



Kickstarter Manuscript Preview #4:
Mortal Cults

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Mortal Cults

*“As a boy you burned ants with a magnifying glass and stomped on snails, yes?
This is how you should now think of the kine. They are pests, curiosities, and
distractions.”*

— Mason Ha of Clan Tremere to his new childe Joseph Dominguez

Humans have long sought the comfort of religion in the wake of death, and the newly Embraced are no different. Their catastrophic change in condition leads many a young lick to question the beliefs they held in life, and reach for new answers to provide solace and direction. When other Kindred can't provide camaraderie in shared belief, the kine will do in their place, and the power of the vitae in their veins makes amassing followers a simple task for many a young, spiritually syncretic vampire. These heterodox groups can be nihilistic or joyful, cruel or cooperative, but beneath even the kindest vampire-led religions the Beast is waiting, ever hungry for the congregation's life-giving blood.

To some Kindred, religion is more tool than calling. Many spiritual belief systems have promised what they themselves already have: life beyond death, reincarnation, immunity to the ravages of time. The more direct Disciplines can be dressed up to look like miracles, proof of a connection to a higher power or an enlightened state of being. Subtler arts like Presence sway a crowd regardless of proof. To an enterprising lick, creating a cult of adoring human worshipers looks almost too easy: make up some sermons, use a dose of vitae, and desperately hope your elders and betters don't kill you on the spot for breaching the Masquerade. It's only that last caveat that prevents vampire cults from proliferating out of control.

Finally, the Kindred aren't the only ones who have discovered the utility of faith. The first Inquisition was founded within a religion, one that kept its followers zealous in their task. While the modern intelligence agencies of the Second Inquisition prefer to skirt the issue of the supernatural, shrouding every phenomenon in science on their official reports, cults can be a useful tool in the war against the blankbodies. Whether they're turning existing groups into deniable assets, tracking vampires through their human followers, or creating entirely new cults, the Second Inquisition is well versed in using people's faith to serve their own ends.

The House of Anteros

“There's no force in this world more powerful than true, radical, selfless love.”

— The Eaden Family

The House of Anteros advertises itself as a “self-help group phenomenon,” and offers free seminars and paid workshops on their radical philosophy. Followers are taught that love is the key to happiness, and that true love is completely selfless. Beautiful retreats, healthy food, and simple spiritual ceremonies make learning about love enjoyable, and initiates are given ample praise and a strong sense of community from existing members. As recruits are drawn deeper into the philosophy, the community becomes more and more encompassing. Members are encouraged to hand themselves over completely to the House, forfeiting personal possessions, identity, and eventually the very blood within their veins.

History

Virginia and Leonard Eaden were both born in the 1910s. They grew up together, fell in love together, and died together, Embraced on the same night by members of the same coterie after short mortal lives full of dancing and saloons. Officially bowing to the local Camarilla, the two young licks stayed out of politics, preferring each other's company to the complex treacheries of the court. This reclusive behavior was as much necessity as choice: the two vampires formed a mutual Blood Bond almost immediately, and they were proud of it. Lacking understanding from their fellow Kindred, they sought like-minded souls among the kine instead. By the 1960s, they had established themselves in a small domain, and began building a herd for indefinite sufficiency without needing to involve themselves in Elysium's games.

The House of Anteros was founded on Virginia and Leonard's personal spiritual beliefs, though both would admit to having dressed up the truth to make it more palatable to prospective members. In the 1960s, they used the language of free love and peace, giving their followers flyers to hand out at concerts and nightclubs. Free "sharing circles" run out of cheap rented spaces within the vampires' domain let them solidify a group of kine followers who could serve as both food and messengers, bringing their doctrine of love across vampiric borders.

In the '90s, the House of Anteros evolved to target unfulfilled white-collar workers, nihilistic college students, and bored couples, advertising on the early internet and through word-of-mouth. Having fully embraced technology, Virginia and Leonard are always looking for new ways to grow and change with the times, making the House of Anteros stronger and more flexible with every passing decade.

Doctrine

Love is everything: power, happiness, and spiritual enlightenment all rolled into one. Learning how to love properly is the most important thing anyone can do with their life. Love is also a sort of divine force, not quite a god but often spoken of in similar terms.

The truest love is the most selfless, the most freely shared, the most devoted. You must be willing to do anything for the one you love, leaving all your own wants and needs behind, to make the world and the lives of others better. Love that is in any way limited or conditional is, at best, a pale shadow of the real thing, so share it. At worst, inhibited love makes a mockery of the term, and isn't really love at all.

The Blood Bond is the truest form of love in existence, perfect selfless devotion enforced by spiritual power that makes it unbreakable, and thus stronger and better than mortal love. To be part of a one-sided Blood Bond is a wonderful thing, to be part of a mutual Blood Bond is a state of virtue that cannot be equaled.

Love conquers all. Failure, illness, and unhappiness stem from an inability to love completely. Perceived failure from someone in a mutual Blood Bond must be victory in disguise.

What is Love?

The House of Anteros sends a mixed message regarding love, preaching freedom to love whom one wishes, while advocating for true love, devotion, and servitude through love. They praise monogamous as well as polyamorous relationships. They treasure intimate unions between two individuals and revel in wild orgies. As more than one cultist has asked the Eadens, "what is love?"

The truth is impossible to define, and the Eadens know it. They tailor their message to their followers, but they really do believe their own tract, citing how love is different for all but the constants show that love emboldens, empowers, and triumphs. The meaning of love may vary from person to person, but so long as a cultist carries love in their heart and openly shows it, they're welcome to participate in cult practices.

Activities

The House of Anteros has branches in Chicago, St. Louis, Phoenix, Houston, New York, and Salt Lake City, five of which are staffed entirely by mortal followers. These distant offices focus on earning money from expensive weekend "wellness retreats," funneling profits back to headquarters at the Anteros mansion, a huge suburban complex in Arizona with several buildings located in the middle of the Eadens' domain. Retreats, and the group's general philosophy, are advertised at free seminars open to the public; most hosted by senior members, with the Eadens going on tour once a year to speak in person across the country. Most House events are held in rented auditoriums or campgrounds, but the group owns two retreat properties outright: one in the Midwest and one near the US-Mexico border.

Most people leave an Anteros workshop, either rejuvenated or ripped-off, and return to their daily lives, but a few come back again and again. These regulars are nudged toward meeting the Eadens in person, and encouraged to drop all their external ties and move into the communal mansion property. Houses and cars are sold, and money is moved into the House's bank accounts, an act of selfless, trusting love that pushes acolytes further toward enlightenment. Recruits who hesitate or refuse aren't pushed or punished, just quietly ostracized by House friends who are disappointed at their lack of selflessness. The House claims to want love that's freely given, but the Eadens expect more than just affection if they're providing protection and homes to their lovers.

Those who accept are introduced to the idea of blood drinking slowly and carefully, first through bloodletting rituals held between mortal members. Offering your blood to another is discussed as another way to devote yourself to them completely, and acolytes living at the mansion are encouraged to make small cuts on their arms to be licked clean by other followers, who will offer blood in exchange. Only one among a number of rituals that the outside world would deem distasteful, few acolytes even think about vampire myths when participating, even when presented to the Eadens for the first time. Members practice blood-sharing for decades before they learn about the Eadens true immortal nature, by then a glorious extension to everything they've already internalized.

Barring emergencies, the Eadens feed only in their main house, well within the official domain as granted by the Camarilla. They've also negotiated for feeding rights at the House's two campgrounds: they are off-limits to other Kindred, in exchange for a few won't-be-missed attendees getting plucked off and delivered to local Princes by the senior members hosting retreats. Disowned college students, down-on-their-luck unemployed singles, and people struggling with mental health are targeted for these disappearances, with House money used to cover them up and bribe local authorities into keeping the camps' reputations untainted.

Future Plans

More than power, wealth, or even stability, the Eadens crave family. The House of Anteros isn't just their belief system and their herd, it's a method of searching for someone who shares their

values, who can understand love on the same level that they do. Both vampires hope dearly to find such an individual and turn their paired bond into a three-way partnership, each Kindred bonded to the others. From there, they could become a quartet, and so on, spinning an ever-wider web of perfect, immortal love. They've had dozens of potential candidates over the years, but none who have lived up to the couple's zealous scrutiny and obsessive need for perfect adoration. A third member of the Eaden family would share in every aspect of the House's business, with full access to its bank accounts and larders.

In the meantime, the cult continues to expand. Though the Eadens have all the blood and money they need for a comfortable eternity, the House of Anteros is a true religious mission. Inserting themselves into more cities is a top priority, even if over-extension means increasing the risk of discovery. Two more facilities are planned in smaller North American cities, one in a city that has recently fallen to the Anarchs. The Eadens are also planning a trip to Europe, hoping to scout out a new location and handle the associated Camarilla politics in person. They're bringing a small army of followers with them: ghouls and blood-slaves to provide comfort, protection, and potential bribes to those they seek to court.

Annabelle Jones

Annabelle joined the cult after her messy divorce. Once a fierce corporate lawyer, she now uses her law degree to protect the House's interests. She fell in love with the feeling of being utterly worshiped, but had a hard time understanding the joy of selfless giving until her first experience with the Kiss. Now she's hooked, but quietly frustrated that neither of the Eadens will share their blood with her in return.

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 3, Social 4, Mental 5

Secondary Attributes: Health 5, Willpower 6

Exceptional Dice Pools: Drive 4; Insight 5, Persuasion 7; Finance 6

General Difficulties: 4/2

Jacob Wrightson

Jacob looks incredible for a man of sixty-five, since he's been a ghoul for the last twenty years. A top international recruiter, he runs seminars around the world and occasionally plays interference for the Eaden couple in Kindred society. More interested in free love than true love, his high position in the House is due to hard work and natural charisma, not any deep faith in the group's beliefs. The more he learns about wider vampire society, the more he yearns to be Embraced himself, but knows his current masters are unlikely to grant him that privilege.

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 5, Social 5, Mental 3

Secondary Attributes: Health 6, Willpower 5

Exceptional Dice Pools: Etiquette 6, Leadership 6; Finance 4, Politics 5

Disciplines: Presence 1

General Difficulties: 3/1

Alyson King

Alyson has only been with the group for a year and a half, but she's already been introduced to the blood rites and spends hours most days alone with the Eadens. She's a true believer, young

and optimistic, and a promising candidate for induction into the House's highest circles. Her worried parents have contacted the authorities over her apparent cult brainwashing, a potential threat to the House if words like "blood" and "immortality" ever make it into the federal investigation reports.

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 3, Social 4, Mental 3

Secondary Attributes: Health 4, Willpower 8

Exceptional Dice Pools: Etiquette 5, Insight 6, Persuasion 5; Academics 4, Occult 4

General Difficulties: 3/2

The Eaden Family

Virginia and Leonard are both Kindred of Clan Ventrue, and have lived lives so intertwined that separating them out into two individuals is nearly impossible. They sleep together, feed together, finish each other's sentences, and come up with the same plans without saying a word. They even look alike: both pale and strong-boned, with jet black hair. In public appearances, they cultivate two identities: the original Eaden couple who founded the House, made up to appear to be in their mid-sixties, and their own now-adult twin children. Both like to present themselves as compassionate and caring people, invested in cooperating with anyone who doesn't actively threaten them or their cult. They might even believe their own line, but they're quick to turn against anyone they perceive might betray their generosity, with or without evidence. Those who know them well might notice that Virginia takes the lead in long-term planning, while Leonard tends to speak first in social situations.

Virginia Eaden

Clan: Ventrue

Sire: James Acker

Embraced: 1933 (Born 1910)

Ambition: Don't let other Kindred discover the cult

Convictions: Always defend your loved ones; Never turn down a new experience

Touchstones: Andrew Eaden — Virginia's now adult son; Jacob Wrightson — sexually spectacular lover, and her favorite cultist

Humanity: 6

Generation: 12th

Blood Potency: 2

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2; Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Composure 5; Intelligence 5, Wits 4, Resolve 4

Secondary Attributes: Health 5, Willpower 9

Skills: Melee 2; Insight 3, Leadership 3, Performance 3, Persuasion 3, Subterfuge 3; Academics 4, Awareness 3, Finance 3, Occult 5, Politics (Southwestern United States) 5, Technology 3

Disciplines: Auspex 2, Dominate 2, Fortitude 1, Presence 3

General Difficulties: 5/3

Leonard Eaden

Clan: Ventrue

Sire: James Acker

Embraced: 1933 (Born 1912)

Ambition: Expand the cult to new domains

Convictions: Never refuse someone's affections

Touchstones: Nadia Eaden — Leonard's now adult daughter

Humanity: 5

Generation: 12th

Blood Potency: 2

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3; Charisma 5, Manipulation 3, Composure 4; Intelligence 4, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Secondary Attributes: Health 6, Willpower 8

Skills: Brawl 4; Insight 4, Leadership 5, Performance 4, Persuasion 4, Subterfuge (Cult members) 2; Academics 2, Awareness 3, Finance 1, Occult 3, Politics 2

Disciplines: Dominate 2, Fortitude 2, Potence 1, Presence 4

General Difficulties: 5/3

Special: Both the Eadens suffer from a unique Codependency Flaw; when separated, they lose two dice from all actions that don't directly assist them in being reunited. They are both Consensualists and their Ventrue Bane manifests to reinforce this, preventing them from drinking from anyone who doesn't give their blood freely.

Story Hook: Love in Death

The PCs find the House of Anteros hosting self-help sessions on their territory, but without the presence of the Eadens or any undead involvement. For an enterprising Kindred, the cult presents an opportunity to gain retainers, the procurement of a herd, or — if feeling savage — a one-stop shop for an indulgent night of feeding.

Unless the PCs scare the cult away, they return night after night, drawing a larger and larger crowd mainly consisting of single individuals on low income, who all leave feeling happier. The House acts as a form of Resonance alteration chamber, shifting the melancholic into the sanguine.

The further the PCs probe into the House of Anteros' activities, the more likely it is the Eadens will take notice and take action. If the characters have been respectful and show interest in the group's message, the Eadens may attempt to lure the vampires further into the cult. If they've been nothing but predatory, the Eadens will not stop in their attempts at visiting vengeance on their cultists' abusers.

[LAYOUT: PAMPHLET]

Do you HATE yourself?

Many of us do. Life is hard, you don't earn enough, and you've just seen another relationship fail. You blame yourself. So many of us blame ourselves.

We have the answers. This isn't a scheme you have to pay into. This isn't therapy. It isn't religion. What we offer is an ear for your problems, understanding, and acceptance. We've all been where you've been. It might not comfort you to know it yet, but we promise you, none of us hate ourselves now.

Come by Starlin's Gymnasium on 33rd Avenue on Tuesday 3rd and we'll teach you the first steps toward stopping the hate and starting to love yourself. If it doesn't work out, we promise, you will never hear from us again.

But it will work out. You have our word.

The House

[/PAMPHLET ENDS]

The Church of Means

"Do you believe in a higher power? Is your faith strong enough to put it all in His hands? Then you might be destined for RICHNESS ON THIS EARTH. Ask us how to become one of the prosperous, and LIVE FOREVER as a MILLIONAIRE."

Only a few years old, the Church of Means is reaching an international audience through live internet broadcasts, a strong focus on proselytizing to friends and family, and the inhuman charisma of leader Joseph Dominguez. Presenting itself as a "nondenominational understanding of the divine and its plan for humankind," the Church's doctrine places a strong emphasis on the happiness derived from material wealth. Of course, to make money you have to spend money: new converts are expected to buy into the church, paying for pamphlets and workshops and proprietary devotional symbols. Successful recruiters take home a share of the proceeds generated by those they register, a pyramid scheme gilded in faith. Slowly numbed to the atrocity of conning desperate people out of their money, top earners are encouraged to commit greater crimes, eventually luring people to the Church's lavish enclaves as slaves and blood dolls. Eternal life, presented to recruits as a metaphor for success, is eventually revealed as the ultimate reward for those who serve the leader best, though their eternity as ghouls gives their master one more string on his leash of control.

History

Joseph Dominguez was a young vampire with a low generation and high ambitions. Not yet dead fifty years before his sire was called to the Gehenna War, he was left in a very unpleasant position in Kindred society: too potent to be ignored, but too disposable to stay out of the cross-hairs of his sire's enemies. He needed to find a way to protect himself, make himself invaluable, and quickly.

He found it in his voice, his sire's accumulated wealth, and his old life's history in advertising. With charisma, good business sense, and a thorough understanding of human nature, he began the Church as a means of assembling a loyal herd and a vast fortune as quickly as possible. The judicious application of Presence made finding converts easy, the trick was keeping things subtle enough to avoid breaching the Masquerade. Joseph copied heavily from the doctrines of kine

churches and cults while creating his own, hiding himself in plain sight as just another fringe inspirational speaker. He used his seed money to hire a team of human assistants, including a convincing body double for daytime appearances, and let natural human greed replace the use of disciplines in almost every recruitment event. In many ways, the Church of Means was barely a vampire cult at all, though hints of Joseph's personal beliefs about immortality inevitably colored the doctrines he wrote.

The Church of Means prospered quickly. Members were split evenly between those who were emotionally and spiritually moved by Joseph's doctrine, and those who saw the Church as a chance to make money. The most ruthless congregated at the top, earning the title of priest, and forming a powerful and vicious inner circle of ghouls to protect their leader and exemplify the wealth he offered.

Doctrine

There is a Higher Power, who is conflated with the highest force of every major world religion (the Abrahamic God, the concept of nirvana, the Supreme being, and so on.) This Higher Power is benevolent and wants everyone on Earth to be happy, but He also believes in free will; humans must choose to be happy for the Higher Power to act upon them.

Choosing to be happy involves signing up for the Church of Means and completing the exercises detailed in the books you buy from them; opening yourself to prosperity through meditation, mantras, and the like. After that, the best way you can signal your readiness to be happy is by recruiting others to the Church, sharing the good news. Their attempts to be happy will magnify your own.

Some techniques of the Church are secret, for the safety of the world at large. New initiates aren't spiritually advanced enough to understand everything about how the Higher Power works, and learning about everything the priests do before understanding all the basic material could be harmful to your physical and emotional well-being.

Money can buy happiness, but only if it comes from the will of the Higher Power. If you complete all the exercises correctly and do everything in your power to recruit others, you will become both rich and happy. If you aren't rich and happy, you've done something wrong, and you should return to the Church of Means' teachings and redouble your efforts.

Eternal life will come to those who are open to the Higher Power by way of good luck and medical advances. Though the Higher Power takes care of the faithful in the afterlife, His greatest gift to humanity is their time on Earth, and maximizing that time is what He wants for people.

Activities

The Church is still expanding rapidly, keeping its operations lean and flexible by renting space and working with third party manufacturers for publication and shipment of their devotional materials. Independent members buy in to become preachers, proselytizing to local crowds around the world from auditoriums, coffee shop open mic nights, dingy apartments, and street corners. Hired risk management staff and programmers work on algorithms to target preachers who are ready to pay more or considering leaving, minimizing drop-outs and maximizing profit per worshiper with an ever-improving blend of hope and pressure. Most invested members of the Church are at or near the poverty line, if not when they start then certainly after a few months of

trying to buy their way up to priesthood. When a priest notices someone at the bottom of the pile has lost the support of all their friends and family after sinking themselves too deeply into the Church, they see an opportunity to pick that won't-be-missed preacher up and quietly deliver them to Dominguez himself, earning further favor.

Like any good pyramid scheme, risk flows downstream and money flows upstream, fueling the decadent lifestyle that the priests live as an example of what adhering to Church doctrine can bring; penthouse apartments and luxury villas, extravagant parties full of beautiful people, fast cars, designer brand clothing, and all the sex and drugs money can buy. Spending money freely isn't just allowed by the church, it's actively encouraged as a way of demonstrating devotion to the Higher Power and giving thanks for the good things with which He has provided you. The Church's website and promotional videos put all these amenities in the spotlight, selling a vision of a bacchanalian heaven on Earth that anyone can be a part of with enough hard work and faith.

New priests are ordained every few months, in an elaborate ceremony broadcast to every member that focuses on their life stories, how they've risen out of nothing and become millionaires through the Church's teachings. The truth about Joseph's vampiric nature comes after the ceremony, once he's sure they're in too deep to run. The revelation gives them a new goal to chase: true immortality and superhuman power, through a taste of their leader's blood. Only the best of the best are granted ghoulish status, and those who have achieved it know their domitor can take it away, encouraging competition at every rung of the ladder. At the top, looking down, priests inevitably realize the truth: the only Higher Power granting them happiness is Joseph Dominguez, and everything they've earned will be lost if they turn against him.

Dominguez himself participates in almost none of his supposed luxury life, sending subordinates and body doubles to events where his personal oversight isn't required. With fame and fortune, Dominguez has put himself in the spotlight; he's playing a dangerous game and knows it, so instead of having fun, he's investing in security. Much of this investment goes to paying off the Princes and Barons of the cities where he lives, flitting from one to another to avoid accumulating grudges. So long as he can arrange for an Elysium night full of beautiful snacks and top-of-the-line security, and so long as his mortal fame makes taking him out a potential breach of the Masquerade, Joseph believes himself relatively safe from vampiric retribution. The Second Inquisition is another matter, one he handles through several layers of natural and one layer of supernatural security. Money buys him the best private army, security technology, and bribes to keep the feds away. Meanwhile, he trains his ghouls in secret to fight for his life, quite prepared to feed them to the wolves if he ever needs to get away.

Future Plans

Joseph Dominguez is beginning to experiment with his power among the Kindred, trading favors here and there to see just how much a young upstart like him can get away with. The old ways are crumbling, and the places at the top of the new order will go to whoever can take them first. Potent blood and low generation were the tools of the old Princes and Barons, but Dominguez is wondering if his hired guns and herd of followers might be even better. All he needs is the right target, a city in the throes of a civil war calling out for a natural leader to take the reins. With all the traveling he does, he's bound to find one sooner or later.

Financially, the cult is looking to diversify. Real estate has been an obvious choice, and Church money has flown into a skyscraper of condominiums aimed at "night-shift workers," with state-

of-the-art UV and light-blocking window controls and facilities that operate on an after-dark schedule. Dominguez is quite interested in backing other vampiric endeavors, bringing start-up money to businesses that can't go to the bank for funding. A small consulting firm of trusted mortal and ghoulish cult members can even help older vampires adapt their ideas to the modern world of algorithmic advertising and innovative technology. If his resources help him gain more allies among the Kindred, backing his future bid for power, then all the better.

Millicent Jarvey

Millicent likes to think of herself as a strong woman who's broken into the boys' club, a role model that other people should follow. She was one of the first to start kidnapping people for Joseph, and alleviates her guilt by imagining they would have done the same to her if they could. She's at the top of the class learning how to use firearms, and expects to lead the team in taking down anyone who threatens their leader, and her immortal life with him.

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 5, Social 4, Mental 3

Secondary Attributes: Health 6, Willpower 6

Exceptional Dice Pools: Athletics 6, Firearms 7, Melee 6; Intimidation 5, Persuasion 6; Occult 4

Disciplines: Celerity 1

General Difficulties: 4/1

Morgan Brant

Morgan joined just a little too late to be a founder, and has regretted it ever since. Now well into his sixties, he bought his way up the ladder with his life savings, chasing dreams of enough money to ensure his children and grandchildren could always afford the best healthcare. The whole family is involved in the Church now, but only Morgan has been made a priest, and thus made aware of the cult's true intentions. He's shown no remorse for the people he's climbed over to succeed, convinced he's doing what's best for his family and that's all that matters. The next step is earning ghoul status for himself, and eventually his descendants, ensuring their prosperity for all eternity.

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 2, Social 5, Mental 4

Secondary Attributes: Health 5, Willpower 7

Exceptional Dice Pools: Drive 3; Etiquette 6, Persuasion 7; Investigation 5, Politics 6

General Difficulties: 4/2

Malik Lugo

Malik is the Church's newest priest, the model of a Means success story. Born into poverty, he worked his way into business school, and used what he'd learned there to buy into the cult and recruit through networking and conferences. He thought of the Church as a company like any other, an amoral entity he would work for blamelessly; if what he did was wrong, there would be laws against it. Now that he's found out about the vampire behind the scenes, he's starting to realize what he's gotten himself involved with, but now there's no way out: the cult owns his wealth and reputation, and if he tried to leave he'd surely run afoul in some "unfortunate accident." His plan is to keep in the boss's good books and look for an opportunity to escape without raising any red flags along the way.

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 3, Social 5, Mental 4

Secondary Attributes: Health 5, Willpower 5

Exceptional Dice Pools: Firearms 4, Survival 4; Insight 6, Leadership 6, Persuasion 6; Finance 7

General Difficulties: 4/1

Joseph Dominguez

Joseph is a handsome, athletic Spanish man who looks to be in his mid-forties. He's of Clan Tremere, though not adept at the bloodline's famed sorcery. Ambition and paranoia war within his heart, making him dangerously unpredictable: expanding into new territory one night, retreating to his private penthouse and avoiding all outside contact the next. He speaks with a stammer he's had since childhood.

Clan: Tremere

Sire: Mason Ha

Embraced: 1989 (Born 1962)

Ambition: Locate a domain in the throes of civil war

Convictions: Never show fear to an aggressor

Touchstones: Millicent Jarvey — cultist and adept kidnapper

Humanity: 5

Generation: 11th

Blood Potency: 2

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2; Charisma 3, Manipulation 5, Composure 4; Intelligence 3, Wits 2, Resolve 4

Secondary Attributes: Health 5, Willpower 8

Skills: Brawl (When Cornered) 2, Firearms 4; Etiquette 4, Insight 2, Leadership 4; Academics (Economic Theory) 2, Awareness 4, Finance 5, Investigation 1, Occult 2, Politics 3, Technology 2

Disciplines: Celerity 2, Dominate 3, Presence 2

General Difficulties: 6/2

Story Hook: Financial Drain

Many people show a marked dislike and distrust of the poor, obliging those on low income to take out loans, remortgage the house, and see bankruptcy as a real option, because in truth, there's no other way out. When one of the PCs' Touchstones comes to them, cap in hand, they explain they've lost everything: the job, the house, the savings, even the kid's college fund. At first the Touchstone is reticent to explain why and mutters that it was a gamble. With a push, they admit they invested in a start-up colleagues recommended, led by a city success story named Morgan Brant.

If the PCs show concern toward the Touchstone and help them out of their financial bind, they willingly take the coterie to Brant's building, which has since closed down without leaving a forwarding address. The investigation leads to the truth behind Morgan Brant running a multitude of pyramid schemes throughout the city. If the PCs try to get the police involved, Joseph Dominguez reaches out and explains they're interfering with his influence. He won't offer the return of any lost funds, but will offer them an investment opportunity.

[LAYOUT: FLYER]

Don't Believe Everything You Read

So many people will tell you "this is how you make more money," "this is where to invest your cash," and "trust me with your savings, I'm a banker." Don't believe everything you read or hear. These shysters will rob you blind and leave you destitute. Every recession to date has been the fault of greedy brokers who don't care for their clients' wealth so long as they take home fat bonuses.

Luckily, there's another way.

Since time immemorial, the Church has been a safe pair of hands. The Catholics haven't lined the Vatican with gold because they're poor. In fact, they've been rich for 2000 years. That's longer than any other single group in the world. So, it's time to open the doors and allow people to once again invest in religion.

We are the Church of Means. We emulate the Catholic Church's methods of sponsorship, slow investment, and quick growth. We know we can make your money grow because we've seen our own money grow. Don't believe us? Stop by Campbell & Campbell on Lake at any time between 9am and 8pm, and we'll open our accounts for you.

We won't ask you to trust us with your money. We won't tell you to believe everything you're reading here. We definitely won't ask for thousands of your hard-earned dollars. What we will ask, is you hear us out. Come to Campbell & Campbell, and if you're interested, drop as little as \$10 and we'll make your money grow in a week. That's our guarantee, or your \$10 bill goes right back in your hand.

We hope to see you there and make you richer.

[/FLYER ENDS]

Leah's Circle

"Only monsters can give other monsters something to fear. Our dark angel can give you fangs, and together we will take back the night."

In smoky clubs and dingy theme bars, alt fashion scene kids and occult enthusiasts meet with a purpose: saving the world, one act of vigilante justice at a time. They are creatures of the night, but not of evil, the chosen few empowered to protect the weak and innocent from those who would murder, rob, or violate those who walk the city streets after sunset. At their center is the dark angel Leah, a vampire abandoned by her sire, a blood-drinker with a noble heart.

What no one in Leah's circle knows is just how much they have all come under her thrall. As she feeds her blood to her friends to give them the strength to fight by her side, she's turning them into puppets who can't help but agree with her every plan. While she wrestles with her new

bestial nature, she has unknowingly turned everyone close to her into a blood-slave, and the truth could destroy her carefully manufactured self-image as a righteous, avenging angel of the night.

History

Born Lilah Hawkins, the young girl who would become Leah was a weird kid. Introverted and philosophical, she started her goth phase young and never looked back, finding peace in the ability to express the darkness she saw in the world through music and fashion. She was never one to seek the spotlight, but people in the local scene saw Lilah as a friendly and helpful pillar of the community, the sort who would welcome in newcomers without passing judgment. She was also quite bright, earning a scholarship to the local university and pursuing a Bachelor of Social Work, hoping that helping others professionally might provide her with a sense of purpose in a world she so often found depressing. She was turned by mistake a year before graduation, by an inexperienced vampire who hadn't sought his Prince's permission, and abandoned as soon as she rose.

Awakening with no idea what had happened to her, Lilah had both the knowledge and the imagination to put two and two together and come up with "vampire." She also knew better than to tell everyone what had happened; if the supernatural was real, but hidden, there must be a good reason for it. But being a vampire felt good, better than anything she'd ever felt before. She finally had the strength to enforce her will upon the world, to make a real difference, and it changed her. Lilah chose the name Leah, angel of the night. She began piecing together a personal mythology through trial-and-error experiments, gut feelings, and a fair dose of pop culture that felt "right" enough it had to be true. A few weeks later, she introduced herself to some of her old friends, explaining what had happened: she was a vampire now, and she planned to use her powers for good, but needed their help to stay connected to humanity and feed without getting someone killed. A few more experiments, non-lethal largely by luck, taught her how she could share a portion of her own power with her friends through letting them drink her blood too.

The group has continued to grow, but slowly, hindered by a healthy sense of paranoia about being discovered. Each new member is vetted carefully over several months, exposed to various vampire media franchises, and questioned about how they might react to meeting a real one. The city's active goth scene provides the circle with natural camouflage, a community of people who see talking about real vampires as only mildly eccentric, a fun game of what-if to pass the time and inspire interesting narratives.

Doctrine

Vampires are real, natural creatures of the night. Their appetites tempt them toward evil actions, but they are not inherently evil themselves.

Good vampires are natural protectors of humanity, active at night to best defend against wicked people and monsters who would use the cover of darkness to harm the innocent.

Vampires and their friends must remain hidden from the world. Humanity isn't ready to know about their existence, and would react with fear and hostility. Other supernatural forces might also want to hunt any vampires who make themselves known. Exposing a member of the group to outsiders is tantamount to murder.

If you drink the blood of a willing vampire, you become a “half-vampire,” still alive but with some of a full vampire’s power. The effect wears off after a while, so becoming a half-vampire is harmless and completely reversible.

It’s possible to become a vampire by drinking vampire blood while close to death, but only a small percentage of humans are capable of rising again, everyone else simply dies. Leah, a full vampire, is rare and special.

Activities

Leah’s circle have a mission: protect the city at night from those who would do harm to innocents. Inspired by superheroes and vigilante pop culture vampires, they primarily patrol the clubs and back alleys where their goth scene congregates on Friday and weekend nights, sometimes venturing further afield to known dangerous neighborhoods. Elaborate makeup, outfits, and codenames help them hide their identities, to prevent retaliation and police reports. When they spot someone acting suspiciously, half-vampire circle members decide whether to interfere themselves, or contact Leah for help.

Most of the time, the circle intervenes with a few thrown fists and a demand to get lost and never try something like that again. Repeat offenders, and those the circle have deemed extremely dangerous, are dealt with more permanently by Leah. She hasn’t consciously noticed how all of her half-vampire followers are always willing to help her hide a body, while her human friends are a lot more unsettled, but she’s still taken to keeping the murderous side of her activities away from those who haven’t tasted her blood.

On weeknights, when patrolling isn’t as necessary, the circle meets as friends and to discuss strategy. Leah is always at the group’s heart, adored to the point of near-worship by her ghouls. She’s tried to stay humble, but nearly everyone close to her is supernaturally bound to her will, and she doesn’t even know it. New doctrine is forming among the circle, fed by half-vampire devotion and Leah’s growing ego. It’s only a matter of time before she becomes less of a leader, and more of a god.

Future Plans

As the group grows, security is becoming more of a concern among Leah and her circle. The group has already gained some notoriety within their community; no one knows exactly who their new “night guardians” are, but the club scene is taking notice of a substantial drop in muggings, sexual assaults, and other violent crimes. Other people, like the local police, are noticing an uptick in missing persons among the career criminals who prey on the drunk and disoriented after the clubs close. This recognition is all the more threatening because Leah knows she’s ignorant of what forces are out to harm her. Do the police know that vampires exist, and do they have agents trained to fight them? If vampires are real, what other monsters are real too? Leah plans to direct resources away from her vigil and toward finding her sire, or anyone else who could help explain how this supernatural world really works.

While Leah is looking for vampires, other vampires are looking for her. The city’s Sheriff has guessed that someone is hunting in the rack without permission, but would rather track down the perpetrator herself before mentioning the matter to the Prince. The sire who abandoned her is now realizing just how stupid it was to leave an illicit childe running free, one who could identify him by description. It’s a big city, and Leah is cautious about where and how she shows her face, but she’s determined enough to make a difference that she is bound to be found eventually.

Whoever finds her first will also have to deal with her circle, an unexpected army of well-equipped ghouls who have devoted themselves to training for a fight against any evil, supernatural or otherwise, that might want to harm their angel of the night.

Jake “Diabolic” Martins

Jake used to date Leah, back before her death and resurrection. Chronically obsessed with coolness, he’s leveraged this tenuous connection into a position as second in command. Being able to beat people up and get praised for it suits him very well, and Jake lives for his half-vampire life as Diabolic, daydreaming through morning shifts as a line cook. He’s become convinced that he could survive the transformation into a full vampire, and has petitioned Leah to try, but so far she’s been too afraid of failing to grant his request.

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 5, Social 4, Mental 3

Secondary Attributes: Health 6, Willpower 6

Exceptional Dice Pools: Athletics 6, Brawl 8; Intimidation 5; Investigation 4

Disciplines: Potence 1

General Difficulties: 4/2

Mika Bittermann

Mikah was a friend of Leah’s back in college, a horror and occult movie fan who’d always daydreamed about meeting a real vampire. He’s been acting as the group’s administrator since the beginning, but a childhood accident and amputation left him without a right leg, or much interest in learning how to fight. As one of the only circle members who doesn’t regularly drink Leah’s blood, he’s starting to get worried about how everyone else is starting to act, but isn’t sure how to bring it up with the vampire without upsetting her.

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 3, Social 4, Mental 5

Secondary Attributes: Health 4, Willpower 7

Exceptional Dice Pools: Craft 4; Subterfuge 5; Academics 6, Occult 6, Technology 6

General Difficulties: 3/2

Melissa “Razor” Thomson

Razor has been chasing new thrills since she was a teenager. Drugs and warehouse raves gave way to kickboxing and roller derby as she grew up, finding steady employment as a personal trainer. The rush of endorphins and power that comes from Leah drinking her blood, then offering blood in return, is the best of both worlds, a drug-like high and the adrenaline she needs to feel alive. Razor leads the charge among the half-vampires, the first to get into fights and the one who’s teaching everyone else how to win them.

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 6, Social 3, Mental 4

Secondary Attributes: Health 7, Willpower 6

Exceptional Dice Pools: Brawl 7, Survival 7; Intimidation 5, Streetwise 5, Subterfuge 4

Disciplines: Celerity 1

General Difficulties: 4/1

Leah

Leah is too short and freckly to resemble the classic expectation of a vampire, though she does keep her hair dyed raven black and her eyes filled with red contact lenses. She's clanless, not that she knows what a clan or a Caitiff is. A once-shy girl with newfound confidence, she's prone to indecision, and overcompensating when she feels she's made a mistake. She cut off all ties with her family after death, fearing for what they'd think of her, and now couch-surfs with the members of her circle, feeding off their blood and their money to fully immerse herself in her nocturnal life.

Clan: Caitiff

Sire: Unknown

Embraced: 2010 (Born 1991)

Ambition: Find my sire

Convictions: Always protect the innocent

Touchstones: Mikah Bittermann — friend from school and cultist

Humanity: 5

Generation: 13th

Blood Potency: 1

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2; Charisma 4, Manipulation 1, Composure 3; Intelligence 3, Wits 2, Resolve 2

Secondary Attributes: Health 5, Willpower 5

Skills: Athletics 1, Firearms 2, Stealth 2; Animal Ken 1, Etiquette 3, Insight 2, Intimidation 2, Leadership (Goth Subculture) 3, Persuasion 3; Academics 2, Awareness 2, Investigation 1, Occult 2, Technology 1

Disciplines: Celerity 2, Potence 1, Protean 1

General Difficulties: 4/2

Story Hook: Mugging Gone Wrong

In the middle of a chronicle the PCs are pursuing, a ghoul or mortal they've met in the story's course fails to show up to a rendezvous. Investigating why, the PCs discover the individual was hospitalized in the early hours of the morning, apparently mugged. If the PCs visit the individual in hospital, they explain that the muggers started threatening violence if they didn't disassociate from Kindred society. Not fully grasping the situation, the victim told the muggers to "fuck off," at which point the circle beat them severely.

The circle soon shifts their sights to the PCs. They saw their target meeting with the characters and have been following at least one of them back to their haven. The PCs should have the chance to detect they're being followed. If they interrogate their pursuer and find their way back to Leah, the young Caitiff expresses honestly that the mugging went too far, and the circle is mostly interested in protecting the innocent while punishing the wicked. The PCs may see a possibility to influence or punish the hopelessly naïve vampire for her circle's actions.

[LAYOUT: CHAT LOG]

DIABOLIC SIGNED IN

Diabolic: come on come on

RAZOR SIGNED IN

Razor: Just got your message. What's up?

Diabolic: got a bead on a real bad cat who ferries victims to a drinker

Razor: Where?

Diabolic: often makes the drop off on the park southside near the fountain

Diabolic: think we need to teach them the difference between good and bad

Razor: Okay have you ran this by Leah?

Diabolic: nah going to deal with this ourselves earn our stripes ok?

Razor: I don't know. She should be told.

Diabolic: come on raz where are your balls??

Razor: Yeah yeah. I know. All right. I'll meet you. Where and when.

Diabolic: if it's good enough for them the fountain at 4?

Razor: 4AM? Fuck off man I'm asleep then.

Diabolic: these bastards come out at night come on

Razor: No way. Maybe if Leah's there, but 4AM is well past my bedtime.

Diabolic: ffs i'll do it myself

RAZOR SIGNED OUT

Diabolic: pathetic

DIABOLIC SIGNED OUT

[/CHAT LOG ENDS]

The Dread Cult of Eligos

*"Blood for Eligos, blood for Eligos, blood for Eligos. Praise the dark master,
worship the dark master, fear the dark master."*

Eligos has walked in darkness since before the dawn of written history. He drank from those who built the Parthenon, fanned the flames of crusade and grew bloated and content upon the blood that ran through the streets. He taught the infamous Countess Báthory the ritual of eternal youth, gave Vlad III the strength and cruelty he needed to crush his enemies. To the herds of humanity, Eligos is a nightmare incarnate, the immortal monster who has spawned so many vampire myths. To the enlightened few who have chosen to worship him, he is a demanding taskmaster, but capable of granting his chosen few a portion of his power. Under the shroud of night, his cabal of followers meet in secret, receiving orders from their dark master through a chosen few disciples before dispersing to commit the evil deeds their demonic king commands.

Fortunately for everyone involved, Eligos does not exist.

History

Only months after the Second Inquisition began, specialists within the Newburgh Group began to notice a pattern among the blankbodies: many were found surrounded by willing humans who had been convinced to become blood donors and even bodyguards through promises of power, ecstasy, blankbody transformation, or spiritual enlightenment. Project Cathedral was created to study this phenomenon, determining how much influence blankbody mind control had on such groups, and how much was simply human nature. To this end, they created a cult of their own.

The Dread Cult of Eligos worked almost too well. Targeted ads on fringe websites focused on European and North American white males ages 18-32 with a prior interest in violence, self-sufficiency, or the occult. Honing in on disenfranchised, angry candidates with no other form of social support, the initial three agents were able to initiate twenty adherents after only three months. By the time the original timescale of the project was running up, Project Cathedral had made itself a real army, hundreds of adherents across three countries who were willing to do more-or-less whatever they were asked, all in the name of a fictional elder vampire.

After reassessment panels and some serious ethical debate, Project Cathedral was given the green light to continue its experiment, assessing the limits of what humans could be convinced to do in a cult-like environment as a control group to measure against blankbody mental influence. The risk to the lives and mental well-being of the cult's followers was deemed acceptable, and agents who disagreed with that assessment were quietly reassigned. Remaining agents were given permission to use the cult to further other SI goals; no sense letting a good brainwashed army go to waste.

Doctrine

Might makes right, all other ethics are petty human contrivances of the weak and fearful. Working with others for mutual benefit is useful, but in the end it's every man for himself.

Eligos is the mightiest being in the world. To follow him means gaining a portion of his power, to disobey him means death.

Eligos speaks through his High Priests, with whom he has shared a portion of his power. They can read minds and perform magic spells through blood rites.

To become a High Priest, you must obey Eligos and his speakers' commands. He will only share his power with those who know how to serve him, for to do otherwise would be to risk his own downfall.

Activities

Recruitment is an ongoing concern for the cult, who lose members to dissent and death at an unfortunate rate. Most new members are recruited from message boards and private email lists associated with a series of conspiracy theory and occult websites. Agents of the Newburgh Group pose as cult members online, answering questions and showering new members with attention and validation. Once someone has become part of the online community, they're encouraged to join the group in real life, and those who pass on the opportunity face social exclusion. Liaisons with the local police department and MI5 keep civilian investigators at bay, even when a stray member reports the group's obviously threatening nature.

Once made loyal, each member is given a task by the High Priests of the cult once every few weeks. Most tasks are small and only vaguely menacing — listen to this television channel at 8:00 PM on Monday for two hours, get your boss's phone number and home address, deliver a parcel from one end of the city to the other. These jobs are a mix of busy work and real spy work that benefits the Newburgh Group, though the latter assignments tend to go to members who have a positive track record with meaningless tasks. Sometimes, a member is asked to do something obviously illegal — steal something, gather blackmail material, poison food at a grocery store, or commit murder with a provided weapon. These are part of agency tests to see how far a civilian will go when subjected to mundane religious brainwashing, as compared to the supernatural influence of the blankbodies. While most are carefully controlled, set up to prevent any real loss of life, Project Cathedral has been called on to take illegal actions against known blankbody collaborators, working in conjunction with FIRSTLIGHT to coordinate their attacks. Members who succeed at their tasks, only to find their theft or poisoning or murder unreported on the news, are told the cover-up is the work of Eligos' high-level influence on world events.

Church meetings are held every week, at secret locations that change frequently and are communicated through code on various conspiracy sites. Attendees engage in prayer, and trained members extract the blood of supplicants with sanitized needles, an offering to Eligos. The High Priests forward donations to blood banks through back-alley channels, reserving only a small amount for ritual use. New tasks are given out to members privately in small confessional booths, and those who were previously assigned a job report their success or failure. The final phase of the meeting is a lavish dinner provided by the cult, a gift from Eligos to the loyal, but mostly a chance to make members socialize. Friendships and networking are encouraged, to better socially isolate anyone who decides to leave.

Future Plans

Three months ago, the cult's primary site received an anonymous letter, warning it to cease and desist due to something called the "Masquerade." Though the correspondence has not been traced, contacts within FIRSTLIGHT believe it may have been a genuine attempt at communication from a blankbody, or more accurately a society of blankbodies. Has Eligos managed to fool even the real undead? Fearing a trap, the Newburgh Group has been reluctant to pursue contact, but the agents of Project Cathedral think it's worth the risk. If the blankbodies think they're writing to one of their own, how many secrets might they be tricked into revealing?

In the meantime, FIRSTLIGHT has asked for a contingent of cult members to complete tasks in America, and perhaps even set up a branch of the cult somewhere in the States. Less interested in the science experiment than in the potential source of devoted off-the-books followers, the international organization is eager to adapt the model to multiple new countries. There's also talk of training FIRSTLIGHT agents to better mimic real blankbody cult leaders, hoping to infiltrate their society deliberately through posing as one of their own.

Amy Montague

Amy is the agent who came up with the Eligos myth, and put together most of the symbolism and rituals. A trained intelligence operative with a dark creative streak, she's secretly enjoying her role as High Priestess far more than she should be. She sometimes likes to pretend she really is a sexy, immortal vampire, controlling her adoring masses with unnatural powers instead of technology and psychological tricks. It's fun to see just how far she can push her slavish followers and get away with it, all in the name of "research." An honest psychological

assessment would make even the Newburgh Group's dubious ethical advisors take her off the project in a heartbeat, so no one can ever find out how deep she's sunk into the mythology she created. Within the cult, she's known as High Priestess Jezebeth.

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 5, Social 5, Mental 4

Secondary Attributes: Health 7, Willpower 7

Exceptional Dice Pools: Firearms 6; Leadership 7, Performance 6; Investigation 5, Occult 5

General Difficulties: 4/2

Jaden Michaels

Jaden was one of Project Cathedral's founders, a trained psychologist brought in to monitor the mental state of cult members and assist with efficient recruitment. He did his job well, but when it came time to extend the project, Jaden dissented. Going any further was unethical, he argued; they had to deprogram their recruits and help them return to society. A week later, he was "laterally promoted" to a cushy position in MI5, with a nice pay raise and very few responsibilities. He's tried to keep his head down since, but what he did with the Dread Cult of Eligos still haunts him, and he lies awake at night wondering if blankbodies are really more monstrous than the people sworn to fight them.

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 4, Social 5, Mental 5

Secondary Attributes: Health 6, Willpower 8

Exceptional Dice Pools: Firearms 6; Etiquette 6, Insight 7, Subterfuge 6; Science 6

General Difficulties: 4/2

Franklin Bryant

Franklin was numb to atrocity long before he joined Project Cathedral. An expert in "enhanced interrogation techniques," he'd been torturing civilians for decades for the DIA before FIRSTLIGHT headhunted him, trading him across the pond to work on the cult project. Aside from acting as a High Priest, he serves as the head of security within the cult, assessing risk to agents and coordinating assault missions carried out by the group's members. Within the cult, he's known as High Priest Agramon.

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 5, Social 4, Mental 4

Secondary Attributes: Health 6, Willpower 6

Exceptional Dice Pools: Brawl 6; Insight 5, Intimidation 6; Investigation 5

General Difficulties: 3/2

Rupert Brant

Rupert was one of the cult's first recruits, having found the group through one of the conspiracy websites set up to attract members. He's a dedicated true believer who's taken the "might makes right" doctrine thoroughly to heart, spending every available moment outside his desk job and his cult activities training in martial arts and firearm use. Though he's devoted to Eligos, he's starting to get fed up with the High Priests. It's high time an exemplary member like him got to meet the dark one in person, and gain access to the real power.

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 3, Social 4, Mental 3

Secondary Attributes: Health 5, Willpower 6

Exceptional Dice Pools: Firearms 5, Survival 4; Politics 4

General Difficulties: 3/2

Teresa Miles

Teresa joined the cult for the sake of her girlfriend, the 300-year-old Sheriff of the city who wants to know what the hell is going on. The 50-year-old ghoul has slipped in unnoticed with a fake identity that hasn't been checked too hard, but the longer she stays the more likely someone will check her history and discover it's not all there. Until then, she plays her part, and tries to figure out just who this Eligos person is, and where he'd been hiding before his cult sprang up.

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 5, Social 6, Mental 4

Secondary Attributes: Health 7, Willpower 8

Exceptional Dice Pools: Stealth 6; Insight 7, Subterfuge 7; Investigation 4, Occult 5, Technology 6

Disciplines: Auspex 1

General Difficulties: 4/2

Story Hook: Eligos' Breach

Word reaches the PCs of a new vampire in the city making waves, and the ruling vampire is less than happy. Apparently, this Kindred named "Eligos" is having their retainers draw blood from hapless vessels in church halls and other rented spaces, in a way that implies a very callous master with Bagger tendencies. They ask the PCs to investigate who this Eligos is, and if they can find this Kindred, bring them to the court — willingly or staked, whichever is easier.

As the PCs look into the cult's activities, they spot another of the city's Kindred hovering around the group's fringes. In a case of mistaken identity, it's possible the PCs believe this vampire is "Eligos" and attack them for their perceived Masquerade breach. In reality, the vampire is just as concerned about the cult's activities, especially as they're taking place in a location this vampire considers their territory.

[LAYOUT/ART: BANNER AD FROM A WEBSITE]

We're not alone in the dark. You know it. We know it.

It's time to find out the truth. With whom do we share this world?

Are you between the ages of 18 and 35? If so, contact us:

dreadcultofeligos@sunburst.com

No more secrets.

[/BANNER AD ENDS]

The Order of the Broken Branch

"Incendo flammam veritatis; let the fire of truth burn bright, and the demons of Ignorance will fall by our torch and blade."

Before modern Greek fraternities, American university students formed all manner of secret societies. The Order of the Broken Branch is among the oldest, one part social club, one part exercise in getting away with something you're not supposed to be doing. The secret society has always had an interest in mysticism and the occult, ostensibly as metaphors and tools for philosophical enlightenment and intellectual growth, which made them an early target for the Society of St. Leopold. Hoping for real vampire facts, the hunters instead found a team of smart, cooperative, semi-brainwashed student members, a small army just waiting for instructions. The Order was infiltrated and transformed, its largely harmless members turned into unwitting servants of the cause. Some Society members find it distasteful, turning innocent college kids into assassins, but a cardinal somewhere up the chain has decided that their lives are a small price to pay for ensuring human security.

History

Founded in 1835 by a group of bored Classics students, the Order of the Broken Branch was set from the beginning on maintaining the "secret" in secret society. Unlike other organizations that had been discovered, or even made their presence known on campus, the Broken Branch charter specified that the group was to remain hidden, and members were commanded to deny any knowledge of it when questioned. While not completely effective, the Order has managed to remain a rumor, oft-repeated but only sometimes believed.

Much of the group's doctrine comes from that original charter, which shrouded the Order's goals in poetic, Latin text. The struggle to gain knowledge and expose lies is described in metaphor as an army of knights-templar fighting an army of ignorance. The founding generation was quite satisfied with their writing, and spent years holding meetings in living rooms and bars, debating literature and politics and congratulating each other at the end of the night for a "fight well-won" with the demon Ignorance.

In the '70s, members began to direct the club's activities outward, organizing war protests and civic action campaigns. To justify the new approach, leaders cherry-picked journal entries from the founders, reimagining them as activists themselves. Historical revisionism continued into doctrinal belief, with the metaphors of fighting ignorance being reframed as a command to act up and change the world. Blood ran hot, but as the decades went by and freshmen recruits gradually stopped remembering the '70s, future cohorts were never able to recapture that same fervor. Photos of protests and guerilla anti-government action were carefully preserved alongside the Order's charter, oft-imitated since but never matched.

The Society of St. Leopold became involved with the Order only a few years ago, when an alumni member got in touch through the right priest to ask about the potential for the Order to help their cause. Hunters young enough to pass as students joined the group, and were soon able to take over leadership as older members graduated and left. The active fervor of the '70s was stirred again, but this time with a new enemy: literal demons, evil creatures of the night who have tried to keep humanity ignorant of their existence since history began. Just like previous generations, the Society borrowed from the charter to support their cause, suggesting a new reading that posited the founders as the first demon hunters, and challenging current members to live up to their calling.

Doctrine

Ignorance exists in the world because of the forces of evil, manifest as demons who must be fought. The secret Order of the Broken Branch was created to lead that fight.

The Order's fight is of utmost importance to humankind: without them fighting back Ignorance, everyone would become slaves to the demons. Sacrificing yourself in the name of the Order is the greatest good you can do with your life.

The Order of the Broken Branch must remain secret in order to carry out its mission. When asked, members must deny the existence of the Order. Those who break this edict are forever outcast.

The Order must always be led by current undergraduate students, though graduate students and alumni may participate in many activities. This keeps the organization young and focused, better able to hunt, and less likely to fall prey to ennui.

Activities

The Order keeps up some of its old activities as a smokescreen, discussing literature and current events academically with other members at weekly or bi-weekly meetings held in reserved library corners or dorm rooms. Anyone curious enough to try and track down the Order of the Broken Branch usually finds only one of these meetings, and walks away disappointed that the famous secret society is just a bunch of undergrads talking about books. These weekly get-togethers are open to all members, past and present, allowing undergraduates to meet and network with successful alumni and securing the Order's success through a chain of well-connected generations. Each weekly meeting opens with a reading from select portions of the charter, call-and-response between a meeting leader and the attending members. New members are expected to memorize these responses within a month of joining, internalizing them in the process. Food, wine, and an atmosphere of colloquial collaboration help cement ties of loyalty and friendship, to other members and to the Order at large.

Real meetings are held off campus, at office space rented out for the Order by well-to-do alumni. Scheduled sporadically via coded emails, texts, and word-of-mouth, each meeting is run by a current undergraduate leader and is planned to address a single issue or project. All current members are expected to attend each meeting, but alumni members are invited only on a case-by-case basis, involving only those who are necessary for that particular engagement.

With the Society of St. Leopold controlling the Order from within, these special meetings usually involve a hunt for a particular Kindred or Kindred organization. Facts about the supernatural menace are passed on by the Society to the students, who are then asked to come up with ways to use that knowledge to hunt them. Often, alumni members — usually trained government agents and sometimes priests in disguise — carry out the student plans, reducing risk and casualties while still benefiting from the free student think-tank. Undergraduate members are only called upon for fieldwork when the Society needs an extra level of plausible deniability. Guerilla assaults on respectable demon-owned homes and businesses are planned out as home invasions, with the perpetrators trained to give alternative motives to the police and media; political dissent, personal revenge, or whatever other story suits. Although the Society tries to protect these student soldiers from capture, those who do get caught are expected to deny the existence of the Order and go to jail quietly, comforted by the knowledge that they've made the world a better place.

Future Plans

Due to the Order's organizational structure, Society personnel working as undergrad members can only lead the project for one or two years, and finding experienced members who look young enough to be undergrads has become harder and harder. The current leader of the Order has stayed on for four years, taking a second undergraduate degree to meet the requirements, but dissent is growing among members who feels this violates the spirit of the charter. The easiest solution would be to change the Order's rules for leadership, allowing a single agent to stay in charge indefinitely, but that idea is wildly unpopular among current and alumni members alike, who see it as disrespecting the club's oldest tradition. Since the Society of St. Leopold usually regards this ingrained loyalty as a strong positive, dissolving it in this case will have to be done carefully.

The utility of the undergraduate members as a secret think tank had been underestimated, until recent creative hunting designs were presented to Society leadership. A group of physics students have a prototype device that can perfectly mimic sunlight, while a team of computer science and history majors are working together to sort through old documents and cross-referencing the names, locations, and physical descriptions of supposed historical "monsters" with modern social media data, rooting out suspected immortals. Creative, interdisciplinary innovation is hard to foster within the confines of the Catholic Church, even within secret societies such as the Society, so student ideas are starting to get more than a cursory glance. With more funding, perhaps the Order could extend itself to additional campuses, targeting the best and brightest for recruitment worldwide.

Margaret Thales

Margaret used to be president of the Order, until she graduated three years ago. Now working on her Master's in Engineering, she's stayed involved with her old club and outwardly supports its new direction. In private, she has serious doubts. Overheard conversations and unusual phone calls have her suspicious that one or more fellow alumni might be trying to turn the Order into government agents, masking acts of home-soil terrorism as "demon fighting." She'd love to put a stop to it, but first she has to prove it, and then find out who she can trust to help bring them down.

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 3, Social 5, Mental 5

Secondary Attributes: Health 4, Willpower 8

Exceptional Dice Pools: Stealth 5; Etiquette 6, Leadership 6; Science 6, Technology 7

General Difficulties: 4/2

Samantha Watts

Samantha gave up a promising career in the Vatican to work for the Society of St. Leopold after encountering a vampire firsthand. Her baby face got her into the Order as a "freshman" seven years ago, and she's led the club since her third year back at school. Though she knows she's doing good work, pretending to be a twentysomething student is draining, and not what she signed up for. She'd much rather be in the field, fighting the monsters who once stole her blood and her dignity.

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 6, Social 4, Mental 4

Secondary Attributes: Health 5, Willpower 6

Exceptional Dice Pools: Intimidation 5, Persuasion 5; Investigation 6, Occult 6

General Difficulties: 3/2

Edward H. Sullivan

Edward is quite certain that the Order of the Broken Branch is real. After all, he helped found it. He was Embraced long after graduation, brought into eternity as a man in his early seventies. Over nearly two centuries, his youthful misadventures founding a secret society had been all but forgotten, until reports started coming in about students from his old *alma mater* working for the Second Inquisition. An affable Nosferatu, well-liked by Kindred society, Sullivan is tracking down old haunts and history, trying to discover what's happened to his old Order and how he can stop it.

Clan: Nosferatu

Sire: Hedwig

Embraced: 1823 (Born 1749)

Ambition: Discover what became of the Order of the Broken Branch

Convictions: Always fight ignorance

Touchstones: Lars Magnusson — faithful mortal servant for the last 20 years

Humanity: 6

Generation: 10th

Blood Potency: 3

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3; Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Composure 3; Intelligence 4, Wits 4, Resolve 3

Secondary Attributes: Health 6, Willpower 6

Skills: Brawl 3, Craft 3, Larceny 4, Stealth 4; Animal Ken 3, Etiquette (Kindred) 3, Insight 2, Intimidation 2, Persuasion 2, Subterfuge 3; Academics 3, Awareness 2, Finance 1, Investigation 2, Occult 3, Politics 1, Science 2

Disciplines: Animalism 1, Obfuscate 3, Potence 2

General Difficulties: 6/3

Story Hook: God's Weapons

Just last night, some well-meaning cops interrupted a trade between high-up members of the Order of the Broken Branch and the Society of St. Leopold held in a mobile office at a building site outside of town. The cops saw lights on at the abandoned site, and suspecting a drug deal, commenced a raid on the office. As the protesting cultists were led away, one of them coincidentally possessing a small bag of marijuana in their pocket, the cops left the most important prize: a sunlight caster. This device was constructed by student members of the Order of the Broken Branch, and now sits in a bag kicked into a cupboard in the mobile office.

The entire event would have passed Kindred society by, were it not for a nomadic Kindred who saw the whole thing go down, and who at Elysium now laughs about the sight of a few priests and some students being led away by the city's boys in blue. The event might draw the coterie's

curiosity, especially as the building site sits in unclaimed territory. Of course, eventually the Society or the Order is going to return to the building site to claim their device, capable of casting a beam of light said to be as potent against Kindred as the light of the sun.

[LAYOUT: TRANSCRIPT]

Recording Number: 1190

Subject/s: Human

Pertinent Notes: Catholic order of blankbody hunters, the SoSL

RECORDING STARTS

Voice 1 (Father Harry Grainger, Suspected): — won't fly any more.

Voice 2 (Unknown, Female?, Late 20s or 30s): I'm sorry. I really am sorry. I know how important it was that we get it, but the cops.

Voice 1: Where is it now?

Voice 2: Best guess is it's still there. We can send someone to retrieve it now, if you give the word.

Voice 1: No. Todd says he saw a figure watching as he was led away. Maybe an undead set the police onto the entire operation.

Voice 2: If they're aware of the Order, then we need to close up shop. Immediately.

Voice 3 (Margaret Thales, Confirmed): Father, how have you been?

Voice 1: Margaret! My goodness, I didn't see you there. I'm well. I'm well. And have you met [indiscernible noise].

Voice 2: A pleasure.

Voice 1: We were just talking about some equipment we lost. A stupid thing.

Voice 3: Lost? Where?

Voice 1: A building site. Here. Let me show you the map on my phone. Here. One of our students dropped something of importance. Something the college owns. But the student can't go back there because they've headed out of town.

Voice 3: Do you need me to go out and get it? I don't mind. It's not that far from where my boyfriend lives.

Voice 2: That would be wonderful. Thank you so much, Margaret!

Voice 1: You are an angel.

RECORDING TERMINATES

[/TRANSCRIPT ENDS]

Other Cults

The Black Blood Seekers believe in the historical truth of vampires. A loose network of jaded historians, conspiracy theorists, and people seeking an outlet for their darkest imaginings, the Seekers have communicated over the internet since the earliest usenet groups. According to their

research, vampires ruled much of the Western world before a series of human uprisings wiped them out in the 12th-14th centuries. The blood-drinkers were highly intelligent philosopher kings with centuries of accumulated wisdom, beneficial to humankind even though their existence required the frequent sacrifice of less worthy lives. Whether or not any vampires survived the culling is a matter hotly debated between the Seekers, and members who do manage to make contact with a real one have never managed to produce enough proof to convince the group at large. Modern Kindred looking for a neatly prepackaged cult of supplicants nonetheless eye the Seekers with deep suspicion: a group that open about their theories on the internet has surely attracted the attention of the Second Inquisition, to whom the Seekers' obsessive combing of news articles and rumors for evidence of vampire activity is a useful spot of free manpower.

The Temple of Endings was created by Yong-un Hong, a Seon Buddhist before his Embrace. Dying transformed him from vaguely religious to utterly devout, and he soon fixated on the vampire myth of Golconda, believing it to be a form of buddhahood achieved by the undead. He resolved to become an ascetic as the first step to achieving this enlightenment. Knowing he could not walk the Eightfold Path alone, he turned to the local Buddhist community, his blood-laced tongue easily talking many into following him. As an undead creature, he argued, he was closer than many to enlightenment. His baser human desires were gone, replaced with a simpler Hunger that could be more completely understood. He preaches long fasting and hours of meditation to his students, and tries to follow his own advice. Unfortunately, a vampire fasting for too long leads to undesirable consequences, and more than one private meditation ceremony has ended with blood on the walls and a supplicant dead at Hong's feet. Such accidents are regrettable, but Hong soothes himself with the belief that his victim's *karmaphala* will be a pleasant rebirth, since their sacrifices have aided his quest for nirvana.

The Church of Nigel, Reborn is a tiny, accidental movement that has sprung up around Thin-Blood vampire Nigel Hunt after he rose from the dead in the middle of a protestant church sermon. His pastor and a group of church elders have decided he was sent by God, and Nigel doesn't want to disappoint them. He is capable of doing some pretty amazing things now, and the pastor seems to think that the bite marks he leaves on parishioners to perform miracles are a form of stigmata. In his small church, people are lining up to see him, offering their blood in exchange for happiness and healing, the latter of which he has no idea how to provide. Though the only evangelizing the Church of Nigel does is through local word-of-mouth, the group is getting popular enough that the Second Inquisition can't be far behind.

The Order of St. Rose broke off from the Society of St. Leopold centuries ago, over a divine revelation received by their original leader and rejected by the main church. The Order believes that spilling the blood of the undead upon the Earth serves only to corrupt the planet, transmuting the evil of the vampire into a cloud of darkness upon the souls of all humanity. Of course, they still mean to hunt, just with careful rituals around blood contamination and clean-up. Ideally, they capture vampires alive, and take them to a specially equipped facility where they can be drained dry into a consecrated silver basin, a process that takes hours of excruciating pain. The blood is then preserved in containers and prayed over daily to prevent it from infecting the Earth. Rumor among the Kindred holds that the vitae the Order preserves actually retains its power indefinitely, acting just like the fresh lifeblood of a vampire even when consumed months later. Once a year, a priest of the order is chosen to drink all the blood that its knights have accumulated, then set himself on fire at dawn. The priest's burning death and the cleansing sunlight remove the dark taint of the executed vampires from the world for good.