and Exuberance (Human Possessor)

Quotes: *The city street at evening. Teeming with people. So many choices. So many tastes. Where to begin?*

Description: Does it matter? This Strix hops from body to body, never letting them get to the point of total putrefaction. Rarely does this creature remain in a body for more than a week—now, though, he’s been gallivanting about in the body of a middle-aged hausfrau (represented by the stats below), with her sun-dress torn, dirt in her teeth, blood under her fingernails. In whatever body the Fiend lurks, he gives the host a manic gleam that goes well beyond the flashing eyes of any other Strix. The host body wears a crooked half-grin that never leaves the face no matter what the creature encounters.

Background: This Strix remains truly reptilian—whatever his background is, he doesn’t remember it. Or more specifically, he doesn’t *care* to remember it. Truth is, new Nemeses come from somewhere—they weren’t all part of the parliament of monsters that once “blessed” the Founders lord with the gift of callousness. This Owl is one of those “young” monsters summoned up from nothing, drawn from the deepest gloom and cast into the world with little idea as to his purpose.

Storytelling Hints: It’s all about the present, the here and now. The Fiend grows swiftly excited, but also suffers fast boredom—it’s a manic-depressive attitude, a constant shuttling from the highs and lows of pleasure and pain. This creature hasn’t yet tasted the fruits of hijacking a vampire’s body, though. At present, he’s working his way through a vast catalogue of human experiences, and right now those experiences are purely physical: broken bones, injected drugs, great gouts of sexual pleasure (sometimes, all three together).

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 4, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Investigation 2, Medicine 2, Occult 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Larceny 2, Stealth 2, Weaponry 1 (Kitchen Implements)

Social Skills: Empathy 2 (Read Victim), Expression 1, Intimidation 3, Persuasion 3, Socialize 3, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Danger Sense, Direction Sense, Fresh Start

Willpower: 5

Humanity: N/A

Virtue: Charity. The Fiend loves to give, give, give. Of course, *what* the Fiend gives isn’t always a good thing—but it’s the thought that counts, right?

Vice: Lust. Carnal expression is the uttermost delight.

Health: 7

Initiative: 6

Defense: 3

Speed: 10

Disciplines: Dominate 1, Nightmare 1

Dread Powers: *Uncommon:* Grotesque Ejection, Hollow Bones; *Rare:* Vice Manipulation

Weapons/Attacks

Type	Damage	Dice Pool	Special
French knife	1L	5	N/A
Fingernails	-1L	Chance Die	N/A



Scarborough, That Old Spider (Lingers Longer)

Quotes: *Who am I? I'm just an old spider sitting at the center of a very large web.*

Description: Scarborough is a large man in all ways—giant salt-and-pepper beard, great heaving gut shoved into a dusty old suit, hands big enough to twist someone's head off, and feet like cement blocks. It's made all the more prominent by the way he leans back and stares down at his foes over his prodigious belly.

Background: Make no mistake: a Strix lurks within the flesh of this old vampire, but to be honest, the lines have started to blur a bit.

Scarborough was—and is, really—a powerful vampire, an old Lord that always claimed to be content with amassing his own estate without ever challenging the authority of the Prince. It was a lie, of course—his own estate was meant to rival that of the Prince, and he always wanted to be a kind of *sub rosa* powerbase for both the First and Second Estates within his city. It worked. A formidable presence and personality, Scarborough's been amassing power—and allies, and foes—for well over a hundred years.

A few years back, though, one of the Nemeses believed Scarborough was worthy of the punishment only the Strix could bring. The Owl would possess him and cause him to destroy his own estate—an estate gained on the backs of vampires, but still eminently *human*.

Once the Nemesis possessed him, though, the Strix discovered a couple of things. First, it learned what a pleasure it was to be nestled in the body of such a powerful vampire. Second, it learned the power could be used in so many ways:



to gain pleasure, yes, but more importantly to destroy not just Scarborough's Requiem, but to help dismantle the nocturnal society of the Damned from the inside out. It would be a great pleasure to pick apart this fly, leg by leg, wing by wing.

Except, one problem. The Strix within Scarborough is taking a long time to do the deed. Which is fine, really, given that vampires have eternity, and the Strix have an eternity within a given vampire... but the lines truly are starting to blur. The Nemesis enjoys being Scarborough, and is not so quick to dismantle his unlife. It has even undertaken efforts to actually *masquerade* as him, something most Strix won't—or can't—do. It's an irony, of course, but the Nemeses are not creatures that understand the vagaries of irony so well.

Storytelling Hints: The Strix tries to be like Scarborough. It fails. But it doesn't much matter, because Scarborough was always a strange monster—a lumbering, quietly-simmering pot of unpredictability. His inferiors always expected him to act oddly, so the fact that the Strix within him only pushes him further off-kilter is not troubling to any but the vampire's closest advisors.

Clan: Ventrue

Covenant: Invictus

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 5, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 4, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Investigation 4, Occult 3

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 5 (Bear Hug), Survival 3, Weaponry 2

Social Skills: Animal Ken 2, Empathy 2, Expression 2, Intimidation 4, Persuasion 3, Subterfuge 2 (Acting)

Merits: Fighting Style: Boxing 5, Giant, Strong Back

Willpower: 5

Humanity: N/A (Scarborough's actual Humanity was 4)

Virtue: Fortitude. The Strix has found a grim sympathy with Scarborough: both are survivors that play the long con.

Vice: Gluttony. The Nemesis within has actually found an intense liking for the blood of other vampires; it gorges whenever it can.

Health: 11

Initiative: 5

Defense: 3

Speed: 13

Blood Potency: 6

Disciplines: Animalism 5, Auspex 3, Dominate 3, Resilience 5

Dread Powers: *Uncommon:* False Fiend, Indomitable, No Surprise, Sudden Surprise; *Rare:* Devil's Deal

Vitae/per Turn: 15/3

Weapons/Attacks

Type	Damage	Dice Pool	Special
Bear Hug	0(B)	11	Grappling
Crushing Fist	0(L)	10	See "Brutal Blow" under Boxing

Dampyr

NOBODY CRIES IN CANDYLAND

3:36 PM COFFEE GIRL



I'm officially a complete tard.

I was getting this skinny indie rock boy (yes, I know I have a type—stop commenting on it!) his coffee today, and all this glitter fell out of my hair into his coffee while he was standing right there. I'd been so slammed with school that I hadn't showered after **THE SHOW**, and still had all that glittery shit everywhere. But he laughed and was totally cool, and he wouldn't let me make him more coffee, and drinks the coffee with all the glitter in it while scribbling in his little book. I think he was trying to make it obvious that he was writing poetry, so 1 point off for trying too hard, but ten points for being cool on a night when I needed it.

When he came back up for another espresso, he had glitter on his lips and in his teeth, and we did that thing where I pointed out the glitter, and he tried to wipe it on the wrong side, and then for some reason I ended up reaching across the counter and wiping his lips off for him. This line came to me—I swear to Christ, I actually said this!—

"Glitter on your lips, and glitter all over me... people are going to get the wrong idea."

He gave me this smile... wow... and said "Yeah, like you held down Tinkerbell while I ate her."

It seems weird when I read it written, but the way he said it made me totally lose it, and he took a picture with an antique Polaroid (like I said, totally indie).

How do you know the difference in like and love? Well, in lust and love? Well, in hunger and love? Yet these things are not mutually exclusive, are they? I should know better than to even consider these questions.

I find myself following the coffee girl around, just on the edge of her perceptions using the tricks I bought from Cully to remain distant and hidden. I snapped some pictures with my Polaroid 205, burning through my last stock of film recklessly—no art or anything, just snap snap snap. I'd be begging and stealing to afford more film, but something about her demanded recklessness, a reasoned release—embrace the dissolution of the past, and snap pictures of the now.

The second approach is trickier than the first, the ice is broken, and there's cold waters to fall into. I ask around, try to find out things about her so we can have things in common when I make the next move.



10:56 PM COFFEE GIRL

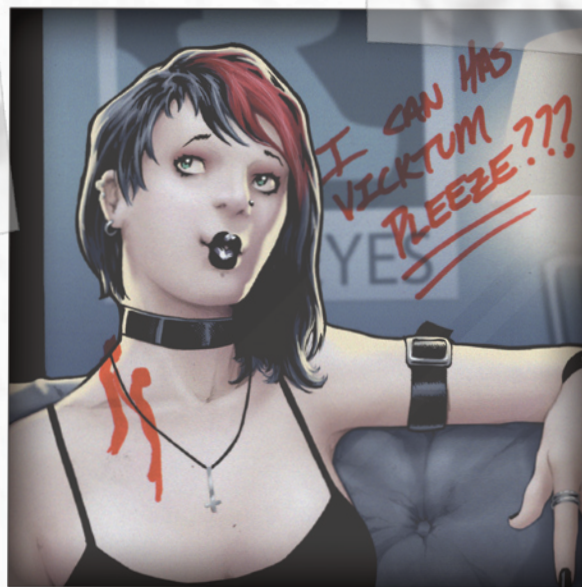
So Indie Boy seems to be working up the nerve to ask me out or something—he's been in the shop four nights this week, and I spotted him chatting with 🐶FoxyerKhan when he came in to give me a lift to rehearsal, and it sounded like they were talking music and poetry. Indie Boy gave FK a beat up paperback, and FK invited him around to see us practice. He smiled, but I think we're not exactly his scene. He's probably into Neutral Milk Hotel. I have to get a look at his iPod sometime to see how far off he is from my music... not sure if I can date someone who's into totally different music.

And yes—I just said "DATE".

It is important to know a lover, inside and out. To hazard a guess, inside she had blood and bones and tubes that glisten wetly, and purplish lumpy bits—all of it essential, but none of it especially pretty. Still, I'd have to check on that one day too, just in the interest of being a thorough and conscientious lover, mind you. On the outside she had straight dark hair, a gigantic smile I wanted to eat off her face, eyes that are some color between blue and brown that I can't remember right now, and an acceptable number of facial piercings. It's good to see someone who recognizes how a touch of the grotesque can make beauty more gorgeous, but too much of the grotesque just leaves you looking grotesque. Thankfully too, no tongue stud. If there's one thing I don't want anywhere near my precious well-sprung prick, it's a cliché.

What have I learned about my soon-to-be-sweetie?

1. She plays rhythm guitar in a horrible candy-goth band called Pickled Peppers, and it takes all my skill to smile and say nice things about it.
2. Her mother is dead, and killed herself, and she never knew her father. I am not so proud that I didn't do a bit of woo woo—we know how easy the needy girls are to love.
3. She has a roommate who never leaves his room, and is possibly a compulsive ^{The internet is hilarious!} masturbator to the internet. She called him a "total bee-tard", which I laughed at, because it seemed the right thing to do. I will use the Google to find out what that means when I get the chance.
4. She came here for college because of a guy, but doesn't regret it.
5. I tried all my tricks to get her to come over to my place, and she said she'd prefer to take it slower. I don't know if I'm slipping, or if she's really something special. Maybe I secretly want this one to be different? I tested with a girl I saw at the Mellon Belly show, and she came home with me like it usually happens, lickety split lip, but she tasted like nicotine, and so I kicked her out and rinsed my mouth out with bow-bon, but it was the roofie bow-bon, and I wasted it. Now I have to see the loathsome McSkibbit to get some more roofies.



9:48 AM COFFEE GIRL

So I went out with Indie Boy again last night after work, and we walked all over town. I showed him some of the weird stuff I found, like the fish tank full of **Barbie heads** (it was almost full!), and the **dueling graffiti wall**. He's got totally weird taste in music, like stuff I never heard of, and he's obsessed with the Beats, and can recite lines from *On the Road*.

He's been totally cool after I told him I wanted to go slower, but he looks at me like he's hungry for me, and it's so hot sometimes (and sort of scary other times, like he might eat me!)—seriously! Tell me to be strong! I have to slap myself and scream "REMEMBER MANIC-DEPRESSIVE DJ BOY!"

she was busy last night—had to study she said, and it left me raw as ground beef to spend the night alone. I decided hell with her, and waited for her in the alley outside her apartment, and when she came by I *teased* to grab her, but then the urge left me, and I wanted to instead ask her if everything was OK, and if we were cool (like "we" was a real thing!) I preserved dignity by fleeing, and got dinner with my friend Cully because I felt like torturing myself a little bit. Cully had three hair-less cats, and he fed them opium syrup (where on earth did he get opium syrup, I'll never know, but Cully is such a hideous mystery), and if you had to eat cats, they weren't bad because there was no hair to get caught in your teeth, and the opium was a nice warm buzz that ended up making me maudlin and yappy, and so I told Cully about the girl, and he laughed at me.

"Just do your whammy, and nail her, and be done with this shit. You used to be my hero, but now I hardly know you anymore, man."

"It's not like that. This is something new."

"Dude, if you don't tap her, I'm going to do it just to see what's so hot about her. Don't worry, I'll hit her while she's sleeping—just a little prick."

I didn't rise to the obvious joke—instead, I hit Cully with the table, and kicked his plasma screen over. He came off the floor spitting, and threw me through a thin interior wall, and I hit him with his DVD player, and he broke his Xbox against the back of my head so I saw stars (and that just made me think of her again!). By that time, the neighbors were banging on the walls and shouting abuse and copthreat so I fucked off out of there.

Fucking Cully. On the way back to my place, I left her a note, even though doing that while loaded never leads to anything good.

What the hell is wrong with me: I'm the blade. I cut, but am not cut.



8:27 AM COFFEE GIRL

Indie Boy left me this weird but sweet note last night:



1:58 AM COFFEE GIRL

He's torturing me! I told him I had to study like hell, and he's been pretty cool about it, but he keeps coming into work every night like usual, for his coffee and some scribbling in his journal. It's KILLING ME! He's conspiring against my GPA.

After I got off shift, we walked over to the 24/7 for some feta cheese fries. He made a face, and said, "I'll watch you eat them."

And I said, "Well, I'm going to taste like them now, so you'll have to deal with it."

And then I realized that we'd never actually kissed yet, and I got to fishmouth at him for a few seconds before the server came over to take our order.

He just sat there with this little smartass smile, like he'd double-jumped and got a checker kinged.

"What I meant was..."

"You want to kiss me. Can't take it back!"

"Can so!"

"No take-backs with kisses. It's in the constitution."

"Which article?"

"It's one of the bills."

"Which bill?"

He grabs the check as the server brings it over, and hands it back with a twenty, "This one" he says. "I bought you dinner, and so courtesy dictates at least a goodnight kiss."

We got up, and worked our way back out to the street.

"How long have you had that thing with the bill planned?"

"YEARS. I can't believe you fell for it. You can keep your feta cheese kisses."

"No givebacks!"

And I kissed him!

*She kissed me last night and it was like a golden unicorn fucked my skull
and ejaculated rainbows into my brain.*

1:52 PM COFFEE GIRL

It's official now—Indie Boy is now Indie Boyfriend. No more comment about MDDJB—he's gone, and the life lesson he represents is learned. Indie Boyfriend is totally different, and I seriously feel like he's right there with me, and he's feeling it too. If he invites me over to his place again, I'm going. Last night, he came to my place again and we made out on the couch until something like three in the morning. Yeah, he's as good a kisser as I thought he might be. Doug kept laughing at something in his room, and every time he'd laugh Indie Boyfriend would curse and glare at the door, and that got me laughing every time he did it. It took an hour to get him out the door, we kept falling into each other. Finally he went home almost at sunrise, and I fell asleep and skipped class all day. I dreamed his hands were all over me.

I was hurting and hungry, but I had to push hard to get home before sunrise. The risks I was taking! Daring the sun to spend another minute coiled up with my coffee girl. When I got home, I was feeling the pressure in my eyes, drooping heavy but also the hunger in me, and I knew I'd not wake without something more in me, so I hammered on Mrs. Harrigan's door until the old lady opened up. I hit her with my brightest smile, and then tackled her, kicking her door closed behind me. I took enough off her immediately to make her woozy and compliant, and then dragged her into the bathroom with me and shut the door. I kicked the flowery bathmat into the crack and cuddled up with Mrs. Harrigan's wrinkly corpse for the day, hoping her kids were as worthless and absent as she always complained when I helped her take her trash down or carry her groceries up.

11:53 PM COFFEE GIRL

OMG, I'm floating. (you can all shut the fuck up!)

He made me a mix tape (on actual tape!), and I had to sneak into Doug's room to get his old boombox to play it. Doug's been gone for a couple of days at least—but then, when he's quiet I don't know when he's in or not. Here's the playlist from the case:

A	B	DATE
The dB's "Moving in your Sleep"	Big Star "September Girls"	
Television "Venus"	The Soft Boys "Queen of Eyes"	
Nick Drake "Which Will"	Grant Lee Buffalo "The Hook"	
Pylon "Feast on my Heart"	The Fleshtones "Anywhere You Go"	
Patti Smith "Ain't That Strange"	Camper Van Beethoven "Devil Song"	
The Velvet Underground "I'll be your Mirror"		

Oh dear Journal, my cellulose confessor, I know I should be wallowing in angsty horror at dropping poor Mrs. Hannigan's weighted body parts into the lake, or more broken-up about disposing of annoying Doug, but mostly those things just left me tired and weirdly spent.

I caught Doug on one of his rare trips out of his cave to forage for cigarettes and cases of Doctor Pepper. His hole was filled with those little translated Japanese comics, so many they'd spilled out into the main room of their apartment. I asked her about them when I accidentally knocked a drift of them off the end table.

"Are all these things about effeminate gay boys and light s&m?"

"No, some are about elves and magic, and some about giant robots, and some about tennis."

"Tennis?"

"Yep."

"I think I'll stick with your gay sex comics then. I can't even watch tennis when it's real."

"They're all Doug's."

"Doug is..."

"Yep."

"Huh."

"What do you mean 'huh'?"

"I should introduce him to a friend of mine so he'll get the hell out of here and stop giggling so loud! It's hard to maintain the mood with a laugh track. I say something sexy, and BWAAA HAAA HAAA."

So I caught him at the Snack and Go, and used Hungry Eye Lust number eight on him, with a kick in the libido to hook him, and back at my place I had him moaning in ten minutes, and naked in fifteen, and when I was about to have my way I... stopped.

Something about it felt wrong and gross, something about it felt like betrayal. I could have made myself open him and drink, but it would have been a force feeding.

Why couldn't I do it?

Why couldn't I do it to him?

Because it wasn't her laid out before me this way, that's why.

See journal? True love.



7:22 PM COFFEE GIRL

Doug is still gone—no idea where he is, but he left his check for rent on the fridge like usual this morning, so I guess he's staying at somebody else's place. I'm feeling like a total sap right now, and hoping he's met somebody good for him, and he's laying all curled up with them right now. I'm glad I never gave him an invite to *Candyland* because he'd make fun of me.

We're doing a Tragedy Oreo at Indie Boyfriend's place tonight. I've got *Requiem for a Dream*, *Leaving Las Vegas*, and for the creamy filling, *Spaceballs*.

She's agreed to come over to my place tonight! I've never been a housekeeper, but I clean sort-of. I push the entropy around, and turn my spare room into a vault of filth. I've still got Doug in the freezer chest, but I bury it under a drift of clothes and books so it looks more like a table than a tomb. Food? Once upon a working tastebud, I knew my way around a kitchen, but decide to order Chinese so there's something in the fridge I can offer if she's got another appetite that needs satisfying.

I consider my TV, and raid Mrs. Hannigan's apartment for a replacement. She's got a DVD player too. It's tragic when an octogenarian widow has cooler home entertainment than me.

I put on an Isaac Hayes album and dialed the volume to "semi-ironic."

I'm sitting here now, scribbling and waiting for the knock knock knock, not sure if I'm the spider or the fly.

Is that her? More later.

6:37 PM COFFEE GIRL

Sorry I haven't posted in a couple of days. Been trying to get my head straight about Indie (ex?)Boyfriend.

I go to his house with the movies, and it's all just like I'd hoped. His place is dark and cool, and retro kitsch—he's got one of those lamps made of big glass grapes. It's pretty clean (guy-clean), and looks like he made an effort, and that was worth more than it being neatnik, because he made a special effort for me and didn't just assume I'd sleep with him regardless (even if I would—you all read about my *dreams*).

He warms me up some eggrolls, and we start watching *Requiem for a Dream*. The springs are shot in his couch, and it pours us both down into this dip in the center until I end up with one leg over his leg, leaning back against him. I think he was nervous, because he was breathing so shallow I could hardly feel it, but he started to touch me and it seemed accidental at first, how he'd trail his fingers along my arm so the hair there stood up like it was reaching for his finger tips, then his hand would languish out to pick up his beer, and he'd sip like that was what he was doing all along. By the time Sara's fridge tries to eat her, he's given up the pretense and he's touching me on my arms and my neck, and across the tops of my feet, everywhere.

I'm slowly rubbing my back against him, and it's almost like rolling but I'm crystal clear. I arched so my head fell back on his shoulder, and he started kissing my neck and biting me gently under my ear, kissing my earlobe. I guess I should have known what was coming, and it's not like I'm a *prude*. I might have been into it if I'd had some warning.

When he bit me, my neck went cold then hot, and I got a huge shot of adrenaline and started to shake. I wanted to pull away, but I got mixed up and pushed back harder against him (it was like getting flustered in Driver's Ed when I was 15, and nearly rear-ending a bus when I was stomping the gas trying to stop).

I said something like, "What the fuck? No. STOP!"

And he did. I flopped forward onto the floor and turned my back to the infamous ass-to-ass scene. I said "What the fuck again" while feeling my neck. I was bleeding pretty bad, but my head was clear. He looked sick in the TV light, he looked like he was rotten inside and it was bursting out. He had his hands up to his mouth wiping at his lips, smearing the words as he wiped. His eyes were huge, flickering with reflected TV like dancing stars. I thought he was about to puke, and then he threw himself off the couch, and past me into the bathroom, and started to heave into the toilet, convulsing so hard his forehead hit the bowl. He puked a few sips of beer and a few quarts of blood, and flopped back against the bathtub with his chin smeared with stringy puke and blood all down his shirt. He met my eyes, and then he wouldn't even look at me, he just kept them clenched shut and said, "Go! Just go! Go! Get out!" I started sobbing, and ran out (I owe Vision Video for those movies now).

I can't get him on the phone, and when I got up the nerve to go back to his place he wouldn't answer his door. I don't know what the hell is going on.

I know I know—Manic Depressive DJ Boy strikes again.

I wish I just knew why.



It was so right, how did it go to fuck? The way she looked at me! Oh fuck, I wish I had religion. I wish I had anything. I wish I could kill her just to feel something, but I don't have the strength. I'm STARVING, but it's too hard to go looking for food. I keep opening the freezer chest and trying to fit in there, but Doug is too big and he's frozen stiff and I can't move him. I don't have the strength in me.

I need to eat, but fuck I can't. If I just crawl under the bed and go to sleep the landlord will find me in a few weeks, and then I'd get carted out into the sun and never even see it end. Is that how I want it to end? Like Kerouac said?

ON THE ROAD

They danced down the streets like dingedodies, and I shambled after as I've been doing all my life after people who interest me, because the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones that never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn

TRANSLATION SANGUINEOUS CATECHISM 8TH CANON

Question: How does the 8th Canon relate to physical congress between damned and mortal individuals?

Answer: Indulging in sensual pleasures with mortals is a distraction from the duties of the faithful, and risks transgressing against the natural order, and represents a sin VENIAL subject to proper confession.

On the act of lying with mortal woman so as to get upon her child, or to so lie with mortal man as to be got with child by him, this act represents sin IMMORTAL, apostasy for the faithful, and abominable for any and all regardless of faith.

- Let any who so transgress be treated thusly
- Let them be brought before the congregation and accused
- Let them answer accusations in the agreed fashion
- Let them be forced to acknowledge their illegitimate issue
- Let judgment be passed
- Let them be made to consume their issue to the last breath if the child may be found
- Let the offending organs of generation be removed with fire
- Let them be excommunicated from the faith
- Let them be caged to meet the sunrise and go unshriven into judgment

Any who provide succor or relief for those who violate natural law thusly be also brought before the congregation, and made to answer charges and suffer correction to a degree commiserate with their complicity in the practice.



CATE
INTE
JNM
FJDE
MAN
CAVE
TRJ
COM
COMMENTATUS

Truth

The half-damned aren't what you think. The Dampyr is a curse upon the cursed, and a proof that even the Damned can still transgress.

The vampires that haunted the Balkan region during the preindustrial age must have been a lusty and perverse lot, for it's from this region that the predominant legends (and indeed, the name) of the Dampyr arose. The spelling and pronunciation varies regionally from the Serbian *vampirović* to the Bulgarian *dzhadadzhiya* (or the less exotic sounding *glog*).

The offspring of unholy unions between vampires and mortals were typically said to possess some or all of their vampire parent's power and vitality, without the usual assortment of conventional and unusual weaknesses, and further were driven to hunt and slay the undead. The power of the Dampyr to pierce the veils of vampire glamour or defy their influence made them especially effective hunters, and some legends have them able to share this ability through several bits of folk mummery and charms—looking down the sleeves of a Dampyr's doffed shirt being one of them.

Dampyr would rove the countryside, seeking out vampires to slay for proper remuneration from appreciative locals—taking their payment in silver, livestock, food or clothing. Many seemed to diversify into general traveling exorcists who would arrive to (miraculously!) find vampires in the local graveyard, or other unquiet dead that needed putting to sleep. After an impressive show of seeking them out and putting an end to them, the Dampyr would move on. Regional folk-history records several instances of opportunists making use of the Dampyr legends to perpetuate cons on credulous locals. The range of physical features identifying a Dampyr was so flexible as to encompass any trickster willing to put on a good show.

Legends say the half-Damned man is filthy or smells of the grave. Others describe a noseless face, no bones, enormous dark eyes, prominent teeth, a sickly pallor or a glow of good health, skeletal thinness or a soft plump physique, slouched, straight, ugly, handsome, stinking of rot or smelling of flowers. Where the legends lack consistency in attributes, they are remarkably consistent in profession—Dampyrs are vampire hunters, and they do it for pay.

Among some of the Kindred, legends of these odd half-breeds exist. Many consider it the stuff of legend and pop media, and look to their own irrelevant and only indifferently functional genitalia as evidence.

Most reliable reports of mortal and semi-mortal beings with distinctively vampiric powers almost inevitably turn out to be of an unfamiliar or particularly accomplished ghoul, a member of one of the ghoul families, or even another vampire adopting the blush of life. It's all clouds, swamp gas and weather balloons. Most of the time.

What is a certainty is the explicit forbiddance in pursuing natural-born offspring found in the older canonical writings of the Lancea Sanctum, the mysteries of the Ordo Dracul, and the lore of the Circle of the Crone. One can also find prohibitions against it in the volumes of edicts and laws in long-established princedoms (notably in the older Eastern European cities) indicating at some point in the long history of Kindred society, a ruler felt the need to explicitly rule against vampires knowing mortals in the biblical sense.

But vampires can't procreate. What do you suppose rattled them so much?

Even the Damned can Blaspheme

The Dampyr exist.

Dampyr are not conceived by accident—unlike the easy breeding of mortals, to breach all natural order and force dead semen to fertilize living eggs or withered wombs, to nurture and feed a living child, requires some kind of dramatic and deliberate effort. But even when the passion and Willpower needed to force this is lacking, there are occult methods to foster the sin.

All the practical efforts of occult copulation aside, what we're really talking about is the decision to damn an innocent, to take a human in his most unspoiled state and spoil him, dirty him, and half-damn him to a life of nearly inevitable horror.

You've got to want to mar that innocence for its own sake, or want a child sprung from your own flesh badly enough not to care.

Daddy, Where Do Babies Come From?

"Well, son, when a mommy and a daddy who are deeply in love decide they want a little baby, mommy murders a homeless man and drinks up all his yummy blood until her belly is big and full of it, and then daddy lays on top of her, and puts his wing-wang in her hoo-haa and moves up and down, and then his seed and her egg meet, and mommy uses some of the blood to make the little baby growing in her big and healthy, but because she's eating for two now, mommy gets very very hungry, and has to murder lots and lots of homeless men so in nine months a perfect little bouncing baby is born, with daddy's nose, and mommy's sickening occult affliction."

Sounds lovely, doesn't it?

Most people try not to think about how they were conceived—and if they do, hope it was beautiful and loving. If a Dampyr were forced to consider the question, and the mechanics of the act were explained to her, these are some of the things she might have to rationalize into something less sordid.

Basic vampire biology (necrology?) would seem to forbid fathering or mothering mortal babies. The vampire can convincingly counterfeit mortality briefly, and at great cost, in stolen Vitae. Even then, the blush doesn't change the vampire's true nature as a hideously animated corpse carrying an infectious curse.

Yet, sometimes, a baby is born.

They say a vampire is denied true human emotion—that her palette of feeling is limited to those colors with which her life had been painted up to the time of her undeath. They say she can't ever really know true love. But, really, what kind of a curse is it that denies its subject such a truly marvelous torment? No, vampires can know love, even love of the truest, most poetical sort, and having experienced the heights, the depths are so much blacker.

When the love is obsessive enough, driven enough, irrational and mad enough, if it's the sort of love that could see you kill anyone who got between you and its object, then it's a love fertile with possibility. Pride can do it, too, sometimes—the desire for potency and masculinity, or the bone-deep urge to feel life growing within. But love is most often the blasphemer, and when brought to bear even vampiric biology steps aside. Love conquers all, as they say.

Even with all the warnings, the pronouncements, the writs promising a true and torturous death for any vampire

brazen enough to dare this sin, vampires still conceive the half-Damned. Try as they might to abandon human frailty and weakness, the Kindred succumb again and again to that old snake offering hope.

For every bloody-minded evil old bastard trying to shape a weapon or pawn, there's half a dozen convinced that this time it's different, this time it's right, this time it's *love*.

Occult Fecundity

Breeding a Dampyr should be a vanishingly small statistical impossibility. That's true if one ignores the amazing human capacity for perversity and meddling, a capacity refined in the vampire rather than lost. If a thing can be done, then someone will do it, and figure out how to do it better and more efficiently. No surprise then that the three covenants that most strongly forbid vampires breeding with mortals safeguard secrets and rituals enabling it, granting vampires fertility exceeding even the human capacity.

Several mystical techniques permit vampires to breed with mortals. Some assist the user, and some allow the user to curse another so he'll unknowingly impregnate the next mortal with whom he has congress. Wait, you say, surely you mean that he'll impregnate the next mortal *woman* with whom he has congress, yes? Ha ha. No. Occult pregnancy is by its very nature a perversion of the essential human procreation—a piratical invasion of something sacred and primal. Distinctions in what is and is not possible have already left the building, and that leaves us with female vampires impregnating women and male vampires impregnating men (with variations on these themes). While the woman carrying the child of her lesbian vampire lover would certainly be surprised at the development, she at least is biologically (and socially) equipped to contend with the life growing within her, the swell of belly and breast, the hormonal swings. She has the physical means for the baby to be born, as well.

Pity her poor clueless male counterpart.

Carrying pregnancy and giving birth is not something human males are biologically prepared for, nor socially conditioned to deal with. The parasitic Dampyr fetus that finds its own niche in a male abdominal cavity is protected by an occult placenta and cowl of tissue, but the male body it feeds upon is unprepared to handle the hormone flux, the swelling, the discomfort. It's a disconcerting experience, but compared to the (possibly fatal) agonies of delivery, the months of pregnancy seem like a fading nightmare. Surgery can save the father's life, but his sanity will be another matter.

Being Born is Hard

The injustices of society and biology are perpetuated into undeath—men have an easier time than women yet again.

Assuming the requisite passion (or its occult substitute) is present, a vampire father need only expend the Vitae and Willpower he'd commit to making a mortal into a ghoul.

For the vampire mother to force life into her withered womb is a vastly more costly effort in Vitae, requiring a daily expenditure of blood, which increases with the fetus's gestational age. Two rather than 1 point of Vitae is required to wake for a night's activity. In addition, through the course of the night the additional expenditure of Vitae equal to the trimester of pregnancy is also required. By the third trimester, the gravid vampiress must expend 5 Vitae total to rise and maintain the pregnancy. Failure to do so results in immediate (and graphic) miscarriage.

If there's any compensation for the vampiric mother, it's how the pregnancy changes the Beast's instinctual responses, and awakens powerful protective instincts in the mother. Protecting and promoting the pregnancy becomes a source of strength, acting like another Virtue for purposes of recovering Willpower. If threatened, the Beast rises with a shocking ferocity and in addition to the usual benefits of Frenzy, grants the mother the benefits of the 8-Again rule on all rolls while acting to protect the pregnancy or exterminate any threats to it. Further, the Frenzy is easy to ride if the mother wishes to protect the pregnancy. The pregnancy also breaks emotional and occult bonds—severing Vinculum and codependency alike, as well as allowing her to ignore the effects of mind-altering Disciplines and magic. She's wholly under the influence of a more primal and elemental compulsion. These potent advantages are sometimes enough to justify the sin and the effort of carrying the child, for a particular sort of devious monster.

The other edge of the sword is the instinct driving the vampire to carry the child to term.

The course of pregnancy for a mortal mother to a half-Damned child is fairly typical, though the usual cravings run to the bizarre, and there are the dreams, and the waves of emotion and unfamiliar memories. The blood of the father has some effect, of course—Nosferatu means night terrors, Ventruue inexplicably grandiose moods, Gangrel hunger and the urge for open spaces and fresh air, Mekhet quietness and a peculiar interest in puzzles and patterns, and Daeva a glow of health and horniness.

Delivery can be a rougher matter, with the conflicting vampire and human natures in the tiny mindless child warring, and, again, seeing the father's blood run true—the Gangrel's child biting and snarling, the Daeva's a chortling cherub, seducing from birth. But minor irregularities aside, there's nothing to distinguish the Dampyr from any pure bred mortal child until one day when inexorably he attracts the eye of a vampire whose blood resonates with his, and the engine of revenge is first fired.

ENDING IT

In system terms, willingly ending a Dampyr pregnancy costs a dot of Willpower.

Losing the pregnancy willingly or unwillingly inflicts an Obsession Derangement—an obsession with becoming pregnant again and again.

Blood Will Out

A Dampyr can live a long time and never even know she's something other than an ordinary unhappy human being. She thinks the horrors visited upon her again and again are a result of circumstance rather than a function of *who she is*. And what she is, is payback. She's walking revenge for the act that gave her life.

A Dampyr isn't cursed, but rather a vessel for a curse—the vehicle for a mindless cosmic revenge. She doesn't destroy vampires by hunting them down with axe and stake and sword and fire, but by walking down the street, having a night out with friends, and striking up a conversation with the nice (if a little pale) guy who offers to buy the next drink.

Her blood makes her a vessel to deliver retribution upon a transgressing vampire, and upon that vampire's whole line. The clan of her vampire parent always influences the course of the child's life in dramatic ways, shaping her destiny, and pushing her into proximity with vampires of the same clan. The child inherits some traits and behaviors broadly similar to the clan of the vampire parent, but also possesses a quality that fascinates and attracts members of that clan, ultimately luring them into a particularly apropos doom.

No sense a vampire can bring to bear upon a Dampyr shows the undead anything weird about her. She looks like a perfectly ordinary mortal, flawed and afflicted by all the ordinary foibles, and some oddly fascinating particular ones. Obsessing over mortals is nothing so unusual in Kindred experience, and certainly nothing to be laid at the feet of the mortal herself.

But all it takes is one taste of the Dampyr's blood to unleash hell upon the vampire that dares pluck the fruit. In the end, the blood contains the essence of his own destruction, and the bemused half-Damned bastard is left reeling, another relationship disintegrating into madness and chaos around her.

So, is it a foregone conclusion for the half-Damned that they lead inexorably tragic and traumatic lives? Is the Dampyr slave to his blood-born tendencies and compulsions, or can he change? The Afflictions outlined for each bloodline below work on the carrot and the stick principle, making the character stronger when he acts in certain ways, making him weaker when he acts in others. And yet, it's always possible to hoe a different row than the furrow plowed out at conception. It's not easy, but then is anything that is worth it *ever* easy?

Dampyr Characteristics

The blood of the Damned marks the child with a touch of sympathetic damnation, imprinting in him like wet clay the negative image of the vampire's own nature. The child is born complicit in the murder of his own parent (or at least, his parent's blood kin). The child carries a tiny measure of his parent's power, and the means to unmake the unnatural undead *thing* that forced him into existence.

All Dampyr share these characteristics:

- **The Penetrating Eye:** Dampyr can sense, and with an effort of will negate, the effects of Obfuscate, Dominate, Majesty, Nightmare and other psychological Disciplines. If the Discipline is being used by a member of the clan from which the Dampyr is descended, this costs only a single point of Willpower, and the immunity persists for the entire scene. If the Discipline is used by a member of another clan of vampire, then it requires the expenditure of a point of Willpower per use of the power.

The Dampyr character doesn't even have to know this is happening—it's a reflex action of sorts. The player—who should know *something* is going on—can choose whether or not to spend the Willpower point. Dampyr don't recognize vampires on sight alone. Even the sense of being subject to strange mental fiddling can seem normal enough that some Dampyr remain ignorant of their true nature for years, sometimes even after meeting vampires themselves.

- **Aura of the Ordinary:** To any vampire perception, mundane or magical, a Dampyr appears completely mortal. There are hints this might not be entirely true, but nothing obvious. Were vampires easily able to identify the half-Damned, they'd make it a point to avoid them, and a curse upon the cursed won't be so easily fooled. Other supernatural creatures that can see auras can notice something in the Dampyr's aura, flashes and veins of paleness. Vampires simply can't see this.
- **Poisoned Veins:** To vampires of their clan, Dampyr blood brings doom—a curse that robs a vampire of some essential part of his nature without which he'll find survival plenty difficult (which we'll explain in more detail below).

To vampires of other clans, the blood of the Dampyr is oddly unsatisfying. It occupies space, but when it's tapped for use it provides no power.

The blood has to be expelled from the system before it can be replaced with fresh healthy blood. The vampire knows the Dampyr Vitae is useless as soon as he drinks it. In system terms the vampire must spend the Vitae, at the usual rate allowed by his Blood Potency, without any positive effect. In story terms, the vampire has to make himself vomit the blood up.

Dampyr Clans

When considering a Dampyr, the clan of her vampire parent determines much of her power, and charts a ridged destiny nearly impossible to escape. Sometimes, the strange Vitae of a parent's bloodline may also tell in the child's nature (the half-Damned child of a Morbus, for example, may be prone to carrying diseases without getting them, or the issue of a Toreador might be an exceptional artist), but typically the stronger strains of the line's parent clan dominate.

- **Advantage:** Beyond the advantages all the half-Damned possess, they also inherit a particular potency to mirror the undead nature of their parent. These provide a constant subtle sympathy with the parent's powers, and with an exercise of will, a more obviously supernatural effect.
- **Affliction:** Born with dead blood in his veins, the child inherits some weakness of body or character like a stain, further reinforcing the gross injustice of his existence, forcing him to suffer for the sins of another even as he willingly or unwillingly works toward vengeance for those sins.
- **Favored Attributes:** Another sympathy to the parent, the child inherits the favored attribute of the vampire's clan and gains the same 1-dot bonus at character creation.
- **Lure:** As the true mark of the Dampyr, the constant and inescapable proof of their purpose as instruments of automatic revenge, each Dampyr possesses a quality or aura that those of their parent's blood find fascinating and irresistible, attractive and compelling. The Lure promises a surcease from suffering, a reawakening of life and hope in even a cynical hard-worn vampire's still heart. For the child, it means living as a beacon to trouble and death, betrayal and horror. At the first taste of the Lure, the vampire feels emboldened and stronger—it's a source of Willpower. When he swallows the hook, however, he'll suffer when he fails to follow the Lure's compulsion, and then when finally reeled in, suffer the doom carried in the Dampyr's blood.

Each Lure has three distinct stages, and increasingly limits and steers actions. The first stage is a generous Willpower reward for interacting with the Dampyr according to the Lure's general theme. The second stage robs the vampire of the ability to regain Willpower without interacting with the Dampyr. The final stage twists the relationship, rewarding behavior that pushes the vampire closer to feeding upon the Dampyr, and penalizing feeding upon other victims.

The Lure advances based upon story demands and pacing (for Dampyr protagonists) or can be based upon a total in Willpower drawn from the relationship (for vampire protagonists).

How the Lure works to hook a vampire will depend upon whether the vampire is a player's character or the Storyteller's character, and is described in detail below.

- **Escape:** Even a hooked vampire might slip the hook, and escape with nothing more than a metaphorical torn mouth, and some much-needed paranoia. Escape means deliberately thrashing against the Lure, and it *will* hurt, and *will* compromise the vampire morally, possibly leading to loss of Humanity or worse.
- **Doom:** It isn't by fire or sword that the Dampyr destroy their parents, but through a slow spiraling dance of attraction and withdrawal, until the vampire is wholly entangled before the true realization of their true positions, who hunts, who feeds, and who lives until tomorrow. At the culmination of the seduction, the Dampyr's doom is visited upon the vampire that dares the incestuous feeding upon children of his own blood.

Vampires that *willingly* drink the blood of a Dampyr of their own bloodline suffer terribly—a doom is a curse that could easily mean the end of a vampire's immortality, and one requiring an effort and sacrifice and a story event to lift.

Each doom has an Out, some way to escape this deeper curse. Finding the Out is challenging. It requires a vampire to question and change something essential about himself, to in some way atone for his sins and sacrifice a part of himself. In system terms, the effort expended to defeat the curse needs to take much longer than a simple night.

In game terms, the vampire must earn and spend between 40 and 60 experience points in the process of defeating the curse (and when they're spent, they're gone). Exactly how many experience points depends upon the Storyteller. Other traits might fall as well, particularly Humanity.

Daeva Blood

Advantage

- Daeva Dampyr gain 8-Again on rolls of Athletics, Empathy and Socialize.
- Spend 1 Willpower to create an infatuation in one target. You gain a +1 die bonus to Social pools related to this target for the duration of the infatuation. At the start of each subsequent meeting, this bonus increases by 1, but at the end of a scene wherein you take advantage of this bonus, roll the total bonus dice for the infatuation and if they roll a success, the infatuation turns sour, and all the dice are lost. If an exceptional success is rolled, the infatuation turns really bad, resulting in a violent blowout or a psycho obsession. If no successes are rolled, then the infatuation continues to grow.

Affliction: Drama Junkie

- “It’s not me... it’s you.” – Gain 1 Willpower when you hurt someone who trusts you emotionally, or when you end a relationship, leaving the other person the worse for it. If you break up a relationship with the big drama or betray someone who trusts you, leaving him seriously messed up for a long time, refresh all your spent Willpower.
- “You’re suffocating me!” – Lose 1 Willpower at emotionally significant milestones in a relationship after the first phase of passion and infatuation is done. Meeting your SO’s parents, moving in together, anniversaries, holidays, even hearing certain songs when you’re together. Things that normally reinforce the relationship make you feel constrained and claustrophobic, and it takes Willpower to avoid breaking it off right then and there.

Favored Attributes: Dexterity or Manipulation

Lure: Romance

The Daeva may be shallow, manipulative creatures, but they’re vulnerable to self-delusion, and of the delusions, romance is among the sweetest. Therefore, their Dampyr exude an inexorable sense of this—the promise of rekindled human feeling, of passion, of, dare we say it, *love* (which is what happens between Indie Boyfriend and his Coffee Girl).

In the first stage, the Vampire gains Willpower when pursuing the romantic affair with the Dampyr. Minor gestures reward the vampire with a point of Willpower, while major acts of devotion (especially those that feed into the mythology of romantic love) refresh all the Vampire’s Willpower. This honeymoon period doesn’t last forever.

In the second stage, the vampire loses the ability to regain Willpower through either her Virtue or her Vice, and can regain Willpower only by pursuing her role in the budding romantic fantasy surrounding the Dampyr. Still worse, to step outside the fantasy scenario and act with rational self-interest costs the vampire 1 Willpower each time—including feeding upon anyone but the object of her obsession.

In the third stage of the Lure, the romance turns obsessive and creepy. The vampire continues to gain Willpower only when interacting with the Dampyr, but now it is tinged with irrational jealousy and possessiveness, which could easily turn into violence and abuse. Every point of Vitae drunk from another victim now requires the vampire to spend 1 Willpower to force herself to swallow the blood, which tastes like infidelity. Any time the vampire refreshes all her Willpower now, she has to make a Humanity roll to avoid succumbing and feeding upon the Dampyr.

Escape: Escaping the Daeva Lure requires a messy breakup scene that leaves absolutely no room for doubt that the relationship is over. If this happens in the first stage of the Lure, this merely costs the Vampire all her current Willpower, leav-

ing her listless and depressed. If this happens in the second stage, it requires a Humanity roll because it feels like ripping a piece of yourself out and throwing it away. If this happens in the third stage, it causes automatic Humanity loss, and inflicts the Depression Derangement. When it becomes clear how much this breakup will cost her, the vampire can back down and stop the blowup, avoiding the consequence of the escape, but remaining hooked by the Lure.

Doom: Heartbreaker

When the vampire finally succumbs, as she inevitably must, to her hunger, seeking to consummate the romance she feels so intensely, the Dampyr’s doom is visited upon her in the sweet but tainted blood. The poison annihilates the vampire’s capacity to feel *anything* save for the sorrow of loss. It hits the Daeva where she’s most vulnerable, in her already-atrophied ability to feel.

The inability to regain Willpower from Virtue or Vice becomes permanent, and the vampire can’t raise even enough anger to wish harm upon the Dampyr who left her so utterly bereft. The ennui of the jilted lover afflicts the vampire fiercely, and to take any kind of dramatic action (such as hunting) requires her to spend a point of Willpower—a dwindling resource, without her Virtue or Vice to restore it.

She can no longer experience Frenzy—an odd thing to lose to a curse, but with it goes even the desire to hunt, or flee, or lash out in anger. Suicide becomes an increasingly attractive proposition, and elaborate fantasies of her lost love’s grief haunt waking fantasy and sleeping dream. Without the Hunger Frenzy to drive her, she’s easily able to stay in bed all night every night until she drifts into a torpid rest.

Out: If somehow she can make amends for past crimes of the heart—offering closure to jilted lovers, sacrificing herself to make someone else’s love possible, or letting a treasured thrall go free to be with a love, the vampire might find a way to be free of the doom.

Gangrel Blood

Advantage

- Gain 8-Again on rolls of Animal Ken, Brawl and Survival
- Spend 1 Willpower to shrug off deadly wounds, converting all the Lethal damage from a single source into an equal amount of Bashing damage, from which you can recover normally. You look a mess, but the bullet *somehow* managed to miss all your vital organs. You can do the same trick with Aggravated damage, but every point of damage costs you 1 Willpower.

Affliction: Temper, Temper

- “Violence solves everything” – Gain 1 Willpower when you resort to physical violence to solve your problems. You don’t

gain this if you are physically attacked, but can if you initiate a fight, especially when the situation could have been resolved with other tactics. You also gain 1 Willpower when someone backs down from your threat of violence, and blinks first. When using violence brings down a world of pain on you and your allies, causing trouble and danger beyond the immediate confrontation, refresh all your spent Willpower.

- “I’m nobody’s bitch” – Lose 1 Willpower when you demur from a fight, back down, or succumb to intimidation. When anyone else makes themselves your master, and you eat it, lose 1 Willpower.

Favored Attributes: Composure or Stamina

Lure: Trust

Loners, wanderers, driven to seek the company of animals, but finding only salivating slaves and followers, Gangrels feel the Beast rise to challenge their fellows, the urge to dominate and establish hierarchy. Not lonely by choice, but instinct. What would such a creature crave? Trust.

The space to relax around someone, to be silent with someone, the Beast sleeping soundly. Nothing like love or sex, just companionship and ease.

In the first stage of the Lure, when the Gangrel succumbs, she finds herself trusting the Dampyr, confiding in her, spending time doing ordinary things with her. There’s no tension there for either of them—the usual cycle of anger and rage short circuits, and there is peace, and sometimes confession. The Gangrel gains a point of Willpower for making time to hang out with the Dampyr, and unburdening herself can offer another point. If she trusts the Dampyr with a big secret or confesses something major, then she refreshes all her Willpower.

During the second stage, the Gangrel loses the ability to regain Willpower normally from her Virtue and Vice, and so her friendship and trust with the Dampyr become more vital. Now, if troubled or worried, the Gangrel must spend Willpower to avoid unburdening herself to her new friend. This requires at least 1 point, but more if she is enduring a great deal of stress (from local politics, for example). She must also spend Willpower to willingly lie to her friend or to deny her help. Increasingly, she’ll grow protective of her friend, and will cut ties to her other acquaintances and allies, especially if they question the oddly intense new friendship. Doing so refreshes all the Gangrel’s Willpower, and refusing to do so costs a point of Willpower. Suggestions that there is something wrong with the friendship risk Röttschreck (requiring 5 successes at least to resist). Actual threats to the friend’s welfare are much more intense, requiring the expenditure of Willpower (and 8 or more successes to resist Frenzy). This violence drives the vampire back to her friend with more to confess, more in need of that safe relationship.

By stage 3, the Gangrel alienates all her other friends and allies, cutting herself off from all social contact save for with

her friend, and then things start to go sour. She begins to feel that the Dampyr is her only lifeline to sanity and Humanity. Spending time away from the Dampyr requires the Gangrel spend a point of Willpower, but being in her company and not taking out all the frustration and isolation on her requires she spend additional Willpower. Worse, the temptation to just bite her and get it over with grows as well—also taxing the Gangrel’s dwindling Willpower. Without secrets to confess, she’ll quickly succumb to the doom.

Escaping the Lure requires the Gangrel throw herself into social situations as hard and as often as possible, forging as many ties with others as possible, serving others, and being served. The goal here is to wash out the Lure by trusting as many others as possible, and making herself vulnerable to them. If the Lure is in stage 1, this requires the vampire spend all her current Willpower in social situations helping others. If the Lure has reached stage 2, the constant reminder of how much trusting this way hurts (and how far from human she has become) demands a Humanity roll. If the Lure is in stage 3, the Humanity loss is automatic, and she gains a Phobia of being alone.

Doom: Put the Beast to Sleep

The blood of a Gangrel-born Dampyr brings a particularly appropriate doom upon Gangrel that take their blood—it puts the Beast to sleep. This frees the vampire from all his unnatural instincts—the threat of Frenzy the most noticeable, as the constant snarl falls silent, and the clarity of those first few minutes is almost pure joy before the true depths of the doom are revealed. With the Beast slumbering, the vampire loses all his protective instincts and fears. Fire and the sun hold no particular dread, and the Predator’s Taint of other vampires doesn’t even register anymore.

Sound almost wonderful? The doom is truly revealed with the vampire’s first efforts at feeding. Without the Beast’s hunger, the vampire can no longer judge how in need of Vitae he is, and if a player’s character, the player no longer knows how many points of Vitae his character has. Worse, the experience of drinking blood is grotesque and revolting. It’s hot and cloying in the mouth, salty and metallic, and the gorge rises, the long quiescent gag reflex reawakens. Drinking blood requires the expenditure of a point of Willpower to overcome this alien disgust. And without even the sense of hunger to warn, it is all too easy for a starving vampire to fall torpid, and without the instincts to seek shelter from the sun, to do so on a park bench or the backseat of a car.

Out: Awakening the Beast again, and being free of this doom, requires the Gangrel to engage in a truly savage series of acts, which shocks the Beast from its slumber. Without the instincts of the Beast to inspire this horror, the Man must commit atrocity and horror willingly and unflinchingly—a process almost certain to result in the loss of several dots of Humanity.

Advantage

- Gain 8-Again with rolls of Academics, Investigate and Occult
- Spend 1 Willpower to gain an uncanny insight into a given situation, person, object or place. This *might* be the result of exceptional deduction or induction, the processes of logic and reason, but it often stretches credibility the point where something unnatural would be easier to believe. You may ask the Storyteller one question, which she must answer truthfully with “yes,” “no,” or “maybe” per scene. If the question implies an answer or combines multiple questions (“Is he proud he killed the girl?” when the identity of the killer has yet to be established, for example), the Storyteller can explain the problem with the question and then refuse to answer, or force you to revise the question.

Affliction: Obsessive Secrecy, Secret Obsession

- Gain 1 Willpower when you withhold important information for no other purpose than keeping it secret. If there is a reason to keep the information secret (protecting yourself or someone else, for example), you do not gain the Willpower. If withholding this information has no inherent benefit, and also leads to danger and hardship for yourself or those about whom you care, refresh all your spent Willpower.
- Lose 1 Willpower when you fail to pursue a mystery or secret when presented with the opportunity. When you ignore the chance to poke around in things that don’t concern you (such as someone’s marital troubles or his safe, left half-open), you also lose 1 Willpower.

Favored Attributes: Intelligence or Wits

Lure: Mystery

There’s something inexplicably fascinating about Dampyr of this blood to Mekhet vampires. A nagging sense of hidden truth lurking somewhere in the mortal’s body or mind or life. Yet, also the sense that this truth is fragile, and one wrong step will crush it, and snuff out any chance of ever uncovering it. The investigation begins at a distance.

During the first stage of the Lure, the Mekhet feels an upswell of excitement when observing and investigating the Dampyr. It invigorates the vampire and he earns a point of Willpower whenever he makes these observations or uncovers some fact about the object of his obsession. When he makes a major discovery (he uncovers one of the Dampyr’s secrets, for example), he refreshes all his spent Willpower.

Only the most careful observation, and background research. When these fail to reveal any truth, the vampire begins to obsessively track and observe the Dampyr, making minute records of the mortal’s most mundane action.

Thralls or hired agents are dispatched during the hateful daylight to continue the observation. At some point, the Mekhet will realize that the life he is investigating is a blind, like a scene painted on an eggshell surrounding... *something*. More intriguing, he’ll believe the mortal is aware of the observations, and playing a deliberate and deep game of misdirection (which to be fair, she likely is).

In the second stage, the Mekhet can no longer regain Willpower from using his Virtue or Vice outside the context of the investigative game he believes he’s playing. Worse, ignoring an opportunity to investigate the fascinating mortal (to attend to important personal business, for example) costs the vampire 1 Willpower, though by prioritizing other concerns, they may be addressed in their turn.

With the coming of the third stage, the vampire reorders his priorities, as anytime he’s working on some other project or investing effort in another goal, he loses a point of Willpower. He can regain Willpower only when actively pursuing the investigation. And then, something strange begins to happen when the vampire realizes that even as he has been studying this fascinating mortal, she has been investigating him. Even if the Mekhet discovers the truth of the Dampyr’s parentage, he’ll believe it to be a coded message—“From you, I am born.” A statement of solidarity and acknowledgement, proof that the truth he was seeking all along should have been immediately evident. That this mortal is the perfect protégé, self-tutored and prepared to accept immortality, to live in the secret-laden shadows. With that, he makes his personal approach, his first direct contact. Each time he meets the Dampyr—in some carefully staged coincidence—he must spend Willpower to resist the urge to initiate the mortal into the vampiric mysteries, to show her a measure of the truth of immortality and the hidden world.

Escape: Escaping the Mekhet Lure is agony—because the secret investigation has become so wrapped up in everything the vampire does and pursues, he must abandon all research and all investigation, ceasing any search for truth or insight. If this happens in the first stage, it only requires the Mekhet isolate himself for a month from any source of ready information, and expend all his current Willpower (regaining none during his information addiction detox). If the Lure has advanced to stage 2, the Mekhet must distract himself with base animal pleasures and indulgences—letting the Beast run, and feeding freely, blotting out his mind with hunger sated. This demands a degeneration roll, no matter what the vampire’s current Humanity score (roll 3 dice). If the Lure has progressed to stage 3, then being cut off from information is like heroin withdrawal, and the vampire is wracked with spiritual agony. The vampire loses an automatic dot of Humanity, and the vampire gains the Irrationality Derangement.

Doom: Paranoia

With the first taste of the Dampyr's blood, a hideous realization crashes upon the vampire, and drives him away from his chosen acolyte—Who better to destroy me than those I trust? This poison seed grows into a black vine choking the vampire's loyalty and trust. Entrusting anything to others requires he spend at least 1 (and possibly more) Willpower, and he can no longer regain Willpower if he feels vulnerable or exposed. Effectively, the vampire also gains the Paranoia Derangement.

The more he pushes people away from him, the more he feels abandoned and betrayed. The vicious circle continues.

His thralls and servants must be conspiring against him, so he drives them off or concocts schemes to send them to their deaths. Allies are preparing to betray him, so he takes the initiative and moves against them instead—actions that seem like betrayal, but to him are sound strategy.

He'll begin to avoid all direct contact with other beings, instead relying upon increasingly difficult to decipher messages and duped intermediaries. If he has the power, he cloaks himself and never becomes visible if he can help it. He'll eventually become so much trouble that his fears will be self-fulfilling, and the local authorities within his community will stalk, capture, and put him down.

Out: Being free of this doom requires a nearly super-human commitment to do the opposite of its driving impulses. The Mekhet must throw himself open, reveal his secrets, sleep in unsafe unsecured havens, and make himself vulnerable. He must confess his crimes, reveal his weaknesses, and entrust everything up to and including his very survival to strangers.

Nosferatu Blood

Advantage

- Gain 8-Again with rolls of Intimidate, Stealth and Streetwise
- Spend 1 Willpower to seem like a wholly forgettable non-person to those around you. So long as you do nothing to draw attention to yourself, or act out of place in a given situation, most people will ignore you and won't remember anything special about you. Stand on a street-corner and shake a cup filled with change, and you read as a perfectly ordinary panhandler. Pursuers might run right past you. Walk into an office with a blazer and a suitcase, and people will assume you work there. This isn't invisibility, and if someone is looking for you specifically, he may attempt a roll of Wits + Investigation, contested by your character's Manipulation + Subterfuge to pierce the veil concealing you in plain sight.

Affliction: Alienation

- Gain 1 Willpower whenever you reject an offer to join or participate in a group or alliance, or to otherwise join with others in a formal way. Gain 1 Willpower if your actions or demeanor see you chastised or excluded. Refresh all your Willpower when you are persecuted or harmed in a significant way for being an outsider.
- Lose 1 Willpower when you seek out membership in a group or seek the approval of others. Lose 1 Willpower when you cave in to social pressure or expectations, or obey social convention because doing so is easier.

Favored Attributes: Composure or Strength

Lure: Pity

Cold fish that he is, the Nosferatu vampire is often far more humane than his appearance or aura would suggest, sometimes even more than he himself suspects. The Dampyr spawned of his blood touches a nerve in his kind, wakening a rough and unexpected pity. The sullen mortal, alienated from society for his aberrations, deformities, personality, anger—yet so obviously ripe with a potential that will never be appreciated. It resonates with him so profoundly, even a true monster will rarely question the upswell of sympathy.

Once he's swallowed the Lure, during the first stage the vampire gains a point of Willpower whenever he helps out the Dampyr in covert ways, especially consoling ways that take the sting out of alienation.

Acting as something of an unseen guardian angel gives the vampire more perspective on his charge's life, her failings, her losses, and how deeply these things wound her. He begins to feel less abstract pity, and it becomes a more definite sense of responsibility, almost as if this mortal outsider might even be his own childer.

When the Lure enters the second stage, the vampire's ability to restrain himself when protecting the Dampyr erodes, and he'll find himself attacking and even murdering those who torment her or reject her rather than just scaring them or intimidating them. Restraining this level of violence requires a point of Willpower be spent. His interest in protecting the Dampyr becomes the Obsession Derangement. He also loses the ability to regain Willpower through his Virtue or Vice except when working to help out his wayward charge, console her, or ease her life in some way.

With stage 3, from this responsibility arises a sense of unity with the Dampyr—a sense that they're truly two of a kind. It costs the vampire 1 Willpower to resist approaching and revealing himself to the Dampyr, and saying in effect, "Look at us, we're the same... join me." Whether the mortal rejects him or not is irrelevant—proof that society has so fucked with her head that she can't recognize when things are good for her. The Nosferatu will

continue to watch, and continue to approach, and each time it'll become harder to resist forcing the embrace upon the Dampyr—it hurts for a little while, but it'll be for her own good.

Escape: Escaping the Lure demands the Nosferatu confront everything he hates about himself, and try to find closure with those who've rejected him in the past. In the first stage, this only demands a cathartic personal meltdown, costing the vampire all his current Willpower. If the Lure has advanced to stage 2, then it'll require actual confrontation with those who've wronged or alienated the Nosferatu, and he'll need to be brutal about it. This requires a Humanity roll to deal with the fallout. If the Lure has advanced to stage 3, the confrontation will turn bloody and horrible—the Humanity loss is automatic, and the Nosferatu gains the Avoidance Derangement.

Doom: Revelation

Upon tasting the mortal's blood to initiate the Embrace, his eyes are cleared, the Lure's veil dropping, and he sees the same shudder at his touch, the same curled-lip disgust, and the same gasp of fear he always dreads seeing. And it breaks him.

The haunt becomes manic and extravagant; rather than hiding his nature or concealing his deformity, he flaunts it aggressively. What's all this secrecy worth anyhow? It doesn't protect us from rejection, it doesn't even give us the sympathy of those who're most like us. The vampire must spend Willpower whenever an opportunity to flaunt his true nature presents itself. Every night he remains isolated and

hidden also costs him a point of Willpower, as he's driven to seek mortals to outrage with his hideous reality. So driven to ignore the Masquerade with casual flagrance, he cannot expect to long remain existent when the wrath of terrified mortals, or worse, his own Kindred falls upon him.

Overcoming this doom requires the Nosferatu find a sane mortal who'll accept him without pity, even knowing what he is, without prejudice or disgust, and requires he win the approval of this mortal.

Ventrue Blood

Advantage

- Gain 8-Again with rolls of Persuasion, Politics and Subterfuge
- Spend 1 Willpower to assume a mantle of authority others accept unless there is some obvious reason not to. The effects of this advantage vary a bit based upon the situation and the people involved. Exactly who you're assumed to be to warrant the authority varies—in a prison, people may assume you're a prison official, guard, or a gang leader, depending upon the context. In a police station, cops might assume you're a detective (if you're in plainclothes), or a local politico. If you're dressed like a hood, they might disbelieve their first reaction to you, or with some suggestion believe you're undercover. In many situations, the use of this advantage precludes you having to make certain rolls



to convince people of your position or right to be where they find you. In other situations, it will enhance these rolls, granting you 3 dice for the remainder of the scene.

Affliction: Dominance

- Gain 1 Willpower when others bend to your will, obey you, or acquiesce to your demands. Gain 1 Willpower when you impose your will upon others, directly or indirectly, through manipulation or direct confrontation. Refresh all your Willpower when you break a competitor completely, making a servant of a former enemy, or when you supplant your own master and become dominate over him.
- Lose 1 Willpower when you obey the will of another, accept him as master, or follow rather than lead. Lose 1 Willpower when you back down from a challenge to your leadership, or reverse a decision you have made.

Favored Attributes: Presence or Resolve

Lure: Challenge

Who is this aggressive young turk? Across the vampire's domain, the presence of another mover and shaker is felt. The Dampyr is a cunning and able leader, and his attitude is fierce. Even though he's only a mortal, something in the vampire rises, feels challenged by him. Not *threatened*—the Beast doesn't demand blood—but if this formidable mortal can be guided, shaped, if he can learn to accept the firm hand of a just ruler then he would be a powerful asset.

But before he can be turned, he must be trained—broken to the saddle, without breaking his spirit. It's a slow game, and not unpleasant.

During the first stage of the Lure, the Ventrue gains Willpower when he opposes his mortal challenger indirectly, interfering with his business or his plans. The vampire also gains Willpower when the mortal's actions are guided to serve his ends—making the challenger serve his will, without his chosen knight even being aware. But the game is not without its frustrations—if the mortal outwits the vampire, it costs him Willpower, more if the mortal evades the vampire's moves and wins out regardless.

As the Lure progresses to stage 2, playing the game becomes something of a cycle of passion, frustration and rage. It becomes harder and harder for the vampire to concentrate upon other business, and he loses the ability to recover Willpower through his Virtue or Vice unless it involves manipulating the mortal challenger. This focus becomes monomaniacal and obsessive, and the regular business of his domain will be neglected, his own power base going untended as he fences with the Dampyr.

Arriving at stage 3, he finally feels ready to bring the challenger into the fold, and all seems to be unfolding according to plan. The Ventrue makes the Dampyr an offer he should not refuse. If he does, the rejection costs the Ventrue Willpower; if he accepts, the Ventrue will finally realize the

hideous truth the challenger's blood reveals—it's all been a twisted plot to bring the Ventrue to this point, and to so poison him. The vampire's triumphant act becomes one of utter defeat—his will is shattered and his throne broken. He is left with nothing but the ache of defeat.

Escape: Escaping the Lure demands the Ventrue abdicate some of his responsibility—give over his power to another, at least for a time. Allowing another to rule in his place demands all his current Willpower if the Lure is in the first stage. If things have progressed to the second stage, letting go is a torment, and inflicts a Humanity roll. If the Ventrue is so unfortunate as to have reached the third stage, the abdication wracks him, makes him feel loathsome and unworthy, hardly human. His Humanity loss is automatic, and he gains the Inferiority Complex Derangement.

Doom: Futility

What's the point? Even knowing the nature of the Lure and the doom doesn't console—they're further indictments of the Ventrue's natural right to lead. Utterly gone is the vampire's desire for power, advancement and position. His Beast is cowed, and accepts the dominion of any other. He can gain no Willpower from any aggressive action, and to stand up for himself at all requires he spend Willpower. He can no longer experience a Frenzy of rage, and only fear and hunger motivate him. He must spend 1 Willpower to even roll to resist Fear Frenzy, and his Beast flinches when startled or frightened by even the entirely mundane—the challenge of other vampires or similarly fearsome creatures sends him irresistibly into a cowering fit, a catatonic retreat, or mad headlong flight. He can rule nothing, command nothing, and is terrified of even his own food—any mortal able to put up resistance to his assault can send him fleeing.

Out: To be free of this doom, the vampire must somehow find the reserves of character to stand up and reclaim his throne. Even if he fails or is outmaneuvered, standing and fighting for it, resisting the bone-deep urge to cower, he might reclaim his self respect, and once again find the will to lead.

Dampyr As Protagonists

A chronicle featuring one or more Dampyr as characters has some unique advantages and challenges. They possess subtle rather than dramatic supernatural powers, and in most respects are mortal, so most of the general chronicle guidelines provided in **The World of Darkness** core are applicable. They also have some new avenues to explore, chief among them the way their own natures drive their behavior (via the Affliction Willpower gains and losses), and how by their nature they attract the attention of vampires.

In the legends, Dampyr often stalk and slay vampires. The truth is less cinematic, but equally deadly—most

Dampyr destroy the undead entirely by accident, and some can go their whole lives and *never even know* what is happening to them over and over. Perhaps even more horrible, even clued in Dampyr fall into the same patterns of tempting and destroying, the same cycles of need and abuse because they can't help themselves, because it feels so right, even if it always ends so wrong.

And others keep doing it because it gets them off.

With Dampyr as the protagonists, the rules for how the Lure guides behavior though Willpower accrual and loss serve as guidelines for the Storyteller—the Lure provides an outline for the descent of hooked vampires, but the specifics are going to vary wildly based upon character, situation, and the dramatic demands of the chronicle. The dooming of a vampire might serve as the major thrust of a character's story arc, or might be a complication on other action—it serves as an immediate way to inject complications into a chronicle, even if the focus is entirely different.

Rather than play on the vampire's Willpower, if the Dampyr is the protagonist, then the character gains and loses Willpower based upon how readily he plays his role in the pantomime. When he engages the vampire in minor ways related to his Lure, he gains a point of Willpower. When he takes major steps—moving the Lure up one step, for example—he refreshes all his Willpower. Likewise, when he tries to break with the vampire, or circumvent the Lure, he loses Willpower—the Dampyr is as bound to the situation as the vampire. Making the vampire just fuck off and leave him alone requires creating a situation pushing the vampire to escape, and then paying the Willpower to push him away.

A Dampyr is comparable in power to other lesser supernatural template characters, and could meld well with a group of mortal psychics, ritual magicians or lesser shapechangers. Their skill advantages give them a fairly significant boost in a swath of mundane actions, so they partner better with experienced mortals than starting characters.

Creating a Dampyr character requires first creating a mortal and then applying the Dampyr lesser supernatural template, granting the advantages described above. Dampyr use Humanity as vampires do—their essential Humanity is also threatened by their affliction, but the process is less violent than with their vampire progenitors. Willpower is of special significance to Dampyr, as this advantage allows them to better resist their compulsions and afflictions, and to use their special blood-borne trick.

DAMPYR HUNTERS

Owners of **Hunter: the Vigil** will immediately start wondering whether a Dampyr character can be a hunter, and maybe even join a Compact or Conspiracy. The answer is... maybe.

It does make a sort of sense for a Dampyr who figures out what he is to end up hunting monsters. It's the point of his existence, in some respects. There's no reason why a Dampyr can't become a Tier One hunter. As for the other Tiers, that's a bit more complicated. The question of whether a Dampyr can or cannot join a Compact really depends upon the question of conceptual purity more than anything else. Does it make any kind of sense for a member of Network Zero, the Long Night, or any of the other Compacts to be a Dampyr? If you can come up with a rationale as to why such a character might make any sense at all, then go ahead.

It's much, much harder to imagine a Dampyr joining one of the Conspiracies. A Dampyr in the Cheiron Group, the Malleus Maleficarum or Task Force: VALKYRIE is near-impossible to imagine: unlike the vampires, each of these groups has the means to notice the Dampyrs are supernatural—and that means near-certain death or at the very least incarceration. The Aegis Kai Doru and the Ascending Ones are ancient, paranoid Conspiracies. Are they even going to meet a Dampyr? And as for the Lucifuge, the idea of a hunter with both devil blood *and* vampire blood is hard to imagine.

In the end, though, if you want to do it, and the Storyteller and the other players will still have as much fun as you, go ahead.

Dampyr As Antagonists

Using the half-Damned as antagonists in a vampire chronicle offers some potent stories that get to the heart of tragedy and betrayal—and also present some challenges for Storytellers and players alike.

Dealing with ordinary vampire hunters is a fairly straightforward prospect: they want to burn you to ashes. Not so with most Dampyr. These subtle dangers subvert a vampire's strength and nature, tempting him to damn himself further and with finality. It's very much a social threat that culminates in an occult doom—and one best handled slowly, even as a B-story played out in parallel to the chronicle's main thrust.

The trick here is for the Storyteller to introduce the Dampyr and to start using the Lure's Willpower reward mechanics as the carrot to draw players' characters further into the interaction. By being extremely generous with this reward, players can be encouraged to become further involved with the Dampyr (who may or may not be a clued-in mover). Only when the relationship

is established through play should they be hit with the stick. The reward will make the player suspicious—this is the World of Darkness, and there's no free lunch—but few will out and out reject an intriguing new source of Willpower.

When introducing the Dampyr and the Lure, frame the introduction as an obvious opportunity for a Virtue-based Willpower refresh scene tied to the Dampyr somehow.

Target this scene for a time when the character's Willpower reserves have been taxed and are at dangerously low levels so the player will be inclined to take the bait. Build the relationship described by the Lure up with this scene, and give the player to believe the Dampyr character is in some way significant, and not just background color in the chronicle. Each time the character encounters the Dampyr thereafter, make sure he can easily recover Willpower, and even when he makes only a token effort, reward him. When he's taken a certain amount of Willpower from the Dampyr Lure (two or three times his maximum Willpower is a good guideline, but base this upon your chronicle's pacing), the Lure advances to the next stage, and he starts feeling the stick—the inability to regain Willpower if he doesn't interact with the Dampyr. Continue to up the rewards for interaction, and penalize breaks with the script. Explain nothing—if he wants to know what's happening to him, he can investigate it.

Players are inevitably confounding—some might take a bite of the Lure and go straight for the Dampyr's throat. They circumvent the slow dance, leaping right into the doom carried in the Dampyr's blood and unleashed upon those who willingly drink it.

If this happens, you can invert the dance—rather than a slow spiral down, the vampire has to find the Dampyr who doomed him, and understand what has happened if he's to have any hope of seeing the doom averted. All the while, he must struggle with the effects of the doom, and keep it from destroying him or forcing action that ruins him forever. Suffering a Dampyr's doom makes a vampire incredibly vulnerable, and so at those moments you know who your true allies are—they're the ones helping you escape your fate instead of taking advantage of it to pitch you into the street and steal your valuables.

Dampyr Merits

All these Merits are limited to Dampyr characters.

Reel it In (•)

Effect: Unlike most Dampyr, you can temporarily suppress the effects of your Lure, preventing it from attracting unwanted vampire admirers. Spend 1 Willpower to suppress the Lure for 1 scene.

Drawback: While the Lure is suppressed, you can't use your advantages.

Boneless (••)

Effect: You are like the Balkan Dampyr whose exploits fed much of the old mythology, and possess flexible bones. Though you appear normal, you're able to bend and contort your body in grotesque ways, easily allowing you to fit through gaps as small as a human fist, though doing so requires several minutes (tighter squeezes taking longer to negotiate). You are also extremely resilient to Bashing damage, and have 2 points of durability against such attacks.

Drawback: Your flexible bones don't protect your organs as well as normal human bones, and Lethal attacks against you benefit from the 9-Again rule.

Unmask (••••)

Effect: You may share your ability to pierce vampiric veils and undo vampiric influence by touching a target, and spending a point of Willpower. The recipient benefits from the same perception and protection you enjoy for the remainder of the scene.

Scourge (•••••)

Effect: Your half-Damned nature is flexible and potent, affecting any vampire that encounters you as if your Lure and doom were perfectly attuned to her blood. None of your other traits or advantages change, and this power is almost more of a curse—your life will be an unstoppable pageant of tragedy and revenge, but for all vampires you are a whirlwind of endings, leading your obsessive admirers into conflict with one another.

New Rituals

It seems strange that the covenants that explicitly prohibit creating Dampyr should have in their lore the means to conceive the half-Damned. Or maybe it's obvious.

Cernunnos's Horn (Level 2 Crûac ritual)

This ritual imbues a male caster or target with sexual potency and fertility until he next sleeps. He can participate in and enjoy sexual relations normally, and his fertility is supernaturally enhanced—all such unions will prove fertile (see above for the implications of this). It is little known, but this ritual has an identical effect upon female vampires. The symbolism and ritual is so obviously male that few realize this, but it imbues a female with the power to impregnate others.

Fire the Cauldron (Level 3 Crûac ritual)

This ritual prepares a vampire female to carry a child, and renders her fertile until she next sleeps. She is fully able to conceive after relations with a mortal. See above for the difficulties and special rules for a pregnant vampire.

Anoint the Spear (Level 3 Theban Sorcery ritual)

This blasphemous ritual restores a male target's member to full function and fertility until he has fathered one child. The target can be any vampire the caster can see at the time of the casting, and the target may be wholly unaware of the ritual. This is an uncommon ritual, and those of the faithful who know of its existence theorize it was created as a form of ironic punishment for dallying with mortals before the acts this ritual enables were proscribed as verboten. The magical "charge" imbued by this ritual remains until it is used, for years or decades even.

The Fruitful Womb (Level 5 Theban Sorcery ritual)

A lengthy and intense ritual in which the subject's body is used as an altar upon which animal sacrifices are made, the corpses then burned. Prayer and the laying on of hands follow. This ritual may target female mortals or vampires. Mortal subjects become pregnant with the caster's half-Damned child, but female vampires become pregnant with Dampyr of their own bloodline unless a ritual vessel filled with the Vitae of another clan is used in the ritual, a practice allowing the parent clan of the child to be chosen. This implies that the purpose of this ritual was to forge Dampyr to use as weapons against enemies of other clans.

Devotion: Defiant Child

*(Celerity **, Fortitude **, Vigor **)*

This Devotion charges an adherent with vitality and sexual potency—a male vampire with this Devotion can sire children, and a female vampire can bear the children of a mortal. Once this Devotion is learned, this capacity can be activated for a whole night by expending an additional Vitae when waking.

This Devotion costs 18 experience points to learn.

Story Hooks

Dampyr stories come in two almost completely inverted types, depending upon whether the Dampyr is the protagonist or the antagonist. Whether they're bringing doom to hapless characters or suffering the attentions of a Storyteller's vampires, their stories always involve the complexities of the relationships to which their blood dooms them.



What Goes Around...

- **Doomed:** Welcome to the worst night of your life. This starts in *medias res*—the character has just sipped the blood of a Dampyr of his clan, and the doom has crashed down upon him. The Dampyr legged it (depending upon how things played out), and now the doom strips away some essential self and Willpower. Given the sudden crushing limitations imposed by the doom, how can the character survive? Seeking the help of his coterie, the doomed vampire might be able to seek out the Dampyr who cursed him, and find some answers, and perhaps a way to lift the doom.
- **Ricochet:** In the haze of passion, it seemed like a good idea all those years ago, and it wasn't like anyone had anything to say against it (other than the Sanctified, but there's not much they won't say something snide about). You were young, it was the custom, and you found a way to give your human lover a child. Of course it ended, and you did want to die for awhile, but everything dims in the endless night eventually and you could go a day without thinking about it, and then a week, and then a month, and now it's the rare year when it troubles your daytime delirium. And so times have been ordinary until you go to pay your respects to your sire, and find him shattered—a broken creature, his life disintegrating. *Doomed.* And the pictures littering his haven are of someone who looks uncannily familiar to you.

... Comes Around

- **The Day I Killed My Mother:** Pure tragedy—come back to his hometown, the Dampyr character encounters a fascinating woman who seems oddly familiar, and very attracted to him. Whether he's clued in to the vampire luring elements of his nature can shift the poignancy of this encounter, as the woman proves remarkably attractive and supportive. If he knows the score, then it's like he's falling for someone he knows will be doomed by the relationship. If he doesn't then the doom is there for dramatic irony. The final revelation is, of course, that this vampire is the character's mother—not in a colloquial sense, or in reference to the elder blood, but it was her act of stolen sorcery that saw the character begot.
- **Hi, My Name is Bob and I'm a Dampyr:** A group of clued-in Dampyr forms as a mutual support group, not to help each other Lure and slay vampires, but to help each other break the cycle of abusive relationships with doomed climaxes. Your sponsor welcomes you, and shows you the ropes—how to watch out for each other, how to interrupt a vampire's attraction before he swallows the Lure, and how to keep each other safe.

Abigail Glichman, the Coffee Girl

Quotes: Oh God, it's Indie Rock Boy all over again.

You want milk or cream with that?

Background: Abigail blames her serial relationship woes on her messed up childhood. It's easier than admitting it's her own fault. She never knew her dad, and her mom killed herself when she was thirteen, on the day Abby got her period for the first time. She ended up living with her grandparents, and out of respect for them, kept her flirting and fooling around fairly quiet until she followed a boy she was in love with to college in another state.

When her mom died, she'd gone goth pretty hard, but her incongruously sunny disposition saw her increasingly identifying with the sub-sub-culture of happy ironic Goths. In her sophomore year, she stopped just listening to bad goth music, and started making her own bad goth music with the band Pickled Peppers.

Her disastrous love-life, while marvelous blog-fodder, raised no special alarms for Abby until the night she met Indie Rock Boy while working her late shift job at Ugly Mug coffee. The whirlwind romance saw Abby baffled and Indie Rock Boy doomed.



It also raised certain questions in Abby's mind, certain unsettling questions about the circumstances of her birth, her regular romantic disasters, and the smoky looks she's begun getting from Hardcore Punk Girl, despite swearing she'd never play out the queer for a year cliché.

Description: Abigail is twenty-one, in great shape, moderately pierced and tattooed, and pretty dramatically hot. She strikes a nearly perfect balance between her sub-culture's extremes and everyday good looks. She's extremely athletic—in high school, her dyed hair made a show on the soccer field—but it's not obvious given her fashion sense. She's had offers to do some Internet alt-modeling, but she's too body-conscious to show her goods online (and has enough awareness to realize one day she might have to get a real job, and nothing is ever forgotten online).

Storytelling Hints: Abby is a little ditz, and a little baffled by her romantic predicaments, but she's starting to get wise to them. If one of the characters falls victim to her Lure, she might actively fight the relationship (which, given the character involved, might make it harder for him to resist). As a Dampyr of Daeva blood, Abigail is compelled to fall in and out of love regularly, and will usually be involved in either the start of an infatuation or the messy breakup following one when encountered. Abigail represents a starting Dampyr character.

Parent Clan: Daeva

Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Resolve 2, Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Presence 4, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Skills: Academics 2, Computer 3, Crafts 1, Athletics 3 (Field Sports), Drive 1, Empathy 2, Expression 2 (Guitar), Persuasion 2, Socialize 3 (Flirt), Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 1

Merits: Allies 1 (Pickled Peppers), Contacts 2 (Local music scene, Online Friends), Resources 1, Striking Looks 2

Advantages: 8-Again with Athletics, Empathy, and Socialize. Spend 1 Willpower to inspire an infatuation in a single target.

Health: 7

Willpower: 5

Morality: 7

Virtue: Hope. Abby's candy-goth persona is a reflection of her basic irrational hope that despite all evidence to the contrary things will work out for the best. It keeps her sane during her rollercoaster relationship dramas.

Vice: Lust. Inescapably, she's her father's daughter, her blood purring for male attention.

Speed: 10

Defense: 2

Initiative: 6

Carl Hager, Hates the Players, Not the Game

Quotes: *It's all coming together, just like I planned.*

Background: Carl Hager (born Carlos Brenna) became aware of his unnatural parentage during a contentious high school class president campaign in his hometown in New Mexico. He attracted the attention of the Venture vampire that controlled the local school board, and saw the school system as her domain and private hunting preserve. In Carlos she saw ambition and character—and taming him to her will was a task she relished. Carlos proved wilier than expected, and finally the vampire decided to embrace the young man, only to meet her doom. He returned home, shaken and semi-coherent, and babbled his story to his mother, who wept. She confessed her liaison with the devil, and how she'd prayed every day for Carlos to be free of the devil's taint. She thanked God that instead of a demon, she'd given birth to her avenger—the instrument of God's wrath against the devils clothed in human skin. In turn, Carlos came to believe something similar, though without what he considered the religious nonsense.

Carlos studied, he investigated, and he came to believe in vampires, and their hidden hand at play in human endeavor. Always competitive, always striving for status and position, he found the undead a proper challenge for his abilities. He graduated top of his class, and chose an academic scholarship over an athletic one. He studied business administration and finance, judging these skills to be the best to serve his ambitions. While in college, he encountered and doomed three vampires—two hardly worthy of his efforts, and one that nearly destroyed him. His brush with disaster made him more cautious and tempered his arrogance. Again, he excelled academically, and with the resources he took from his victims, began building his own power structure. Upon graduation, he was scouted by a Wall Street investment house, and began playing the game for big stakes.

Carlos anglicized his name to better blend with his new environs, and has begun prowling the halls of power for new challenges—vampires of consummate skill and wealth against which he can compete, and whose destruction he can properly relish.

One day, he hopes to meet his true father, and play the game against the old man, and in his destruction finally own completely his legacy.

Carl has become something of a bogymen in Kindred circles—an unknown king-breaker. Some of his victims are thought to have fallen to that particularly Ventrue madness, but among those who track these things obsessively, Carl's pattern is revealed—the downfall of his victims has left an impression those in the know can track.



Description: Carl Hagar is a tall fit man in his mid thirties. He's always dressed conservatively and immaculately, favoring simple steel wristwatches and accessories. His naturally dark skin has paled with his hours spend inside, and keeping his prey's hours, so he resembles a tanned Anglo rather than a man of Latino descent.

Storytelling Hints: Carl exudes easy control and competence. He has a practiced calm, and a way of assuming command over situations that puts people at their ease, making them feel protected and taken

care of, rather than dominated. He knows where he came from, and supports the community he grew up in, but recognizes the realities of racism and classism, and acts accordingly. He's an experienced and aware Dampyr responsible for the doom of at least five vampires. He uses the Lure, plays the game, destroys his opponents, and takes what resources he can from them. He has previously used two of his doomed victims as pawns. When he needs to be, he's an astonishingly ruthless bastard.

Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resistance 3, Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 4

Skills: Academics 3 (Finance), Computer 2, Investigation 3 (Forensic Accounting), Occult 3 (Ventrue Vampires), Politics 2, Drive 2, Empathy 2 (Calling a Bluff), Intimidate 3, Persuasion 3 (Making Deals), Socialize 2, Streetwise 2 (Underground Finance), Subterfuge 3

Merits: Allies 4 (Financial Industry, Hunters), Contacts 5 (Finance, Hunters, Mob), Reel it In 1, Resources 4

Advantages: 8-Again rule on Persuasion, Politics and Subterfuge. Spend 1 Willpower to assume a mantle of authority.

Health: 8

Willpower: 8

Morality: 6

Virtue: Justice. Carl sees his role and his passion as both serving the same end—justice for those unable to seek it themselves. It might be a posture to justify his pleasure at his victories, but it gives him strength nonetheless.

Vice: Pride. Carl believes he's been tested against the best, and come out victorious every time. He's proud of his accomplishments, his abilities, and his nearly mythological place in the Kindred cacophony.

Size: 5

Speed: 10

Defense: 3

Initiative: 7

Armor: None



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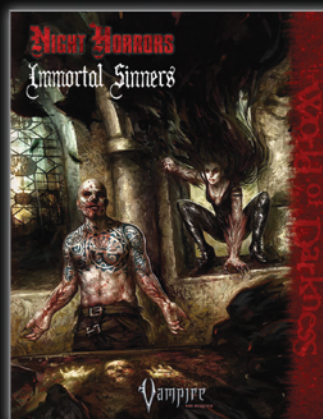
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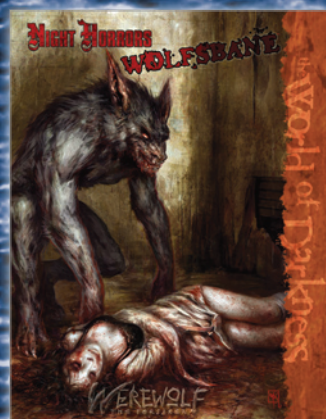
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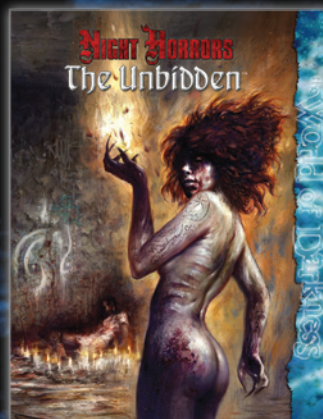
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